

# **LIVING WITH THE TSUNAMI**

**CONTESTED KNOWLEDGES, SPATIAL POLITICS AND  
EVERYDAY PRACTICES IN SOUTH EAST SRI LANKA**

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*We don't need to remember it ... we live it every day. Why would I want to remember something that felt like it happened two days ago?*

(Mallee, Arugam Bay resident, PT010)



'Tsunami Zone'. One of the first signs one encounters when entering Arugam Bay. Panama Road, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis offers an ethnographic account of the ongoing legacies of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, focusing explicitly on communities in Arugam Bay, South East Sri Lanka. It provides empirical evidence that the tsunami should not be considered ‘over’ or an ‘event’ confined to the past, but instead that it is ongoing, shaping everyday life. The thesis argues that ongoing experiences of the tsunami are not equal, and it unpicks some of the relationships that shape these inequalities, specifically with regards to knowledge production in relation to the disaster. In doing this, it highlights the contested geographies surrounding the area. The thesis presents three overlapping ways in which the tsunami continues to be experienced in everyday life: through its spectacularisation and commodification; through the practices of (I)NGOs; and through the lived coastscape.

Informed by literature that seeks to understand disasters and places ‘on their own terms’, the thesis develops the concept of ‘communities of practice’: a theory of practice which highlights the contextual nature of practices in everyday life, emphasising that they are both influenced by discursive and embodied knowledges, and in turn, produce knowledges. This term is used heuristically to explore the tsunami’s legacies, and highlights the ways in which specific knowledges are produced and contested in the area. The thesis focuses specifically on four key communities of practice: fishing; tourism; surfing; and researching. These are central to the production of everyday life and hence embodied knowledges of the tsunami, and are therefore present throughout the whole thesis. Running alongside this are a number of themes: the agency of the more-than-human, specifically the sea; memory and memorialisation of disaster; and broader theories of space and place. These are mobilised to argue that people continue to live with the tsunami as a part of everyday life.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>A-Bay</b>	<b>Arugam Bay</b>
<b>APC</b>	Asian Peasant Coalition
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Association (Broadcaster)
<b>BBS</b>	Bodu Bala Sena (The Buddhist Power Force)
<b>Ch.</b>	Chapter
<b>CIDA</b>	Canadian International Development Agency
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network (Broadcaster)
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development, UK
<b>EEZ</b>	Exclusive Economic Zone
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GoSL</b>	Government of Sri Lanka
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Government Organisation
<b>J-Bay</b>	Jeffrey's Bay, South Africa
<b>LTTE</b>	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (The Tamil Tigers)
<b>MONLAR</b>	Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government Organisation
<b>NOAA</b>	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
<b>PT(+001)</b>	Participant (+ ID number)
<b>P-TOMS</b>	Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
<b>SLTDA</b>	Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority
<b>STF</b>	Special Task Force
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USGS</b>	United States Geological Survey



# CHAPTER 1.0

## INTRODUCTION

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*“The tsunami? It change everything” (Mamar, PT031)<sup>1</sup>*

*“Tsunami make many problems. But everyone have different tsunami story...” (Uma, PT037)*

### **1.1 The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**

On 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004 at 00.58 UTC, pressure building up between the Indian Plate and the Burma Plate was released, triggering an earthquake off the coast of Sumatra. Measuring 9.1 on the Richter scale, this earthquake was one of the most powerful on record (USGS<sup>2</sup>, 2008). Occurring deep below the Indian Ocean, this moment was to have far reaching effects, as one plate subducted under another, displacing a huge amount of water and triggering a series of tsunami waves that swept across the Indian Ocean basin. This is a thesis about the social and cultural legacies of these waves, about how that moment was a part of broader processes, and how it produced a disaster that is ongoing and unfinished. This is a thesis about people remaking their lives in the context of this disaster. This is a thesis that seeks to tell the stories of these people.

The waves that the earthquake generated, hereafter referred to as ‘the Indian Ocean tsunami’, or simply ‘the tsunami’, caused swathes of destruction along the coastlines it struck. In total, around the Indian Ocean basin, over 220,000 people lost their lives and over 1.8 million people had their homes destroyed (Gamburd and McGilvray, 2010; Telford et al. 2006). The

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<sup>1</sup> All participant names are pseudonyms unless stated

<sup>2</sup> United States Geological Survey

worst affected places included Aceh in Indonesia, the islands and coast of southern Thailand, the Andaman Islands, Tamil Nadu in India, and Sri Lanka, upon which this thesis focuses. In Sri Lanka the tsunami impacted around three quarters of the island's coastline and the country experienced the second highest death toll (after Indonesia), with around 35,000<sup>3</sup> fatalities, as well as the displacement of a further 500,000 people due to the destruction of over 100,000 houses (Brun and Lund, 2008: 277). Disasters do not occur in socio-political vacuums, but rather unfold in specific contexts (Pelling, 2001; also see Hastrup, 2011; Ruwanpura, 2008). In Sri Lanka, the tsunami intersected with pre-existing issues, such as the country's ongoing ethnicised conflict and civil war, unequal gender relations, postcolonial geopolitics, and the ongoing neoliberalisation of the nation's economy, particularly in the growing tourism sector.

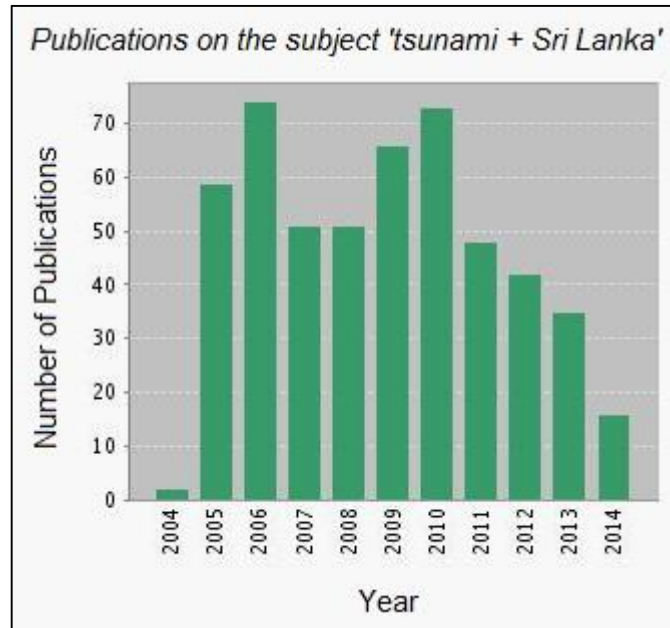
The sheer scale of the tsunami, along with the deaths of a number of international tourists, resulted in a huge media interest and an unprecedented outpouring of aid (Olds et al. 2005). Closely linked to this, it also provoked a vast number of publications as professionals and academics from around the world sought to make sense of the disaster (Brun, 2009). In the immediate aftermath, the number of researchers flocking to the coast prompted concerns of over-research and research-fatigue as academics and funding bodies responded to the global 'tsunami hype' (Buranakul et al. 2005; Korf, 2010). Nevertheless, academics, including geographers, have made some important contributions and interventions in the wake of the tsunami. As a discipline that straddles the natural and social sciences, geographers are well positioned to comment on the disaster (Greenhough et al. 2005), and in the years that have followed the tsunami, geographers' unique disciplinary position has contributed to numerous, important publications. In particular, geographers have produced critical knowledge that influenced the recovery, conducted fieldwork that has made useful links between theory and practice, and explored the notions of ethics and caring at a distance (see below; also Brun, 2009).

Despite the scale of the tsunami, it did not take long for the global media interest to die down, and within a few months the tsunami was significantly less prevalent in international newspapers (Greenhough et al. 2005). Similarly, following an initial few years of high interest, publications about the tsunami have been steadily dropping since 2010 (Figure 1.i). News cameras move on to more recent disasters, and 'impact' influenced research funding

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<sup>3</sup> The exact number of the death toll is generally unknown, and this figure is an estimate. In various publications the figure has been cited as low as 30,000 and as high as 39,000 (see also Gamburd, 2014: 3).





**Figure 1.i** Academic publications on the subject of 'tsunami + Sri Lanka'. November, 2014. Data: Web of Knowledge

takes geographers and other academics to new, 'more relevant' places. However, despite global interest in the tsunami dropping, this has not signalled the 'end' or 'conclusion' of the disaster. Rather, the tsunami is not temporally bounded and should be imagined as ongoing, unfinished and without easy conclusion. As the opening quote to this thesis (pg. i) suggests, the tsunami is an important, ongoing part of everyday life for those who continue to inhabit the coast. This thesis contributes to some of the important work that has already been conducted on the tsunami. However, in order to understand the impacts and processes associated with disaster, it is essential that research does not cease once the 'tsunami hype' is over. As such, my research explores the social and cultural legacies of the tsunami, focusing beyond the immediate aftermath of the waves, and looking towards its longer term effects and processes.

The thesis builds on previous work conducted within geography that has sought to produce critical knowledge about the tsunami and expose the asymmetric suffering and impacts of the disaster. In order to do this, I focus on the coastal communities of Arugam Bay, in South East Sri Lanka (see Ch. 1.3). Central to this thesis are two theoretical platforms. Firstly, that the tsunami, and disasters triggered by geo-physical events more broadly, are not simply 'natural', but rather have socio-political dimensions (see e.g. Pelling, 2001). Secondly, such disasters, including the tsunami, should not be considered as events confined to the past, but

rather their impacts continue to be lived in the present (see e.g. Das, 2007). Based on this, while the rhythms of everyday life were cataclysmically disrupted by the tsunami, they have been remade, the tsunami becoming a part of the ongoing production of place and folded into the everyday lived realities of the people of Arugam Bay, upon which this thesis focuses. This remaking has not been experienced equally, and everyday practices are shaped by, and in turn shape, discursive and embodied knowledges that are situated, varied and contested, embedded within wider relationships of power.

## **1.2 Disaster, knowledge and geography**

As stated above, there was a profusion of research conducted after the tsunami (Figure 1.i). Numerous experts and researchers from various backgrounds and disciplines have produced knowledge trying to make sense of the disaster (Brun, 2009). These have included: non-government organisation (NGO) workers and practitioners conducting research directly related to their organisations' various aid projects; natural scientists writing about the geological factors relating to the tsunami, and the environmental impact of the waves; engineers and surveyors assessing the damage to buildings and infrastructure, or producing plans for reconstruction; and health practitioners and social workers have explored issues relating to human health, particularly mental health and post-traumatic stress (see Gamburd and McGilvray, 2010). In addition to this, social scientists, including geographers, have published widely on the tsunami, making important interventions on its social, cultural and political ramifications. Such a variety of work has been useful in attempts to understand the tsunami and the impacts it has had on the populations living around the Indian Ocean basin. It also highlights the multifaceted ways that people have engaged with and understood the tsunami, and how knowledge about a subject can be produced in multiple ways (see Ch. 4.6; also Ismail, 2005). In this section I highlight some of the work that has been conducted on the tsunami, particularly by geographers, and in doing this I also seek to clarify my theoretical approach.

### *1.2.1. Conceptualising 'natural disasters'*

Social scientists have engaged with natural disasters for several decades now, approaching them from a variety of theoretical and ontological positions (see Oliver-Smith, 1999). While

common in everyday parlance, scholars from a range of geography's subdisciplines have highlighted that the term 'natural disaster' is problematic, particularly when held in binary opposition to 'human' or 'political disasters'. As Mark Pelling states:

Whilst physical phenomena are necessary for the production of a natural hazard, their translation into risk and potential for disaster is contingent upon human exposure and a lack of capacity to cope with the negative impacts that exposure might bring to individuals or human systems (Pelling, 2003; 4; also Pelling, 2001).

That is to say that disasters are only considered as such when geophysical processes negatively impact upon *humans*. Such debates are situated within broader arguments that seek to rethink and undermine humanist perceptions of 'the natural world' and 'the human world' as separate, and with humans and non-humans (or 'nature') in binary opposition (see e.g. Castree and Braun, 2001; Panelli, 2010; Whatmore, 2002; 2006). These debates should also be located within subaltern and postcolonial geographies, insofar as the very concept of 'nature' is problematic, even as a departure point. 'Nature', in this sense, is located within specific Eurocentric conceptualisations and can have very different meanings in different contexts (see Ch. 3.2.2.; also Jazeel, 2013a; 2014). In addition to this, political ecologists have revealed how socio-political relations cause certain groups to be more susceptible to the impacts of disasters and to be affected more severely than others (see e.g. Blaikie et al. 1994; Keys et al. 2006; Oliver-Smith, 2004; Pelling, 1999; 2001; 2003). As Neil Smith asserts:

In every phase and aspect of a disaster – causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction – the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus (Smith, 2006: no page).

As such, when thinking about 'natural disasters', it is important to consider the contextual specificities regarding where and how disasters unfold. In short, when exploring the impacts of disasters, geography matters (see also Hilhorst and Bankoff, 2004).

The importance of geography is highlighted by the unbounded nature of disaster. That is to say that disasters, including the tsunami, are neither spatially nor temporally contained. The tsunami affected people beyond the spatial confines of the Indian Ocean coast, as media coverage beamed images of the wave and the subsequent human suffering into living rooms

around the world (Hyndman, 2009c). In part due to this media coverage, and the deaths of numerous tourists, the tsunami provoked an unprecedented outpouring of aid (see Olds et al. 2005). Such processes forged new connections between places and strengthened and revealed previous connections. In this sense, the tsunami was a ‘global disaster’, experienced around the world, albeit in very different and uneven ways. However, as well as a ‘global disaster’, the tsunami has played out at multiple scales, from the very personal, individual disasters experienced, to a ‘community’, ‘local’, ‘national’ or wider ‘regional’ scale. For example, in the wake of the tsunami, geographers highlighted the new spatialities that the wave opened up, notably a geography centred on the epicentre of the earthquake, encompassing the Indian Ocean basin (see Greenhough et al. 2005). The unbounded, connected nature of places has been explored in work by geographers over the past two decades (e.g. Massey, 1993; 2005), providing useful cues for geographers to comment on the wider implications of the tsunami, and how its impacts manifest themselves at different scales and through multiple connections (see Greenhough et al. 2005).

The tsunami is also not temporally confined to the past. Rather than considering disasters as ‘events’, it is important to acknowledge that they are in fact ongoing processes (see Oliver-Smith, 2002). While disasters can be given a specific moment or timing (e.g. when the tsunami struck at just after 9am local time, 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004), such events do not simply ‘end’ (as is often portrayed in media representations), but rather become interlaced and part of the rhythms of everyday life, as a number of academic studies on disasters have usefully highlighted (see Das, 2007; Das and Kleinman, 2001; Hastrup, 2011; Samuels, 2012; Walker, 2013a). Disasters such as the tsunami are profoundly dramatic and violent, and such acts of unprecedented violence disrupt everyday life. Following such an ‘event’, things do not go ‘back to normal’, but rather what is considered normal, ordinary and part of the everyday fundamentally changes. As such, instead of carrying on as before, everyday life is ‘recovered’ and ‘remade’, not by grand gestures or performances, but rather through slowly allowing violence to become increasingly normal, or part of the ordinary (Das, 2007; Das and Kleinman, 2001; Walker, 2013a). In this sense, the ruptures that disasters produce do not end, but are processed and dealt with as they interlace with the ongoing processes and practices of everyday life (Hastrup, 2011).

### *1.2.2. Disasters and postcolonial theory*

Conceptualising disasters as ‘unbounded’ highlights how disasters are subjective and contextual. When attempting to define disasters it is important to ask *who* gets to define what a disaster consists of, to explore notions of who has ‘ownership’ of the disaster and on what terms, for whom and to what ends is the calamity framed (see Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 1999: 9). As such, I seek as much as possible to explore the legacies of the tsunami on the terms of those who have lived it and, in doing so, avoid presupposing what the disaster is. Indeed, studies which predefine ‘disaster’ have had a tendency to “miss the way in which what the disaster is and means is shaped over time and in relation to the everyday” (Samuels, 2012: 4; see also Hastrup, 2011).

In an attempt to understand the tsunami on its own terms and avoid ‘predefining’ disaster, this project engages with the concept of ‘subalternity’ and recent work in geography which has engaged specifically with postcolonial theory in order to expose the ‘masked universalisms’ of the discipline’s prevailing Eurocentricism (see e.g. Gidwani, 2009; Jazeel, 2014; Nash, 2002; Robinson, 2003). Indeed, many of the aims of this project echo those of the Subaltern Studies Collective. This group was born from a general dissatisfaction with the historical interpretations of the Indian freedom movement. They argued that Indian historiography was written in ways that celebrated the contribution of elites, whilst simultaneously ignoring contributions from peasants and the working classes, and more explicitly denying the “politics of the people” (Guha, 2000 [1989]: 3). Influenced by Gramsci and committed to the notion that history should be written ‘from below’, the collective sought to readdress the dominance of elites and elite culture (specifically colonial elitism and bourgeois nationalistic elitism) in South Asian historiography (see Ashcroft et al. 2007: 198-201). Much of the work that the collective published explored the gaps, silences and erasures in the colonial archive in an attempt to access ‘the people’s’ history (see Chaturvedi, 2000). Of more relevance to this project, the Collective’s work has been expanded to include an interrogation of Eurocentric knowledge production, specifically the ways in which history, geography and other disciplines are written in such a way that it becomes impossible to think about people, processes and places outside of certain (European) categories and concepts (Chakrabarty, 2000; Ismail, 2005; Jazeel, 2013a; 2014). As such, this thesis seeks to explore some of the ways the tsunami has been (re)defined and experienced by those living on the tsunami affected coast *on their own terms*.

While the Subaltern Studies Collective has provided a useful theoretical departure point, engaging with their approach is not without challenges. Through posing the question ‘can the subaltern speak’, Gayatri Spivak famously critiques many of the assumptions underlying the subaltern project (Spivak, 1988; 2006 [1999]). In particular she argues that theorists’ positioning within certain knowledge systems mean that they invariably end up (mis)representing the subaltern subject, reproducing the ventriloquism and subversion of peasant agency that these scholars have so vigorously critiqued (Spivak, 2006 [1999]). As Ashcroft et al. summarise:

No act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 201).

Such arguments pose a significant challenge for this project, specifically whether I, as the author of this project, can effectively move beyond taken-for-granted (Eurocentric) knowledge systems. This is not just a theoretical challenge, but also one that has implications for my methodological and analytical approach, and raises certain ethical questions (see Ch. 2.0). Importantly, Spivak does acknowledge the importance of the Collective’s approach in unsettling certain knowledges, the first step in clearing space to allow the subaltern to speak and, perhaps more importantly, be heard. As such, this project does not necessarily seek to ‘speak for’ subaltern groups, but rather I utilise postcolonial theory as a method for “thinking against the grain of colonial power’s lingering and subjugating effects” (Jazeel, 2013b: 20; see also Spivak, 1993). I engage with this question more explicitly in Ch. 2.0, though such an approach is woven throughout the thesis.

In order to explore the legacies of the tsunami on people’s own terms, this thesis engages with the concept of ‘the everyday’ and ‘ordinariness’, an approach which has been effectively utilised by scholars studying violence in Sri Lanka (see e.g. Gaasbeek, 2010; Walker, 2013a). For example, Timmo Gaasbeek (2010; 2013) uses a focus on ‘the everyday’ to highlight the prevalence of inter-ethnic interactions in the North East of Sri Lanka. This effectively writes back against narratives that produce Sri Lankan society as fundamentally divided along ethnic lines, and provides a useful counter to the ideals perpetrated by both Sinhala and Tamil nationalist groups (such as the BBS and LTTE) and other more mainstream accounts which perpetrate this narrative. Gaasbeek’s work also highlights that there is more to life in Sri

Lanka than violent conflict, critiquing the prevalence of work that focuses either on the suffering and survival of an affected population, or on the broader socio-economic and political forces prevalent in war. Gaasbeek argues that these accounts reduce populations to “pitiful victims, skilful survivors or mere pawns on the chess-board of larger actors” (2010: 1). As such, a focus on people’s everyday practice and encounters allows one to explore the ways in which people negotiate violence and conflict, and highlights their “capacity to interpret, negotiate, and at least partly shape their lives” (Gaasbeek, 2010: 327).

Gaasbeek’s account of the everyday and ordinary in North East Sri Lanka provides some useful insights into people’s lives, encouraging an understanding of life on their own terms. However, his work tends to juxtapose conflict and everyday life as in opposition to one another:

Both everyday life and violent conflict deserve attention, but neither should be foregrounded. Focusing on everyday life alone when studying life in war risks ignoring the intense fear and suffering that people need to live with. At the same time, foregrounding violent conflict risks ignoring that a lot of aspects of everyday life go on despite the conflict and to quite an extent independent of the conflict. (Gaasbeek, 2010: 327)

Rebecca Walker’s (2013a; see also 2010; 2013b) research in Batticaloa provides a useful counter to this standpoint. Walker’s deep ethnography of everyday life in the war torn Eastern Province explores how people live in a context of extreme violence. Rather than holding violence and the everyday in opposition, Walker uses the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) and Veena Das (2007) to explore how violence becomes *part* of everyday life, loosening how we think of the terms ‘ordinary’ and ‘everyday’. In doing this she uses the example of the regular shelling that occurred in the area, which became a routine part of people’s existence, to argue that:

...where violence is endemic, it does not necessarily become normalised so much as to challenge the boundaries of the analytical abstract categories of normal and ordinary. This, then, suggests that there are forms of everyday life in violent contexts, which cannot be understood through the juxtaposed categories of the ordinary and extraordinary ... So, where everydayness has come to characterise experiences that appeared to be firmly embedded in the known rituals of practical life, we are left with events which are not seen as

extraordinary in their context yet remain firmly outside accepted everyday routines. (Walker, 2013a: 87)

So while shelling and other forms of violence are regular, usual and in this context unexceptional, they may be considered ‘ordinary’. And yet simultaneously, such violence is deeply unsettling, and may never be considered ‘normal’ (see Walker, 2010; 2013a; also Korf, 2013). This is important for this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seeks to highlight how what is considered ‘ordinary’ must be understood within the context in which everyday life occurs. So for the ethnographic researcher from a UK university the violence experienced in Sri Lanka’s protracted civil war may seem unthinkable (or similarly, the ongoing threat of oceanic violence in the wake of the tsunami). In contrast, for those living in these contexts, while never *ordinary*, such violence and fear become part of everyday lived realities. Secondly, and linked to this, one needs to place emphasis on the narratives of those at the centre of the violence to best understand the context in which it occurs and is experienced. In doing this, we can move to begin to comprehend everyday life on the terms of those who live it. Thirdly, Walker’s work highlights the challenges and potential pitfalls of conducting ethnography far away from the Euro-American academy. In particular the challenges of unlearning one’s privilege, and learning to interpret the absences, silences, and that which is *not* said, as much as what is said (see Ch. 2.0). Finally, it emphasises once again that there is more to life in Sri Lanka than violence, arguing that what occurs outside, in between and around the violence are important tactics for coping and enduring (after de Certeau, 1984). This approach has helped inform some of the conclusions drawn in this thesis. In particular the idea that, following an act of violence, people do not return to what was before, but rather “must remake their lives as an *ongoing process* in and around violence” (Walker, 2013a: 95).

Such accounts of ‘the everyday’ provide important departure points for this thesis. While they focus on the violence perpetrated during the civil war, this thesis makes use of their approach to think through the violence and *perceived threat of violence* perpetrated by the tsunami. In the same way that both Walker and Gaasbeek’s work emphasise that there is more to life in Sri Lanka than the violence of the civil war, this thesis seeks to highlight that there is more to life than ‘the tsunami’ in Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka’s coast more broadly. However, simultaneously, it also seeks to emphasise that the tsunami plays a key role in the practice of everyday life, but to understand how this occurs on the terms of those living on the affected coast.



### *1.2.3. Critical knowledge, Sri Lanka and the tsunami*

The tsunami struck a diverse range of coastlines, affecting multiple places in a myriad of ways. As such, it is important to acknowledge some of the specificities of how the disaster unfolded in Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay. This section explores some of the ways that geographers and other scholars have engaged with the tsunami and related issues in the context of Sri Lanka. The subsequent section expands on this to describe the contextual specificities of Arugam Bay.

As I highlighted above, through their explicit engagements with concepts of space and place, geographers have been well positioned to comment on the tsunami, and the discipline has produced some important work in the wake of the waves. In conceptualising place as unbounded and defined by its connections to other places, new spatialities emerge, and understandings of how the tsunami affected people around the world. Geographers, along with other social scientists, have contributed to such research, producing significant critical knowledge that exposes the asymmetrical nature of the impacts, responses and suffering related to the tsunami in Sri Lanka (Brun, 2009).

Within a Sri Lankan context, the specific gendered impacts of the tsunami have been explored. In particular research has highlighted how the tsunami had a greater impact on women than men in Sri Lanka due to prevailing gendered inequalities (see Ch. 5.3; also de Mel and Ruwanpura, 2006; Hyndman, 2008). This not only relates to the higher number of fatalities amongst women and girls, but also links to issues regarding women's livelihoods and responses from (international) development projects (Ruwanpura, 2008). Such research has revealed the particular experiences of women in the context of Sri Lanka. In addition to this, work has also explored the intersectional nature of women's experiences, highlighting the obvious but often overlooked point that 'women' are not homogenous, and that gendered experiences are also shaped by other issues, such as ethnicity and geographical location (see Perera-Mubarak, 2013; Ruwanpura, 2008).

Research specifically focusing on ethnicity and the spatial politics of Sri Lanka following the tsunami has highlighted the varied experiences of the country's different ethnic groups. In particular, it has revealed the ways in which Tamil and Muslim populations were increasingly marginalised and discriminated against in the wake of the tsunami (e.g. Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Ruwanpura, 2009). In relation to this, of particular note was the politicised 'buffer zone', a strip of land running along the entire tsunami-affected coast within which the

government restricted the reconstruction of residential housing. Implemented under the rhetoric of coastal safety, this policy proved controversial due to it not applying to hotels and other commercial buildings, leading to accusations of profit driven land-grabbing (see Cohen, 2011). However, perhaps more controversially was its politicised and ethnicised implementation, in which the buffer zone paid no attention to physical geography. Instead, in government controlled areas the no-build zone consisted of 100 meters in the Sinhala dominated south, and 200 meters in the predominantly Tamil and Muslim east. This led to accusations of the government favouring Sinhala populations, whilst seeking to obtain land, control and increased power in the Tamil and Muslim dominated east (see Hyndman, 2007b; Uyangoda, 2005a; 2005b).

The buffer zone and politicisation of the aftermath of the tsunami highlight some of the specific spatial politics experienced in the wake of the tsunami. Linked to the ethnicised politicisation of recovery is the tsunami's relationship with Sri Lanka's protracted civil war. Often referred to as an 'ethnic conflict', this war is said to have begun with anti-Tamil violence in July 1983 and ended by the defeat of the Tamil separatist group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) by the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) nearly 30 years later in May 2009. However, scholars and commentators have been at pains to point out that the conflict has its roots long before the official 'start' of the war, and that (ethnicised) violence and human rights abuses have continued since the 'end' of the war (see Anonymous, 2013; Walker, 2013a; Weiss, 2011). Furthermore, to position the war as just between conflicting Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms is to oversimplify it, and risks misunderstanding its causes (see Ismail, 2005; Perera, 2009). This has subsequently led to an assumption that the country is 'at peace' now that war has been declared 'over'. Indeed, it is this misinterpretation of the war that contributed to the failure of the 2002 internationally brokered ceasefire four years later (see Holt, 2011), combined with the tsunami, which was also a key catalyst for the resurgence of war (see Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007).

In the immediate aftermath of the waves, ethnic tension in the country seemed to dissipate in the face of an atmosphere of solidarity and good will between the country's ethnic groups. This was particularly apparent in Sri Lanka's 'Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure' (P-TOMS) in which the GoSL sought to include the LTTE in the administration of allocating funding for recovery and reconstruction projects (see Keenan, 2010). However opposition from Sinhala groups who felt that such an approach legitimised the LTTE as a political entity, as well as Muslim groups who felt they had been excluded from such

discussions, resulted in this progressive policy never being implemented. P-TOMS's failure has been attributed as a key contributor to the recommencement of outright civil war in 2006, and a number of researchers, including geographers, have explored the way the tsunami shaped how conflict unfolded and reignited (see e.g. de Alwis and Hedman, 2009; Hyndman, 2009b; 2011; Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007). Equally, the conflict has shaped experiences of the tsunami and its aftermath, particularly ways in which humanitarian aid was distributed, along with people's coping mechanisms, highlighting the intersections of the two disasters (see e.g. Boano, 2009; Brun and Lund, 2008; Hyndman, 2007; 2011; Lehman, 2013; Ruwanpura, 2009; Walker 2013a; 2013b). Research has revealed how, perversely, those increasingly affected by the civil war, particularly those already in refugee camps in the east, were better positioned to react and 'recover' from the tsunami (see Ruwanpura, 2009).

As well as focusing on issues surrounding ethnicisation and militarisation of society, and its relationship with the tsunami, much work in the wake of the tsunami, particularly undertaken by development geographers, has sought to critically assess the effectiveness and impacts of the huge wave of humanitarian aid projects that flooded Sri Lanka (e.g. Boano, 2009; de Alwis, 2009; Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006; Hollenbach, 2013; Hollenbach and Ruwanpura, 2011; Hyndman, 2009c; 2011; Kapadia, 2013; Khasalamwa, 2009; Kleinfeld, 2007; Korf et al. 2010; Ruwanpura, 2008; 2009; Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014; Stirratt, 2006; Telford and Cosgrave, 2007; see also Ch. 6.0). Such work brings to the fore questions of neo-colonialism and ongoing geopolitical relationships of power between actors from the so-called 'global North' and 'global South'. In addition to this, debates surrounding geographies of care and responsibility (see e.g. Barnett and Land, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Silk, 2004) have provoked exchanges relating to the tsunami. For example, Benedikt Korf and colleagues have critiqued the ways in which generosity was practiced in the wake of the tsunami, arguing that it reaffirmed the superiority of Western donors, and denied agency to those affected (see Korf, 2005; 2006; 2007; Korf et al. 2010). Conversely Nigel Clark and colleagues have celebrated the various acts of generosity that followed the tsunami, highlighting the shrinking distances and political possibilities that the tsunami opened up (see Clark, 2005; 2007; Clark et al. 2006). Such debates highlight how geographers' implicit focus on scale, distance and place have allowed some unique and important insights into understandings of the impacts of the tsunami.

While scholarship on the tsunami is vast, until recently what has been largely omitted from such accounts is the disaster's materiality. As Jessi Lehman contends, it is significant that

“the *ocean* unexpectedly arose to destroy property, homes and lives” (Lehman, 2013: 495, emphasis in original). Building on recent work by environmental historians, feminists, poststructuralists and posthumanists, Lehman argues that the ocean should be considered an important ‘actor’, shaping the everyday lives of those living on Sri Lanka’s East Coast, with an agency that exists beyond social construction (see Lehman, 2013; 2014). Lehman’s argument for bringing the sea into focus when exploring issues related to the tsunami, and acknowledging the relationships between humans and non-humans, is important and came through strongly in my ethnographic research. As such, the sea features throughout the thesis.

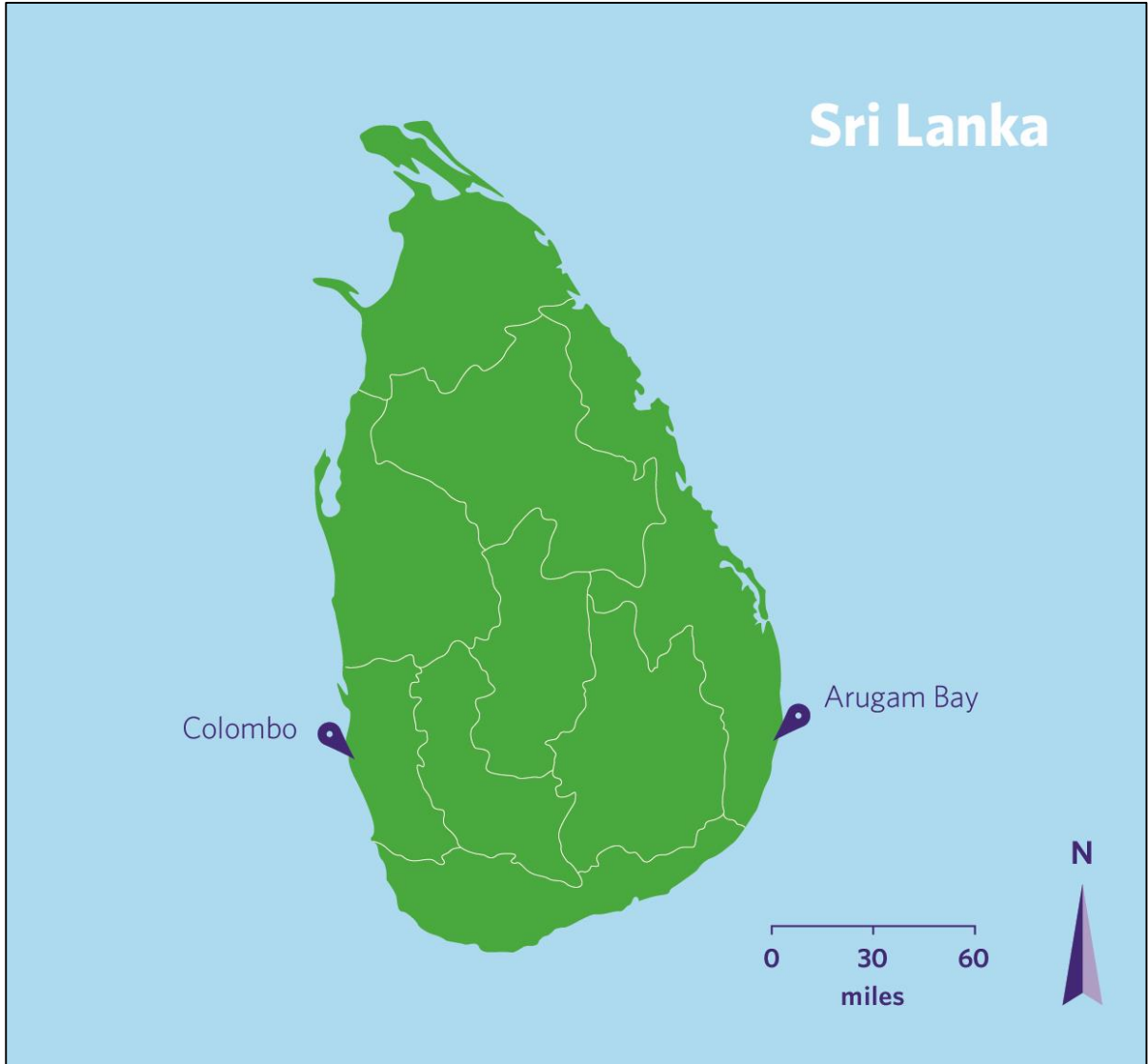
The thesis seeks to build on work conducted on the tsunami in the wake of the disaster. However, it departs from research conducted in the immediate aftermath of the waves to explore how the tsunami has become part of ordinary, everyday life. While, I do not wish to categorise the disaster into different ‘phases’, nevertheless, as I have discussed above, it is important that research does not cease once the more visible, tangible effects of the disaster and humanitarian response have disappeared. As such, I build on some of the work conducted in Sri Lanka on the concept of the ‘everyday’ to write against popular media narratives that situate the tsunami as a spectacular event confined to the past.

### **1.3 Introducing Arugam Bay, Sri Lanka**

The project is based on the experiences and everyday lives of residents in Arugam Bay, a settlement of approximately 3500 people situated in Ampara District, Eastern Province, on the south east coast of Sri Lanka. It is a few miles south of the market town of Pottuvil, and approximately 130 miles east of Colombo, or 6-8 hours’ drive (see Figure 1.ii). In many ways, Arugam Bay represents an unusual case study to focus on, due to a relatively uncommon ethnic make-up and distinctive form of tourism development on the East Coast. However, while a unique place, the area is inhabited by ordinary Sri Lankans living ordinary lives. The thesis is an attempt to tell the stories of these ordinary lives, and the everyday practices of the people of Arugam Bay in the wake of the tsunami, an extra-ordinary event.

#### *1.3.1. The Arugam Bay area*

Administratively, Arugam Bay is bounded to the north by Arugam Lagoon and the Heda Oya river to the south, with the Pottuvil-Panama Road (B374, also known as ‘Main Street’ or ‘The



**Figure 1.ii** Map of Sri Lanka showing provincial boundaries and location of Arugam Bay. *Map: Paddy Wright*



**Figure 1.iii** Map of Arugam Bay. Research was predominantly conducted with those living in Ullae (Tamil/Sinhala Village), largely within the area circled in grey, although my research practices extended beyond this area and beyond the confines of this map (see also Ch. 2.2). *Map: Paddy Wright/Google Maps*



Strip’) running through the village, roughly 200-500m parallel to the coast (see Figure 1.iii). The settlement consists of three main spatialised (and ethnicised) locales, known as Perie Ullae, Sinai Ullae and Ullae (‘Ulla’ is also sometimes used to refer to the three settlements as a whole<sup>4</sup>). Perie Ullae and Sinai Ullae are situated to the north and south of the area respectively, and are predominantly made up of Muslim residents. Farming, fishing and tourism make up the main socio-economic activities in these two areas. Ullae, where the majority of the research was conducted, is a small settlement located between the other two, and consists of a few hundred people, largely Tamils, although there are a significant number of Sinhala residents as well. Unlike the other two settlements, very few farmers live in this part of the place, and the main socio-economic activities here are fishing and (ocean based) tourism. Fishing and tourism in Arugam Bay are markedly seasonal, with the main fishing season running from September/October through to March/April, and the tourist season between April and October.

Arugam Bay provides an example of Sinhala and Tamil groups living in relative harmony. Indeed, in Ullae there are a number of families of mixed ethnicity. The Tamil population is predominantly Christian, although there are also a significant number of Hindu Tamils too. The Sinhala population are predominantly Buddhist. While these ethnicised groups are very much interconnected, and relationships between Tamil and Sinhalese along with Muslim residents are generally good, there is noticeably less integration between the wider Muslim population and the Sinhala/Tamil population. Indeed, at times there were some tensions and hostility directed towards the Muslim population from Sinhala and Tamil residents. Some of this tension is said to be historic, but it also reflects broader trends in Sri Lanka, in which Sinhala nationalist movements, such as the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS or ‘The Buddhist Power Force’), have stoked anti-Muslim sentiments<sup>5</sup> (Anonymous, 2013; Wickramasinghe, 2014). In addition to Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim residents, there is a significant migrant expatriate

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<sup>4</sup> I heard numerous and contradictory ways of defining, describing and naming these locales, however this was the most common narrative in my research.

<sup>5</sup> The BBS, along with other nationalist groups and individuals, have come to prominence in Sri Lanka in recent times, aiming to reinforce the gains of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony following the end of the war. Led by Sinhala Buddhist monks, and acting within the rhetoric that positioned the civil war as a war in the defence of Buddhism, the group have led anti-Muslim rallies, published a wide range of Islamophobic literature, and been responsible for violent attacks on Muslims and other minorities perceived as a threat to the ethno-nationalist narrative they propagate (see de Mel, 2013: 78; Wickramasinghe, 2014).

population from Europe, Australasia and North America, as well as a minority from other areas such as Japan and Israel. The majority of expatriates own small-scale tourism businesses, often in partnership with local land owners.

As with the majority of Sri Lanka, the country's protracted civil war has affected and shaped the area's development. During the earlier years of the conflict, the region was subjected to relatively high levels of violence, and a number of people, especially young Tamil men, moved away at this time. However, during the latter stages of the war, and particularly since the 2002 ceasefire, Arugam Bay and the wider region experienced very little outright fighting. However, the main impact of the civil war on the area was to maintain its relative isolation from the rest of the country, and prior to the 2009 'end' of the war the region was subject to a large number of road blocks, checkpoints and travel restrictions. As such there is an absence of large scale international tourism, as experienced on the South and West coasts, as visitor numbers were kept down. Furthermore, this also resulted in comparatively low levels of government investment in the area due to its distance from any commercial hubs or large centres of population. For example, Arugam Bay only received mains electricity in the early 1990s, and it remains inconsistent, with power cuts common, especially during the tourist 'low' season. Furthermore, main roads in the region were only sealed a few years ago. However, this situation has changed in recent years due to the government's drive to increase tourist numbers.

Tourism in Arugam Bay has increased rapidly in the past decade. While domestic tourism has been present for many years, international tourists only started coming to the area in large numbers since the 2002 ceasefire. Arugam Bay was 'discovered' around the 1970s by travelling surfers, predominantly from Australia, who were attracted by the presence of a world-class surf break at 'Main Point'. From this time through to the 1990s the area was frequented by a small but steady stream of international tourists, largely surfers, as well as 'hippies' and backpackers (Crick, 1994). Numbers remained low due to the country's ongoing civil war, but the existence of quality surf meant that unlike much of the rest of the East Coast, tourism remained present throughout this time. Tourist accommodation and amenities were largely catered for by small-scale businesses that were generally locally owned or the product of partnerships between local land owners and petty capital from Western tourists/ex-pats. However, since the 2002 ceasefire, and particularly since the 2009 'end' of the war, visitor numbers have increased dramatically, and the area has seen a significant amount of new development (see Figures 1.iv, 1.v). While most of this has





**Figure 1.iv** Looking south, Main Street/Panama Road, Arugam Bay, circa early 1990s.  
*Photo: Coley/Family Janitha*



**Figure 1.v** Looking south, Main Street/Panama Road, Arugam Bay, July 2013. *Photo: Author*



**Figure 1.vi** New concrete hotel development, Panama Road, Arugam Bay, 2013. *Photo: Author*

remained small scale, an increasing amount of external investors are constructing larger scale establishments, and local businesses are expanding, often flouting, or finding ways to bypass, local planning restrictions (e.g. Figure 1.vi; also Guruge, 2011). This expansion is a product of the combination of the ending of the war, tourism's centrality to reconstruction efforts after the tsunami, and recent broader efforts by the state to boost tourism numbers to the island (Carrigan, 2011; Fernando and Jayawardena, 2013; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008; Wickramasinghe and Takano, 2007). According to the website [arugam.info](http://arugam.info), at the time of writing there are currently over 70 tourist establishments, with this number increasing every season.

Arugam Bay was badly affected by the tsunami, and was one of the first places in Sri Lanka to be struck on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. An estimated 200-300 people were killed, and over 500 houses were destroyed (Klein, 2007; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). Everyone living in the area at the time is said to have lost family members, friends and loved ones, and all but the sturdiest of beachfront properties were completely destroyed. This not only had an impact on people's homes, but the area's economy as well, as fishing boats and buildings were wiped out, along with the majority of tourist establishments. In the immediate aftermath, many

families had to move into temporary accommodation, which for the residents of Ullae meant relocating to Lahugala, several miles inland, or staying with friends/relatives elsewhere on the island. While some families opted to not return to the area at all, the trauma of the wave proving too much for them, within a few months the majority of people had returned to Arugam Bay to rebuild their lives.

Following the tsunami, a large number of national and international NGOs descended on the area. The chaotic and uncoordinated nature of their response has left lasting impacts on Arugam Bay, almost as profound as the tsunami itself (see Ch. 6.0). Many of these projects were linked to the tourism industry, which was seen as a key way to rebuild the area's economy. This was akin to a broader strategy in Sri Lanka, in which the government made no secret of its desire to use the tsunami as an opportunity for economic development. As a representative from the state's tourist board stated at the time, "out of this great tragedy will come a world class tourism destination" (quoted in Rice, 2005: 11; see also Carrigan, 2011). Initially this strategy involved the GoSL designating Arugam Bay one of several 'tourist zones', which earmarked the area for large scale development. Investors and developers produced plans for luxury hotels, boutique shops and a marina, taking advantage of the controversial 'buffer zone' proposal which at the time prevented domestic buildings from being rebuilt, and in the process displaced dozens of families. A sustained resident protest ensured that such plans never materialised and the controversial buffer zone policy was eventually abolished. However residents in the village and wider region remain under pressure from the aforementioned ongoing smaller developments (see APC and MONLAR<sup>6</sup>, 2013; Cohen, 2011). The protests against government plans attracted a significant amount of media attention, and prompted the journalist and political analyst Naomi Klein to use Arugam Bay as a case study in her book, *The Shock Doctrine*, which explores global 'disaster capitalism' (see Klein, 2007). Largely thanks to Klein, for many Arugam Bay has become synonymous with issues relating to 'disaster capitalism' and is mentioned in many articles about the tsunami and tourism development, despite the fact that the large scale developments Klein predicted did not actually manifest themselves in Arugam Bay in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami (see Hyndman, 2011; Jeganathan, 2009).

Arugam Bay represents a useful case study to explore the legacies of the tsunami for a number of reasons. While there are elements of the area that are quite unique (notably the

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<sup>6</sup> 'Asian Peasant Coalition' & 'Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform'

distinctive form of tourism development), the area still maintains many features common in Sri Lanka's South East coast. For example, the presence of an active fishing community and a way of life dominated by the sea has been documented elsewhere on the coast, albeit practiced in a slightly different fashion (see Lehman, 2013; 2014). In this sense, some of the insights this thesis makes on people's relationships with the sea, the material coast of memory, and the role and agency of the ocean in rebuilding everyday life could be applied to other contexts within Sri Lanka. Furthermore, many of the challenges that the population in Arugam Bay face, such as gendered inequalities, alcoholism, and precarious lifestyles are also prevalent in many places in Sri Lanka. In addition to this, the village does not exist in a vacuum, and national issues such as government corruption, the neoliberalisation of the economy, and national ethnicised tensions also shape everyday life in Arugam Bay. In short, Arugam Bay is populated by ordinary Sri Lankans living in many ways ordinary lives. This is the basis for this thesis, to explore this ordinariness.

However, despite this, as mentioned, Arugam Bay is a relatively unique place. While all places are 'unique' in some sense, Arugam Bay has a number of features that set it apart from other settlements on the East Coast, not least because of the long term presence of tourism and surfers, the lack of outright conflict in the village in the past fifteen years, and a relatively unusual mixed ethnic make-up. This allows for the exploration of a number of additional issues that may not be possible in other places in Sri Lanka.

Firstly, as a place less affected by war than other coastal settlements on the East Coast, an ethnographic account of Arugam Bay allows for an exploration of everyday life in Sri Lanka without foregrounding the conflict. While other studies have attempted to show there is more to life than war in these places (e.g. Gaasbeek, 2010; Walker, 2013a), through the framing of their studies around the war, they inadvertently reproduce the imagination of Sri Lanka as dominated by ethnicised conflict. Through studying Arugam Bay, one can move beyond this narrative, while also acknowledging that the war and ethnicised conflict is still important. In addition to this, the presence of surfing highlights that life in Sri Lanka is not simply dominated by war, tsunamis and other disasters, but rather there are elements of joy and happiness too. A focus on the community of practice of surfing encourages this important counter-narrative, as well as providing an interesting example of ways in which people have coped with the legacies of the wave.

Secondly, the presence of tourism and surfing provides a useful example of contested knowledges and geographical imaginations. While all places feature multiple imaginations, the presence of tourists foreign to Sri Lanka allows one to explore themes such as the exotic, discourses of paradise, and otherness, and their importance with regards to the tsunami (see Ch. 4.4). Furthermore, the transformation of places into consumption goods is a key attribute of tourism, and this encouraged some of the conclusions drawn around commodification and the tsunami (see Ch. 5.0).

Thirdly, the unique connections of Arugam Bay with other places around the world, notably through tourism and surfing, allow for an insight into the multiple ways in which disasters play out, particularly the heterogeneity of how aid works and is practiced. Of note here is the presence of the global surf community and how it mobilised in the wake of the tsunami. This allowed an exploration of the geographies of care and responsibility, which in turn provides deeper understandings of humanitarianism and how it works (see Ch. 6.0). Indeed, through Arugam Bay's unique attributes, I have been able to draw a number of broader conclusions surrounding debates within geography, disaster studies, and development studies.

### *1.3.2. Communities of practice in Arugam Bay*

Arugam Bay has been the subject of work exploring issues of community. In particular, Pradeep Jeganathan (2009) utilises Arugam Bay as a case study in his critique of Eurocentric imaginations of 'community', which he argues has also been appropriated by nationalist politics in Sri Lanka. In this imagination, a 'community' is designated by spatial or administrative boundaries, and fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity of a population (see also Hasbullah and Korf, 2013). Jeganathan argues that practices of 'community' are also "practices of the hierarchical reproduction of the social order and the making of the authoritative 'voice' which is predicated on doxic silencing and repression" (2009: 81). Such imaginations of 'community' informed much 'community consultation' by INGOs in the wake of the tsunami in Arugam Bay (as celebrated in Robinson and Jarvie, 2008) and resulted in unsuitable and poorly received projects. In the light of this, I do not consider Arugam Bay a single 'community', or presuppose what the 'community' consists of, but rather I approach the area through numerous 'communities of practice' which emerged from my ethnographic research.

The term ‘communities of practice’ refers to groups of people engaging in similar activities, and in the process, producing specific (spatial) knowledges. Throughout this thesis I focus on four communities of practice that play out in Arugam Bay: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. As I discuss, these four communities of practice are not the only ones present in the area, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, communities of practice are multiple, messy, overlapping and constantly in flux (see Ch. 4.0). I approach community in this manner in part to address the concerns outlined by Jeganathan: to allow ‘communities’ to extend beyond the spatial confines of Arugam Bay, and emphasise the relational connections the area has with numerous places and processes. In this sense, the concept compliments the idea of a ‘progressive sense of place’ (see Massey, 2005; also Ch.3.0). The four ‘communities of practice’ are utilised throughout the thesis as a heuristic device to explore the legacies of the tsunami. As I describe in more depth in Chapter 4.0, this approach is part of a broader postcolonial strategy that seeks to explore the legacies of the tsunami on the terms of those who live, work and play on the tsunami affected coast. A focus on practice encourages this in a number of ways.

Firstly, it avoids pre-determining the centrality or importance of the tsunami. Research in Sri Lanka, particularly from within geography, has been dominated by issues relating to the tsunami, in addition to the country’s civil war (see Ch. 5.2). While I do not wish to play down the importance of these issues, there is more to life in Sri Lanka than ‘natural disasters’ and ‘ethnicised conflict’. Through focusing on the rhythms of everyday life, I seek to move ‘beyond the spectacular’, and instead focus on people’s ordinary everyday lives, on their terms. So while the *subject* of this thesis centres on the tsunami, I do not frame my approach around it, or assume the centrality of the disaster in everyday life. Rather, I explore the ways that the tsunami is known, experienced and negotiated *as a part of* everyday life.

Secondly, it avoids placing people within essentialising identitarian categories. By focusing on what people *do*, rather than trying to (pre)determine who they *are*, one is better positioned to explore issues on the terms of the people. This is particularly pertinent in Sri Lanka, where identity politics, especially in relation to ethnicity, have been the centre of extreme violence and the elimination of various human rights (see e.g. Weiss, 2011). In Sri Lanka, tensions, antagonisms, and divisions do not simply occur between ethnicised ‘communities’, but also *within* them (Hasbullah and Korf, 2013). By focusing on practice, one is encouraged to explore how various identitarian markers, such as ethnicity, gender or nationality, shape practices, but also how they are (re)produced, challenged and socially constructed through

practices. In doing this, I seek to highlight the importance of such categorisations, but also stress that these markers are relational, social constructions and dynamic processes, rather than essential characteristics of people and places.

Thirdly, ‘communities of practice’ highlights how knowledges are constructed, situated and partial. Through focusing on communities of practice, I seek to reveal how knowledges of the tsunami are produced through various practices, and highlight how such knowledges can be contested, are dynamic and in flux. In doing this, I emphasise the contextual nature of knowledge production, in particular unsettling dominant discourses surrounding the tsunami, and clearing space to allow other narratives and ways of knowing the waves to be written into existence. As debates surrounding whether the subaltern can speak reveal (see Spivak, 1988; 2006), attempting this is somewhat challenging. However, by focusing on communities of practice, I seek to at least take steps towards understanding the tsunami on the terms of the people who continue to inhabit the affected coast. A major part of this strategy has been to include ‘researching’ as a key community of practice.

Finally, this approach also allows the agency of more-than-human actors, specifically the sea, to be acknowledged. In this thesis the geo-physical world is not conceptualised as a backdrop to everyday practices, but rather an active part of its production. In this sense, everyday life is in a process of co-production with the geo-physical world, in which actors such as the sea or animals such as fish, play a role in shaping how people practice, and as such play a role in how people have negotiated the tsunami. However, equally, these actors also have knowledges produced *about* them. That is to say that ‘the sea’, for example, is known in specific, situated and subjective ways by different (groups of) people. Such knowledges change the way that geo-physical agency is experienced, and as such, interactions with the sea’s agency varies through space and time. As I explore in the chapters that follow, this has had a profound effect on the ongoing legacies of the tsunami.

#### **1.4 Thesis aims and objectives**

This thesis explores the social and cultural legacies of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, nearly a decade after the wave struck, specifically focusing on the coastal communities of Ullae, Arugam Bay, in South East Sri Lanka. In particular, I explore the practice of everyday life in the area, and the extent to which the tsunami shapes everyday practices. Based on this, the project addresses the following key questions:

- How does the tsunami permeate the day-to-day lived realities of the people of Arugam Bay?
- How do these experiences vary between different groups?
- To what extent are narratives and representations of the tsunami, and the tsunami affected coastscape, varied and contested?
- How have the specific materialities and more-than-human actors of the coastscape shaped the disaster and its legacy?

### 1.5 Thesis outline

My key argument is that the tsunami should not be conceptualised as an ‘event’ confined to the past, as is commonplace in popular media representations (see Ch 5.0). Rather, I reveal that the tsunami has a continued presence in everyday life in Arugam Bay. However, experiences of the tsunami are not universal, and knowledges of the tsunami are situated within relationships of power. In particular, I explore some of the imaginations of the tsunami, many of which are embedded in wider discourses of ‘othering’, tropicality and spectacle. Furthermore, dominant discourses within Sri Lanka both implicitly and explicitly situate ‘the nation’ and ‘Sri Lankan’ as ethnically Sinhalese and religiously Buddhist, thus excluding Tamil, Muslim and other non-Sinhala-Buddhist possibilities. I unpick the ways in which such representations have asymmetrically shaped everyday life on the tsunami affected coast, paying particular attention to alternative knowledges of the tsunami and coastscape, as well as to the agency of more-than-human actors that exists beyond social construction. In doing this, I argue that everyday life has been remade, incorporating into it the tsunami and the manifold knowledges it has produced.

This thesis is based on data collected during eight months ethnographic fieldwork, collected over two visits to Sri Lanka’s East Coast. The methodology of the project is an important feature that runs throughout the whole thesis, however the research process is described and debated in the chapter that follows this introduction.

The opening two empirical chapters (3.0 and 4.0) are designed to be read together and serve to situate the research both theoretically and contextually. The opening empirical chapter **3.0 The Sea, Place and the Rhythms of Everyday Life** focuses on the medium of the disaster, the sea, which is central to everyday life in the area. It builds on recent work in human



geography which argues that more-than-human bodies, including the sea, have a material agency existing outside of social construction. I argue that the dynamic, rhythmic movements of the sea are central to building (a sense of) place in Arugam Bay. However, I conceptualise place as being produced by an assemblage of materials, practices and representations. As such, the sea is not simply a space that is experienced first-hand, but also one that is known contextually, mediated through discursive representations. As such, I trace some of the dominant discourses of the sea, which situate the sea within Romantic imaginations of a sublime, ‘othered’ and natural space. This has led to contemporary conceptualisations of the sea as being socially insignificant, a space to be traversed, a precious resource and a series of consumable spectacles. This has important implications regarding how people around the world reacted to the tsunami (see Ch. 5.0). However, in this chapter I also argue for situating the sea within the context of Sri Lanka and specifically Arugam Bay, emphasising that this space is an everyday social space, culturally located and has contextually specific affective properties.

Knowledges of the sea are produced through everyday routines, which are the subject for chapter **4.0 Communities of Practice**. In this chapter I introduce a theory of practice, which highlights the contextual nature of practices in everyday life, emphasising how they are both influenced by discursive and embodied knowledges, and in turn, produce knowledges. The chapter describes the four communities of practice – fishing, tourism, surfing and researching - in detail, exploring knowledges they produce, negotiating radical differences and emphasising their contextual specificities. For the remainder of the thesis, these communities of practice weave their way through the subsequent chapters.

The remaining three empirical chapters focus much more explicitly on the tsunami, each one highlighting different ways in which the tsunami continues to be experienced in contemporary, everyday life. Chapter **5.0 Spectacle, Consumption and Encountering the Tsunami** focuses on how the tsunami continues to be negotiated by those living in Arugam Bay due to the situated knowledges of non-residents, in particular the imagination that the tsunami was a spectacular event that occurred in the past. The spectacularisation of the tsunami transforms the disaster into a consumption good, and as such a point of interest for tourists and researchers alike. As such, these practices continue to force an engagement with the tsunami for residents. This chapter also explores the contested memorialisation of the tsunami (see also Ch. 7.0). In particular it highlights how the state and other actors celebrate anniversaries and monumentalise the tsunami. Such practices are largely rejected in Arugam

Bay and seen as unnecessary by much of the population. With both spectacularisation and monumentalisation, the tsunami is discursively placed in the past, which ironically serves to keep it alive in the present.

Chapter **6.0 'Building Back Better'** focuses on practices of aid, inextricably entangled within narratives of the disaster, and a factor which keeps the tsunami alive in the present. Aid was donated in a context of specific spatial imaginations, one which denied agency and power to those affected, the product of discourses surrounding global development and natural disasters. However, through focusing on the practice of surfing, I explore how different spatialities and connections emerged, and emphasise that donating aid was not universally practiced. Building on the idea of the spectacularisation of the tsunami (**5.0**), aid left a material reminder of the tsunami, through NGO signage and 'competitive humanitarianism'. Many aid projects were considered damaging and inappropriate by residents, however these projects have been met with the agency of the people of Arugam Bay, demonstrating that despite prevailing discourses that situate them as otherwise, they are not powerless. Aid was also part of a larger project of tourism development and neoliberalisation, resulting in a damaging societal shift. This has been difficult to recover from, and is one of the legacies of the tsunami that continues to affect residents and remains a key challenge in their everyday lives.

The final empirical chapter **7.0 Memory, The Material Coast, and Remaking Everyday Life** argues that the tsunami is memorialised and remembered within the coastscape through communities of practice, in which everyday life is remade to incorporate the tsunami. The tsunami resides in the material coastscape, largely due to the situated knowledges of the people who inhabit it. The residents of Arugam Bay have learnt to live with the tsunami, reconfiguring everyday practices to include the tsunami. This chapter re-emphasises the agency of the material world, including the more-than-human, to shape and influence memories of the tsunami. However, while part of everyday life, the tsunami was an extraordinary event, and from time to time the memory of it can more intensely rupture the regular rhythms of ordinary life.

In summary, this thesis offers an ethnographic account of the ongoing legacies of the 2004 tsunami. Rather than focusing on the immediate aftermath, it contributes to previous literature on the tsunami by exploring how the tsunami permeates everyday life once the initial 'hype' of the disaster has subdued. Informed by literature that seeks to understand disasters and

places ‘on their own terms’, and work that highlights the agency of more-than-human actors, this thesis explores three key (overlapping) ways in which the tsunami continues to be experienced in everyday life: through its spectacularisation and commodification; through the discursive practices of INGOs; and through the lived coastscape itself. Throughout this thesis I utilise ‘communities of practice’ heuristically to explore this legacy, and highlight the ways in which specific knowledges are produced and contested in the area. Running alongside this are a number of themes which this project seeks to tease out. These include the agency of the more-than-human, specifically the sea, the spectacularisation of disaster, memory and memorialisation of disaster and broader themes relating to geographical theory of space and place.

As a whole, these chapters provide empirical evidence that the tsunami is not ‘over’ or an event confined to the past, but rather is ongoing and shapes everyday life on the coast. Furthermore, these ongoing experiences of the tsunami are not equal, but rather are shaped by relationships of power, specifically with regards to knowledge production. This thesis highlights the contested geographies of the tsunami-affected coast, and seeks to tell the stories of those who continue to live, work and play in the wake of the waves.



## CHAPTER 2.0

### METHODOLOGY: RESEARCHING, LEARNING, AND BECOMING PART OF THE COASTSCAPE

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*Research-wise things continue to go slowly today. In part I think this is my fault for not pushing enough and feeling uncomfortable asking people for interviews. But this is an issue with conducting research with your friends – I don't want my whole relationship with people to be simply about me pushing them to do things for me... Today I waited 3 hours for [participant] to turn up and he didn't. This was so frustrating, as I saw him 10 minutes before we were due to meet and he said he was coming. ARRRRGHHH!! This seems to be happening so often and is really getting me down. Will I get 'enough' interviews? What does 'enough' even mean?! Either way, at this stage, I am some way off... (Adapted from field diary, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013)*

In this chapter I explain the research process I undertook in order to understand and make sense of the everyday rhythms of Arugam Bay. As the opening extract suggests, this was a demanding process with a number of practical, methodological and ethical challenges. The chapter commences by situating my research within the practice of undertaking geographical research, in particular problematising geography's imperial roots, and outlining my broad approach to conducting responsible ethnographic research. Following on from this, I describe how I encountered Arugam Bay. This section will explore how I initially established Arugam Bay as a 'research site', the challenges of this, and the process of allowing the ethnography to (re)define the researched community.

The majority of the research undertaken for this study was conducted in Arugam Bay, and consisted of a broad ethnographic approach. This entailed a variety of participant observation techniques, ranging from auto-ethnographic 'observant participation' to much more detached observation techniques (although as I explain below, it is my contention that the researcher is never fully detached). Various research methods were also used to complement this, which I

describe below: interviews, participatory mapping and focus groups, complimented by ‘reading the landscape’ and ‘critically familiarising’ myself with relevant discursive texts. Finally, I describe and reflect on how I came to analyse and produce knowledge about the legacies of the tsunami in Arugam Bay.

## **2.1 Towards a postcolonial methodology**

Ethnographic research has inherently colonial roots, is a product of ‘white modernity’ (Saldanha, 2007: 46), and “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (Smith, 2001: 1). As Linda Smith argues, during the age of colonialism:

...knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (Smith, 2001: 1-2).

This process has continued beyond the colonial period and has been particularly apparent when researchers of European descent conduct research with indigenous groups, or when research is conducted across the boundaries of the ‘global North’ and ‘South’ (Sidaway, 1992; Madge, 1993). In the past two decades geographers have increasingly engaged with postcolonial theory and ideas surrounding ‘subalternity’ in order to address such issues and rethink the discipline’s prevailing Eurocentrism (see Gidwani, 2009; Jazeel, 2013a; 2014; Nash, 2002; Robinson, 2003).

As a discipline, geography is not without its share of colonial baggage. In particular, EuroAmerican/Anglophonic geography has been critiqued for the ‘assumed universalisms’ of many of its theoretical claims (see Robinson, 2003: 275), with European theory and knowledge acting as a ‘silent referent’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: 28). This can lead to the ‘dissimulation’ of the politics of specific places due to geography’s unsuitable conceptual language (see Jazeel, 2013a). For example, the Enlightenment binaries of culture/nature and secular/sacred, prevalent in EuroAmerican geography, are inadequate descriptors when applied to the Sri Lankan context, as they fail to capture the non-binary socio-cultural and political specificities of this particular place (see Jazeel, 2014).

These issues raise important questions regarding the ability of ‘Western’ and other ‘elite’ academics to represent ‘the subaltern’ or even define ‘subalternity’. This is despite the best efforts of groups such as the Subaltern Studies Collective to write ‘from below’, allow a

‘politics of the people’ and understand people ‘on their own terms’ (see Ch. 1.0; also Chaturvedi, 2000; Gidwani, 2009; Guha, 2000). Through posing the question ‘can the subaltern speak?’ Gayatri Spivak (1988: 2006 [1999]) critiques the assumption that elites are able to effectively ‘speak for’ the subaltern, whilst avoiding ventriloquism and the subversion of peasant agency. Rather than representing and speaking for, representation is akin to an artistic or philosophical portrayal which effectively reinterprets the object of representation within the language and knowledge systems of the theorist or researcher (Spivak, 2006). As such, acts of dissent and resistance occurring on behalf of an essential subaltern subject cannot be “separate[d] from the dominant discourse that provides the language and conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks” (Ashcroft et al, 2007: 201).

Such work provides a challenge for this project theoretically, methodologically, analytically and ethically. Specifically, questions should be asked as to whether it is possible to move beyond the taken-for-granted knowledge systems that dominate the discipline I inhabit and, linked to this, can I effectively write about Arugam Bay and its population without my work silencing and subverting people’s voices? The people of Arugam Bay may be described as ‘subaltern’ in the sense that their lives and experiences cannot be adequately (re)presented, on their terms, within dominant discourses surrounding the tsunami or Sri Lanka. Such hegemonic knowledges may be produced in numerous ways, for example through a spectacularised global media (Ch. 5.0), the portrayals of ‘disaster victims’ by INGOs (Ch. 6.0), the ethno-nationalist narratives of the Sri Lankan state (Ch. 5.0), the exoticised imagery of the surf and tourism industries (Ch. 4.0) or the Eurocentric binaries of disciplinary geography (Ch. 3.0). However, as I state above, Spivak argues that the elite researcher cannot formulate an unproblematic, unified ‘subaltern identity’ (1988; 2006). Indeed, the people of Arugam Bay are a diverse, heterogeneous population, and there are numerous relationships of power, subordination and contested narratives occurring *within* this population, of which I was (briefly) a part (see Ch. 4.6). As such, the goal of this research is not to attempt to ‘speak for’ an imagined unified population living in Arugam Bay, but rather, to unsettle those presupposed knowledges, using postcolonial theory and the concept of subalternity throughout the thesis as “a *method* for thinking against the grain of colonial power’s lingering and subjugating effects” (Jazeel, 2013b: 20, emphasis in original). In doing this, I seek to *clear space* for alternative narratives to exist, giving the numerous marginalised voices of Arugam Bay at least the opportunity to speak, and be heard (see also Chakrabarty, 2000; Noxolo, 2009; Spivak, 1992).

There have been a number of efforts by geographers to engage with issues of representation and responsibility, specifically reflecting on postcolonial geography and geographers (see e.g. Jazeel, 2007; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007; 2010; Kapoor, 2004; Noxolo, 2009; Noxolo et al. 2008; 2012 Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Raghuram et al. 2009). Such work sets an agenda for this thesis insofar as I wish to conceive of my responsibility as being beholden and answerable to the place I am researching, in this case Arugam Bay (see Spivak, 1994). As such, I follow these writers in engaging with postcolonial theory in order to engage with Arugam Bay and the tsunami ethically. Specifically, Ilan Kapoor sets out a useful manifesto for achieving the face-to-face ethical encounter Spivak prescribes: intimately inhabiting and negotiating difference; acknowledging complicity; unlearning one's privilege as loss; learning to learn from below; and working without guarantees (Kapoor, 2004). Similarly, Raghuram and Madge (2006) suggest three methodological approaches to achieve a more responsible postcolonial approach in (development) geography: reflecting on why one is conducting research in the global south; problematising theorisation, specifically challenging the universalism of Eurocentric theories; and reflecting on one's multiple investments in conducting research.

In order to do such work justice, I do not attempt to answer all these calls immediately. As such, while the remainder of this chapter does go some way to addressing the concerns I have raised, I reflect on the practice of research throughout the whole thesis (see Ch. 4.6 in particular). In doing this, I build upon writers such as Qadri Ismail (2005) and Tariq Jazeel (2007; also Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010), who argue that people writing about places, in this case Sri Lanka, are never located 'outside' of the place. Through their writings and representations, they become part of the continued production of that place (Jazeel, 2007: 295; also Ismail, 2005: xxvi). As such, I do not disappear from the thesis's narrative after this 'methodology' chapter.

## **2.2 Establishing 'the field' and encountering Arugam Bay**

Postcolonial geographers are wary of conceiving 'the field' as something 'out there' and 'othered' in relation to the normalised environs of the British academy (e.g. Raghuram and Madge, 2006; see also Knapp, 2014). Throughout this thesis I use the term 'the field' to refer to Arugam Bay, and the area in which I undertook ethnographic fieldwork. However, it is important to note that the university and geography department in which I worked, and for



whom this thesis is written, is also ‘a field’ of sorts, in which structures of power and knowledge exist. My location within a British academic institution means that for the knowledge I produce to count, my writing has had to conform to the Academy’s expectations of prose, citation and styling (see also Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007). Therefore, through focusing on the practice of researching throughout the thesis, ‘the field’ is in reality extended to include anywhere in which I conducted, reflected on or presented my research.

The decision to conduct research in Arugam Bay was an amalgamation of a number of contributing factors. The initial proposal for this project (which I did not produce) did not have a specific community in mind, instead consisting of the broad brief to explore post-tsunami sustainabilities in Sri Lanka. The tsunami impacted over 75% of Sri Lanka’s coastline (Stirratt, 2006), affecting hundreds of communities, and as I had few personal contacts or links with the island, the initial task of establishing the field site had the potential to be overwhelming. I had been aware of Arugam Bay’s existence due to my experience as a surfer, and the area’s prevalence in the international surfing scene. Arugam Bay was the destination for a number of international surf competitions during the 2000s, both before and after the tsunami, and as such, was a name I associated with Sri Lanka. However, my interest in Arugam Bay as a potential site to conduct research grew as I discovered a number of projects based in the area that sought to (re)engage people with the ocean following the tsunami. Much of this was based around the surfing community, and through various contacts made in the UK I was put in touch with members of the Arugam Bay Surf Club, who agreed to help facilitate my research.

An important factor in deciding to conduct research in Arugam Bay was the prevalence of tourism development as a form of recovery. Throughout the project I have been interested in exploring differing and contested knowledges surrounding the tsunami. Part of this has been how touristic imaginations of the coast have shaped the (re)construction process, both through the cultural practices of tourism, and the imagination of Arugam Bay as an exotic, tropical, paradisaical destination, as well as the largely neoliberal political economic practice of tourism. I encountered Arugam Bay in a number of reports and academic research papers, particularly studies into tourism development and displacement (see Cohen, 2011; Rice, 2005; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008; Wickramasinghe and Takano, 2007), as well as in Naomi Klein’s well-known study on disaster capitalism, *The Shock Doctrine* (2007). This displacement, both physical in the form of land-grabbing, or emotional due to the rapid changes in the area as a result of the tsunami and ensuing development, has subsequently

become a focus of this thesis. The presence of tourists also had some methodological advantages, as it allowed me to remain a relatively 'invisible' researcher when required.

Initially, this project was conceived as being a comparative study, focusing on a 'Tamil community' in the East of Sri Lanka, and a 'Sinhala community' in the South. However, after considerable reflection, I felt that such an approach ran the risk of reproducing binary conceptualisations of Sri Lankan society and the nation. Academic research, political commentaries and numerous representations within popular culture of Sri Lanka tend to conceive of the country's society and geography in oppositional binary terms, between Sinhala people and places, and Tamil people and places (see Ismail, 2005; Perera, 2009). This is particularly apparent within representations from nationalist groups, in particular the LTTE. Such an approach not only tends to exclude Sri Lankan Muslims and other ethnicised groups from debates (see e.g. Hasbullah and Korf, 2009), but also produces a false dichotomy, in which Sinhala and Tamil are perceived to be in opposition to one another, incompatible and inherently different. As such, I decided to focus on a single case study site, with Arugam Bay, specifically the area known as Ullae, providing an example of a community in which a Sinhala and Tamil population occupied the same space, and for the most part live without the ethnic tension written about in much of Sri Lanka. Indeed, within Arugam Bay there are several mixed families in which the parents were Sinhala and Tamil respectively, one of whom I ended up living with.

I had originally envisaged focusing on Arugam Bay as a whole, however this was impacted upon by the ethnicised, spatial divisions within the area between the Muslim population and the Tamil/Sinhala population (see Ch. 1.0) and the limitations of taking a 'village focus'. As my connections with the Tamil/Sinhala population in Ullae grew, I found it increasingly difficult to interact with the Muslim population in the wider area. While I did have some interactions with Muslims, and built up personal relationships with a few, generally the spatial and social divisions within the area meant that this was not an easy undertaking. While engaging with the Muslim community would have been a possibility, I felt it would have been to the detriment of my research with the Sinhala and Tamil populations, largely due to the time it would have taken to establish myself with the Muslim population, but also because the risk of alienating myself amongst some of the Sinhala and Tamils.

Based on this, Arugam Bay was not a neat, contained community, waiting for me to come and research. Rather, it was unbounded, messy and difficult to get to know. This reflects the

unbounded nature of place more generally, as places are defined by their connections to other places, rather than by their ‘essence’ (see Massey, 1993; 2005). It also encourages us to rethink how we define ‘community’, which does not necessarily reflect spatial or administrative boundaries and definitions (see Jeganathan, 2009). As such, the ‘field site’ emerged from the ethnographic fieldwork, in which previous assumptions about the Arugam Bay community were superseded by a more complex, messy community, defined on one level by ethnicised identity and spatial divisions, but on other levels by everyday activities and communities of practice (see Ch. 4.0).

Furthermore, it is important to note that this is not a study of ‘a village’. For several decades now, a focus on ‘villages’ as a site of enquiry has been critiqued for overemphasising the significance of local observations, and the way it implies that these sites are “isolated, identical, socially homogenous and until recently unchanging (but in need of urgent research to capture their vanishing way of life)” (Hoefle, 2008: 377). In order to overcome this, anthropological studies tended to move towards ‘multi-sited’ ethnographies in so as to provide a comparative focus. Rather than focusing on a specific study site, this approach prioritises a focus on examining the diffusion and variation of “cultural meanings, objects and identities, in diffuse time-space” (Marcus, 1995: 96). While this project initially had ‘the village’ as the site of enquiry, the ethnographic approach was also informed by geographical scholarship that argues that space is socially produced through discourse and practice (see e.g. Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; also Ch. 3.0). In light of this, it was important to allow the site of research to emerge from the ethnographic data itself. As such, Arugam Bay, as a village whole, was the departure point for my ethnographic study, however the main site of research was defined by the practices of the people I encountered. As discussed, Arugam Bay is spatially divided into three main sites. As my initial interactions with residents were centred on the area around Ullae, or the Tamil/Sinhala village, this is where the vast majority of my ethnography was set. While my research practices extended out to a large area, and was not limited to the village boundary of Arugam Bay, nevertheless, the people I encountered and conducted most of my ethnography with tended to confine most of their practices to the area around Ullae. Indeed, while not an official separate village, people’s everyday practices produced Ullae as a distinct place, albeit embedded within Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka, and global flows of tourism.

Based on this discussion, my research is not about a place *per se*. Rather, it is about the practices, knowledges and lives of people. These everyday practices and knowledges produce

place, with these practices producing Ullae, Arugam Bay, the surrounding area, and beyond, as the site of research. Furthermore, places are not neatly bounded, but rather characterised by flows of information, people and materials, defined by their connections to other places, rather than their essential character (see Massey, 1991; 1993; 2005). So while the research did occur predominantly in a ‘village’ setting, it is not confined to this area. Throughout the thesis, when I make reference to the area under study, it is this area I am referring to. For ease of transcription, when I refer to Arugam Bay, particularly ‘the residents of Arugam Bay’, I am generally referring to a small area, that is the mixed Sinhala/Tamil (and Western migrant) communities to the south, rather than the whole administrative village area, which officially stretches from Arugam Lagoon to the north, to near the Heda Oya river to the south (see Ch. 1.3).

### **2.3 The research process**

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted from June 2012 to August 2013, consisting of an initial scoping trip and two main fieldtrips, totalling eight months. I conducted the initial scoping trip to Arugam Bay in June 2012, so I could determine first hand as to whether it would be a suitable place to undertake such research. I was under no illusion that by going to Arugam Bay myself I would witness some sort of unmediated ‘reality’, however it was important that I visit the area in order to ascertain whether it had *the potential* to be a site for my research. Part of this trip involved meeting with members of the Surf Club and an INGO worker, with whom I had already been in contact, as well as chatting informally with tourists, fishers and business owners about my planned research. During this trip, which lasted two weeks, I also visited some other coastal areas and inland destinations, in order to contextualise Arugam Bay and familiarise myself with Sri Lanka more broadly.

I returned to Arugam Bay in October 2012 to commence my first main research visit. I made the decision to split the research into two trips for two key reasons. Firstly, due to the seasonality of the area, it was important that I experienced it during both the fishing season (lasting from October through to March), and the tourist season (from April through to October, peaking in July and August). As such, two field trips meant that I could experience both the peak tourist and fishing seasons, without spending a whole year in Arugam Bay, which would not have been financially viable due to funding constraints. Secondly, I felt that

by removing myself from Arugam Bay it would allow some time for reflection on my initial findings, and allow for a more tactical and informed second trip.

During my time in Sri Lanka I associated myself with the University of Peradeniya, near Kandy, obtaining a 'visiting student' status in the Department of Geography. This allowed me to engage with Sri Lankan academia, and resulted in a number of useful discussions with researchers in my field. I furthered my engagement with Sri Lankan scholars through attendance at a conference hosted by International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Colombo. Engaging with academics based in Sri Lanka not only provided me with some useful perspectives and insights on the tsunami and academic practice, but also helped me to locate myself within Sri Lanka and, as such, acknowledge how I was part of the place I was researching (see also Brun, 2009).

#### **2.4 Doing ethnography in Arugam Bay**

This project takes a qualitative approach to research, specifically ethnography, which is increasingly common amongst geographers studying society, culture and everyday life (see Crang, 2002; 2003). Ethnography has been described as particularly appropriate for such work as it uncovers and reveals "how structures are made real in the contexts and commotions of daily life" (Herbert, 2000: 553). Perhaps better described as a style of research, rather than a method (see Brewer, 2000: 11), my ethnographic approach is focused around participant observation, complemented with interviewing, focus groups and other qualitative methods that seek to "understand parts of the world more or less as they are experienced and understood in the everyday lives of people who 'live them out'" (Crang and Cook, 2007: 1). As such, in this thesis I utilise the term 'ethnography' to describe what some may refer to as a 'mixed qualitative methods' approach. This approach is particularly fitting when exploring complex and contested issues, due to its:

...ability to compensate for limited findings from individual methods, the enhancing of credibility, and their varied applicability at various stages of the project... [as well as] the facilitation of different spaces of knowledge production (Meth and McClymont, 2009: 911).

Throughout the ethnography I reflected on my positionality as a researcher. This is an important process in all research practices, but particularly important in qualitative methods

which are overtly subjective, and where one's positionality affects all aspects of research, from design, to data collection, through to interpretation and representation (Lunn, 2014: 274 see also Cloke et al. 2000; England, 1994; Moser, 2008; Watson, 2004). As such, it is essential to acknowledge the situated nature of the knowledge one collects and produces, and avoid 'God tricks' in which the researcher is imagined as all-knowing, and completely detached from their data (cf. Harraway, 1988). However, while reflecting on one's positionality is an important step in overcoming this, the partiality of knowledge also applies to reflections on power-structures and positionality of the self (see Rose, 1997). Therefore, in undertaking ethnographic work I have been influenced by approaches within feminist ethnography, which frames such "partiality and uncertainty as central components of representation and knowledge creation and focuses on shifting identities, silence, and temporality as key tactics" (Lehman, 2013: 486). Ethnographic research in this case is not about producing objective knowledge about an external subject, but rather an attempt to develop "*intersubjective* understandings between researcher and researched" (Crang and Cook, 2007: 37, emphasis in original).

In undertaking this research I was supported in Arugam Bay by a research assistant, Krishantha (Krish), a young man of mixed Tamil and Sinhala parentage who undertook multiple roles in my ethnographic work. As a resident of the Arugam Bay, the Chairman of the local surf club, with siblings who were fishers, and part of a family who ran a tourist business, Krish was well set up to act as a gatekeeper and facilitator with a number of people from different communities of practice. Being fluent in Sinhala, Tamil and English he was a good translator when required. He also provided me with many valuable insights into the area, for example his experience working for a small INGO as a project manager in the wake of the tsunami meant he had many helpful insights around aid following the waves. Krish was generally well-liked in the area's communities, as was his family, which was important when considering how his role influenced my research, and he became someone I could trust and confide in about my concerns. While I undertook large parts of the research alone, Krish nevertheless played a key role in helping to shape my research<sup>7</sup> (see also Leck, 2014; Twyman et al. 1999).

I conducted most of the research in English, with Krish acting as a translator when required. This decision came about as I had no prior knowledge of Sinhala or Tamil, with funding and

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<sup>7</sup> However, all views, arguments and conclusions expressed in this work, as well as its limitations and shortcomings, remain my own.

timing constraints limiting my ability to adequately learn these languages to a standard where an interview may be conducted. When organising interviews, I decided to leave the decision as to whether they required a translator present up to them, depending on how confident they were with their English. More importantly, I was aware that having a translator can produce additional complications regarding positionality and being ‘spoken for’ (Bujra, 2006; Twyman et al. 1999). In total, all but three of my participants opted not to have a translator present.

The following sections describe the individual component parts of my ethnographic research: participant observation, interviewing, participant mapping, focus groups as well as the additional non-ethnographic methods to support this work. While I have separated these methods for the purpose of reflection, they do not necessarily exist independently, but rather overlapped and converged throughout the research process.

#### *2.4.1 Participant Observation*

Participant observation is often conflated with ethnography more broadly. It consists of:

...an immersion of the researcher’s self into the everyday rhythms and routines of the community, a development of relationships with people who can show and tell the researcher what is ‘going on’ there and, through this, experiences of a whole range of relationships and emotional states that such a process must inevitably involve (Crang and Cook, 2007: 37).

Participant observation is a useful research method if, like me, one seeks to “study social life as it unfolds in the practices of day-to-day life” (van Donge, 2006: 180). While interviewing was an important part of the research process (see below), participant observation provided an important accompaniment to this, as what people *say* can differ to what people *do* (Herbert, 2000). One reason for this is that groups can take certain things for granted, and do not consider it worthwhile mentioning them in interviews (see e.g. Thrift, 2004). Participant observation allows such taken for granted processes, practices and structures to be revealed through an engagement with the people who live them. In addition to this, the difference between speech and actions can be due to the ‘gap’ between words and meaning, whereby people do not necessarily have the conceptual language to articulate certain meanings or feelings (see e.g. J. Anderson, 2004; 2012). This issue is exacerbated when conducting

research across languages and cultures. Through engaging in practices with those who live them, one can at least take a step towards understanding everyday life on people's own terms. Finally, participant observation is a particularly useful research method due to the 'chance encounters' it produces. Rather than relying on research assistants to schedule all interviews and meetings, participant observation allows for the meeting and interaction with people by chance. Indeed, many of my most fruitful encounters with people came unexpectedly, for example, through chance meetings, running into people out and about, or the product of informal conversations whilst living everyday life. Had my data been limited to interviews, I would have lost a great deal of important material.

I spent time with many different groups of people: fishers, tourists, surfers, hoteliers, surf instructors, restaurateurs and other service sector workers, domestic workers, NGO workers and others. I engaged in a multitude of practices, such as fishing, surfing, touristic activities, service sector work and broadly spent time living *with* the investigated population (Hoggart et al. 2002: 253). Participant observation can take a number of different forms, with varying degrees of participation and observation (Phillips and Johns, 2012: 168). During my time in Arugam Bay I engaged in a variety of different styles of participant observation, depending on who I was with, and what we were doing. While all participant observation generally has elements of both participating and observing, at times one or the other was more dominant. For example, when conducting research with tourists, it was relatively easy to participate in typical touristic practices, largely because I was a type of 'tourist' myself, albeit one with a specific agenda (see e.g. Duijnhoven and Roessingh, 2006; Galani-Moutafi, 2000). Indeed, for much of my research with tourists, and to a certain extent surfers, my previous knowledges and skill sets, as well as often similar socio-economic backgrounds, meant that elements of my participant observation became a type of 'auto-ethnography', where my own embodied encounters and experiences with people and the material world became important elements of my data (Butz and Besio, 2009). Furthermore, when speaking about these practices, people could talk to me in a certain way, and could make assumptions about my prior knowledge.

At the other end of the scale, spending time with fishers involved a very different form of participant observation. It takes many years of fishing to become a competent fisher, and I did not possess the skill set to adequately go fishing as an equal part of a fishing team. As such, my engagements with fishers consisted significantly more of observation than participation. In particular, I engaged in what I termed 'day-in-the-life ethnographies', in



which I would shadow fishers for the day, learning what they did through observing. This was largely spent at sea, and I went on around a dozen fishing trips with a total of four different crews during my time in Arugam Bay. That is not to say I did not ‘participate’ in any way. On most trips I was given a line to hold, and while I failed to catch much, I was still subjected to the affective, embodied feeling of being at sea and engaging in fishing. I also spent time with fishers on land, and particularly after a successful day’s fishing, many fishers would congregate at the local bar. Regardless of the levels of participation in this research practice, I was always participating for different reasons to those engaged in the practice, that is, to learn and to gather information to ultimately write a thesis. So, my livelihood did not depend on the how many fish were caught on fishing trips, the mundane spaces of domestic life were not mundane for me, and touristic practices were not simply hedonistic pleasure.

It was not possible to be with people at all times, and indeed on some days I was left to my own devices. On these days I would use the opportunity to transcribe interviews or go over notes, activities that positioned me firmly as a ‘researcher’. However, every day I made sure I engaged with the place, rather than retreating into my own private space, and on such days I had a number of walking routes around the village and local area that I would undertake. These allowed me to observe life in Arugam Bay, particularly the general changes that occurred over time, such as the construction of new buildings, changing sea behaviour and sand patterns, and shifting demographics. It also facilitated chance engagements with people. Indeed, many of my most fruitful and interesting ethnographic moments emerged from such encounters. This highlights the importance of the ‘unexpected’ when conducting research, and indeed, I ensured that my research was not too strictly ‘planned’ in order to allow these encounters to play out.

Participant observation brings with it a degree of ethical baggage, particularly surrounding issues of informed consent, and how one presents oneself to people (Bryant, 2014; Chacko, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007; Godbole, 2014; Sultana, 2007). Unlike interviews, where oral informed consent was acquired, it was not always appropriate or possible to do this when undertaking participant observation, particularly during informal encounters with people. Indeed, anyone out in public had the potential to be a ‘participant’ in my research. As such, I undertook several strategies to ensure my research remained as ethical as possible.

I never obscured the fact I was in Arugam Bay in order to conduct research and in general I tried to answer questions about my research openly and honestly. However there were times I

felt I could not reveal everything about my work or opinions. For example, with certain groups or people I played down the fact that I was broadly critical of the Rajapaksa government or that I am very much anti-military, as I felt that these could be very divisive opinions. Similarly, I encountered people who espoused xenophobic, racist, sexist and/or homophobic opinions. In such situations I tended not to challenge them as I felt that my role when conducting research was to learn about people's lives, rather than actively shape or change them (see also Laws et al. 2003; Smith, 2014). Furthermore, through confronting participants, I risked isolating myself, and could have found people unwilling to speak or interact with me. This led to a number of uncomfortable situations in which I felt like I was biting my tongue, wanting to challenge and confront people, but at the same time gaining valuable insights into people's world views (Crang and Cook, 2007; see also Bryant, 2014; Keith, 1992; Smith, 2014).

When describing my research, I tended to emphasise that my research was about people's relationship with the sea, and their everyday lives, rather than on the tsunami. Indeed, I tried to omit the tsunami from all descriptions of my work. This was for ethical, practical and methodological reasons<sup>8</sup>. Ethically, I was very aware of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, and as such I tried to allow people to bring the tsunami up on their own terms. I did not want to force an engagement with the tsunami, or bring up bad memories, although this proved to be a difficult balance to strike (see Ch. 5.2). Practically, I felt that if I told people I was researching the tsunami, they might be unwilling to talk to me. While approaching my research in this way proved effective for recruiting interview participants, or simply having conversations with people, I did worry about the ethics of 'springing the tsunami' onto people. However, had I told people I was doing a project about the tsunami then this would define my engagement with people, augmenting its significance in my interactions with people and the place more broadly. This was something I wanted to minimise, although the tsunami did inevitably come to define how I interacted with the area (see Ch. 4.6).

One of the key aspects of participant observation is building up relationships and rapport with people (Crang and Cook, 2007). In general I felt well received amongst the area's communities, however at times my work was met with suspicion, and in some instances outright hostility. For example, one fisher quite aggressively pointed out the extractive nature of my fieldwork, highlighting that the work would "make me rich" whilst not benefitting him

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to extend my apologies to any participants reading this, who may feel aggrieved by this point. As I describe, this was a difficult ethical, methodological and practical decision.

at all. As I explore in more depth in Ch. 4.6, despite being unpleasant, this opened up an important door for reflection, and contributed to my decision to focus on researching as a ‘community of practice’.

My relationship with people and the place changed over time as the fieldwork progressed (Chacko, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007). Indeed, upon first arriving in Arugam Bay, the area was an unknown and quite lonely place. However, as time passed, I familiarised myself with the area, forging a number of very good friendships. Friendships were beneficial from a methodological point of view, as I was able to build strong ties with people, and gain an excellent insight into their everyday routines, concerns and worldviews, as well as making the research process significantly more enjoyable. However, making friends with research participants brings with it the challenge of maintaining an ‘ethic of friendship’ (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Crang and Cook suggest that it is unlikely that participants will ever forget what the researcher is ‘up to’ (2007: 58). However, there were a number of times when people who I had grown close to spoke to me about very personal issues, confiding in me as a friend. While the researcher can never stop being a researcher, there were moments where it seemed people ceased to perceive me as such. My whole time in Arugam Bay helped inform my thesis, however, I felt that I had to omit certain conversations with participants I was close to, in particular the family I was staying with. It felt wrong to treat them as research subjects, especially with regards to personal and sensitive information. Even with anonymous data, this still sat uneasily. As such, while these encounters were impossible to completely forget when reviewing and analysing my research, I generally did not include them when selecting quotes or examples when writing up or presenting my work. Fortunately, none of these omitted encounters would have changed the overall results or conclusions of the thesis, and as such excluding them was relatively unproblematic. While conducting research with friends can help to undermine the potential for exploitation and power imbalances (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), there remains the issue of feeding back to participants, and greater risk of a sense of betrayal or ‘misrepresentation’ when research is written up and disseminated (see Ellis, 1995; Scheper-Hughes, 2000). Indeed, I face an ongoing challenge to disseminate the results of the thesis in an accessible and relevant manner.

Many of the relationships I built up during my time in Arugam Bay were built through being part of various communities of practice. While I wish to move beyond the notion of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ in conventional ethnographic terms (see Lunn, 2014: 272), engaging and participating in various ‘communities of practice’ allowed me to gain insights into people’s

everyday lives that other researchers may be unaware of. For example, as a surfer prior to arriving in Arugam Bay, I was able to engage with the resident surfers relatively easily, as with a shared passion there was always something to talk about, and build up a rapport. As one participant in my research said to me after I interviewed him:

*...you understand [our lifestyle] because you are surfing. Colombo people, they don't understand. They not surfing. They treat us like children* (Ishan, PT003).

Of course, such a statement is Ishan's opinion, and is just as indicative of his views of Sri Lanka's urban elites. However, it caused me to reflect on how my positionality in the field was shaped by more than the usual 'meta-category' indicators that tend to get tick-boxed in fieldwork reflections; gender, ethnicity, nationality, linguistic competence, economic position, education, age, or caste to name a few (see e.g. Chacko, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007; Moser, 2008). As such, rather than assume that a Sri Lankan researcher would necessarily be 'closer' or more of an 'insider' to the residents of Arugam Bay, I felt that aspects of my positionality and personality influenced and aided how I encountered and understood the place, beyond simply being a white, Western, male researcher.

Throughout the research and analysis process there was an inherent tension between studying the everyday and ordinary, and the ruptures and extra-ordinary moments (of which the tsunami was one). While it is important to 'follow ruptures', and follow up on the unexpected moments and encounters that can make ethnographic research so interesting and unpredictable, it is also important not to do so at the expense of the mundane and ordinary (Crang and Cook, 2007). In order to minimise this, I kept a field diary throughout the whole research process, writing in it more or less every day, often at the end or start of each day, as well as during any spare moments I had. I used this to record my encounters, reflections, thoughts about the shape of the project, quotes people had said, frustrations, moments of enlightenment, moments of despair, and thoughts surrounding self-reflection and self-doubt. While at times difficult, I tried not to merely write what was interesting about my encounters that day, but also to record simply what I had done, even if some days that was just to say that not much had happened. In addition to my main field diary, I tended to carry a small A7 notepad in my pocket to record notes, thoughts and quotes while out and about. I also made use of the 'voice record' function on my phone when I wanted to note something immediately. Notes were then incorporated into my main diary at a later time.

### 2.4.2. *Interviewing*

Interviewing was an important part of the research process, largely as it permitted me to focus on ways in which participants describe and understand the world, allowing them to explain their opinions and attitudes on certain issues and topics (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Willis, 2006). It is a method that complements participant observation, with much overlap between the two (Crang and Cook, 2007). Indeed informal, unstructured interviews (or rather, ‘conversations’) made up a central part of the participant observations (see above). However, I felt that I could not rely on conversations to inform all of my data, and considered it appropriate to engage in more structured, formal interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly, interviews allowed me to follow up on issues and themes emerging from the participant observation in more depth. Secondly, it went some way to addressing some of the ethical issues that emerged from conducting participant observation. In particular this related to obtaining informed consent and the discussion of sensitive and personal information (see Longhurst et al. 2008; Phillips and Johns, 2012). Thirdly, it provided data that could be easily analysed in comparison to participant observation. Indeed, as the opening extract to this chapter states, I had concerns about whether I was conducting enough interviews, which materialised out of a concern for how easy my field diaries would be to analyse.

In total I conducted 32 semi-structured interviews with a range of participants in the area (see Appendix II). These interviews ranged from around 30 minutes to nearly two hours, and all but four were recorded<sup>9</sup>. Interviews were semi-structured, in which I had a checklist of issues and subjects I wished to discuss, but allowed conversation to flow and permitted participants to discuss certain issues in more depth if desired. Participants for interviews were recruited in three principal ways. Firstly, through my own personal contacts, which largely emerged from participant observation and living in the area. Secondly, my research assistant helped to recruit residents who did not typically interact with foreigners and tourists. Finally, a number of people were recruited through contacts of previous participants. Such ‘snowballing’ techniques meant that I was able to reduce the biases of my own and my ‘gatekeeper’s’ contacts, and interview a broader section of people living in the area (see Willis, 2006). Despite this, I still had some issues with recruiting certain demographics. As I discussed, I did not engage much with the area’s Muslim population. Linked to this, whilst I did interview several people who spoke little English and were not linked to the tourist industry, the

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<sup>9</sup> All participants were given the option of whether interviews were recorded or not.

majority of my interview participants did speak English and had some involvement in tourism – largely due to issues of access and practicality. Finally, I did not interview any Sri Lankan women due to local cultural constraints, however I did make use of other methods (participant observation and a focus group) to reduce this bias.

Interviews were conducted in a number of locations. The vast majority of informal conversation-type ‘interviews’ were conducted whilst engaged in other practices – notably fishing, surfing, eating, cooking or simply hanging out. Talking whilst engaged in another practice in a specific place can be particularly useful for “harness[ing] place as a trigger to prompt knowledge recollection and production” (Anderson, 2004: 254). I made it a priority that participants felt comfortable when I was conducting formal interviews, and as such these were undertaken at a location of the participants’ choice. Unexpectedly, the majority opted to come and speak to me at my residence. In these cases, I had a designated space, outside but private, where interviews could be conducted confidentially and without interruption. In addition to this, some interviews were conducted in cafes, bars or restaurants, at residents’ houses and one was done sat on the beach itself.

The content of interviews varied depending on the participant, but generally involved discussions about life in Arugam Bay, the participant’s relationship with the sea, their views on tourism, and changes within the area, which generally segued into discussions of the tsunami along with the subsequent wave of NGOs. Oral histories about an event, such as the tsunami, are useful as they allow dominant interpretations of the past to be challenged, highlighting local and particular differences in interpretation (see Legg, 2004). However, memories are not exact reflections of the past, and the researcher must acknowledge how participants’ experiences of the present shapes their memories and narratives of the past (Stögner, 2009). As such, as with all content within an interview, oral histories should not be considered as ‘objective’. Rather, they are subjective perceptions of past events shaped by participants’ subsequent experiences and dominant representations and myths of those events (Clapperton, 2009). In light of this, rather than taking interviews at face value, information needed to be triangulated with other data when under analysis (see below).

Interviewing presented a number of challenges. Practically, as the opening extract suggests, I found it difficult to recruit participants, and had to quickly learn to be flexible to other people’s lives. It was very common for people, particularly fishers, to fail to turn up to interviews that had been arranged. This was often due to other commitments, having to go

fishing, teaching a surf lesson or having other work to get on with. What was emphasised to me was that people rarely worked on standardised clock based time-keeping. Rather, their everyday lives were more influenced by other rhythmpatterns, notably that of the sea (see Ch. 3.0). Although this was never openly admitted to me, several participants also prioritised the local bar over partaking in an interview. While this was frustrating at times, I never pushed people or berated them for missing our appointments. Rather, I had to accept that this was a part of how life worked in Arugam Bay, and I was generally grateful that people did not reject interviews in the first place. Furthermore, this realisation constituted data in and of itself, and contributed to my ongoing understanding of everyday life in the area.

From the outset I decided that I did not wish to pay interviewees for their participation. I did not want payments to become an incentive for people participating in interviews, which could lead to participation becoming routine, or encourage participants to give answers they thought I wanted to hear in expectation of payment, especially in the wake of numerous INGO interviews conducted in the area after the tsunami. Furthermore, I was aware of the role INGOs played in the area, perpetuating an attitude of dependency, to which I did not want to contribute (see Ch. 6.0; also Twyman et al. 1999). I was also uncomfortable with the commodification of people's knowledge, and did not wish to put a price tag on people sharing their experiences (see also Cook and Nunkoosing, 2008; Hammett and Sporton, 2012; McKeganey, 2001). In spite of this, I was also very aware that people were giving up their time for me, and in some cases, there were clear disparities of wealth and power between myself and the interviewees. As such, I always offered to purchase participants drinks and cigarettes whilst undertaking the interview, to show thanks for their time. Where applicable, I also made a point to utilise small businesses belonging to my participants, and recommend their services to other tourists. In addition to this, I asked a number of people in the area whether there was something I could do to broadly 'give something back' to the communities living there, and avoid a completely extractive research practice. This culminated in my support of the local surf club, a community sports club, which is run entirely by Arugam Bay residents. My support largely consisted of assisting them to produce funding applications for small grants, something I had some experience in, as well as helping them build a social media profile. I also got involved with some of the activities of the club, such as putting on competitions and participating in beach cleans. My support for the surf club was not entirely unproblematic, as not everyone in the area benefitted from the surf club's activities. However, I felt it was important to engage in such practices in order to make the benefits of

my time in the area less ‘one-way’, whilst also avoiding commodifying individuals’ knowledge. As much of my data came from participant observation, it also indirectly ‘gave back’ to many of the participants who contributed to my knowledge of the area, but were not involved in formal research activities (see also Hammett and Sporton, 2012). I have maintained this link since leaving Arugam Bay, in order to not ‘disappear’ from the area upon completing my fieldwork.

Another ethical consideration was the sensitive and potentially emotional nature of my interviews. I was acutely aware of the traumatic subject matter of my research, and wanted to minimise any distress I would cause in discussing it (see Ch. 5.3). I generally started interviews with ‘lighter’ subjects, either through discussing their participant maps (see below), or asking them about their everyday lives and interests. Often, this meant that interviews started with discussions about fishing, surfing, tourism and travel as well as other interests, such as carrom<sup>10</sup> and cricket. Such conversations were designed to put the participant at ease, rather than starting the interview with ‘heavier’ questions about the tsunami (see also Valentine, 2005). As discussed above, I did not frame my research around the tsunami. While I had a number of questions I wished to ask about the tsunami, I tried to ensure that I was not the first person to mention it. Rather, I allowed the participant to bring it up, as much as possible on their own terms. At times, this meant that I had to ask very leading questions, such as “*Can you describe any negative things about living next to the sea?*” and “*Tell me about any significant changes that have happened to the village in the past few years.*” Such questions would usually result in the tsunami being mentioned, at which point I felt more comfortable to probe deeper into the opinions and experiences of the tsunami. This also provided an interesting point of note when the tsunami was not mentioned following these questions, although this was rare. This could have been due to the tsunami not being relevant to their everyday lives. However, due to the prevalence of the tsunami in most interviews, it seems that this was more likely a tactic to avoid discussing the tsunami.

I also had ethical issues surrounding informed consent. When starting the interviews, before any questions were asked, I explained the research and sought oral consent from participants. I decided that oral consent would suffice, rather than written consent, which is generally preferred by university ethics committees. This was because I did not wish to ‘over-formalise’ my research, causing further intimidation, as well as limited literacy amongst some

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<sup>10</sup> A board game popular in Sri Lanka, and South Asia more broadly.



participants. Furthermore, due to the fraught political situation in Sri Lanka, where dissent and criticism is discouraged (and often punished), I did not wish for participants to feel they had a ‘paper trail’ leading back to them if they discussed any controversial subjects (see Lehman, 2013; Skinner, 2014; Weiss, 2011). As discussed above, gaining such consent did help overcome some of the ethical issues emerging from participant observation and I made an effort to ensure that participants were informed about my research, with the exception of the subject matter of the tsunami (see above), my professional affiliations and how I intended to disseminate the results within and outside of the academy. Despite this, it is perhaps impossible for participants to be fully informed, particularly those unfamiliar with the PhD research process and the workings of UK academic institutions, as was the case with many of my participants (see Skinner, 2014).

Interviews officially began with recording, and ended when the recorder was switched off. However, in many cases the process was not bounded by this. Indeed, many of my participants were residents and tourists who I had built up a certain rapport with prior to the interview. The reactions of participants after the interviews were varied. Some said very little, and left me to write up my thoughts and reflections on the process. Others, however, thanked me, stating they had never been able to speak about their lives in this manner before, sometimes simply because no one had taken an interest before, or indeed actively listened to what they had to say (see also Ch. 5.3). Such interactions were helpful reassurances that my research was not as insensitive or problematic as I sometimes feared it was. It also iterated the need to include research as a ‘community of practice’, emphasising how my research became part of life in Arugam Bay (see below and Ch. 4.6). Often, conversations that had been started in the interview continued afterwards, sometimes immediately, other times participants coming to find me to discuss issues they wanted to explain in further depth. It was not uncommon for these to be more contentious issues, particularly regarding the government, tourism development and land-grabbing (see e.g. APC & MONLAR, 2013; Klein, 2007). As I have discussed, this is likely to be due to people’s fears about the state’s heavy handed response to dissent, and has prompted other researchers in Sri Lanka not to record interviews at all (e.g. Lehman, 2013).

#### *2.4.3 Participant mapping*

In addition to participant observation and interviewing, I also utilised ‘participant maps’ as a

form of non-verbal, visual research. Inspired by proponents of ‘Participatory Action Research’ and ‘Participatory Rural Appraisals’ from development research (see Cornwall and Pratt, 2003), participant mapping is a method in which participants are invited to draw a visual map of the local area, including on it important or significant institutions, services and places (Beazley and Ennew, 2006: 194; Phillips and Johns, 2012: 130-131). I asked participants if they wished to draw a map at the start of my interviews, asking them to include on maps the places that were important to them, and where they tended to spend most of their time. While much of this information was also obtained from participant observation, by utilising an additional method, previous observations can be confirmed, and multiple knowledge systems can be accessed (see Meth and McClymont, 2009). In particular, I was interested in how they depicted the sea, its prominence on the maps, and whether it was portrayed as an empty space, or a ‘mapped’ area. In total 22 people, out of 32 interviewees, agreed to produce maps.

This method resulted in mixed outcomes. On the one hand it resulted in some very useful maps, from which I was able to confirm some of the conclusions I had made from the participant observation and interviewing. In the case of several of the maps, I was also able to gain new insights into people’s everyday lives and geographical imaginations, particularly some of the more private spaces that people occupied in their lives. The maps were also useful additions to the interview process - acting as useful ice-breakers at the start of interviews and provoking a number of discussions, from which I was able to explore various subjects relating to my research questions. One of the key strengths of participant mapping is the conveying of information in a non-verbal manner. This allowed people to express themselves who found verbal communication difficult or challenging (Beazley and Ennew, 2006), and was particularly important in a context in which there were challenges with linguistic translation. Indeed, with the maps, there was less ‘lost in translation’, however, it should be noted that analysing and deriving meaning from the maps involved a large degree of interpretation by myself.

I used the method in a slightly different manner to those seeking ‘developmental transformation’, instead utilising it as a complementary qualitative method to other ethnographic approaches. Nevertheless, I still came across a number of methodological issues. In particular, a number of participants highlighted that they felt it was a ‘childish’ activity to be undertaking. For example, one ex-pat referred to the activity as going “back to school” (Mike, PT017), while a British tourist (Rob, PT025) made a disparaging remark

about geographers and colouring in. Some Sri Lankan participants were also sceptical of this method. This ranged from expressing confusion as to why they were undertaking this ‘children’s’ activity, to accusations of being patronising. I got the impression that this was not what people expected a ‘serious researcher’ to be doing, and I was acutely aware of Ishan’s comments (see above) about external visitors, notably from Colombo, treating residents like children, as well as previous research highlighting the disempowering and patronising nature of external INGO interventions (e.g. Korf et al. 2010).

In contrast, some participants did not wish to complete maps as they felt uncomfortable about their drawing abilities. While I tried to make it clear that one did not have to be an artist to complete this exercise, nevertheless some people were unwilling to do this. What’s more, two of the older fishers I interviewed said they had no (or absolutely minimal) experience of holding a pen, and in one case I drew the map by following the finger movements of the participant (Chandra, PT015 - who was proficient in speaking English). In addition to this, several participants could not write, particularly in English. Consequently, I annotated a number of maps for participants. As such, not only did a number of participants opt out of producing a map, but those that did, produced maps of a varying quality. This made the process of analysing maps difficult, due to the messy and somewhat inconclusive data they produced (Guijt, 2003). Based on this, the participant mapping method does not make up a central part of my research, however, it was a useful method to compliment interviewing, and my ethnographic analysis more broadly.

#### *2.4.4. Focus groups*

As I spent an increasing amount of time in the area, it became clear that it would be inappropriate for me, a white man, to interview Sri Lankan women, even with the help of a translator (also male). Local cultural norms dictate that it is inappropriate for a man to spend time alone with a woman, and in particular ask them personal questions. However, I did not wish for all my ‘formal’ data collection with Sri Lankans to focus solely on men. While participant observation did allow for several insights into the everyday lives of women in the area, I felt that the project would be lacking if I did not engage with any women in a more formal research setting.

I overcame this by organising a focus group with a group of 11 women from Arugam Bay, aided by a resident woman, originally from the United States (Becky, PT044). Focus groups are a common research method within geography, and are considered particularly useful as they allow participants to discuss issues among themselves, allowing the researcher to explore how people behave and come to decisions and opinions in social settings (Crang and Cook, 2007; Longhurst, 2010). However, for me, the most useful feature of the focus group was that of access and ethics. The focus group participants consisted largely of a group of Christian Tamil women, whose ages ranged from early 20s to those in their 60s (see Appendix II). It was conducted in a resident's living room one evening. The content of the focus group was similar to that of the interviews I conducted, but I allowed the group to discuss various questions. The goal of the focus group was the same as the interview process, seeking to understand and gain an insight into participants' opinions on various issues, particularly surrounding everyday life and the tsunami. As with interviews, the focus group started with an explanation of the research, the option for anyone to drop out if they did not wish to be in the room, gaining permission to record the session and gaining informed consent. This had the same benefits and challenges as discussed above with regards to interviewing. The group discussed issues largely in Tamil, meaning I could not fully appreciate the nuances of the conversation they were having, but when the group fed back to me, the participants tended to be good at explaining who had said what and how opinions had differed. At times, those with more proficient English skills would discuss issues in English, which while beneficial for me as a non-Tamil speaker, resulted in excluding a number of voices from the conversation.

A common issue when undertaking this method is the over-prominence of a few voices, to the detriment of others (Lloyd-Evans, 2006; Longhurst, 2010). In particular, three women who were proficient in English tended to dominate the conversation, although I purposefully pulled in other non-English speaking and quieter members into the discussions. By the end of the session, every person in the room had contributed something, either directly, or through the translation of another member. Nevertheless, on reflection, when analysing the focus group, I came to the conclusion that I could not claim that this equally represented the views of 11 women.

As with other ethnographic methods, the positionality of the researcher shapes focus groups (Crang and Cook, 2007). This was particularly emphasised by the fact that my positionality had caused the need for focus groups in the first place. Despite being a white, Western man

with a group of Sri Lankan women, I did not feel that I dominated proceedings. Rather, my inability to speak Tamil meant that I could not understand what was going on for some of the time. Indeed, often while I spoke I was aware of the women talking to one another, and much giggling occurring. That is not to say that the women did not take the activity seriously, but rather that they were able to communicate, perhaps about me, without my understanding. The focus group was helped along by a good friend of both mine and the women (Becky, PT044). Becky was a useful interlocutor between myself and the women, and I felt she put some of the more intimidated members of the group at ease, encouraging people to speak, and helping the flow of conversation, particularly between Tamil and English. At the end of the focus group I invited participants to contact me if they wanted to discuss any subjects that were brought up in more detail. Two participants approached me in the days that followed, and informally discussed some of the issues brought up in the focus group, as well as my research more broadly.

Overall, the addition of the focus group added women's voices to my research and as such was an important dimension to my ethnographic work. However, there are two important points I wish to make. Firstly, this method was not the only insight I gained into the everyday lives of women in the area, with much gained from participant observation. Secondly, I cannot make any claims to represent or 'speak for' women in the area. While this is also the case for *all* participants in this thesis, it is particularly pertinent with women as I engaged with fewer women during my time in Arugam Bay, and gained less of an insight into their everyday lives. Based on this, many of the conclusions I make in this thesis may not necessarily apply to women, and future research could explore in more depth the gendered specificities of the legacies of the tsunami.

#### *2.4.5. Other methods*

While this thesis is broadly based around the ethnographic methods described above, I also engaged in additional data collection to help inform my research. Of note, I engaged in what I termed 'reading the landscape' (see also Phillips and Johns, 2012). This involved paying particular attention to the land/coastscape whilst I was in Arugam Bay, making note of any changes and how people interacted with it. This was recorded through observations in my field diary, photography and some sketches. I paid particular attention to the behaviour of the sea, as throughout this thesis I treat it as not simply a passive backdrop to social action, but as

an actor in its own right (see Ch. 3.0; also Lehman, 2013). Indeed, it was important to me that the agency of the physical and more-than-human world was acknowledged and presented throughout this research.

It was also important that I situated my research within some of the discursive representations of the village and wider area, the tsunami and Sri Lanka more broadly. This was particularly necessary in order to explore how narratives and representations of the tsunami and coastscape are varied and contested. However, it was not possible to undertake a full discourse analysis on a comprehensive range of ‘texts’ (e.g. Aitken, 2005). This was largely due to time constraints on data collection and the amount of data it would have produced, with such an undertaking possibly constituting a PhD on its own. As such, I opted to ‘critically familiarise’ myself with some of the representations of the area and the tsunami that were prevalent during my research. Such ‘texts’ included tourist brochures, tourist websites, guidebooks, news articles, films about the tsunami, surf literature and photography (see Appendix IV). These texts were selected on the basis of being prevalent in the area, ones I encountered frequently, commonly mentioned by participants, or ones that came up frequently on internet searches. I approached these ‘texts’ critically, asking questions of their context, production, intended audience and subject matter (see Waitt, 2010; also Rose, 2001). In addition to this, I asked questions of what such representations omitted, and the absences from these texts. As this was just a partial venture in discursively analysing these subjects, I relied on more in depth analyses conducted by previous researchers on relevant subjects. These included for example, the tsunami (e.g. Mamadouh, 2008; Olofsson, 2011; Skelton, 2006), ‘Third World’ tourism marketing (e.g. Echtner and Prasad, 2003) and surf tourism (e.g. Ponting, 2009).

## **2.5 Analysing data and producing knowledge**

In the past, qualitative data has been critiqued for a lack of ‘rigour’, openness and transparency (see Baxter and Eyles, 1997). However, in answer to these concerns, researchers are increasingly reflecting on the process of analysis, encouraging accounts of our methodologies, positionality and research process. This helps readers to assess how credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable the research is (see Crang and Cook, 2007: 146; also Baxter and Eyles, 1997). I have worked towards this throughout this chapter, and the thesis as a whole. However, this section focuses more explicitly on how I moved from the

methods I used, to the broader theoretical and conceptual arguments found in the rest of this thesis (see Blaxter et al. 2004).

While the bulk of my analysis occurred once I had left Arugam Bay, in reality I subconsciously started analysing the data as soon as it was collected. Furthermore, I found that through undertaking transcription and re-reading my field notes whilst still in Arugam Bay, I gained a number of additional insights and analytical reflections (Jackson, 2001). Such insights also allowed me to undertake ‘member checks’, in which I discussed some of my preliminary ideas with my field assistant and other participants to see if they agreed with my initial thoughts (see Crang and Cook, 2007).

Upon returning to the UK, I continued with my transcription of interviews, and re-read my field diaries and notes. I made the decision quite early on to undertake my analysis manually, rather than make use of a computer programme for analysis. While this made the process more time-consuming and messy, I felt that the use of computer programmes risked becoming too mechanistic, alienating me from the data and thus could cause me to lose sight of the bigger picture (see van Hoven and Poelman, 2003). Indeed, through manually analysing the data, the context of my fieldwork remained foregrounded, as did the complexity and entanglement of issues. I did however use the programme ‘NVivo’ to store transcripts, as it has useful search functions, and as such could be used to keep the original scripts accessible, as my written notes became increasingly annotated and messy.

In order to analyse the ethnographic work I collected, I undertook a reasonably standard practice of coding interview and focus group transcripts and field diary notes (see Cope, 2010). Generally I followed an approach suggested by Jackson (2001) and Crang and Cook (2007), highlighting key words or phrases that participants used, and then making note of ‘higher’ analytical themes in the margins. The initial process of ‘open coding’ resembled ideas from ‘grounded theory’ where the data was allowed to, as much as possible, ‘speak for itself’. That said, it is important to note that these codes did not simply ‘appear’, but rather emerged from both the transcripts themselves, as well as my research questions and relevant literature (Jackson, 2001). Initial codes were then further grouped together into broader themes and nodes of analysis (see Appendix III).

From my field diaries I copied significant encounters, moments and thoughts onto post-it notes, which were dated and coded. This allowed me to visualise my field diary data, and group similar extracts together thematically, in parallel to the themes that emerged from my

interview transcripts. These were also combined with my reflections from my other, more visual data, such as the participant maps and discourse analysis (although as mentioned, these were less influential than my ethnographic work). This cross-referencing allowed me to connect relevant sections with other similar cases, and analyse between the multiple methods (Crang and Cook, 2007; Jackson, 2001). This also allowed me to explore any absences from my interviews and other data, thinking through why certain topics and issues, notably the tsunami, may have been omitted, ignored or played down.

I generally undertook my analysis with my research questions in mind, however it was important to allow space for new research subjects and topics to emerge. This was particularly important when it came to the emergence of ‘communities of practice’ as a category of analysis. The four practices that I explore throughout this thesis, fishing, tourism, surfing and researching, began to emerge from my ethnographic research on my first main field visit to Arugam Bay. I was struck at how everyday life was dominated by the practices of fishing, tourism and surfing, in which people’s lives were shaped by participation in these practices. As a consequence of this, I began to explore the various knowledges produced through engaging with these practices, particularly knowledges of the sea and the tsunami. To begin with, I attempted to think through these practices by focusing on ‘characters’ or ‘actors’: the tourist, the surfer, the fisherman, the hotelier and so on. The rationale behind this was that it allowed me to bring in ‘non-human’ characters, such as the material landscape and the sea. However, this was inadequate as it did not allow for people to inhabit multiple categories. While previous research in Arugam Bay utilised this approach (e.g. Klein, 2007), this fails to appreciate that people in Arugam Bay can be a ‘fisher’ *and* a ‘hotelier’ *and* a ‘surfer’ at the same time. In order to avoid essentialising these characters it was necessary to focus on what people *do* rather than try and determine what or who they *are*. By taking an approach that foregrounded practice, it allowed for people to occupy multiple identarian categories at the same time. Furthermore, it allowed a focus on how knowledges are produced through practices. Through allowing these communities of practice to emerge from the data itself, and to be identified by the people I engaged with, it allowed for a more ethical engagement with the place, as prescribed by the debates outlined in Ch. 2.1 above.

As I have stressed throughout this chapter, and the thesis more broadly, my positionality is central to the production of knowledge and representations of the data used in this project (see also Madge, 1993; Rose, 1997; Sidaway, 1992). As such, someone else conducting research in Arugam Bay on the same topic may not necessarily come to the same conclusions



as me, as I brought my own “interests, issues, positionality ... and talents” to the project (Crang and Cook, 2007: 147). Therefore it should be noted that, while my approach was influenced by ideas surrounding ‘grounded theory’ which seeks to allow themes to emerge from the data alone, my own prejudices and research interests will have also influenced the analysis and emergence of themes (see also Crang and Cook, 2007; Jackson, 2001).

My positionality, therefore, contributed to the emergence of fishing, tourism and surfing as key communities of practice in my data. That is not to say that these three practices did not shape everyday life for the residents of Arugam Bay. Rather, that they are three of multiple practices, and it was my specific ways of engaging with the area that caused me to focus on them. As the two main socio-economic activities in the area it was perhaps inevitable that fishing and tourism would feature heavily in this thesis, however the focus on surfing was partially linked to my own personal interests and skill sets. As a keen surfer I not only was able to participate within this community of practice, but also easily bonded with a numerous resident surfers. As such, the emergence of surfing as a key community of practice was as much about my own positionality, as it was the fact it shaped everyday life in Arugam Bay. In addition to this, while both fishing and tourism are prevalent in the area, their centrality to this thesis are similarly a partial product of my own positionality *combined with* their prevalence in everyday life. For example, my positionality as a white, international visitor to the area caused a very specific approach to tourism, one in which I could utilise elements of ‘autoethnography’ to research. Similarly, my positionality as a man meant that I was encouraged to spend time with other men, who in Arugam Bay largely consisted of fishers, tourism workers and surfers. It was therefore unsurprising that these practices became core to my research.

My focus on these communities of practice should not obscure the fact that there are other important communities of practice in Arugam Bay. There are multiple practices that shape Arugam Bay, and out of necessity, many do not feature in this project, for example those practiced exclusively by women, children, Muslims and other groups who I were less able to interact with. This is not necessarily a weakness of the thesis itself, but does highlight the importance of acknowledging one’s positionality in the production of knowledge, the inevitable partiality of research and how the researcher shapes the data they are collecting.

In light of this and the discussions above in Ch. 2.1, the fourth community of practice, researching, emerged as a central practice and an important avenue of reflection. As the

project became more explicitly focused on the various knowledges produced through practice, reflections on my own role and how I produced knowledge increased. The decision to include researching as a community of practice came out of these reflections, combined with previous readings of theory and ethnographic encounters in the area.

The focus on ‘communities of practice’ has been an important tool in this thesis, and a central way in which I have attempted to address the concerns of conducting ethnographic research, as outlined above. In particular, through focusing on communities of practice, the thesis is able to focus on (contested) knowledge production in a framework that does not essentialise groups, nor predetermine the significance of the tsunami. By focusing on what people *do*, it allows for an appreciation of people’s everyday lives *on their own terms* (as much as possible). I explain the specificities of ‘communities of practice’ in more depth in Ch. 4.0.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methods utilised to conduct the research that informs this project. It commences by explaining the postcolonial methodological approach that underlines the whole thesis. In particular it highlights the challenges of conducting research across a global North-South divide. This is especially pertinent regarding issues of representation, and the production of knowledge about people and places who may be described as ‘subaltern’ in relation to dominant knowledges produced around the tsunami. Based on this, this thesis does not seek to definitively describe or ‘speak for’ the experiences of people in Arugam Bay, but rather utilises postcolonial theory as a methodological tool to rethink and unsettle numerous presuppositions regarding the tsunami, Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka more broadly. Such an approach is an attempt to clear space to allow the subaltern the possibility of speaking, and being heard.

This chapter also details the research process, justifying the Arugam Bay area as a case study to explore the legacies of the tsunami, and specifying the purpose of each field trip. It also describes the qualitative, ethnographic research methods undertaken to gather data. The mixed qualitative methods approach was chosen as it is particularly appropriate when exploring complex and contested issues, and provides scope for facilitating multiple spaces of knowledge production. As such, while participant observation and interviews dominated my data collection, they were supported by participant mapping, focus groups and discursively reflecting on the coastscape, and numerous representations of it. As is the case with mixed

methods, individual methods were not undertaken independently of each other, and overlapped. The broad ethnographic approach provided me with useful data, although I make no claims to produce objective accounts of life in Arugam Bay. Rather, in the pages that follow the data presented is the product of intersubjective understandings between myself and participants in the research (see Crang and Cook, 2007: 37). Furthermore, as the above pages highlight, research was at times a frustrating process, with numerous practical, methodological and ethical challenges.

Throughout the analysis of this data, as much as possible I sought to allow the data to ‘speak for itself’. From this, the concept of ‘communities of practice’ emerged, which has become an important heuristic device to explore the legacies of the tsunami throughout the thesis. The four key communities of practice that I focus on in the following chapters - fishing, tourism, surfing and researching - emerged from the data I collected, however an important point of reflection is the acknowledgement that my positionality shaped the research process, and indeed influenced the emergence of these four practices. Based on this, my reflections on conducting research are not confined to this chapter. Rather, through the inclusion of ‘researching’ as a key community of practice, I critically engage with the research process as part of the project’s postcolonial approach. This involves an acknowledgement that, through producing knowledge about Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka, I am not located ‘outside’ of these places, but rather I am an integral *part* of the coastscape, and as such responsible to it. In light of this, along with the other three communities of practice, researching is interrogated throughout the remainder of the thesis, where I present the empirical conclusions I have arrived at following the data collection described in this chapter.



## CHAPTER 3.0

### THE SEA, PLACE, AND THE RHYTHMS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

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**Figure 3.i** The rhythmic, overlapping space between land, sea and air. Arugam Bay Beach, looking east towards ‘Main Point’. July 2013. *Photo: Author*

The sea<sup>11</sup> plays a central role in the everyday lives of the people of Arugam Bay. Despite the sea being the subject of a wide range of art, literature and scholarship, until recently it has been largely absent from human geographical enquiry, prompting a number of calls for an increased focus on the sea within the discipline (see Anderson and Peters, 2014; Lambert et al. 2006; Peters, 2010; Steinberg, 1999a). Rather than considering the sea as a material and

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this thesis the terms ‘sea’ and ‘ocean’ are used interchangeably. Technically these represent different spaces, with seas defined as being “smaller than oceans and usually located where the land and ocean meet. Typically, seas are partially enclosed by land” (NOAA, n.d.). This difference is significant when thinking about maritime and marine geographies. However, this case study explores embodied interactions with the sea where the geophysical differences between ‘sea’ and ‘ocean’ are largely irrelevant to everyday experiences.

cultural void, I build on the work of geographers who are increasingly acknowledging that the sea is “alive with embodied human experiences, more-than-human agencies ... as well as being a space in and of itself that has a material character, shape and form” (Anderson and Peters, 2014: 4). As with terrestrial space, such experiences and agency are mediated through contested knowledges (see Massey, 2005). This chapter focuses centrally on the sea, exploring how certain knowledges have produced specific ways of knowing and experiencing this saltwater realm.

The materiality of the tsunami has been largely overlooked by scholars studying the disaster, which bypasses the significance of the fact that *the sea* surged inland, disrupting and destroying people’s lives, livelihoods and property (Lehman, 2013). Moreover, studies that focus on the cultural dimensions of so-called ‘natural disasters’ have tended to hold the social world and physical world in opposition, despite the physical world playing “an integral role in the construction of meaning out of natural disasters” (Wilford, 2008: 647). The tsunami has had a lasting impact on the everyday lives of the people living in Arugam Bay, and it has shifted the ways in which they engage with the sea. Conversely, how people have negotiated the tsunami is inextricably linked to the ways they imagine and have engaged with the sea. Therefore, in order to understand how the tsunami permeates everyday life in Arugam Bay, it is necessary to initially establish a deeper understanding of the relationship between the sea, people and everyday practices in the area. As such, this chapter will focus on the sea in general terms. I focus more explicitly on the tsunami in subsequent chapters.

This chapter is structured around three sections. First, I introduce how I conceptualise space and place, making use of recent work in human geography. In doing this, I explore some of the ways in which geographers and other scholars have paid attention to the sea, emphasising the materialities and movements that make it such a distinctive space. From this I argue that it is important to take the sea’s agency seriously. Secondly, I trace how the sea has come to be popularly conceived in dominant discourses, situating it as a distinctly ‘othered’ space, largely the result of specific worldviews. Finally, I explore how conceptualisations of the sea play out in the contexts of Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay, emphasising its importance in the production of everyday life, and emphasising how understandings of the sea shift and are contested through space and time. I expand on this notion in the following chapter (Ch. 4.0) which explores (spatial) knowledges produced through ‘communities of practice’ in more depth.

### **3.1 Placing the sea: Materialities and rhythms of the coast**

The sea has traditionally been a marginalised subject within human geography, particularly amongst social and cultural geographers who have tended to focus on urban and other terrestrial spaces (Peters, 2010). However, following repeated calls to bring the sea into geographical scholarship (see Anderson and Peters, 2014; Lambert et al. 2006; Peters, 2010; Steinberg, 1999a), this watery realm has started to be taken seriously by those studying space and place. In particular, research has stressed the important role that the sea's specific materialities play in the constitution of place and, along with other waterscapes, its very agency "actively shapes new geographies" (Bear and Bull, 2011). As Phil Steinberg contends, one of the reasons that geographers may have neglected the topic is that in the past we have lacked "the conceptual tools for grasping this exceptionally ungraspable space" (2014: xvi). Due to its complex, fluid materialities, the sea is an ontologically challenging space to engage with (Bear, 2013; Peters, 2010; Spence, 2014). However, as geographers' understanding of space and place has progressed in recent years, this situation is changing. In this section I explore notions of space and place, and how geographers have engaged with the sea. In doing this I highlight the sea's materialities and dynamic agency, and emphasise the importance of thinking of the sea spatially.

Space is more than just a passive backdrop to social processes. Rather, space and social processes are co-constituted, with places coming into existence as "assemblages of practices, discourses, experiences and affects" (Grossberg, 2013: 37), or as entanglements of cultural practices, representations and imaginations (Lefebvre, 1991; Schmid, 2008). Within human geography the terms 'space' and 'place' are contested, often overlapping concepts (Hubbard, 2005), and at times used interchangeably (e.g. Shields, 1991). This thesis makes use of work by geographers who have conceptualised place as 'socialised space' (Cresswell, 1996), or as "particularisations of space through time" (Jones, 2014: 36), emphasising the processual and unfinished nature of place. Thinking of place as a process, rather than a physical location, is to highlight its dynamism, and to regard places as ever-changing, a coming together of people and materials mediated through shifting representations and technologies (see Massey, 1991; 1993; 2005). Such an approach to thinking about places seeks to move beyond conceptualising them as sedentary, static and with an essential character but rather emphasises the relationships that produce place. It is therefore important to emphasise that the multiple interpretations of places are unavoidably caught up in relationships of power (Cresswell, 1996), both through discursive representations and language (see Jackson, 1989),

as well as practices (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Cresswell, 2006a; 2006b; also Ch. 4.0). Thinking spatially in this manner is useful when thinking about the tsunami, and disasters more generally, as it encourages us to consider disasters as unbounded, both spatially and temporally. It also highlights how disasters are experienced in multiple ways, shifting through time and space.

Thinking about place relationally and as a process is particularly appropriate for thinking about the sea, as it is in constant motion. These “vectors of movement”, the actions of saltwater particles are what defines it as a space (Steinberg, 2014: xv) resulting in the sea having “a lively and energetic materiality of its own” (Lambert et al. 2006: 482). Of course, dynamism is not a property unique to the sea and geographers have highlighted how places are defined by movement and mobility (e.g. Sheller and Urry, 2006) and how long term geological processes render seemingly static places as in motion (e.g. Clark, 2011; Massey, 2006). However, whereas many places may *appear* static, the material movements of the sea are witnessed and experienced by anyone who encounters them (Steinberg, 2013). Indeed, as Veronica Strang points out, “[the] most constant quality of water is that it is not constant, but is characterised by transmutability and sensitivity to changes in the environment” (Strang, 2004: 49). As I argue below, everyday life in Arugam Bay revolves around the sea, and it is clear that people are strongly attached to this ever changing and dynamic space. But how does one gain attachment to something that is constantly in motion, something that embodies impermanence and dynamism? In Arugam Bay, the sea, despite its constant movement, remains one of the more ‘stable’ features in an area that is dramatically changing due to rapid tourist development, on a coastline where residents face “highly uncertain” futures (Lehman, 2014: 245).

Ideas around repetition and rhythm are useful here, and by thinking of the sea as in constant ‘rhythmic motion’, one can begin to appreciate how this dynamic space can become an integral part of people’s everyday life. Through focusing on the rhythms of places, one can explore notions that:

...places are always in a process of becoming, seething with emergent properties, but usually stabilised by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging (Edensor, 2010: 3).



Space plays an important role in everyday life, with social activity relativising and historicising space (Lefebvre, 1991)<sup>12</sup>. By thinking through the historical dimensions of (social) space, Lefebvre argues for conceptualising “space and time *differently*, and to think of them *together*” (Elden, 2004: ix: emphasis in original). Thus, as geographers have emphasised, we cannot think of social spaces, or rather places, as being static, frozen in time, but rather as dynamic processes (see Massey, 1991; 1993; 2005). As such, rather than understanding time as something that is universally understood or experienced, time must be understood along with places as being “multiple and heterogeneous” (Edensor, 2010: 1). For example, Abrahamic religions that teach that human life is a unique event tend to conceptualise time as linear and punctuated by ‘events’, while many cosmologies commonly found in South Asia, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, teach time as being cyclical and repetitive (Prebish and Keown, 2006: 10). This is important when considering the tsunami, as it is often narrated in the global media and in popular culture as an event confined to the past (see Ch. 5.0), whereas I argue throughout this thesis that it continues to be experienced and repeated in the present (see also Samuels, 2012).

Places are constituted by multiple rhythms, which pulse through them and contribute to their ongoing production. Through exploring these rhythms we can conceive the multiscalar temporalities that are experienced in places. Repetition is key here, as there is “[no] rhythm without repetition in time and in space, without reprises, without returns, in short, without measure” (Lefebvre, 2004: 6). Furthermore, everywhere “there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy there is rhythm” (Lefebvre, 2004: 15). Such repetition produces a sense of stability over time, either through regular repetition, or the longevity of some processes in relation to the human lifespan, for example many geophysical processes (see e.g. Clark, 2011; Massey, 2006; Hinchcliffe, 2013).

Place, and the everyday lives of those who inhabit places, are in a process of change, but they are also in a process of repetition (Lefebvre, 1987). As such, the practice of everyday life has a rhythmic quality to it. By its very definition, everyday life is constituted out of multiple “habits, schedules and routines”, all of which are rhythms in themselves (Edensor, 2010: 8). Such rhythmic rituals give people a sense of place, producing ‘social ecosystems’ (see Fullilove, 2004; Till, 2012). We live our everyday lives in relation to others, coordinating our movements in relation to other bodies of movement, be they people or more-than-human

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<sup>12</sup> For Lefebvre, due to its historical relativisation, all space is *social* space, resulting in a definition of space that resembles many geographers’ definition of ‘place’ (e.g. Cresswell, 1996).

actors (Edensor, 2010; Lehman, 2013). Through this we further augment our social ecosystems, our sense of belonging to place. Rhythms intersect, overlap and converge with one another, and through syncing with the rhythms of others we build relationships and a sense of belonging. For example, repeating the same walk each day, and seeing the same people can produce a sense of belonging to a ‘local’ community, while the participation in nationalist rituals can produce a sense of national identity and belonging to an ‘imagined community’ (see Anderson, 1983). As I demonstrate, in Arugam Bay many people attune themselves to the rhythms of the sea, building up specific, situated knowledges, and producing a (sense of) place through communities of practice (see Ch. 4.0).

Indeed, our daily lives do not simply intersect with the rhythmic movements of other people, and it is important to consider the role of ‘non’ or ‘more-than’ human rhythms (Edensor, 2010). The geophysical world does not simply act as a passive backdrop to cultural activity, but rather it has an agency of its own, influencing and shaping human lives (see Ch. 4.0). Thus it is important not to limit the social world to ‘the human’, but rather acknowledge “the complex array of non-human rhythms that impose upon us, exist separately and are entangled with human rhythms” (Edensor, 2010: 7). So with reference to the sea, it is necessary to acknowledge that “the texture, currents and substance of the water impact contemporary social and cultural uses of it”, as I explore in more depth below (Peters, 2010: 1265; see also Strang, 2004).

Conceptualising places as in motion rhythmically is particularly well suited for thinking about the “pulsating medium” that is the sea (Lambert et al. 2006: 482). The sea moves in a very rhythmic fashion, simultaneously producing both movement and stability. As Anna Ryan states in reference to the Irish coast:

...the meeting point of land and sea ... *is* movement. These cyclic and repetitive movements of this mobile coast generate a paradoxical experience of time, where ongoing rhythms are sensed as stable. The relationships between time and the moving coast present a significant complexity to the nature of the negotiations between individual and environment (Ryan, 2012: 14).

Waves are one of the more obvious examples of this repetitive movement, the material embodiment of rhythmic transfers of energy, and the sea is alive with the movements of these undulations (see Pretor-Pinney, 2010). However, the rhythms of the sea occur at multiple,

intersecting scales. One cannot consider rhythms in isolation. Waves are the product of interactions with winds, other movements within the atmosphere and oceanic currents, and combine with one another, pulsating in ‘sets’. Furthermore, the sea converges with lunar and solar rhythms, which not only affects the behaviour of waves, but also causes the sea to pulse twice daily in tidal movements (see Jones, 2010; 2011). These ‘cyclical repetitions’ are the product of cosmic or geophysical rhythms that last for a period, then restart (see Lefebvre, 2004: 8).

While the tidal range in Arugam Bay was relatively small, lunar rhythm patterns still played an important role in everyday life. Not only did the phase of the moon affect the behaviour of both fish and waves, having implications for the practices of fishing and surfing (see Ch. 4.4; 4.5), lunar cycles are important within Buddhist and Hindu practices. In Sri Lanka, every full moon is celebrated as a national holiday, known as a *Poya* day. This not only affected people spiritually, but also resulted in domestic tourist numbers surging on full moon days. Other customs, such as the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, people abstaining from breaking eggs or harming living creatures (thus many fishers not going to sea) distinguished each full moon as a significant and decidedly ‘marked’ day. In this way cyclical rhythms (lunar patterns) and linear rhythms (human practices) can on the one hand be separated out under analysis, “but in *reality* interfere with one another constantly” (Lefebvre, 2004: 8: emphasis in original). Indeed, it is important to note that the tsunami occurred on a *Poya* day, shaping the way in which the disaster played out (see below).

The sea also moves to the pulse of longer-term rhythms too. Seasonal changes such as shifting currents, that affect the movement of sediment in the bay, or changes in water temperature over the course of the year, all represent annual rhythmic changes, that whilst constantly in motion, provides a sense of stability to people’s lives. For example, the formation of a seasonal sandbar to the southern end of the bay, usually around June, is a sign of the start of the peak surf season, and the formation of the surf break ‘Baby Point’. It also creates a lagoon that is an important sheltered area for fishers to store boats. Its late formation in 2013 caused concern amongst both surf instructors and fishers who rely on its regular formation as part of their livelihoods.

Indeed, changes to usually predictable oceanic rhythms is the topic of much conversation amongst fishers and surfers in the area. This emphasises that rhythms are not necessarily constant or unchanging over time:

There is no identical absolute repetition, indefinitely. Whence the relation between repetition and difference. When it concerns the everyday ... there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference. (Lefebvre, 2004: 6).

So, while waves may be a constant feature in Arugam Bay, there is no such thing as two identical waves. Every wave is different, be that in form or in temporality, due to their dynamic intersections with other rhythmic processes. Rhythms are constantly changing and shifting. Sticking with the example of waves, their rhythmic movement changes in the geophysical sense – that is form, through the interactions with shifting weather patterns, sediment patterns, or longer term patterns, such as seasonal changes or climate change. But waves also change in how they are understood, negotiated and experienced by people through time. So for example, prior to surfers arriving in Arugam Bay, the waves at Main Point were not considered much more than as a hazard to fishing boats. However, over time, the waves have become a source of enjoyment and pleasure, a way of making money and a catalyst for tourism development in the area.

Rhythms do not solely change subtly over time either, as there is always the potential for the cataclysmic disruption to rhythms. The tsunami epitomises such a disruption. Prior to the tsunami, there was a perception that the sea had a level of predictability, its rhythmic patterns known in certain ways by those living there. The huge waves of 2004 changed this, creating a new sense of unpredictability (see also Lehman 2014). That is not to say that prior to the tsunami the sea, and knowledges of the sea, were stable, however the tsunami changed the way the sea and its geophysical rhythms have been known. People talked of how the fish patterns changed after the tsunami, and how fishing has become increasingly less predictable. Similarly, the push for tourism development following the tsunami has left a lasting impact on the rhythms of daily life, and continues to evolve and change over time (see Ch. 4.4). The tsunami meant that people changed the way they conceptualised the sea. Due to the unprecedented nature of the waves, the tsunami changed people's perceptions of what the sea's rhythms were capable of, resulting in the sea taking on a new set of potential behaviours and thus a new perceived risk.

Our daily routines are rhythmic, in tune with other people and things, and through these a sense of place, or 'social ecosystem' is produced. Interruptions to these rhythms, or the destruction and loss to familiar rhythms, can result in feelings of inherent loss, as (our sense

of) a place is destroyed (see Fullilove, 2004; Till, 2012). While such loss can be inherently damaging to an individual or population, it can also produce new rhythms and the (re)creation of rhythms in new spaces and times. As this thesis highlights, the tsunami disrupted and destroyed previous rhythms, cataclysmically altering the very fabric of everyday life. However, it also created new rhythms. As time passes, and people continue with their lives, the tsunami and the rhythms it produces are absorbed into everyday life, as it ‘descends into the ordinary’ (Das, 2007; see also Hastrup, 2011). Throughout this thesis I attempt to move ‘beyond the spectacular’ (see Ch. 5.0). I do this through focusing on everyday life, which is informed by a combination of discourses and practices (see Ch. 4.0).

As I argue throughout this thesis, the tsunami plays a huge role in shaping the rhythms of everyday life in Arugam Bay. However, before going into depth on the tsunami, it is important to think about how certain rhythms come to dominate everyday life. Although multiple rhythms come together to produce everyday life, some rhythms have more bearing than others. This is embedded within relationships of power. Lefebvre argues that rhythms can be imprinted on a time and place either through force or covertly by “a social group, a class or caste” (2004: 14). Some clear examples of this include rhythms of capital, or the organising features of the state (Edensor, 2010). However, the relationship between humans and nonhuman actors are also imbued with power, and in the case of Arugam Bay, the sea (itself influenced by other rhythms) has a profound influence on everyday life and practices (see also Jones, 2010; 2011). People ‘tap into’ rhythms, affecting the way they practice. So for example someone walking down the street will adjust the way they walk depending on the surface, stop and start with the rhythms of traffic (Edensor, 2010), or walk to the beat of a Walkman, a process musicologists call entrainment (see Jazeel, 2005b). Rhythms are simultaneously inside and outside of our bodies, that is we internalise external rhythms, and through latching onto certain rhythms we align our bodies “‘with a self-defined choreography’ that generates ‘links stoppages, bolts and rivets to the existing architecture of time and space’” (Labelle, 2008; in Edensor, 2010: 9).

The rhythms of the sea can play a central role in shaping everyday life. In Arugam Bay many people attune their bodily rhythms to the sea. As one expat living in the village said to me:

*My day is determined by the ocean. I mean, there are some other factors, but what I do, how I spend my day, it really is dictated by the ocean a lot (Benji, PT021).*

This was common among surfers and fisherfolk in particular, where the rhythm of the sea would not only determine what practices they would engage in, but also other bodily functions, such as what time they would wake up, eat, go to the toilet and so on (see also Ch. 4.0). Such rhythms also influenced how many and the type of fish caught, influencing eating and cooking practices, as well as income. The entanglement of rhythms in and out of the body are significant when thinking about rhythm. Lefebvre cites the researcher's body as an important departure point for thinking through rhythms, and while he has been accused of neglecting 'embodied experiences' (see Edensor, 2010; Simpson, 2008), one needs to recognise that rhythms course through and around the human body (Lefebvre, 2004; Edensor, 2010).

The sea in Arugam Bay also influences movements of people on a broader scale, with large seasonal fluctuations in the population. During the months of November to March, the favourable fishing conditions swells the number of fishermen in the area, as crews from other parts of the island come to the area (often illegally, due to local fishing laws) to take advantage of prosperous catches. Conversely, during the remainder of the year, when the weather and surfable waves are favourable for tourism, the number of tourists and seasonal workers grows dramatically, and despite diminished fisher numbers, the population of the area increases significantly during this time. My fieldwork visits were framed around this socio-oceanic seasonality (Ch. 2.0).

These movements of people through Arugam Bay are rhythms of mobility that constitute place. Observing such rhythms allows an understanding of a place's spatio-temporal character, be they "dynamic or placid, fast or slow" (Edensor, 2010: see also Lefebvre, 2004: Ch. 3). In this instance, the emphasis is on the researcher becoming 'stationary' in order to observe the rhythms pulsating around them. This approach is problematic however, as it reinforces the idea that researchers do not shape the places they research, and that rhythms will continue to pulsate around the researcher (see Ch. 2.0; 4.6).

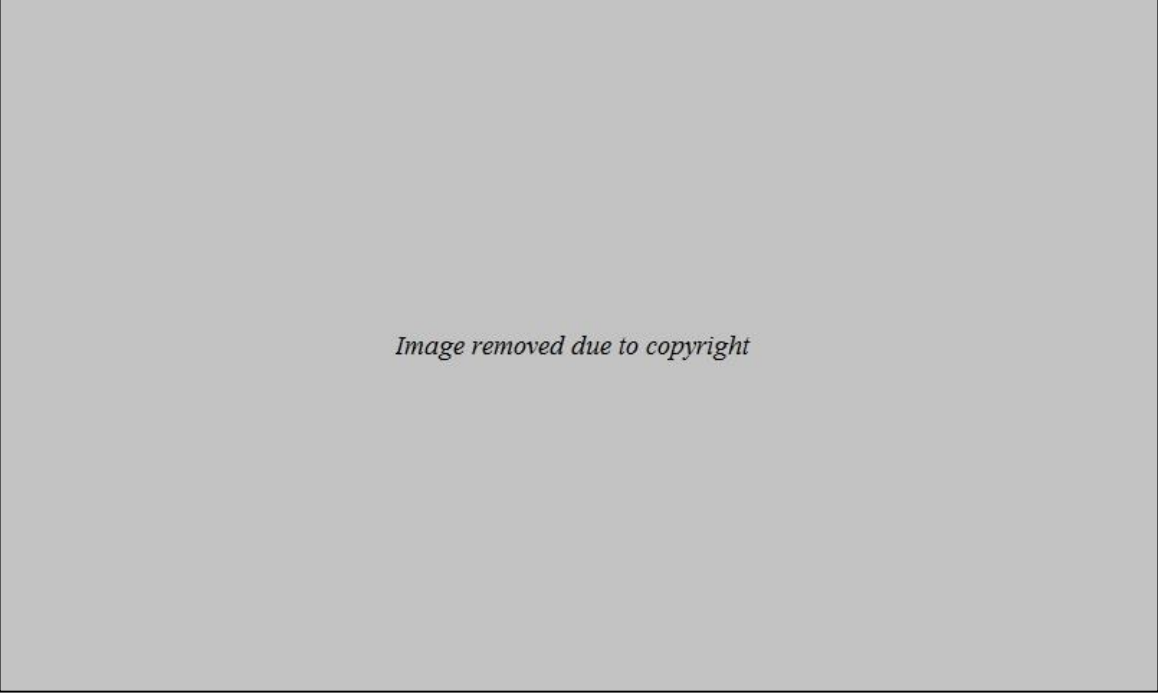
Edensor acknowledges how rhythms of mobility can produce a "sense of mobile place" (2010: 6) or a dwelling in motion (see Sheller and Urry, 2006). Regular journeys, such as commuting, are a good example of this (Jiron, 2010). Such regular journeys were made by the residents of Arugam Bay. For example, there were the daily journeys surfers made to the Main Point, something which many expats jokingly referred to as their 'commute'. Fishers would also make regular journeys to the beach, in order to assess fishing conditions, and in

season more often than not they would make journeys to the various fishing fields. In engaging with this routine practice, they would build up significant knowledge about the sea, and learn how to read the dynamic geography of this space. Land based journeys were important too. For example, women would make the trip several times a week to the market in the nearby town of Pottuvil. Similarly, both residents and tourists would go there to use banking facilities. Such journeys help to orientate oneself in the context of the local area, and in doing this produces a sense of place.

Thinking about ‘dwelling in motion’, work on surfing has argued for conceptualising the surfed wave as a place in its own right (J. Anderson, 2012). In doing this, one can conceptualise surfers as dwelling in the wave, occupying this dynamic, rhythmic space for a moment (Shields, 2004). In surfing the wave, surfers build up a sense of place, and a sense of attachment to the wave, and more broadly to the sea. It is particularly powerful, as they occupy a space that only surfers can experience, augmenting a sense of belonging and identity (Anderson, 2014a; see also Ch. 4.5).

The sea is a rhythmic space that dominates everyday life. It has powerful affective qualities, and the capacity to influence the lives of those living by it. However, affective environments are contextual and “largely an expression of the social ties that form [their] foundation” (Duff, 2010: 881; see also Ch. 4.0). Similarly Massey (2005) contends that our experiences of places are mediated through knowledges and technologies. While true of all places, this is particularly apparent with the sea. The fluid materiality of sea space means one cannot survive in the sea for any length of time without aides, and for example in Arugam Bay experiences were mediated through motor boats, sail boats, surf boards and bodily movements (Figure 3.ii). There are also less physical mediations such as “stories, memories ... fears and dreams” (Steinberg, 2014: xv). In short, the way we experience sea space is historically and geographically contextual.

Indeed, it is not my intention to ‘shoehorn’ European theory into a Sri Lankan context. Rather, I see Lefebvre and others’ work on rhythm as a useful lens through which to approach the sea and Arugam Bay, but not a key to unlocking ‘the truth’ of a place. Instead I acknowledge the multiple voices that constitute everyday life in Arugam Bay, and explore how people negotiate, imagine and interact with the sea and the tsunami on *their own terms*.



*Image removed due to copyright*

**Figure 3.ii** Practices in sea space mediated by technologies, ‘Main Point’ Arugam Bay

*Photo: Serendib Sessions, 2013*

As part of an approach that ‘clears ontological space’ it is important to contextualise the sea in Arugam Bay, and to highlight how different knowledges change the way places are produced and negotiated. As contended above, the sea as an ‘othered’ space is the product of knowledge from a particular time and place. I have begun to demonstrate in this chapter how such an imagination falls apart somewhat when thinking about Arugam Bay. In order to rethink such imaginations, it is necessary to trace how such knowledge is formed. As such, the following section explores the notion of the sea as ‘othered’, before further emphasising the importance of the sea as central to everyday life in Arugam Bay. Chapter 4.0 builds on this by exploring how knowledges of space, including the sea, are produced and contested through ‘communities of practice’.

### **3.2 Contested representations and imaginations of the sea**

In order to think through the legacies of the tsunami and how it has been negotiated, it is important to think through the discursive knowledges of the medium of disaster, the sea. As argued above, human geography has been influenced by prevailing imaginations of the sea



that position it as an ‘othered’ space, outside of the social and cultural realm. This goes some way to explaining the sea’s absence from human geography, at least until recently, and its absence from many geographical accounts of the tsunami (for exceptions see Lehman, 2013; 2014). While the rhythms and materiality of the sea are central to the production of everyday life in Arugam Bay, it is important not to reduce the sea simply to a set of geophysical processes, but rather to explore how this dynamic space is interpreted, imagined and negotiated in multiple social and cultural contexts. In the following sections, I trace some of the contrasting imaginations of the sea that have shaped the ways in which the tsunami has been negotiated in Arugam Bay.

### *3.2.1 ‘Othering’ the sea*

The distinct materialities of the sea produce very different affective experiences in comparison to land. For example, its dynamic interactions with light create a specific type of visuality, in which the “light and reflectivity of the sea gives to it a kind of personality that moves with the seasons” (Ryan, 2012: 16; see also Strang, 2004). Similarly, the sea’s constant motion produces an aural experience, quite unlike that experienced on land (Ryan, 2012). And its lack of stability requires people to make use of technologies and specific knowledges in order to survive for any length of time at sea (Steinberg, 2014). As such, it comes to no surprise that the sea has been conceptualised as a very different space to land, one that is ‘quite other’ to the terrestrial realm.

However, the way this ‘otherness’ has been interpreted, encountered and given cultural value varies across time and space. Nevertheless, dominant discourses have emerged that position the sea as ‘other’, bound up within specific Cartesian dualisms. Such imaginations, predominately emerging from Europe and ‘the West’, have shaped the legacies of the tsunami in Arugam Bay. These understandings informed ways in which the tsunami was represented on TV screens around the world, influencing how people around the world reacted to the tsunami, and in turn shaped the recovery process as well (see Perera, 2010; also Ch. 6.0). The dominance of these narratives mask other understandings of the sea, and conceal the multiple ways in which people have imagined and negotiated the tsunami. As such, in order to loosen the dominance of such understandings of the sea, and ‘clear space’ (after Spivak) for other knowledges of the sea to exist, it is necessary to trace and unsettle the roots of this geographical imagination.

As well as being materially different to land, the sea has been discursively constructed as opposite to land, as an antithetical element or object (Connery, 2006). The roots of Eurocentric imaginations that position the sea as such has been traced back to literature from the Ancient Greeks who associated it with madness (Ford and Brown, 2006). The Bible also provided influential images of the sea and water as destructive and a space of danger, for example the story of Noah and the great flood, or Jonah and the whale (Connery, 2006; Corbin, 1994). As Alain Corbin states, “there was no sea in the Garden of Eden, and for centuries the earth’s ocean was looked upon with hostility, as a chaotic remnant of the flood” (Corbin, 1994: back cover). Similarly, in exploring contemporary ‘dangerous geographies’ of ‘othered’ spaces, Suvendrini Perera has noted:

The sea itself figures among the most dangerous of these othered geographies because of elemental imaginaries of the ocean as a wild and ungovernable space distinct from land, one that is associated in Christian symbology with sin and error (as in the biblical flood). (Perera, 2010: 38)

While such imaginations lay the grounding for the ‘othering’ of the ocean, elements of this shifted during the Enlightenment and the age of European imperial expansion. With improvements to technology and maritime innovations, the sea became a way to access adventure, enchantment and attraction to other shores in pursuit of profit and glory. During this period the sea became an increasingly exoticised space, notably through the tales and travelogues of explorers, such as James Cook, which inspired “awe, wonder, fascination and repulsion” (Ford and Brown, 2006: 11). It was during this time period, through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, that Alain Corbin traces the transforming European perception of the sea, from its treacherous Biblical roots to it becoming an intensely pleasurable and sensuously evocative space (Corbin, 1994). Corbin cites a number of elements as instrumental to this change: a growing interest in travel and exploration, the emergence of geology and natural theology, the perceived medical benefits of bathing (and the resulting rise in health tourism, see also Urry, 1990), and the arrival of landscape painting, coinciding with the development of Romanticism and ‘the sublime’ (Corbin, 1994).

Romanticism and landscape painting had a particularly important influence on imaginations of the sea. As with other ‘wilderness’ areas, such as mountains, the sea became linked to new emotions, notably feelings of awe and wonder (Corbin, 1994). Romanticism focused particularly on the aesthetic beauty of the coastscape and water, deeply reinforcing the notion

that the sea was man's 'other', a purely natural, wild space that could not be tamed or controlled. The Romantic movement, emerging in response to the industrialisation and rationalisation of the Enlightenment, made significant use of the aesthetic of 'the sublime'. While the sublime evades easy definition, one of the most influential accounts was Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* published in 1757, in which he argued that sublimity constituted of: darkness and the constraining of sight, obscurity and the confusion of judgement, deprivation, vastness beyond comprehension, awe inducing magnificence, overwhelming loudness, and shocking suddenness (Riding and Llewellyn, 2013). For Romantic artists, all of these characteristics were to be found in 'nature' and through their depictions of sublime land-, coast- and seascapes, feelings of terror became associated with a certain aesthetic pleasure (Payne, 2014). This period saw the rise of the sea as a subject for art as well as literature, with the sea providing plenty of opportunities to depict the frightening with the beautiful (Payne, 2014; Raban, 1993).

This "dramaturgy of feelings" is epitomised in paintings such as Turner's shipwrecks (see Figure 3.iii; Corbin, 1994: 234; Perera, 2010). Images such as these produce specific 'ways of seeing' the sea. Such images are generally framed, viewing the sea from the shore, specifically the cliff-top, the "theatre from which the sublime anger of the elements may be viewed" (Perera, 2010: 32). In such cases the viewer achieves "transcendence over the awe and terror of nature" (*ibid*: 32), but is also removed from the elements they are gazing upon. At the time of the paintings' production, viewers of such images not only empathised with those caught in shipwrecks, acknowledging how they could also easily be at the mercy of the power of the sea. Shipwrecks were also utilised to teach moral lessons, "bringing out the best and worst in human nature" (Payne, 2014: 17). Such emotional responses continue to inform many depictions and imaginations of the sea in contemporary times (see Kerr, 2014). This becomes increasingly significant when one considers reactions to the tsunami, where the tsunami was depicted as a 'sublime spectacle' in much of the global media (see Ch. 5.0; also Perera, 2010).

In contemporary times, Phil Steinberg has contended that there are three dominant imaginations of ocean space that are prevalent within popular culture and planning circles: "The image of the ocean as an empty void to be annihilated by hyper-mobile capital; as a resource rich but fragile space requiring rational management for sustainable management; as a source of consumable spectacles" (Steinberg, 1999b: 426; see also Steinberg, 2001). Within



**Figure 3.iii** The sublime sea, dangerous yet beautiful: ‘The Shipwreck’ by J.M.W. Turner (1805), Tate Gallery, London. *Source: Wikimedia Commons.*  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph\\_Mallord\\_William\\_Turner\\_-\\_The\\_Shipwreck\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_Mallord_William_Turner_-_The_Shipwreck_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

this thesis I am particularly interested in the ocean becoming a source of consumable spectacles, which is a central facet of sea-based tourism (see Ch. 4.4; also Trist, 1999) and has had very real implications with how people have reacted to the tsunami and as such shaped the aftermath (see Ch. 5.1). In all three imaginations, the sea continues to be framed within a specific lens, constructed through processes of capitalism and modernisation and viewed as an ‘othered’ natural space, in juxtaposition to a terrestrial culture. However, Steinberg does acknowledge that there is space for other conceptualisations to exist, although he constrains this to ‘non-modern’ societies, somewhat augmenting the division between Euro-American concepts and ‘others’ (Steinberg, 2001).

The dichotomy between land and sea gives rise to a number of associated dualisms that position the sea as an ‘othered’ space, including: culture/nature; masculine/feminine; centre/periphery; mind/body; (socially) ordered/anarchic; safe/dangerous; clothed/naked; rational/erotic; cultivated/raw; and everyday/exceptional (Fiske, 2011; Ford and Brown,

2006; Shields, 1991). With these dualisms in mind, the space of the beach becomes a 'liminal zone' between these two alternate spaces (Preston-Whyte, 2004; Shields, 1991). Thus, in this context the beach becomes a space to experience nature, a space of pleasure and a 'platform' to enter this realm (Corbin, 1994; Shields, 2004). Due to the beach's liminality, on the peripherals of society, it becomes a space where social norms can be broken down, such as the wearing of clothes (Androit, 2010; Dutton, 1983; Fiske, 2011).

The beach is a space that was 'invented' as a space of pleasure and leisure between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe (Corbin, 1994: Ch. 11; see also Shields, 1991; Urry, 1990). This conceptualisation closely overlaps shifting perceptions of the sea, not only the sublime representations, as described above, but also a later stage in European art history, in which the sea is depicted as calmer, and an inviting space of leisure, albeit with emphasis placed on its ability to change (Payne, 2014). Throughout this time period tourism ousts fishing as the predominant socio-economic activity occurring on the beaches of Western Europe (Urbain, 2003). Citing a variety of art and literature, including works by Monet, Hemmingway and the Romantic Movement, Urbain (2003) demonstrates how artists and writers systematically removed the fisherman from all representations of the beach, with the fishers' domains restricted to the sea and harbour. They did not fit in with the imagination of the beach as a pleasurable space to experience nature, and were subsequently removed, first in representation and then in reality. This reconfigured the beach as a place that serves "not for use, but exchange, not for labour but contemplation, not for work but for play, not for production but consumption" (Urbain, 2003: 43). This becomes significant when one considers the prevalence of beach based tourism in Arugam Bay, and the role tourism played in the (re)construction efforts following the tsunami waves (see Ch. 4.4).

Of course, tourists do not represent a single homogenous group. Urbain claims that beach tourism is a European concept, therefore all beach tourism is a process of "acculturation" (Urbain, in Doquet and Evrard, 2008: 180). However, as Hazbun (2010) shows in his comparisons of tourism in Tunisia, Spain and Morocco, different groups of tourists utilise the beach for their own needs, performing alternative forms of tourism. While not a homogenous group, domestic tourists in Arugam Bay tended to practice tourism in different ways to their international counterparts. One key difference was interactions with the sun. Whereas (white) international tourists would often be seen sunbathing, wearing few clothes, their Sri Lankan counterparts would rarely engage in this practice, especially women. For international tourists, the beach represents a place where one can not only discard the cultural norms of

wearing clothes (Andriotis, 2010), but also get a sun tan and the associated cultural capital that comes with it (Carter and Michael, 2004). However, this does not apply to many Sri Lankans. Within Sri Lanka, and South Asia more broadly, lighter skin tones are generally associated with higher social classes and equated with beauty, thus sun-bathing and tanning are not desirable practices (Glenn, 2008; see also Johnston, 2005). Furthermore, cultural constraints do not break down for Sri Lankan women on the beach, and the vast majority stay fully clothed. The beach, in other words, can have multiple meanings, varying across time, space and around communities of practice.

### 3.2.2. *Encountering the sea in Sri Lanka*

The conceptualisations I have described above are the product of a specific time and place, and it is important to acknowledge that the sea is not universally understood on these terms (Connery, 2006). That is not to say that such imaginations are ‘false’, but rather it is important to acknowledge that they are partial, with multiple imaginations and conceptualisations of the sea contributing to people’s experience of it. For example, the English phrase ‘all at sea’ means to be lost or without direction, and positions the sea as unfamiliar and threatening. In contrast, the Fijian word *Wansolwara*, which means ‘one ocean, one people’, partners the ocean with familiarity and closeness (see Mack, 2011: 73). The Fijian-Tongan anthropologist and activist Epili Hau’ofa highlights this closeness in his influential essay ‘Our Sea of Islands’ (1994). In this text, Hau’ofa critiques Eurocentric imaginations of the sea as a dividing force between stranded islanders, and rather demonstrates how the sea is an important social-space, reimagining Oceania as formed by connections and relations produced through practices at sea (Hau’ofa, 1994). Similarly the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders conceptualise the sea as an important part of their spiritscapes and dreamland, with little distinction between it and the land (Sharp, 2002). As such, ownership (or rather more accurately, guardianship) of space by different communities in the area extends out from land to incorporate the ocean. This became problematic when European colonisers, whose terra-centric approach to mapping places declared the sea as part of the ‘commons’, ungovernable and beyond ownership (see Jackson, 1995).

These two examples highlight that multiple and contrasting conceptualisations of the sea can bring different groups into conflict with one another. However, it is important that ‘modern’ conceptualisations and ‘indigenous’ conceptualisations of the sea are not held in binary to

one another, but rather acknowledge that multiple ways of imagining the sea come together to produce knowledges and experiences of the sea. So in the case of Arugam Bay, there is a multitude of imaginations, knowledges and experiences of the sea that produce it as an experienced place.

Furthermore, experiences and imaginations of the sea are mediated and intersect with forces of capital, and contrasting economic interests. For example James Carrier (2003) explores the political economy and neoliberalisation of sea space in Jamaica. Carrier demonstrates how conservationists from North America viewed the marine environment as a natural space, to be 'protected' and subsequently commoditised, the consumption of which was sold to dive tourists to fund the park. This put conservationists in direct conflict with fisherfolk, who were excluded from fishing in protected areas, despite tourism development posing the greatest threat to marine ecology (Carrier, 2003; see also Sheller, 2004).

Such examples highlight that there are multiple and contested imaginations of the sea, with ramifications for populations when they come into conflict with one another. Both Mack (2011) and Sharp (2002) emphasise that within communities, populations and places, conceptualisations of the sea are not universal. So, while modernist imaginations of the sea may prevail within policy or popular culture, this does not mean that they are universally accepted or uncontested, both within and outside of the spatial confines of Europe. Thus, when thinking about imaginations of the sea in the context of Sri Lanka, it should be noted that there is not a single 'Sri Lankan' narrative, but rather the heterogeneity of Sri Lanka should be emphasised (see e.g. Ismail, 2005; Wickramasinghe, 2006), along with its connections to other places. As such, people engage with the sea in multiple and contrasting ways within Sri Lanka, and more specifically Arugam Bay. The following section traces some of the ways in which the sea is imagined within Sri Lanka. From this, I then expand on the importance of the sea in everyday life in Arugam Bay. This is then built upon in more detail in chapter 4.0, focusing on 'communities of practice'.

Prevailing imaginations of the sea as an 'othered' space, particularly as a dividing or containing space for the terrestrial sphere of the state, have been important within Sri Lankan nation building. As has been noted, "as an island nation, Sri Lanka is literally defined by the Indian Ocean" (Lehman, 2013: 487). Jazeel (2003; 2009) traces the emergence of Sri Lanka as an island nation through time, developing as part of a specific imperial imagination of islands as separate and bounded (for a more in depth exploration of contested imaginations of

island space, see Baldacchino, 2008; for an exploration of the ‘islanding’ of Ceylon by the British Empire, see Sivasundaram, 2013). Through colonial mapping and textual representations the island nation is seen as natural and inevitable. Such a discourse is used to reinforce Sinhala hegemonic claims on the unity (both political and socio-cultural) of Sri Lanka. However:

...by tracing and loosening some of the misplaced concreteness surrounding settled geographical imaginations and understandings of the Sri Lankan nation-state... [we can gesture towards] the political possibilities of thinking and imagining island space differently (Jazeel, 2009: 399)

So for example, particularly before rail links to the northern areas of the island, the predominantly Tamil communities of the north had more connections and interactions with coastal communities in Tamil Nadu, India, than in the southern areas of the island. Thus the sea does not necessarily have to be considered a divider, or container for socio-political processes, but also a connector to other terrestrial spaces. However, this does not preclude the sea being a socio-cultural space in its own right either.

The role of the sea in Sri Lanka’s protracted civil war also demonstrates how it can have multiple meanings and play a number of different roles for different people. For example, the tsunami played an important role in the reigniting of conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and LTTE in 2006. Despite a brief period of ‘good will’ in the immediate aftermath between opposing leaders, subsequent perceived injustices in the distribution of aid, a controversial and politicised ‘buffer zone’ and the continuing persecution and marginalisation of Tamil and Muslim groups contributed to simmering tensions boiling over into a full escalation of war (see Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Hyndman, 2007b; Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007).

The sea itself was the site of a number of conflicts during the war, as well as a space that influenced how terrestrial clashes played out (Lehman, 2013). For example, the naval division of the LTTE (the ‘Sea Tigers’), and the Sri Lankan Navy fought several key battles at sea, and the coastal regions of the North and East saw much of the worst violence (*ibid.*). The coast, particularly spits of land between lagoons and the sea, also became spaces where Muslims fled to during LTTE efforts to ethnically cleanse Tiger controlled areas, and similarly, many Tamils also fled to these areas following similar tactics deployed by the Sri Lankan army (Hyndman, 2007b). One of the most dramatic examples of the sea’s role occurred in the final days of the war, when thousands of Tamil civilians fled to the coastal



lagoon area around Mullaitivu. This area, known as ‘the Cage’, consisted of a thin strip of land between the sea and lagoon. The geophysical border between land and sea penned people in, preventing them from fleeing when government forces started shelling this so called ‘no-fire zone’ (Weiss, 2011). Here, the sea’s materiality played a strategic role in the enclosure and tragic fate of the people trapped here, and also resulted in the ultimate surrender of the LTTE. However, conversely the sea in another context provided a way of being liberated from war and conflict. Some fishermen in the North East, for example, referred to the sea as a safe place, due to the absence of land mines. Thus, for one group, the sea prevented the escape from conflict, yet in another context, it provided the means for escape. This highlights the importance of acknowledging how the meanings of the sea can shift across space and time, as well as between communities of practice.

Conflicting imaginations of the sea as a space *of* danger and a space to escape *from* danger have been prevalent in Sri Lanka within discourses of asylum seeking and migration, particularly to Australia. Continued human rights abuses since the end of the civil war have meant that a number of Sri Lankans, predominantly Tamils, have opted to leave the island and claim asylum overseas (Pearson, 2014). Furthermore, I spoke with several younger men who said they would consider moving abroad for financial reasons. One of the ways in which this has been attempted has been travelling by boat from Sri Lanka to Australia. In this sense, the sea becomes the route for escaping threatening and dangerous situations on the island, as well as an imagined path towards economic prosperity. The proliferation of right-wing, anti-immigration sentiments in Australia has prompted the Australian government to undertake several high profile and aggressive publicity campaigns in Sri Lanka, highlighting the dangers of the sea, and perpetuating ideas of the sea as dangerous and unforgiving (Figures 3.iv, 3.v). Indeed, within Arugam Bay, the dangers of such boat travel were widely known, with rumours of unscrupulous traffickers, boats dropping passengers in Yala National Park, and interception and detention by the Sri Lankan Navy. One morning in October 2012 a beheaded body washed up on the beach in the village. This was rumoured to have been the result of ‘boat people’ robbing and killing their passengers, dumping the bodies overboard on route to Australia. Through this, a perception that the sea was a dangerous space was highlighted, and reinforced. Despite this knowledge, many still prefer to take their chances at sea, rather than deal with the violence perpetrated against them within Sri Lanka.



**Figure 3.iv** Flyer distributed by Australian government in Pottuvil, April, 2013. The face represents an ‘untrustworthy’ trafficker/boat charterer. *Source: Author*



**Figure 3.v** The sea as a dangerous space. Anti-migration publicity material released by Australian government in Sri Lanka, September 2014. *Source: Customs and Border Protection Service, Australian Government.*

Finally, the Indian Ocean tsunami undoubtedly reinforced the imagination of the sea as a dangerous space. The tsunami impacted on around three quarters of Sri Lanka’s coastline, causing widespread death and destruction (Stirrat, 2006). The actions of the state in the aftermath of this disaster has served to perpetuate ongoing fears of a repeat wave, for example through the controversial buffer zone plans (see Hyndman, 2007b). While the actions of the state in the aftermath of the waves have undoubtedly shaped the ways in which

the disaster has been negotiated and memorialised (see also Ch. 5.3), other actors have also played a role in perpetuating these fears, including the practices of INGOs (see Ch. 6.0), tourists and researchers (see Ch. 5.2). It is also important to consider the role of the sea as an actor on the coast, and how its material agency maintains fears and anxieties in relation to the tsunami (see also Lehman, 2013). Indeed, the tsunami reconfigured what people imagined the sea was capable of, and since the tsunami fear of the ocean has been intensified. In particular, the fact that the tsunami disrupted the regular rhythms of the ocean, extending beyond its usual confines, meant that people now consider the sea as dangerous and a threat whilst engaging in land based practices, such as sleeping. The changing imaginations of the sea in relation to the tsunami is one of the key focuses of the thesis, and will be explored in more depth in the chapters that follow, particularly in Ch. 7.0.

### *3.2.3. The sea and everyday life in Arugam Bay*

Despite numerous representations and imaginations that situate the sea as a dangerous, unforgiving space, in Sri Lanka the sea plays an important role for many people in their everyday lives and practices. Indeed, much of Sri Lanka's coastline is densely populated, a factor that contributed to the tsunami's devastating impact. As well as being an important social space, Sri Lanka's 'Exclusive Economic Zone' (EEZ) at sea amounts to 517,000 km<sup>2</sup>, approximately six times its land area (de Silva and Yamao, 2007: 386). Indeed, economically the sea is a significant space of employment, with fishing and ocean based tourism playing a major role in national and local economies (Lehman, 2013; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008).

Being located on the coast, in Arugam Bay everyday life is dominated by the sea. Almost everyone in the village lives within sight or sound of the sea, and it is a constant presence in the lives of those inhabiting the area. This is particularly apparent in Ullae, where the physical geography of the settlement on a peninsular exposes it to the sea on two sides. The centrality of the sea within people's lives is evident when viewing participant maps, for which participants were invited to draw a map of the local area, and include the important aspects of their everyday lives. All but one of the maps featured the sea on it. For example Ishan (PT003) drew a map which almost exclusively consisted of features in the ocean (Figure 3.vi). The only terrestrial features he includes are the beach, and a boat pulled up onto land. Both of these are nevertheless inherently linked to the sea. Similarly, Hasitha (PT009) includes many specific oceanic details: the reefs, the waves and naming 'places' in the sea,

notably certain surf breaks (Figure 3.vii). While there are more terrestrial features, Hasitha's map shows a unique knowledge of the sea, one in which it is not a uniform featureless space, but one with specific, knowable, geographic features. Another two participants, Sanjeev (PT019) and Yatthu (PT014), both drew images rather than top-down maps. In both representations, the sea and sea-based practices are central (Figures 3.viii; 3.ix).

In addition to the centrality of the ocean in participants' conceptual maps, the ethnographic work I undertook revealed the attunement of the rhythms of everyday life with the sea. People would plan their lives around the sea's behaviour, and often meetings or interviews would be postponed due to the behaviours of the sea, for example favourable fishing conditions, good surf or stormy conditions requiring the boats to be pulled up the beach. The sea also shaped the annual changes in socio-economic activities, influencing fishing and (surf) tourism. This in turn had a direct impact on the demographics and population of the area. The centrality of the sea to economic practices was very apparent, and further highlighted through interviews and conversations I engaged in:

*From the sea I have a job, I have some money. So when I go fishing, I have money. When I give surf lesson, I have money. Because the ocean gives money, you know? And it gives me job. I don't know any other job like mason, carpenter. For me, I know the ocean and it's who I am... (Vinay, PT008)*

*Living by the sea is good for fishing. Good for husband going getting job. (Sanuthi, PT039)*

*The sea is very good for us. We need the sea, because we don't know any other way. We don't have any other business, just fishing and tourism, that's why we need the sea. (Chanaka, PT005)*

Such an economic reliance on the sea positions it as a valuable resource in people's lives. In addition to this, people highlighted the positive affective properties of the sea:

*[I enjoy living by the sea]. I'm every day looking at sea. I just have to see [it]. Today, tomorrow, always thinking about the sea. (Tharanga, PT029)*

*Nothing problem when thinking about the ocean. (Matthi, PT016)*

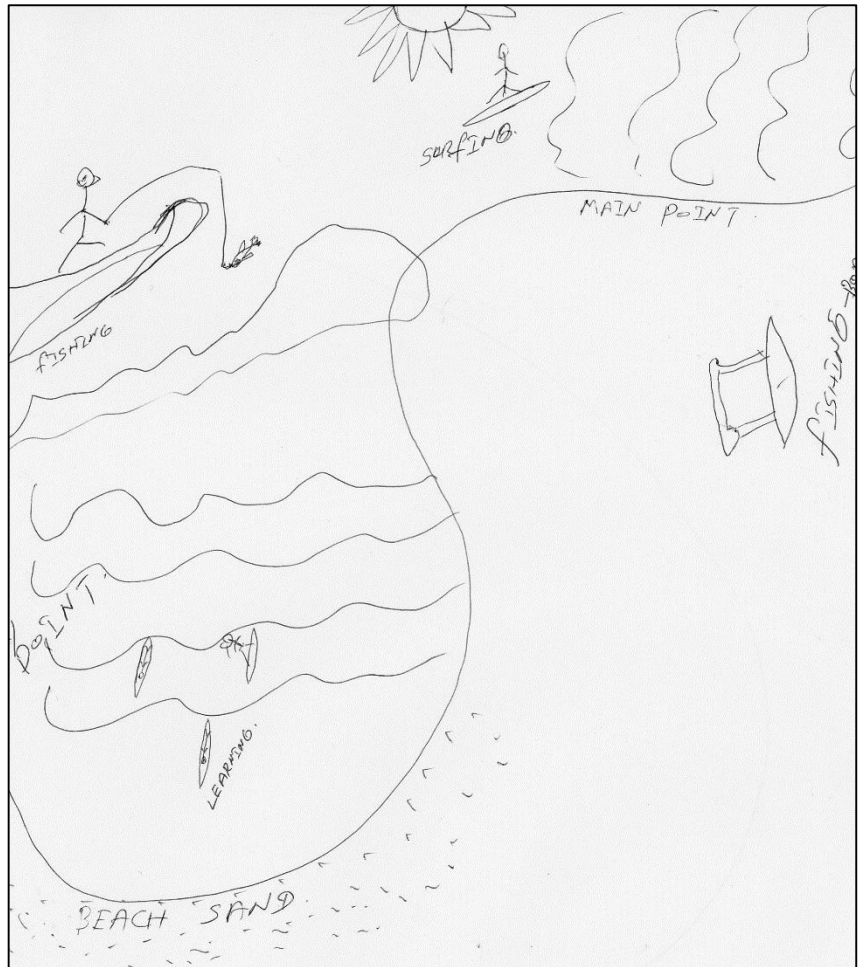


Figure 3.vi Participant map. Ishan, PT003

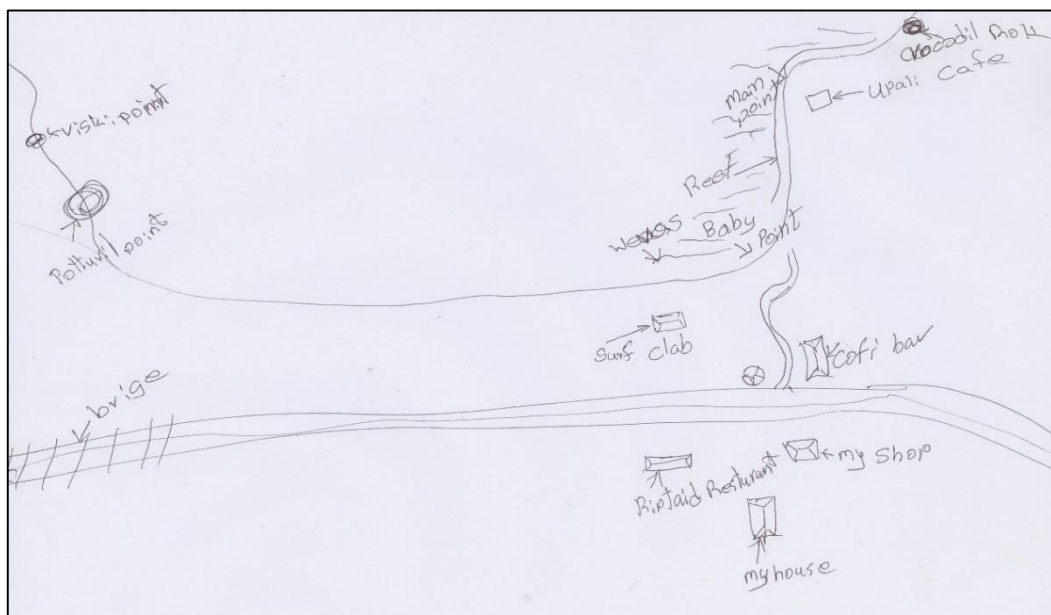
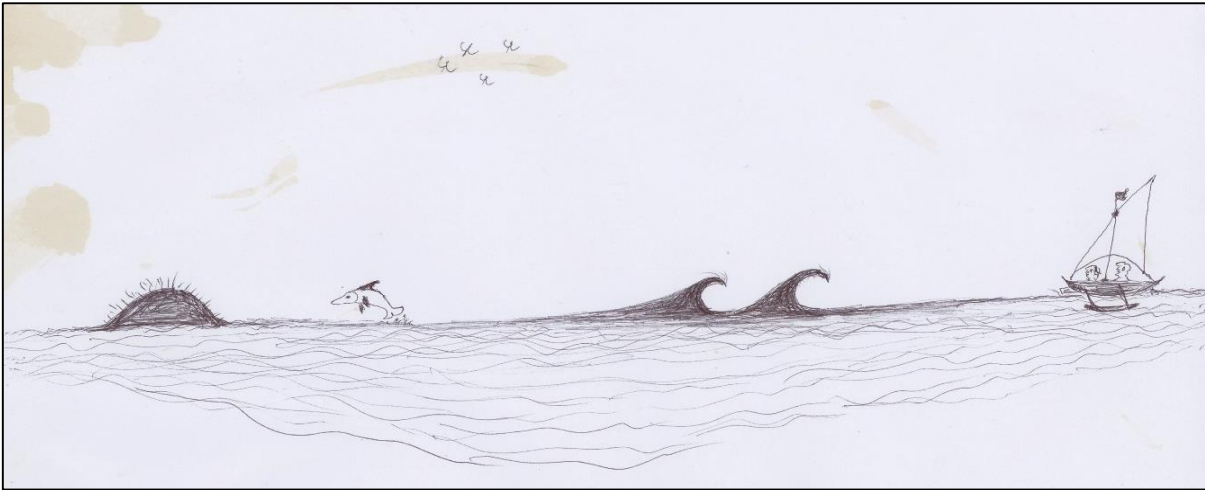
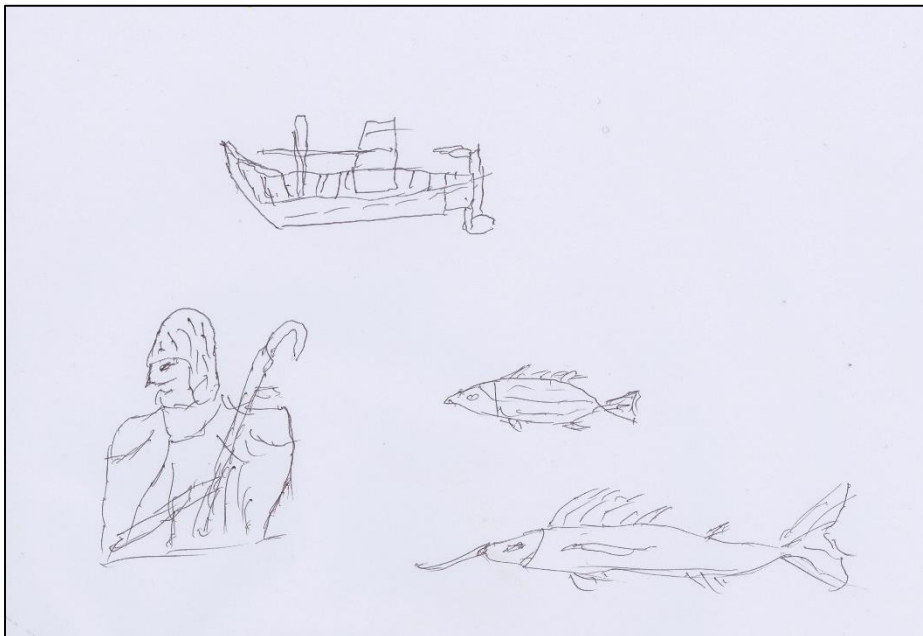


Figure 3.vii Participant map. Hasitha, PT009



**Figure 3.viii** Participant map. *Sanjeev, PT019*



**Figure 3.ix** Participant map. *Yatthu, PT014*

*Evening time, go to beach walking. Many relaxing time here. (Sanuthi, PT039).*

*Of course I love [living next to the sea] ... When we alone, when we confused, it's like meditation... relax, calm, everything ... it's close to nature and this is very important. (Addam, PT007)*

Almost every participant, fisher, hotelier, surfer, housewife had positive things to say about living on the coast, emphasising its importance in their lives. Such statements require a

rethinking of the ocean as ‘other’ and as a space that is something ‘outside’ of the socio-cultural realm. The sea is very much an intrinsic part of the socio-cultural lives of those I spoke to. This is further iterated by participants such as Vinay, who states the sea is “who I am”, a sentiment shared by numerous others:

*I don't think I can live without sea... I am growing up by the sea... It's part of my life. (Ishan, PT003)*

*My life story I will tell you, is about the sea. This is my life... My life is with the sea. (Chandra, PT015)*

*[The sea is] in my blood I guess. And it will always be in my blood. I can't live away from the sea. (Mike, PT017)*

Such statements demonstrate that the sea is not only central to people’s lives, but an intrinsic part of who they perceive themselves to be. Mike, a resident from Europe, stated the sea is in his blood, requiring us to further question the culture/nature binary dualism when thinking about the sea. For Mike, and others I spoke to who echoed similar sentiments, the sea is imagined as part of their bodies and inner most beings (see also Strang, 2004).

That is not to say that imaginations of the sea as a ‘natural’ space or another realm were not prevalent in Arugam Bay. Indeed, Addam’s quote above refers to the sea as being ‘close to nature’. The sea is often constructed through its material opposition to land, and in many ways imagined as being ‘natural’. While the conceptualisation of the sea as ‘natural’ or ‘close to nature’ is present, it is important not to simply conceive of ‘nature’ as being universally understood or experienced. As Castree and Braun state:

*...what counts as 'nature, and our experiences of nature (including our bodies), is always historical, related to a configuration of historically specific social and representational practices which form the nuts and bolts of our interactions with, and investments in, the world. (Castree and Braun, 1998: 26)*

Our experiences of nature are contextual, and as such cultural. Nature is “intrinsically social” (Castree, 2001: 5). As such, when we talk about it as a separate realm from ‘the human’, we not only cause the potential for confusion, but also perpetuate existing power relations and knowledge systems.

Based on this, it is important to interrogate the Cartesian dualism of culture/nature and Eurocentric conceptualisations of nature, particularly when played out in the context of Sri Lanka (see Jazeel, 2005a; 2013a; 2013c). This can be highlighted through an exploration of Yala (Ruhuna) National Park, the eastern section of which (Kumana) is a popular attraction for tourists staying in Arugam Bay. The park itself was territorially contested during the civil war, with large areas of it closed due to LTTE activity within its borders. However, Jazeel argues for a more subtle reading of the contested meanings of the park, revealing how ‘nature’ in the park is embedded within a national discourse promoting a hegemonic Sinhala narrative. In particular, the weaving of Sinhala archaeological sites into ‘nature’, and the promotion of a distinctly Buddhist conceptualisation of nature gives authority to, and normalises Sinhala territorial and nationalist claims, excluding other narratives, importantly those of the island’s Tamil and Muslim populations (Jazeel, 2005a).

One can also interrogate this idea of nature further in considering how nature is conceptualised within Theravedic Buddhist philosophy. Theravedic Buddhism teaches that mankind and the natural world evolved together (Prebish and Keown, 2010), that Buddhist selves and the biophysical world are understood to have come into existence through a “relational emergence” with one another (Jazeel, 2013a: 72). This sharply contradicts the Enlightenment belief that culture and nature are in opposition to one another, or the Christian belief that man has stewardship or dominance over nature (Prebish and Keown, 2010).

As noted by Jazeel (2013a), when one interrogates the Sinhala linguistic use of the word ‘nature’, *Swabhawadharmaya*<sup>13</sup> one can see the inclusion of the word *dharma*. Dharma has overlapping meanings that refer to religion, the teachings of the Buddha and all things in nature, the energy or forces of the universe (Batchelor and Brown, 1992). Thus, in Sinhala, the word for nature, which is said to capture “the lawful nature of the universe in which humans and nature live” (de Silva, 1998: 32), connects this “lawful nature” within Buddhist principles, specifically the world consisting of dharma. *Swabhawadharmaya* is not simply an equivalent to European understandings of nature, but rather it is culturally and contextually situated within a specific Buddhist narrative (Jazeel, 2013a: 72). Thus, conceptualising the sea as ‘natural’, does not necessarily mean that imaginations exclude humanity and culture from this space.

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<sup>13</sup> Also *Svabhava dharma*



The example of swabhawadharmaya and Buddhist nature demonstrates that the vocabulary of taken-for-granted terms, such as nature, can ‘dissimulate’ the politics of place, and in other words mask important spatial meanings to people (Jazeel, 2013a). Of course in Sri Lanka there is not a single narrative regarding nature, and geographical knowledges of space and place can be multiple, overlapping, contested and contradictory. As such, to reduce Sri Lankan understandings and interpretations of the nature of the sea to Buddhist imaginations and narratives, denies other spatial possibilities, particularly spiritual ones. The vitality of the sea is important when thinking about religious and spiritual meanings attributed to it, and it comes to no surprise that water-based gods, spirits and demons are abundant in cultures around the world and throughout history (Strang, 2004). Indeed, in Sri Lanka the sea is an important spiritual space in a multitude of ways. For example, Patricia Lawrence (2010) explores the significance of the tsunami in the village of Navalady, in Batticaloa District. In particular she notes the prominence in the village of the Hindu temple dedicated to *Kadalatci Amman*, the goddess of the sea. As well as being an important socio-economic space for the fishers and their families who lived in the village, the presence of this temple meant the sea had additional spiritual significance for the population. This had notable implications after the tsunami with regards to memory and memorialisation of the event and loved ones. Thus, in Navalady the sea had specific meanings that may not have been present elsewhere along the coast.

Within the Arugam Bay area, I encountered particular beliefs about the sea and spirits. For example, I encountered a Hindu mother whose young child had fallen ill. She attributed this to the fact that the child had been taken to the beach and spent too much time by the sea, where the presence of demons from the sea had caused the illness. For many I spoke to in Arugam Bay the sea was alive with the presence of such spirits and demons. Similarly, Mallee (PT010), a Sinhala Buddhist stated that, for him that “the sea is kind of ... a god you know?” While Sanjeev (PT019), a Tamil Christian said:

*[we spend a lot of time at sea] and so we connect with the ocean. Connect with God and connect with the ocean. Actually, the ocean is like a god, you know. So when we pray for them [fishers at sea] to come back ... we pray to the ocean...*

Those who engage with the ocean regularly often attribute it spiritual significance. This has been notably documented with surfers, who gain “a sense of spiritual involvement with

surfing waves” through their repeated embodied interactions with the sea (Anderson, 2013: 955). Such attitudes were common amongst surfers in Arugam Bay (see Ch. 4.5). Linked to this, the sea was often referred to as a character on its own terms, with a personality and emotions, at times given anthropomorphised names, such as ‘Mother Ocean’. During my time in the area I heard the sea described using very ‘human’ emotions, such as angry, calm, unforgiving and merciful. This further highlights the importance of treating the sea as an actor on the tsunami affected coast of Sri Lanka (see Lehman, 2013; 2014).

Such varied conceptualisations of the sea, particularly the spiritual significance of the sea, play an important role in thinking about how people have negotiated the tsunami in Arugam Bay. It was unsurprising that many people attributed the causes of the tsunami to some sort of religious or spiritual reasoning. For example, several Christians told me that the tsunami was a form of retributive punishment from God due to the sinful behaviour of people. Similar narratives have been documented from Muslims in Aceh, Indonesia (Samuels, 2012), which could also be applied to Sri Lanka’s Muslims. One fisher I encountered told me that he thought that the tsunami was the result of angered demons in the sea due to the occasional presence of women at sea. Many Buddhists I spoke to talked about karma (*kamma*). For some, the reasons for the tsunami striking was down to karmic retribution, listing a range of different behaviours that may have caused this. Others referred to karma as a reason for performing certain memorialisation rituals and practices (see Ch. 7.0). It has been argued that the Buddhist belief in karma, and *anicca* (impermanence) have been important factors in Sri Lankan Buddhists coping and demonstrating strong resilience in the aftermath of the tsunami (see de Silva, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused explicitly on the medium of disaster, the sea. While it does not focus on the tsunami, it lays an important foundation for exploring how the specific materialities and more-than-human actors of the coastscape have shaped the disaster and its legacy. In particular it emphasises the importance of taking the sea seriously as a social space, due to the implications this has on how people have negotiated the tsunami. In Arugam Bay, the sea is central to people’s everyday life, and interacting with the geophysical rhythms of the sea plays an important role in the construction of people’s identities and ‘social ecosystems’. People in Arugam Bay are strongly attached to the ocean, both emotionally and

economically. By thinking of the sea rhythmically, one is able to conceive the sea as a space that is dynamic and constantly in motion, but also one which is stabilised through the repetition of geophysical processes and human practices. It is important to highlight the dynamic materiality of the sea as it shapes the ways in which people interact with it, and construct meaning from it. As I discuss in Ch. 7.0, this is significant when it comes to negotiating the tsunami in contemporary everyday life in Arugam Bay.

The ways in which the geophysical materiality of the sea is conceived, imagined and negotiated is not universal. Rather knowledge is situated and contextual. This chapter has traced some of the ways the sea has been constructed within certain imaginations and dominant discourses, and lays a foundation to explore the contested narratives and representations of the tsunami. As will be explored further in the following chapters, this has been significant with regards to how people have negotiated and reacted to the tsunami, for example influences on the practice of humanitarianism, tourism development and the politics of memorialisation. In order to deconstruct these knowledges of the sea, and allow an exploration of how people have negotiated the tsunami on their own terms, I have traced how a specific imagination of the sea emerged, predominantly from Europe, which situated the sea as distinctly ‘othered’ space. However, it is important to pluralise how we conceptualise the sea, and think through how multiple imaginations of the sea exist. This chapter has traced some of these imaginations, and how they play out in the context of Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay. For example, it is important to emphasise the conceptualisation of the sea as a ‘natural’ space, and how the term ‘nature’ is a socially contested term. With regards to the tsunami, thinking through the social aspects of ‘nature’ also allows a deeper understanding of the term ‘natural’ disaster. This chapter has also highlighted how the sea’s materiality plays a role in how meanings are constructed from it. For example, its fluid vitality lends itself to thinking about it being alive with the presence of spirits or demons, or thinking of it as a character or personality in itself.

This chapter has highlighted the importance of thinking about materiality and discursive representations, and how these contribute to the production of specific knowledges and values. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the day-to-day lived realities of Arugam Bay, and how the tsunami is a part of this, it is necessary to explore how practices play out in Arugam Bay. As such, the following chapter builds on this one, exploring how knowledges of place, the sea and the tsunami are constructed through ‘communities of practice’.



## CHAPTER 4.0

### COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

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*The history of Arugam Bay is fishing and tourism, and ... we all go surfing*  
(Ishan, PT003)

*It's a fishing community first, then it's a surfing community second, and after that it's a tourist community* (Mike, PT017)

*I've slowly come to realise that everything I do here is technically 'research'*  
(Field diary extract, 21/11/12)

Our experiences of place are mediated through technologies and knowledges produced through discursive representations and practices (Massey, 2005). Having established the centrality of the sea to everyday life in Arugam Bay, and demonstrated how knowledges of the sea are socially and culturally constructed, this chapter explores how practices produce spatial knowledges, which have shaped the way the tsunami has permeated everyday life in Arugam Bay. Practices produce certain ways of knowing the world, contributing to the construction of a (sense of) place. However, practices are not engaged with universally, but rather are located, situated and influenced by discursive knowledge systems. In this chapter I introduce what I have termed 'communities of practice', defined as groups of people engaged in similar activities, producing specific knowledges through an embodied engagement with the world. As such, I utilise communities of practice as a heuristic device to explore how people negotiate the tsunami in their everyday lives.

In order to do this I focus on four key practices central to my ethnographic work in Arugam Bay which have subsequently helped structure this thesis: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. There is of course more to life in Arugam Bay than these four practices, particularly more mundane, quotidian practices such as eating, sleeping, or washing. There are also numerous practices that I was largely excluded from, notably due to my gender, such as cooking, housekeeping and childcare. Indeed, there are specific politics regarding *who*

participates in certain practices, as well as *how* people participate in them. Nevertheless, I argue that the four practices I focus on dominate everyday life in the area. Furthermore, they all involve an explicit interaction and engagement with the sea, and as such are consequently central to how many people have negotiated the tsunami in their everyday lives. In the following pages I outline my theoretical approach to practices, emphasising their contextual and specific nature. In the second section of the chapter I describe the four practices in more detail, highlighting how they have been instrumental in negotiating the tsunami, and subsequently shaped this thesis.

#### **4.1 Practices, the everyday and the production of spatial knowledges**

##### *4.1.1. Contextualising practice*

As I argue throughout the thesis, past disasters are not merely events that are confined to history, but rather continue to exist in the present, weaving themselves into everyday life (Das, 2007). So for survivors of the tsunami, in order to cope and recover from the huge rupture to their social ecosystems, rather than attempting to “[exorcise] the disaster from their memory or their everyday life” they instead allow it to “descend little by little into the realm of the ordinary” (Hastrup, 2011: 5; see also Das, 2007). The tsunami, then, is weaved into the practices and performances of everyday life in Arugam Bay.

Thus, in order to understand how the tsunami resides in the everyday lives of the people of Arugam Bay, it is necessary to explore practices. Practices have been described as “material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices to reproduce themselves” (Thrift, 2008: 8) or more simply a “routinized type of behaviour” (Reckwitz, 2002: 249). That is to say a practice is something that one does, a repeated ‘doing’ or habit. This repetition draws us back to Lefebvre’s work on rhythm, and how the repetitive does not necessarily mean permanency, but at the same time can give the perception of stability (Lefebvre, 2004). Through this study of practice, we are better positioned to understand the world. Focusing on what people *do*, rather than trying to determine who people *are*, allows for an increased understanding of people’s lives on their own terms. The focus on the everyday also allows us to study the tsunami and its legacy, without foregrounding the disaster too much. Instead, we

are able to explore how the tsunami becomes *a part of* the everyday, rather than as a spectacular event confined to the past.

In the past two decades there has been an increased interest in practices amongst cultural geographers resulting in a heightened focus on performativity, materiality and everyday life (see Nash, 2000). I argue for an approach to practice that acknowledges how practices are informed by, and in turn (re)produce, discursive knowledge systems. In doing this it is important to pay attention to the contexts in which practices are played out. In other words, the way people practice varies and practices can be, for example, gendered, racialised and sexualised in differing historical and geographical contexts. Thus, building on Hayden Lorimer, I wish to “conceive of representation (context) and non-representation (practice) held together – albeit sometimes in tension” (2008: 4).

This project focuses on the tsunami as part of ‘everyday life’, the mundane, routinised and ordinary day to day existence in which practices are played out. The thesis takes an approach towards everyday life utilising the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977) as influential departure points. In his path breaking book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau argues for a focus on the taken-for-granted practices and tactics that people mobilise as they negotiate, reappropriate and resist the strategies of institutions and structures of power. These “ways of operating” (de Certeau, 1984: xiv) become particularly important as people move through space. De Certeau focuses on walking in the city, described as “a dynamic process of *movement, improvisation and passage* ... [that] creates an *occasional sense of the present*” (Duff, 2010: 883, emphasis in original). In doing this, he demonstrates how practices increase “the number of possibilities” in the city’s spatial order (de Certeau, 1984: 98), with walking inventing new and discrete places (see also Duff, 2010: 883). This embodied practice serves to instantiate relations between points of transition, between a “near and far ... a here and there” (de Certeau; in Duff, 2010: 883). That is to say practices, in this case walking, produce (a sense of) place (see also Fullilove, 2004; Ingold, 2000). In this sense, places come into existence through human (and non-human) practices. With regards to the sea and coast, “the physical geographies of the sea are ‘known into place’, ‘felt into place’ and ‘practiced into place’ by humans and non-humans” (Jones, 2014: 40).

However, the way people practice is not universal, and Bourdieu’s (1977) account of *habitus* encourages an exploration of *how* history and memory influence how one practices. Using the case study of the Kabyle, an indigenous group in North Africa, Bourdieu demonstrates how

the “idiosyncratic (the personal) combines with the systematic (the social)” to create ways of practicing (Bourdieu; in Jenkins, 1992: 75). He argues, for example, that the historical politics of gender shape and are revealed in men and women’s ways of walking, learnt through the routine carrying out of practices. Such ways of moving are beyond the “grasp of consciousness” and therefore almost impossible to overcome (Bourdieu, 1977), although that does not mean that they are not challenged, or that they do not change over time. Ways of moving, and the ‘learning’ of how to practice is also significant in relation to embodied memory, and an important consideration in the aftermath of the tsunami (Samuels, 2012). Bourdieu’s work highlights the importance of acknowledging the context in which practices play out. In this sense, practices are informed by specific, situated knowledges. However, as de Certeau’s work encourages us to consider, practices also produce knowledges and specific ways of knowing people and place. As such, these two authors lay the foundation to consider the spatial and historical specificities of practices in everyday life.

Within cultural geography, it has been argued that there has been “a shift in analytic focus from *discourse* to *practice*” (Whatmore, 2006: 603, emphasis in original). This has emerged particularly with the rise of the school of thought termed ‘non-representational theory’ (see Thrift, 1997; 2008). Influenced by the focus on the everyday of de Certeau and Bourdieu, as well as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the rhizomatic thought of Deleuze and Guattari, non-representational theory focuses on “mundane everyday practices” (Thrift, 1997: 142). It repositions social agency into performances rather than discourse (which is considered a specific kind of practice) and focuses on experiences rather than knowledge. (Whatmore, 2006: 603-604; see also Doel, 2010; Laurier, 2010).

Non-representational theory has made important contributions to debates within human geography surrounding practice (see Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Cresswell, 2012), in particular critiquing an over emphasis on visual modes of enquiry (e.g. Wylie, 2006). It has also been central to human geographers (re)focusing on the material world. However, it is not my intention to jettison a focus on representation from this thesis. Non-representational geographies’ focus on the material and experiential, at the expense of engaging with representations, has “blunted geography’s ability to contextually comprehend radical alterity” (Jazeel, 2014: 89). Rather than placing practices as occurring in “pure, blank spaces of social encounter” (Lorimer, 2008:3), I focus on the context of practice, taking into account the structures of power that shape the ways in which people practice. In particular, I acknowledge



how practices produce specific spatial imaginaries, and in doing this explore the particular geographies being played out and lived in South East Sri Lanka.

Indeed, in ignoring the context of practice, or attempting to get “beyond humanity”, one risks obscuring the corporeality and the politics of position (Thien, 2005: 453), or ‘dissimulating’ the specific politics of place (Jazeel, 2013a; 2014). Tolia-Kelly (2006) argues there is a danger of concealing the subject position in particular histories of powerlessness and oppression. The way people practice varies, and practices can be, for example, gendered, racialised and sexualised in specific historical and geographical contexts:

...a slave and a holocaust victim do not necessarily experience pain, suffering, anomie in the same way due to their social positioning and ‘enforced’ capacities of (im)mobility, experience and affecting the social space around them ... a body that is signified as a source of fear through its markedness cannot be free to affect and be affected similarly to one that is not (Tolia-Kelly, 2006: 215)

Such an occurrence has been witnessed in Sri Lanka after the tsunami where, as Ruwanpura (2009) has argued, those living in the North East, and previously affected by war, were better equipped to cope with the harrowing experience of the waves, and subsequent displacement, than those living in the south (see also de Mel and Ruwanpura, 2006). When one fails to contextualise social processes, it can result in the normalisation and universalisation of masculinist, ethnocentric and apolitical outcomes (Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006).

There have been some constructive ways of moving beyond the charge levied at non-representational theory provided by the ‘mobilities turn’ within geography (see Sheller and Urry, 2006). For example, Tim Cresswell (2006a; 2006b) argues that movement, and by extension practice, is codified and regulated through representations. These create knowable ways of moving, and these knowledges are reinscribed back onto the body, both consciously and subconsciously (Cresswell, 2006a; see also Adey, 2010). Along with several other examples from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe and the US, Cresswell demonstrates how ballroom dance schools in the 1920s encouraged the learning of ways of moving that were considered ‘correct’ and ‘appropriate’. These ways of moving were underpinned by specific ideas of what it meant to be English, with clear roles for men and women in the dance, inscribing a nationalist and gendered discursive ideology to movement (Cresswell, 2006a; 2006b). As the dances were transferred across Europe and the US, their meanings shifted. Thus these

movements are situated within specific contexts, and while the movements become pre-cognitive as they are learnt, they are nevertheless influenced by discourses and relationships of power. As such, Cresswell contends that we need to understand “bodily mobility within larger social, cultural and geographical worlds that continue to ascribe meaning to mobility and prescribe practice in particular ways” (Cresswell, 2006b: 59). Therefore, “[s]omething like gender is not simply an outcome of practice but also a precondition for it” (Cresswell, 2012: 103). Within Arugam Bay people surfed in different ways, along gendered and ethnicised lines for example. This was the result of learnt discursive knowledges, performed precognitively, but nevertheless the product of discursive representations (see below).

Arun Saldanha’s (2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2010) work on race and viscosity also emphasises the importance of acknowledging discursive representations when considering practice. Through approaching practice and embodiment from a Spinoza-Guattarian perspective, Saldanha argues that the category of race is not something that is simply socially-constructed (and as such imagined), but is real, produced through bodies, the material and faciality. Race is an ontological ‘event’. Faciality, according to Saldanha, is “a quintessentially euro-american [sic] process whereby bodies are assigned particular ‘faces’ (racial, sexual, national, socio-economic etc.)” (Saldanha, 2006b: 175). This suggests that the assignment of faces is informed by discursive representation. However, as Saldanha continues, this does not mean that faces are labels “stuck *upon* bodies, but regularities in the dynamic and heterogeneous assemblage of things, environments and bodies themselves” (Saldanha, *ibid.* emphasis in original; see also Saldanha, 2007: ch. 8). As such, race and other categorisations come to exist not just as a representation of the body, but as something lived, “a reality involving the interactions, imaginations, and biologies of human bodies” (Saldanha, 2010: 2410). Indeed, such a process of faciality was witnessed in Arugam Bay with the segregation of beach space along ethnicised lines, which facilitated certain ways of performing tourist practices, as well as provoking emotional responses from those affected (see below).

Both Saldanha and Cresswell usefully encourage us to move beyond the binaries of representational and non-representational work. Practices produce ways of knowing space, and spatial and historical contexts produce ways of practicing. As such, we should not have to choose *between* discourse and practice, but instead should consider the value in holding both together, even if that does result in some tension and messiness (Lorimer, 2008).

#### *4.1.2. Practice, materiality and the geographies of affect*

Practices are influenced by the material world, and as such, geographers are increasingly interrogating space's materiality, and its relationship with 'the social' (see Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Peters, 2012; Whatmore, 2002; 2006). Following influential calls to 'rematerialise' social and cultural geography (see e.g. Jackson, 2000), geographers have sought to demonstrate that non-human, or more-than-human, actors have an agency or force of their own, existing without social construction (e.g. Lehman, 2013; Peters, 2012). Such approaches have paid particular attention to the "rich array of senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of all manner of social objects and forces assembled through, and involved in, the co-fabrication of socio-material worlds" (Whatmore, 2006: 604). Here, there are obvious links with Actor Network Theory (see Latour, 2005) and Deleuzo-Guattarian inspired assemblage theory (see DeLanda, 2006), both influential in recent outputs in human geography, particularly with regards to the sea (see e.g. J. Anderson, 2012; Bear, 2013; Lehman, 2013; 2014; Steinberg, 2013). Such approaches have provided useful insights into how humans interact with the ocean, and more broadly the material, geo-physical world.

As I argued in Ch. 3.0, the rhythmic agency of the sea plays a central role in everyday life in Arugam Bay, and is an important economic, social and emotional space. Such agency shapes relationships between people and place, and while this can be manipulated or transformed by humans, non-human actors nevertheless maintain an active place-making role (see Jones and Cloke, 2008). Indeed, nonhuman actors play an important role in people's lives as they maintain:

...a capacity to engender affective and emotional responses from the humans who dwell amongst them—to contribute to the haunting of place via exchanges between the visible present and the starkly absent in the multiple and incomplete becoming of agency (Jones and Cloke, 2008: 81; see also Lehman, 2013: 488).

This is important when considering the role of the nonhuman in the aftermath of the tsunami, where the sea's agency has kept the disaster alive in the everyday practices of those inhabiting the tsunami affected coast (see Ch. 7.0).

Despite the sea's importance in everyday life, it is important not to overstate its actions and equate such agency with human actions. While intentionality is not necessarily a prerequisite

for ‘agency’ (see Jones and Cloke, 2008; Lehman, 2013), there remains a fundamental difference between the agency of humans and that of ‘other’ actors:

...human ‘types’ have the capacity to act in a way that conforms to representations of them. In other words, it is possible to act as a refugee, or a gang member, or a business person – it is possible to inhabit a category in such a way that a category is confirmed. Alternatively, a waterfall has no capacity to become conscious of being a waterfall and then act in a more waterfall-like way. (Cresswell, 2012: 101)

Furthermore, while I concede that such more-than-human actors play a role in social and cultural practices, their very existence are socially and culturally constructed. As established in Ch. 3.0, the ocean has a distinct set of rhythmic materialities and a certain type of agency that influences everyday life in Arugam Bay. However, the very categorisation of it as a separate body, or actor, is the result of knowledge from a specific socio-cultural context (see also Connery, 2006). Instead, as argued in Ch. 3.0, the sea must be thought of as being conceptualised in a number of ways, through situated and contested knowledges. In doing this, we are better positioned to explore the legacies of the tsunami on the terms of those affected, as well as highlight how these legacies are bound up within broader relationships of power.

Closely linked to recent work on practice and materiality is the concept of affect, an increasingly significant area of research within social and cultural geography (see e.g. B. Anderson, 2006; 2012; Pile, 2010; Saldanha, 2010; Thien, 2005; Thrift, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Affect has been described as the “sense of push in the world” (Thrift, 2004: 60) or the capacity for a body to be affected by other bodies, and simultaneously affect other bodies (Cadman, 2009: 456). Geographers’ engagement with it has encouraged a deeper focus on the relationality of the world, in particular a shift of concern from what things mean to what they do (Whatmore, 2006: 604). This has had some useful outcomes that are relevant for this thesis, especially the consideration of the relationships people have with the ocean and the coast in the wake of the tsunami. However, the concept of affect, especially its (non) relationship with emotion, is very much contested (see Bondi and Davidson, 2011; Curti et al. 2011; Dawney, 2011; Pile 2010; 2011). Two (overlapping) key points emerge from these discussions that are important to consider with regards to this research.

The first is linked to those broader criticisms of non-representational theory, articulated above. By thinking of affect as pre-personal (and in opposition to emotions, which are shared), one can omit and obscure the social context in which affect plays out (Rose et al, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Instead, the line between affect and emotion should be considered ‘blurry’ (Edensor, 2012). As such, I wish to conceive of affect as “a cumulative, and therefore historical, process of interaction between human beings and place (including other human beings) through which the capacity of individual feeling arises” (Kobayashi et al. 2011: 873). Thus, affective environments are “largely an expression of the social ties that form [their] foundation” (Duff, 2010: 881).

The second point, linked to this lack of context, is to acknowledge that the majority of theorisations of affect and emotion represent a way of thinking about mind, body and being in the world that derives from Enlightenment thought. Affect is “a product of a particular time, place and world; neglecting non-secular, non-western and postcolonial people and places, and the emotions and psyches of ‘others’” (Mohammad and Sidaway, 2012: 655). It is less appropriate to apply the language of affect in certain cultural contexts. For example, the relationship between mind and body in Buddhism is complex, and relates to the cycles of reincarnation of the body, and the constant presence of the mind, or more specifically the soul. Furthermore, their very conceptualisation is embedded in a wider philosophy denying the individualism of the body, and emphasising the importance of mindfulness and awareness of the body (see Harvey, 2013; Prebish and Keown, 2010). This also has implications for the concepts of self and other, which while central in much philosophy originating from Europe, is not recognised in the same way in the Theravedic Buddhist tradition. That is not to say that the ‘other’ does not exist in Sri Lankan Buddhism – indeed much rhetoric from groups such as the BBS relies on ‘othering’ to produce imaginations of the Sri Lankan nation as purely Sinhala-Buddhist (see e.g. Ismail, 2013). However, what is important is that taken-for-granted dualisms within disciplinary geography, such as mind-body, as well as culture-nature and sacred-secular, are interrogated in their specific contexts in order to acknowledge the ‘quite other’ spatial formations at work (Jazeel, 2014: 88; see also Spivak, 1988).

As such, this thesis approaches affect cautiously, continuously acknowledging the contextuality of the practices and material land/seascapes that have been encountered. In doing this, I acknowledge that:

...contextualizing ... affect must be done with considerable geographical sensitivity which aims not just at provincializing one's familiar theoretical toolkit, but more fully at 'suspending oneself into the text of the other' (Jazeel, 2013a: 72; see also Spivak, 2008: 23).

As explored in Ch.2.0, Kapoor (2004) sets out a useful manifesto to achieve this, in which, he argues for intimately inhabiting and negotiating difference, acknowledging complicity, unlearning one's privilege as loss, learning to learn from below, and working without guarantees (see Kapoor, 2004; also Spivak, 1988; 1994). Similarly, Jazeel (2014) advocates Spivak's concept of the subaltern and subalternity as a method for:

...first, revealing the ideological constitution and dissimulation of quite other spatialities, and second, for embarking on the (im)possible task of eliciting those quite other geographies on terms true to the singularity of their differences (Jazeel, 2014: 100).

This approach goes some way to move beyond an institutionally prescribed narration of my encounters with the people of Arugam Bay, and allow at least the beginning of an understanding of their lives. This is particularly important when considering how the tsunami has affected different groups in different ways, and exploring their own spatial imaginations. The following section, in which I describe four 'communities of practice' I encountered in Arugam Bay, is an attempt to explore such 'quite other geographies'.

## **4.2 The communities of practice**

I utilise the term 'communities of practice' to refer to groups of people that engage in similar practices. In doing so they gain, share and (re)produce specific (spatial) knowledges and 'ways of being' in space. The term 'communities of practice' was originally used in reference to the ways in which employees learn specific work skills whilst 'on the job' (see Pinch, 2009; also Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). While I move beyond its use exclusively within 'the workplace', nevertheless, I borrow much from Wenger's conceptualisation of 'communities of practice' to think through the various knowledge communities present in Arugam Bay. In particular, I draw upon Wenger's (1998) assertion that communities of practice may be diverse, and not necessarily be free from internal conflict, as well as being shaped and influenced by 'external' forces (Pinch, 2009). Specific, situated knowledges are

(re)produced and shared through engaging in “a shared repertoire that includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, actions, or concepts that the community has produced” (Pinch, 2009: 26; after Wenger, 1998). The repetition of such practices are central to the construction of identities (as witnessed in Benedict Anderson’s (1983) conceptualisation of ‘*Imagined Communities*’), as well as (re)production of (a sense of) place and belonging. As such, it is useful to think of practices as occurring in ‘communities’, as this highlights the common values, knowledges, and sense of shared identities, which are produced through engaging in specific practices. This is important when one considers how the tsunami permeates everyday life and how these experiences differ between groups.

This thesis focuses on four heterogeneous, overlapping communities of practice: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. These communities are by no means exclusive, and it is very possible to engage in multiple practices at the same time, and thus exchange and produce multiple knowledges. Furthermore, these communities are only four amongst many potential others present within Arugam Bay. However, as I have discussed (see Ch. 2.0), these four communities of practice emerged strongly from my ethnographic engagements with the people living in Arugam Bay. Indeed, almost every family in the Ullae settlement had at least one member engaged in at least one of these practices. While I was the only person in the area conducting tsunami related research (that I was aware of), my work is situated within a broader community of practice that consists of the ‘wave’ of researchers who conducted research in Sri Lanka following the tsunami (see Brun, 2009; Korf, 2010). Previous research has not only informed my knowledge of Arugam Bay and the tsunami, but also, along with the research I have conducted, informs the knowledges and practices of the people of Arugam Bay. This highlights the importance of acknowledging that the communities of practice are not spatially confined to Arugam Bay, but rather are the product of multiple knowledges and influences in relation to other places and processes. In addition to this, within Arugam Bay, the concept of ‘community’ cannot be intrinsically linked to the spatial area of the village, or rather, the village cannot be conceived of as being a single unified community. By interrogating community through these practices, one is able to move beyond presupposed formations of community, many of which are constructed by state apparatus and reinforced through development discourse and practice (see Jeganathan, 2009).

In what follows, I expand on my earlier descriptions of Arugam Bay by introducing the four practices I have focused on: fishing, tourism, surfing, and research. In doing this, I provide

some contextual background to the practices, however I also describe how I encountered them, giving some insight into how they are practiced in the Arugam Bay context. As part of this, I describe specific encounters with people engaging with these practices. These descriptions are italicised, and are sourced and adapted from field diary material, with some additional quotes from interviews. This approach is an attempt to describe and highlight the contextual specificities of these practices, and explore some of the knowledges they produce.

### 4.3 Fishing

*I meet Sonny on the beach by the small lagoon before dawn. He greets me with a grunt of acknowledgement, and I catch a whiff of arrack as he responds “oh, hari hari” [yeah, ok] to my “kohomida?” [how are you?] It is still dark as we load the boat up with the day’s supplies – hooks, reels, food, water, fuel – and he prepares the engine. Around us other fishers, in teams of two or three, are doing the same, preparing for the day ahead, murmuring to one another, with a sense of anticipation, resignation and camaraderie. The scent of incense is in the air, and I hear some fishers blessing their boats and praying to their various gods<sup>14</sup> in order to keep them safe at sea and in hope of a prosperous day.*

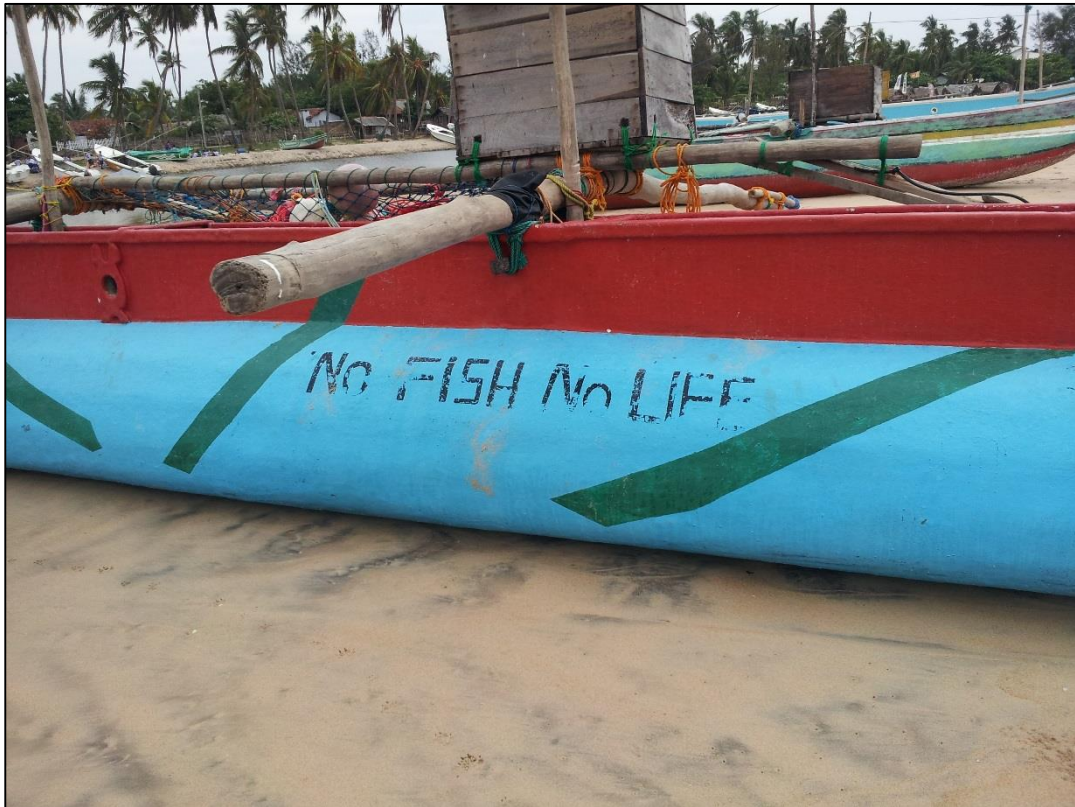
*We push the boat into the lagoon and Sonny starts the engine, it splutters to life on the third attempt. We zoom across the water and with expert timing so as not to wreck the motor on the sand, he beaches us onto the sandbar that separates the lagoon from the open ocean, alongside a number of other boats. The boats are then dragged across the sandbar, with all the teams helping each other move the vessels, roughly 15 feet long. We push our boat into the sea, timing it with a break in the waves and after restarting the engine, we set off across the bay. We are joined by Nirmal, an older fisher who doesn’t own a boat of his own, but has fished here all his life. Before setting off we do three rotations of the boat, and Sonny dips his hat into the water. This is an important ritual for many fishers, and for Buddhists (as Sonny is) represents the movements of monks walking around the temple<sup>15</sup>, showing respect for the sea.*

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<sup>14</sup> The teams in Ullae, Arugam Bay are a mix of Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. Further up the beach are Muslim teams

<sup>15</sup> I was later told by a Christian fisher that the practice represented the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The practice was also done by some Muslim fishers too, although I never discovered the meaning behind it.





**Figure 4.i** 'No Fish No Life'. The importance of fishing, painted boat, Arugam Bay Beach. *Photo: Author*

*As the first rays of the sun appear on the ocean horizon, Nirmal directs us from his position at the prow of the boat, using the position of the sun, swell direction and shore based landmarks, such as mountains, to navigate to the fishing grounds. Nirmal doesn't know how he knows how to get to the fishing grounds, he claims he was never taught, but just knows from spending extensive time at sea and picking up this oceanic geographic knowledge. We motor out for over an hour into open ocean and eventually come across about two dozen other boats anchored in what appears to be an unremarkable area of ocean. I am told that it is an area of reef, where the ocean bed rises up to about 30 meters in an area of about an acre, and Sonny shows me where the waves change shape due to this upwelling, subtly, but noticeable to someone with years of experience on the ocean. Sonny has fished in the waters off Arugam Bay for over two decades. Despite being in his thirties, his skin is wrinkled and his face haggard, his eyes are bloodshot and glazed, a combination of constant exposure to the equatorial sun, and a persistent consumption of arrack. His hands are covered in scars caused by lacerations from the hand lines they use to land the fish. Sonny is lucky, he says. Many fishers have lost fingers to their trade. These bodily absences and scars provide*

*permanent reminders of past experiences, some lucky escapes and some unpleasant encounters...*

Fishing has played an important role in the development of Sri Lanka, and historically has accounted for around 3% of the country's GDP, although this figure dropped dramatically in the wake of the tsunami (de Silva and Yamao, 2007). Until the rise of tourism in the past two decades, fishing was the principal socio-economic activity in Arugam Bay, and the practice of fishing continues to dominate the cultural landscape of the area. Fishing in Arugam Bay is a practice performed almost exclusively by men. Women do not engage in this practice, due to prevailing cultural norms within the area, and I even heard one fisher state that a woman's presence on the water would anger the gods. While the majority of fishers are adults, it is not uncommon for children to start the practice in their early teens, helping out on the boats of their fathers or uncles, at the expense of their formal education. Most fishers continue to engage in the practice until they are physically unable to continue.

Within Arugam Bay the fishing community is spatially and socially divided into two distinct groups, the Sinhala and Tamil fishers who inhabit Ullae at the southern end of the main beach, and the Muslim fishers who are further north in Perie Ullae. While these groups do not often work together, there are some overlaps, and friendships and social interactions do transcend these groups. In addition to this key division, the fishers also work in separate teams. Often these teams are led by a fishing 'boss'. The boss, of which there are between four and six in Arugam Bay<sup>16</sup> provide capital for fishers to purchase boats, fuel and make repairs. In return, fishers are obliged to sell their fish to the boss at a fixed price, often below market value. This often locks fishers into patterns of debt and dependence on the bosses, and many fishers struggle for money because of this. Those fishers that are fortunate enough not to have to take loans from the bosses are able to make a reasonable profit from their endeavours. As well as being associated with bosses, most fishers are also associated with cooperative societies, present throughout Sri Lanka and the main way that fishers gain access to government and NGO services (see also Lehman, 2013).

Fishing in Arugam Bay is a seasonal practice particularly influenced by the rhythmpatterns of the sea and other 'non-human' actors, namely fish. While fish can be caught all year round,

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<sup>16</sup> I received a number of different figures for this, and did not get the chance to meet any of the bosses in person to clarify this.

the main fishing season is from September through to February due to the migratory patterns of various fish. How fishing is practiced depends on which fish is in season. For example, from September to October dynamic nets are used from large catamarans to catch sizeable schools of yellow-fin tuna (Figure 4.ii). This “active technique” is in contrast to the “passive technique” (see Hoeppe, 2007: 43) of hook and bait fishing from smaller fish used to catch seer fish from November – January. Other fish caught throughout the year using a variety of techniques include mullet, trevallies, sail fish and shark, as well as smaller reef fish. In addition to catching fish in deep water, fishers also take small paddle boats out to drop lobster nets. Some fishers also use hand nets, and rods and reels to fish from the beach (Figure 4.iii). The way that fishing is practiced in Ullae differs to that of Perie Ullae and Sinai Ullae, with the latter two communities tending to use static and sweeping nets from the shoreline to catch fish. This is due to a combination of physical geography and differing knowledges built up within each community of practice. Indeed, within Sri Lanka each coastal village tends to have a distinct ‘village identity’, built around specific and contrasting ways of practicing fishing (de Silva and Yamao, 2007).

As well as shifting rhythmpatterns throughout the year, fishing practices are determined by shorter-term rhythmic factors too, including weather systems and the moon. Full moons are important within the Buddhist calendar, and as such none of the Buddhist fishers work on these *Poya* days<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, Muslim fishers do not fish on the holy day of Friday, and many of the stricter Christians do not fish on Sundays. The dynamism and movement of the sea is also important in the practice of fishing. The choppiness of the water determines not only where people fish (see also Lehman, 2014), but also shifts the seas affective properties. Thus on calm days, fishing becomes much more pleasant as one does not have to contend with the choppiness of the sea in the boat. Of course, how one is affected by choppiness is contextual, and seasickness is common amongst the uninitiated, but rare amongst experienced fishers.

While the majority of fishers fish for economic purposes, some also fish recreationally, and on occasion Western ex-pats and tourists will also join fishers on trips to sea, in some instances providing additional income. In addition to this, my own experiences of fishing constituted part of my research experience, demonstrating how fishing, tourism and research communities can overlap. With regards to practices of fishing, there is a marked difference between fishing for leisure and out of necessity. There is not the same urgency or necessity to

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<sup>17</sup> *Poya* days are also national bank holidays in Sri Lanka.



**Figure 4.ii** The practice of fishing I. Fishing team from Arugam Bay haul in tuna nets.

*Photo: Praneeth Sandaruwan*



**Figure 4.iii** The practice of fishing II. Rod fishing from the beach, Arugam Bay. *Photo:*

*Mark Nunn*

catch fish when one's livelihood does not depend on it, and the motivations behind catching fish differ, be that to gain an income, for fun, or in order to learn about specific ways of life. Ashok (PT034), a Tamil fisher told me that he enjoys fishing when he goes out for pleasure, but he dislikes the practice when he has to go out with his uncle out of financial necessity. Such different motivations result in different ways of practicing, with one expat (Mike, PT017) noting that when he fished with Sri Lankan fishers, they tend to be much more frantic with their fishing. Their aim is to get as many fish as possible in the shortest amount of time, maximising their potential income, whereas he prefers to 'play' with the fish and enjoy the process of catching it.

*...six hours have passed, and still no fish. The sun, now directly overhead, beats down on us, and with nowhere to shade, we have to just endure it. I sense a tension on the boat. If we catch no fish, then the day's work will have lost us money. Sonny says that fishing is harder now than it used to be. He tells me that before the tsunami there were more fish and that they were bigger. He blames the Muslim fishermen, who he says fish with nets and trawl everything out of the sea. We sit in silence, smoking beedies and chewing beetle nuts – neither of which I enjoy but feel somewhat obliged. The three of us have lines extending out from the boat, all with a 'bola' bait fish on the end. Our target is thora, which Sonny says is his favourite fish as it gets the most money, and is a good challenge to catch. "Fighting fish!" he says. I find this sentiment to be common with other fishers too. As time passes I notice that both Sonny and Nirmal have fallen asleep, lines in hand, and my eyes begin to droop. Sun, heat, beedie smoke, the gentle rhythmic rocking of the boat and the constant sound of waves lapping at our hull creates a tranquilising effect. I drift off...*

The practice of fishing is one of "active knowledge making" (Hoeppe, 2007: 43). Knowledge of the sea is gained in a number of ways. Many fishers said that they learnt how to fish by being taught, often by an older family member. However, as Nirmal (PT050) states in the opening passage to this section, many did not know explicitly how they came to know the sea's distinct geography, citing years of undertaking the practice, learning bit by bit from other fishers and their own experiences, and slowly building such knowledge up into their *habitus* (after Bourdieu, 1977). Thus many of the fishers are attuned to the coastal rhythm patterns that dominate their lives, knowing where to go fish, and when. For the fishers,

the sea is not an empty space, but a set of distinct places consisting of reefs, sandbanks, wrecks, currents and movements of non-humans (such as fish and sea birds), as well as being an important social space. While from time to time fishers keep new fishing spots a secret, generally learnt knowledge is shared and exchanged. This is not just out of benevolence, but also a necessity due to the dynamic nature of the sea. As Wilson (1990) has noted:

[the] ocean is a very large complex and rapidly changing environment. No individual fisherman acting alone could hope to acquire the experience necessary to establish the regularity or predictability required for its successful exploitation (Wilson; in Hoeppe, 2007: 43).

In order to gain enough information about the sea and fishing practices to become successful, one has to share knowledges.

Fishers tend to be very aware of the dangers of their job and many wanted to share stories of the perils they had encountered. Some of these involved having to deal with being at sea during storms, or the engine failing on their boat when in open water. Other stories are more far-fetched, for example one fisher spoke to me about crabs with 3 meter diameter shells attacking a friend's boat. While questionable in terms of accuracy, such stories emphasise the perception of the ocean as dangerous (see also Ch. 3.0). Furthermore, as Lehman states, “[l]egends and myths about the ocean abound in popular culture and can serve as a powerful indicator of its importance” (2013: 492; see also Connery, 2006; Lambert et al. 2006).

The many rituals with which the fishers would begin each trip, such as praying, circling the boat and lighting incense, were also indicative of the acknowledgement of peril. However, the sea is not considered dangerous because it is ‘unknown’. Rather it is because the fishers have an in depth knowledge of the potential danger of the ocean. It is the sea's dynamism and uncertainty that make it dangerous, and while the fishers do have knowledge about the rhythms of the sea, there remains a level of unpredictability that makes it dangerous. Furthermore, the many rituals, stories and myths surrounding the sea also go to reinforce the belief that it is a dangerous space. This means there is the potential for fishers to have an augmented sense of fear of the ocean too. Conversely, one fisher said to me that he did not fear the ocean because:

*I understand the waves, how it's feeling ... I learn from the sea and from [my] father. So I understand it. [Things] can happen... problems. So I can*

*understand it's going to be a rough sea today, and if get fish or not get, depends, we go to the land.* (Chandra, PT015).

This in-depth knowledge of the ocean and constant repeated practices produce the ocean as a set of discrete, known places, rather than empty space. It is a realm experienced every day, producing a sense of familiarity and ordinariness to the ocean's perceived dangers, as a story I encountered in a Sri Lankan newspaper neatly encapsulated:

A man asks a fisherman how his father, grandfather and great grandfather died and the answer on each occasion was 'drowned at sea'. 'Aren't you scared to go to sea?' he asks again. The fisherman asks a question by way of response: 'Where did your father die?' The man says 'In bed'. 'And where,' the fisherman asks 'did his father and his father before him, die?' 'In bed,' he man answers. 'Aren't you scared to sleep?' Silence. (Seneviratne, 2012: no page).

Many of the fishers I spoke with highlighted this combination of the ordinary and danger. Indeed, despite being an everyday space, many fishers still referred to the sea as very distinct from land. This is not necessarily because it is outside of the 'cultural realm', but rather due to its material differences and the perception of danger:

*I believe in karma. When we go fishing, we go away from the ground. So we always try to do our best to be good people, because we never know what can happen out to sea. Can be storm, can be heavy rain, so the life is at risk when we go fishing... [When] I go to fishing, I not saying when coming back... So [on land] I say I coming in 2 minutes or 20 minutes. Fishing I can't say this until I come to the beach, until I on the island. The sea is dangerous place.* (Yatthu, PT014).

Similarly, when explaining why he has various rituals before going to sea, Sanjeev, a fisher, said it was because "the ocean is another world" (Sanjeev, PT019), drawing an explicit line between terrestrial and oceanic space.

As discussed, ways of practicing are not universal, and communities of practice can fracture, change and reform over time. Such experiences and knowledges of the sea as an 'othered' space are varied. This can be demonstrated through the different approaches to fishing between ex-pat fishers and the Sri Lankan fishers, and within different groups of Sri Lankan

fishers, as discussed above. As well as noting the difference in practice due to financial necessity, there could also be cultural reasons for this variance in practice. Mike (PT017) talked about how he prefers to 'play' with the fish, treating the practice as a form of competition. While he never explicitly stated with who he was in competition, there are two key competitors that he could be referring to. One is other fishers, and for sport fishers it is common to take the 'trophy' shot of man (and it is usually *man*) and fish. This allows for a comparison between fishers. However, competition is also with 'nature' itself, and the catching of fish represents the masculine practice of conquering and the domination of nature (see also Bull, 2009), which can be traced through European histories of masculinity, nature and the hunt (e.g. MacKenzie, 1988).

*...all is suddenly a flurry of activity. Sonny has a bite! He jerks the line back, then lets some out. He proceeds to tease the fish towards the boat, keeping tension on the line, pulling it in with his hands, but not too much, or too fast, which would result in a snapped line. This goes on for about ten minutes. It's hot, sweaty work, requiring focus, concentration and skill. Nirmal and I have drawn our lines in. All attention is on the fish. It jumps. It's a big thora! There is excitement on the boat. If landed, this fish will cover the cost of the fuel and some leftover, completely changing the day. The fish is tiring, and close now. In one last vain attempt it darts under the boat. Nirmal has the gaff ready and lunges at the fish as it emerges at the side of the boat, piercing it on its side. It thrashes about as the two fishermen haul it onto the boat. I do my best to stick to my job – keep the equipment and myself out of the way! The fish continues to thrash, gulping helplessly at the air. Nirmal uses the end of the gaff as a club on the fish's head. BAM! It flaps. BAM! Blood spurts. BAM! BAM! The fish goes still, its blood mixing with the seawater at the bottom of the boat, turning it a deep scarlet. Panting and flecked in blood, Sonny picks the fish up, faces it directly and spits in its mouth as a mark of respect, symbolically connecting his and its body in a ritual practiced by a number of the fishers. He smiles. The price of thora is good at the moment, and this fish will provide some valuable income. We congratulate each other on a job well done and move the thora into the tiny hold at the front of the boat. Sonny re-baits his line, as Nirmal and I let our lines back out. The tension on the boat has dispersed, but there are more fish to be caught. We still have another 5 hours of daylight left. I'm already shattered...*



Communities of practice are dynamic and constantly changing, and indeed the practice of fishing has changed over time. One obvious change has been the change in fishing techniques resulting from the switch from sails to motorised kerosene engines on fishing boats<sup>18</sup>. It is now thought that only three fishers in Arugam Bay know how to sail, highlighting the changing knowledges within the community. This has had both positive and negative effects. While fishers are now able to fish further afield, and in a wider variety of conditions than when they relied on wind power, there is increased pressure to catch more fish, as fishers now need to cover the cost of the kerosene. It is not uncommon for fishing trips to be unprofitable, a trend that is getting worse due to the increasing cost of fuel and the tendency for bosses to fix the price of fish below market value.

The majority of fishers stated that there were significant changes after the tsunami. Many of the Sinhala-Tamil fishers benefitted from tsunami aid, and it was common to hear them say that they are better equipped now than before the tsunami. However, this has come at a cost. Many fishers spoke of an increase in the number of fishermen practicing in the area. After the tsunami a huge number of aid agencies donated boats to the area, and people were said to have come to the area in order to receive a 'ready-made profession'. It is commonly said amongst the Sinhala and Tamil fishers that the Muslims are not 'proper' fishers, but were given boats and nets by aid agencies after the tsunami, and now try their luck at sea. Trawling by Muslim fishers is one of the reasons that they believe the fish stocks are decreasing, along with large trawlers out to sea. However this belief may be the result of a broader xenophobic narrative against Muslims in Sri Lanka, fuelled by groups such as the BBS (see Ch. 1.3).

The aftermath of the tsunami also saw an increase in tourism development in Arugam Bay (see Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). This has led some commentators to argue that fishers in the area have been put under increased pressure to stop fishing in order to make way for hotels and tourists (see Klein, 2007). Indeed, within the wider area there have been a number of protests against displacement and government land-grabbing in the name of tourism development (see APC-MONLAR, 2013). However, within Arugam Bay, and particularly Ullae, while some fishers did express concern at tourism taking over the area, the situation is more complex (Jeganathan, 2009). Many fishers have now diversified their livelihoods, and no longer simply rely on fishing for income. *Tuk tuk* driving, hotel and restaurant work and

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<sup>18</sup> At the time of research, there was one sail boat in Arugam Bay, the result of a project between an older fisher and a Western NGO worker living in the village.

surf instruction are all additional jobs fishers have taken up, which goes some way towards overcoming the precarious<sup>19</sup> and seasonal nature of fishing work.

*We get back late, and by the time we have finished unloading the boat it is dark. Sonny and I head to the local teashop, a popular haunt for the fishers after a day's work. Sonny's sister is there. She has been worried. Apparently we were the last to be back, and she had begun to get anxious that there was no sign of us. With every trip out to sea, the fishers leave behind their families and friends, and while relatively rare, occasionally do not return. Sonny's sister seems acutely aware of this. Part of me wonders if this worry is augmented by the fact that I was with them, and the liability I may have been. While not fishing themselves, those left behind are still affected by the practices of the fishers. After apologising for his lateness, Sonny gives his sister two of the fish he caught that day and she disappears with them. The fish are now in the domain of the domestic household, and they will be transformed from creatures of the sea that have been caught, into the staple food, rice and curry. I was rarely allowed to help in the kitchen, and when I did my role was reduced to grinding coconuts. However, I often admired the skill involved in the preparation of the fish. Whereas the fishers have learnt over time how to catch and kill fish, their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters have all learnt how to gut, spice and cook them, with knowledge passed down within families. The material body of the fish is taken into another 'community of practice' (from which I am excluded), and transformed into something entirely new.*

Fishing is a central practice in Arugam Bay, and produces distinct knowledges of the sea. The sea is the central space in which this practice is performed, and the fishers have built up a unique knowledge of this space, that is shared and exchanged within the community of practice. However, this knowledge is also necessarily as dynamic, changing and unfinished as the sea itself (see also Hoeppe, 2007). Furthermore, this knowledge is not homogenous among all who engage with the practice, and there is always the potential for the community of practice to fracture.

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<sup>19</sup> Fishing is conceived as being precarious in that it does not guarantee a return of money. It is also seen as precarious in the sense that it is dangerous – in my time in Arugam Bay two fishers died at sea, and reports of fishers from around the island being killed were not uncommon.

While a typically masculine activity, fishing affects those who are not directly involved in the practice, such as the family members of the fishers. While out, they have the burden of knowing that fishing is a precarious activity, both in terms of safety and financial return. Once fish have been landed, they are either sold off, or used by the families themselves. Here, knowledge of fish is constructed through another community of practice, that of domestic work, typically undertaken by the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of the fishers. This is a community of practice which, while important to everyday life, I was generally excluded from, and as such do not write about. This highlights the multitude of other communities of practice within the area, and emphasises that the four I write about are by no means exclusive. What's more, communities of practice do not occur in isolation, but rather overlap, inform and influence other practices and knowledge communities.

Fishing has undergone a number of significant changes in recent times, notably due to the tsunami and subsequent outpouring of aid (see Ch. 6.0). Rapid tourism development has also had a significant impact on the area's fishers. While often held in 'opposition' to tourism (see e.g. Klein, 2007), fishers are acutely involved in the tourism industry in Arugam Bay, and many are diversifying their livelihoods and knowledges through tourism.

#### **4.4 Tourism**

*The beach is busy today. Not only is it peak season for international tourists, it is a Poya Day, and as such a national holiday in Sri Lanka. During these days busses of Sri Lankan tourists from nearby towns, such as Pottuvil, Monaragala and Ampara, flock to the coast, swelling the number of bodies on the beach. The crowds tend to gather at the southern end of the bay, right outside my home, and as I walk along the beach towards the Point, I am greeted with shouts: "Machan<sup>20</sup>, Machan! Photo?" and a camera phone is thrust in my face as two domestic tourists, both men, wearing nothing but their underpants pose with me. While such interactions are common for me, I still feel slightly uncomfortable, smiling to the camera with two semi-naked strangers. It is hard not to notice how different the men and women here dress for the beach. The men are nearly always topless, and often wearing only their underpants. They play cricket on the water's edge, and run around boisterously from sand to sea. The women, however, remain fully clothed, even when bathing in the sea,*

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<sup>20</sup> A slang word in both Tamil and Sinhalese, literally translating as 'cousin' or 'brother-in-law', but in this context similar to the English word 'mate' (see Meyler, 2007: 157).



**Figure 4.iv** 'Producing paradise'. Tourist accommodation: Paradise Sand Beach Hotel, Main Street, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

*although they are rarely seen engaging in activities requiring physical exertion. On the beach, families sit in the shade of the fishing boats, and it is common to see umbrellas open for protection from the sun.*

*I walk on up the beach. I am supposed to be meeting some friends from the UK at 'Mambo's', a tourist resort with a popular bar serving cocktails and playing traveller favourites such as Bob Marley, Manu Chau and Jack Johnson. As I reach the bar, only about thirty yards from where I was, I notice that the bodies have changed. Nearly everyone is white (or pink, as is often the case). Fishing boats have been replaced by sun loungers, and young women in bikinis and men in board shorts read books and snooze in the midday equatorial sun, sipping on cold drinks. There is a strong smell of sun cream. Shade is generally avoided. Every now and again a lounging tourist will get up and jump into the sea to cool down. The atmosphere is much mellower than along the beach.*

*I meet with my friends. However, something is bothering me. Had my friends noticed how segregated the beach is? "Yeah, it's thanks to that guy there" my friend Sam points. I look*

*over and see one of the STF Lifeguards<sup>21</sup>. He is stood at the water's edge. Every time a Sri Lankan gets too close to where the foreign tourists are, he blows his whistle and sends them back. There is a racialised beach apartheid. Up to then I had always thought that people self-segregated as they felt uncomfortable in the presence of 'others'. Clearly there is more to it, although under whose authority I never find out. The moment highlights an uncomfortable reality for the three of us, in which our (white) privilege as tourists allows us to walk where we please, but Sri Lankans are excluded from the prime beach locations. My friend Katie isn't happy. "I really hate it when they [Sri Lankan men] take pictures of me, and they are SO starey. You can't relax." She continues, "But I don't think that's right, you know? I feel more uncomfortable about that, than like the photos and stuff". Sam is also uncomfortable "I worry that people are gonna resent me. The last thing I want is to be resented".*

Tourism has had an important influence on the development of Arugam Bay, particularly in recent years, where the number of visitors has grown rapidly. In the wake of the tsunami the government had plans to develop the area for large-scale, mass-tourism (see Ch. 6.3; also Klein, 2007). Despite scrapping these plans due to widespread opposition, tourism has nevertheless been employed as a way to grow the local economy, and (re)invigorating the tourism sector was the priority of a number of NGOs working in the area during the aftermath of the tsunami (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). In an attempt to boost tourism, since 2010 the village has been designated a 'Tourism Promotion Zone' by the World Bank. While this programme has had a rhetoric of sustainability, this has resulted in numerous cases of land grabbing and displacement in the local area (see APC/MONLAR, 2013).

The tourist industry in Sri Lanka has been critiqued for its exploitative nature, producing a situation in which:

Foreign investors buy beachfront land for a pittance and erect hotels before villagers realize the value of the land. While some locals owning beach-front property are able to open guest houses and restaurants, most are forced to resort to illegal, demeaning sources of profit: hawking, handicrafts and

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<sup>21</sup> In Arugam Bay, following the end of the civil war, members of the Special Task Force have been used as lifeguards. For many residents, this is seen as an excuse to keep a military presence in the area, and many complained at the lack of training that these 'lifeguards' possessed.

corals, peddling drugs, trading gems illegally, guiding tours and prostitution (Deckard, 2010: 173).

Such a situation has developed in the resorts of Hikkaduwa and Negombo on the Southern and Western coasts. At present Arugam Bay has largely avoided such developments, with most people engaged in more legitimate forms of tourism employment. However, this is said to be changing and many residents I spoke to had concerns that the area was increasingly resembling resorts on the other coasts, citing businesses and seasonal workers from the South, particularly Hikkaduwa, as encouraging this process. In addition to this, I was told that many foreigners and people from other parts of Sri Lanka bought beachfront land in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, exploiting people's fears of returning to the sea. Western NGO workers were apparently particularly complicit with this (see Ch. 6.0).

Tourism in Arugam Bay is markedly seasonal, with the tourist season linked to the surf season of April to October. During the off season, the number of international visitors drops dramatically, as a lack of surf and monsoon rains deter visitors, as well as this being the peak season for the Western and Southern coastal resorts. Consequently, many establishments in the area close completely during this time. However, there are attempts to attract visitors throughout the year by a number of local hoteliers (e.g. arugam.info, 2014a).

While there is no official statistical data for tourist demographics in Arugam Bay, my ethnographic work revealed that international visitors have traditionally consisted of mainly Australian and European surfers, with a few North Americans, Japanese and Israelis. Such tourists go surfing, but also engage in other practices such as eating, drinking, partying and 'hanging out'. The area also receives a significant number of domestic tourists, predominantly day-trippers from nearby towns and cities<sup>22</sup>. The demography of tourism is changing, with increasing numbers of non-surfers visiting the area. As a result, tourist practices are changing too, with a growing emphasis on non-surf related activities, such as going on safari to Kumana (Yala East) park, visiting local temples and spending time sunbathing on the beach. This changing demographic has also prompted a rise in the number of surf schools. Origins are also changing, with reports of an increasing amount of Russian, Chinese and Indian visitors. As Sri Lanka seeks to boost the number of tourists visiting the

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<sup>22</sup> Due to a lack of data, and the fact that relatively few domestic tourists actually frequent local businesses, the practices and performances of tourists will predominantly focus on international visitors. However, it is important to note that the number of domestic tourists is rising, particularly from Sri Lanka's growing middle class.

country (Fernando and Jayawardena, 2013), this trend is likely to continue. Tourism, as such, is a dynamic practice, and constantly changing.

*I sit enjoying an exceptionally sweet coffee and a toasted jaffle. The café I am in overlooks the Main Point, and it is busy today, as I watch surfers tackling the waves. The café is an important meeting spot for local surfers, as well as being frequented by visiting tourists. It never takes long for a familiar face to appear, normally following a surf. I am soon joined by Nigel, a veteran Australian surfer now living in the village, and Vinay, a young Tamil surfer born in Arugam Bay. We sit and chat about the surf, lamenting the high season busyness, and the crowded line-up. We watch as two surfers nearly collide, and proceed to argue between themselves about whose fault it was. Nigel chuckles, “Bit tense out there today. People need to chill out!”*

*One of the surfers involved in the near miss decides to end his session, and he comes in, clearly frustrated. He is a young man from Australia, long haired and tanned, although he has only been in the area for about a week. He is fuming. “Fuck man!” he exclaims to his friend, “So busy out there. Why can’t all these people fuck off back to the real world and leave us in paradise?!” Nigel smiles at the two surfers, although he seems put out by this outburst. “What if this is the real world mate?” he says. The Australian surfer quietens down and we continue to chat.*

*I ask Nigel what he meant by his comment. “Well I live here. Vinay lives here. [Lots of people] live here. This isn’t a two week vacation for me. It’s my life not some fantasy, you know?” Later, Vinay talks to me about the Australian tourist. “He piss me off. People come here [as if they own] the place” he says. “No respect for my friends in the waves, just drop in<sup>23</sup>, drop in, drop in. I know they want good time on holiday, but this is my home. [Tourists] have to respect us if they come here.” He does continue though “Not all people like this. Just some people. Some people good and we make good friends...”*

Tourism does not simply involve ‘consuming place’, but rather the practice of tourism also actively produces place. Knowledges produced though tourist practices shape the place itself

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<sup>23</sup> Etiquette in surfing dictates that the person closest to the breaking wave has priority. Breaking this rule is known as ‘dropping in’ (see e.g. Roy, 2014; Waitt, 2008)

(McDonald, 2005), or rather, tourism “spatializes social meanings” (Crang, 2004: 76). Tourists arrive in destinations with expectations and imaginations of what a place *should* be like, informed by marketing and other media (Echtner and Prasad, 2003). These imaginations inscribe themselves on the physical landscape, which changes to conform to tourists’ expectations (see e.g. Davis, 2005; Duffy, 2004; McDonald, 2005; West and Carrier, 2004). The presence of tourists can also serve to discipline the behaviour of people living in touristed places as they are expected to “generally conform to tourists’ ill informed stereotypes” (Urry, 1992: 177). Equally, tourists are also subjected to a number of disciplining forces, especially when one considers that tourism “is a set of learned competences and skills, and most definitely not something natural or innate” (Crang, 2004: 78-79). This “working consensus about what to do” (Edensor, 2001: 71) is learned from guide books, other tourists and the attitudes and knowledges of those living in tourist destinations (see Edensor, 1998; 2001; Gillespie, 2006; Maoz, 2006).

By its very definition, tourism is about removing oneself from everyday rhythms, namely the rhythms of the workplace (Urry, 1990). As such, a key element of tourist practice is the search for the atypical, and a consumption of ‘otherness’<sup>24</sup> (Haldrup and Larsen, 2009; Hall and Tucker, 2004). In Arugam Bay, tourists I spoke with overwhelmingly alluded to this idea of Arugam Bay as ‘other’, in particular through their mobilisations of the idea of ‘paradise’. As the surfer stated in the vignette above: “*Why can’t all these people fuck off back to the real world and leave us in paradise?!*” Indeed, imagining Arugam Bay as a ‘paradise’ was common amongst tourists:

*...I mean it feels like paradise ... I love that you can eat everything fresh, and I mean I haven’t eaten one processed thing since I’ve been here. I love that you can jump in the water the whole day if you wanted, uh yeah, it’s easy living here. (Cindy, PT027)*

*I mean, just look at this place man! It’s a paradise no doubt. Like, that sounds kinda cheesy, but nah, it’s amazing. I wake up with the sunrise, go surf all day, uhhh, eat the nicest food and hang out with the coolest people... (Rob, PT025)*

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<sup>24</sup> Although it is important to note that tourists will only tolerate a limited amount of novelty (see Hall and Tucker, 2004: 8)



Sharae Deckard traces the evolution of paradise discourse, exploring how it has morphed and changed to accommodate a more secular, capitalist imagination of a “*state of consumption*” in which “exclusivity and luxury” can be accessed through the “accumulation of money and status” (Deckard, 2010: 12, emphasis in original). In particular, the imagination of paradise relies on it being free from work or exertion. As such, it is unsurprising that paradise has been mobilised as a way of selling tourist destinations (see Deckard, 2010; Huggan, 2001).

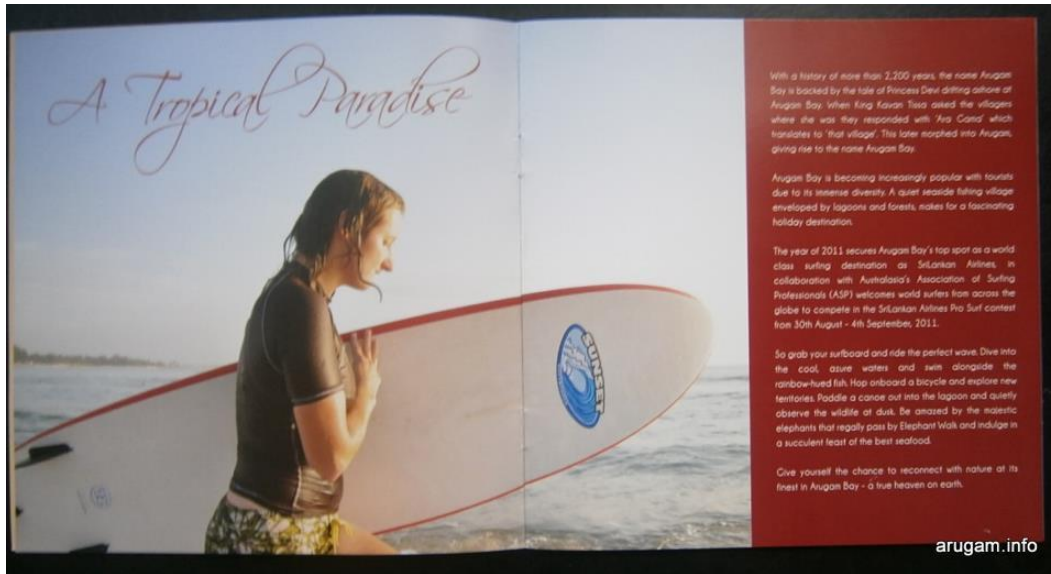
Imaginations of paradise also overlap with contemporary, Western imaginations of the beach, in which this perceived ‘liminal zone’ has become one often associated with “‘escape’ from routine and constrictions placed on the body” (Ryan, 2012: 34; see also Ch. 3.0).

Indeed, paradise has been used to market Arugam Bay (see e.g. Figure 4.v), with imagery of constant sunshine, endless waves for hedonistic pleasure (surfing), and opulent foods for consumption. A quick internet search of Arugam Bay reveals how the place is overwhelmingly represented by images of the sea, the beach and surfers (Figure 4.vii)<sup>25</sup>. People featured in the images are overwhelmingly white tourists, playing and consuming the coastscape. These imaginations and practices of tourism have changed the area, with the imagery of paradise appearing and being maintained in the landscape. Tourism has also changed the land use of large areas of the area, with former residences becoming tourist based businesses (see Figure 4.iv).

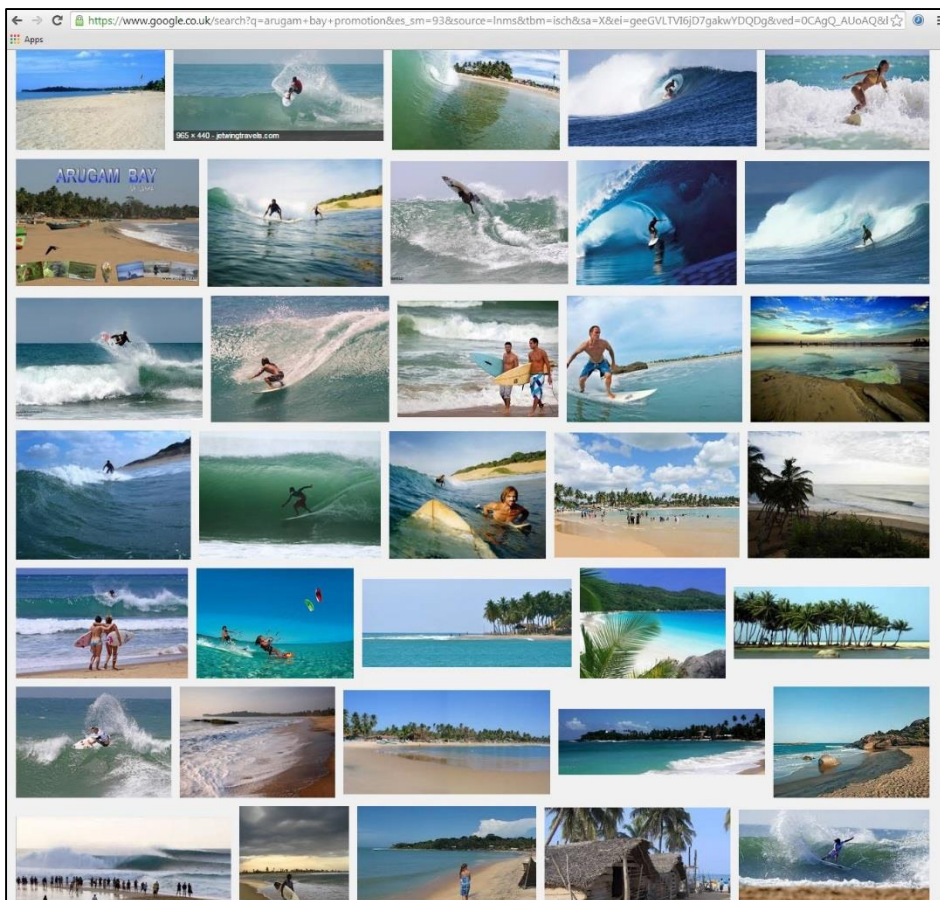
Tourism marketing myths can mask the geopolitical ‘realities’ of certain destinations. In particular, illusions that perpetrate constant sunshine and paradisaal landscapes, common in representations of Arugam Bay, can obscure ‘darker geographies’, such as poverty, persecution or war (d’Hauteserre, 2004). Such a situation has been witnessed in Sri Lanka regarding the civil war, with images of white sandy beaches and ancient ruins obfuscating the country’s violent past (Deckard, 2010). Of course such representations do not completely transform the landscape, and I witnessed a number of occasions where the illusion of paradise fell apart. The presence of crows, litter, noisy fishing boat engines, mosquitoes, large modern hotels and other tourists (both domestic and international) were all distinctly ‘non-paradisaal’ features that tourists complained about. Furthermore, Sri Lanka’s ongoing militarisation, and the presence of the military personnel throughout the area, including on the beach, would

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<sup>25</sup> Note that this search was conducted with ‘cookies’ turned off so that the search was not influenced by Google’s algorithms. Nevertheless, it is likely that this search conducted in different parts of the world from a non-UK IP address would turn up different results.



**Figure 4.v** 'A Tropical Paradise': Arugam Bay marketing material. *Source: Sri Lanka Tourist Board, 2012. Full brochure available at: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151132547759894.466486.34935689893&type=3>*



**Figure 4.vi** Google image search Arugam+Bay *Source: Google, 09.12.14*

occasionally provoke conversations among tourists about the civil war and human rights abuses in the country (Figure 4.vii).

Related to this, the ongoing effects of the tsunami in Arugam Bay have been largely hidden by tourism. While the tsunami does maintain a material presence in the landscape (see Ch. 7.0), these are almost completely absent in the main tourist areas of the village (see Figure 1.iii). As such, it was common for tourists to remark that they would not have known that the tsunami struck the area had they not already known about it. On a number of occasions tourists were unaware that the tsunami had occurred at all. As one expat migrant said to me regarding the tsunami: “I am constantly amazed at the naivety of some tourists” (Mike, PT017). That said, many tourists did show an interest in the tsunami, or want to discover more upon finding out that the area was struck by the wave, looking to consume the tsunami as part of their touristic experience. Tourists asking questions about the tsunami was cited as a key way in which the disaster has continued to be experienced in the present day (see Ch. 5.2).

*It is late morning as I leave my home and head down to the beach. Since arriving in Arugam Bay, I have established a number of walking routes that I undertake regularly. These not only allow me to observe the ongoing changes to the area, but also encourage chance encounters with people who I had got to know. Today is no different, and as I wander past the fishers boats by the lagoon I spot Sanjeev, an experienced fisher who also occasionally fixes boards and teaches surfing to tourists. He is conducting some boat repairs as I approach him. Following an exchange of niceties I chat to him about the new hotel construction, which is starting to loom over the bay. Sanjeev stops his work and looks up at the new concrete building. “Ugly. No good. Not natural building” he says. I ask him about tourism and the village. “Tourism is good, because we get money. But not like this one. Builders, not Arugam Bay. Owners not Arugam Bay. Bad for local people...” It seems that it is only a certain type of tourism that Sanjeev wants, understandably one that benefits the local population. As we sit and chat about the new building, and its lack of aesthetic appeal, we are approached by a couple of tourists from North America. They ask us if we know where to find a specific guesthouse. Sanjeev has not heard of it. Neither have I. “I think it’s near to the juice bar”*



**Figure 4.vii** The illusion of paradise falls apart: the militarisation of the beach. Main Point, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

*says one of the tourists. “Juice bar?” says Sanjeev. He looks confused. “Not knowing this juice bar! Not knowing this hotel. What to do? This village change too quickly for me...”*

Tourism does not simply consist of the experiences and practices of tourists, and it is important not to overplay the power tourists hold (Cheong and Miller, 2000). The practice of tourism involves a myriad of actors: tourists, tour operators, government officials, seasonal workers, as well as nonhuman actors. Indeed, the production of tourist places is the product of numerous people, practices and knowledges:

Touristed landscapes are about complexity of different people doing different things, locals and visitors, sojourners and residents, locals becoming visitors, sojourners becoming residents, residents ‘being tourists,’ travellers denying being tourists. (Cartier, 2005: 3)

As such, tourist places are not simply places people visit, but also places people live and call ‘home’. Experiences, practices and knowledges of tourism are (re)produced, shared and

contested by those living in the places tourists visit. In Arugam Bay, attitudes towards tourism from residents was decidedly mixed. Some, usually those working in the tourist industry, had very positive things to say about tourism. While many of these participants highlighted how tourism provided the means to earn extra income, others talked of the friendships and bonds they made with tourists, and the knowledge gained from this:

*I learn all my English from tourists. Nothing learning at school! (Vinay, PT008)*

*For me I am happy, if [tourists] are coming I am happy. I learning English from tourist otherwise I can't understand, this is why I can speak with you! But I after ten or eleven years old, I go all the time to beach. So I seen and learn by word, by word, learn English. (Chandra, PT015)*

*Two teachers for my surfing life ... one it's my father ... my second teacher is from Australia, ... That is my teacher for ever, you know he's the best teacher, mmmm, yeah, teaching me surfing life. So one of the guys [most] involved for my life from out of the country, so I like [tourists] to come again, come again to visit... Also, my girlfriend [was a] tourist. So that another good thing about tourism! (Mallee, PT010).*

This highlights the exchange of knowledges in tourism, with Arugam Bay residents learning new skills and ways of life as a result of interacting with tourists. Language proficiency was particularly highlighted, and the majority of residents in Arugam Bay, particularly younger ones, had at least a basic knowledge of English, with many also able to speak other languages, notably Japanese, German and French. However, other knowledges gained from tourism were not always universally appreciated. Of note were lamentations of young men replicating the hedonistic lifestyles of visiting tourists, with open sexual relationships, drug culture and late night parties:

*Tourist people always hugging and kissing. This never happen before. Now some Arugam Bay people doing this... We worry, kids can't grow up in this place. Only tourist place. They go surfing, but then after going to parties, then fighting with parents – boys, not girls, boys (Sanuthi, PT039)*

*Some boys are going really crazy after tourists come here ... some of the tourists, they teach us to take a bad life, to go and party and stuff like that*  
(Thambi, PT020)

As well as changing the behaviour and ways of life of the area, tourism was noted by many residents as a catalyst for development, with the new bridge, repaved road, amenities such as electricity and better access to healthcare and education highlighted as positive things to have come out of tourism, and the additional income it was generating. Conflicting spatial imaginations were common however. This is particularly apparent in tourism contexts where there is a paradox of commodifying ‘premodern’ aspects of a place to attract tourists in order to modernise (see also Cole, 2007). For example, one Tamil resident (Daniel, PT022) referred to the redeveloped bridge as “the best thing” to happen to the area, while many tourists disliked it, with one tourist who had been visiting the area for twenty years (Jimmy, PT053) describing it as the “worst” thing in the area as it “modernised the village” too much. In this case, Daniel admired the ‘progress’ the bridge represented, while Jimmy lamented the loss of a romanticised village imagination.

In addition to this, many residents from a variety of demographics had less positive things to say about tourism development in the area, citing the destruction of trees, the loss of traditional buildings and the rapidity of changes to the area (such as Sanjeev above). The increasing number of capitalist ventures in the village were also cited as a reason for people perceiving there to be more jealousy amongst residents, as neighbours are transformed into business rivals in competition with one another (see also Ch. 6.0). Furthermore, tourism development has provoked a number of protests in the local area, as the government and external investors are accused of ‘landgrabbing’ (see APC/MONLAR, 2013; Klein, 2007). In general, the majority of residents I spoke to tended to highlight that there are both positives and negatives to be taken away from the area developing in the way that it has.

Following the tsunami, tourism was central to the reconstruction effort in Arugam Bay (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). The overlaps between tourism and aid will be discussed further in Ch. 6.0, paying particular attention to how such development has had a perceived impact on the area. Tourism and tourists had a significant impact on how people negotiated the tsunami and continues to have an ongoing impact on the way people negotiate the tsunami in their everyday lives. This plays out in two key ways.

On the one hand a number of people were very positive about tourism, and talked of how tourism helped them overcome the trauma of the waves. This was through a number of ways. Firstly, it was claimed that because none of the tourists who came to the area after the tsunami were afraid of the sea, it encouraged some local people to reengage with it. As one participant said to me:

*If tourists aren't afraid of the sea, why should we [be afraid]? (Sanjeev, PT019).*

Secondly, some explained that they found it useful to talk through events with tourists who asked them about the tsunami. It helped them to deal with the trauma, and furthermore, made people feel like they cared about them, taking an interest in their lives and history (e.g. Daniel, PT022). Thirdly, people pointed out that tourists were instrumental in the (re)construction process, providing aid and capital for building work, and the (re)establishment of businesses. Indeed, by having a business to focus on, one participant said it helped them to forget about the wave (Ishan, PT003).

However, others were less positive about tourism and the tsunami. Some disliked talking about the tsunami with tourists, claiming it was an invasion to their privacy. Despite numerous tourists remaining naïve about the existence of the tsunami, many do ask questions about it, and in doing so bring up a subject that people want to forget. Some feel obliged to talk to tourists about the tsunami, despite not wanting to, especially if they are customers at their business. It is important to note here that whether they want to talk about the tsunami or not, the choice as to whether people recall the tsunami or not is taken out of their hands by curious, albeit largely sympathetic, tourists. The tsunami becomes part of a tourist transaction, where in order to keep guests happy, and thus enhance their financial gains, people produce an oral account of a disaster landscape for tourist consumption (see Ch. 5.2).

Overall, tourism has had a profound impact on Arugam Bay and its growth, along with the tsunami, is cited as the aspect of the area that has changed the most in recent years. Tourism (re)produces multiple knowledges and ways of knowing space. This is not only through the production of places in marketing material, but also through embodied exchanges and encounters between the various actors involved in tourism. For those living in Arugam Bay, this has resulted in a rapidly changing area and encounters with tourism becoming an ordinary, everyday experience. Due to the sheer multitude of practices involved with tourism, and the multiple knowledges that tourism produces, it is not surprising that opinions on

tourism development were impassioned and varied. However, many people acknowledged the positive and negative aspects of tourism. Tourism has also been central to the development of the area in the wake of the tsunami, and practices of tourism have shaped the ways in which the tsunami has been negotiated by those living on the affected coast. As discussed, one of the key practices that has shaped tourism development in Arugam Bay is surfing. This is no longer something uniquely practiced by tourists, but rather residents have learnt the practice, and it is now an important everyday experience for many of those from Arugam Bay.

#### **4.5 Surfing**

*It is dark as I walk along the beach. As I pass the Surf Club's clubhouse I see one of the members, Pradeep. He waves to me, and I go over. He is clearly excited about something on his phone. "Check the swell bro!" He is looking at a surf forecasting website, showing images of the Indian Ocean. He brings up a map with a brightly coloured splotch off the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The map shows swell height, and the brighter the colours, the bigger the waves. The fluorescent colours on the map suggest something big is coming our way. This swell was the result of a storm off the coast of Antarctica, and Pradeep has been tracking it over the past few days. He brings up another two maps, and comments on how the period and wind both look favourable. However, Pradeep then looks pensive. He stands up and looks out into the night towards the sea. "Not sure bro" he says. "Can't hear waves yet. Swell coming late, maybe Wednesday, not tomorrow." I'm not convinced. The website is normally pretty reliable, and I, along with most of the other surfers in the village, have been following this swell's progress too. I chat with Pradeep for a while longer before heading home to bed.*

*The next morning I wake up, excited for the potential waves and head out to the beach. I immediately notice that the bay is calm, the waves gently lapping against the sand, normally a sign that Main Point is small. Still, I carry on out to the Point, convincing myself that there could still be waves. I round the corner and see the Point. Flat. A couple of surfers walk towards me from the Point. "Nothing, I wouldn't bother mate" they say to me. Pradeep was right. The swell was late. I see him later that day, landing his boat on the beach. He chuckles at me. He had got up early and headed out fishing, correctly predicting the conditions for a*





**Figure 4.viii** ‘Off the lip!’ An Arugam Bay resident surfs at ‘Main Point’ *Photo: Cody Carruthers/Arugam Bay Surf Club, 2013.*

*good catch. Local knowledge of the ocean has proved to be superior to computer algorithms today...*

Within Arugam Bay, surfing played a particularly important role in the aftermath of the tsunami, with a number of surf oriented relief organisations arriving in the area. Some of these were already established, although many were set up specifically to channel money from surfers around the world (particularly Australia, UK and USA) to Arugam Bay and other affected surf communities (Ch. 6.0). Surfing is an important everyday practice for many (male) villagers and produces unique knowledges of the ocean, and as such is a significant community of practice.

The focus of surfing in Arugam Bay is the break known as ‘Main Point’, a world class point break towards the southern end of the village, considered by many to be the best wave in Sri Lanka. There are around ten other well-known breaks in the local area, plus several additional ‘secret spots’ too. During the high season (July-August), one can expect to find between 30-40 surfers in the water at Main Point<sup>26</sup>, a number which is apparently rising every season.

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<sup>26</sup> At one point in July (2013) over 60 were counted

While the main surf season runs from April to October, there are still occasionally rideable waves all year round. However, the majority of the breaks stop working during the off season (November – March), and consequently the number of surfers reduces dramatically, with rarely a surfer in the water in December and January.

Surfing has been described as “the art of standing and riding on a board propelled by breaking waves” (Shields, 2004: 45)<sup>27</sup>, although the practice is notoriously difficult to describe and define due to it being such a sensory experience. Indeed, this ‘unique’ experience has been utilised within global surf marketing, with a multinational surf corporation adopting the strapline, ‘Only a surfer knows the feeling’ (Rielly, 2003). The unique nature of surfing practice has led to surfers developing their own language and terminology to describe their experiences (see Anderson, 2014a; Evers, 2006). Here we see the difficulties in bridging “the space between words and meaning” (Anderson, 2014a: 27), and likewise we see how embodied practices produce specific ways of knowing and speaking about space and place. Such words, which usually originate in English, but also Polynesian languages<sup>28</sup> (e.g. *Aloha*, *Kahuna*), are incorporated into other languages, and the Sri Lankan surfers would often use surf terminology when speaking Sinhala or Tamil.

Social and cultural geographers, along with cultural theorists, have explored such representations and narratives of/by surfers, and how they are consumed. Such work has explored how surfers have represented the ocean, positioning it as a sublime and ‘othered’ space (Ford and Brown, 2006). Others have focused on how the surf media positions the ocean as a ‘frontier’, ripe for (colonial style) exploration (Ormrod, 2005), or (re)produces imagery of paradise and Nirvana in tropical coastal spaces (Ponting, 2009). In Arugam Bay, such imagery was common, especially amongst tourists. For example, the first person reported to have surfed in Sri Lanka is said to have described it as a “Shangri-La for surfers” (Warshaw, 2003: 559). Research tends to position the consumers of such imagery as ‘Western’ (European, North American, Australian) surfers, neglecting the large body of other surfers around the world. This includes those from Sri Lanka. The Australian surfers, who first came to Arugam Bay in the 1970s, are often described by tourists and expats as

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<sup>27</sup> Many other forms of surfing exist, including kayak surfing, body surfing and body boarding (see e.g. Waite and Clifton, 2012). Unless otherwise stated, ‘surfing’ refers to the practice as described by Shields (2004).

<sup>28</sup> Before it became a globalised practice and industry, surfing’s roots lie in Polynesia (for an in-depth history of surfing see Warshaw, 2010)

‘explorers’ who ‘discovered’ the wave. The Sri Lankans I spoke to almost always refer to them as the first ‘visitors’.

As a result of surfing’s origins in the area as a tourist practice, there are many links between the two communities of practice. As mentioned, the majority of tourists in the area are surfers, and as such the practices produce similar knowledges. In particular, themes of tropicality, paradise and Nirvana are imbued within many representations and imaginations of surf tourist imaginations (Ponting, 2009). In a similar way to tourism’s representations more broadly, such spatial imaginations have obscured darker geographies in surfing places (see above). For example, Scott Laderman explores the ways in which surfing ignored political issues in places such as Indonesia and South Africa, constructing them as paradises for surfers to explore (Laderman, 2014). With reference to surfers’ imaginations and representations of Bali during the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, Laderman writes:

In light of the horrific violence, one might have expected a popular reconsideration of the paradisaical view. Nothing of the sort emerged in the surfing imagination however. On the contrary, Bali (and Indonesia more broadly) remained in the early Suharto years a tropical fantasy of brown-skinned primitive locals – an Eden before the fall that, surf publications and films suggested, was begging for discovery and exploitation ... The surfing imagination was not only ignorant of Indonesian repression and its facilitation by Jakarta’s Western allies; it in fact demanded such ignorance, for to acknowledge the larger realities would have been to dispel surfers of the allure of exotic discovery in a timeless present in which they could play modern-day explorers in a corrupted political world (Laderman, 2014: 68-72).

Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka are no exception to this process, particularly regarding surfing’s disregard for the issues emanating from the civil war and human rights abuses. Of course, some surfers are acutely aware of the political controversies and violent history that shape Sri Lankan society. Indeed, surfers have in recent years increasingly engaged with political issues, predominantly revolving around conservation and the environment, but on occasion confronting issues such as homophobia, political repression and US foreign policy (see Laderman, 2014). However, in Arugam Bay these tended to be in the minority, and, like

tourists more broadly, most surfers I encountered were prepared to suspend and ignore such issues in order to perpetrate the myth of Sri Lanka as their ‘Shangri-La’ or paradise.

Surfing also (re)produces a unique way of imagining and negotiating the coast, at times reinforcing binaries between culture and nature (see Fiske, 2011), while also producing knowledge and an appreciation of the specific nuances of the breaking wave (Preston-Whyte, 2002). Such surf-based imagery is common throughout Arugam Bay – from the naming of guest houses (Point View, Aloha, the Green Room, Hang Loose) to the imagery on street signs (Figure 4.x), or the importance of beach-front property. Arugam Bay is routinely shortened to ‘A-Bay’, a reference to J-Bay (Jeffreys Bay), a famous surf break in South Africa. Through such links we can conceive of a ‘global surf community’ or ‘postnationalist wave’ in surfing, connected by a common practice and travel (see Laderman, 2014). The mobility of (certain) surfers and their search for waves around the world “*dislocates surfer identity from its ‘surf-shore’ moorings and produces in its place a routed but rootless ‘trans-local’ surf identity*” (Anderson, 2014b: 237). This identity is formed through interactions between surfers’ bodies and the surfable coastal environment, with unique knowledges and experiences formed around, for example, waves, weather patterns and sea beds (see below; also Ch. 3.0; J. Anderson, 2012; Evers, 2006). The imagination of a ‘global surf community’ poses interesting questions for what it means to be a ‘local’ surfer (see also Usher and Kerstetter, 2015), with a number of resident expat migrants and long-term visitors from Europe, Australia and North America negotiating between being ‘a local’ and ‘a tourist’, demonstrating that these identities are neither static nor exclusive.

The global surfing identity is (re)produced in surfing places, and in the same way that specific representations and imaginations within tourism (re)shape the topologies of place, the global surf community does the same. There is a distinct political economy to the surfers’ way of imagining surfing places, and Arugam Bay has transformed and conformed to suit the palate of visiting surfers. Indeed, rather than simply being an embodied practice (see below), surfing is also shaped by a political economy that has resulted in the commodification of the surfing experience, the rise of multinational surfing corporations and the development of a lucrative international surf-tourism industry (see Laderman, 2014; Warren and Gibson, 2014).



**Figure 4.ix** Surfing imagery used in ‘Paradise Road’, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author, 2013*

*Following the previous day’s disappointment, I don’t allow myself to get too excited the next morning. However, I see Pradeep running past my front gate with his board. “Waves today bro!” he shouts to me. I grab my board and join him, walking out to the beach and starting the short pilgrimage out to the Point. The sun is already up and there is a light offshore breeze, a good sign for our session in the water. Pradeep is in his early twenties and has been surfing for over ten years. He started when a visiting Australian tourist left him his board, and along with a couple of friends, they taught themselves how to surf. He wears the outfit of a typical surfer – brightly coloured boardshorts and a rash guard sporting a global surf brand logo. “Surfing is my life,” he tells me later, “It’s who I am, I can’t imagine not surfing”.*

*We see a number of familiar bodies in the water, and as a surfer catches a wave, I sense Pradeep’s urge to get in the water. We walk along to the entry point, further up from the main break, where it is easier to paddle out. I have witnessed people, always newcomers, attempting to paddle out directly in front of the break, and get pummelled by the waves. Snapped fins, dinged boards and reef cuts are the result of getting this wrong. But Pradeep has entered this wave many times before, and knows exactly where to go. He runs out,*

*inexplicably not cutting himself on the sharp reef, and with expert timing and grace jumps over a wave and onto his board, paddling out in between waves. Less gracefully, I follow him, taking a little longer, but managing to time my paddle out so as to avoid duck diving, and dragging my board and knuckles along the reef.*

*I appreciate the warmth of the water as I paddle out. It is a novelty that does not get old for me. Some of the Sri Lankans had been complaining recently that the water was cold, but compared to the frigid UK waters that I am used to, this feels glorious.*

*As I approach the line up a large set rolls in. I dig deep, slightly panicking that it's going to hit me, but manage to make it over the lip just in time. The wave crashes behind me, and I am safe. A surfer attempts to catch the wave, but mistimes his take off and crashes over the falls. The line up collectively winces. I do not have much time to contemplate this, as I am paddling again to get over the next wave in the set, slightly larger than the one before. I make it, adrenaline flowing. The waves are big today, and I'm feeling slightly out of my depth...*

Surfing, at its most basic level, is an embodied practice that is centred on interacting with the sea, specifically with the rhythmic movement of waves (Ford and Brown, 2006). Surfing only engages with a very specific part of the sea, the zone where waves break, usually close to the shoreline. The changing behaviour of the sea is paramount to the way surfers practice, and surfers have to negotiate the shifting rhythms of the ocean. As mentioned, this includes waves, sets of waves, the changing conditions throughout the day and the shifting patterns of the sea throughout the course of the year (for a geophysical description of the changing sea and its implications for surfers see Butt, 2002). In doing this, they build up a specific set of knowledges about the unique materialities of the ocean (Ch. 3.0; Preston-Whyte, 2002).

While the practice of surfing only involves a small part of the ocean, the processes that produce waves emphasise the relationality and connectivity that the surfed wave has with other places (see J. Anderson, 2012). Most surfers are very aware that the waves they surf are often the product of storms hundreds of miles away, and that the shape of the wave is dependent on the subsequent swell interacting with the topography of the seabed, and the wind. For example, Pradeep's predictions of the waves demonstrate an in depth knowledge of how swell and waves are formed, and a certain attunement with the rhythms of the ocean. One expat also described to me his growing awareness of how the waves are produced.

*I hear the waves breaking at night, and hear the waves in the evening, and I think, yep, tomorrow is gonna be bigger. And that's something I never had, it's so weird, but it's like you get this connection with the ocean that... that famous Tuesday swell, last Tuesday [that didn't arrive], I was at the beach in the evening before, and I was like, nah, it's not gonna happen, you just could feel it you know. (Benji, PT021)*

This is a further example of not only the unique knowledges of the sea that this practice produces, but also how the material agency of this more-than-human space determines how (or even whether) people engage in the practice of surfing (see also Ch. 3.0).

For many surfers the sea is a known and familiar space. The sea has been described as a “medium of joy” for surfers (Ford and Brown, 2006: 177) and many participants describe the practice as something that is intense, sensuous and fun. However, it is important not to equate all surfers’ experiences as homogenous. As I have argued, our affective experiences of place are bound up within contextual knowledges produced through representations and practice. For example, for the Western tourist visiting Arugam Bay, their experiences may be bound up within preconceptions of what the Indian Ocean will be like, comparisons with images of ‘perfect waves’ in magazines, and a specific, contextual imagination of sea space (see Ford and Brown, 2006). Researchers have also highlighted how experiences of surfing can vary according to gender (Evers, 2009; Olive et al. 2012; Roy; 2014; Waitt, 2008), race (Thompson, 2014) and skill (Evers, 2006; Preston-White, 2002). One’s previous experience of the sea shapes how one experiences surfing, which is particularly significant when one considers the aftermath of the tsunami (see below).

The sea’s complex materiality requires full concentration in order to successfully ride a wave. Because of this, many surfers equated surfing as a way to ‘escape’ the everyday, and as a way of forgetting problems on land:

*Surfing is a way to forget having an argument with family or [if you have] money problem (Ashok, PT034)*

*When I feel sad I go surf. It is when I call ‘happy hour’. So I have a great time there, I just forget everything, concentrate on the nature and surfing (Ishan, PT003)*

*You know when you've not been surfing for a while. You just need to go. It's an escape ... You may be sat in the line up thinking about things, but once you're on a wave, you're just reading a wave... (Mike, PT017)*

Despite surfing being a daily experience for all three of these surfers, the practice of surfing was still seen as doing something 'outside' of normal life. A distinction is drawn between the leisure activity of surfing, and the practice of everyday life, that involves family problems, or issues of money. So surfing is simultaneously an escape from the quotidian, whilst also an important part of the quotidian too.

*Having made it to the line-up I catch my breath and take stock. The line up is an intimidating place, an area where surfers jostle for position to take off. It is competitive and full of machismo. I rarely catch a wave straight away, preferring to firstly figure out how it is breaking, and gauge the atmosphere of the line up. Today is no different. Pradeep, on the other hand, paddles straight into the melee, his local-ness seemingly giving him respect and an ability to transcend the strict etiquette that surfers have developed around the world to determine who has priority. As a sizeable set approaches, at least three feet overhead, he paddles into position, and with apparent ease, puts in a couple of paddle strokes before popping to his feet and making the drop down the face of the wave. He has done this thousands of times. He navigates the contours of the wave, dragging his hand across the face and slows his speed, tucking under the lip and into a barrel. For the second time in a few minutes, the line up reacts collectively, this time whooping with admiration. Everyone is aware they are seeing an exceptionally talented surfer, and appreciate an artist at work. Pradeep knows this dynamic space so well, and just as it looks like the wave is going to swallow him up, he pops out of the barrel and begins to turn up and down the face of the wave, generating speed to make the fast sections and cutting back on the slow ones. These movements all flow seamlessly into one another, and it is mesmerising to watch. In one final manoeuvre, he pumps down the face of the wave building speed, before launching himself off the lip, and into the air. He lands behind the wave and gets onto his board, in order to paddle out of the way of the following wave. Before he does though, he splashes water into the air with his hands, grinning. He knows he's just surfed a fantastic wave and the adrenaline is pumping. He is, as surfers say, stoked<sup>29</sup>. I grin too. Stoke is something that is shared.*

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<sup>29</sup> To be 'stoked' describes a "fully embodied feeling of satisfaction, joy and pride" (Evers, 2006: 230-231)



*I paddle around the line up for a while, waiting for a wave to break favourably for me. There is a current taking us down the coast, and everyone is in a constant battle to stay in position. This is not uncommon. When one surfs, one spends more time paddling and waiting for waves than actually surfing. It's all part of the experience. I enjoy the feeling of the motion of the sea, as it bobs me up and down, fish below my feet and the sun on my back. Eventually a wave comes my way, and I see the surfer to my outside bail. It's my wave. I hear someone in the distance shout me into it. I turn my board and paddle hard. I feel the water rise up beneath me, and the motion takes the board. I push down, pop to my feet and before I can react, am falling...*

Surfing played an important role after the tsunami struck Arugam Bay. This was particularly because of the plethora of surf based charities set up in the area in its wake, and because of the wider surfing community giving significant amounts of aid money specifically to communities like Arugam Bay (see Ch. 6.0). Furthermore, surfing as an embodied practice has also been attributed to helping many people overcome the trauma of the wave, reconfiguring sea-space from “a graveyard to a playground”, as one aid worker put it (Mike, PT017). A number of surfers cited surfing as a key way they (re)engaged with the ocean in the wake of the tsunami:

*I was scared to go back to the ocean, and the first time I went surfing [after the tsunami] it reminded me of the waves. But the more I surfed the more fun I had and I forgot about this day (Chanaka, PT005)*

*Yeah of course I scared [of the sea after the tsunami]. I not going surfing. But tourist people going to surfing, why not me? Because all human. Only colour skin change ... so looking, ah this guy going surf, why not me? If tourists aren't afraid of the sea, why should we? Then everybody now going [surfing], scared gone, and me too. (Sanjeev, PT019)*

Through practicing surfing, surfers like Chanaka and Sanjeev have been able to reconfigure the ocean back into their everyday lives. That is not to say that the tsunami has been exorcised from everyday life (see Ch. 7.0), however specific knowledges about the sea (re)produced by the practice of surfing has contributed to the ‘remaking’ of everyday life (Das and Kleinman, 2001), allowing the coast to be liveable once more.

Such reconfigurations of space are not open to all, with surfing an overwhelmingly masculine sport when practiced in Arugam Bay. There has been a significant amount of research into how surfing is informed by specific representations of masculinities, with (male) surfers performing in ways that conform to preconceived ideas of what it means to be a man (see e.g. Evers, 2006; 2009; Olive et al. 2012; Roy, 2014; Waitt, 2008; Waitt and Clifton, 2012; Waitt and Warren, 2008). While women do participate in surfing, it is argued that they are under pressure to adhere to specific gendered roles (Roy, 2014; Waitt, 2008). Thus, representations of male/female gender norms affect *how* people practice. However, such research has mainly been conducted in a Western (predominantly Australian) context, and in Arugam Bay, the gendering of the waves has different meanings. While foreign (specifically white) women are encouraged to participate in surfing (albeit as long as they adhere to aforementioned gendered roles, and can tolerate the ‘patronising’ experience, see e.g. Olive et al. 2012), Sri Lankan women are largely excluded from participating at all. This is largely due to prevailing socio-cultural norms in the area that not only position surfing as inappropriate for a ‘good woman’, but also require women to spend much of their time undertaking housework, leaving little leisure time for such activities:

*If [Sri Lankan] girls go surfing [people will gossip]. That’s why I don’t go surfing, village people talking, say bad things about me. Girls don’t go surfing... The culture here is very different (Imali, PT040)*

*We only kitchen and cleaning. No time for surfing. Parents not allow (Sanuthi, PT037)*

Very few of the local surfers are women, and during my time in the area I only came across two Sri Lankan women who had been surfing at all, and this was considered controversial<sup>30</sup>. In contrast, there are around thirty to fifty surfers from Arugam Bay who are men (or boys). Therefore, surfing in Arugam Bay is shaped by popular representations of gender, intersecting with contextual cultural practices and norms. Through being excluded from surfing, women in Arugam Bay were not able to access this therapeutic practice in the wake of the tsunami. As such, this has contributed to certain gendered ways of negotiating the tsunami and practicing everyday life in its aftermath. While it could be attributed to

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<sup>30</sup> One of the young women in question hid her participation in the practice from family members.

masculine bravado, it is significant to note that almost all of the young men who surfed in Arugam Bay said they no longer feared the sea.

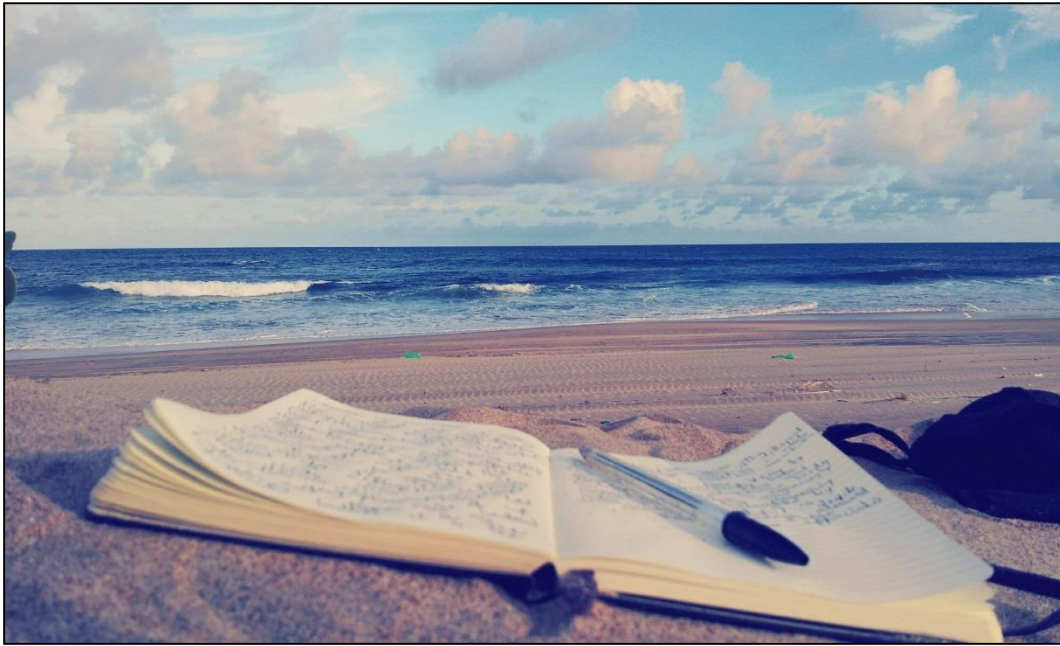
As with all the communities of practice, the practice of surfing overlaps and intersects with other communities of practice. Indeed, many of the surfers were also fishers and/or also tourists or worked in the tourist sector. And as the descriptive sections above demonstrate, I engaged in surfing as part of my research. My own knowledges as a surfer have been an important factor in the development of this thesis (see also Ch. 2.5). Indeed, my whole time in Arugam Bay, as well as my engagements with it pre and post fieldwork, were shaped by the community of practice of researching, and as such my ways of performing and producing knowledge about surfing were influenced by this.

#### **4.6 Researching**

*I sit in the restaurant, waiting for my order. I had arrived in Arugam Bay earlier that morning, but after an eleven hour flight and an overnight bus journey, I am feeling absolutely shattered. I take stock of my surroundings, everything new and exciting, not least the warmth of the equatorial climate, having left a rainy Yorkshire October behind me. There is also a sense of familiarity, having visited the area a few months earlier. But I have a distinct feeling of trepidation too. I am at the start of my fieldwork, which won't be over for ten months. I sit there worrying about the enormity of the task I am about to undertake. Will it work? Will I be able to find out what I came here to do? What will I tell people I'm doing? Will people want to chat to me? What if there's nothing about the tsunami here?*

*I sit there, thoughts whizzing through my head, reminding myself that I'm not going to have all the answers on day one. Actually, I'm not going to have all the answers by the end either! As I wait, I notice that there is a framed photo collage on the wall. Curiosity gets the better of me and I go and have a look. It's a selection of photos of the rebuilding of the restaurant owner's property after the tsunami. I am fascinated, and quickly make notes in my field diary about it.*

*Later that day, I decide to go for a walk around the village in order to get my bearings, a practice I would undertake many times during the course of my research. That evening I write about my experience:*



**Figure 4.x** Producing knowledge: writing in my field diary, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author, 2012*

*Fantastic walk today. Feeling much better about research. Evidence of the tsunami is EVERYWHERE! The charity logos on boats. Charity signage on buildings. Numerous evacuation signs. The TSUNAMI HOTEL (unbelievable!!!) Some foundations of buildings not rebuilt. Photo collage in restaurant. I think I'm gonna have plenty to write about after all...*

*Unwittingly, everything I write about on the walk relates to the tsunami, despite there being many other things to explore on this excursion.*

During the time I spent in Arugam Bay, more or less everything I did had the potential to contribute to my research, from formal research practices, such as conducting interviews, to more mundane quotidian practices such as eating or simply 'hanging out' (see Ch. 2.0). During my fieldwork technically I, the researcher, was the only person engaging in the practice of 'researching'. However, participants were brought into this community of practice through my engagement with them, and through my approach to Arugam Bay as a researcher. The importance of reflecting on one's positionality and the impact it has on one's 'data' when conducting such ethnographic research has been widely explored (see e.g. Chacko, 2004; Crang and Cook, 2007; Twyman et al. 1999). It is also crucial to reflect on *how* one conducts research, the methods one uses and how that shapes one's 'data' (see Ch. 2.0).

While important, such reflection does not necessarily go far enough in thinking about *how* we come to produce knowledge. Within the British Academy one of the key aims of a PhD is to “create new knowledge or theories in [a] specialist area, or build on existing knowledge or theories” (McDonnell, 2011: no page). With this in mind, it is important to reflect on the production of ‘new’ knowledges about people and places, and in the process to “confront rather than blithely sidestep the politics of representation and distancing” (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007: 782). As Qadri Ismail provocatively asks:

[W]hat is this object, Sri Lanka, in the first place? ... Do you know it? Really? How do you know it? Did you hear or see or read about it? Why are you convinced what you heard or read or saw was persuasive? Did it occur to you ... that Sri Lankans and Westerners, for instance, might comprehend it differently? Did you pause, consider, however briefly that *different disciplines might produce it differently?* (Ismail, 2005: xiv-xv, emphasis in original)

Such questions prompt researchers like myself to reflect on the many different ways that we can know the places that we research, how we come to know these places, and how we write about and represent them. Producing knowledge is not a neutral process, but rather produces socio-political relationships, and a connective geography between the places that are researched and the places where knowledge is consumed (see Gidwani, 2008). I have already emphasised that producing knowledge through ethnographic work is about developing intersubjective understandings of the subject between myself and those with whom I conducted research (see Ch. 2.4; also Crang and Cook, 2007). However, in doing this, certain knowledges are made to count, while others are discarded in a distinctly political process. As such, I focus on ‘researching’ as a community of practice in order to tease out some of the political and ethical ramifications of producing knowledge in and about Arugam Bay. In doing this, I focus on three key points regarding the ways in which I have come to know, and in turn produce knowledge about, Arugam Bay, Sri Lanka and the tsunami.

Firstly, I encountered the place through my research aims and questions, resulting in the fetishisation of certain topics, in particular the tsunami. In doing a project about a community and the tsunami, it comes as no surprise that the tsunami dominated my experience of the place. When walking around the area, I would deliberately be on the lookout for signs of the tsunami. When involved in conversations, my ears would prick up every time the tsunami was mentioned, often resulting in me extending conversations, and pushing for further

details. This was an extremely dominant feature in my everyday life in the area, especially compared to other visitors. As I wrote in my field diary towards the end of my fieldwork “I have been thinking about this disaster WAY more than is healthy!” When conducting research into the everyday, it was important to remember that the tsunami, despite being my ‘entry point’ into the place, intersects with other issues (Hastrup, 2011: 7). So in Arugam Bay, while the tsunami plays a significant role in the production of everyday life, it is entangled within concerns such as gender relations, ethnic tension and the civil war, processes of tourism development and globalisation, aid, class systems, local and state authority, religious practices, and postcolonialism. Thus, as Hastrup reminds us, we should seek to avoid “formulaic interpretations” (2011: 7; see also Sen, 2005: 31) of culture and society, as we risk decontextualizing the case study. So the people of Arugam Bay are not simply ‘Sri Lankan’ or ‘Sinhala/Tamil/Muslim/expat’ or even ‘disaster victims’ but rather are part of a specific local reality of which the tsunami is a part. It is a significant challenge for the ‘researcher’s gaze’ to avoid constituting the object of research, focusing in on it and augmenting its significance in the everyday life of the ethnographer. A focus on ‘communities of practice’ is an attempt to counter this.

Secondly, and linked to this point, I encountered the place in a very particular way, viewing it through a specific geographical lens. On the one hand my disciplinary background, as a human geographer, informs this knowledge. As Ismail contends above, different disciplines produce knowledge about a place differently. Thus an oceanographer, an anthropologist or someone engaged in tourism studies would all provide differing accounts of Arugam Bay and the tsunami. Being in a discipline often informed by a predominantly EuroAmerican theoretical canon, it is very difficult to move beyond certain taken for granted categories and concepts (see Chakrabarty, 2000; Robinson, 2003). For example, in relation to this research, this could involve thinking of the tsunami as a distinct ‘event’ (Hastrup, 2011), predetermining what constitutes a disaster (Bankoff, 2001) or having universalising ideas about the sea (Jackson, 1995).

My knowledge is not just informed by my academic discipline. As a white, Western, male, I encountered the place with a specific set of embodied knowledges – in that my experience of moving through space will differ, and throughout my life will have been different to someone who does not share these attributes. Within the academy, such varying knowledges can also result in ‘awkward’ encounters between researchers from different nationalities and disciplines (see Jazeel, 2007). There are an infinite amount of socio-cultural ‘markers’ that

inform this embodied knowledge. Consequently, it is my previous experiences that have informed how I approached, and was affected by the place. While it is impossible to avoid this, it is also possible to reflect on how one's position affects how we produce such knowledge. Thinking about this with regards to this research, it is important to reflect on how I came to know 'the field', on my own preconceptions and through my encounters with the tsunami (see Ch. 5.0). As Götz Hoeppe states:

To the ethnographer who sets out to explore people's knowledge, a serious headache seems guaranteed. Too easily she or he may construct a 'knowledge' or a 'knowledge system' that either is an idiosyncratic construct or may not even represent anything meaningful for the natives [sic] themselves (2007: 11).

The ethnographic encounter is a process of communication that is both "highly individualistic" (Hoeppe, 2007: 11) and subject to the difficulties of cross cultural translation (LeFevre, 1999). As well as communicating and translating knowledge, the researcher also 'transports' knowledge. Knowledge is produced from ethnographic encounters in peripheral locations, and transported back to the metropole, in this case 'the academy'. This process transforms knowledge into a "recognizable form within prevailing disciplinary protocols and debates" and invariably profits the researcher (Gidwani, 2008: 236). Gidwani (2008) likens the northern researcher conducting research in the global south to a capitalist entrepreneur, whose exploitation of ethnographic subjects is not necessarily the result of a lack of ethical conviction, but rather the constraining architecture of the global academy and the ongoing commodification of knowledge production. Such a process was uncomfortably highlighted to me by a fisherman in Arugam Bay, as described in the passage below.

Thirdly, my gaze as a researcher shaped people's lives and affected the ongoing realities of the place. As such, my interest in the tsunami meant that through interacting with me, participants were coerced into engaging with the tsunami. In very real ways, my research kept (and continues to keep) people's memories of the tsunami alive, when perhaps they might have dealt with them differently had I not been there. In short, I produce an experience of the tsunami (see Ch. 5.2). My research does not preclude the place, but rather is an active part of producing the place, along with other 'experts'. To be clear, the 'community of practice' of research consists not only of myself and those I conducted research with, but also the preceding 'waves' of humanitarian aid experts and researchers who arrived in the aftermath

of the tsunami (Korf, 2010). Humanitarian aid following the tsunami produced a certain set of knowledges about the tsunami affected coast and the people that live there. For example, in many cases those affected by the tsunami are positioned as ‘disaster victims’, lacking agency or the ability to help themselves. Indeed, tsunami aid has been critiqued for being symbolic of ‘the West’ dominating the so-called ‘developing world’ (Korf, 2007; Korf et al. 2010). Such relationships manifest themselves ‘on the ground’, and perpetuate the relationship between a giver and receiver, in which the receiver becomes indebted, and as such subordinate (see Korf, 2007; also Barnett and Land, 2007). In Arugam Bay there were a number of instances where such a relationship had been internalised. Numerous tourists recounted times where they had been asked for money by locals who claimed to have lost property and possessions in the tsunami. Regarding her research on Sri Lanka’s east coast, Lehman (2013) documented a situation where participants, despite not being asked to, would list off personal losses during her interviews. It is likely this is a product of participants’ previous interactions with (D)NGOs, in which communicating their losses to potential donors was a way of accessing aid.

The tsunami prompted a flurry of researchers to study the disaster, from a variety of disciplines including geography (see Korf, 2010; Wong, 2005). It became something to be researched, and indeed “something to do a PhD on” (Korf, 2010: ii). The combination of research by humanitarian organisations and academic research has provoked warnings of over-research and research fatigue (Brun, 2009; Buranakul et al. 2005; Korf, 2010). As such, this can result in people giving answers that they *think* the researcher wants to hear, or answers that may result in benefits for them (as experienced by Lehman, 2013b). In situations such as this, researching, or rather ‘being researched’, becomes part of everyday life for those living in tsunami affected areas.

These three points direct us to a certain way of knowing Arugam Bay, informed by numerous, overlapping gazes, culminating in the ‘ethnographic’ or ‘researcher’s’ gaze. Much like the tourist gaze, the researcher’s gaze has the ability to discipline and normalise behaviours of people, causing them to conform to what the researcher wants to see or hear. Scholars studying the tsunami are part of the process of negotiating the tsunami itself.

*The sky is overcast and there is a blustery atmosphere in the village. Reports have come in that the tail end of a cyclone in the Indian Ocean is going to sweep into the bay*



*in the next 24 hours. I walk down towards the sea and see a number of fishermen dragging their boats up the beach, and ensuring they are secure in preparation for the anticipated storm. I join the fishermen, some of whom I know, and offer to help them in their task. My motives are not entirely selfless. As well as being part of my participant observation, I am eager to get to know a few more of the fishers a bit better, in the hope that some of them would be willing to be interviewed. At present, this demographic is slightly lacking.*

*I join my friend Praneeth<sup>31</sup>, a fisher himself and also someone who had agreed to help me conduct my research. Along with about a half dozen other fishers we heave several tank boats up the beach, as well as a large catamaran. It is tough work. During a pause in the work, I explain to Praneeth that I'd like to interview some of the fishers, if that was ok. I had already spent quite a lot of time with a few of them, so was confident that I'd get some positive responses.*

*Praneeth approaches one of the fishers, a heavily built man, probably in his late twenties. Speaking in Sinhala, Praneeth explains who I am and asks if he'd be willing to speak with me. He responds angrily, and even with my limited knowledge of the language, I know that things have not been positive. I ask Praneeth what he had said. "He said he doesn't wanna be interviewed. He says why should he, when all you're gonna do is go back to England, write about him and make lots of money."*

*This feels like a bit of a slap in the face. Until now I had been received very positively. Praneeth is feeling uncomfortable and I feel guilty I have put him in this position. The fisher has pointed out the irredeemably extractive nature of my research. Reflecting on this later I try to spin the encounter more positively. Slightly perversely, I start to appreciate that, while unpleasant, it has allowed me to explore some ideas about my presence in the area, about how my presence produces knowledge and influences the everyday realities for those I encounter. I write in my field diary about it, concluding that "every encounter, positive or negative, planned or unplanned, counts towards my knowledge of this place..." However, my presence also produces the place in a certain way. This has come at a cost to the fisherman, who is likely to have come across a number of researchers, both academic and those from NGOs. I realise that despite encountering such people, he is yet to find his position improving, and probably feels*

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<sup>31</sup> Due to his presence in the acknowledgements section, this is his real name.

*used, as an object of research that improves the career prospects of those already well off. This realisation causes me no end of guilt for the remainder of the fieldtrip and beyond.*

Geographers and other scholars have been criticised for ‘anthropologising’ Sri Lanka (Ismail, 2005), translating and transporting knowledge to their advantage (Gidwani, 2008). This process intensified after the tsunami where the swathe of foreign ‘experts’ descended on the country and produced knowledge without acknowledging the host of local knowledges being produced (Brun, 2009). Geographers have the potential to contribute constructively to the aftermath of the tsunami, and ‘natural’ disasters more generally (Brun, 2009; Greenhough et al. 2005). However, when doing this it is important to ask whether it is possible to truly overcome our presupposed knowledges of people and place – to effectively ‘speak for’ subaltern groups whilst avoiding forms of ventriloquism and the subversion of people’s agency? In order to address this I return to the work of Spivak (see Ch. 1.2; 2.1), and other work in geography which questions the responsibility of the researcher and theorist (see e.g. Brun, 2009; Jazeel, 2007; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007; 2010; Noxolo et al. 2008; 2012; Raghuram et al. 2009). Spivak advocates conceptualising responsibility as being ‘answerable’ to, as in completing the transaction of speaker and listener, with responses flowing from both sides (Spivak, 1996). In doing this, it is also important to make discursive room for the ‘other’ to exist, clearing space for non-Western-centric knowledges and voices (see Jazeel, 2013b; Robinson, 2003). A key way I attempt to do this is by including ‘researching’ as a community of practice, and engaging with this practice throughout the thesis. This highlights how anyone producing knowledge about a place cannot be ‘outside’ that place (see Brun, 2009; Ismail, 2005; Jazeel, 2007). Indeed, by focusing on ‘researching’ throughout this thesis I attempt to locate myself within Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka, rather than see myself as ‘outside’. By producing knowledge about Sri Lanka, or indeed Arugam Bay, I become “*responsible to*” (or rather ‘answerable to’) Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay (Brun, 2009: 200).

Thus, throughout this project I acknowledge the situated nature of the knowledge I am producing, and rather than ‘speaking for’ people I am conducting research with, I instead unsettle presupposed knowledges, and explore how I contribute to such knowledges. I once again return to Kapoor’s (2004) manifesto to achieve this (after Spivak): intimately inhabiting and negotiating difference; acknowledging complicity; unlearning one’s privilege as loss;

learning to learn from below; and working without guarantees. This allows the face-to-face ethical encounter that Spivak calls for, rather than an institutionally prescribed narration of Arugam Bay (Kapoor, 2004: 644)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined in depth the concept of ‘communities of practice’ and describes the four knowledge communities I focus on throughout this thesis. Along with the preceding chapter (3.0), it highlights how knowledges of people and place are constructed through discursive representations and practices. Rather than considering representations and practices as discrete and separate, I introduce a theory of practice in which these two are held together, mutually informing one another. Practices in everyday life need to be considered in their specific contexts, and throughout this chapter I emphasise how practices are simultaneously influenced by discursive and embodied knowledges, and in turn, produce knowledges. The term ‘communities of practice’ is used to describe groups of people who are unified through certain activities, producing specific and situated knowledges in the process.

The chapter is framed around four communities of practice: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. These four practices, which feature throughout the remainder of the thesis, emerged from my ethnographic fieldwork as dominant in everyday life in the area. However, these communities of practices are not all-encompassing, and everyday life in Arugam Bay is made up of numerous other communities of practice, many of which I was excluded from. Of particular note is the gendering of practices in the area, with women engaging in the featured communities of practice in very different ways to men, as well as producing multiple other communities of practice. Furthermore, while I have separated out the communities of practice for the purpose of analysis, this does not render them exclusive to one another. Rather, in reality people are members of multiple communities of practice, and as such the communities overlap and merge to (re)produce numerous ways of knowing Arugam Bay, the sea and the tsunami.

As part of the thesis’s postcolonial strategy, the four communities of practice are described in depth, exploring the knowledges they produce, negotiating radical differences and emphasising the contextual specificities of each practice. Indeed, a focus on practice is in itself an attempt to explore the tsunami and everyday life in Arugam Bay on the terms of those currently living there. Rather than focusing on predefined categories, or attempting to

frame Arugam Bay exclusively around the tsunami, this thesis utilises ‘communities of practice’ as a conceptual lens to focus on what people do. In doing this, I explore how people have negotiated the tsunami in their lives, as part of everyday practices. While gaps and partiality are an inevitable product of ethnographic research (see Ch. 2.0), this approach allows for an exploration of the legacies of the tsunami to be, as much as is possible, on the terms of the people who live, work and play in the tsunami affected coast.

In light of this, the four communities of practice run through the remainder of the thesis. This approach highlights the numerous ways that the tsunami has become part of everyday life, emphasising the subjective and personal nature of negotiating such a disaster. By utilising communities of practice as a heuristic device through which to explore the legacies of the tsunami, I also highlight how knowledges are often contested, and as such negotiating the tsunami also involves negotiating relationships of power.

## CHAPTER 5.0

### SPECTACLE, CONSUMPTION AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORIALISING THE TSUNAMI

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*She switched on the heating and sat down to scenes of chaos on the television. “Oh God!!” They looked at each other in horror, as news blared of a tsunami in the Indian Ocean and pictures of raging waters, floating bodies of humans and shattered houses, screaming and wailing bombarding their screens. As they watched the pictures of Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka one after another, the story was unravelling of an earthquake followed by a huge tidal wave that engulfed part of these countries.*

Neluka Silva *Toys Appeal* (Harris and Silva, 2008: 55)

*American movies, English books – remember how they all end?’ Gemini had asked that night. ‘The American or Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That’s it. The camera leaves with him. He looks out the window at Mombasa or Vietnam or Jakarta, someplace he can look through the clouds. The tired hero ... The war, to all purposes, is over...’*

Michael Ondaatje *Anil’s Ghost*.

(in Jeganathan, 2005: no page; see also Hyndman, 2011: 17-18)

A number of people in Arugam Bay reflected with hindsight on the peculiarities of the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Of note were observations that dogs and other animals were uncharacteristically agitated or behaving unusually. However, for the most part, there was little to suggest that anything extra-ordinary was about to happen that morning. The day was a national holiday on account of the full moon, and as well as being significant for Buddhists and Hindus, the area’s Christian population were preparing to celebrate the day following Christmas Day, St Stephen’s or Boxing Day. These important celebrations meant that many of the area’s fishers were not out on their boats that morning, and a number of domestic tourists from nearby were expected to descend on the area later on. As the morning

progressed, a number of eyewitnesses noticed the sea behaving slightly strangely, and shortly after 9am local time the sea retracted completely out of the bay, exposing the sand and reef below. The religious significance of the day meant that many saw this as an auspicious sign, and people rushed down to the bay. One man looked out to the exposed reef and witnessed a golden Buddha, reclining on the exposed rock. Then, the sea rushed back into shore with devastating consequences.

Accounts of how many waves there were vary, emphasising the confusion that occurred during the tsunami. Despite this, it is generally agreed that at least one smaller wave preceded a much larger one. The wave crashing ashore represented a mammoth 'event', etched into the consciousness of people around the world. However, it is important not to conceive of the tsunami as being spatially confined to the Indian Ocean basin, nor temporally bounded to the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Rather, the tsunami was experienced all over the world, mediated through images and representations, and continues to be experienced and encountered in the present in a manifest of ways – through memories, narratives and representations.

As discussed in Chapters 3.0 and 4.0, our experiences of place are mediated through knowledges (see also Massey, 1991; 2005), produced through both discursive representations and communities of practice. In this chapter I interrogate some of these knowledges, demonstrating how they have resulted in the tsunami's continued presence in Arugam Bay. The tsunami has been represented and conceptualised in numerous ways. In this chapter I explore two dominant narratives of the tsunami that emerged in its wake, and were prevalent in my ethnographic encounters. Firstly, the spectacularisation and commodification of the disaster, which has turned the tsunami into a consumable, packaged 'event'. Secondly, the tsunami has been monumentalised by the state, framing it as a 'national disaster', in which imaginations of the nation are restricted to Sinhala-Buddhist narratives. As I argue throughout this chapter, despite not coming from the residents of Arugam Bay, both imaginations of the disaster play out in the area. Both narratives provide an example of how the tsunami is popularly perceived as an event, confined to the past, but in doing this they also keep the traumatic aspects of the disaster alive in the present. On the one hand these narratives are undermined and contested through the practice of everyday life in Arugam Bay. On the other hand, such narratives have influenced and shaped the way the tsunami has been, and continues to be, negotiated by those living on the coast, written into the rhythms of everyday life.

The chapter commences by introducing the concept of ‘the spectacle’, and suggests how the (Western) media spectacularised and commodified the tsunami. In particular I explore how such representations of the tsunami position it as a contained event with a conclusion, as well as how they mask a number of (less spectacular) impacts of the tsunami. The tsunami continues to be experienced in the present in a number of ways as a result of this commodification. For example, I explore the ways in which the tsunami is kept alive through practices of tourism, resulting in both wanted and unwanted tsunami encounters. Due to their privileged socio-economic position, tourists tend to determine the terms on which the tsunami is mentioned, and as such remembered and encountered. Similar power relations are also witnessed within the community of practice I call researching, and in this chapter I interrogate the ways in which my presence as a researcher has resulted in people having to negotiate the tsunami.

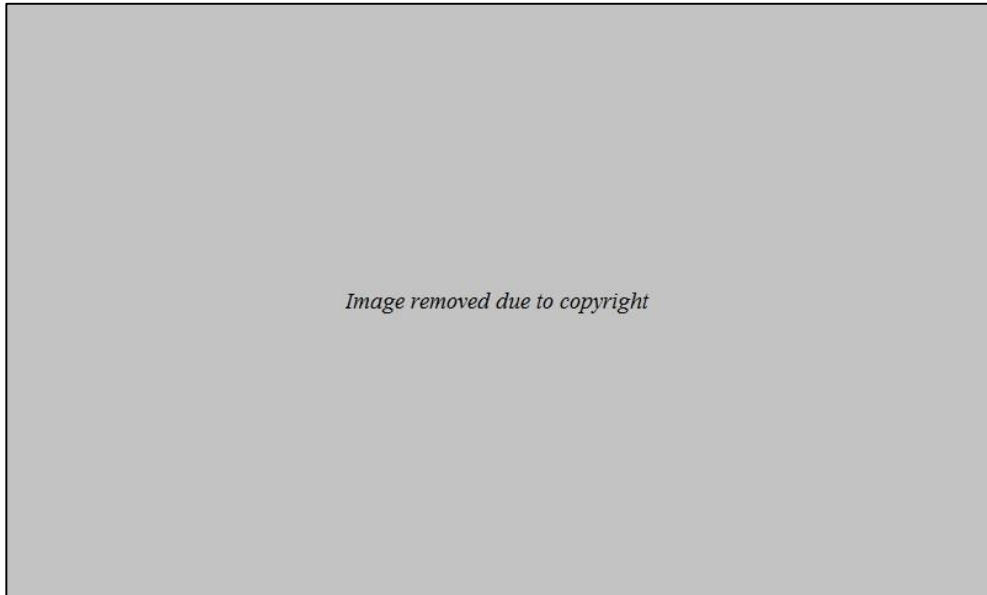
Finally, this chapter explores how the memorials and the practice of memorialisation has been contested in Arugam Bay. In particular I place emphasis on situating the politics of memorialisation within issues of ethno-nationalism and other national political issues. This stresses the importance of acknowledging that disasters do not occur in a socio-political vacuum. However, I also emphasise that one’s physical position has an important influence on the politics of memorialisation, specifically whether one physically experienced the waves, or whether one’s experience of the tsunami was through mediated representations.

The chapter concludes by arguing that in order to understand the impact of the tsunami on people’s lives, the disaster needs to be considered as ongoing, unfinished and an important (but not definitive) factor in the continued production of place. This is a product of dominant discursive imaginations and representations, which intersect with everyday practices in people’s lives.

## **5.1 The spectacularisation and commodification of the tsunami**

### *5.1.1 The ‘Society of the Spectacle’*

The tsunami was not experienced solely by those physically caught in the waves, but rather people witnessed it around the world, mediated through (re)presentations by various media outlets. This has led the tsunami to be described as a “global media spectacle” (Kellner, 2008: 17). ‘Spectacle’ and the transformation of the world into a picture or representation is one of



**Figure 5.i** Imagery of the spectacular wave. BBC News 24. 26/12/04. *Source:*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRZG3OWMHtE>

the key aspects of Western modernity (Perera, 2010). This is significant with regards to the tsunami as its sheer scale and physical materiality rendered it a very visible disaster (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008) and thus particularly susceptible to this spectacularisation. Spectacle, a display or performance that is “visually striking” (Mikula, 2008: 189), produces “spectators who are distinct from participants. But these spectators are not necessarily detached” (Weisenfeld, 2012: 83). As such, this mediation extends experiences of the tsunami beyond the spatial confines of the physical wave, and out around the world. For those who did not experience the tsunami first hand, spectacular images of the waves crashing onto the shores of the Indian Ocean basin became the predominant (visual) interaction that they had with the tsunami (Figure 5.i).

Images such as Figure 5.i are not simply reflections of the world, but rather part of a distinct process of spectacularisation. Disasters are represented to spectators, permeated by the logic of spectacle and entertainment (Gotham, 2007). The work of Guy Debord (1977) provides some useful insights into spectacle and everyday life. According to Debord, the spectacularisation of the world represents a new socio-economic stage of late capitalism. We now live in a society dominated by images, in which advertising, television, entertainment, mass media and other cultural industries are ever more defining and shaping everyday life. This serves to conceal the alienation and fetishisation resulting from processes of global



capitalism and represents ‘separation perfected’, where people not only are isolated from the means of production of commodities, but also from the representation of their own lives (Debord, 1977; see also Gotham, 2007).

Spectacular images are not merely representations of the material world, but an intrinsic part of those material realities. Thus, the spectacle provides the means for how we come to know places, people and things. As Debord states, the spectacle is not simply “a collection of images but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (1977; thesis 4). Researchers have exposed how such mediation does not just occur between different people, but also between people and the environment (Igoe, 2010) and people and disasters (Gotham, 2007). As such, this can be extended to the mediated relationship between people and the tsunami. The boundaries between the material world and the spectacularised world of representations are distinctly blurry, as “[lived] reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness” (Debord, 1977: thesis 8). As such it is important not to conceive of representations and the material world as separate, but rather that they inform one another. Such a process has been witnessed in ‘wilderness’ areas (see Igoe, 2010), and in sites of tourism (see Urry, 1990; West and Carrier, 2004), in which places change and conform to correspond to discursive representations of them in an ongoing hermeneutical cycle.

This process of representation and spectacularisation is not neutral, but the product of the relentless pursuit of corporate profit “as ruled by the dictates of capitalist competition, commodification and the rationalisation of production and consumption” (Gotham, 2007: 82). In the modern age of capitalism, spectacularisation is part of the process of commodification. That is to say that spectacles are consumed as commodities themselves, as well as being used to sell commodities. In both instances, the result is an expanding commodification of everyday life, as the spectacle commodifies previously uncolonised aspects of life – for example disasters such as the tsunami, Hurricane Katrina (Gotham, 2007), or the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and so-called ‘war on terror’ (RETORT, 2005).

Debord’s work provides a useful departure point to explore representations and negotiations of the tsunami. However I wish to move beyond the notion that the spectacle is universal and all encompassing. Indeed, as I articulate in Ch. 3.0, when thinking about the sea, geographers have been at pains to acknowledge that it has a “lively and energetic materiality *of its own*” (Lambert et al. 2006: 482, emphasis added; see also e.g. Bear, 2013; Peters, 2012; Steinberg,

2013). The sea and other more-than-human actors have an agency that exists beyond social construction (see Lehman 2013), and thus beyond spectacularisation. Furthermore, whereas Debord sees the spectacle as all-powerful and monolithic, it is important to remember that discursive representations are open to contestation and contradiction, for example at contested memorial sites (e.g. Legg, 2005a). This is particularly true with the emergence of ‘new media’ on the internet, which produces a world of “infinite possibilities and risks” (Igoe, 2010: 378; see also Bauman 2000). Indeed, people are not as passive or as lacking in agency as Debord makes out.

Furthermore, not all spectacles occur within the realm of capitalism or in the pursuit of profit. Nevertheless, in order to understand the “powers and vulnerabilities of the capitalist state” (RETORT, 2005: 17) we need to take ‘the spectacle’ seriously “as a term of political explanation without turning it into the key to all mysteries” (RETORT; in Jeffrey et al. 2008: 534). In short, the concept needs to be desacralised, applied contextually and used to engage with specific problematics relating to class, race and gender to give three examples (Kellner, 2008). I therefore utilise the term ‘spectacle’ in a ‘Debordian’ sense, but rather than using it to understand a universalising stage of global capitalist society, I focus on the outcomes of specific representations relating to the tsunami.

### *5.1.2 Representing the tsunami as spectacle*

As articulated above, the tsunami was experienced by people physically ‘distant’ from the waves, and significantly the majority of tourists I spoke to in Arugam Bay stated they first encountered the tsunami through watching it on the news, on televisions in their home countries. As a member of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) stated close to the time: “Destruction came to the sitting room” (cited in Hyndman, 2009c: 30). Representations of disasters, particularly in the media, “are a vivid reminder of the constructed nature of disaster imagery, whose producers have a vested interest in spectacle and aesthetic impact while providing visible evidence of the event” (Weisenfeld, 2012: 83). News media outlets are important actors in disaster situations, relaying information to the public, nevertheless they still exploit “the affective, sensational aspects of major disasters for profit” (Weisenfeld, 2012: 85). This has an effect on which disasters get reported on, as Rob Nixon argues:

Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disasters possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page turning power ... [in] an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need. (Nixon, 2011: 3)

Whereas Nixon juxtaposes such disasters as ‘fast violence’ with the ‘slow violence’ of other disasters, such as climate change or toxic build ups, I contend that such a situation also masks the long term, ‘unspectacular’ effects of the tsunami. Thus, media outlets reporting on the tsunami, reliant on viewing figures, newspaper sales and (less so in 2004, but increasingly today) website hits, had to report on the tsunami in a way that would capture their audience. As competition between media outlets intensifies, reporting becomes increasingly sensationalised (Kellner, 2003; 2008).

Consequently, market forces determine what the media report on, as they conform to the wishes of the consumer. Spectating the tsunami, and other disasters, represents a form of sensory entertainment for those watching:

...spectacular disaster images, in all their titillating and frightening aspects, seek to tap into the viewer’s desire for emotional authenticity as a means of experiencing the sensory aspects of the disaster. They actively engage the sensorium to stimulate the embodied experience (Weisenfeld, 2012: 86).

Thus, through experiencing the tsunami through TV screens, in addition to images found in newspapers, the tsunami is represented to the ‘distant’ viewer as a spectacle. Indeed, it is precisely because of the visuality of the tsunami, and the fact that people, largely tourists, captured the waves on film, that it was considered ‘newsworthy’ (Keys et al. 2006). Seeing such images on news based media encourages the belief that it is ‘accurate’ and a true representation due to such media having a certain authority, playing a central role in “shaping public perceptions of issues and the social construction of events” (Ashlin and Ladle, 2007: 331).

Disasters are a key part of the contemporary (Western) entertainment industry (Keane, 2006). However, in order for them to remain entertaining it is important that experiences of disasters are sufficiently detached. If the viewer is too close to the disaster, physically, culturally or emotionally, then the disaster becomes traumatic. Disasters are only entertaining if the viewer has “a sense of safety and distance from physical harm” (Weisenfeld, 2012: 93). This sense

of safety is produced in a number of ways, largely due to its enframing on TV screens and in photographs (Perera, 2010). People gain a form of mastery over the tsunami as they gain knowledge about it, (see below). Furthermore, the ‘othering’ of the disaster in the (Western) media transforms the plight of ‘people of colour’ into entertainment (Ortega, 2009; see also Skelton, 2006).

The transformation of the tsunami into a form of spectacularised entertainment (albeit a shocking and horrific form) leads to the blurring of the boundaries between reality and representation (Debord, 1977). Indeed, a number of tourists referred to watching the tsunami as being like something they would watch in the cinema:

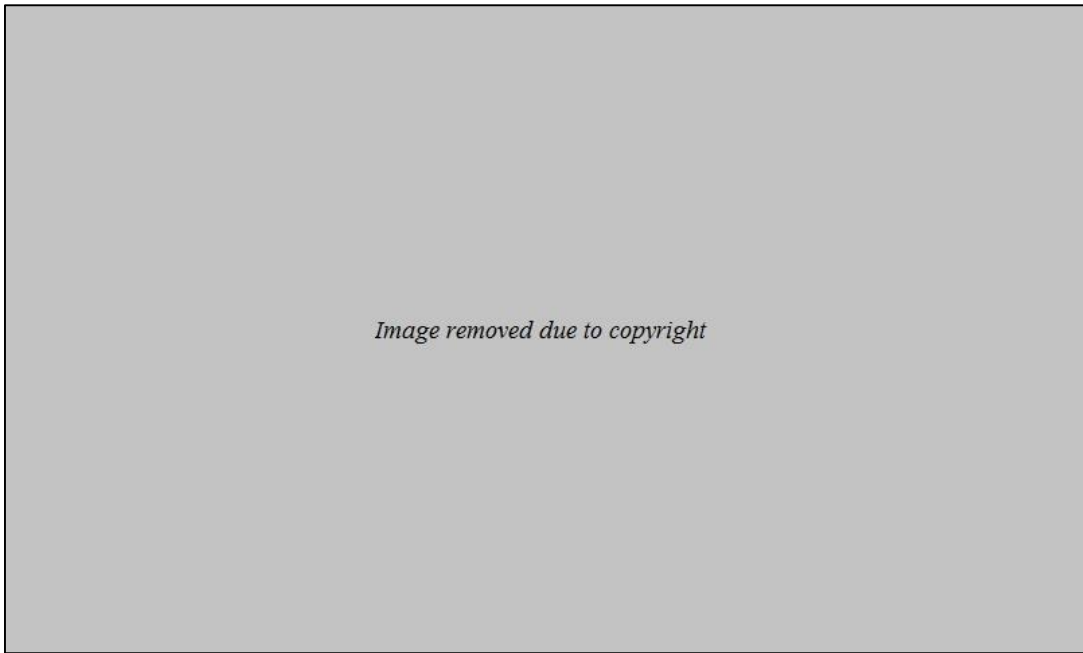
*I remember I was in England and turning on the tele ... I was like ‘fucking hell’ ... it was like watching a movie. (Steve, PT028)*

*I can’t remember much about it really other than it didn’t seem real... like you see all these things on TV or in films... it’s hard to believe it’s really happening. (Sam, PT052)*

As well as spectacularised news coverage, the tsunami has indeed been further transformed into a commodified spectacle by featuring in several recent Hollywood movies, such as *The Impossible* (Bayona, 2012) and *Hereafter* (Eastwood, 2010). Indeed, *The Impossible* was released during my time in Arugam Bay, and tourists brought it up regularly when I was explaining my research to them. Disaster movies require an element of spectacle in order for them to be considered entertaining. In short, they require “key disaster sequences ... the cinema of spectacle” (Keane, 2006: 4). In the case of *The Impossible*, there are awe-inducing scenes of the waves crashing ashore (Figure 5.ii), with life-threatening consequences for the film’s mostly white, wealthy protagonists (Cox, 2013; von Tunzelmann, 2013). Such scenes are an example of typical disaster sequences, the “cosmetic... thrill seeking” that are central to such movies (Keane, 2006: 5).

Critiques of the racialisation of these disaster movies are not intended to deny the trauma or suffering of those groups portrayed in the film (namely wealthy, white, Western tourists). It is also important to note that a significant number of people from around the world, including those in ‘the West’, had friends and family caught in the tsunami, and the trauma experienced by them as they watched these representations of the waves should not be forgotten.

However, it is important to interrogate the role that the spectacular content in such films and



**Figure 5.ii** ‘Spectacular entertainment’. Scene from *The Impossible* (Bayona, 2012).

Source: [http://news.bbcimg.co.uk/media/images/64884000/jpg/\\_64884236\\_64884235.jpg](http://news.bbcimg.co.uk/media/images/64884000/jpg/_64884236_64884235.jpg)

media play in (re)constructing imaginations and experiences of the tsunami, and what this means for the everyday lives of the residents of Arugam Bay. Indeed, in contrast to denying the suffering of those affected by the tsunami, I contend that such representations are a key way in which the tsunami continues to be experienced, and thus suffered, in the present.

As I explore further in 5.2 and in Ch. 7.0, negotiating the tsunami is an ongoing and unfinished process. However, films such as *The Impossible* or the rolling news coverage of Western media outlets which transform the tsunami into an enframed spectacle, (re)produce it as contained, something with a conclusion. This is achieved in two key ways. Firstly, the tsunami is given a narrative with a finale. For example, in the film *The Impossible*, the protagonists all survive the tsunami. In the concluding scene the characters are on a plane, leaving the tsunami destruction behind them. The film does not deal with the ongoing trauma, the nightmares, fear and suffering experienced by tsunami survivors, but rather only with the spectacular aspects of the disaster. As such, the narrative resolution gives the impression that their tsunami experience is ‘over’, a sentiment echoed in the opening quote from Michael Ondaatji (see above). This is typical of disaster movies, where protagonists are expected to be in perilous situations, attempt to survive a crisis, and give the viewer the thrill of not knowing who will live or die (Keane, 2006). In this genre of film, the emphasis is not on the long term, ongoing effects of an event, but of the spectacle of ‘the event’ itself.

Secondly, the viewer is able to stop being a spectator of the spectacle once the film text reaches its narrative conclusion. Whereas for the people of Arugam Bay the tsunami remains an ongoing material reality, remote spectatorship finishes once the newscaster moves onto the next item, the TV is turned off, the newspaper folded up, or one steps out of the cinema. Of course the images' affective properties may extend beyond the experience of watching the tsunami unfold (particularly for those who lost loved ones), but once the spectator has finished viewing representations of the tsunami, they move on to dealing with a different set of spectacles, representations or materialities in their everyday lives. In writing the tsunami as a narrative event with a conclusion, the disaster is bounded, packaged and manageable for those consuming these representations.

The role of the media has been similarly critiqued by Das and Kleinman (2001) who argue that it complicates people's negotiations of disaster:

Not only do the media pay scant attention to long-term and "little" consequences of violence, they are also positioned to demand a sentimental view that privileges miraculous exceptions, hopeful endings, and a clarity of pronouncements. The global media, suspicious of too much local detail that may overwhelm the viewer, have created a viewing stance in which the consumers of news and documentaries<sup>32</sup> are suspicious of mixed messages, paradoxes, and *unfinished stories*. (Das and Kleinman, 2001: 26, emphasis added)

Thus, the global media, beholden to the consumption patterns of consumers, is bound to represent the tsunami in very specific ways, informed by the logic of spectacle and narrative. These spectacular representations of the tsunami flatten the specificity of suffering, reducing impacts of the disaster to those which are visually striking. This masks the multiple other ways in which the tsunami was, and is, experienced and endured by the people of Arugam Bay in particular more subtle and longer term impacts. While the sheer scale of the tsunami meant that there was a popular perception that the tsunami was suffered evenly (Jirasinghe, 2011), there has been important research that has shown that the tsunami and its aftermath has been asymmetrically experienced along gendered (e.g. de Mel and Ruwanpura, 2006;

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<sup>32</sup> I would add to this: consumers of 'Hollywood movies.'

Hyndman, 2008; Ruwanpura, 2008), ethnicised (e.g. Brun and Lund, 2008; Hasbullah and Korf, 2009) and socio-economic (Keys et al. 2006) lines.

This spectacularisation also masks the ‘unspectacular’ impacts of the waves. Much of the relief effort was based around very ‘visual’ projects, largely surrounding (re)construction in the areas that had the most “visible destruction” (Stirrat, 2006: 12; see also Ch. 6.0). Indeed, tsunami impact is often measured in ‘lives lost’ (with different priorities given to different lives, see Olds et al. 2006), ‘houses/businesses destroyed’ and ‘financial cost’. Humanitarian assistance contributed to this spectacle, as aid agencies in competition with each other for donations focused on (re)producing images of the visually striking work they were undertaking. Less visible impacts cannot be encapsulated as easily in photographs, thus cannot be as easily represented to potential donors (Stirrat, 2006; see also Ch. 6.0). Impacts such as post-traumatic stress, alcoholism and violence against women are consequently hidden from view in many representations of the tsunami, as well as many NGOs’ work, despite their prevalence in Arugam Bay, and other parts of Sri Lanka (see Fisher, 2010; Lommen et al. 2009; Neuner et al. 2006).

As argued, in much of the global mass media, the tsunami is narratively conceptualised as an event with a conclusion. This assumption is further augmented through the focus on ‘the visual’. Issues such as post-traumatic stress or a fear of the ocean are effects of the disaster that have a longevity to them; they continue long after the waves have receded and the rubble cleared. However, as the spectacularisation of the tsunami focuses on the strikingly visual aspects of the disaster once the wave has receded and the clean-up and (re)construction process is underway, it is easy to assume that the disaster is ‘over’. Indeed, in Arugam Bay much of the large-scale, visual evidence of the tsunami was cleared relatively quickly, and while it does still reside in the coastscape (see Ch. 7.0), for many visitors there was scant indication that a tsunami had struck (see below). In this sense, the tsunami becomes something consigned to the past, temporally constrained, rather than something that is continually lived in the present, through memories, narratives and encounters (Samuels, 2012).

## 5.2 Consuming the tsunami

### 5.2.1 Knowledge, power and agency of spectating

Spectators of the tsunami gain a certain form of mastery and power over the disaster (Perera, 2010). As mentioned, their distance gives them a sense of safety, with their lives not threatened by the waves. They also have the ability to ‘look away’, and not have to deal with the tsunami if they do not wish to, simply by switching off the TV or closing the newspaper for example. However, through consuming the tsunami as a spectator, the distant viewer gains knowledge from the ‘overview’ that news programmes and other media provide. The spectator has a ‘panoptical magisterial gaze’ (see e.g. Natali, 2006), with the viewer whisked from Sri Lanka to Indonesia to Thailand. Images, often provided from an elevated position, give the spectator surveillance over the disaster. All the while, the viewer is given information as to what has happened, where and why, assisted by the occasional cut away to (Western) experts who explain the science or geopolitical consequences of the tsunami. This is accompanied by a rolling death toll, and images of the suffering of ‘others’. Such knowledge gives the viewer a certain degree of agency. Firstly, as discussed, they are watching the event unfold protected by a screen, and removed from the elements. They do not have to deal with the material effects of the disaster. Secondly, as the viewer acquires information, they are able to make sense of it, and as such make a reasonably informed decision as to how to react. In the case of relatively wealthy viewers, their privileged socio-economic position allows them the power to give aid, decide who gets it and where it goes. This power to make decisions as to who gets aid gives the potential for the “ultimate expression of sovereignty... in the power and capacity to decide who may live and who must die” (Mbembé, 2003: 11).

Suvendrini Perera (2010) highlights how those (Westerners) observing the tsunami from the distance of their televisions are similar to those observing shipwrecks centuries beforehand, acknowledging how the tsunami becomes a ‘sublime spectacle’ (see Ch. 3.0). Associating the tsunami with the sublime is significant, as it produces an imagination in which the distant observer is able to (re)act to the threat of ‘nature’:

The sublime ... underwrites the Western advance through the awe-inducing and terrifying theatre of the natural world that it alone is biologically, mentally, materially equipped to confront and master. In the context of this terrifying theatre of sublime trauma as representational and affective



spectacle, the Western subject is positioned as both spectator and actor, a benevolent interventionist (as colonizer, missionary, aid organization, or volunteer) (Perera, 2010: 37)

As such, through the sublime spectacle of the tsunami, an imagination is produced in which there is a sense of mastery, which in turn justifies interventions in ‘other’ places. This is significant when one considers the numerous aid agencies that descended on Arugam Bay in the aftermath of the waves (see also Ch. 6.0).

Compare this ‘mastery’ of the disaster to some of the accounts of the tsunami recounted to me by people from Arugam Bay, who were not afforded the privilege of such knowledge:

*I was shopping in Pottuvil ... when I come back to town the bridge was breaking away and people told us we can't go this way because the bridge was gone. We don't know what's going on, we don't know what is this tsunami, so try to go this way ... Then people [running inland], we don't know what happening to family, to friends. (Pradeep, PT006)*

*The sea go out. I never seen this so I looking. Then wave coming. I running, running... I can't find my mother or my father, I don't know where they going... (Matthi, PT016)*

*When first wave coming I running with family... I don't know what happening this time. (Hasitha, PT009)*

*I didn't know the word tsunami until three months after. I know that the sea [was] coming, but I don't know what this mean. (Mallee, PT010)*

*After tsunami going we can't find [my sister]. We don't know what happening [to her]. We thinking she dead. (Suvendrini, PT055)*

Along with many other accounts, participants talked about confusion, about not knowing what was happening or where family members were, as highlighted above. Many of these accounts were also followed by descriptions of moving to camps, or staying with relatives in other parts of the island, not knowing when or even whether they would return to Arugam Bay. The people caught up in the tsunami did not have the ability to make informed decisions about their actions. The tsunami and the immediate aftermath were typified by confusion and unknowing, creating a degree of ‘uncertainty’ and unpredictability to people’s lives that they

continue to live with today (see Lehman, 2014). These contrasting accounts of ‘encountering’ the tsunami present very different positions of power and agency.

However, as I argue throughout this thesis, it is important to remember that all knowledge is situated and partial. As contended above, the knowledge gained from spectacular representations only give *the perception* of being totalising and monolithic. Instead, these representations obscure and mask many material realities. Spectators do not have complete control over what they see, nor do they see everything. Indeed, what they are consuming is not ‘reality’, but rather “[t]he real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this factuality real illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation” (1977: thesis 47). However, due to their socio-economic dominance, spectators of the tsunami still influence conditions in Arugam Bay. Spectacle has the power to conceal, but it also blends with material reality too. So with the case of the tsunami, the outpouring of aid, and the specificities of that humanitarian assistance, was informed by spectacular representations. This had a major impact on the material aftermath in Arugam Bay, and demonstrates the way that spectacle and capital come together to (re)produce certain conditions ‘on the ground’ (see also Ch. 6.0).

### 5.2.2. *Tourism and the (re)production of the tsunami*

Knowledges produced through the community of practice of tourism have shaped the way in which the tsunami has been negotiated. Indeed, the tsunami is kept alive in the present in Arugam Bay in part through the practices of tourists in the area. The power of tourism to (re)produce places in accordance with the fantasies of (Western) tourists has been widely documented (see Ch. 4.4). While many of these fantasies are informed by tourism marketing (Echtner and Prasad, 2003), many tourists’ encounters with the coast in Arugam Bay were also mediated through spectacular representations of the tsunami. Spectacle is an important concept within tourism, as spectacularisation is used to sell tourist destinations. The practice of viewing spectacles (be they landscapes, objects or performances) are also a key part of many touristic experiences (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Of course, tourist experiences involve more than simply visual practices (Haldrup and Larsen, 2009), however the visual still remains an important and dominant part of the corporeal tourist experience. Spectacle also features heavily in imagery associated with surfing (Ford and Brown, 2006), which as discussed, dominates tourist practices in Arugam Bay.

The vast majority of tourists I encountered witnessed the tsunami through the media. Numerous tourists I encountered, particularly surfers, had been visiting Arugam Bay for a number of years, and as such there were some visitors who had experienced the area before the tsunami. However, for most, their first visits to the area occurred since the tsunami. Therefore, their first experience of the tsunami and the affected coast was via the spectacular images on TV and in other news media. As such, preconceptions and knowledges of the area, and the impacts of the tsunami, have been shaped by such representations. As time passes, and the number of tourists to the area continues to rise, the proportion of tourists with no direct experience of the area prior to the tsunami is likely to increase.

As I have argued, spectacles, and representations more broadly, are both an intrinsic part of a place's physical reality, but also conceal certain aspects or features of a place. As such, the spectacularisation of the tsunami has served to simultaneously mask the tsunami from tourists but also kept it alive for residents in very real ways. The lack of spectacular evidence of the tsunami in Arugam Bay resulted in many tourists assuming that the tsunami was 'over'. Tourists I spoke to would often express their surprise at the lack of signs of the tsunami and, despite remembering seeing images of the tsunami on TV, some tourists were even unaware that the tsunami had struck Arugam Bay at all:

*I can't see any evidence of it in Arugam Bay. I wouldn't have known there was a tsunami here at all [if I didn't already know] (Hannah, PT024)*

*It's hard to believe it happened here though. You don't see a lot of aftermath, or pictures of it. Like it was so big and crazy, so I thought the beach would be real dirty with all this stuff from the village that got washed up. If I didn't know there was a tsunami here, I wouldn't have guessed it. (Cindy, PT027)*

*I knew [the tsunami] was in Thailand. I didn't realise it was here before I spoke to you though. You can't see it can you? (Alyna, PT032)*

Through the spectacularisation of the tsunami, it becomes reduced to something which is strikingly visual in the imagination of tourists. As such, the lack of strikingly visual, large scale evidence of the tsunami in the area signified the 'conclusion' of the tsunami to many tourists. Indeed, one long term tourist referred to people in the village being "over the tsunami" now that the rubble has been cleared and it has got "a lick of paint" (Jimmy, PT053). Tourism development projects contributed to much of the (re)construction in the

area following the tsunami, and as such this has contributed to the reduction of much of the visually striking evidence of the tsunami, such as rubble and debris (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). Indeed, the tsunami has much more of a presence in the landscape once one leaves heavily touristed areas. Consequently, the ongoing (non-visual) effects of the tsunami are largely concealed from tourists.

However, that is not to say that the tsunami is invisible. Many tourists were interested in the tsunami and having previously encountered the tsunami as a form of mediated entertainment, this interest continues when visiting Arugam Bay. ‘Learning about the tsunami’ has indeed become part of the tourist experience. The tsunami has been written into the tourist landscape, as something to be consumed. For instance, guidebooks on Sri Lanka contain information about the tsunami and feature places where visitors can see evidence of it. For example, in describing a guesthouse in Unawatuna, on the south coast, one guidebook states “As you walk in notice the piece of door on the left. Mrs Perera (the charming owner) clung to this as the tsunami swept through the guesthouse in 2004” (Chare, 2011: 160). On the tourism website *Tripadvisor*, a photo museum near Hikkaduwa dedicated to the tsunami has been awarded the site’s ‘Certificate of Excellence 2014’, an award given to highly rated tourist attractions. Reviewers of the museum promise tourists a ‘moving’, ‘touching’ and ‘emotional’ experience (see *Tripadvisor*, 2014). Once again, the tsunami is consumed through images that provoke an emotional response (see Weisenfeld, 2012), although this time they are positioned in the tsunami affected landscape. Both examples demonstrate that the tsunami has become something of a tourist attraction. Whilst ‘learning about the tsunami’ is often not the principal motivation for visiting the Sri Lankan coast, the disaster has nevertheless become conceived as a noteworthy part of the local history. As such, it is now an event for tourists to ‘discover’ and learn about as part of their holidays in this ‘exotic’ destination<sup>33</sup>.

In light of this, many tourists were very interested in the tsunami and would not only discuss it with me, but also with some of the villagers who experienced the wave first hand. Many residents of Arugam Bay recounted times they had conversed with tourists about the tsunami:

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<sup>33</sup> In this sense, tourist engagements with the tsunami echo many themes found in ‘dark tourism’. Dark tourism is a form of tourism in which tourists visit sites and attractions which have “real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as the main theme” (Stone, 2006: 146). Through such attractions, death and disaster become commodified for tourists to consume (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). In the same way that there is an element of safety from spectating the tsunami from a distance, dark tourism does not make the tourist feel in danger, or contemplate their own mortality as it focuses on the suffering of ‘others’ (see Stone and Sharpley, 2008).

*Some tourists [talk about the tsunami]... If they ask me what happened I am ready for this, but it make me a little sad when they remind me... (Thambi, PT020)*

*Tourists always coming, asking about tsunami time... We don't like this. Why not letting us get on with life? (Suvendrini, PT055)*

*Lot of tourists ask, they want to know about tsunami, about what happen. Some people get really sad about tsunami... [when I tell them about the tsunami] they're like WOW, they never seen... just seen on television, but we've had BIG, huge experience... big experience in my life I guess... (Addam, PT007)*

*All I want is people to forget about this, because it makes them sad. But [tourists] repeat, want us to repeat... It doesn't help me... (Ishan, PT002)*

*A lot of tourist people asking about tsunami, how much we been affected yeah... I don't mind, I think it's a good thing. It shows they care about us. (Daniel, PT022)*

While most of the Arugam Bay residents I spoke with considered tourists talking about the tsunami as something negative, some, like Daniel (PT022), did not mind, or even enjoyed sharing their experiences. However, due to tourists' privileged socio-economic positioning, the power as to whether the tsunami is brought up is largely in the hands of tourists, and out of the hands of Arugam Bay residents. For example I spoke with one restaurateur (Sumendra, PT056) who told me that she felt obliged to talk about the tsunami with people visiting their restaurant, as they were paying money to be there. She said she felt that she had to talk to them, as if she did not they may not speak so highly of their experience at her restaurant, which may cost her future business.

Even without these economic conditions, people may still feel obliged to answer tourists' questions out of politeness. One evening I was sat with a mix of tourists and Arugam Bay residents in a bar. One tourist was interrogating Mallee (PT010) on his tsunami experiences. Questions such as "where were you when the tsunami struck?" and "did you know many people who died?" were asked. Significantly, these inquiries focus on the event of the wave itself, rather than the disaster's ongoing aftermath. While Mallee was clearly uncomfortable talking about this, he did his best to answer the questions. When I asked him why he

answered these questions, he said he did not want to be rude and ignore them. Another participant, Pradeep (PT006), said that when people asked him about the tsunami he only gave short answers. Even if such questions are ignored, the very fact that the tsunami is mentioned serves to produce experiences of the tsunami, in a situation where “words carry fear and pain from the past into the present, woven through everyday events and experiences” (Walker, 2013a: 94; see also Das, 2007). Remembering and encountering the tsunami is therefore taken out of the control of the people who witnessed it first-hand. It is the tourist – the practice of tourism that is to say - that brings up the tsunami, talks about it, (re)produces their own narratives of the event and bring in their own memories and experiences.

### *5.2.3 Research, commodification and disaster*

Encounters with the tsunami are not just (re)produced through touristic practices. Research is also a practice that creates such experiences, maintaining encounters with the tsunami in the present. Furthermore, the representations and knowledges of Arugam Bay (re)produced in this thesis unavoidably enframe the place as one affected by the tsunami. My encounters with Arugam Bay do not occur ‘outside’ the place, but rather are an active part of the constitution of the area, and as such they produce ongoing consequences for those living there (see Ismail, 2005; Jazeel, 2007).

As discussed, the tsunami was a ‘global media event’ that captured the imagination of people around the world, provoking a number of emotional responses. The ‘dramaturgy of feelings’ (see Corbin, 1994) produced by these spectacular images of destruction provoked one of the largest outpourings of aid in human history (Stirrat, 2006). Members of the academy were not unaffected by these images either, and following the tsunami a huge ‘wave’ of researchers descended upon the Indian Ocean coast, including the coast of Sri Lanka (Wong, 2005). Benedikt Korf (2010) identifies three key ways in which this occurred. Firstly, many researchers had previous professional, personal and emotional links to Sri Lanka and tsunami stricken areas. These included both scholars based in the EuroAmerican academy and domestic academics too. Secondly, there were a number of researchers undertaking projects in Sri Lanka, particularly on the coast, who found that their research was fundamentally changed by the cataclysmic impacts of the tsunami on local society and as such research projects changed to incorporate the disaster. Finally, a number of new researchers were attracted to the tsunami “hype”, as new funding became available and the tsunami became

“something to do a PhD on” (Korf, 2010: ii). Linked to this final point, the current structure of funding within the British academy means that certain projects gain funding over others. With the current ‘impact’ agenda attempting to measure influence outside of the academy, projects that relate to issues of importance to the general public have an augmented chance of getting funded (see Rogers et al. 2014). The spectacularisation of the tsunami in the media meant that it became a subject of interest to people, especially with regards to the impact of aid. Furthermore, funding bodies are not neutral, but made up of people with their own situated knowledges. The tsunami is a key example of how emotional responses to events can influence the distribution of funding and as such set research agendas (Brun, 2009).

Researchers flocking to the tsunami affected coastline (myself included), as well as those conducting research at a distance, produce a distinct community of practice in which specific knowledges about the tsunami are (re)produced for academic consumption. Indeed, according to the Web of Knowledge, there have been over 500 academic papers published on the subject of the tsunami in Sri Lanka alone, over 10% of which are within human geography. Using a broader search on Google Scholar, which includes books, book chapters and some unpublished work, over 16,900 results are returned when searching for ‘Sri Lanka + tsunami’. These large numbers, and the sheer number of researchers practicing on the coast of Sri Lanka have led to concerns over ‘research fatigue’ (Buranakul et al. 2006) and serious questions regarding how useful all this research is for those affected (Brun, 2009).

Researchers exploring the tsunami need to acknowledge that their presence keeps people’s experiences of the tsunami alive. This is not simply due to the researchers themselves, but also the broader set up of funding within the academy, and public engagement with the disaster. During my time in Arugam Bay I had several awkward encounters where I felt that talking about the tsunami with people was bringing up unwanted memories. While I made the conscious decision to not mention the tsunami to participants until they had brought it up first, there were some times where I asked some deliberately leading questions in order to get the tsunami into the conversation (see Ch. 2.0). I could not avoid this, as my funding stipulated that my research had to interrogate the tsunami in some way. Much in the same way that the tsunami was written into the tourist landscape, packaged, and became ‘something for tourists to consume’, the tsunami also became part of the international academic research agenda, and ‘something for researchers to consume’. As discussed in Ch. 4.6, research, or rather ‘being researched’ becomes a part of everyday life for the people of Arugam Bay. And just as encountering the tsunami through practices of tourism becomes an

everyday experience, practices of research (re)produce encounters with the tsunami in similar ways.

The outcomes of these encounters are not entirely negative. As mentioned with above, for some people talking about the tsunami with tourists is a positive experience. Similarly, conducting research on traumatic subjects can result in researchers providing therapeutic outlets for participants (see Meth, 2003). Indeed, following interviews, several participants thanked me for taking the time and interest in their lives, stating that the interview was an enjoyable process. As demonstrated above, within tourism encounters people have also found ways of using encounters with the tsunami for their own economic gains. No such gains could be made through research. However there are broader benefits for people to engage with researchers such as myself. For example, Brun (2009) argues that geographers are well positioned to produce critical knowledge (and with regards to the tsunami and its aftermath, there is much to be critical about) which in turn can influence policy. As geographers, we are obliged to “do something about inequality” (Massey, 2004: 10), and research into the issues emanating from the tsunami can productively address this. However, no one in Arugam Bay asked for people to come and do something about the inequality experienced in the area. The decision as to whether researchers, such as myself, came to the area was not made by those living there. Instead it was made by academic funding bodies, the academics who applied for funding, and ethnographic researchers (me), all based in the UK. This is indicative that:

the mainstream hegemonic belief still prevails in geography that it is acceptable, justifiable, even a ‘right’ to undertake research in the Third World, which is perhaps a reflection of geography’s conservative Eurocentric nature and the colonial roots of the discipline (Madge, 1993: in Noxolo, 2009: 56).

While I agree with Brun (2009) that there is great value in producing critical knowledge about the tsunami, and a potential for valuable interventions to be made, it is important to reflect not only on the positionality of the researcher and the power relations that he or she is entangled in, but also the cost of such research. In my case, researching the tsunami has come at a cost to my participants, many of whom have had to encounter and deal with the tsunami in very real ways, and in ways that they would not have done had I not been there.

Research on the tsunami has also (re)produced places, indelibly associating them with the tsunami. For example, according to the Web of Knowledge, of the 242 papers published since



2005 within human geography under the search term ‘Sri Lanka’, nearly a quarter of them explore issues associated with the tsunami. Thus, within recent outputs in human geography, Sri Lanka has become a place unavoidably associated with the tsunami. This emphasises the importance of reflecting on *how* we come to know places, particularly how different disciplines may (re)produce places (and events) differently (see also Ch. 2.1; Ismail, 2005).

The tsunami was my ‘entry point’ into Arugam Bay. Had the tsunami not occurred, I would not have been there. As such, my encounter with the area is unavoidably enframed by the tsunami. Just as the tsunami has been written into the tourist landscape, my writing (re)affirms Arugam Bay as a place affected by the tsunami. However, as I contended in Ch. 4.6, while the tsunami plays an important role in everyday life in Arugam Bay, there is more to life in the area than this, and people should not be simply reduced to ‘disaster victims’ (see also Hastrup, 2011). Nevertheless, in the same way that spectacular representations of the tsunami constitute an important part of everyday reality within Arugam Bay, representations within academia also contribute to the ongoing realities and experiences of people living in Arugam Bay.

In addition to this, knowledge about Arugam Bay and the tsunami is not produced outside of the global system of capitalism. Here I return to Vinay Gidwani’s (2008) conceptualisation of the academic researcher as a capitalist entrepreneur, through whom “knowledge is produced as a commodity within a spatial division of labour that characteristically profits researchers in the metropole” (Gidwani, 2008: 236). With the ongoing neoliberalisation of the EuroAmerican academy, knowledge production is increasingly tied to global capital and market forces (Noxolo, 2009). Research outputs are ever more seen as products to be consumed, as knowledge becomes commodified, packaged and sold, through journal subscription rates, monograph charges and rapidly increasing tuition costs. Researchers, as such, are in competition with one another to produce material, to ‘publish or perish’, as Gidwani states:

Within the northern academy, a researcher’s academic survival depends in large measure on the exchange value of her written product, which – like any commodity – depends for its “realization” on its social use-value to the academic community. It must be “consumed.” If the social use-value is judged slender or if there is over production (too many similar papers in

circulation), then the researcher's product is in a very precise sense, devalued (Gidwani, 2008: 236-237).

While there is a backlash against the marketization of research, and higher education more broadly (see e.g. Collini, 2013; Pickerill, 2008), for the moment research outputs and knowledge production remains at the mercy of the market. This is likely to only augment the issues outlined above, maintaining a continued presence of the tsunami in Arugam Bay and other places affected by the disaster.

### **5.3 The spectacle of tsunami memorials and memorialisation**

*Symbolizing the unity of humankind, this replica of the Bamiyan Buddha statue is erected at Thehwatta, Peraliya, in memory of the original Bamiyan Buddha statue of Afghanistan, a world Heritage Treasure, destroyed by terrorists; and the many Viharas and Dagobas destroyed by the Tsunami of December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004.*

Mahinda Rajapaksa, 2006. Inscription at tsunami memorial, Peraliya.

This chapter has thus far explored the ways in which the tsunami has been kept alive in the present, largely through its commodification and subsequent engagements through communities of practice. Such engagements evoke powerful, and thus evocative, memories of the tsunami and its aftermath. Space is important to memory, providing visual, aural and olfactual moments that remind us of events and objects in our past (Johnson, 2004; Nora, 1989; Wilde, 1999). In turn, space is also shaped through memory, through the performances of people, as well as through the construction of material sites of memory, notably memorials (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008). This section explores how the production of memorials in Sri Lanka is situated within local and national politics. However it also emphasises that contrasting individual experiences and encounters with the tsunami result in a different kind of contested politics of memorialisation.

Memorials are “social objects, products of particular times and places, and open to constant reinterpretation” (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008: 6). They are often the product of a selective memory, one which suits the needs of specific groups, often elites or those in power (Johnson, 2004). Rather than assuming that memorials are made by those affected by the

memorialised 'event', (state funded) memorials have a tendency "to be made *for* people affected by disaster rather than *by* them", as is the case in Sri Lanka (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008: 7, emphasis in original). Large scale memorials, such as the Sri Lankan national tsunami memorial at Peraliya (see below), do not simply express history, but they legitimise it too. The selective nature of these memorials mean that those installing them decide what is memorialised and what is omitted. In addition to this, their scale, cost, central position and apparent permanence can give them a power and authority that affords them a large influence on shaping perceptions of the past, and thus also the future (Harvey, 1979; Azaryahu, 1996). Subaltern groups rarely have the capital, social standing or influence to install such large memorials, and thus they are often excluded from the 'official' heritage landscape that governments and elites seek to impose (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008; Peet, 1996). Due to their size, large scale memorials also have the power of spectacle, with complex events often reduced to a single narrative. Such memorials can also become commodified, and incorporated into the landscape of tourism. Memorials have the power to be therapeutic ways of dealing with trauma, but they can also provide unwanted encounters with memories of past events that those affected may prefer to forget (Legg, 2005b).

### *5.3.1 Nationalism and Memorials*

As well as packaging the tsunami as a commodified spectacle, representations of the tsunami were also bound up in broader discursive imaginations of culture/nature and the sublime (Perera, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 3.0, within many dominant imaginations the sea has been systematically represented as a 'natural' space, associated with awe and wonder, but dangerous and beyond being tamed and controlled (see also Corbin, 1994; Ryan, 2012). Such imaginations are also tied to the spectacularisation of the sea (Steinberg, 1999b), and nature more broadly (Igoe, 2010). The tsunami was shown to be the result of a spectacular 'force of nature', unavoidable and the product of geophysical processes (Perera, 2010). Defining the tsunami as a 'natural disaster' brings in specific ideas about suffering. Such thought has its roots in the Enlightenment, where a distinction is drawn between 'natural' and 'political' disasters, with victims of the former deemed as particularly 'innocent', implying that victims of the latter are in some way complicit in their suffering (see Nieman, 2002; Perera, 2010). This brings in important debates about the naming and definition of disaster (Abbas, 2005; Oliver-Smith, 1999), and helps explain why aid agencies receive so many more donations for

seemingly ‘natural’ disasters (Khiani, 2013). Through spectacularising the tsunami, the focus is on the impact of the waves themselves, rather than interrogating the pre-existing social conditions and inequalities that the tsunami revealed, reinforced and augmented (see Pelling, 2001; Clark, 2007). Thus, precisely because it was spectacularised and framed as a “seemingly non-political, unavoidable [and] aestheticized form of suffering” (Perera, 2010: 42), reactions to the tsunami were able to “remain silent about the inequality and multiple ways of dying inflicted upon us by society and civilization” (Abbas, 2005: 1).

However, geographers have emphasised that disasters do not occur in a socio-political vacuum (Pelling, 2001), and that the tsunami needs to be understood within the context of Sri Lanka’s politics and society (see e.g. Lehman, 2014; Ruwanpura, 2008; 2009). For example, the relationship between the tsunami and Sri Lanka’s ethnicised conflict/civil war has been widely interrogated by social scientists, and particularly within geography (see e.g. Brun and Lund, 2008; de Alwis and Hedman, 2009; de Mel, 2007a; Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Hyndman, 2008; 2009b; Kleinfeld, 2007; Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007; Uyangoda, 2005a; 2005b). As these authors assert, it seemed initially the tsunami unified the country, with tensions between Sri Lanka’s ethnicised groups transcended in the immediate aftermath as people, having shared and survived the trauma of the waves, helped each other regardless of ethnicity, religion or political persuasion (Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Gamburd, 2014). Indeed, one resident noted such a situation in Arugam Bay:

*[During ‘tsunami time’] every religion, they together. Buddhists, Christians, Hindu, everyone. Everyone in one place. [Everyone] giving advice, helping... (Addam, PT007)*

During this time, even the government of Sri Lanka and the leaders of the LTTE initially showed unprecedented levels of cooperation, certainly on a localised scale (Uyangoda, 2005a).

However, this was not to last, and within one year of the tsunami, and less than four years after a ceasefire agreement, Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict had reignited to full scale civil war (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007). Much of this has been attributed to the politicisation of aid, and the perceived inequality in how aid was distributed along ethnic lines in the aftermath (Brun and Lund, 2008; Gamburd, 2014; Hasbullah and Korf, 2009). And, while Arugam Bay had managed to avoid experiencing outright fighting since the 2002 ceasefire, the initial feeling of goodwill soon disappeared, with many people citing the unfair

distribution of aid as a real problem. Addam continued from his initial story of unity in the area, to state:

*[Immediately after there was unity,] more together, but now people are more separate. The religions separated, because of [politics]. (PT007)*

In Arugam Bay, people did not speak to me much on the subject of the ethnicised conflict (see also Ch. 2.0). Part of this could be attributed to the fact that for the past two decades the area avoided the worst of the fighting. Indeed, the area I conducted my research consisted of a mix of Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims, the majority of whom have lived side by side for several generations in relative harmony. However, another reason could be that people did not want to speak to me about the issues that the war raises due to the government's heavy handed approach to dissent, and subsequent fear of persecution that criticism of the government may lead to (Lehman, 2013). Despite its minimal discussion, the shadow of the country's civil war looms large in Arugam Bay, and the area has a heavy military presence. The beach features a Special Task Force (STF) 'lifeguard tower' that is visually prominent on the beach with the military 'lifeguards' carrying machine guns. This represents part of a broader, ongoing militarisation of everyday life in Sri Lanka (see de Mel, 2007b). Regardless of whether the area was subject to fighting during the civil war, the politics, tensions and processes that caused the conflict to pervade everyday life in the area. The area was not the 'bubble' of peace and harmony that a number of expat migrants and long term visitors described it as being during the civil war. On the contrary, it is very much entrenched within national politics. In particular, I heard stories of conflict between both Sinhalese and Tamils with Muslim groups, a tension which still endures in the region today (see Hasbullah and Korf, 2013). On the whole, however, tourists were unaware of this. This demonstrates tourism's ability to fetishise place, masking aspects of the area that tourists would deem unpleasant. This could also explain people's reluctance to talk to me about the civil war, as they would assume that a 'tourist' would not be interested in the subject.

Arugam Bay sits within a broader context, of which issues such as Sinhala nationalism, 'the politics of purification' (Hasbullah and Korf, 2009) and uneven development contribute to the production of everyday life. This is important when one considers how the tsunami is constructed and remembered in Sri Lanka. In particular, the government was keen to emphasise that the tsunami was a 'national disaster', one which transcended the ongoing ethnic conflict. As stressed above, initially it did, however, as time went by this broke down.

That said, this has not stopped government rhetoric turning the tsunami into a ‘Sri Lankan’ disaster, in which the singular ‘Sri Lankan’ is situated within a narrative that prioritises Sinhala-Buddhist imaginations of the nation, rather than Tamil/Hindu/Christian/Muslim and other imaginations of the nation (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008). Such narratives can be found in the official national memorial for the tsunami, a large statue of the Buddha, located in the Sinhala dominated south west (Figure 5.iii). The national tsunami memorial overwhelmingly only speaks to the Buddhist Sinhalese population, as illustrated by the words by Mahinda Rajapaksa on its base (see above). Its size, position (next to the main road from Colombo to Galle), and constant illumination<sup>34</sup> give it a legitimacy and authority that other memorials do not (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008). That is not to say that memorials are universally accepted and official narratives of memory are not challenged and opposed (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008; Legg, 2005a). Indeed, in Sri Lanka the memorialisation of the tsunami was vigorously contested between government and LTTE nationalisms, with different groups attempting to write their own versions of Sri Lanka/Eelam into the memorialisations of the tsunami (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008).

In Arugam Bay, the presence of a central public memorial was conspicuous by its absence. People in Arugam Bay attributed a number of reasons to this. One was that Arugam Bay was too ‘out of the way’ to have a memorial. Unlike the settlements on the south coast, or further north around Batticaloa and Trincomolee, Arugam Bay has a comparatively small population and significantly less thoroughfare. As such, a large memorial would be seen by relatively few people, and so does not represent a good place to build an expensive memorial. One participant compared the wealth of the village of Welligama on the south coast, to Arugam Bay, telling me that its comparative wealth in relation to Arugam Bay meant that Welligama could afford such ‘luxuries’ as memorials.

Another important point to consider is the demographic of the general area. While the community I spent time with were largely Sinhala and Tamil, the wider region has a large Muslim population, who are bound by “religiously sanctioned restrictions on iconic and visual representation”, and thus memorialisation (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008: 12). Some participants did cite this as a contributing factor to there not being a memorial in Arugam Bay.

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<sup>34</sup> At the state’s expense, and thus at a cost to the *whole population* of Sri Lanka.



**Figure 5.iii** National tsunami memorial, Peraliya, Galle District, Southern Province.  
*Photo: Author, 2013*

### 5.3.2 Memorialisation, location and narrative

While ethnicity is an important feature of everyday life, there is more to life in Sri Lanka than conflict framed along ethnicised lines (Ismail, 2005). My explorations of how people negotiate and remember the tsunami have so far been largely framed around people experiencing the waves through mediating, spectacular representations, such as the media, film or ideological memorials. However, there is a big difference between spectating the waves ‘from a distance’, and actually being caught in the waves. This, of course, affects how one remembers and memorialises the tsunami. The fact that many people do not want to remember *the tsunami* is inevitably a contributing factor as to why no physical memorial appears in Arugam Bay, and memorial practices in the area focus on *individuals* lost in the wave (see Ch. 7.0).

Tensions over how the tsunami has been memorialised have been noted at other memorial sites in Sri Lanka, notably the Fernandopulle memorial, on the south west coast (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008). The memorial graphically depicts the moment the tsunami hit an overcrowded train, killing hundreds on board in the process (Figure 5.iv). The memorial not

only masks the government failures to provide safety procedures on what was a grossly overcrowded train (de Alwis, 2009; Simpson and de Alwis, 2008), but scenes such as the graphic depiction of the traumatic moments in the tsunami's aftermath provide unpleasant, and unwanted reminders of the suffering the tsunami caused. While no participants in Arugam Bay cited this memorial specifically as providing unwanted memories, there was an overwhelming consensus that people did not like to think about the tsunami, or picture it in their minds. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Fernandopulle memorial has been largely rejected as a site of memorialisation for the families of the victims of the train disaster (Simpson and de Alwis, 2008).

The two memorials I cite in this chapter are both large scale, state-sponsored monuments to the tsunami. In many ways they embody a certain spectacularisation of the tsunami due to their large scale, prominent positioning on the Galle Road (one of the busiest roads in the country), and very visual content. Indeed, it is significant to note that both memorials have become attractions to tourists, further writing the tsunami into the tourist landscape, and contributing to its commodification. While I visited these memorials, the only people frequenting them were tourists, generally not pausing for reflection or contemplation of the tsunami, but rather to take photographs. I even witnessed one tourist who did not even leave her car, preferring to lean out the window with camera in hand before driving on.

As stressed, the tsunami has not been publically monumentalised in Arugam Bay. However, it has still been memorialised in the area through various practices (see Ch. 7.0). This highlights the different ways in which the tsunami continues to be negotiated, and also how practices within the area were not homogenous. In particular, the way people continue to negotiate the tsunami is directly linked to whether they experienced the physical wave or not. This was illustrated through encounters I had with two Arugam Bay residents. The first was with a bar manager, Dilup (PT054), with whom I would often converse. On the evening of 25<sup>th</sup> December, the eve of its eighth anniversary, conversation turned to the tsunami. Dilup, a Sinhala Buddhist, was out of the country when the tsunami struck. He told me of his shock when he heard about the tsunami on the radio, and then watching the waves crash onto the shore of Sri Lanka on the news. Despite being from the inland Kandy region, Dilup still had a number of friends and family who lived in coastal regions, and he told me of his worry for those he loved. But he also reflected on the broader picture too. He told me he could not





**Figure 5.iv** Tsunami rail disaster memorial, Fernandopulle, Galle District, Southern Provence. *Photo: Author, 2013*

believe this was happening to his country. As the conversation continued he spoke of what would happen on the following day. Having been to memorial events in other parts of the country in previous years, Dilup spoke of the practices he expected to see to commemorate the tsunami: “The people will all come to the beach and there will be lotus flowers floated into the sea. Very beautiful...”

The following day I spent much of the morning on the beach, making sure I was to be there between 9am and 9.30, the time the tsunami struck. While I had not heard any of my friends from Arugam Bay speak of this event, I was nevertheless expecting to see some people on the beach, some symbolisation of the significance of the date. I could not see anything. I walked up and down the length of the beach, past the Buddhist shrine, and failed to see anything that resembled a memorial event. Some fishers were repairing nets, others who had gone out to sea earlier were returning.

I was struck at how ordinary the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2012 was in Arugam Bay. There was no visible sign that this was a noteworthy date. I later discovered that many people

engaged in numerous private practices (see Ch. 7.0), highlighting that this was still a significant date. However, there was no public memorialisation of the tsunami as there were in other parts of the country (Kalubowila, 2012). Furthermore, the two minute's silence which, according to the Sri Lankan media, was meticulously observed in Colombo, passed by Arugam Bay apparently unobserved.

I caught up with Dilup later that day as he spoke with some tourists in his bar. He was clearly upset that to his knowledge nothing had been observed in the village. He stressed that it was “disrespectful to their fellow nationals. To all who died”. His sentiments imply an adherence to the official narrative of how to commemorate the tsunami. Such narratives prevent other forms of memorialisation (and indeed forgetting). As a Buddhist, Dilup's expectation that people would come to the beach to release lotus flowers is significant, as this is a symbolically important practice within this religion. With the wider area dominated by Muslims, and Tamil Christians making up a significant proportion of the non-Islamic population, it is perhaps unsurprising that they did not engage in this practice. Indeed, due to the mixed demographic of Arugam Bay, particularly Ullae, it is to be expected that people did not engage in unified practices of memorialisation.

However, there is more to this than simply reducing differing memorialisation practices to ethnicity and religion. On the 26<sup>th</sup> December I also spoke with my friend Mallee (PT010), who I would later interview in depth. I had hypothesised that perhaps people had not observed the silence in defiance of it being held at 9.30, when the waves struck the Sinhala dominated south coast, rather than earlier when the waves struck the Tamil/Muslim dominated east (de Mel, 2007b). Mallee had another explanation as to why there was no public memorialisation of the tsunami:

*We don't need to remember it. In Colombo they didn't experience it, but we live it every day. Why would I want to remember something that felt like it happened two days ago? (Mallee, PT010)*

Similar sentiments regarding remembering and memorialisation were echoed by other participants in the area, for whom the tsunami is not something that exists as an event in the past, but rather, is an ongoing reality they have to deal with in their everyday lives:

*I thinking about tsunami often... We don't want [a memorial] in village because we don't need to remember this one... Never forgetting. (Janu, PT004)*

*We will never forget that one, the tsunami, we will never forget how this happened, because we see a lot of people die and everything, sometimes we talking with our friends... (Chanaka, PT005)*

*No need [for a memorial]. Remember here [\*taps head]. Remember here [\*taps heart]. (Ashok, PT034)*

While memorials and memorial practices are meant to provide the means for dealing with a traumatic event, they can also keep the past alive in the present. Rather than mourning the tsunami in the past, memorialisation has, for some, negatively invoked it in the present (see Eng and Kazanjian, 2003; Legg, 2005b).

This did not mean that people did not engage in memorial practices. However, people did not engage in practices that focused on remembering the tsunami as an event in the past, nor did they engage in practices in public. Rather, people's memorial practices focused on the individuals, the family and friends that they lost on that day (Ch. 7.0). The tsunami itself, the event that is to say, is not memorialised because, firstly, it was deeply traumatising and not something that people want to remember, and secondly, the tsunami is lived continuously in everyday life. It is not confined to the past, but rather is lived in the present, part of the 'realm of the ordinary' (see also Das, 2007; Hastrup, 2011; Samuels, 2012). To paraphrase Mallee, why is there a need to memorialise something that feels like a recent occurrence? Disasters, in this sense, are not temporally bounded, they do not have easy narrative conclusions. Rather, disasters need to be considered ongoing and an important part of the ongoing production of place. This marks a stark contrast to the narratives of the tsunami articulated at the start of this chapter, where its spectacularisation and commodification result in it being imagined as bounded and concluding.

In light of this, it is an obvious but important point to stress that whether one actually experienced the waves physically or remotely is a central factor in how people have negotiated the tsunami. The physical trauma of being in the waves, the embodied experience of losing control of one's body and the fear of losing one's life adds an additional dimension

to the huge trauma of losing family, friends and social ecosystems. As one participant explained:

*A lot of my family members are scared to live next to the sea because of the tsunami. But me, I didn't really see this, because I was on my way to Hikkaduwa. So I did not see the tsunami water. But my sisters, my mum, my father, my auntie, they were affected. I think for them it's difficult to live next to the beach. Because they feel like there will be another tsunami. And for that I feel sad, because myself I love the ocean. I don't want to leave the ocean. But now my house is top of the hill, so we will not get the tsunami.*  
(Daniel, PT022).

For Daniel, the tsunami was incredibly traumatic. He lost family members and close friends, not to mention the devastation wrought in the familiar spaces of his home, Arugam Bay, the town in which he was a seasonal worker, Hikkaduwa, and his parent's village of Komari. However, he did not experience the waves first hand, which he believes has allowed him to avoid the fear that members of his family have. It is noteworthy that generally participants who were most willing to talk about the tsunami were ones who did not experience the waves first hand, and I heard a number of in depth stories of 'near misses' (for example: gone inland to market, was visiting relatives, was out in deep water). While there were some exceptions, those caught in the waves tended to give shorter answers about the tsunami, and not wanting to be responsible for bringing up traumatic memories more than I already had, I did not push them.

The variety of tsunami experiences that were recounted to me was noticeable, varying from horrific accounts of being taken by the waves, to just escaping from the waves, to watching it on television. It is important to note that one's location during the tsunami was not random. For example, research has shown that women were more likely to have been caught in the waves than men for a number of reasons. One reason was that many women attended markets, usually held on road junctions near the coast. This meant that many women were by the sea when the tsunami struck (de Mel and Ruwanpura, 2006). There were also socially produced skill sets that were highly gendered and favoured men, such as the ability to climb trees, run fast or swim. In addition to this, gendered clothing in Sri Lanka is typically more restrictive for women, and thus inhibited their ability to escape the oncoming wave (Hyndman, 2008). Furthermore, women in Sri Lanka traditionally hold the role of care

givers. This meant that many women had to help young and elderly relatives escape the waves, to the detriment of their own safety (*ibid.*). Thus whether one was caught in the tsunami had a distinctly gendered dimension, and in some parts of Sri Lanka over 80 percent of fatalities were women (Emmanuel; in Hyndman, 2008). As I highlighted in Ch. 4.0, Sri Lankan women are generally excluded from communities of practice that involve interacting with the sea, such as fishing and surfing. Many men I spoke to attributed these practices as key ways they have coped with the trauma of the waves. As such, it is not a coincidence that in my encounters in Arugam Bay, women, excluded from such therapeutic outlets, tended to express more concern of a repeat wave than men. Other necropolitical inequalities during the tsunami included the disproportionate survival rate of tourists, who were able to escape on the upper floors of their sturdily built hotels (Keys et al. 2006), and those frequenting religious buildings, which tended to be well built and on higher ground (Dias et al. 2006).

Debates around the tsunami have (quite rightly) recognised the limitations of producing knowledge about the way people have negotiated the tsunami without acknowledging “the wider political, cultural and social terrain of war, ethno-nationalism and uneven development in Sri Lanka” (Hollenbach and Ruwanpura, 2011: 1300). However, as this section demonstrates, it is important not to reduce everyday life in Sri Lanka to these themes, and acknowledge that there are further factors at play in how people have negotiated the tsunami. On the one hand, engagements with specific communities of practice in the aftermath of the waves have produced specific ways that people have negotiated this (Ch. 4.0; 7.0). But it is important to acknowledge that people did not experience the tsunami universally – some were caught in the waves, others experienced it ‘from afar’, others had near misses. How one negotiates the tsunami is inextricably bound up with one’s physical position when the waves struck. However, one’s socio-cultural position may have influenced the physical position one was in when the tsunami struck, as well as the practices one has engaged in since then.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the multiple ways in which the tsunami has been encountered, remembered and experienced in Arugam Bay. It makes no claims to be a definitive list of all the ways in which the tsunami has been encountered. Indeed, the number of different encounters equals the number of different people who encountered the tsunami; every experience is unique. As one participant stated “Everyone have different tsunami story”

(Uma, PT037). However, it shows how the disaster has been (re)produced through specific knowledges, informed by representations and communities of practice. These knowledges are located within the specific context of Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka, as well as within the processes of global capitalism. A key point from this chapter is to acknowledge that, through knowledges and representations, the tsunami, and disasters more broadly, are not spatially or temporally 'contained'.

The chapter commenced by introducing the concept of 'the spectacle' and how the logic of spectacle and entertainment permeates representation of disaster within the (Western) media. Rather than considering spectacle as a universalising and monolithic force, in this chapter I focus on the outcomes of specific spectacular representations of the tsunami. The majority of tourists stated that they encountered the tsunami through TV. Along with it being the subject of spectacular disaster films, such mediatised representations of the tsunami transform the disaster into a type of entertainment, positioning the tsunami as a consumable spectacle. Importantly, in doing this, the tsunami is framed as a specific 'event', with a narrative conclusion.

Such imaginations reduce perceptions of the tsunami's impacts to the visual, and in the process mask the multiple ways in which the tsunami has been, and continues to be, experienced. It also masks the non-spectacular impacts of the tsunami, such as long term trauma and fear, and promotes the myth that once the visually striking evidence of the tsunami has gone, the event has reached its conclusion. There is a clear distinction to be drawn between the knowledge and power gained from consuming the spectacular representations of the disaster, rather than being caught in the physical wave. However, it is important to note that knowledges gained from such representations are situated and partial.

This chapter has demonstrated how the tsunami continues to be lived in the present through encounters with two communities of practice, tourism and research. Firstly, the tsunami is commodified and written into the landscape of tourism. Having encountered a spectacularised tsunami on the TV, in newspapers, at the cinema, the disaster becomes an object-event of curiosity for tourists, as well as one that occurred in the past. Some residents saw this as positive, although the majority did not appreciate such encounters. Regardless, power as to whether they encounter the tsunami in such a way is largely vested in the hands of tourists.

Secondly, the practice of research produces encounters with the tsunami in similar ways. Due to the tsunami's position as 'something to be researched', my encounters with people in

Arugam Bay brought up the tsunami, and once again took the power of whether to remember the tsunami or not out of people's hands. Furthermore, as has been a trend within geographical research in Sri Lanka, my written representations of Arugam Bay cannot help but reproduce it as a place defined by the tsunami, augmenting the prevalence of the disaster in representations of the area.

This chapter has also addressed the tsunami as an ongoing part of everyday life through the contested practices of memorialisation. Monumental memorials provide visual representations of the past in the present day. They are not reflections of the past, but are bound with ideology, and as such contested. In Sri Lanka exclusionary nationalist politics have caused the memorialisation of the tsunami to be contested. Graphic depictions of the tsunami on memorials have also provoked discontents amongst the affected populations. Furthermore, many people I spoke to rejected the narrative that the tsunami was an *event* that is confined to the past. In Arugam Bay there was no public memorial. There are a number of suggested reasons for this, including its positioning on the east coast and the large Tamil and Muslim populations not sanctioning a state funded memorial. However, memorialisation of *the tsunami* was unnecessary as it is continually lived in the present by those who experienced it first-hand. Rather than being public, practices of memorialisation were generally private and focused on the individuals lost in the disaster, rather than on the disaster itself. This was not the case for Sri Lankan nationals who had not experienced the waves first hand. These negotiations of the tsunami by those living in Arugam Bay demonstrate the ongoing and unfinished nature of the tsunami. This is in stark contrast to the narratives produced by the representations within the media, tourism and research, which all contribute to the tsunami's ongoing presence.

Overall this chapter has interrogated some of the varied, contested narratives and knowledges of the tsunami. It has shown that knowledge of place is produced and reproduced through both discourse and communities of practice. In particular, it has demonstrated how one's position, both socio-cultural and physical, mediates one's encounter with the tsunami. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of placing a disaster within a socio-cultural context, while acknowledging that disasters are not spatially or temporally bounded.

Throughout this chapter, I have alluded to the impacts of the huge aid and relief effort that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the waves. Indeed, it is impossible to separate experiences of the tsunami from experiences of aid, and narratives tend to merge the two. As

such, the relief effort, and subsequent ideological (neoliberal) development in the area have had a significant impact on contemporary everyday life. This will be explored in more depth in the following chapter (6.0). I will then go on to explore how the tsunami pervades everyday life in Arugam Bay, in particular focusing on how people's practices have resulted in ways of negotiating the tsunami. This is not only with regards to specific memorialisation practices, which I have referred to in this chapter, but also the remaking of everyday life, of which the tsunami is necessarily incorporated into (Ch. 7.0).



## CHAPTER 6.0

### **‘BUILDING BACK BETTER’: LEGACIES OF HUMANITARIAN AID AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

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*In a cruel twist of fate, nature has presented Sri Lanka with a unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world class tourism destination.*

Sri Lanka Tourist Board (quoted in Rice, 2005: 11)

In the aftermath of the waves Sri Lanka experienced a huge influx of international NGOs (INGOs). This was the product of an unprecedented outpouring of aid to tsunami affected countries from both public and private sources across the globe, estimated to be at least US\$13.5 billion (Telford and Cosgrave, 2007). Arugam Bay was no exception to this, with dozens of INGOs coming to the area, as well as many philanthropic individuals, all looking to help with the clear-up and reconstruction effort. Indeed, the sheer scale of the humanitarian effort and the amount of material items distributed prompted some residents to refer to the tsunami as the ‘golden tsunami’ or ‘golden wave’ (see also Gamburd, 2014). When discussing the disaster, it was common for narratives of the tsunami to become entangled with stories and accounts of the ‘waves’ of humanitarian and development organisations that rolled into the area. Indeed, many of the people I spoke with about the tsunami recalled not only the geophysical event but also narratives of living in temporary camps, the vast influx of NGOs into the area and the perceived changes this has had on the area. In such imaginations, aid is central to narratives of the tsunami.

In this chapter I explore some of the ways in which aid continues to shape everyday life in the Arugam Bay area. By the time I first visited the area, in June 2012, the majority of international aid agencies had packed up and moved on. During my time in the area I only came across a few active INGOs in the area, all of which were small scale operations.

However, the legacy of the humanitarian effort is still evident in Arugam Bay even if for the most part INGOs are no longer present. I explore some of the different knowledges that the effort produced, and their implications for the remaking of everyday life in Arugam Bay.

As discussed in Ch. 5.0, the spectacular images of the waves rolling onto the coastline of the Indian Ocean basin prompted one of the largest outpourings of aid in history. The distribution of this aid had a number of ramifications, notably its entanglements with the country's ethicised conflict/civil war (see Ch. 5.3.1; Hyndman, 2011). In particular, the influx of humanitarian organisations destabilised the already fragile and fractured relationships between central and regional governments, the LTTE, and existing international humanitarian and developmental organisations working with those affected by conflict (de Alwis and Hedman, 2009). The relationships and challenges between the war and the tsunami have been widely explored by geographers and others researching in Sri Lanka (see e.g. Brun and Lund, 2008; de Alwis and Hedman, 2009; Gamburd, 2014; Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Hyndman, 2009b; 2011; Keenan, 2010; Kuhn, 2010; Ruwanpura, 2009). Of equal importance is how aid and development has infiltrated the everyday lives and practices of those living on the coast.

As mentioned, aid is inextricably tied to narratives of the tsunami, and residents of Arugam Bay were quick to list criticisms of how the humanitarian effort played out in the area. Grievances that people relayed to me included complaints of inappropriate housing, poor building materials, corrupt officials, NGO workers incessant partying and lack of coordination between NGOs resulting in some people receiving disproportionately more aid than others. Many of the complaints highlighted the farcical nature of how aid was delivered. For example, one fisher said he had been given materials to set up a restaurant, despite having no previous restaurateur experience or knowledge of cooking. Additionally, one US based organisation came to Arugam Bay to replant trees along the side of the main road, before the road itself was rebuilt. During the first rains, all the tree saplings were washed away due to the unstable nature of the unsurfaced road. While not all projects were complete failures, the list of issues that people had with the humanitarian effort could go on, and there have indeed been a number of comprehensive, damning assessments on the effectiveness of humanitarian aid in Sri Lanka following the tsunami (see e.g. Cosgrave, 2007; Stirrat, 2006; Telford and Cosgrave, 2007).

Writing on the subject of geographical research in the wake of the tsunami, Benedikt Korf states: "If our conclusion, for the umpteenth time, is that aid has not worked, we should probably abandon the question of whether aid does work or not, and rather ask: *how* does it

work?” (Korf, 2010: v, emphasis in original). As such, rather than simply critiquing aid, this chapter interrogates the influence aid has had on the everyday lives and practices of the people of Arugam Bay in the present.

The chapter commences by exploring how Western media coverage (re)produced those affected by the tsunami as ‘bare life’ (after Korf, 2007), situating those affected by the tsunami as devoid of agency and requiring intervention. This ‘othering’ combined with other factors (see Ch. 5.0) resulted in the outpouring of aid, which gave rise to ‘competitive humanitarianism’ (Stirrat, 2006). The chapter documents how aid donated in this manner is problematic, not only due to inappropriate interventions, but also due to its reinforcement of the dominance of those donating. Furthermore, the continued visual presence of aid in the area produces unwanted memories of the tsunami for residents, maintaining the disaster in the present. In short, aid has the capacity to help, but in many cases, ‘aid wounds’ (de Alwis, 2009; see also Douglas, 2002).

The second section of this chapter rethinks some of the ways in which humanitarian aid has been represented within Sri Lanka, in particular the discourse that aid has ‘othered’ and disempowered its recipients (see e.g. Korf, 2007; Korf et al. 2010). This is achieved in three key ways. Firstly I focus on the heterogeneity of practicing aid following the tsunami, in particular how aid was practiced differently by groups of surfers following the tsunami. Through interrogating different geographical imaginations, in particular the idea of a ‘global surf community’, I argue that it is important to consider not just the practice of giving aid, but also to focus on *how* one gives and receives gifts. Secondly, I focus on the agency of local people in Arugam Bay. The landscape of aid is changing as local people take control of aid projects that were implemented by NGOs, reclaiming ownership of the place. In doing so, aid is being systematically written out of the landscape. Thirdly, residents have also demonstrated agency through their use of the tsunami for their own forms of empowerment, in particular through the manipulation of emotions of visiting tourists to gain gifts. This further unsettles the giver/recipient imagination. All three examples go some way to reveal *how* aid works, and how it is practiced and negotiated, rather than simply evaluating whether aid in Arugam Bay has been a ‘success’ or not.

Finally, this chapter explores some of the socio-economic changes to the practice of everyday life in the wake of the tsunami, exploring how much of the aid work has contributed to a process of rapid tourism development in the area. While this has on some levels led to many

people gaining additional incomes and livelihoods, it has also augmented issues of displacement, conflicts over land and the perception of an increasingly fractured community. Furthermore, it has contributed to the ongoing commodification of everyday life in the area.

The chapter concludes by arguing that, despite some successes, many people living in Arugam Bay have conceptualised aid as part of the tsunami disaster. However, the chapter also places emphasis on the agency of local people and the heterogeneity of how aid is practiced. The chapter further demonstrates how disasters are neither spatially nor temporally bounded. Rather, tsunami aid emphasises the relational connectedness of Arugam Bay to other places, and aid's continued wounding in the present highlights the lack of easy or definitive conclusions to the disaster. As such, the chapter argues that aid has made a significant contribution to the writing of the tsunami into the ordinary, everyday lives of the people living in Arugam Bay.

## **6.1 Giving, receiving and the geographical imagination**

### *6.1.1 'Othering' the tsunami*

The departure point for this chapter is the dominant geographical imaginations that were (re)produced by coverage of the tsunami. As established in Ch. 5.0, the broad media coverage of the tsunami meant that it was experienced in 'real time' by people all over the world. It was a globalised event (see also Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006). Despite this, the tsunami was constructed in sections of the Western media as an 'othered' event, situated within broader discourses of tropicity, development and orientalism. Gregory Bankoff (2001; 2004 see also Hewitt, 1995) traces the conceptualisation of vulnerability to disasters, arguing that it is a continuation of a distinctively 'Western' way of seeing the world. This has resulted in a divided world comprising 'the West' and its 'other', in which "tropicality, development and vulnerability form part of the same essentialising and generalising cultural discourse that degenerates large regions of the world as disease-ridden, poverty-stricken and disaster-prone" (Bankoff, 2001: 19). Combined with imaginations of the tsunami as a sublime, spectacular 'natural disaster' (see Ch. 3.0; 5.0), this produces imaginations of places that are defenceless, vulnerable and typified by misrule, resulting in the justification of Western intervention, be that colonialism, aid or disaster relief, "for *our* and *their* sake" (2001: 20 emphasis in original). Another key intervention is that of conducting research and producing knowledge,

in which researchers from ‘the West’ justify undertaking projects in these ‘dangerous’, ‘othered’ destinations, often ignoring the wealth of knowledge already coming out of these places (see Ch. 4.6 also e.g. Brun, 2009; Jazeel, 2007; Madge, 1993; Noxolo et al. 2012).

Tracy Skelton (2006) has used Bankoff’s ideas to interrogate British media representations of the tsunami. Her analysis of *The Guardian* newspaper’s coverage of the tsunami demonstrates how discourses of vulnerability divide the world into an active ‘us’ located in the global North, and a passive ‘them’ in the global South. A large part of Skelton’s analysis demonstrates how media coverage reasserted the superiority of Western knowledges and expertise. For example many of the articles were framed to portray the tsunami’s impacts as being exacerbated by a lack of ‘scientific’ knowledge, limited deployment of Western technocratic solutions and weak governance, perhaps slightly unfairly due to the unprecedented nature of the tsunami (Skelton, 2006).

Skelton’s analysis also reiterates how coverage of the tsunami divided the world into ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’ (Skelton, 2006). There was a distinct geopolitical imagination of the world, divided into those countries who gave aid, and those who were affected and thus received aid (Figure 6.i). Articles that covered the tsunami almost completely failed to mention what the governments and nationals of the affected countries were doing, reinforcing the notion that designates this part of the world as passive, hapless receivers in need of outside expertise and intervention (Skelton, 2006; see also Korf, 2007). Similar dichotomies of donors/receivers were found in Olofsson’s (2011) analysis of coverage of the tsunami in Swedish newspapers. Furthermore, in the Netherlands it was noted that the Dutch media played a central role in mobilising aid for the tsunami through its framing of the Netherlands as a ‘developed country’ and an ‘aid donor’ as opposed to an ‘aid receiver’ (Mamadouh, 2008).

While the immediate aftermath of the tsunami was characterised by confusion (Ch. 5.0), this does not mean that whole regions were in a state of chaos, immobile and without action. Indeed, the material specificity of tsunamis means that, while the coastline may be devastated, a few hundred metres inland can be completely untouched by the wave (Stirrat, 2006). As such, in Sri Lanka, not only was the government a central actor in the recovery process, other Sri Lankan actors such as the LTTE and Sri Lankan NGOs played an important role (Cosgrave, 2006; Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006; Korf et al. 2010; Walker, 2013a) as well as wealthy Sri Lankan philanthropists donating significant funds to those affected

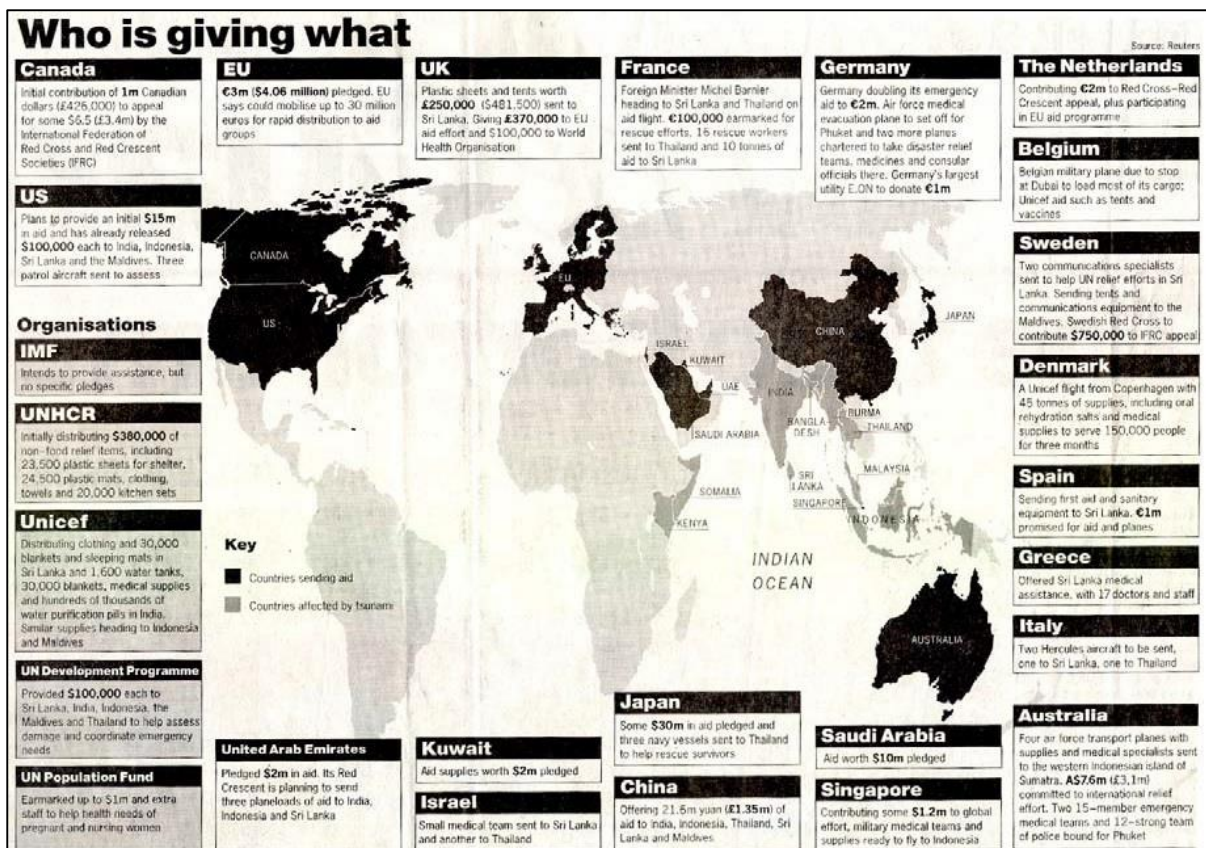


Figure 6.i Dividing the world into givers and receivers. 'Who is giving what?' Source: *The Guardian*, 29/12/04: in Skelton (2006: 18)

(Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). In addition to this, many people I spoke to in Arugam Bay were helped by extended family and friendship networks:

*After tsunami I staying with friends [living inland]. They helping us. (Vinay, PT008)*

*My father's friends, they helping our business after tsunami... [After tsunami, I] live one and a half month in [inland town with my mother's cousin]. (Mallee, PT010)*

*[Not just foreign people] helping. Actually after tsunami, many people help, I don't know. Everybody help. So Sri Lankans help Sri Lankans, and also village help village, brother help brother. This how it work. And it work together actually. Community help each other big time. (Ishan, PT003)*

Such stories were often ignored (see Clark, 2007), and prevailing representations of tsunami affected places reinscribed the 'dangerous geographies' as described by Bankoff (2001),

positioning those affected as being devoid of agency. Of course, to a certain extent those on the beach did have very little of agency in the face of the power of the earth's geophysical forces. We are all at the mercy of processes outside of human control, and as I have acknowledged, the agency and power of more-than-human actors should not be overlooked (see Ch. 3.0; Clark, 2011; Lehman, 2013). This agency, visually captured as a 'sublime spectacle' in media responses to the tsunami (see Ch. 3.0; 5.0; Perera, 2010), contributed to the huge outpouring of aid that followed the tsunami. The sublimity of the tsunami renders people helpless, reducing them to passive, pure victims. As Pradeep Jeganathan comments: "In a tsunami, the victims are pure and blameless as babies. Charity pours in, to save the children" (Jeganathan, 2005: 18).

Tourism, including surf tourism (see below), played an important role in emphasising the connections between people physically distant from the wave, and those caught in the wave. Many of the places affected by the tsunami were popular tourist destinations, including Arugam Bay, and many of those who lost their lives were tourists visiting the Indian Ocean coast on holiday. It has been widely acknowledged that were it not for the deaths of these tourists then the tsunami would not have gained nearly as much media attention (Korf, 2007). The Western media largely prioritised the coverage of 'white deaths' over the 'brown' victims of the tsunami, and as with other disasters, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, placed increased value on the lives and deaths of 'us' over 'them' (see Hyndman, 2007a; 2007b; Olds et al. 2005). In Sweden, for example, the tsunami became conceived as a 'Swedish disaster' occurring in the 'dangerous' space of the Indian Ocean basin, despite Swedes making up a relatively small proportion of the total deaths (Olafsson, 2011). On one hand, the multiple nationalities affected by the tsunami did serve to bring people together (Clark 2005; Clark et al. 2006). However, this idea of 'vanishing distance' has been critiqued for its failure to acknowledge the different ways in which people were affected (Korf, 2006; 2007). Furthermore, the prioritisation of 'white death' serves to augment global divisions about whose deaths are meant to count, exposing a racialized geography of care in the mainstream Western press and wider society (Olds et al. 2005; see also Brauman, 2009; Rose, 2009).

Representations of the tsunami and the plight of those living in this dangerous, 'othered' world produced imaginations of 'pure victims', people reduced to 'bare life', and devoid of agency (see Korf, 2007). Intervention through aid (and following this, development projects) was not only justified, but it was seen as entirely logical. However, in addition to this,

processes of globalisation, notably mass media and mass tourism, meant that the tsunami was a global disaster, and people all over the world were affected by the waves. These two somewhat paradoxical points provoked one of the largest outpourings of aid in history, and aid agencies did not have to try hard to capture the attention of potential donors (Telford and Cosgrave, 2007; Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). This resulted in the unusual situation in which many aid agencies had an excess of funding to spend on the tsunami and a limited amount of time to spend it (Stirrat, 2006).

### *6.1.2 The politics of giving, commodified generosity and competitive humanitarianism*

The numerous examples of generosity experienced after the tsunami should, quite rightly, be celebrated. Indeed, at least temporarily, the geographies of responsibility were reconfigured, as people extended help out to ‘distant others’, or to those they were in conflict with. Such acts of generosity provided us with a brief view of a more “humane, inter-connected world, aware of its emotional interdependence and attuned to the ethical imperative to offer solace to ‘strangers’ in need” (Clark et al. 2006: 249; see also Clark, 2005; 2007). However, it is also important to interrogate the impacts and processes that are involved with giving, particularly across asymmetric relationships of power. Central to this is the notion that humanitarian ‘gifts’ are not just material transfers of aid, but also embodiments of socio-political power and cultural symbolism (Korf et al. 2010). Aid, donated through compassion, empathy and “pure intentions to help”, quickly morphed into a consumption good (Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014: 244; see also Korf, 2006). Following the ideas of Marcel Mauss (2002 [1950]), gift giving is a relationship, in which the giving of a ‘pure gift’ is impossible, because “as soon as a gift is knowingly given as a gift, the subject of generosity is already anticipating a return, taking credit of some sort” (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1072). Extending this from ‘individual to individual’ giving, in broad geopolitical terms this can result in aid coming with certain conditions, such as structural economic change or transparent governance (see below; also Bastian, 2007; Hyndman, 2009a; 2009c; 2011). Played out locally, this has resulted in projects conforming to the ideology of donors, who may have certain culturally situated or nationalist visions of what their donations should generate (Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). It also reinforces certain relationships of dominance and subservience, where gifts given in asymmetrical relations create ‘symbolic domination’ (after Bourdieu, 1990) in which the donor asserts their position of dominance through their



generosity (Hollenbach, 2013; Korf, 2007). The receiver acknowledges such dominance through accepting their gift, and as such reinforces an existing social order (Hattori, 2001; Korf et al. 2010). Such relationships were embodied in the performative ‘hand-over’ ceremonies common in Sri Lanka following the tsunami, with several of these ceremonies occurring in Arugam Bay. These ritual performances, usually between donors and representatives from the recipient community, typically involve visually showing off what the donors have provided, a symbolic handing over of these gifts, and sometimes a celebratory meal, all accompanied by ‘traditional’ music and dance performances throughout the day (Hollenbach, 2013; Hollenbach and Ruwanpura, 2011; Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). Aid, in this context:

...becomes a culturally charged, political commodity. In other words, post-tsunami gifts – seemingly altruistic acts of generosity – became entangled in the economy of charity and reciprocal obligations in the political economy of aid (Korf et al. 2010: S61; see also Bastian, 2005; Korf, 2007).

As was the case in Sri Lanka, the majority of donors and receivers do not directly interact, but rather their relations are mediated through aid agencies (Korf, 2007; Korf et al. 2010). While born out of compassion, donors still seek something in return for their donations, often the feeling of having done something good or the knowledge that their gift (or ‘investment’) has flourished (Korf, 2007). In this sense, aid is commodified, as donors give money and expect something in exchange – the feeling of doing something good, manifested in imagery of ‘their’ gratitude’ (Korf, 2006). Following the tsunami in Sri Lanka, this resulted in the production of visual images of gratitude and ‘effective projects’. Furthermore, aid recipients have to conform to a certain imagination of ‘victim’, and as such are denied the agency to be post-disaster subjects on their own terms. Conceptualised this way, aid is humiliating. Indeed, many people I spoke to placed emphasis on the fact that they *didn’t* receive any help from NGOs, particularly during interviews. However, upon getting to know them personally I discovered that many of those who initially denied receiving aid had in fact received houses, tuk tuks, boats or other donations. While I did not ask people why they had kept this from me, this could be interpreted as an attempt to remove themselves from the systems of patronage, subservience and humiliation that humanitarian gifts signified. Indeed, more broadly in Sri Lanka following the tsunami, losing or giving away more than one received from aid agencies became a signifier of middle-class status, with particularly high status denoted to those who refused aid (Gamburd, 2014: 10). Concealing what one had received

from previous NGOs could also be the result of similar practices used to access further aid. Despite emphasising that I was independent from any NGOs, as a foreigner asking questions about the tsunami it is entirely plausible that I would be conflated with the numerous aid workers that preceded me (see also Lehman, 2013).

In his assessment of the relief effort, Stirrat (2006) cites the need for reassurance that the donor's gift has flourished, or the "commodification of good intentions" (Korf et al. 2010: 60) as the root cause for many of the failures of the humanitarian effort. This resulted in pressure "not only to be effective but to be *seen* to be effective" (Stirrat, 2006: 13: emphasis in original). Therefore, projects had to be highly photogenic, and appear to be dealing with the impacts of the tsunami in a way that (Western) donors recognised as relief. This highlights how aid organisations are generally more accountable to their donors, who they rely on for income, rather than those who they are trying to help. In Arugam Bay a popular way of practicing aid was through the donation of boats, a relatively easy way to provide visible relief (see also Hyndman, 2009c). According to a number of participants, this resulted in a huge surplus of boats, with one fisherman estimating that the number of boats on the beach tripled after the tsunami. Nearly all of the boats came with large charity or overseas development agency logos on them, leaving donors in no doubt that their donation had flourished, invested in something material and tangible (see Figure 6.ii).

Of course fishing boats are an entirely appropriate gift to a community which relies so heavily on fishing, and whose fleet had been almost completely destroyed. This is particularly pertinent as the vast majority of fishers affected by the tsunami were not in a position to simply change profession (see Sarvananthan, 2007). However, the surplus of boats (not to mention the uncoordinated nature of their distribution) not only caused tensions within the area, but also diverted potential funds from less visible, longer term but equally important projects, such as psychiatric therapy. In addition to this, fishers often complained that while the boat they received was good, they struggled to maintain the expensive engines or pay for fuel. Indeed, after the initial donation of a motor boat, charities rarely provided ongoing technical or financial support. Furthermore, the surplus of boats attracted more fishers to the area, increasing the pressure on coastal resources and augmenting the already precarious nature of subsistence fishing (see De Silva and Yamao, 2007). In this sense, the tsunami and subsequent aid effort changed the way fishers practice fishing. Due to the increased number of fishers in the area, they now have to travel further afield in order to maximise their



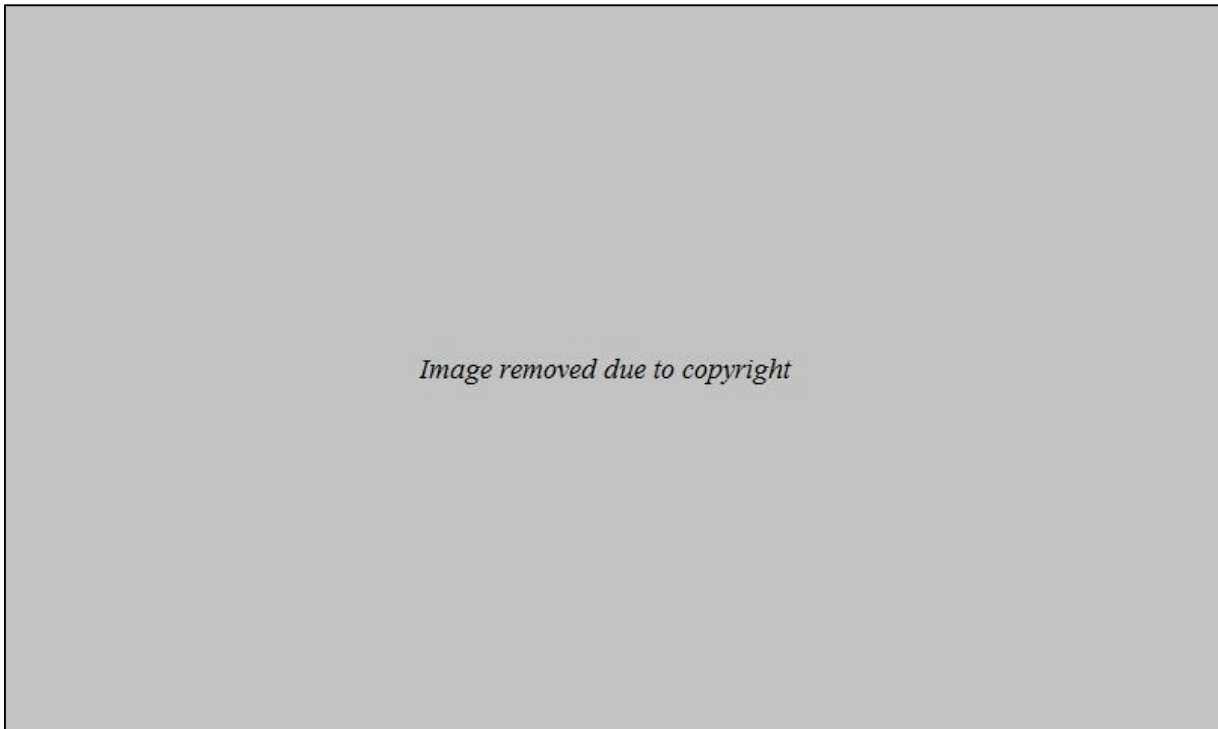
**Figure 6.ii** Donated boat with logo. Beach front, Arugam Bay, 2013. *Source, Author.*

catches, and there is more competition between fishers. New knowledges have had to be produced in the wake of the waves, maintaining the tsunami in the present. As discussed, this community of practice is somewhat fractured along ethnicised lines, with Sinhala and Tamil fishers blaming Muslim fishers for poor catches. Here we see how socio-political issues intersect with the tsunami.

Pressure on INGOs to be seen to be effective resulted in a high degree of competition and lack of coordination between humanitarian organisations (see below). This resulted in the carving out of humanitarian ‘territories’<sup>35</sup>, along the coastal strip affected by the wave, often undermining the work of local NGOs and other actors distributing aid (see also Hasbullah and Korf, 2009; Stirrat, 2006; Walker, 2013b). Such territorialisation materialised through visual assertions of the organisation’s presence, through the erection of signage and logos, all of which was part of the practice of being *seen* to be effective. As such, humanitarian aid is visually written into the landscape, becoming a material feature of the affected places (see

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<sup>35</sup> In this instance I use the term ‘territory’ to describe a space that has been bounded and politicised, controlled by a certain group or body (see Delaney, 2009) in this case INGOs. I acknowledge that such a definition is contested, and the historical and geographical contexts of defining ‘territory’ should be acknowledged (see Antonsich, 2011; Elden, 2010). Unfortunately, there is not space here to do such debates justice.



**Figure 6.iii** 'Competitive humanitarianism'. Aid agencies' signage, Main Street, Arugam Bay, 2006. *Source. arugam.info (2006)*

Figure 6.iii). This competition was so intense that I heard of agencies placing signage on projects they did not even implement. Mike (PT017) spoke of how he raised funds in his home country in Europe, before rebuilding a local pre-school with his Sri Lankan family. After travelling to Europe for a few months, he returned to Arugam Bay to discover that an international aid organisation had placed a sign bearing their logo on the school. It seemed that if one did not take claim for any work done, then someone else would. Similarly, I witnessed wells on which the logos of three humanitarian organisations appeared, all claiming they'd been responsible for cleaning it.

As the debris was cleared, the tsunami remained a feature of the Sri Lankan coast through these signs (see also Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). In Arugam Bay such signs are evident throughout the area and are a consistent feature of the landscape. This is not only achieved through signage and logos on boats, but also by the naming of roads, such as 'World Vision Road' in the south of the village. This not only has the potential to remind people of the subservience and debt they owe benevolent donors, but also serves as a potent reminder of the tsunami itself:

*We also seeing sign on boats, reminding us [of the tsunami]. NGOs, Rotary Club, all helping us, but don't like to see these signs and remember... (Ishan, PT003)*

For Ishan, and others I spoke to, seeing signage from the NGOs was an everyday reminder of the tsunami, and thus prevented him from moving on from the event. This highlights the agency of the material world, and how the tsunami continues to reside in the coastscape (see also Ch. 7.0). Competitive humanitarianism, and the donors' need for recognition continues to wound the population, contributing to the ongoing trauma of the tsunami. Due to this 'second tsunami', the 'first tsunami' remains without conclusion or closure.

This represents another example of the tsunami pervading everyday life due to the commodification of disaster and links to previous debates about spectacularisation. In this instance it is the "commodification of good intentions" (see Korf et al. 2010: 60) that has resulted in the need for visual evidence of 'flourishing donations' throughout Arugam Bay. In a Debordian sense, this is the commodification of previously uncolonised aspects of life (see Ch. 5.1), notably that of generosity and the feeling of having done something good. The signage throughout the area is the spectacular evidence of generosity which is visually consumed, although they have very different meanings for donors and so-called beneficiaries.

## **6.2 Rethinking homogenous practices of giving**

The above account of the practice of humanitarian aid provides a useful departure point for exploring the legacies of aid, notably through aid's potential to 'other' and disempower. As I have explored so far, this has been utilised by a number of geographers to make some useful interventions and critiques of the global aid project. However, as the following section demonstrates, it is important to explore the ways in which aid can be practiced differently in different contexts by various groups of people (see also Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006). As such, I make two interventions in the following three case studies, firstly emphasising the heterogeneity of aid and practices of giving and receiving, and secondly highlighting the agency of those affected by disaster and subsequently receiving aid.

### *6.2.1 Caring at a distance: the global surfing community*

It is important that critiques of aid do not fall into the trap of assuming that aid is practiced homogeneously. As I have argued, local and national actors played an important role in the aftermath of the waves, and aid should not be simply conceived as solely flowing from the global North to the South. While a significant amount of aid was transferred across this geopolitical divide, this does not mean that it was practiced homogeneously. Indeed, the world, and the places that make up the world, are defined by their multiple relationships and connections (Massey, 1991; 2005). As such, Arugam Bay and its population are not simply connected to other places through their positioning in the 'global South', or as economically inferior to 'othered' places located in richer parts of the world. Perhaps most obviously it is defined by the movement and mobility of people (see Sheller and Urry, 2006), with a significant number of migrants from other parts of Sri Lanka, as well as Europe, North America and Australia who call Arugam Bay home. Similarly, a number of people born in Arugam Bay have moved elsewhere in Sri Lanka and further afield, notably to Australia and the Middle East. Thus for a significant number of people not resident to the area, Arugam Bay is a place to which loved ones have moved to, or a place from where one has moved and left loved ones behind. This represents a different geographical imagination to the one described above.

Clark (2005; 2007) argues that while the tsunami destroyed so much, it also produced and reinforced a number of connections and created a kind of 'throwntogetherness' between different people (Clark, 2007: 1128: after Massey, 2005: ch. 13). Thus new connections are forged between groups of people where they may not have existed. For example, in the Netherlands people sympathised with those hit by the tsunami due to links made by the media to their own threat of the sea encroaching national territory, an important constitutive element of the imagined Dutch national identity (Mamadouh, 2008).

The reaction of many surfers in the wake of the tsunami also further undermines imaginations of the tsunami as 'othered' or somehow distanced from donors. Surfers' connections to many of the places affected by the tsunami meant that there was an especially strong reaction to the events of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. As Ford and Brown state:

The tragic events of the December 2004 tsunami have had particular personal resonance for many surfers. It is not so much that surfing's medium of joy has once again been shown to be the carrier of death and destruction, but that

many of the very localities in which the havoc has been wrought contain some of the world's most enchanted surf spots... The surfing community has lost many dear Indonesian and Sri Lankan friends (Ford and Brown, 2006: 177).

This quote emphasises the importance of acknowledging that it was *the sea* that swept ashore, due to surfers building a large part of their identity through their interactions with the ocean (see also Ch. 4.5; also Anderson, 2014b). The very fact that surfers' "medium of joy" became "a carrier of death and destruction" was significant in their understandings and negotiations of the tsunami, and provoked a particularly strong reaction. However, it is also important to acknowledge the connections and friendships built up within the global surf community (see Laderman, 2014: 162). As Scott Laderman states:

If riding waves is ultimately about the pursuit of pleasure, there is something about sharing that experience with others that has created a surprisingly intimate community unbound by national borders (Laderman, 2014: 162-163).

It was noticeable in Arugam Bay that a number of surfers from around the world decided to come to the area in order to help with the recovery, and how multiple surf based charities were set up in the aftermath of the waves. These organisations were still located within a broader geopolitics of aid and uneven relationships of (economic) power. As such, on the one hand this could be interpreted as a reinforcement of the 'donor/recipient' binary, one which places the receivers of this aid as subservient to those giving. However, on the other hand it is necessary to articulate the deeper context and manner in which this help was given. In many instances, it was a case of surfers helping people who they knew, who had shown them hospitality in the past, who they had built up past relationships with. As one Tamil surfer put it:

*Many people from many countries [helped us after the tsunami]... People helping because we are surfing, and [they come] to look for people. They say 'where [is Sanjeev]? I want to see [Sanjeev's] family? Did [Sanjeev] die?' ... We all connect, every tourist surfing and every [Sri Lankan] surfing ... one nation is surfing nation. Because surfers [live a] different life. (Sanjeev, PT019).*

Here we not only see once again an imagination of a global surf community, but we also see how surfers mobilised to help friends – friends made through membership of the same community of practice. Foreign surfers have been personally affected by the tsunami, even if they were not present when the waves struck. As one surfer said on his return to Arugam Bay following the tsunami “It just broke my heart to see all the destruction here... of a place and people I loved” (Jonny, PT013). Similarly, one Australian surfer, writing in the magazine *The Surfers’ Path*, said of the tsunami:

My heart began to race as I thought of my friends in Nias, Simeulue, and most of all mainland Aceh. Since 1995 I’d spent many months up there at a time, and in one particular village counted many local people as my friends (Sparkes, 2005: 57).

And another British surfer quoted in the British surf magazine *Carve* stated:

[I was] in Panama in 2004 watching live CNN footage of tsunami with the places and families I had lived with totally flattened. It was so heavy I was crying (England, 2014).

For these surfers, the tsunami did not wreak havoc in unknown tropical places, killing anonymous people. Rather, the tsunami destroyed something familiar, places they knew and people who they cared deeply about.

The imagination of a ‘global surf community’, in which surfers are unified by their practice (as well as a commodified ‘culture’), creates a ‘trans-local’, or ‘post-nationalist’ surfing identity (Anderson, 2014b; Boyd, in Laderman, 2014). As such, surfers not physically affected by the waves felt a sense of solidarity to those surfers living in tsunami affected areas, with surfers around the world performing memorial acts in the wake of the tsunami, as well as on subsequent anniversaries (Figure 6.iv). Arugam Bay, the south coast of Sri Lanka and Indonesia are well known surf destinations, and even if they had not visited them physically, surfers around the world will have heard their names, seen photos in magazines or watched footage in surf films. Thus, surfers had an emotional attachment and connection to these places, *even if they had never been there*. Speaking with Mike (PT017) who worked for a surf based NGO following the tsunami, he stated “there was a real sense of surfers helping surfers... I’m sure that’s what got us donations”. Similarly, Sanjeev (PT019) stated that following the tsunami, help was given “by surfers, to surfers”.





**Figure 6.iv** Surfers' performing tsunami memorialisation. Cornwall, UK, April 2005.

*Photo: Tony Blunt. <http://www.surfersvillage.com/content/surf-relief-day-surfers-raise-%C2%A310000-tsunami-victims>*

For surfers the binary of 'us' and 'them' is not simply imagined as occurring across a global North/South divide, as described by Skelton (2006) or Olds et al (2005). Of course surfers still operate within a global system characterised by inequality. However, through surfing different geographical imaginations emerge – of a world populated by surfers and non-surfers, of coastal and non-coastal communities. As Chatterjee asserts:

...intuitively, we seem to have stronger obligations to those who are physically or affectively near than to those who are remote. Distance seems to set moral boundaries, and distant strangers are accorded minimal moral concerns" (Chatterjee, 2004: 1-2; in Korf, 2007: 371).

But imaginations of spatial distance are fluid, and subjective. When considering the geographies of care, distance is often equated with 'difference', which produces the 'distant strangers' that Chatterjee describes (Barnett and Land, 2007). However, in order to understand this place-based geography of care, it is necessary to acknowledge how place is conceptualised, and to think of place, care and responsibility relationally (Massey, 2004). As such, Arugam Bay is connected to places around the world, notably to other coastal communities and the homes of surfers, because it is a place where people surf. Place is not 'contained', and as such due to such relationalities, the tsunami striking Arugam Bay (and other surf locales) did not simply wound this place, but the 'global surfing community' as well.

In order to provide appropriate care it is necessary that one is “attentive and responsive to the needs of the other” (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1067). Surfers were well positioned to provide surf based care to other surfers due to an appreciation of what surfers needed to recommence their surf-based lifestyles. This was a common perception in Arugam Bay:

*...you understand [our lifestyle] because you are surfing. Colombo people, they don't understand. They not surfing. They treat us like children (Ishan, PT003).*

*It's universal, I don't think it matters if you are Sri Lankan, French, English. I think you have that sort of feeling we all hold, we are all on the same wavelength. We understand each other. (Benji, PT021)*

Thus surfers donated boards, leashes, wax, rash vests and a number of other surf-based ‘gifts’. Furthermore, they organised swimming lessons for children and competitions for local surfers in Arugam Bay, having engaged in similar practices in their home communities. These competitions not only served to act as a distraction from the tsunami and reengage people with the ocean (see Ch. 4.5; 7.0), but also through distributing aid in the form of ‘prizes’ to all who entered, the ‘gift economy’ was sidestepped to a certain extent. It is also important to note that the majority of surf based practices of tsunami-relief focused on ‘the sea’, rather than a ideological ‘economic development’.

Finally, an assumption in much of the literature on giving aid is that the gift relationship starts with the giving of aid after the tsunami. However, this assumes that there was little interaction between the giver and receivers of aid before the tsunami. While for much of the aid donated this may be the case, but for many surfers this was not. Instead, surfers were already engaged in relationships with the affected locales. As Mike explained to me:

*Oh without a doubt [it's significant that Arugam Bay is a surfing community], because one of the pitches really to raise funds was about surfers, giving something back... surfers travel the world, we go into communities, small poor communities that don't have much, and we enjoy their [waves]. You know, they don't ask us to come and crowd their waves .... So one of things we used was giving back. Surfers giving something back to surfers' communities, or communities that had a good wave, where surfers went. (Mike, PT017)*

Thus in this case, the gift is not purely altruistically, but locked into of a sense of obligation to the communities where foreign surfers visit. The initial ‘gift’ was the sharing of waves, the hospitality shown on previous trips, and the friendships built up through surfing. Donating money, surfboards or other gifts was, as Mike said, ‘giving back’, rather than simply just giving. Aid in this instance is not an attempt at producing a ‘pure gift’, but rather is a form of reciprocation, in an ongoing circuit of mutual exchange, with foreign surfers feeling obliged to give due to receiving previous ‘gifts’ from affected people. This emphasises the importance of noting not just what aid is given, but the circumstances and context in which it is given.

### *6.2.2 Adaptation, agency and writing aid out of the landscape*

Researchers on the tsunami have occasionally been complicit in producing knowledge that denies agency to those affected, portraying them as homogeneously poor and vulnerable. This is particularly apparent in critiques of the political economy of the tsunami and its aftermath. For example, Chris Philo describes those affected by the tsunami as “the poorest fishing communities in the most ramshackle of seaside dwellings” (Philo, 2005: 443), while Keys et al. state that the “hundreds of thousands killed by the tsunami were [the] ‘wretched of the earth’ ... the poorest of the poor...” (Keys et al. 2006: 196). Commentators on ‘disaster capitalism’ (e.g. Klein, 2007; Schuller, 2008) have also been critiqued for the simplistic reduction of those affected to ‘poor victim’ (see Gamburd and McGilvray, 2010; Jeganathan, 2009). While I do not deny that many people living around the Indian Ocean basin face huge challenges in their everyday lives, representing all those affected by the tsunami homogeneously in this way fails to acknowledge the variety of people caught up in the disaster and portrays a whole group of people as powerless and without agency. As described above, obscuring the fact they received aid is an example of how people do not want to appear poor or helpless. In describing people as without agency, commentators are in danger of reinforcing imaginations of ‘pure victims’, and along with it, similar humiliations to those which come with accepting aid (see Korf, 2006; 2007).

Aid agencies operate with certain ideologies informing their practices (see below; also Bastian, 2007; Hyndman, 2011). This can include being cooperative with governments, or working more independently, emphasising advocacy (O’Keefe and Rose, 2014). Delivering aid can also become problematic when agencies divide disasters into ‘natural’ and ‘political’

ones. For example, in Sri Lanka there are many examples of agencies ignoring or overlooking the inextricable entanglements of the tsunami and the civil war in everyday life, particularly in the North East (Walker, 2013a; 2013b). One of the major criticisms of the implementation of projects in Arugam Bay, and Sri Lanka more broadly, has been the lack of coordination between different humanitarian organisations and a lack of communication with the people they were seeking to help (Stirrat, 2006). This resulted in a number of people in Arugam Bay complaining that those coming to help delivered inappropriate aid, which was not sensitive to the local context:

*After tsunami our shop broken, home and everything broken. After, some [NGO] people came to help us, but it doesn't work because [they leaving and] not understanding Sri Lanka way. They doing things different way. (Hasitha, PT009)*

*In my experience, the majority of NGOs they came in with fixed agendas, rather than coming in and being flexible to the community's needs, communicating with the community, and actually spending time to identify individuals, families, groups, what their needs were, what was the best way to approach that, and how to regroup the community, rebuild the community... Several NGOs did come and speak to me to try and assess the community needs. And then they just ignored what I said and did their own thing anyway. (Mike, PT017)*

*NGO doing some good things, helping people. But they doing wrong business too. They only helping the clever people. Many poor people not getting [help]. People not speaking English, not getting from NGO. Then have to go get mafia money... NGO not understanding this village. (Seeya, PT026)*

One issue that people cited was the donation of motor boats, rather than paddle or sail boats. While motorised boats were becoming increasingly popular, many fishers still used older style boats because they could not afford the fuel. Thus, when they were donated motor boats they could not afford to go fishing (see also Ch. 4.3). As one participant stated:

*My boat gone in tsunami. So I getting given motor boat. But, machan, I am poor man. I can't pay for fuel. Borrowing from fishing bosses. This is why I keep so poor (Mamar, PT031).*

As aid agencies attempt to ‘build back better’, a situation has emerged where fishing has become an unsustainable practice for Mamar and others. Rather than assessing what would be an appropriate ‘gift’, and exploring how people practiced fishing, there was a preconceived assumption about what the fishers’ needs were. This provides another example of how fishing as a community of practice has been inextricably changed by tsunami aid.

Such assumptions about people’s needs and lifestyles was also particularly apparent with the reconstruction of housing. This often reflected the ideals of the donors of how they thought people *should* be living, rather than paying attention to the pre-tsunami lifestyles or current needs and desires of those receiving the houses (see e.g. Boano, 2009; Brun and Lund, 2008; Hollenbach and Ruwanpura, 2011; Ruwanpura, 2009; Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). This resulted in a number of problems with new houses. However, this does not mean that those receiving houses passively accept these issues. Rather, these houses are adapted into everyday practices and their intended uses are often transformed as they are appropriated. For example, a common complaint from people in Arugam Bay was that many new houses had internal toilets, an issue witnessed elsewhere in Sri Lanka (see Ruwanpura and Hollenbach, 2014). This was seen as unhygienic and many people built new external toilets, transforming the existing bathroom into an extra bedroom, or store room. One family in Arugam Bay converted their bathroom and used the extra space to set up a ‘homestay’ for tourists. On the one hand this can be seen as a demonstration of humanitarian incompetence, and a lack of understanding of local conceptualisations of homemaking. However, it also demonstrates the agency, resilience and innovation by Arugam Bay residents. Similarly I spoke with one woman who had a house rebuilt on her land, close to the beachfront. Having lost a number of family members to the tsunami, she told me that:

*...after tsunami [I] can't live here, too close to be by ocean... Many people scared to be by ocean (Lalitha, PT043)*

She moved her family in with her parents up on the hillside, renting out the house which provided her with a source of income. Thus, while it is important to interrogate the shortcomings of humanitarian interventions, it is also important to acknowledge that people do not simply passively accept them, but rather adapt and morph them to their own advantages. The houses built for people transform from being a donated building, and become ‘homes’ and lived spaces, or sources of income. Their meanings shift and change over time through the practices (and thus agency) of local people. As such, people do not

simply accept gifts passively, nor are they only called into action when required to perform gratitude (see Korf, 2006; 2007). Rather they invoke a number of strategies for dealing with, and benefitting from, the shortcomings and negative outcomes of aid provision.

In addition to this, local people demonstrated a degree of agency when it came to aid being written into the landscape. As has been established, places are not static, but rather dynamic and changing. In addition to this, territories are not permanent, but temporary. This is emphasised through the reduction of aid signage as time has passed. For example, I spoke with one fisherman, Malu (PT033) whilst he painted his boat on the beach. As he stripped the previous paint job, which included details of the European Rotary Club who had donated the boat, he told me that it felt like the boat was now his. Competitive humanitarianism and the need to be seen to be ‘doing good’ (Stirrat, 2006) meant that the boat featured the donor’s logo. As Malu said, this logo meant he did not feel he owned the boat, but rather served as a constant reminder of the symbolic debt he owed the benefactors of the boat. However, having earned enough money through fishing to repaint the boat, he made an important step in transcending the humiliation of aid, as well as removing a reminder of the wave itself. Many of the boats have been repainted since the tsunami. While this was often only done when the boats required a new paint job, the practice serves another function, as fishers seek to take symbolic ownership of their vessels (Figure 6.v).

The dynamic nature of the landscape is emphasised particularly well through a set of photographs taken by an Arugam Bay hotel owner. The project, a personal endeavour of the hotelier, has involved walking the length of Arugam Bay Main Street each year, taking a photograph of every sign passed. Analysing the photo set from 2006 (see [arugam.info](http://arugam.info), 2006), of the 153 signs shown in the photos, almost a third of them (47) show various aid signs, giving details of various projects, and importantly, the origin of the donation. However, in the most recent set of photographs (see [arugam.info](http://arugam.info), 2014b), of the 169 signs, only four document NGO projects, the majority of others being for local businesses. These largely consist of tourism establishments, such as hotels, restaurants and shops.

The repainting of boats and replacement of signs demonstrates that, as time has passed, aid has started to be written out of the landscape. This has in part been due to the agency of the people actively removing those signs, a process of active forgetting (see Ch. 7.0). However, as the second example demonstrates, it is also due to the dynamic processes of capitalism, as small tourist businesses and entrepreneurs have taken the place of aid agencies. Tourism was



**Figure 6.v** Repainted boat, Arugam Bay beach, 2013. *Photo: Mark Nunn*

central to the reconstruction process in Arugam Bay, (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008; see also Ch. 4.4) with infrastructure projects encouraging tourism, as well as schemes to encourage individual entrepreneurialism. Furthermore, as discussed, (re)construction in Arugam Bay was influenced by international tourist imaginations of what the area *should* be like (see Ch. 4.4). In this instance, knowledges produced through a community of practice, tourism, have informed the remaking of everyday life in Arugam Bay. This has further impacted on the recovery in the wake of the tsunami, as I discuss below (Ch. 6.3).

### *6.2.3. Tourism and the manipulation of the gift*

Tourism and humanitarian aid have a complex relationship. As described above, following the tsunami a huge number of humanitarian organisations came to Arugam Bay, and with them a large cohort of international humanitarian workers. In many ways these workers resembled the tourists that had been coming to the area prior to the tsunami, and continued to come in its aftermath. The workers would frequent the tourist bars and restaurants, spend their time off on the beach and many of them stayed in newly rebuilt tourist accommodation. Along with the humanitarian workers, as mentioned above, a number of long term tourists,

predominantly surfers, returned to the area to help with the clear up and show loyalty to the area (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). As such, among a number of people in the area, there seemed to be a blurring of the boundaries between ‘tourists’ and ‘humanitarian workers’, with many aid workers considered tourists, and vice versa:

*Army and navy coming [to Arugam Bay], and police, and many tourist people coming with NGO, and then us [all helping to rebuild the village]. (Vinay, PT008)*

*After the tsunami ... all basically gone. Now tourist coming with NGO, they rebuilding, money giving ... many places are back. (Sanjeev, PT019)*

The growth of volunteer tourism further blurs this boundary (see Keese, 2011; Mowforth and Munt, 2009). Volunteer tourism, or voluntourism, combines “development work, education and tourism” (Keese, 2011: 258), in which tourists undergo volunteer projects as part of their holiday. While such tourists were limited in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, I encountered numerous tourists who were engaged in volunteer projects in Arugam Bay, and other places in Sri Lanka. As such, there is very much a blurred line between INGO workers and tourists, particularly in the imaginations of many of Arugam Bay’s residents. Furthermore, many of the complaints I heard about tourism in the area – excessive drinking and partying, ‘immoral’ sexual behaviour, inappropriate dress – were also made about humanitarian workers. As one resident said to me:

*NGO people, they just [came to] party and [have a] good time. Not interested in helping (Sumendra, PT056).*

Here we see how knowledges can be produced *about* people engaged in certain practices. In this instance, the touristic behaviours of INGO workers caused them to be known as tourists themselves, even if their motivations for going to Arugam Bay were different to ‘regular’ tourists. While I have discussed situations in which the gift economy may not be a simplistic case of recipients being subservient to the donors, namely when giving occurred within a community of practice, there remained a lot of humanitarian aid that was distributed within classic narratives of patronage. Furthermore, the sheer scale of aid distribution and the large number of private donors giving seemingly without conditions (see also Fernando and Hilhorst, 2006), meant that during the months that followed the tsunami visitors to Arugam Bay became associated with ‘gifts’. Since the tsunami some Arugam Bay residents have



continued to associate Western visitors with aid, and during my time in Arugam Bay I noticed it was not uncommon for tourists to be asked for money, with the tsunami cited as the reason that they need a ‘hand-out’. Indeed, this happened to me on a number of occasions, and other tourists would cite this as a common grievance:

*I get fed up with people asking me for money, thinking I’m some kind of blank cheque book (Joe, PT002)*

*Cheeky fuckers always asking for money. They’re like ‘oh mister, tsunami take my house’... It’s all bullshit I reckon. (Steve, PT028)*

*[People see] you as a bank, cos you’re a tourist. I always get asked for money and stuff. (Cindy, PT027)*

*You feel that people prostitute the tsunami to get money. Cos that’s how they got money from the NGOs. So they say to tourists ‘wife lost, children lost, house lost, what to do?’ And it could be big BS, or it could be true. One guy asked me for money once, and I knew for a fact he was building a garage for his house, sorry, his BIG house. One thing I would say is that those who are still really affected by it won’t be the ones talking about it [and asking for money] (Benji, PT021).*

On the one hand this reinforces certain discourses that position the local people as powerless and in need of help and intervention. On the other hand, it also emphasises the agency of local people, as they play on the emotions of tourists. In particular they play on the feelings of discomfort and shame of tourists to provoke a “positive disruption” to an otherwise inherently unequal and postcolonial relationship (see Tucker, 2009: 444). While tourists imagine local people as disempowered, some Arugam Bay residents have been able to play on this, resulting in their financial empowerment. Despite the tourists quoted above being sceptical about the truth of these stories, many of those who engaged in this activity (who are minority of people) had some considerable successes. Indeed, I heard of people getting school sponsorships, large cash donations and new boats, as well as a number of smaller donations.

This demonstrates that the gift economy continues to inform relationships between some Arugam Bay residents and tourists. However, it also shows how the gift economy can be manipulated by people, with beneficiaries of the gift not necessarily lacking agency.

Furthermore, this is an example of how relationships of patronage can come ‘from below’ with expectations of gifts and reciprocation coming from *beneficiaries*, rather than *benefactors* (Korf et al. 2010). All this points to a situation where the legacy of the tsunami continues to shape the ways in which relationships play out within tourist practices in the present day.

The three examples presented in this section demonstrate that it is important not to homogenise the practice of humanitarian aid, but rather explore the numerous ways in which it is practiced. In particular, it is important to acknowledge the agency of all the actors involved in aid donation and reception. Furthermore, this section demonstrates the value in exploring the legacy of humanitarian aid after the aid agencies have moved on, exposing that projects – and, by association, the tsunami - continue to impact on people’s everyday life, long after the presence of NGOs themselves.

### **6.3 Tourism development and disaster capitalism**

As discussed, communities of practice are not simply socio-cultural, but are also shaped by economic processes. As such it is important to explore some of the ways in which this political economy has informed ways of practicing everyday life in the wake of the tsunami. The practices and knowledges of aid agencies have been a central feature of Arugam Bay’s local economy since the wave struck. Following the tsunami, tourism was encouraged as a key way to recover the local economy in Arugam Bay. International aid organisations, national government and private donors all provided a great deal of support to existing tourism businesses, such as hoteliers, restaurateurs, safari operators and surf rental shops in order for them to get their businesses running again (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). This was in line with a vast amount of other aid programmes in Sri Lanka which encouraged entrepreneurship and individual businesses as a means for recovery (Kapadia, 2013). Aid also brought people into the tourist industry who had previously not been involved. A number of people I spoke to started working in the tourism sector following the tsunami. For example, many fishers were not only donated new boats, but also received tuk tuks, or money to develop accommodation or a restaurant on their land. As such, the tourism industry was said to be thriving one year after the tsunami, and has continued to grow since then (Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). Of course aid is not the only reason for this, and other factors such as the

increasing confinement (and eventual ceasing) of open conflict, central government policy that promoted tourism and international consumer trends have all intersected with aid programmes to encourage tourism in Arugam Bay, and Sri Lanka more broadly.

Situated within the mantra of ‘building back better’<sup>36</sup>, the plan in Arugam Bay was not to restore tourism to its state prior to the tsunami, but rather to ‘improve’ it. It is in this rubric that aid becomes increasingly problematic and particularly wounding, as it is not “help in need”, but rather “the overcoming of a deficit” (Gronemeyer, 2010: 69). This deficit is the product of a comparison with a “foreign normality”, in which need is assessed through an external diagnosis (Gronemeyer, 2010: 70). Despite attempts to overcome this through ‘community participation’, this is problematic due to difficulties in defining ‘the community’ (Hasbullah and Korf, 2013; Jeganathan, 2009), as well as the fact that participation does not address the social contradictions generated by capitalism (de Alwis, 2009: 126). Therefore, attempts to ‘build back better’ were the product of external forces, rather than something that came from the people of Arugam Bay. In light of this, the practice of tourism in Arugam Bay is compared unfavourably to an imagination of how tourism should be practiced.

However, initial plans to ‘build back better’ went beyond the small scale entrepreneurial plans of most donors. Instead, through taking advantage of the 200m buffer zone restrictions and a beach seemingly cleared of pre-tsunami residents, the Sri Lankan government proposed large scale plans to redevelop the area including luxury hotels, boutique shops and a marina (see Ch. 4.4; Klein, 2007). This ‘improvement’ plan has been documented by Naomi Klein (2007), who described how the plans would have caused widespread displacement and loss of livelihoods for residents.

Despite these plans, at the time of research in 2012/2013 no such developments had materialised and the vast majority of tourist accommodation remains small scale, low to mid-range budget, and generally locally owned (either by Sri Lankans and/or resident expat migrants predominantly from Europe and Australia). The plans to construct the large scale hotels were eventually scrapped due to sustained opposition. While Klein frames this conflict as one between local fishermen and rapacious market capitalism, resistance to the plans came from a variety of sources (Jeganathan, 2009). Fishermen, who stood to lose access to the beach, did make up some of the opposition. However, in addition to this, the petty bourgeois

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<sup>36</sup> This term was popularised by former US President Bill Clinton, and adopted by numerous aid agencies working in the wake of the tsunami, including those of the UN (see Khasalamwa, 2009)

local hoteliers, both Sri Lankan and foreign, were also involved, as were several NGOs, who supported small scale entrepreneurial capitalism, rather than big business (see Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). These protests, which culminated in a barrage of the bridge to stop bulldozers entering the village, were also supported by activist civil society organisations, elected officials and unelected politicians, all important actors in shaping Sri Lankan society (Hyndman, 2011). Indeed, it was perceived as a moment of local unity, as Raj (PT058) stated:

*...the whole village worked together. Muslim, Sinhala, Tamil and white people, rich and poor, fisherman and hotel owner all together (see also Ch. 4.4).*

As such, Klein's analysis not only denies much agency to local people and groups, but also fails to engage with the specifics of Sri Lankan society, and reduce notions of 'community' to naïve conceptualisations that position 'the people' as homogenous and vulnerable (see Hyndman, 2011; Jeganathan, 2009). In this instance we see the value of exploring Arugam Bay through various communities of practice, in which people can be part of multiple, overlapping communities, engaging in a variety of practices and producing situated knowledges.

Despite the lack of mass tourism developments in Arugam Bay, residents still faced many of the issues described in Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*, notably land conflicts, displacement and the fracturing of a sense of community. This is the product of a more insidious form of capitalist development, one which is not the product of one large development, but the slower encouragement of multiple businesses, based around individual entrepreneurs and growth through competition, as encouraged by aid agencies and government policy. In 2009 Arugam Bay was identified as a potential 'Tourism Cluster' and integrated into a World Bank project implemented by the Sri Lankan government to promote 'sustainable tourism development' (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority, 2009). This identification emerged from the fact that Arugam Bay was already attracting a significant number of international (surf) tourists, and the commodification of the coast was well underway. While small scale tourism businesses are generally seen by residents as favourable to large scale mass tourism, nevertheless, such development has resulted in the displacement of several groups of people, in particular those who are unable to show the deeds to their land<sup>37</sup>, and are subsequently

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, many individuals lost evidence of land title deeds in the tsunami waves.

forced to make way for the development of hotels and other (small scale) tourism projects (APC, MONLAR, 2013). Furthermore, the government has put Arugam Bay land owners under increasing pressure to develop their land to encourage tourism. Due to the majority of the land in Arugam Bay being under the ownership of the state, and tenured out to the land occupiers on 'permanent' leases, the government is able to legally seize and evict people from the land, in the name of 'the greater good' (see also Robinson and Jarvie, 2008).

I spoke with a number of Arugam Bay residents who told me they felt under immense pressure from government authorities to develop their land, although due to a lack of capital they were either forced to accept government loans in exchange for reducing their tenure to thirty years, or to find foreign capital to invest and develop their land. Indeed, during my time in Arugam Bay I witnessed one resident go through multiple court hearings, as the government tried to seize his prime, but undeveloped, beachfront land. Despite several generations of his family being buried on the land, he did not have the correct legal title deed. While he ended up keeping his land, the process put immense pressure on him, leaving him stressed and exhausted. This is but one of many examples of the fear and uncertainty that residents have to deal with in their everyday lives (see also Hyndman, 2007b; Lehman, 2014). As an increasing number of external investors come into the area, developing the tourist industry, there is an increasing perception that tourism is not benefitting the local population. As one resident, who himself owned a small tourist business selling juices, said to me:

*More tourist coming is good, but I think some businesses not good, not good for local people. Some people making money, other people life more difficult. So I like tourists because I making money. And other people doing also. But some businesses, they not [employ] local boys, they spending money outside place (Matthi, PT016)*

As businesses get bigger, and the tourist industry 'improves', it becomes increasingly difficult for those on lower incomes to access the benefits of an increased number of tourists. The area is becoming increasingly connected to other places, and as mobility improves in the region, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep circuits of capital within the locale, as articulated by Matthi.

In addition to this, a reduced buffer zone of 20 meters continues to be implemented, maintaining a sense of fear and precarity. This is under the rhetoric of coastal conservation,

and resulted in the demolition of several beachfront properties in 2011. However, during my time in the area rumours emerged of government plans to build a beachfront road.

Infrastructure projects such as this, or the USAID funded bridge (see Jeganathan, 2009; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008) are classic examples of attempts to facilitate neoliberal growth, albeit at a slower pace than the original 2005 plans.

This slow creep of neoliberal capitalist development was greatly augmented by the tsunami. However, as articulated above, it has not manifested itself in the large-scale way that Klein predicted, but rather more insidiously, through the encouragement of individual businesses and entrepreneurship. Such development has still had a number of negative consequences for many residents in Arugam Bay, not dissimilar to the impact that Klein predicted for villagers. However, small scale development, despite its negative impacts, is much harder to mobilise and protest against. Entrepreneurship and ‘capacity building’ are particularly popular with aid agencies, as they are seen as ‘empowering’ and ways to reduce poverty (Kapadia, 2013). However, ‘empowerment’ is based on an assumption that ‘the other’ is powerless. Furthermore, people are incorporated into “the project of the modern”, and into the model of capitalism, namely as consumers and producers (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). In doing this, the people of Arugam Bay are pitted against one another ‘in competition’, and as such do not unite, but instead divide and fracture. As such, due to such (I)NGO ‘empowerment’ practices, there remains very little political space for autonomous struggle, such as protesting the government buffer zone (de Alwis, 2009). What little space is left has been increasingly closed by government censorship, the militarisation of society and a heavy handed response to dissent (de Mel, 2007b; Ruwanpura and Jazeel, 2009).

That said, it is important not to suggest ‘the people’ are anti-capitalist. Indeed, many people I spoke with were embracing capitalist tourism development, and many of the projects that sought to invest in people’s livelihoods have been well received by some of the individuals they sought to help. This was especially apparent with young men, who are finding more employment opportunities, increased income and tend to enjoy interacting with people from around the world (see Ch. 4.4). As such, many people have benefitted from this development. However, what is important to stress is that these benefits are not even, and while it is beyond the scope of this project to analyse this in depth, there were a number of people excluded from these benefits, namely women, those unable to speak English, and those who were unable to afford to invest in a tourism business.

As such, the continued expansion of tourism development in Arugam Bay has had a further perceived effect on the area, with many people stating that the area is becoming increasingly divided. The aid effort was often cited as causing jealousy and a catalyst for changing people's attitudes towards one another:

*Before the tsunami in this village everyone like brothers and sisters, like whole family... After the tsunami people getting many things from government, and they change their mind about things. [People changed] because of the money... because NGO coming and giving lots of money and boats and things, the people get jealous... (Pradeep, PT006)*

*Personalities have definitely changed, before and after the tsunami... there never seemed to be this jealousy, the preoccupation in what other people are doing, everybody seemed more relaxed and chilled. Since the tsunami, they're all wound up and worried about what their neighbours are doing and jealousy... You know there's a lot of backstabbing. (Mike, PT017)*

*Arugam Bay changing fast. [The] richest families and richest people, they ... buy property here, and they wanna do something, they wanna make something, they wanna live you know... but, uh, people also getting angry, jealous. (Mallee, PT010)*

*After tsunami, this [was] the first time people [had] money. NGO and government, they giving too much money and the people making greedy... Before, fishermen working together. We sharing all. We still working together, but not the same. People more jealous, want to take for himself. (Tharanga, PT029)*

*A lot of people become greedy after the tsunami. Because the NGOs came... Now people they are not sharing. This has changing in the village, definitely. Because more and more NGOs. Before people lived together, helping each other. But now people just want, want, want... (Daniel, PT022)*

These attitudes were almost unanimous, and echoes Sunil Bastian's claims about "the total transformation" of Sri Lankan society (2007: i). Emphasis has been placed on the changing types of jobs people are doing, from agriculture to manufacturing and fishing (Morrison, 2004). While in Arugam Bay such trends are being witnessed, as tourism opens up the

opportunities for more service sector employment, it is also significant to note the ways in which practices have changed. For example people spoke of how the fishing teams used to pool their catches and money communally, ensuring that fishers who had poor catches still received an income. Similarly, due to a lack of surfboards, surfers used to share boards rather than having a system of individual ownership. Neither system is still in place, with the area increasingly made up of individual private tourism businesses in competition with one another. This situation is consistent with the narrative that the area is increasingly divided since the waves, and experiencing a socio-economic shift from social capital to market based practices.

While it is not possible to verify whether the area actually *has* changed in this manner, or whether people look back to a romanticised past (see Ch. 2.4), what is important to note is that people *perceive* the area to be changing. When it comes to the construction of place and people's everyday life, what is often more significant is not how something is or was, but rather how it *seems* to them (after Thrift, 2008). Thus, aid and the subsequent tourism development encouraged by NGOs is perceived by many to have had negative effects on the area, particularly its unity. Indeed, far from being a unified community of practice, tourism has produced numerous fractures and divisions within Arugam Bay, emphasising that such communities are not necessarily harmonious. The Sri Lankan government's approach to tourism, and its preference for high end, mass tourism, suggests that this trend, and the ongoing commodification of place, is set to continue. Based on this the tsunami continues to maintain its presence in the present *through people's perception* that it was the catalyst for changes to the 'village community'.

## **Conclusion**

The humanitarian effort following the tsunami is inextricably entangled within many participants' imaginations of the disaster itself. Indeed, while the geophysical hazard was over within a few hours, the disaster continues to unfold in people's everyday life. This chapter has documented the role aid has played, and continues to play in people's everyday lives, arguing that it has largely been received negatively. However, it has also placed emphasis on the heterogeneity of aid and the agency of local people, whilst acknowledging their continued engagement with the tsunami and its legacy in their every lives. In doing this,



the chapter continues to demonstrate how the disaster is neither spatially nor temporally contained, and that it necessarily evades easy conclusion.

The chapter commenced by continuing the work of Ch. 5.0, exploring how the tsunami was constructed in the Western media. Much of this was situated within wider discourses of vulnerability that served to 'other' large parts of the world as dangerous, inhabited by a passive, hapless population in need of intervention and salvation. In contrast to this, the rest of the world was positioned as active donors, with the expertise and agency to help the passive victims of disaster. Such narratives were bound up within wider discourses of tropicality, development and Orientalism (Bankoff, 2001; Skelton, 2006).

Combined with other reasons, such as the spectacularisation of the disaster (Ch. 5.0), the tsunami provoked one of the largest outpourings of aid in history. However, aid can reinforce relationships of dominance and subservience, and this symbolic domination of donors was witnessed in Arugam Bay in the practice of giving and delivering aid. The wish of donors wanting to see their gifts flourish resulted in aid being written into the landscape, with visual projects accompanying the large number of NGO signs that dominated the area. Their continued presence serves not only as a reminder of the inferior position people were put in as a result of humanitarian aid, but also provides a material reminder of the trauma of the geophysical event itself. These objects highlight how the agency of the material coastscape shapes the legacy of the disaster.

While this is an important critique of practices of humanitarian aid and giving following the tsunami, it is also important not to homogenise such practices, or deny the people of Arugam Bay agency. As such the chapter traces three ways in which such critiques may be unsettled. Firstly, it is important to rethink distance, and allow for the existence of different geographical imaginations. In particular I focus on how surfers mobilised to help the area following the tsunami. Through personal links with the area, and an imagination of a global surf community, surfers donated much to the area. For the surf community, the binary of 'us' and 'them' as described by Bankoff (2001), Skelton (2006) or Korf (2007), is less prevalent. As such, giving was not to anonymous 'others', but rather surfers were helping members of their own 'community'. This unsettles the notion of 'giving at a distance', and more importantly upsets traditional ideas surrounding patronage and reciprocation. It is much easier to both help and reciprocate when one is perceived as being 'closer'.

Secondly, the chapter undermines narratives that position those affected by the tsunami as powerless, through an exploration of how people in Arugam Bay have taken control of aid projects that had not been successful, adapting and transforming them to their advantage. This was particularly apparent with tsunami housing, where people would adapt inappropriate houses to suit their needs. Residents actively removing or painting over NGO signs also embodied a reclaiming of place, a step towards healing the wounds that aid has caused.

Thirdly, some residents have manipulated the situation of being positioned as ‘tsunami victims’ to their advantage, using the tsunami to benefit materially and socially. This practice continues in the present, as people play on the emotions, guilt and ignorance of tourists in order to receive gifts, particularly cash.

The final section of this chapter deals with the neoliberal ideology that informed many aid agencies, in particular addressing the role of tourism development and disaster capitalism. While tourism has been growing steadily in Arugam Bay since before the tsunami, external aid played a central role in its recovery and growth in the wake of the wave. Despite protests against plans for mass tourism, continued tourism development encouraged by foreign aid has had a number of negative effects on the area, notably displacement, uncertainty and anxiety, and the production of an increasingly fractured community. These processes have also contributed to the closing of spaces of protest and dissent.

The expansion of tourism development has resulted in the commodification of Arugam Bay. The place is ‘packaged’ to tourists, as the area, notably the beachfront, is transformed into something that may be sold to tourists. In addition to this, while not universally practiced in this way, the donation of aid resembled a form of exchange, in which donors gave money in order to gain a feeling of having done something good. This ‘commodification of good intentions’ (Korf et al. 2010) is a further example of how everyday life has been increasingly commodified in the wake of the tsunami (see also Ch. 5.0).

I do not wish to completely discredit the generosity and lifesaving work undertaken immediately after the tsunami, and there are many wonderful examples of generosity, kindness and effective projects. However, this chapter has demonstrated that the humanitarian effort in Arugam Bay has had lasting impacts in terms of the ability of people to sustain themselves going forward and to deal with the traumatic memory of the event. It emphasises that, despite the fact that most INGOs are no longer operational in the area, their legacy continues to shape everyday life in Arugam Bay. This includes issues around

contested representational knowledges of the area, disempowerment through intervention, visual reminders of the tsunami and encouraging a form of tourism that is contributing to uncertain futures for residents of the Arugam Bay area.

Humanitarian aid has been inextricably written into everyday life in the area. Its unavoidable association with the tsunami is but one example of how the disaster continues to pervade the lives of the residents of Arugam Bay. Continuing this theme, the following chapter (7.0) will explore the role the tsunami has in everyday life in Arugam Bay. In particular I will focus on practices of remembering and forgetting the tsunami, how people's everyday practices have shifted to negotiate the tsunami, and expand on the role aid and 'development' has had on this. Continuing the themes of this chapter, I argue that the tsunami continues to shape everyday life in Arugam Bay, drawing out one my key lines of argument in this thesis: that disaster is not temporally bounded, but ongoing and without easy conclusion.



## CHAPTER 7.0

### MEMORY, THE MATERIAL COAST, AND REMAKING

#### EVERYDAY LIFE

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On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012, close to where the earthquake of 2004 occurred, two earthquakes of a magnitude 8.8 and 8.2 on the Richter scale struck under the Indian Ocean. These were the largest earthquakes to have hit the region since 2004, with the former registering as the thirteenth most powerful tremor to have ever been recorded. Around the Indian Ocean basin recently installed tsunami warning sirens were triggered, and in Sri Lanka the government issued immediate advice for people to evacuate the coast and head inland. In Arugam Bay the tsunami alarm rang out across the bay, and people rushed to higher ground, taking whatever belongings they could. After several hours of confusion, it transpired that the earthquakes had not triggered a wave due to the specific type of tectonic movement, and all warnings were lifted by the evening. However, it took some people several days before they were prepared to return to the coast.

Despite the lack of a wave, the threat and fear of a tsunami had (re)entered the lives of the residents of Arugam Bay in a very real way. People described the day to me:

*I remember that day. We had just finished painting the cabana bedrooms [in the family tourist business]. We do all this work, and I remember thinking what's the point in doing this? It just go again like before. People very scared this day. My sisters all crying... (Ishan, PT003)*

*People many scared. I go topside [up the hill] and we waiting... I OK because my house is topside, but some people they living downside [by the coast], they working downside. My boat on the beach. I thinking boat going if tsunami coming. Many problem machan. (Matthi, PT016)*

*I got phone calls from everywhere, other parts of the island, Australia, America all saying 'it's coming', there's not an if or a but, it's the same place, the same size, it's coming... and just to watch the people, and the*

*things that they chose, they cherished, and the things that they took, uh, I mean, I was watching tuk tuks carrying washing machines and refrigerators and people carrying their boats up on the hills, and every hill was full of people just screaming and crying before anything even came... it hasn't left, six, seven years later now, that fear is still engrained.* (Jonny, PT013)

I have commenced this chapter with this account of the April 2012 false alarm, as these events were a stark reminder of the tsunami. Such an occurrence not only produced a moment of fear and trauma, dramatically maintaining the tsunami's presence in the present, but it also reemphasised the precarious and uncertain nature of people's lives (see also Lehman, 2014). The false alarm also highlights how the material world can act to keep certain memories alive. This chapter explores the ways the tsunami continues to endure in people's present day lives, arguing that it has now become an important part of everyday life in Arugam Bay. I do this through exploring the agency of the material coastscape, as well as eliciting the manifold ways that the tsunami is memorialised by communities of practice, in ways that remake everyday life in the wake of the event.

This chapter commences by exploring some of the conceptualisations of memory that have emerged in geography, in particular highlighting the importance of contextualising memories in time and space. Following this I explore the ways in which the tsunami maintains a constant presence in the material coastscape. I have already highlighted how this has occurred through the commodification of the tsunami in tourism and research (Ch. 5.0), as well as through the commercial practices of INGOs (Ch. 6.0). However, this section explores this in more depth, exploring the significance of dwelling in the disasterscape, and how people living in the site of disaster continue to cohabit with the tsunami's presence. It will then continue to unpick the agency of the more-than-human actors present in the coastscape. In particular, I draw attention to how the medium of disaster, the sea, plays a central role in producing memories of the tsunami. In doing this I highlight how the sea's material agency means that the tsunami, while ever present, is experienced in different intensities at different times. Following this, I explore how such interactions with the tsunami have become part of the ordinary geography of everyday life, building on the work of previous chapters that argue that the tsunami is not something confined to the past, but rather plays an integral role in the remaking of people's social ecosystems. In particular I explore how communities of practice have been (re)formed to incorporate the tsunami into them, producing specific, situated knowledges about the disaster. In addition to this, I also explore other memorial practices,

and how the tsunami continues to inform the ways in which they are played out in everyday life.

Throughout this chapter I place emphasis on contextually specific conceptualisations of space and time, building on previous chapters that have argued that the tsunami is an important aspect of everyday life in the present. In particular I wish to explore some of the contemporary experiences of the tsunami that are excluded from dominant representations and narratives, and in doing so allow for alternative experiences of the tsunami to exist. In this chapter I argue that there are a myriad number of actors, practices and processes that serve to keep the tsunami alive in people's minds. In particular I emphasise the role of geo-physical and animal agency, however, what is important is that people have developed strategies and mechanisms to cope with this, and they continue to live with the tsunami.

### **7.1 Space, context and memory**

Memory studies is a broad and wide ranging field. At its most basic level, the act of remembering (or forgetting) is an individual experience, occurring in the human brain. Unsurprisingly psychologists have explored the impacts of the tsunami on individuals, focussing on issues such as stress and trauma (e.g. Lommen et al. 2009; Neuner et al. 2006). While this work is important, it is not enough to simply consider memory as an individual act. Rather, memories are "shared, exchanged and transformed amongst groups" (Johnson, 2004: 318) and as such they are socially constructed. The mediation of memory by social and cultural processes results in memories being contested by different groups as they attempt to impose their own narratives and versions of history within certain contexts. As such, dominant groups organise a 'selective memory' that creates a continuous history, serving the needs of certain groups, namely elites, whilst subaltern memories get written out of history (see Chaturvedi, 2000; Guha, 2000 [1989]; Johnson, 2004; 2005; Stoler, 2009). In the context of Sri Lanka this has been documented in the monumentalisation of the civil war, where the government's 'triumphant nationalism' has narrated the war in certain ways. Specifically they have positioned the LTTE as terrorists, the Tamil people as excluded from imaginations of 'the nation', and the state as always acting in the best interests of its people (see Hyndman and Amarasingam, 2014). Such contested memories have also been present in Sri Lanka following the tsunami. For example, as demonstrated in Chapter 5.3, the Sri Lankan state erected monuments through which they sought to impose a narrative that framed the tsunami

as a 'Sri Lankan' disaster, within which the nation was reduced to Sinhala-Buddhist conceptualisations, thus excluding Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and others from this imagination. It also emphasised that the disaster was an unavoidable natural event, and in doing so denied its political-economic dimensions (see also Simpson and de Alwis, 2008). However, as I explore in more depth in this chapter, contested memories in Sri Lanka do not solely occur along ethnicised lines. Based on this, throughout this chapter I continue to explore the experiences and narratives of people in Arugam Bay whose memories may have been excluded by dominant representations and narratives.

As discussed, in Arugam Bay there is an absence of a central monumentalised memorial to the tsunami. However, that is not to say that people do not remember or memorialise the tsunami, but rather it highlights that people do not conform to national models of remembrance. Nevertheless, people's memories do still intersect with dominant discourses surrounding the tsunami. As highlighted in both 5.0 and 6.0, the tsunami has been kept alive through its commodification in tourism, its position as an important academic research subject, and through the practices of INGOs. The tsunami and memories of it produce, and are in turn produced by, specific, situated knowledges.

Knowledges, and as such memories, shift and change as one moves through space. Memories operate at different scales and in different contexts, with collective memories both the product of various individuals and institutions, as well as serving as their precursor (Legg, 2007). In light of this, memory has a significant dialectical relationship to place. Places are shaped by memories, in particular through the construction of material sites of memory, notably monumental memorials (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008), and through the bodily performance of memorial practices in and through specific spaces (Till, 2012). In turn, places can ignite memories, providing visual and other affective moments that remind us of events and objects in our past (Johnson, 2004; Nora, 1989; Wilde, 1999). Just as places are dynamic, rhythmic, and in a constant process of becoming (see Ch. 3.0), memories are also in a continuous process of change. On the one hand this can be witnessed as one moves through space, or as one focuses on different spatial scales, as described above (see also Legg, 2007). However, as established in Ch. 3.0, it is important to consider space and place in relation to time (see also Elden, 2004; Lefebvre, 2004; Massey, 2005), and explore how memory changes along with space through time. Stephen Legg highlights two ways in which this can occur:



First, memories of an event change through time. Each recollection is as much a recollection of the last time an event was remembered as a direct relationship with the event in question. This allows the context of recall to infiltrate the memory leading to distortion, or enrichment, depending on perspective. Second, the ways in which memories are formed and valued change as one moves through time. (Legg, 2007: 457)

With this in mind, it is important to emphasise that memories do not simply form on their own. Rather they are co-produced with other actors – people, non-humans, material objects and shifting discursive knowledges. Thus, rather than thinking of memories as simply changing, I wish to think about how memories form, and are reformed, through changing relations. In this sense, much like places themselves, memories are emergent and always unfinished.

In addition to this, memories are not constant, that is to say that one is not always engaged in the process of remembering. So with regards to the tsunami, people do not think about it all of the time. It comes and goes. For example, while many people said that they would never forget the tsunami, they also said that it was not always on their mind:

*I don't think about it all the time. Day by day memory [of the tsunami is] going, little bit less, little bit less, less less... I just want to forget, but I never forget... (Addam, PT007)*

*Sometimes we talking about it with our friends. Now less happening. But we will never forget that one, the tsunami, because we see a lot of people die and everything... (Chanaka, PT005)*

*The reason I'm surfing yeah? It's helping me forget [about the tsunami] ... I just forget everything and just concentrate on the nature and the surfing. So it makes me really happy. (Ishan, PT003)*

The tsunami has fundamentally changed the area through its constant presence and the physical transformation of the coastscape. Furthermore, people's perceptions of the coast have changed and the way people engage in everyday practices has altered (see below; Ch. 4.0). However, it is not necessarily *consciously* a constant in people's lives. Rather, the tsunami enters people's lives rhythmically through certain practices, encounters and relationships, as well as at times, exiting their consciousness. Indeed, the tsunami is not the

only thing that defines the people of Arugam Bay, and it is clearly not the only thing that people think about. Other concerns also shape everyday life. These range from serious challenges, such as the threat of government land-grabbing in the name of tourism development, domestic violence or financial troubles. But it also includes more mundane concerns, such as whether to go surfing, what type of curry to cook the family, or what is happening in one's favourite soap opera.

Throughout this thesis I have stressed that time is subjective. Time has often been conceptualised as linear, chronological and constant, particularly in the traditions of European historical scholarship (Gell, 1992). In this imagination, events punctuate time and can be categorised in terms of past, present and future. When conceptualised in this way, one can date the tsunami. Indeed, many, including the Sri Lankan state, have done so, specifically at the moment the tsunami struck the South West coast – 9.25am, 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Not only does this ignore the fact that the tsunami struck the northern and eastern coasts earlier than this (see de Mel, 2007a), but confines the tsunami as an event that occurred in the past. The ways in which the tsunami remains present as a memory, and as such a very real experience, are ignored. In light of this, I wish to revisit Mallee's quote in which he states:

*We don't need to remember it. In Colombo they didn't experience it, but we live it every day. Why would I want to remember something that felt like it happened two days ago?* (Mallee, PT010)

Mallee suggests a different temporal imagination, one in which the tsunami is part of, or at least much closer to, the present day. Indeed, both residents and tourists had a tendency to underestimate how long ago the waves hit the land, and it was not uncommon for people to be shocked when corrected. Furthermore, it is important to note that the temporal status of memory is the present. Thus, through memory, past experiences manifest themselves in the present day.

This assertion has particularly shaped a rethinking of the concepts of mourning and melancholia. Often linked to a traumatic event, mourning, as conceptualised by Sigmund Freud, is a process of dealing with the past, of actively forgetting or reconciliation with loss, with the goal of achieving 'closure' and acceptance of past events (Legg, 2005b). In contrast, melancholia represents despair and a failure to deal with past events, thus continuing to negatively affect the subject (see also Eng and Kazanjian, 2003). However, more recent thinking on the subject has explored ways in which people seek to continue to productively

deal with the past in the present. Thus, it is suggested that people seek “to learn to live with the dead in a new way, to find a space in our lives for theirs” (Green, 2008: 189). Indeed, there are many different ways of dealing with a traumatic event, and as such, time needs to be considered as subjectively experienced and conceptualised. This further emphasises that memories, and as such the impacts of trauma, can change through time, as they are subjectively confronted in different temporal and spatial contexts (see Das, 2007: 99).

Such specificity is highlighted in Anne-Marie Samuels’ (2012) study of tsunami affected communities in Aceh. She places emphasis on the process of grieving, which in Aceh was particularly shaped by the regions Islamic culture, and the belief that everything is in Allah’s hands. As such, in this cultural context, the general belief is one should not spend too much time openly grieving. Similarly, it has been noted in Thailand that people’s engagement in Buddhist practices, particularly through communicating across the boundary of the living and dead, have been central to their negotiations with the tsunami (Falk, 2010). In Southern Sri Lanka, similar observations have been made, especially with regards to the complex relationship between culture and traumatic events, and the role of Buddhism in coping with the ongoing effects of the tsunami (de Silva, 2006). This is particularly significant when one considers the specific relationship Buddhists have with the dead, and the concept of reincarnation (see also Harvey, 2013).

As such, it is important to acknowledge that there are religious (and by association, cultural) elements to people’s remakings of everyday life. However, I cannot do justice to an in depth exploration into the role of religion in the wake of the tsunami. In light of this, this chapter seeks to explore how the tsunami, and the specific violence it inflicted, continues to influence everyday life in Arugam Bay, focusing on the ways in which it is remembered and memorialised in the coastscape and works its way into ordinary life and practices. The following section does this by focusing on the significance of people remaking their lives in a coastscape in which the tsunami is ever present.

## **7.2 The material coast of memory**

In Arugam Bay the tsunami maintains a constant presence in the material coastscape. As discussed, there is no official memorial to the tsunami in Arugam Bay. Nevertheless, the tsunami is still memorialised in other more subtle ways, imbued in the mundane memoryscapes of everyday life. For example, the tsunami’s presence is maintained by

material traces of the wave in the coastscape including ruins and debris. In addition to this, there are additional presences in the coastscape, such as government erected signs warning of future tsunamis. Such reminders are memory cues that did not exist before the wave struck. However, the tsunami also changed the meanings attached to objects and actors, which subsequently causes them to act as material reminders of the disaster. Such objects and actors, for example the sea, are now inextricably associated with the tsunami in the minds of many living on the affected coast. This section describes this in more depth, highlighting the lingering presence of the tsunami in Arugam Bay.

### *7.2.1 Dwelling in the disasterscape*

...to make your dwelling with the broken pieces of rubble, to stalk time, to inhabit a world in a gesture of mourning – all this gives everyday life a quality of something recovered (Das, 2007: 101).

When the tsunami struck the coast of Sri Lanka, for the residents of Arugam Bay it struck the site in which everyday life plays out. It struck their home. As the wave swept inland it destroyed all but the sturdiest of beachfront buildings, reducing them to ruins and rubble. As time has passed, the rubble has been cleared, and many of the ruins have been rebuilt. Nevertheless, throughout the area there remain a number of tsunami ruins and the remnants of building foundations (Figure 7.i).

Ruins have been of increasing interest to geographers in recent years due to their function as “emblematic sites at which to re-examine and recast our relationship with the past, and our understandings of temporalities” (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013: 471). Indeed, ruins have the ability to fold the past into the present, acting to elicit memories, and emphasising that which has been lost through an “embodied exchange” with history (Garrett, 2011: 1057). This was emphasised to me when I spoke with one man whilst on a visit to Trincomolee, on the North East coast. Outside his guesthouse the concrete slab and brick line marked the remains of his previous house. He told me that often he would look at the skeletal remains of the building, and think about times before the tsunami, in particular the family members he lost. In the case of ruins and rubble, there is an emphasis on the fact that what is ‘lost’ remains materially



**Figure 7.i** Tsunami ruins, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

present, but its function, form and meaning have shifted (Wilford, 2008). In some cases, this has resulted in difficult memories of the past.

In other cases the shifting use of tsunami debris in the reconstruction has also been an important part of the remaking of everyday life (see Hastrup, 2010; 2011). For example, one surf school was planning to make use of a panel from a boat destroyed in the tsunami to display their prices. When I asked why they had done this, I was told that they wanted to keep it as a reminder of before the tsunami, and as a reminder that they are lucky to have survived (Pradeep, PT006). For the instructors of the surf school, it was important for them to have a material reminder of life before the tsunami. People use material objects in order to facilitate a connection to the past (e.g. Morgan and Pritchard, 2005), and in this case, the broken shard of boat served as a reminder that there was life before the tsunami. As I describe below, for many people, the tsunami represented the destruction of everything, and they were left with nothing. As such, material objects that survived the tsunami, even if that was a broken shard of boat, serve to provide much needed continuity from a time before the tsunami, from which there is a perception that everything was destroyed. These objects are thus important tools for rebuilding a sense of place, and for reconstructing one's social ecosystem. However, they also serve to keep the tsunami present in the coastscape. Indeed, such material objects embedded in the coastscape have different meanings for different people. For the owner of

the ruined house in Figure 7.i, the remains of this building represents a link to a previous life, a reminder of a lost home, potentially in a negative way, but this could also represent an important signifier of a past that they wish to maintain. Conversely, for tourists, such ruins interrupt the imagination of Arugam Bay as a tropical paradise. On the one hand this represents an undoing of certain touristic fantasies. However, as discussed in Chapter 5.0, the tsunami has become part of the tourist experience, and indeed such ruins have become something interesting for tourists to discover. For myself as a researcher, the ruins were an interesting object to study, to reflect on my research, and ultimately something to take a photograph of and analyse in this thesis.

Ruins and rubble emphasise the ways in which the tsunami maintains very obvious traces in the present. However, many of the tsunami's traces are very personal, bound up within people's individual histories and experiences. This was made very apparent to me in an encounter I had with Ishan (PT003) one day, as we walked and talked together:

*I walk with Ishan around his yard. "That morning [of the tsunami] my dog just going crazy" he says. "He not wanting to stay downside, so I tie him up over there", he points to the corner of the yard. "When the wave come, he drown. I never see him again..." As we walk Ishan tells me of his experience of being caught in the water. "The wave coming, and I don't know what happening. I'm OK because I can swim, but the current very strong and many things in the water. So I grab hold of this tree." He shows me the large bushy tree. It's covered in spikes. "I hold on, but the tree scratching me many bad. Many painful for me, but I don't mind this, because I know if I'm not letting go, I'm not dying..." Ishan shows me his back. There are scars on it from where the tree's thorns lacerated his skin. A permanent physical reminder of the tsunami, etched onto his body. I ask him if the tree reminds him of the tsunami. "Sometimes" he says pensively... (Adapted from field diary, 24/10/12)*

For Ishan, the tsunami is imprinted into his everyday life, and while he does not think about it every time he sees the 'tsunami tree'<sup>38</sup>, from time to time being in its presence reminds him of the wave. I conducted many of my interviews near the beach, often within sight of the sea. When describing the tsunami, it was not uncommon for participants to gesticulate to the coastscape around them in order to clarify what they were saying, the material space around them acting as markers in their remembered stories: the sea, the beach, certain trees, buildings and other significant items. Many of the buildings mentioned – people's homes,

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<sup>38</sup> This is the term used by Ishan to describe the tree

fishing huts, a local tea shop - were all destroyed in the waves, and subsequently rebuilt. The landmarks mentioned were not the originals, however they still act as markers for remembering the tsunami. Thus, there is a significant relationship between one's physical location and the commemoration and remembering of the past. Indeed, such markers are very personal to the individuals who experienced the tsunami in certain spaces and at certain times. Objects such as Ishan's tree are only significant to Ishan. For others, myself included prior to our conversation, the tree is just another tree. This emphasises the different meanings that objects can have, and how their agency and affective properties are relational and subjective. I discuss this in more depth below.

The tsunami has shaped the way that Arugam Bay was (re)constructed. I have already explored how tourism has had a profound effect on how everyday life has been remade in the area, conforming to the fantasies and desires of the international (surf) tourist (Ch. 5.0; 6.0). However, the tsunami has also been incorporated into the coastscape in a more overt manner, in particular through the erection of tsunami related signage. As I discussed in 6.0, signs from NGOs served as reminders of not only the wounding effects of aid, but also of the physical waves themselves. In addition to this, the area has a number of tsunami evacuation signs, warning people that they are in a 'tsunami zone', and in some cases providing trilingual instructions as to what to do in the event of another wave – head to high ground or inland (Figure 7.ii). It is questionable what purpose these signs serve and whether they actually provide useful information to Arugam Bay residents. One afternoon as I walked past one of these signs, my friend (Suvendrini, PT055) laughed, stressing that "everyone" in the area now knew that one should head to high ground in the event of another tsunami. Having experienced the tsunami, there was no need for a sign to tell them to do so. However, such signs highlight the precarious nature of coastal life, and the ongoing (albeit unlikely) threat of another tsunami striking the coast. Indeed, a number of people cited these signs as one of the features of the area that caused them to think about the tsunami.

Another type of signage that maintains the tsunami's presence in the coastscape are those used in tourism in the area (Figures iii & iv). The most obvious example of this is 'The Tsunami Hotel' (Figure 7.iii). This unfortunately named establishment is not actually a reference to the 2004 disaster, but rather has had this name since it opened in 1999. I am told that the name was originally a reference to the large waves that can be found at the Main Point surf break. However, the context of such a name changed fundamentally following the



**Figure 7.ii** 'Tsunami Zone' signage. Main Road, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*



**Figure 7.iii** The Tsunami Hotel, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*





**Figure 7.iv** Wave imagery. Lagoona Face Hotel, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

tsunami. In the immediate aftermath of the waves, the owners changed the name of the hotel, in order to disassociate the establishment with the disaster, but then soon reverted back to its original name. I was unable to find out why they changed the name back, however, it is important to note that the name and the logo were cited by several participants as something which reminded them of the events of 2004.

While not as overtly a reference to the tsunami, images of large waves are abundant throughout the local landscape thanks to the area's association with surfing and a form of tourism focused on the sea (Figure 7.iv). Indeed, the imagery typically associated with surfing predictably focusses on the breaking wave, as a browse of any surf artists' and surf photographer pages will demonstrate (see e.g. [clubofthewaves.com](http://clubofthewaves.com)). For some people, the association of these waves is likely to be with surfing. As I argued in Ch. 4.5, the practice of surfing has reconfigured sea space from a space associated with the tsunami, to a space where one can have fun. However, for others, the constant imagery of large waves is an everyday reminder of the sea's power and its potential to destroy. The likeness of such imagery to the tsunami came up in conversation with participants from Arugam Bay on a number of occasions.

Such a presence in the coastscape contributes to the tsunami becoming ingrained in people's subconscious. As mentioned, people do not necessarily think about the tsunami *all of the*

time, however the disaster still affects them unconsciously. This was highlighted through people's discussions of dreams they have had in the wake of the waves:

*Before the tsunami, I never having a dream in my life. But after tsunami time I always dreaming about tsunami. This the only time I having dream, when I dream about tsunami. Not too much now, but my sister still having. She wake up she crying. (Suvendrini, PT055)*

*[Sometimes] dream coming, very scary. Tsunami dream. I wake up so so scary. Two time dream coming like that. (Bandula, PT023)*

*We don't think so much [as before], but sometimes I have dreams, huh. Big wave... I had many big time wave dreams... I had a dream the tsunami took my father, and another took my sister. (Daniel, PT022)*

In the case of dreaming, the tsunami is not encountered in the physical, material world, and yet it is still experienced in a very real way. That is not to say that dreaming does not have a relationship with the material world. Indeed, events and encounters in our daily lives provide the trigger for certain dreams in our sleep (Hobson, 2005). Furthermore, one tourist (Jess, PT060) told me that she had had a number of dreams about the tsunami whilst she had been staying in Arugam Bay, despite not experiencing the tsunami first hand, or ever dreaming about the disaster before. She put this down to being able to hear the sea while she slept, and also her awareness that the tsunami struck the place she was sleeping. Those studying dreams have long abandoned trying to determine what individual dreams mean, instead focusing on the perceptual, cognitive and emotional qualities of dreaming (Hobson, 2005). In the case of dreaming about the tsunami, affective feelings and states such as fear, anxiety and sadness are invoked by such dreams.

These examples point towards a coastscape in which the tsunami resides mnemonically and imaginatively. The materiality and visuality of the coast ensures that the tsunami remains in the consciousness and subconsciousness of those inhabiting the affected coastline, and facilitates an embodied interaction with the past, in this case with the tsunami waves. Of course there are likely to be many more examples than the ones cited here, however the point is that the tsunami is not confined to the past. It lives on in people's social ecosystems, and is encountered by people as they move through place. However, what is missing from these accounts is an explicit engagement with the medium of disaster, the sea. As such the

following section addresses the role of the material ocean, and other more-than-human actors in keeping the tsunami alive in the present.

### *7.2.2 Remembering the tsunami on a dynamic coast*

The above section points towards the agency of the material world in the production of memories (Hastrup, 2011; Wilford, 2008). In Ch. 3.0 I introduced the sea as an important everyday space for the people of Arugam Bay, emphasising the unique and situated knowledges of this dynamic space. In addition to the sea being a space (re)produced through discourse and practice, I highlighted its unique fluid materiality, in particular its liveliness that exists beyond social construction (see also Anderson and Peters, 2014; Lambert et al. 2006; Lehman, 2013). As Jessi Lehman states, quoting Jones and Cloke (2008: 81):

The tsunami is an instance of the ocean acting *nonreflexively*, with ‘a capacity to engender affective and emotional responses from the humans who dwell amongst [it] – to contribute to a haunting of place via exchanges between the visible present and the starkly absent in the multiple and incomplete becoming of agency’ (Lehman, 2013: 496)

Similarly Stephen Legg stresses that “processes of memory and forgetting are specific not only to historical events and their interpretations, but also to environments and their harbouring or exorcising of memories and their prompts” (2007: 463). As the medium of disaster, the ocean played a central role in the tsunami, and as such it has also been central to people’s efforts to get over its lasting effects (Ch. 4.0). However, the agency of the sea also keeps the tsunami alive in the present.

The sea’s very materiality has implications for how it produces memories and maintains the tsunami in the present. Its fluid and dynamic materiality means that it cannot be shaped or built upon by people in the same way that terrestrial space can be. As such the construction of monumentalised memorials does not occur on the ocean. Furthermore, the ocean’s rhythmic movements engender a constant remaking of space. Nevertheless, it is still an important space of memory for some. Whereas tsunami debris on land generally remains in place until somebody moves it, debris at sea is (re)moved. As such, following the wave, it did not take long for the sea to appear visually similar to before the tsunami. However, currents and movements can also return debris to the coast. For example, bodies continued to be washed

up on the beaches around the area for several weeks following the tsunami. Indeed, debris from tsunamis is taken by the sea, revealing itself on near and distant shores in the weeks, months and even years after the waves strike (see Maximenko and Hafner, 2011; 2013).

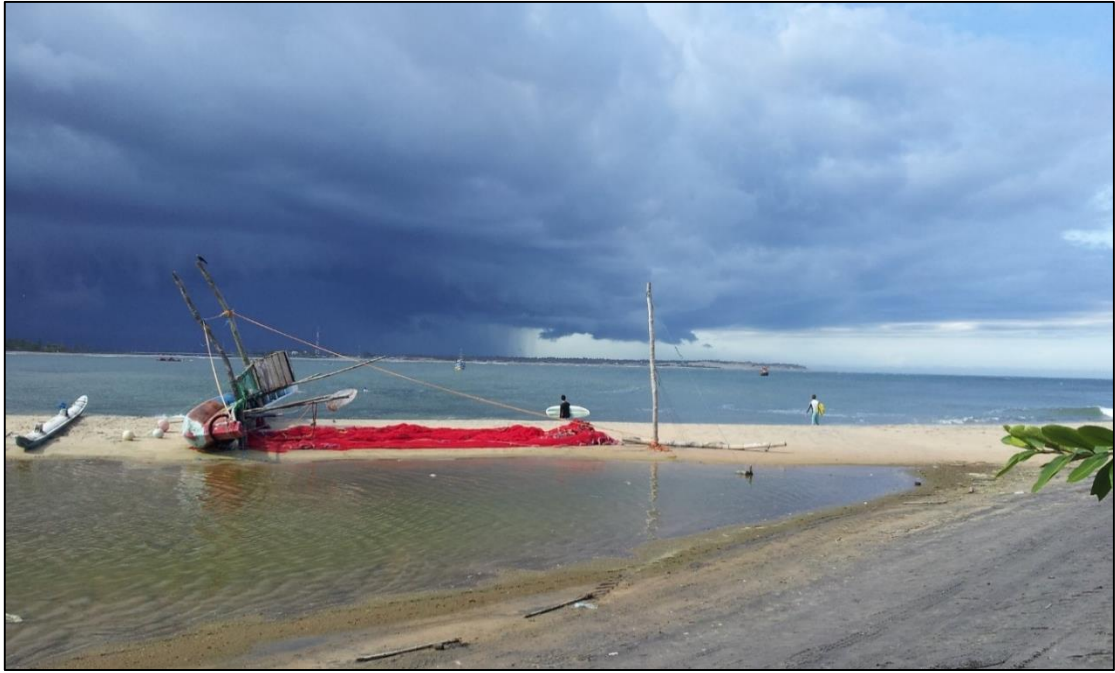
The sea further acts as a realm of memory due to the shifting relationships people have with it. The tsunami reconfigured what the sea's agency was capable of, and produced a new imagination of precarity that comes from living on the coast (Lehman, 2013). As such, the sea's movements are (re)imagined to incorporate the tsunami. For example, one afternoon whilst I was at the Surf Club, a surging wave on the incoming tide flooded some nearby sunbathers. "It's another tsunami, run!" joked Pradeep (PT006). While such a light-hearted statement suggests that for Pradeep the tsunami is no longer a deeply traumatic subject, it also emphasises the way in which the disaster has entered everyday consciousness and vocabulary, descending into ordinary life (see also Das, 2007). Prior to 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, such an occurrence would not have elicited such a reaction.

A more dramatic example of the sea's agency is the reaction that many people have to storms. Particularly during the monsoon season, it was not uncommon for the bay to be struck by sudden high winds and heavy rains (Figure 7.v). When this happened the sea would be whipped up into a frenzy, with the regular rhythmpatterns of the waves becoming chaotic and unpredictable. Such storms were also very intense, often accompanied by thunder and lightning. When these events occurred, it prompted a number of residents to rush to check the internet, radios and television announcements for another tsunami. During stormy nights, I was told that many people would abandon their homes on lower ground and sleep in friends and family houses higher up the hill:

*Night time, sometimes when it's windy, stormy, some people saying 'oh tsunami coming'. So people going topside for sleeping. (Lalitha, PT039)*

*I many scared of tsunami. When storm coming I thinking about tsunami, and thinking maybe tsunami coming. (Mamar, PT031)*

Every person I spoke to knew that tsunamis are caused by tectonic activity, and not the product of atmospheric processes, such as storms. Nevertheless, that did not stop memories and fears of the tsunami being triggered by the violent agency of the sea. This violent agency is associated with the violence experienced during the tsunami, and as such causes the disaster to be lived in that moment.



**Figure 7.v** Storm approaching the bay, Arugam Bay. October 2012. *Photo: Author*

The fear that storms produce highlight two key points. Firstly, that the tsunami has changed *where* people feel threatened by the violence of the ocean. Fishers and others described that they have always feared the ocean, particularly during storms. The violence of storms pose a very real threat to fishers whilst out fishing, and furthermore those on land, not fishing, feared for their husbands, brothers, sons and friends when they were caught at sea in storms. However, since the tsunami, people have become afraid of the ocean whilst undertaking land based practices, such as sleeping. The tsunami blurred the imaginary line between land and sea (see Ryan, 2012), as the sea moved beyond its usual spatial confines onto land. This links to the second point, that it is important to acknowledge how the sea is not a distinct, isolated body or object. Rather, building on recent outputs in human geography (see J. Anderson, 2012; Anderson and Peters, 2014; Lehman, 2013; 2014; Spence, 2014), it is essential that we consider this watery realm *relationally*. In this case, the seas behaviour has a direct relation to the atmosphere, the land and to the people who live with it and construct specific knowledges about it.

The 2012 false alarm, as described at the start of this chapter, was perhaps one of the most intense ways in which the tsunami has been brought into the present day. In this instance the wave was relived in a very real way by the residents of Arugam Bay. This occurrence was the product of the coming together of the earth's tectonic movements with human-made



**Figure 7.vi** Tsunami warning siren, Arugam Bay. *Photo: Author*

technology installed as a result of the 2004 disaster, specifically the coastal wide alarm system (Figure 7.vi). This combined with new knowledges, fears and memories of tsunamis to produce a very real experience of the tsunami in the present. The Indian Ocean wide alarm that the 2012 earthquake provoked is an example of the new geographical connectivities and spatialities that the tsunami produced (Greenhough et al. 2005). Prior to 2004, tectonic activity off the coast of Sumatra that did not produce a tsunami would have had very little bearing on the everyday lives of Arugam Bay. However in 2012, the tremors provoked panic, fear and served to remind the coastal population of Sri Lanka that everything they had worked towards in the wake of the 2004 wave could be taken away again in an instant.

These three examples: the surging wave and sunbathers; fear of storms; and the 2012 false alarm highlight how the agency of the ocean has the potential to cause the tsunami to be lived in the present. They also highlight how the tsunami is experienced in different intensities, which vary through time and space. On the one hand, the tsunami maintains a presence in the mundane and everyday, as seen with Pradeep joking about a small wave affecting tourists'

sunbathing experience. On the other hand, the trauma, fear and precariousness of coastal life are experienced in very real and intense ways during moments like the 2012 false alarm.

This section has explored how the tsunami continues to maintain its presence in everyday life through the material agency of the coastscape. I have described some of the many moments and provocations in which the tsunami was present, or described to me during my time in Arugam Bay. It is likely that there are a number of other ways in which the material coast reminds people of the tsunami which were concealed to me. While the wave crashing ashore represented a cataclysmic break from the everyday rhythmpatterns, the constant presence of the tsunami in people's lives, its ongoing threat and fear of it have become part of the everyday rhythms of life in the area. In this sense, the tsunami has descended into the realm of the ordinary (Das, 2007; see also Hastrup, 2011; Samuels, 2012). However, the people of Arugam Bay are not paralysed by such a presence. Rather they have remade everyday life to include the tsunami. The following section explores the ways in which life has been remade, practices have shifted and strategies have been implemented to overcome the disaster, to make the tsunami affected coast liveable in the wake of such a cataclysmic disruption to one's life.

### **7.3 Remaking Everyday Life**

#### *7.3.1 The destruction and rebuilding of social ecosystems*

As I argued in Ch. 3.0, our everyday lives are rhythmic, in tune with other people and things. Regular, repeated rhythms offer a sense of stability and support through “familiarity, routine, aesthetically comfortable spaces, and a sense of belonging and security” (Till, 2012: 10; see also Fullilove, 2004). People become attached to place, relying on these rhythmic movements, which builds a sense of who people are, constructing what psychologist Mindi Fullilove (2004) refers to as ‘social ecosystems’. We have countless potential possibilities on how we move through our environments, however, our patterns of movement are often repeated, a kind of ‘mazeway’ that provides us with security and stability (Till, 2012: 9).

When we are forced to move from the environments in which we have constructed our social ecosystems, or these environments are fundamentally changed and/or destroyed, then individuals and groups can suffer what Fullilove (2004) terms ‘Root Shock’. This is a “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem”

(Fullilove, 2004: 11). What we consider familiar, and how we identify who we are, has been taken away. This was certainly many participants' broad perception of what the tsunami had done to Arugam Bay. Many people in from the area referred to how the tsunami destroyed 'everything' and how they were left with 'nothing':

*[The tsunami] destroy all. Everything [was] destroy[ed]!* (Matthi, PT016)

*People, they had nothing after the tsunami, like so not even dress or things like that* (Pradeep, PT006)

*I see a lot of broken homes, a lot of people die, everybody crying, have no food, have nothing... And we were like going crazy because we have nothing [left]* (Vinay, PT008)

*I mean after tsunami like, we got even not flip flops, that mean we got nothing just our property [which was all] broken... So we got nothing, not even ID, you know like we can't even prove we are Sri Lankan...* (Mallee, PT010)

*We run, but we see [the tsunami breaking] everything. Everything [was] broken.* (Chanaka, PT005)

*After tsunami, our shop, our home, everything broken.* (Hasitha, PT009)

Thus, the tsunami served to destroy people's social ecosystems, fundamentally changing the area as familiar places, such as homes, businesses and public buildings were reduced to rubble. What's more, the tsunami also changed the way people perceived the sea, as the potential agency of the sea, and its usual relatively predictable rhythms, were completely reconfigured (see Ch. 3.0; also Lehman, 2013; 2014). As documented in Ch. 6.0, government and NGO policy towards (re)construction after the waves was to 'build back better'. This meant that the area was rebuilt physically very differently to how it existed prior to the tsunami, notably were more concrete buildings, and greater emphasis on tourist businesses.

Despite the fundamental change to the area, the presence of life before the tsunami continues to inform life 'after' the physical waves. As Judith Butler explains:

Places are lost – destroyed, vacated, burned – but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of the new place. What is new, newness itself,



is founded upon the loss of original place, and so it is a newness that has a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by the past that continues to inform it. And so this past is not actually past in the sense of ‘over’, since it continues as an animating absence in the presence one that makes itself known precisely in and through the survival of anachronism itself (Butler, 2003: 468).

Despite developers seeing the post-wave coastscape as a ‘blank slate’ (see Klein, 2007), places are always the product of the past, even if what existed has been shifted cataclysmically. Following the tsunami, the fear, shock and trauma of the waves prompted a number of people to leave the area. Residents spoke of many people, friends and family members moving inland, selling their beachfront land at cut prices, unable to face living in the shadow of the tsunami. However, for most people in Arugam Bay, they returned to the area, drawn back from temporary shelters. Ishan explained his family’s predicament when in the camp:

*[At first we felt] we don’t want to live by the sea, [when] we in the camp. Then, after three months we feel like we want to get back to sea yeah. We feel we miss this life. (Ishan, PT003)*

For Ishan and his family, being away from their old life was too difficult to maintain. They felt that they missed their former social ecosystems too much, which crucially involved the sea as well. For many from the area, they had to move back to Arugam Bay, as this was the only place they had a home. Furthermore the only livelihoods they knew, often fishing or tourism based practices, could only be fulfilled by the sea, specifically in Arugam Bay (see also 4.0). In addition to this, in the immediate aftermath of the wave, people were forced to move to temporary accommodation, often camps and shelters. In these circumstances it is very difficult to perform the everyday, and rebuild a social ecosystem for oneself<sup>39</sup> (see Wilford, 2008). As such, it is unsurprising that so many people ended up returning to Arugam Bay, to rebuild their lives in the area.

In the wake of the wave people had to go through a necessary process of ‘remaking’ social ecosystems and reconstructing communities of practice. In the words of Das, they had to

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<sup>39</sup> That said, in other parts of Sri Lanka, particularly the North East, people have been displaced for many years due to both the war and the tsunami. In these cases, ‘temporary’ accommodation becomes increasingly ordinary and part of everyday life (see Ruwanpura, 2008; 2009; Walker, 2013a)

“pick up the pieces and find out how and whether to go on, that is, to go on living in this very place of devastation” (Das, 2007: 13). Everyday life had to be reconstructed, new rhythmpatterns established and the place had to be made ‘liveable’ once more. Even if the area had been rebuilt physically identical to how it was before the wave, it would still be a very different place to that of before the tsunami. As such, when people work to make their lives go ‘back to normal’, they are not necessarily ‘going back’, but rather they reconfigure what is considered ‘ordinary’ (see also Samuels, 2012). Everyday life is not static, but rather it is constantly made and remade, unfinished and in a constant state of becoming (see Ch. 4.0; also de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1987; 2004). As such, the past is always part of the present. This process has been described as ‘descending into the ordinary’ (Das, 2007). What is considered ‘ordinary’ can include acts of extra-ordinary violence, in this case violence from the sea:

While everyday life may be seen as the site of the ordinary, this ordinariness is itself recovered in the face of the most recalcitrant of tragedies: it is the site of many buried memories and experiences (Das and Kleinman, 2001: 4).

As such, the remainder of this chapter explores this notion of everyday life and how people now actively engage with the tsunami as part of the practice of everyday life.

### *7.3.2 Remaking communities of practice*

Both Fullilove’s (2004) concept of ‘social ecosystems’ and Das’s (2007) concept of ‘descending into the ordinary’ provide useful ways of conceptualising reactions to disaster and violence, as they allow for a focus on people’s everyday strategies and practices, rather than predetermining concepts such as ‘grief’ or ‘trauma’, which in themselves have contextual specificities (Das, 2007). In this section I return to the concept of ‘communities of practice’, exploring the ways in which these communities have been (re)made in the wake of the tsunami. In particular I stress the ways that these knowledge communities have (re)incorporated the tsunami into everyday practices.

In her account of people living with violence as part of everyday life in eastern Sri Lanka, Rebecca Walker (2013a) documents how fishers went out to sea immediately after the tsunami. Despite knowing that there were very few fish about and that the chance of a catch was slim, the fishers felt a need to keep-up regular routines. The practice was less about

financial return, and more about “establishing and remaking their meaning and identity as well as doing something *ordinary* to keep going” (Walker, 2013a: 114, emphasis in original).

In Arugam Bay many of the fishers with whom I spoke did not return to sea for several months, in some cases years, after the tsunami. This was often a combination of fishers lacking a vessel to take them, alongside an entrenched fear about returning to the space that had caused so much death and destruction:

*Not fishing for six years after the tsunami. I not any money having machan [to buy a new boat]. No NGO helping. [At first] I not want new boat. I many scared of sea after tsunami.* (Tharanga, PT029)

*After tsunami, no [house], can't stay, no boat, so come back... after three months. After getting boat, going fishing again.* (Yatthu, PT014)

*I go [fishing] after one year [after the tsunami]. I only go when getting new boat.* (Matthi, PT016)

*I fishing as soon as I get a boat. But my father not going fishing. After tsunami he stopping. Too scared to go to sea.* (Daniel, PT022)

In Arugam Bay, it was not a case of going back to sea immediately after the tsunami. Fishers had to wait to return to the sea, wait for a house to be built, for an available boat to be purchased or donated, and wait for their own fears to subside.

For those that have returned to practicing fishing, once again it is a rhythmic part of everyday life. The fishers identify themselves as fishers, or ‘men of the sea’ (Chandra, PT015). They routinely check the conditions and when not at sea, jobs such as mending nets, untangling line and repairing boats are all undertaken. However, it is important to emphasise that in the wake of the tsunami, the practice of fishing has changed. While fishers tended to emphasise the dangers of the sea, they were rarely explicit that this was because of the tsunami. Rather, as described above, such fears were the result of knowledges of the sea, acquired through experience, in which they were acutely aware of the sea’s potential power and unpredictability (see Ch. 4.0). While it is likely that people perceive such power and unpredictability as greatly augmented following the tsunami (see Lehman, 2014), the changes the fishers cited that affected them most were the reliance on kerosene (and its rising price), and the increase in other fishers using nets, meaning there are less fish close to shore. Both

outcomes are the product of donations from INGOs, and both have made fishing significantly less profitable since the tsunami. As such, it is important not to pre-suppose how one defines 'disaster'. For the fishers, who were already very aware of the sea's dangers, the tsunami has brought unexpected issues in the form of a more economically precarious lifestyle.

In addition to this, the tsunami has shifted some of the meanings behind certain fish migratory patterns. While I was in Arugam Bay the fishers enjoyed a particularly good tuna season. Boats were arriving back into the bay with dozens of fish, and stories of nets breaking due to the size of shoals being caught. On the one hand, this was excellent news for the fishers, many of whom would receive sizeable incomes from these catches. However, the catches were marked by a sense of sadness and trepidation. The last time the catches had been this profitable were in the months preceding the tsunami. This led to people coining the contemporary catch as 'tsunami tuna' and for some, including the local media, this was seen as a sign of another immanent tsunami. Knowledge of these more-than-human rhythms, produced through practice, has engendered an ongoing encounter with the tsunami, and as such the associated feelings of grief of what has been lost in the past, and fear of what could be lost in the future. Referring to the fish as 'tsunami tuna' is significant. As Das (2007) has argued, a shared language on the subject of trauma and violence helps to maintain past events in the present. However, in this case, it is the agency of fish combined with specific knowledges and memories of their actions that causes the tsunami to endure in everyday life.

The practice of tourism has changed in the area, shaped by the legacy of the tsunami. As I have argued in Chapter 5.0, the tsunami has been systematically written into the tourist landscape and become 'something for tourists to discover'. As such, tourists have been partly responsible for coastal residents' continued encounters with the tsunami. Linked to this, in Chapter 6.0 I argued that tourism shaped the (re)construction effort after the tsunami, informed on the one hand by tourists imaginations of what this exotic, paradisaal coastline should look like, and on the other hand by the economic ideologies of INGOs and other actors championing individual entrepreneurialism.

In addition to this, the tsunami has also shaped residents' attitudes towards tourism, in particular how people approach developing tourist business. While on the one hand NGOs and state funding have supported the development of individual businesses, there has been a reluctance amongst many residents to invest and commit to constructing anything too permanent. As Ishan stated in the opening paragraphs, the false alarm in 2012 caused him to

question why he had spent so long repainting his family's cabanas if the sea was just going to destroy it in an instant. This sentiment was noted by other participants:

*Nobody wants to do anything that is permanent and big and nice in this area. Everyone kinda focuses on temporary, they all think it's gonna happen again, everyone wants to live up high, um, I shouldn't say everyone, a lot of people... (Jonny, PT013)*

*After the tsunami it felt like people [are] living day by day, [they buy] TVs, mobile phones and motorbikes, rather than thinking of their future, their children's future... (Mike, PT017)*

*Life is short, we don't know what gonna happen. (Mallee, PT010)*

In the years that followed the tsunami, many people were reluctant to build permanent structures on the waterfront. Indeed, a large number of structures were made of wood and *cadjan*. However, more recently, people talked about how there was more construction occurring, and during my time in the area I witnessed a number of new concrete structures appearing. While many of these were the result of external investments, several were financed by residents of Arugam Bay.

This suggests that attitudes towards the tsunami are changing, and it is logical to assume that as time passes people would be less worried by a repeat tsunami. However, the tsunami is not the only thing that shapes everyday life in the area, and as I have argued throughout this thesis, the disaster intersects with other processes. Indeed, residents in Arugam Bay also feared losing their property by other means. As I discussed in Chapter 4.3 and 6.3, landowners in the area have been threatened with eviction from their properties by the Sri Lankan government, who are seeking to develop the area for tourism (see also APC and MONLAR, 2013; Robinson and Jarvie, 2008). Linked to this, Arugam Bay has experienced an increase in tourist numbers in the past few years, thus making investing time and resources into one's property increasingly profitable. This highlights the importance of not assuming that the tsunami dominates all aspects of everyday life in Arugam Bay. In this case, tourism development policies from central government, along with broader tourism trends in Sri Lanka, have also played a central role in shifting everyday practices. In the wake of disaster, everyday life has to be remade, but other factors influence and shape this remaking.

Another key practice that has been central to the remaking of everyday life is surfing (see also Ch. 4.3). Surfing has many intersections with tourism, and is the key reason for many tourists visiting the area. However, it is also an important practice for a number of Arugam Bay residents, and as discussed has been a key way that people have remade their lives in the wake of the disaster. Surfing has helped many of the younger men in the area rebuild their lives in the wake of the waves (Ch. 4.3). This has been through providing employment opportunities, reconfiguring the ocean from a dangerous to a fun place, and providing the means for escapist practices. Indeed, in contrast to other practices, surfing appears to be one in which the tsunami is encouraged to be ‘left behind’, rather than brought into the present. Here we can revisit Chanaka’s quote, who stated:

*I was scared to go back to the ocean, and the first time I went surfing [after the tsunami] it reminded me of the waves. But the more I surfed the more fun I had and I forgot about this day (Chanaka, PT005)*

Of course there are other aspects of the disaster which will pervade in surfers’ everyday lives, however, surfing has provided an important means for remaking everyday life. That said, surfing excludes many groups. In particular, in the context of Sri Lanka’s East Coast, women are strongly discouraged from surfing due to prevailing socio-cultural norms. Furthermore, others who have to work long hours, and have employment commitments, are less able to surf. Finally, older people and those less physically able are unable to participate in the practice.

As discussed in Chapter 5.0, approaches to research in the area have been completely remade in the wake of the tsunami. Whereas there was little published around Arugam Bay prior to the tsunami, in the aftermath, largely thanks to Naomi Klein’s work, the area has become a place inextricably associated with the tsunami and subsequent disaster capitalism. More broadly, the tsunami fundamentally changed the way research has been approached in Sri Lanka, particularly within the discipline of human geography. Sri Lanka has become strongly associated with the tsunami, and as such it has shaped research agendas. This has changed the way knowledge is produced on Sri Lanka (see Ch. 5.0). As such, part of residents’ remaking of everyday life has been to negotiate the influx of researchers, as ‘being researched’ as part of the tsunami aftermath has become an ordinary practice.

### *7.3.3 Actively keeping the past in the present*

As this chapter has thus far demonstrated, despite there being no memorial in the area, the tsunami is still remembered. Indeed, the tsunami remains alive in intersections between the agency of the material coastscape and people's everyday practices. Thus far, the examples I have given have tended to highlight the ways in which acts of remembering and memorialisation have been taken out of the hands of people living on the tsunami affected coast. Many people's encounters with the tsunami are not on their own terms, but rather come unexpectedly, or in ways that people are uncomfortable with. However, in addition to these encounters, people have actively memorialised aspects of the disaster in a number of ways as part of a remaking of everyday life.

Memorialisation practices occur in Arugam Bay in order to actively commemorate the victims of the tsunami. For example, one family I encountered in Arugam Bay would give alms to the monks at the local Buddhist temple on the 26<sup>th</sup> of every month. On this day, the women of the family would be up early preparing large amounts of rice and curry, the production of which is very labour intensive. This practice serves as a monthly reminder of the tsunami. I was invited to join some of the family in taking the meals to the monks on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> December, on the eighth anniversary of the wave. Upon giving the monks their food we then positioned ourselves in front of a large statue of the Buddha and engaged in some chanting with the monk. Following this, we returned to the family home. When I asked why the family engaged in such a ritual, one of the brothers (Prasanna, PT061) explained to me that it was "for karma", specifically to pass on good karma to those who had died and help them in their next life. This is an important part of Theravada Buddhism, in which gifts are bestowed upon monks in order to transfer karmic fruitfulness to the dead, aiding them in gaining a better rebirth (see Harvey, 2013: 45; Langer, 2007: 148). I asked Prasanna if there was anyone specific they did the ritual for. He informed me that it was largely for relatives who had died in the tsunami, although he also said he specifically thought of an individual, a coconut picker who perished in the tsunami, who he believed to not have anyone engaging in such a ritual on his behalf.

The practice of giving alms was one that the family engaged in before the tsunami struck. However, through enacting it every month and focusing on tsunami victims, the practice has taken on new meanings. I witnessed this further in practices surrounding shrines. Shrines play an important role for Buddhists, Hindus and Christians in Sri Lanka, and they have a very

visible role in the country's landscape. In Arugam Bay, as well as a central Buddhist shrine, and multiple roadside shrines in the nearby area, there are numerous small personal shrines outside people's houses, associated with individuals' religious and particular practices. On the anniversary of the tsunami I witnessed one Hindu woman lighting candles and incense on her shrine dedicated to various deities, and was told it was in memory of several members of her family, including her parents, son and grandson, all lost in the tsunami. The shrines I encountered in Arugam Bay were not dedicated to the tsunami, but rather had broader religious and spiritual significance<sup>40</sup>. Religious and spiritual practices at shrines are important parts of everyday life for many people in Sri Lanka and the tsunami has become incorporated into these practices.

Both rituals described above actively bring memories of the tsunami into people's lives, however emphasis is placed on the individuals lost in the disaster, rather than the physical wave itself. In both cases, pre-tsunami practices are reconfigured to include the tsunami, highlighting how the tsunami is incorporated within the remaking of everyday life. This is similar to the memorialisation practices involving family photographs. Photographs play an important role in the interplay between "memory, time and loss" (Jones, 2011a: 881; see also Prosser, 2005). These images are a present representation of a moment in the past that is no longer. As such, they are argued to be "the medium in which we unconsciously encounter the dead... [They] are not a signs of presence, but evidence of absence. Photographs contain a realization of loss" (Prosser, 2005: 1). They are "a trace of a person's presence; but they are also taken, displayed and circulated in an awareness of the pervasiveness of absence and distance" (Rose, 2010: 47). In Arugam Bay, as with many households around the world, photographs are common in households. Images of loved ones adorn the walls and shelves of people's homes, filling homes with memories of special occasions in the past, weddings, births and other celebrations or events, as well as photos specifically commemorating a lost loved one. In the case of the latter it was not uncommon for the dates of the individual's life to be depicted, embossed in gold calligraphic lettering. All too often I witnessed a date which left me with no need to ask how the individual departed:

2004-12-26

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<sup>40</sup> In the case of the large Buddhist shrine in the centre of the village, this also has political significance, and is part of the ongoing normalisation of a Sinhala-Buddhist presence in Tamil and Muslim dominated areas (see e.g. Klem, 2014)



While these photographs highlight the loss, Gillian Rose has also maintained that photographs of people “carry a part of the person they picture, and in that sense they – the photo and the person – are real, beyond representation” (Rose, 2004: 560). Rose also highlights the paradox with family photography, as it is simultaneously incredibly emotionally affective, but also banal, and part of the ordinary landscape of everyday life, both in photographs’ positioning and their depictions (Rose, 2004). Photographs have different meanings for different people (Barthes; in Rose, 2004; see also Rose, 2010), and I never asked people if these images of loved ones reminded them of the tsunami out of respect for their loss. As a researcher on such a sensitive subject I did not feel that it was my right to ask such a personal question, even during interviews. However, the numerous photographs featuring this date suggests a normalisation of the tsunami in people’s everyday lives. Being adorned on families’ walls and shelves throughout the area I conducted research, the date of the tsunami is encountered in the everyday, and as such it descends into the ordinary. In order to remember and commemorate loved ones, one has to deal with the tsunami itself. As such, the tsunami has become a part of the materiality of the home, part of people’s tactics to memorialise and cope with the personal losses they experienced. What’s more, these photographs also served as a constant reminder *to me* of the loss that people had at the hands of the tsunami, and hence of the sensitive nature of the research I was conducting. They highlighted the very personal traumas that people have gone through, and continue to experience – an important point to remember when the disaster is so often defined by its unprecedented scale and power. Indeed, these photographs are never of the disaster itself, but rather of what has been lost, keeping the presence of loved ones in the present. This is an important process when dealing with loss and trauma.

## **Conclusion**

For many of Arugam Bay’s residents the tsunami continues to inhabit the coastscape. Place plays an important role in stimulating and enlivening memories, and as such the past continues to reside in, and shape, the present. Therefore it is particularly significant that people continue to reside in the site where the disaster unfolded. For the residents of Arugam Bay, the coastscape is littered with objects and sites which remind them of the tsunami. While many of these seem obvious, such as ruins, tsunami information signs or images that

represent large waves, others are deeply personal and individualised, such as Ishan's 'tsunami tree'.

The dynamic nature of the coastscape, and the agency of various actors also serves to keep the tsunami present in contemporary everyday life. In particular the behaviour of the sea, and its ability to become stormy, violent and unpredictable, has the potential to cause residents to seek higher ground, and relive the sense of fear and precariousness that the tsunami enlivened. Other actors which may produce such feelings include animals, notably 'tsunami tuna', demonstrating how the tsunami can be experienced in potentially unexpected places and through unpredictable means. This emphasises how the material coastscape and more-than-human actors have shaped the disaster and its legacy. It also highlights the shifting knowledges of the environment that have emerged in the wake of the wave.

In light of these changing ways of knowing place, and the perception of people's social ecosystems being completely destroyed, people in the area have undergone a process of remaking everyday life. That is to say, rather than trying to get over the tsunami, or exorcise it from their minds, people have instead learnt to live *with* the tsunami, allowing it to inhabit their ordinary, everyday lives (after Das, 2007). Phrases such as 'tsunami tree' or 'tsunami tuna' are indicative of this. What is important to remember here is that the tsunami did not produce a 'blank slate', but rather people quite deliberately re-inhabit the familiar spaces they did before the tsunami, even if these spaces have fundamentally changed as a result of the wave.

In doing this, practices on the coast have altered, notably due to shifting knowledges of the environment, but also due to the influx of new ideas, technologies and social structures brought in by INGOs and government policies (see also Ch. 6.0). As such, the communities of practices of fishing, tourism, surfing and researching have changed significantly since the tsunami, highlighting how different groups experienced the tsunami in different ways. Of course, knowledges are always in a state of becoming and unfinishedness, however, the tsunami accelerated and shaped these changes. Memorialisation of the tsunami, or more specifically people lost in the tsunami, has also become an important influence in religious and spiritual practices. These practices were undertaken before the tsunami, but have been reconfigured in the wake of the wave, as part of remaking everyday life. Similarly, the tsunami maintains a presence in people's homes through the repetition of the date of the

tsunami on memorial photos of loved ones lost in the waves. This is an important tactic to allow the tsunami to 'descend into the ordinary'.

Overall, this chapter has further demonstrated how the tsunami has become an inextricable part of the practice of the everyday in Arugam Bay. That is to say that this extra-ordinary occurrence of the sea rushing ashore has become engrained in ordinary life on this coast. However, it is important to emphasise that there is more to life in Arugam Bay than simply a population reacting to the effects of the tsunami. Rather, the tsunami is one feature in a myriad of concerns in Arugam Bay, all of which intersect and overlap to produce everyday life. Furthermore, as the area changes, as knowledges shift, memories are remade and as other factors become of increasing concern, notably the rapid tourism development the area is experiencing, it is likely that the tsunami will fade even further from people's consciousness.



## CHAPTER 8.0

### CONCLUSION

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I returned to Arugam Bay in May 2015, two years after the fieldwork for this thesis was completed. This was largely to feed back some of my work to those I had worked with, but also to gain an insight into how the village had continued to change. Perhaps most strikingly was the pace at which tourism had continued to develop, with several new businesses appearing, and the main strip significantly more bustling and busy than May 2013. A number of my friends from the area commented on this rise in tourists, but also how the increasing number of businesses - many of which were set up by people from Colombo, Hikkaduwa and other parts of the South West coast – had meant that they were seeing few benefits from the increase in visitors. As I spent more time in the area it was striking how everyday life had continued. In my absence people had got married, some had had children, and some people had passed away. Conversations ranged from hopes and concerns about tourism, the recent defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the recent swell that had got surfers so excited, concerns over declining fishing stocks, gossip about local romances, and the recent affairs of the Sri Lankan cricket team. I attended a good friend's wedding and was also introduced to another friend's son who had been born in my absence.

During these happy moments it was easy for me to forget that the tsunami had happened at all. Indeed, one of the central tsunami evacuation signs had weathered in the past two years to the extent that it was almost impossible to see what was written on it. This seemed to be almost symbolic, signifying that people may be moving on from the tsunami all together. And yet, despite this, I continued to encounter the tsunami during my short visit. On numerous occasions I witnessed tourists asking residents about the tsunami, storms continued to make people nervous of a repeat wave, and while many boats had been repainted, many still bore the names of the NGOs that donated them. As I spent time with friends in the village, the tsunami still came up from time to time in conversation. Everyday life has continued in Arugam Bay since the tsunami and everyday life had indeed evolved and changed in the two years since I had last visited. But the tsunami remains in the lives of the residents of Arugam

Bay. While life goes on, as Mamar (PT031) said, quoted at the start of this thesis, “The tsunami? It change everything.”

The thesis has explored the social and cultural legacies of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami focusing explicitly on Arugam Bay, in South East Sri Lanka. Rather than considering the tsunami as an ‘event’ that occurred in the past, I have highlighted some of the manifold ways in which the tsunami continues to influence and shape everyday life in the area. Indeed, as Mamar’s quote above suggests, the tsunami has fundamentally changed people’s perceptions of the area, and the way they go about their everyday lives. The thesis has utilised ‘communities of practice’ as a heuristic device to explore how the tsunami has permeated everyday life. This has been a part of the project’s broadly postcolonial strategy that has sought to understand the tsunami as much as possible on the terms of those who live, work and play on the affected coast, whilst also rethinking and disrupting some of the dominant discourses surrounding the tsunami. In doing this, the thesis has also been an exercise in clearing discursive space for other voices and experiences of the tsunami to exist.

The thesis makes an important contribution to what has become a rather saturated field (see Brun, 2009; Buranakul et al. 2005; Korf, 2010). Firstly, it moves beyond the ‘event’ of the wave and the months that followed. Rather, it focuses on how the tsunami remains present in people’s lives over eight years after the initial waves struck the coast. Secondly, it focuses explicitly on people’s everyday lives. Through utilising ‘communities of practice’ as a conceptual framework, I have explored the ways the tsunami intersects with other processes, specifically how it becomes part of the ordinary and mundane aspects of everyday life. Thirdly, the heuristic device of ‘communities of practice’ has allowed me to highlight how the tsunami is not something that is experienced evenly, but rather has had asymmetric impacts. In addition, I have shown how knowledges about the tsunami are situated, partial and contested. This has been central to my attempt to think through the varied and subjective experiences of the tsunami. Finally, this thesis has brought together scholarship on the tsunami and recent work in human geography that has begun to take the sea seriously as a social space. This has been central to my understandings of everyday life in Arugam Bay, and the ongoing legacies of the tsunami, but has often been overlooked in previous geographic accounts of the disaster (see Lehman, 2013).

Based on this, the thesis has sought to explore how the tsunami has permeated the day-to-day lived realities of the people of Arugam Bay. As part of this, it has focused on how these

experiences vary between different groups, in particular exploring how communities of practice affect the ways in which people have negotiated the tsunami. In exploring the manifold experiences of the tsunami, I have sought to reveal the extent to which narratives and representations of the tsunami, and tsunami affected coast, are varied and contested. Finally, I have highlighted how the specific materialities and more-than-human actors on the coast have shaped the disaster and its legacy. In the following sections I demonstrate how I have answered the thesis' research questions, before highlighting some of the practical, theoretical and political implications of the findings. Finally, I explore possible routes for expanding this research.

### **8.1 Empirical findings**

In this thesis I have highlighted how an approach utilising 'communities of practice' can augment understandings of the legacies of disasters, specifically the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. In particular I have stressed that the manifold knowledges produced about the tsunami have continued to shape the way the tsunami is experienced and negotiated in the present. This links to a major challenge for the project, which stems from Gayatri Spivak's (1988) question: 'Can the subaltern speak?' How could I produce knowledge about the tsunami, without 'speaking for' participants and (re)producing a form of ventriloquism and the subversion of subaltern agency that I critique throughout? By using postcolonial theory as a *method* (after Jazeel, 2007; 2013b) to think through the legacies of the tsunami, highlighting absences and silences in popular representations of it, I demonstrated how my work is not a definitive representation of people's experiences of the tsunami. Rather, it is an attempt to unsettle and encourage a rethinking of dominant imaginations of the disaster. It also crucially emphasised that my research is not located outside of Arugam Bay or Sri Lanka, but rather argued that, through my practice of producing knowledge about the place, my research and I are firmly embedded within Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka. As such I highlighted the importance of ensuring responsibility to the places one conducts research.

This approach informed the whole thesis, and accounted for the first two empirical chapters that sought to theoretically and contextually situate the research. From the ethnographic data it very quickly became clear that the sea plays a central role in (re)producing everyday life in Arugam Bay. Chapter 3.0 identified this, and served to 'write back' against dominant discourses of the sea that position it as an 'othered', cultural void and purely 'natural' space.

As such, this chapter engaged explicitly with the medium of the disaster, the sea, situating and contextualising it within knowledges and practices of Arugam Bay, and thus provided a grounding for the rest of the thesis. The chapter also introduced my approach to space and place, which broadly conceptualised places as dynamic, assemblages of practices, materials and discourses (after Massey, 1991; 2005). This chapter focused explicitly on the latter two aspects of place, firstly through tracing how dominant imaginations of the sea are less appropriate when applied to the context of Arugam Bay. Secondly, it emphasised the importance of the material agency of the sea itself, particularly its rhythmic qualities which are central to building (a sense of) place in the area. This is a particularly important point, as it was a cataclysmic disruption to these rhythms that produced the disaster. The chapter also lays the foundations to explore how the sea's specific materialities shaped the disaster and its aftermath.

Chapter 4.0 complimented Chapter 3.0's exploration of how places are produced. This further contextualised my research, and locating it as a part of Arugam Bay. Indeed, the chapter highlighted the importance of contextualising practices, showing that they have spatial and temporal specificities. In doing this, I argued for an approach to practice that holds discourse and practice *together*, as mutually informing one another. A central facet of this approach has been to interrogate what I have termed 'communities of practice', which are groups of people who are unified through certain activities, producing specific and situated knowledges in the process. This chapter introduced the four main communities of practice which subsequently ran through the rest of the thesis: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. These knowledge communities were described in depth, highlighting their contextual specificities and relationship with the tsunami. This was part of the thesis' postcolonial strategy, in which practices are argued to have social and cultural particularities, informed by history and geography. Building on this, I argue that the ways in which people react to, and attempt to remake, everyday life is contextual. In doing this, it highlights how the tsunami affected different groups in different ways.

Having contextualised the case study, and highlighted how knowledges of the tsunami are subjective, situated and contested, the remaining three empirical chapters expanded on this, tracing some of the ways that the disaster continues to shape everyday life in the present day. The first of these, Chapter 5.0, explored how the disaster has been spectacularised, monumentalised and subsequently has continued to be consumed in the present day. The first section of this chapter explores specifically the commodification of the disaster, situating it as



a consumable, packaged 'event'. This, I argued, was a product of the spectacularisation of the disaster, a result of news and media coverage, as well as representations of disasters in movies. Indeed, the 2004 tsunami has featured in a number of Hollywood films. Such representations of the tsunami narrate it in a certain way, as bounded and with a conclusion. This perversely serves maintain encounters with the disaster in the present. I explored how this occurred through two communities of practice, tourism and researching. Tourists show an interest in the tsunami, having encountered it as a commodified spectacle on the news and in films. Through such an interest, they force residents to engage with the tsunami, asking questions and taking an interest in what happened on that day. While for some this provides a useful way of processing and sharing their experiences of the disaster, for others it provokes an unwanted encounter with the tsunami, forcing them to relive painful memories, losses and traumas. While people develop strategies for dealing with this, such encounters are not in their hands, and residents of Arugam Bay are denied the opportunity to deal with the tsunami on their own terms. It is tourists who decide whether to provoke an engagement with the tsunami. The chapter also explored the parallels between tourists and researchers coming to the area in the wake of the wave. In the same way that the tsunami captured the imagination of tourists, it also has been of huge interest to researchers from various backgrounds and disciplines seeking to make sense of the disaster. Many of these researchers had previous personal and/or academic ties to Sri Lanka, however many were also drawn to Sri Lanka specifically because of the tsunami. This project is an example of the latter, the product of funding that has become available to research the tsunami. Funding bodies and university departments striving for high 'impact' research facilitate such research to be undertaken. In doing this, Sri Lanka has become a place indelibly associated with the tsunami, as the disaster has come to dominate geographical academic outputs about Sri Lanka. This has implications for those living on the tsunami affected coast. As I discussed in Chapter 2.0, research does not occur 'outside' of Arugam Bay or Sri Lanka, but rather plays a role in the construction of places. In doing this, I argued in this chapter that in a similar way to tourists who seek to 'discover' the tsunami on their holidays, researchers consume the tsunami as part of their work. Researchers are also responsible for producing experiences of the tsunami, as 'being researched' becomes part of everyday life on the tsunami affected coast.

The second section of Chapter 5.0 explored the monumentalisation of the tsunami in Sri Lanka, building on previous work by Simpson and de Alwis (2008). In particular, this section explored how there is a lack of a material memorial to the tsunami within Arugam Bay,

which contrasts with other parts of the island (see Simpson and de Alwis, 2008). Expanding on this, I explored how the memorialisation of the tsunami has been contested. On the one hand this is the product of contested nationalist politics, which (re)produces the tsunami as a ‘national disaster’, in which imaginations of the nation are restricted to the country’s Sinhala Buddhist population. However, national memorialisation practices have also been largely ignored by Arugam Bay’s Sinhala Buddhist population. This, as I argued throughout the chapter and thesis as a whole, is largely because the tsunami is not an event confined to the past, but something that people continue to live, endure and experience in their everyday lives in the present day. Memorial practices performed by those directly affected by the tsunami tend to focus largely on loved ones lost in the waves, rather than the tsunami itself. This provides an example of how, while important, ethnic identity politics do not shape every aspect of life in Sri Lanka. As such, this chapter highlighted how different groups experienced and negotiated the disaster in contrasting and, at times, conflicting ways.

Chapter 6.0 built on the work of the previous chapter, continuing the argument that the disaster should not be considered spatially or temporally contained. The chapter focused on one of the more visible lasting legacies of the tsunami: the humanitarian aid and development that followed the wave, which is unavoidably intertwined with the disaster. Making use of previous critiques of tsunami aid, the chapter explored how the giving of aid reinforced relationships of subservience and dominance between some donors and recipients, bound within specific narratives and global imaginations. It also argued that the wounding practices of aid and the tsunami are kept alive in the present through (I)NGO signage that continues to feature throughout the area, highlighting some of the materialities that have shaped the disaster’s aftermath. The chapter departed from previous critiques of aid by exploring how aid was not practiced homogenously. I explored how members of a key community of practice, surfing, responded to and shaped the disaster. A particular relationship with the sea, personal links to the area, and a specific spatial imagination that perceived a ‘global surf community’ provoked a different response to the tsunami than that of mainstream aid. Rather than giving to anonymous ‘others’, surfers were helping members of their own ‘community’, unsettling the notion of giving at a distance and upsetting traditional notions of patronage and reciprocation. Through interrogating communities of practice, this chapter revealed how the tsunami did not simply affect places located where the waves struck. Rather, it emphasises how places are related to other parts of the world through multiple communities, networks and connections. The chapter further departed from previous critiques of aid through

exploring two key ways in which the residents of Arugam Bay have shown agency in the face of adversity. This was seen through people taking control of previously inappropriate aid projects, notably housing, and transforming them to suit their needs, as well as removing aid related signage in the area. Some people also manipulated their position as ‘tsunami victims’ in order to benefit materially and socially, in particular taking advantage of the emotions of wealthier tourists in order to receive gifts.

Chapter 6.0 also explored the ongoing effects of tourism development in the area, a process which was augmented and accelerated by the tsunami. This was due to the Sri Lankan government and aid agencies considering tourism as central to recovery and growth in the wake of the waves. However, in line with broader socio-economic changes within Sri Lanka, development in the area has resulted in concerns in Arugam Bay surrounding issues of displacement, uncertainty and an increasingly fractured community. Many people I spoke to cite the tsunami and the subsequent humanitarian response as a key factor for this. While tourism development has resulted in many residents diversifying their livelihoods, and provided an increased and more reliable income than fishing, it has also had detrimental effects regarding environmental concerns, tensions within the community, and increased inequality between those who are able to benefit from tourism, and those who are not. The chapter, broadly speaking, revealed how the legacy of aid has been written into everyday life in the area, with an unavoidable association with the tsunami. As such, it provided a key example of how the tsunami continues to pervade the everyday lives of the residents of Arugam Bay, but affecting people in asymmetric ways.

Chapter 7.0 continued this exploration of the tsunami as part of everyday life, explicitly focusing on memory and the material coastscape. Indeed, this chapter most strongly highlighted the agency of the more-than-human actors present in Arugam Bay, exploring the ways in which the material world maintains the presence of the tsunami on this coast. The chapter explored the numerous ways that this occurs. This can include the deep fear provoked by false alarms of a repeat tsunami, a reminder of the sea’s destructive potential during storms, or above average tuna catches mimicking events in the weeks preceding the waves, eliciting concerns of another disaster. The tsunami also endures in people’s lives through its presence in the coastscape in less intense ways. For example through INGO signage, as discussed in Chapter 6.0, tsunami evacuation signs, wave and tsunami imagery featured in tourism signage, and other, more personal reminders of the day the waves struck. Along with the previous two chapters, this chapter strongly highlighted how everyday life is remade,

incorporating the tsunami as a part of people's quotidian practices. The tsunami inextricably changed the way people go about their daily routines, shifting and reconstituting what is considered ordinary. This ranges from how people relate to the sea, with an ongoing fear prevalent amongst many, to changing the date one gives alms to the temple – a practice undertaken before the tsunami, but subsequently reconfigured in the wake of the waves.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate how the tsunami is neither spatially nor temporally contained, its effects sprawling beyond the confines of the Indian Ocean basin and the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Rather than an 'event' confined to the past, the tsunami is an ongoing part of everyday life in Arugam Bay, in which people continue to experience its effects in manifold ways. Building on the work of Veena Das (2007), the effects of the tsunami can be considered part of a 'remaking' of the world in the wake of disaster. Many of these effects are the product of relationships and knowledges of the disaster between different groups of people, as well as interactions with the more-than-human. Such knowledges are not homogenous, but rather are situated, partial and at times contested. As such, relationships between people and knowledges have shaped the ways people continue to live with the tsunami in the present. Importantly, this thesis does not exist outside of these relationships, but rather is situated within specific, situated knowledges, and the research process, as well as this written account, are all part of people's ongoing experience of the disaster.

## **8.2 Implications of research**

Through mobilising the concept of 'communities of practice' as a heuristic device to explore the legacies of the waves, this thesis makes an original contribution to a heavily researched subject: the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. It combines debates within human geography that focus on practice and materiality with postcolonial theory - principally debates surrounding knowledge production - and in doing so expands knowledge and understandings about the tsunami. Through engaging with geographical theory, the thesis develops and challenges certain concepts and ideas within the discipline, with a number of theoretical implications. Furthermore, the epistemological approach, arguments and conclusions of the thesis have broad implications for those researching the tsunami (and other disasters), as well as those studying everyday life in Sri Lanka and beyond. As a number of scholars have argued, it is important that research on the tsunami has some practical implications, particularly in

supporting better aid policies and implementation (see Brun, 2009; Buranakul et al. 2005; Korf, 2010; Wong, 2005). As such, following a discussion of the theoretical and academic implications of this research, this section considers some of the more practical and policy-based implications of the thesis and its conclusions.

As a piece of work located specifically within geographical scholarship, this thesis has a number of theoretical implications for geographers and their discipline. Firstly, the concept of ‘communities of practice’ provides a useful way to approach the challenge of thinking through the division between discourse and practice. As discussed in Chapter 4.0, (British) geography’s materialist turn in the past two decades, particularly the body of work termed ‘non-representational theory’, has come at the expense of thoroughly engaging with issues of discourse and representation. This has led to a limited ability to contextually understand issues surrounding radical alterity (see also Jazeel, 2014). Yet, it is also important that the discipline does not retreat from exploring practice and the everyday, which has been a central part of geographical scholarship in recent years. Throughout the thesis I have developed the concept of ‘communities of practice’ which holds practice and discourse together, as mutually informing one another. This is important if geographers are to continue to explore practices, particularly in contexts in which ‘quite other’ spatial formations and knowledges may be present, and where an acknowledgement of the contextual specificities, and the discursive construction of these knowledges, is required to effectively engage with such places.

Secondly, and linked to this point, through its mobilisation of a postcolonial methodology the thesis encourages academic geographers to reflect on how we produce knowledge and how our discipline represents a ‘community of practice’ in itself. It highlights how geography as a discipline maintains a number of taken-for-granted knowledge systems, particularly in relation to European theory and knowledge which often act as a silent referent when exploring non-European people and places. The key implication for geographers here is to problematise the prevalence of the discipline’s Eurocentrism and to encourage geographers to think through how their theorisations may silence the very voices, experiences and knowledges they are seeking to write about. As such, rather than attempting to speak for groups, who are not necessarily homogenous in the first place, geographers are instead well placed to question and unsettle presupposed knowledges that perpetuate colonial (and other) power’s subjugating effects, in the process clearing space to allow people to speak *on their own terms*.

Thirdly, the thesis highlights the importance of engaging with the ocean in geographical scholarship. Building on work from scholars such as Kimberley Peters, Phil Steinberg, Jessi Lehman and Jon Anderson (see Anderson and Peters, 2014; Lehman, 2013; Peters, 2010; Steinberg, 1999a; 2001; 2013) it further encourages geographers to move beyond a terra-centric focus, explore new material spaces, and acknowledge the agency of this fluid space. Indeed, geographers' previous exclusion of the sea from serious academic debate is partly due to the Eurocentrism of the discipline and the philosophical tradition that positions the ocean as a material and cultural void. The thesis departs from this standpoint, highlighting that our engagements with the sea can be an important postcolonial strategy in and of themselves. However, in doing so, the thesis also highlights that it is important to postcolonialise our engagements with the sea, and as with the previous point, not exclusively rely on Eurocentric theory to explore oceanic and coastal places in different contexts.

For geographers and other researchers exploring the tsunami, and those investigating disasters more broadly, the thesis also provides a number of implications. Firstly, it builds on work that encourages us to think of disasters as ongoing processes. One of the key conclusions of this project has been that the tsunami is not a bounded event, but rather continues to shape the practice of everyday life nearly a decade after the waves struck. It provides an example of how, despite there being little evidence of large-scale and immediate impact (such as rubble or active NGO projects), a disaster can still subtly yet powerfully affect people's lives. As such, in order to fully comprehend the socio-cultural impacts of the tsunami, the thesis highlights that researchers (and research funding bodies) need to continue to engage with it (as with other disasters) after the spectacular impacts have subsided.

Secondly, the thesis also highlights the usefulness of a broad geographical perspective in approaching disasters, stressing the importance of considering the contextual and material specificities of disaster. It does not provide a universalising, meta-analysis of disasters based on a case study of Arugam Bay. Rather it highlights how disasters play out and are negotiated in heterogeneous ways, which are varied depending on the places in which they strike. It builds on work that has stressed that so-called 'natural-disasters', such as tsunamis, do not occur in vacuums (e.g. Pelling, 2001; Ruwanpura, 2008). Rather, the places in which they strike have social, cultural and political specificities that shape their legacies. Linked to this, the research has shown that material context of the disaster should also be considered, and tsunami research should acknowledge the importance of the fact that it was *the sea* that played a central role in the devastation (see also Lehman, 2013). Engaging with and building

on geographical work that explores the materiality of sea and coastal spaces can provide a deeper understanding of the ongoing legacies of the tsunami. A similar engagement with the materiality of other disasters has the potential to reveal similar insights. A further benefit of taking a geographical perspective when exploring the tsunami is the insight that the impacts of the tsunami are not spatially confined to the Indian Ocean basin. In particular, it is important that researchers exploring the legacies of the tsunami acknowledge the connections between places, and that the reaction of people physically distant from the waves still shapes the way the disaster played out. This research uses the example of people donating money to NGOs, tourists, and researchers to highlight this point, however there are many other examples that future researchers could explore.

Thirdly, the thesis clearly demonstrates that tsunami research is an intrinsic part of the disaster itself, and that it is important that researchers locate themselves within the places they are working. This has practical implications for how one explores the tsunami, particularly in contexts in which a large influx of researchers have been present, leading to research fatigue, participants giving responses they think the researcher wants to hear, and other issues. While important, this concern has been propagated by researchers for some time in numerous contexts, including the Indian Ocean tsunami (see e.g. Buranakul et al, 2005; Korf, 2010; Wong, 2005). However, this point also has important ethical implications for the ways in which researchers studying disasters and other traumatic subjects approach their work. In particular, the thesis highlights that it is important to acknowledge how research has the potential to contribute to the ongoing presence of a disaster in everyday life. Through engaging with people about their experiences of the tsunami, researchers - myself included - create a situation where they force an engagement with the disaster. It is important that in the process of designing and undertaking ethnographic research on the tsunami (or other disasters) that researchers take into account that the disaster would be dealt with differently had they not been present, and the potential for our research to be upsetting or even traumatic.

The thesis also has a number of implications for those studying everyday life, both within Sri Lanka and beyond. It develops a specific field of knowledge that encourages those conducting research to reflect on how they come to know the people and places they are studying. In particular, building on work within geography and postcolonial theory that explores the politics of knowledge production, representation, and responsibility (see e.g. Ismail, 2005; Jazeel, 2007; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007; 2010; Noxolo, 2009; Noxolo et al. 2008; 2012; Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Raghuram et al. 2009; Spivak, 1994), to argue that

researchers exploring everyday life need to be beholden and answerable to the places that they are conducting their work. Furthermore, the concept of ‘communities of practice’ highlights how the practice of everyday life is informed through knowledges which are socially constructed, situated and partial. In doing this it highlights how practices need to be considered contextually, and that there are multiple and sometimes contested ways of engaging in specific practices. Indeed, as with the implications it has for geographers, the concept of communities of practice is a useful one for those wishing to explore the contested nature of everyday lives, to avoid pre-determining the importance of their subject matter (in this case the tsunami), and allow the agency of more-than-human actors to be acknowledged.

Building on previous work that has explored everyday life in Sri Lanka (see Gaasbeek, 2010; Walker, 2013a), the thesis provides an important counter-narrative to accounts of Sri Lanka that position it solely as a place affected by war or natural disasters. This is important for those engaging with this place, and other places which have had specific, single narratives constructed around them. As the research revealed, since 2005 research outputs on Sri Lanka from within geography have been shaped by the tsunami, with over a quarter of publications focusing on the subject. In addition to this, the civil war also dominates academic outputs related to Sri Lanka. For example, within geography since 2004 over a third of publications on Sri Lanka have focused on war and/or conflict<sup>41</sup>. Undoubtedly the tsunami and the civil war have had an important role in shaping people’s lives in Arugam Bay and Sri Lanka more broadly. However, such dominance in research outputs runs the risk of writing Sri Lanka as a place defined by various disasters, and fails to appreciate the broad range of experiences and issues facing Sri Lankans. While this thesis has revealed some of the ways in which the tsunami continues to pervade everyday lives, there is more to life in Sri Lanka than these two dominant topics. A focus on communities of practice allows for a deeper understanding of other factors shaping people’s lives, moving beyond the notion that people are simply victims of war or natural disaster. In particular, the inclusion of surfing provides an important example of how everyday life in Sri Lanka can include joy, fun and excitement. Indeed, the research demonstrates that people in Arugam Bay, as well as being affected by the tsunami and the civil war, also work, have fun, fall in love, get bored, face numerous joys *as well as* numerous hardships in life. To acknowledge this is to depart from this ongoing narrative of

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<sup>41</sup> Data obtained from Web of Science, April 2015.



Sri Lanka, as well as broader representations of the ‘developing world’ that position it as a homogenous, vulnerable, and dangerous space (after Bankoff, 2001).

As well as theoretical implications, the thesis provides a number of important practical and policy related implications. This is particularly related to the practice of international humanitarian/development aid. Firstly, the concept of communities of practice encourages a rethink of how ‘communities’ are defined. Rather than conceptualising community as a population located in a bounded place, or defined by ethnicised or other socio-cultural and economic features, a focus on practice allows for communities to be multiple, overlapping, and contested. Indeed, focusing on what people *do*, rather than making assumption about who they are, allows for an augmented understanding of people’s lives increasingly on their own terms. This is particularly pertinent to development organisations who place ‘community consultation’ at the core of their practice. This has been critiqued for being overly Eurocentric in its conceptualisation of community (Jeganathan, 2009) and fails to acknowledge existing power structures and exclusions *within* particular places (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Through acknowledging the heterogeneity of places and the multiple communities that are present in them, the practice of community consultation could be better placed to define communities and be more inclusive in its methodology. This could lead to aid being practiced in a more appropriate, effective and meaningful manner.

Secondly, the thesis has implications for how aid agencies implement their projects, particularly how they sign and label their work. One of the key ways in which participants cited that they were reminded of the tsunami was through NGO signage in the village. While certain projects and ‘gifts’ may have been well received, the constant presence of signage indicating the circumstances in which it came to be into people’s possession is a cause of distress and upset. Indeed, in attempting to mitigate the effects of the tsunami, humanitarian organisations have in some cases contributed to its continued ‘wounding’. This feeds into a broader implication of this research, that the actions of humanitarian organisations have ramifications long after the project has finished and the aid workers have moved on. This links to one of the key conclusions of the thesis, that the tsunami should be considered as ongoing and unfinished.

Thirdly, as I have argued above with regards to academic practice, when responding to disasters it is important that aid agencies take the materiality of the disaster into account. For many projects conducted in Arugam Bay, the fact that it was *the sea* that swept ashore was

not acknowledged, resulting in several poor policy decisions. The theoretical arguments in the thesis highlight how people's everyday lives have involved a reconfiguration of their ongoing relationship with the sea. This has involved new feelings of fear, with many people worrying about the potential of the sea's agency *on land*, or in other words about a repeat tsunami. An example from this research has been people's unwillingness to move into houses rebuilt too close to the sea for fear of another tsunami. As such, when thinking through housing reconstruction, aid agencies should consider the impact that disasters have on people's relationship with their environment. Similarly, rather than focusing overwhelmingly on 'visual projects', such as housing or schools, the research has highlighted the benefits of addressing this shifting relationship with the environment, and in the case of the tsunami specifically focused on reconnecting people with the sea. The thesis' focus on fishing and surfing highlights this, in particular demonstrating the benefits that surfing has brought to young men in the area. Some NGOs, particularly surf related ones, have acknowledged this and focused explicitly on reengaging people with the sea.<sup>42</sup> However, such a consideration was largely absent from the projects of larger INGOs that operated in the area following the waves striking.

Finally, the thesis also has implications for tourists visiting the coasts in which the tsunami struck, revealing how the tsunami has become part of the tourist landscape. The research has highlighted how the tsunami has been transformed into something to be consumed by tourists and that 'learning about the tsunami' has become part of the touristic experience on the Sri Lankan coast. In doing this, the thesis critiques the role of tourists, and researchers such as myself, in preventing people from negotiating the disaster on their own terms. As such, a key implication of this research would be to encourage tourists (and researchers – see above) to think through the impact their actions have on those living on the affected coast and to acknowledge that their actions have the potential to shape ongoing negotiations with the tsunami.

### **8.3 Future research**

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<sup>42</sup> Some of these projects have continued, taking into account the specific gendered dimensions of surfing in Sri Lanka. In July 2015 a surf introduction day designed specifically for women saw many women and girls in Arugam Bay try surfing for the first time. For many, this was the first time they had been in the sea since the 2004 tsunami.

As with so many attempts to answer a question, this thesis has, in its response, opened up numerous further questions and avenues of study. Indeed, this project makes absolutely no claims to be a definitive account of the disaster. Rather, it has sought to clear conceptual space for other, non-dominant voices to exist, emphasising the importance of acknowledging the specific context of the study. As such, future studies could expand on my approach, utilising ‘communities of practice’ as a heuristic device to explore the legacies of disasters in other contexts. This could include exploring the legacies of the tsunami in other contexts, such as some of the other countries affected: Indonesia, Thailand, India or those in Eastern Africa. This could provide some interesting comparative data. Similarly, as I have stressed throughout the thesis, Arugam Bay is unique within Sri Lanka, and as such, one cannot consider the experiences described here to be the same in other parts of the island. Rather, the island has a diverse number of settlements, with varied socio-economic demographics. While I have warned against the dangers of essentialised comparisons in a Sri Lankan context, nevertheless exploring the experiences of people in other places within Sri Lanka could reveal some useful insights into the disaster, particularly with regards to ethnicised responses, as well as other socio-economic variabilities. Expanding this research even further, one could apply this approach to other contexts, utilising communities of practice as a way to explore the legacies of other disasters.

In this research I largely focused on four specific communities of practice in Arugam Bay: fishing, tourism, surfing and researching. However, as discussed, these represent four of many potential communities of practice that could have been explored. Focusing on other communities of practice, for example domestic work or childcare, could reveal additional information about the legacies of the tsunami, in particular in relation to the experiences of other groups less present in this thesis. Linked to this, and as I discussed in depth in Chapter 2.0, the data collected, and subsequently the conclusions I have drawn from this, are a product of my own positionality, *as well as* produced by the participants themselves. My positionality, combined with time restraints, meant that there were voices in the area that are less prevalent in the data. These include the experiences of women and children, as well as members of the Muslim population living in the area. Future research could focus more explicitly on these groups to explore in further depth whether the legacies of the tsunami have gendered, age related or ethnicised and religious dimensions.

Due to the dynamic and changing nature of place, and the fact that the tsunami is an ongoing feature in everyday life, this research could also be expanded by returning to Arugam Bay

several years in the future to see how engagements with the disaster have changed, or indeed, endured. This could provide some additional insights into how the tsunami maintains a presence in the coastscape, highlighting how the intensity of suffering changes over time.

This thesis touches on a number of issues that could be explored in more depth in the future. This may include a deeper engagement with trauma studies, and thinking in depth about the individual and collective meanings of trauma. Linked to this, an exploration into the explicit role of religion, faith and beliefs could uncover some new insights into how people have negotiated the tsunami. Finally, this thesis has interrogated some of the discursive representations of the tsunami and the sea. However, due to time constraints it was impossible to conduct a full, in depth discourse analysis of representations of the tsunami. Future research directions could make use of web-based and physical archives to explore these in more depth in order to discover if any additional themes emerge.

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As I write these words, over ten years since the waves struck, the tsunami continues to pervade the rhythms of everyday life in Arugam Bay. While it affects some more than others, and its presence fluctuates in intensity, the disaster is still being processed and lived by people living in the area. As with all places, Arugam Bay is in a state of constant change, particularly with the onset of rapid tourism development. As such, people's relationship with the sea, and their relationship with the tsunami will continue to change as well. Nevertheless, it will be many years, probably generations, before the disaster disappears from consciousness, and as such, people in Arugam Bay will continue to *live with the tsunami*.

# APPENDIX I

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## APPENDIX II

### List of Participants

Code	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality/Ethnic Identity	Other
PT001	n/a	M	27	UK	Researcher, tourist, surfer, fisher (of sorts).
PT002	Joe	M	20s	E-NA-A <sup>43</sup>	Tourist, surfer
PT003	Ishan	M	20s	Sinhala/Tamil	Surfer, Surf Instructor and surf school owner, Fisher (recreational), NGO worker following tsunami
PT004	Janu	M	20s	Tamil Christian	Parents own tourist business
PT005	Chanaka	M	20s	Sinhala	Surfer, employed at surf school, tourist worker
PT006	Pradeep	M	20s	Sinhala	Surfer, fisher, surf instructor.
PT007	Addam	M	20s	Tamil Christian	Bar manager
PT008	Vinay	M	20s	Tamil Christian	Surfer, fisher, surf instructor
PT009	Hasitha	M	20s	Sinhala	Surfer, fisher (recreational), surf instructor, family runs tourist shop
PT010	Mallee	M	20s	Sinhala	Surfer, fisher, tuk tuk driver, surf instructor, family runs tourism business
PT013	Jonny	M	30s	E-NA-A	Surfer, fisher, NGO worker
PT014	Yatthu	M	40s	Sinhala	Fisher, tuk tuk driver
PT015	Chandra	M	50s	Sinhala	Fisher, tuk tuk driver, surfer
PT016	Matthi	M	50s	Sinhala	Fisher, small tourist business owner
PT017	Mike	M	50s	E-NA-A	Surfer, Fisher (recreational), hotelier, NGO worker following tsunami
PT018	Ellie	F	19	E-NA-A	Tourist, volunteer, family involved in post-tsunami aid
PT019	Sanjeev	M	40s	Tamil Christian	Fisher, surfer, surf instructor, board repairer
PT020	Thambi	M	18	Tamil Christian	Fisher, surfer, surf instructor

<sup>43</sup> E-NA-A – European, or North American/Australasian of European descent.

<b>PT021</b>	Benji	M	20s	E-NA-A	Surfer, fisher, NGO worker
<b>PT022</b>	Daniel	M	30s	Tamil Christian	Surfer, surf instructor, occasional fisher
<b>PT023</b>	Bandula	M	30s	Sinhala	Surfer, fisher, café worker
<b>PT024</b>	Hannah	F	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist, beginner surfer
<b>PT025</b>	Rob	M	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist, surfer
<b>PT026</b>	Seeya	M	60s	Sinhala	Retired fisher and cabana owner
<b>PT027</b>	Cindy	F	30s	E-NA-A	Tourist, surfer
<b>PT029</b>	Tharanga	M	50s	Sinhala	Fisher
<b>PT030</b>	Krystina	F	30s	E-NA-A	Surfer, tourist
<b>PT031</b>	Mamar	M	50s	Tamil Christian	Fisher, former surfer
<b>PT033</b>	Malu	M	30s	Sinhala	Fisher
<b>PT028</b>	Steve	M	30s	E-NA-A	Tourist, surfer
<b>PT032</b>	Alyna	F	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist, surfer
<b>PT034</b>	Ashok	M	20s	Tamil	Surfer, fisher, café owner
<b>PT035</b>	Sonny	M	30s	Sinhala	Fisher
<b>PT037</b>	Uma	F	20s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT038</b>	Manni	F	20s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT039</b>	Sanuthi	F	20s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT040</b>	Imali	F	20s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work, surfer
<b>PT041</b>	Usha	F	30s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT042</b>	Gowri	F	30s	Sinhala	Domestic work
<b>PT043</b>	Lalitha	F	30s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT044</b>	Becky	F	30s	E-NA-A	NGO worker, surfer
<b>PT045</b>		F	40s	Sinhala	Domestic work
<b>PT046</b>	Selvie	F	40s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT047</b>		F	50s	Tamil Christian	Domestic work
<b>PT011</b>	Nigel	M	50s	E-NA-A	Surfer, tourist business owner, fisher (recreational)
<b>PT012</b>	Uri	M	30s	Israeli	Surfer, tourist business owner
<b>PT036</b>	Ali	M	20s	Muslim	Surfer, business owner
<b>PT048</b>	Chapal	M	20s	Tamil	Surfer, fisher, surf instructor
<b>PT049</b>	Yosef	M	30s	Israeli	Tourist, surfer

<b>PT050</b>	Nirmal	M	50s	Tamil	Fisher
<b>PT051</b>	Katie	F	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist
<b>PT052</b>	Sam	M	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist, Surfer
<b>PT053</b>	Jimmy	M	40s	E-NA-A	Long term tourist, surfer
<b>PT054</b>	Dilup	M	30s	Sinhala	Tourism worker
<b>PT055</b>	Suvendrini	F	20s	Sinhala	Restaurateur, domestic work
<b>PT056</b>	Sumendra	F	30s	Sinhala	Restaurateur
<b>PT057</b>	Rani	F	50s	Tamil	Domestic work
<b>PT058</b>	Raj	M	50s	Tamil	Hotelier
<b>PT059</b>	Razik	M	40s	Muslim	Fisher
<b>PT060</b>	Jess	F	20s	E-NA-A	Tourist
<b>PT061</b>	Prasanna	M	30s	Sinhala	Small business owner

## KEY

	Researcher
	Interviewee (recorded)
	Interviewee (not recorded)
	Focus group participant
	Other participant

# APPENDIX III

## Example Interview Transcript

yeah yeah. So in Arugam Bay, you're fishing, you're surfing,  
it's all about the sea, the ocean, would you say that the sea is  
very important for you?

Um... I believe so far, ocean, sea is the um... kind of... you know, *Religion & Sea*  
a god you know, like we believe the reason we live is from that. *OCEAN*

Uh I think ocean, if we going to fishing, then we get money to *FISHING*  
live, food to eat, so, yeah, so far we... uh... love, like and we  
make, uh... you know something nice. We don't want to do bad  
thing for the ocean. Always we try to do they proper way. And  
this way like safety way, we don't want to make, like uh, dirty *Sustainability conservation of ocean KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY*  
ocean, like dirty things, still not yet, like in future, yeah, or  
something. *KNOWLEDGE'S*

So like need to try and keep clean and...

Keep clean yeah.

Mmhm. Do you find there are any bad things about living  
next to the ocean? *No tsunami?!*

Um... not really much, no, but uh, uh... we got way to do, we *knowledge*  
got rules to do, so we follow that things, we do, so its gonna be *KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY*  
nice, or else it's gonna be difficult. *yes. sustainability.*

What sort of rules?

Uhh... time to fishing, and uh, what the, what kind of nets, *This is from the got.*  
what you gonna using. So we don't have a limit to fishing, so *FISHING KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY*  
that is very... uh, kind of, good thing to for us, the reason we

can fish more than ten, fifteen tonnes per day, for one person  
its possible, no problem, so reason we got much fish around  
our Indian Ocean, so that kind of good thing for us.

Abundance of  
ocean.

OCEAN

key +  
memory  
to memory  
memory

Yeah, um, for you, how has the village changed in the past  
ten years?

leading a

Um, you mean like um, you know, so far after tsunami, getting  
develop you know. Like lot of NGO and a lot projects and a lot  
of companies and a lot of others, like out of the country, you  
know, they giving donations and support to Sri Lanka, so much,  
like after tsunami, like um, so far before tsunami, probably  
some of them they got nothing to live and nothing to make  
money, then after tsunami, um... even then they got so many  
things to live and make money, so I am very happy about that  
and I'm very sad about who die from tsunami, you know. So I  
got big story about that, but I don't want to say.

Tsunami +  
NGO together

TSUNAMI  
NGOS

Nothingness

No, you don't need to talk about...

Sadness  
Doesn't want to  
share  
↳ I brought  
up memory?

MEMORY

Answer

So yeah, I don't want to remember, you know. Like tsunami for  
me, um, it's like eight years ago, eight and a half years ago, but  
I feel it's like the last couple of days before that happen to us.  
Even, um, it's inside in the heart, always with me.

Researching

Temporality of  
tsunami  
↳ Memory

TSUNAMI  
MEMORY

RHYTHM TIME?

key

Yeah, so you're thinking about it often?

\* key

Yeah, yeah.

short answer:

So do you do anything to memorialise the tsunami?



What is this?

Err.. Like memorialise, um, remember the tsunami. Like in Colombo they do a minute's silence, and there is a statue on the...

No. No. We don't need to remember it. In Colombo they didn't experience it, but we live it every day. Why would I want to remember something that felt like it happened two days ago?

No memorialisations.

KEY

Temporality of tsunami  
Colombo different  
Situated knowledge

TSUNAMI  
MEMORY  
REMEMBERING  
EOL  
KNOWLEDGE

Of course. Yeah, but do you talk about it with your friends?

Yeah, sort of, just around, three week ago I talk with my girlfriend, reason uh, she ask about my life style and those things like this, so I explain about this, very easy for me to repeat again. Um, but it's not really happy way to chat and

tsunami influences lifestyle

TSUNAMI

explain those things, you know, I find that sad to remember, I think for others it's nice to hear and good to heard and nice experience from that, but I don't think it's going to be good for me, there is a reason, I don't want to, you know.

Sadness.

Others want to hear about it

TOURISM

Situated knowledge

So you're saying tourists often asking you about it?

Research impact

tourism

TSUNAMI  
MEMORY  
TOURISM

Yeah, it's so far I think more than, um, after tsunami I, maybe I remember around, more than ten people been asking for me, but I don't want to explain about those things. Just long time later, like three week ago I explain about those thing, to my girlfriends, you know, that's all.

Doesn't want to talk about it

A time to wait before can comfortably speak

But why to

Yeah, um...

But you know, I didn't know the word tsunami until three months after. I know that the sea coming, but I don't know what this mean. NGO and government people saying this word.

Really? I see. Um, did you, like after the tsunami, did you feel scared of the ocean?

No, like even that tsunami time, that uh, no, not really scary, the reason I know how to surf, I know how to swim, I know what I have to do with water, so it's OK with me and my... better, it's ok with my friends and my brothers, and others in

Arugam Bay, the reason they are fishermen, they know how to swim, they know what they have to do something like that.

So too much people missing and dying from that, they don't know how to swim and they are old and they are young, so, so far they affect, that's the reason. So that's why I, I... tried to

Gender -  
teach my cousins' sisters how to swim and how to surf, so I start from two years ago, I start to teach them swim, so another two... one or two years later I going to teach them how to surf and there will be more safety and good for them you know.

Yeah

Yeah so its not much surfer girls surfing in Sri Lanka...

Yeah, now why is that?

knowledge  
Confusion of  
tsunami  
knowledge  
learn!

Relationship with  
sea - swimming?  
Does it fit with  
many other  
knowledge

Age dimension to  
tsunami death  
↳ situated, embodied  
knowledge.

Surfing & swimming  
= safety from  
tsunami

Gendered practice

TSUNAMI  
KNOWLEDGE

NGO

TSUNAMI  
SURFING  
OCEAN  
KNOWLEDGE  
COMMUNITY

FISHING

KNOWLEDGE  
COMMUNITY

REMARKING  
COL

SURFING

## APPENDIX IV

### List of Sources for ‘Critical Familiarisation’

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This list is not exhaustive, but represents the principal sources that informed my ‘critical familiarisation’ with discursive material related to the tsunami, Sri Lanka and Arugam Bay.

*BBC News 24, Tsunami Coverage - 26/12/04.* Source:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRZG3OWMHtE>

*Carve Surf Magazine* – Various Issues

*Club of the Waves* <http://www.clubofthewaves.com>

*Facebook* – Various pages

*Flickr* – Search ‘Arugam+Bay’

*Google Images* – Search ‘Arugam+Bay’

*Instagram* – Search ‘Arugam+Bay’

*Rough Guide to Sri Lanka.* Thomas, G. (2012) *Sri Lanka* Rough Guide, London

*Sri Lanka Insight Guide.* Insight Author. (2009) *Sri Lanka.* Insight, London

*Sri Lanka. Footprint Guide.* Chare, S (2011) *Sri Lanka* Footprint Travel Guides, Bath

*Sri Lanka. Lonely Planet Guide.* Ver Berkmoes, R., Butler, S. & Karafin, A. (2012) *Sri Lanka.* Lonely Planet, London

*The Guardian (UK)* – Various issues

*The Impossible [film]* – Bayona, J. A. (2012) *The Impossible.* Warner Bros, Spain

*The Surfers’ Journal* – Various Issues

*The Surfers’ Path Magazine* – Various Issues

*Tripadvisor.com*

*Visit Sri Lanka: The official website of Sri Lanka tourism* – <http://www.srilanka.travel>

‘Welcome to Arugam Bay’ *Sri Lanka Tourist Board, 2012.* Full brochure available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151132547759894.466486.34935689893&type=3>