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Small-scale fisher migration, conflict and wellbeing

A case study from Sri Lanka

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7 Migration, place-making and wellbeing

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the wellbeing pursued through seasonal migration and the place-making behaviour of migratory fishing communities in northwestern Sri Lanka. It answers the fifth sub-question: *Why do small-scale fishers migrate to the same place even amidst multiple conflicts?* The chapter explains the motives in selecting a place for seasonal migration and the trade-offs made between three-dimensional wellbeing and their place-making in the host community. This chapter is organized as follows. Section 7.2 explains the motives of place-making of migrant fishers. Section 7.3 analyses the relationships between three-dimensional wellbeing and place-making in the host community. Then, these motives are used to build upon the conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) in section 7.4. Finally, the chapter concludes by answering the fifth sub-question in section 7.5.

7.2 Migration, place-making and fisheries

Place attachment in fisheries includes inter-related attachment to marine fishing grounds and attachment to the adjacent land for the preparation of fishing operations (Stephen 2014; Urquhart and Acott 2013). The place is crucial in determining and shaping the physical setting and the material environment of fishing communities along the littoral zone (Acott and Urquhart 2014; [see 5.2.1.1]). Unlike most of the other fishing communities in the world, e.g. in West Africa (Binet et al. 2012) and Okinawa, Japan (Sugimoto 2016) who are part time fishers with a farming origin, Sri Lankan small-scale fishers have been full time fishers for generations (Amarasinghe 1989; Stirrat 1988; De Silva 1964). Migratory behaviour is important as a livelihood strategy (Njock and Westlund 2010) to secure the present and future wellbeing of households and communities but not explored fully in the scholarship. Hence, this study intertwines the place-making behaviour with the more comprehensive approach of ‘wellbeing’ to unravel the complexity of migratory fishers’ behaviour and decision-making in place selection and thereby enhancing wellbeing factors.

In-depth interviews held with migrant fishermen and women revealed three major types of motives namely economic, functional, and social. The economic motive for place-making includes resources, earnings, and accessibility (see 7.2.1). The functional motive deals with affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions (cf. Scannell and Gifford²⁴ 2010) (see 7.2.2). Being a collective activity in a particular community, the collective aspects of fisheries are discussed under the social motive (see 7.2.3) that explains person-to-person relationships pertinent to fishers’ identity, community identity, security, and migratory site identity. These driving factors are discussed in sub-headings under each motive.

7.2.1 Economic motive

Economic analysis in place attachment literature has been limited to exchanging gifts and expectations on reciprocity depending on age, wealth, and cultural context (Debenedetti et al. 2014; Joy 2001). Our study looks at diverse economic factors that influence the place-making behaviour of migrant fishers including; (i) earnings and savings (see 7.2.1.1), (ii) access to resources, markets, and credit (see 7.2.1.2), (iii) alternative income sources (see 7.2.1.3), (iv) availability of natural resources (see 7.2.1.4), and (v) low population density (see 7.2.1.5).

²⁴ Here, only one process-seasonal migration of small-scale fisheries is discussed rather than a complete psychological analysis.

7.2.1.1 *Income and savings*

The prime goal of seasonal migration is to attain higher earning capacities and considerable savings, which is uncertain by staying in the home region during the off-season. Less expense on junk food (see the quote below), frugal lifestyle (no electricity and water bills), cost reducing fishing operations, and fishing income (a function of both harvest and price²⁵) at the migrant location enable savings. These savings help fishers to settle their debts, incur new loans, redeem mortgages, spend on religious (church) festivals, and repair and invest on fishing craft and gear. Fishers prefer to migrate to a place where they have less expenses with a relatively good income. Migration brings about 80,000 – 100,000 LKR (593 – 740 USD) per month approximately. This is an attractive income compared to poor earnings (less than 200 USD) in the home region during the off-season. This is illustrated by the following quote.

“We do not have many expenses in Silavathurai. No electricity bills, no water bills, we cook all three meals, do not spend a lot of money on snacks and cookies. On the other hand, we can get a good harvest. No need to sail too far, so low fuel cost. The fish trader buys the harvest at a fixed rate”. (I#42)

The above quote further provides information on the fish pricing mechanism. Fish prices at Negombo/Chilaw are subject to frequent fluctuations. Fish at the top of the net (*uda malu*) receives higher prices than at the bottom (*yata malu*). If the fisher arrives late to the market because he landed late, then the catch is considered as *daval malu* and lower prices are offered. Such price discrimination and grading adversely affects fishers’ income enabling an exploitative behaviour of fish traders, as there is no clear criterion on grading and pricing. Despite the slightly lower prices than in Negombo/Chilaw, fish traders in Mannar buy the entire harvest at a fixed rate. This method secures a good return without much discrimination or refusal. Shorter fishing trips with a sufficient fish catch further reduces the operational cost due to low fuel costs and a short duration at sea. Fisher households invest their savings on jewelry, new engines, boats, or nets. This reduces the liquidity but increases their wealth in kind. They convert these assets into money in an emergency (see 6.3.3.1). Moreover, any mode of savings would be utilized to provide a sound education to their children.

7.2.1.2 *Access*

Access can be described in terms of admittance to (i) sea, (ii) credit, (iii) labour, and (iv) markets. In Mannar, they land their boats in front of their *wadi* (Photo 4.3).

“I am happy to be in Silavathurai because I can see my husband returning even from a distance. We can see the catch. We can serve coffee and breakfast. Often, we help to sort out fish and mend nets. In contrast, we know nothing about them or the catch until they return home to Negombo. They come for lunch spending money for tea and breakfast from a shop on the beach. The landing site is about five km from our homes. Since, we are fishers, we need easy access to the beach that would productively facilitate our fishing operations”. (I#11)

Gendered aspirations are displayed in the above quote. The place where one can perform his/her role (duties) is often valued through gender-based relations. The fisher wife in the above quote is waiting to

²⁵Total revenue from fishing= fish catch*price per kilo; profit = revenue from fishing – operational cost of fishing

serve her husband with food, labour, love, and caring and thereby nourishing the family relationships. Moreover, multiple cost-cutting ways are also elaborated, such as (i) reduce consumption expenditure by providing meals from home, (ii) provide family labour for pre- and post-harvest activities, and (iii) reduce up and down travel cost to the beach. All these cost reductions support to increase their savings when compared to the home region.

The strong fisher-trader relationship in migration sites enables easy access to credit that enhances the wellbeing of both fisher and trader (see 4.4.2). Migrant fishers are used to sell their harvest to one particular fish merchant throughout the season who supported them in migration. On the other hand, fish traders are eager to lend money as it makes the fisher liable to sell fish continuously throughout the season to him. Fishers repay their debts throughout the season smoothly. Credit facilities help continuous fishing even though the fisher incurs losses for a number of days.

“The absence of a fisher-trader relationship in the home region shrinks the credit market. Hence, borrowings are difficult”. (KI#5)

Migrant fishers find easy market access at the migration site where the buyer (fish trader) comes to the boat and purchases the entire harvest at a fixed rate (see the quote in 7.2.1.1). Some fish traders settle in the same premises (in migrating sites) throughout the season in a (ice) *wadi* (Photo 7.1) enabling fishers to interact and communicate easily and frequently. In contrast, in Negombo or Chilaw, fishers have to carry their harvest to the weighing balance (Photo 4.4) and then search for a buyer with a good offer, which is time consuming and exhausting.

Photo 7.1 Ice *wadi* - fish buying center at the migrating site - Silavathurai



Source: Author

This indicates that easy access to the sea, credit, labour, and market has become a place-making factor for migrant fishers due to enhanced wellbeing than at their home region. Secured fishing livelihood, family relations, community relations, and market opportunities have been enlarged due to migration of fisher community.

7.2.1.3 *Alternative income sources*

Alternative income generating activities are important *ex-ante* risk coping strategies for fishing households (Koralagama 2011). Depending solely on fisheries make them vulnerable due to the uncertainty of the declining and fluctuating fish catches and prices. Fisher wives are eager to process fish by drying (dried fish) and fermenting (*jadi*) if unable to sell the catch at a good price. However, restricted access to the beach –the space– and opposition by hoteliers hinder them from these economic ventures in their home region. Migration provides many opportunities for fish drying with lengthy beaches under the hot sun. Normally, fisher wives earn a profit of (approximately) 2,000 LKR (14.8 USD) per barrel at the migratory site. This allows women to engage in economic ventures, which contributes to the household income (see 6.3.4.3). Thus, fisherwomen are eagerly waiting to migrate, which enables them to earn extra money. If the fish quantity is too much to handle for one person, the fisherwoman calls for support from neighbours for fish processing, building on the relational factor. In fact, places with multiple income-generating opportunities attract migrant fishers for better earnings than at home.

7.2.1.4 *Natural resources and safety at sea*

Not only a lucrative fish catch, but fishers also look for fishing grounds where they can employ their fishing craft, gear, and equipment without adjustments. Mannar sea is calm with multiple fish breeding sites (see 4.2.1) and a good harvest. Fishers’ preference and extreme satisfaction on the place –the sea, is explained below.

“Mannar Sea is the best in Sri Lanka with a good fish stock. The sea is calm and easy to maneuver boats; so it is safer than other sea areas and has fewer accidents”. (I#15)

Although the main objective of fisheries is a good harvest, safety at sea is also an important factor. Mannar combines safety and a good catch that attracts fishers. This enhances the material wellbeing of migratory fisherfolk.

7.2.1.5 *Low population density*

A higher population density is problematic for fishing as it creates tension over the use of space at sea and on the beach for laying nets, fish landing, and dried fish processing. Being a bare unoccupied beach, fishers find SouthBar and Silavathurai more attractive than crowded Negombo and Chilaw; thus it is mentioned as a reason for migration (Figure 4.7). Higher population density; higher number of fishing households, higher number of active fishers, and fishing craft keep fishers away from the region (Jorion 1988) and vice versa (see the quote below).

“The fishing population is high in Negombo. We do not have enough space to land our boats and sometimes the nets become overlapped at sea. So a good harvest is questionable. Here, we can land our boats in front of our *wadi* without any problem”. (I#7)

Higher fishing populations may contribute to poverty due to reduced CPUE, anxiety, and fewer opportunities for other income sources such as dried fish processing. Heated arguments are not uncommon when nets are overlapped or entangled (participant observation). These result in economic loss and social unrest propelled by competition for space at sea and landing site. The importance of having easy access to the sea and landing site is shown in the above quote too. Hence, migrant fishers look for a site with ample space for fishing and fisheries related activities on the beach and at sea.

7.2.2 Functional motives

The same psychological and behavioural attributes presented in Scannell and Gifford (2010) to explain the functional motives of the place attachment theory (see Table 2.2) is used in this section to assess the affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. The place-making behaviour depends on the positive and/or negative attributes of migrant fisherfolk.

7.2.2.1 Affective

Migrant fishers in my case study sites are sensitive to the issues of local fishing communities who have suffered due to the armed conflict and are trying to recover through the support of post-war re-settlement and rehabilitation programmes. They hardly comment on the use of illegal and destructive fishing gear, ethnic issues, and land issues in order to maintain peace (see 6.3.3.2). Despite these latent tensions, with permanent ties to the place, positive emotions determine affiliations to the place. Migrant fisher families claim their happiness and togetherness at the migrated areas –not only because of the easy access to resources and the ability to earn and save, but also they feel free and united.

“We live peacefully together with the whole family. We feel free and relaxed. Even after fishing, my husband and sons stay at home; otherwise when in Negombo, they are usually idling until dusk”. (I#18)

Migration enables fisher families to spend time together. This makes fisher wives happy and feels better than in the home region. Referring from the previous section, it is obvious that the fisherwoman plays a typical role at the migratory site (see the quote in 7.2.1.2) where she waits until her husband returns from the sea to love, care, serve, and support with contently, engaging with her family members all the time. Thus, affective attributes are promoted. Further, migration helps fisher households to regain social respect, power, and dignity due to a good income, savings, and acquisition of new assets (see 6.3). Such (positive) affective factors motivate their annual migration even amidst latent conflicts.

Photo 7.2 Fisherwife takes fish for cooking



Source: Author (field work phase II at Silavathurai)

7.2.2.2 Behaviour

The behavioural aspect is a sub-dimension in the tripartite model of Scannell and Gifford (2010) referring to the actions that an individual is willing to routinely maintain at a place. The routine behaviour noticed in migrant fishers in my case study includes togetherness, religious practices, and restoration, which is explained by the following quote.

“When we migrate, we all go together and construct our *wadi* close by. Every afternoon, we get together to talk and have fun. On Sundays, we go to church together early morning and return by 11.30 am. Then we sit to drink and sing. Sometimes, the fish trader also joins. He brings us a bottle of alcohol. We work together. We stand up against any wrong action confronted by our neighbours. We pilgrim to nearby churches by hiring a vehicle from Mannar. We share the cost. But, in Negombo, there are less fun activities and sometimes we have lots of arguments with neighbours for silly things. So it is better to stay here”. (I#3)

Group entertainment (relaxing), spirituality (religious activities), and collective action are important factors that promote place-making behaviour of migrant fisherfolk (see quote in 4.3.4). Togetherness helps them to overcome the loneliness of being away from beloved families, strengthens relationships, enhances collective decision-making and information sharing, unites them in actions like protests, pulling boats (Photo 6.2), fish sorting, net mending, and other fisheries related activities that substitute for hired labour that saves money. One of the examples seen during my fieldwork was the collective action of fisherfolk against the increased fuel (kerosene) prices (see the quote of KI#4 in section 4.4.1.3). Further, the gendered behaviour in fishing communities is also explained by the above quote showing how men spend their leisure time.

Being Roman Catholics, the fishers’ affiliation to the church is influential on place-making. Although the fishermen visit the church less often than fisherwomen (KI#10; I#16; I#38) in the home region, both go to the church routinely at the migrated area on Sundays. The historically famous, sacred “Madu Church” is in Mannar. They believe it as a blessing to stay closer to “*Madu Maniyo*” (Mother Maria) that protects them from all possible calamities.

Place restoration and place reconstruction make the place convenient to live. Although migratory fishers in Baththalangundu do not possess legal ownership to the land (the beach) they have constructed a church, a small school, pre-school, and three toilets. A priest had been invited for scheduled prayers prior to the church construction in the area. Similarly, migrant fishers in Silavathurai have donated about 500,000 LKR (3,700 USD) to build a new church in the host village. It enables their routine behaviour with a spiritual life though they migrate only for a season.

These factors corroboratively present the behaviour of small-scale migrant fishers, who try to maintain their church based routine behaviour even at the migratory site. Place restoration, place reconstruction, and most of the collective actions are centered upon the church. Thus, religiosity or in other words, the faith in God has become an important determinant of place-making, which enhances the subjective wellbeing (see 4.4.1.3).

7.2.2.3 Cognitive

Migration takes place to a familiar place, which may be known by someone (Aryeetey 2000: 37) or learnt from others (Kraan 2009). Fisherman from Negombo (I#4) states:

“I know all the places where corals, rocks, and sand beds are located in Mannar Sea. I can maneuver my boat with my eyes closed. I employ hook and line for rockfish. Without having a good knowledge about the sea and seabed, it is difficult to do this job. This is the most familiar sea for me. This is why I migrate to Silavathurai yearly”.

Knowledge and awareness about the place, sea, resources, fishing grounds, fish breeding places, seabed, fishing techniques, and supporters make the fishing operation safe and easy. The compatibility with the craft and gear (that they use at the home region) is another driving factor to migrate (see 7.2.1.4). Feelings of ‘belongingness’ and familiarity have also been mentioned as important cognitive attributes in place attachment (Table 2.2). Being the birthplace for some (I#13), migrators for decades (I#4,7), and marital ties (I#1,21) have brought a sense of belonging to the migrating community. Thus, they are reluctant to seek alternative places to migrate. These cognitive factors of skills, knowledge, memories, familiarity, and belongingness are rarely considered in development interventions (see 5.2.2); yet play an important role as a place-making determinant of small-scale migratory fishers.

7.2.3 Social motives

Fishermen strive to continue as fishers even if it is not economically profitable or viable (Figure 8.6). Their (life-long) identity as fishers, fishing households, and fishing communities are more than an income source (Van Ginkel 2001); it is their way of life (Coulthard 2012:361; Brookfield et al. 2005:56; McGoodwin 2001: 256). Individual and collective ties, identities, and social networks are discussed next as social motives in place-making for migrant fishers.

7.2.3.1 Fishers’ identity

As an inherited identity descending over generations, fishing ties up fishers to their own family and the entire community, because they all are small-scale fishers who employ similar types of fishing craft and gear for years. Fisher’s identity plays a key role in establishing relationships among themselves and being a part of the society. All fishers and their wives (99%) in Negombo and Chilaw come from a long line of traditional fishing families. Most marriages occur between fishing families in Negombo or Chilaw. A few has married those from the migrated areas (SouthBar and Silavathurai). Both husband and wife (in Negombo and Chilaw fishing communities) have same family names: e.g. Warnakulasooriyalage [Given name] Fernando. Unlike South Indian fishing communities who belong to different fishing castes such as *Seruvai*, *Kadayar*, *Paravas*, and *Thevars* (Stephen 2014), most Sinhalese fishers belong to one caste ‘*Karawa*’ irrespective of the religion or region. Self-esteem aligns with their identity. Hence, they proudly introduce themselves as ‘fishers’, because fishers lead the fish supply chain employing crew, net menders, fish sorters, labourers, dried fish processors, fish traders, fish auctioneers, and many more (I#1). They believe “becoming a fisher means the generation of hundreds of jobs in society” (KI#3). The pride, autonomy, and freedom make them powerful and aggressive because as employers, the earning capacity of other actors/agents in the supply chain lies in their hands.

7.2.3.2 *Fishing community identity*

Fishing is the glue, which holds the community together (Brookfield et al. 2005:56). Communities interact with another community wherein both may practice and preserve the same culture, values, symbols, and religion (Fried 1963). Both migrants and locals are Tamil speaking Roman Catholics with a dark complexion. Their religion plays a bigger role than ethnicity. The homogeneity of language, religion, culture, marriage ties, and historical relationships for centuries create affiliation to the migratory place rather than somewhere else. Both communities are small-scale fishers targeting small fish varieties (see 4.2.2). This further encourages finding supporters for pre-and post-harvest operations in fishing.

Similarities enable collective action²⁶, exchange knowledge, and mutual understanding. Hence, social capital, trust, networking, and solidarity among people are further strengthened (Islam and Chuenpagdee 2013). This is true with the northwestern migrant fishers in Sri Lanka where they migrate together and live close by rather than dispersing to different places. Being the ‘bosses’ for some locals (hired labour), migrant fishers extend their power, authority, and social recognition creating a patron-client relationship. The establishment of a local clientele often supports to mitigate the restrictions and oppositions imposed by villagers against the migration process. Easy access to the labour market further strengthens familiarity, awareness, and capability to carry out their livelihood un-interrupted due to common identities. Besides, migration is beneficial not only for migrants but also for locals whose wellbeing is enhanced due to job opportunities, business expansion, petty trading, and knowledge sharing.

When fishers migrate, their caring, sharing, and mutual ties play a crucial role in order to overcome the isolation and sadness of being away from home. This enables them to work as a family, creating an open society with a secured social environment. This is proven by the following quote.

“The community interactions and support are high in Mannar than in Negombo. If one catches seer fish [high priced valuable fish] we share with neighbours. We get fish from others for cooking if we come with zero catch. We share curries or any special dishes with the neighbourhood in Mannar. This is not in practice in Negombo”. (I#22)

Small-scale fishers in Sri Lanka reside in tightly knit communities and share common sets of social objectives (Coulthard et al. 2014). The decision for migration is collectively taken. The migration destinations are pre-determined by migrant fisher groups in the northwest coast and they migrate as groups mostly on the same date. In contrast, Wanyonyi et al. (2016a) state, “no two migrant fisher crews follow similar routes, destinations, or durations of stay” (page 103) showing individualism in migration, which is the opposite to the behaviour of fishers in northwestern Sri Lanka.

7.2.3.3 *Migratory fishing site identity*

Other than the personal factors (individual identity) and social relationships, the physical set-up of the migratory site also contributes to migratory fishers’ identity. Fisher based place identity closely associates with the marine ecosystem, coastal landscape, and physical objects (physical tangible attributes) used for fishing operations, such as fishing boats, nets, auction building, fishing gear, floats, and storage boxes

²⁶ Both locals and migrants participated in a demonstration in Mannar town against Indian trawler encroachment during my field work, in February 2015.

(Acott and Urquhart 2014). Migratory fishing villages are different from other parts of the coast especially in the areas where migrated fishers live, demarcated by a *wadi* constructed with coconut fronds, a hole dug to get water covered by a broken barrel and a *pandalama*²⁷ (Photo 7.3). The lack of a proper water source and toilet facilities in the site is compensated by a few shared common toilets and common wells. The adjacent jungle is used by both men and women in areas where there are no toilet facilities (in SouthBar). A natural water tank and a few wells belonging to local people are accessible for Silavathurai migrants. The migrants are restricted from accessing those wells after 6 pm (none of the respondents mentioned any reason for this time restriction). In contrast, SouthBar does not have any wells nearby. Thus, the water requirement for drinking, bathing, cooking, and all other activities are fulfilled through water suppliers for money. A number of water containers and barrels queued in front of the *wadi* were noticeable.

Photo 7.3 Pandalama and a well



Source: Author

The social dimension refers to all these relationships established by migratory fishers with their migratory fishing community, local fishers, villagers, fish traders, and fishing site. Elaborations help to understand the social capital and networking, which are useful to attain the relational wellbeing of fishers individually and collectively.

7.3 Place-making and wellbeing at the migratory (host) site

The place-making behaviour of seasonal migrant fishers in northwestern Sri Lanka reflects a trade-off between different wellbeing aspects. The above sections have explained the prominent and crucial place-making determinants over three motives: economic, functional (psychological), and social (relationships) (Figure 7.1). This section further elaborates these motives through the three-dimensional wellbeing approach.

Income and savings mentioned under the economic motive is an important wellbeing factor that comes under material wellbeing. Income and savings would enlarge fishers' purchasing power, consumption, and what a fisherman requires for a better standard of life in relation to economic and social welfare. The 'catch' has been emphasized to reveal economic gain, aspirations, freedom from debts, self-esteem, children's education, and enhanced relationships with community members by means of sharing fish, labour, and

²⁷*Pandalama* is a small hut constructed in front of each *wadi* to shelter the boat. It is made up of wooden rods and a cajanus leaves roof with no walls. All the fishing activities, fish sorting, net mending, chatting, and gatherings take place in *pandalama*.

community support. In fact, all material, relational, and subjective dimensions of wellbeing are enhanced. The amount of catch in home and host regions has become a crucial trade-off in deciding the place for migratory fishers. The most important fisher relevant wellbeing factor mentioned in Chapter 6, financial stability (see 6.3.3.1) also represents the level of income and saving that can be generated from fisheries. Accessibility to the sea also contributes to all the wellbeing dimensions as it enables further savings by reducing the expenditure on extra food and drinks, travelling up and down to the beach, labour for supportive activities (substitute with family labour), and tightening family relationships. Sailing heavy boats toward the shore sparks the eyes of fisherwomen with great enthusiasm of a good catch and vice versa. Hence, access to the sea has impacts on the income, relationships, and psychological aspects that directly relate to material, relational, and subjective dimensions of wellbeing. This has also been mentioned as an important wellbeing factor by both fishermen and women in section 6.3.4.5. Access to credit, local labour, and market further support the material and relational wellbeing aspects with assured economic gains, which are lacking in the home region. An effective fish selling mechanism and fish prices are also critical material wellbeing factors. Most importantly, the migratory site facilitates other income-generating activities where fishers, especially fisher wives can enjoy a secured income to enhance the material wellbeing and subjective wellbeing that optimize their psychological aspects.

Fishing in a less populated area enhances the individual and community wellbeing by creating a harmonious environment. The space to lay fishing nets ensures a good economic return avoiding gear crashes, a good harvest, and less potential conflict and more opportunities for dried fish processing for women. The relational wellbeing factor mentioned as ‘peaceful environment for fishing’ supports this idea (see 6.3.3.2). However, the quality of the environment has been immaterial for the migrants, because migratory fishers do not bother too much with basic needs; food, shelter, and sanitation but rely on other factors as mentioned above. All economic factors primarily support a good income and a decent living standard. Thus, material wellbeing is enhanced and subsequently influences relational and subjective wellbeing.

The functional factors, such as experience, knowledge, self-confidence, familiarity, and self-esteem represent the factors explained in the subjective dimension of wellbeing. The migrant fisherfolk look for a place where they can maximize these subjective wellbeing aspects. Moreover, their beliefs and prayers are immense. Thus, a place with a Church or Roman Catholic identity has become a mandatory factor for place-making. The migrant fisher community does not hesitate to construct a church in the area too. Subjective wellbeing factors (prayers and vows) are utilized to attain the material wellbeing by increasing the income (catch), wealth, and livelihood opportunities. These materialistic aspects are linked with the subjectivity via a bridge through identity (Roman Catholic) to be confident, happy, and courageous for survival in a foreign place.

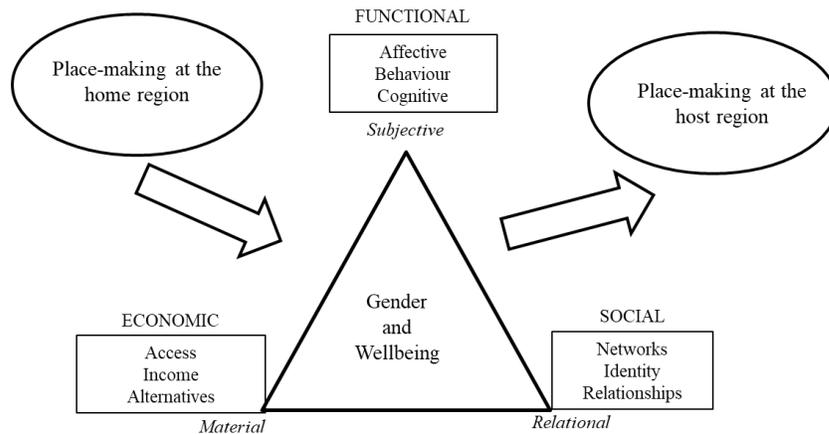
Section 7.2 shows that egalitarian, reciprocal and benign interactions among migrant fishers that strengthen kinship ties and social relationships are higher in the host region than in the home region. Decisions on where to go, when to go, and for how long are collectively determined. Further, migrants employ local labour and this contributes to the local economy and helps to overcome any potential conflicts with locals. These strengthen the relational wellbeing encouraging collective migration to a pre-determined place for a pre-determined duration.

In light of these findings, migration correlates with enhanced wellbeing due to the continuation of livelihoods and relationships as fishers. Migrant fishers seek for places that optimise their wellbeing over the material, relational, and subjective dimensions. Although migrant fishers have to fight for space (with the state and local people), boundaries (with Indian trawlers), operational rights (with local people), freedom to sell (with fish traders), and landing site (with locals), wellbeing through migration can be set against the costs of conflicts.

7.4 Revisit the conceptual framework

The place-making behaviour explained through the three-dimensional wellbeing lens- material, relational, and subjective (Pouw and McGregor 2014; Coulthard et al. 2011; White 2010)- is presented in Figure 2.2. Migrant fishers in the northwestern coast in Sri Lanka make trade-offs between wellbeing experienced in the home region and in the host region (Figure 7.1). The economic, functional, and social motives are the key determinants in place selection that enlarge the material, relational, and subjective wellbeing than in the home region during the off season. Although migration is driven by economic motive, which enables savings and multiple economic activities for women and men, the place is decided on all economic, functional, and social factors.

Figure 7.1 Place-making and wellbeing



Source: Author

Further, the factors mentioned under each motive are highly gendered. The strength and meaning of the factors differ from men to women as does the experience of wellbeing. However, these factors are in line with the fisher relevant wellbeing indicators presented in Chapter 6.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter unraveled why northwestern small-scale migrant fishers select the same place even amidst multiple conflicts and their impact on the household and community wellbeing answering the 5th sub-question: *Why do small-scale fishers migrate to the same place even amidst multiple conflicts?* Seasonal migration happens mainly due to the economic motive of fishers i.e. to earn during the off-season and pay-off their debts. Access to the sea and credit, labour availability, a solid market structure, alternative income generating opportunities, safety at sea, and compatibility with gear and craft, and spaciousness are key economic factors that determine the migrating place. However, place making is driven by social and functional factors as well. Social networks and family relations (love, caring, and sharing) are crucial and inseparable in place making. These social relationships feed into fisher migrants' identity, belonging to the place, and autonomy in the occupation. Experience, familiarity, knowledge, self-confidence, and esteem embody positive emotions (happiness, satisfaction) and strengthen place making further. In fact, place-making even for a season is determined by the economic, functional, and social motives of individual fishers that maximize material, relational, and subjective aspects of wellbeing. The factors realized under each motive are gendered where women and men perceived better lives differently but collectively by migration to a known place. The pursuit of wellbeing is felt to exceed the costs of conflicts. However, none of these factors stand-alone but interdependent and interrelated.