#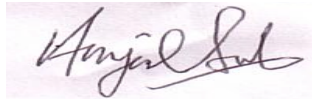 *The Transformation and Politicisation of the Sri Lankan Muslim Identity over 130 years and the Challenges Moving Forward*

Submitted by Mohamed Amjad Mohamed Saleem to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Ethno-Political Studies
In September 2018

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature:
Mohamed Amjad Mohamed-Saleem

Abstract

The duality construct of a 'Muslim' identity has become a challenge for the Sri Lankan Muslim community as they attempt to profess their Sri Lankan identity (and sense of belonging). By identifying themselves ethnically as 'Muslims', the Muslim community through political elites have played on blurring the distinctions between faith as a theological marker (i.e. a religious motivator) and faith as an identity marker (i.e. communal galvanizer).

What the literature and the research shows is that the concept of Sri Lankan 'Muslim' identity was and is politically 'constructed' as a response to colonial influence as well as nationalistic aspirations of other ethnic communities within the country. In one sense it mirrored the development of the identity of the other communities in response to colonial pressures but in another sense the development of a Muslim identity opened the community up to influences from global transnational Islamic reformations. As a result of this, ethnic institutionalisation leading to religious consciousness transformed into a political identity for survival leaving the community with a hybrid identity. However, this reduced several ethnic and cultural communities that subscribe to Islam, to one representative model, which was subsequently challenged by hegemonic actors in the ethno-nationalist struggle of a country coming out of a 30-year-old ethnic conflict. The challenge became more acute after the conflict as transnational questions of solidarity also informed the hegemonic Sinhala Buddhist actors in their relationship with the Muslims

The study thus shows that the political elite from the community were intent on pushing for a political identity but did not understand the changing dynamics of the context. It shows that a transformation of a minority constituency due to changing demographic contexts at the grassroots amidst static political contexts could mean that the legitimacy of political elites from minority communities is undermined unless they can transform to meet those challenges. It shows a need to reimagine how identity is formed and its narrative to manage relations with the 'Other'. In the wake of the Easter Sunday Attacks of April 2019, it leaves the Muslim community needing to reimagine itself to face the future challenges.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to the original and first Dr Mohamed Saleem, of whom I am an extremely pale comparison. Your belief that I could do it kept me going despite many times where I thought I couldn't. I know there are times when I have tested you in your resolve as a parent but I hope this makes up for those times. I grew up in the shadow of your intellect and thoughts which has been the platform that has allowed me to undertake this thesis as well as influenced me to come to some of its findings.

This is also dedicated to my mother Bathool, without whom my father would not function and who remains the bedrock of wisdom for the family. I am because you are.

I want to thank and dedicate this as well to Amaani and Daiyan, without whose patience, understanding, support and constant nagging I would not have been able to do this. I apologise for all those times that I was not stuck on the computer and not able to spend time with you and for those missed family times.

To Husna, thank you for your support and your belief in me and despite our differences, I know that you have always supported me.

To Uncle Niyaz, Aunty Rehana and other members of my close and extended family. Thank you for all your support

To Jonathan my supervisor, who pushed and advised me and told me that when I hate every moment of the PhD that is the time it is complete. I think that time is now!!!

To all my friends and colleagues such as Dr Anas Altikriti, Dr Jemilah Mahmood, Dr Abdullah Faliq, Dr Fareed Sabri, Dr Safiullah Munsoor, Muradh, Rev Ebenezer (my spiritual guru) and others throughout the years that I have taken to do this PhD and also before who inspired me, educated me, pushed me and gave me insights for the thoughts. Thank you.

Thank you for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself!!

I remain grateful to the One without whose Blessings and Grace, I would not have been inspired and enthused to do this.

May this be a boost to the community thinking and my spiritual reflection and contribution towards the benefit of the Sri Lankan Muslim community in their re-imagination of identity especially after April 21 2019 where they now face an uncertain future. This is my Fard Kifayah as a contribution to that dialogue.

Chapter 1 -Introduction

"The Muslim community in Sri Lanka desperately needs a change of strategy if they are to live as citizens, equal in status to all their compatriots. This needs an enlightened political leadership, pragmatic religious scholarship and engaged community leadership that really addresses the questions whether we are 'Muslims of Sri Lanka' or 'Muslims in Sri Lanka'. We can't afford any more mistakes in how we respond and define ourselves as we are at crossroads ".[1]

1.1   A Unique Challenge

The Muslim community in Sri Lanka is not a new phenomenon, and can be traced back to Arab traders coming to Sri Lanka before and after the advent of Islam as well as through a history of migration as a result of colonisation, becoming the country's second largest minority. The ethnic categorisations of 'Muslims' were primarily constructed in response to emerging nationalism from other communities in Sri Lanka in the 19th century but, the community have struggled to carve out their ethnic space, frequently compressed between two dominant ethno-nationalism projects.

The events of 9/11 and the subsequent events, marked an important turning point for Muslim identity globally (and ultimately in Sri Lanka). Almost overnight, being a Muslim became an accusation on top of a religious affiliation. In the West, many organisations had to respond in the public sphere to address the demonization of a whole religion because of the actions of a few, a sad effect of the natural outcome of social movement theory, which sees formal organisation as an "effective instrument for empowering politically excluded collectivities because it coordinates and focuses activities, thereby collectivising what would otherwise remain individualised grievances and concerns." (Wiktorowicz 2001, 7).

For the Muslims of Sri Lanka, this accusation was and remains a double edged sword impacting on their religious and ethnic representation, their relationship with the other communities, as well as their transnational relationship to Muslims from outside the country. In the light of growing Buddhist ethno nationalism especially after the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, they have been burdened with defending a religious identity and an ethnic representation that has become institutionalised[2] over a 130 year period since the time of the British rule in the country.

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[1] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

[2] In this sense, I consider the development and transformation of institutions (of all forms and formats) by the Muslims as a direct response to significant events which then go on to promote certain discursive practices vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims in light of government policies.

1.2 Objectives of the Thesis

The sentiments by Prof Ameer Ali made above, echo similar sentiments that are expressed in private and public by people from within the Muslim community as well as outside the community in Sri Lanka. There is a sense of frustration (and despair) at being unable to fully understand the identity of the Sri Lankan Muslim and also where the 'Muslim' fits into the Sri Lankan national consciousness.

Speaking as someone with Sri Lankan Muslim heritage, I can testify to this frustration (and despair). In the first instance, people do not know that there are Muslims in Sri Lanka and they ask you, 'are you Sinhalese or Tamil?' When you respond 'Muslim', then there is a whole process of trying to explain who and how Muslims are considered an ethnicity in Sri Lanka and not just a faith. There then follows a whole conversation around whether Muslims are a religious grouping or an ethnic / political expression. Sometimes, the question is asked "aren't there Sinhalese or Tamil Muslims?". To many Sri Lankans it is unthinkable to even ask this question, because they can not imagine such a case since "*Muslims are a different ethnicity, background and so on*"[3]. So the question arises: 'How does one explain the Sri Lankan Muslim community?"

Initially I relied on my local and personal knowledge to respond to these queries but as I grew up I started to investigate more about what could be said in this space. It is then that I became acutely aware that there is very little work that has been done in this regard to really get into the deep understanding of what constitutes the identity of the Muslim community especially from an academic perspective. I realised that this confusion was as much within the Muslim community as with those outside. This is why I wanted to do this PhD in order to contribute to the thinking in this area that unpacks and understands the lived experiences of Muslims.

This absence of the understanding of the reality of the Muslim lived experience in Sri Lanka is not made any easier by global dynamics and geopolitics around Islam and Muslims. Thus an ignorance of the history and lived experience of Muslim community in Sri Lanka coupled with global misperceptions around Muslims creates a scenario whereby Muslims in Sri Lanka are now viewed with suspicion. Recent violent incidents in Sri Lanka signify such a rising Islamophobic tension and the worrying incitement to violence (Bengali 2018), echoing narratives that have been present in mainstream Western media for a long time where Islam is seen simply as a religion of unintelligible crazy, violence and mass-murdering fanatics. This type of sentiment, common in the West, is now also becoming common in Sri Lanka and is reflected in the media coverage as well as mainstream narratives in Sri Lanka showing no sign of dissipating (Mazumdaru 2018).

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[3] Key Informant from Focus Group Discussion with a group of Buddhist Monks, June 2016.

1.3 Scope

This research analyses the transformation and politicisation of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity over approximately 130 years following critical junctures in the country, primarily between 1889 and 2014. It is essentially a study about the politics of identity examining structural influences and effects in particular the agency of Islamic political / social / cultural activism in the Sri Lankan context examining how Muslim identity was 'imagined' and 'created' during the time of British colonial rule in response to the 'other' formations of identity in the country. Thus this research explores the historical context of its roots to understand how Islamic identity has been transformed and politicised and the challenges being faced moving forward.

Why choose a 130-year period? My hypothesis is that we need a wider picture of the history of the Muslim community, to understand the context, the influences and the effects of its transformation and politicisation. Such a comprehensive study has not been done before that explores the holistic element of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity which looks at a long enough period for analysis. Hence in so doing, I have broken the thesis into different historical time periods largely based on how I see the Muslim community reacting to certain *critical junctures*[4] in Sri Lankan history that affected representation and formation.

In doing this research, I am not exploring external influences on Islamic cultural practice nor really approaching it from a security lens. Thus, this thesis is not big in scope as to cover the political agenda of the West in producing and perpetuating anti-Islam discursive practices nor does it seek to interrogate the global Islamophobia discourse that has queried the global Muslim experience in the aftermath of attacks such as 9/11 on US soil and 7/7 in London and others.

In addition, though there is a case to be made of relating the development of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity, to wider Muslim – Buddhist interactions such as in Myanmar and Thailand or other nationalist cases of ethno-religious identity such as in Thailand and Malaysia, this is not the scope of the thesis and could be explored as a follow up to the thesis as next stages of research.

1.3.1 What is the Idea?

The research tests the hypothesis that Muslim identity developed, transformed, was institutionalised and politicised in Sri Lanka over a 130-year period, being influenced by a global Islamic reformation but also responding to contextual influences within Sri Lanka pressurised by a colonial history. This premise is evidenced by primary and secondary research data that explores the existential crisis faced by the Muslim community as they navigate their religious, cultural, ethnic and political representation in the country against the 'other' (other ethnic communities) whilst battling influences from global Islamic movements, globalised Islamophobia and other national and global externalities. The analysis

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[4] The concept of critical junctures will be explored later in chapters 2 and 4 but I consider them to be essentially important periods of time which shaped identity formation.

suggests that the identity of Muslims became more religiously inclined and more visible in the early 1980s and 1990s mirroring global moves of Islamic reformation and then with the onset of the ethnic conflict in the country, became embedded and institutionalised within a political framework. Indeed, much of that increase in religious inclinations and development of institutions was premised on early support from the government of the time, who were anxious to ensure that the Muslim community were not involved in the conflict and thus encouraged the development of an identity and institutions. It is this encouragement that has contributed to the dynamic nature of the lived experience of Muslim identity in a minority context swinging like a pendulum from ethnic representation to religious expression. In particular, the latter manifesting as increasing religiosity of Muslims, linked to visibility in public space has caused tensions with the other communities, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust towards the Muslims. These external tensions mask the internal challenges within the community where the lived experience has difficulty disassociating between theological and cultural expressions[5].

The thesis will also demonstrate how the argument cannot be reduced to just dispelling the myth around Islam which has pervaded the relationship between extreme Sinhala Buddhists and the Muslims and the plethora of binary oppositions, linguistic associations, oppositional differences and terms that abound in the discursive practices of identity discussions in Sri Lanka. I am going to argue that the only 'stable' linguistic sign in all discursive strategies is around 'Islam'. In other words, what Islam is pitted against is a shifting category of identity representation. Islam, as a signifier, no longer draws its significance from being the religious affiliation of 1.6 billion people round the globe. The signified has become invested with an infinite set of 'oppositions' related to an ethnic identity in Sri Lanka and the particularity of the ethnic identity expression vis-à-vis politics and religious expression.

My approach here is to look at the conflation of Islam with ethnic / political identity to the exclusion of other aspects of identity construction. With religious expression, the ethnic Sri Lankan Muslim identity became identified as being either 'Muslim or non-Muslim' (in terms of practice of religion[6]), and thus religion emerged as both a unifying force among Muslims and an alienating force from non-Muslims.

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[5] As this thesis will show the difficulty the lived experience has, is dealing with the concept of being a good or bad Muslim being judged on a spiritual or political basis. So the thesis will consider whether it is possible to be a good Muslim in terms of political thinking and affiliation and a bad Muslim in terms of spirituality or vice versa. So the question to be asked 'is there a difference between being a good Muslim spiritually but being bad at politics?' These types of existential questions rarely exist and are discussed within the community but form the crux of my argument.
[6] Your 'piety' could help classify your acceptance within the community but on the flip side other ethnic community's despite being Muslim were also not truly accepted by the community.

In the course of this study, the research and specifically the interviewing consistently nodded to the issue of representation transformation and institutionalisation of identity; in terms of how individuals and small groups who were generally labelled as part of the 'Muslim community', actually identified themselves as such especially in terms of religious representations and institutionalisation and what challenges that these developed in terms of political expression. This is especially when such religious representations aligned with specific ideologies and schools of jurisprudence, but clashed with political representation, cultural agency and ethnic identity, whilst being placed under the wide umbrella of 'Muslim Community'.

1.3.2 Identity Politics

Identity politics thus is the main catalyst for this thesis, which presupposes that identity is not a static but rather a fluid construct that responds to social and political contingencies. Whilst there is a detailed discussion in Chapter 2 around identity, it is important to conceptualise 'identity politics', which has come to signify any political participation that is based around the self-interest, or the specific perspective, of a particular group within society (Heyes 2012) . Usually, this group will be a minority, or one that has suffered (or continues to suffer) particular injustice or inequality. This has given rise to a practice of identity politics where it is sought to remedy perceived injustices or disadvantages, often through challenging the dominant culture's account about the inferiority of the identity in question, and redefining it on its own terms, and also often through raising consciousness within the various communities associated with the identity.

Identity discourse has been characterized by at least five problem areas (Gaudelli 2001): essentialising social groups; categorizing individuals automatically and superficially; failing to recognize the power knowledge dynamic; marginalizing disparate voices; and totalizing the individual. The problems these five areas unpack demonstrate how the Muslim community in Sri Lanka was essentialised (possessive of core properties) first on an ethnic basis, and due to global pressures, on a religious basis/allegiance irrespective of other social, cultural and economic factors. In addition, such essentialist strategies have imbued their identities with presupposed negative stereotypical representations, which have led such communities to respond by resorting to what the post-colonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as 'strategic essentialism' (G. C. Spivak 1988).

As a concept, 'strategic essentialism' is interesting as it refers to a political tactic that minority groups, nationalities, ethnic groups essentially mobilize on the basis of shared gendered, cultural, or political identity to represent themselves. Whilst strong differences may exist internally between members of these groups, and amongst themselves they engage in continuous debates, it is seen as sometimes advantageous for them to temporarily 'essentialise' themselves and to bring forward their group identity in a simplified way to achieve certain goals often for

equal rights, or to oppose the levelling impact of global culture. Thus political claims are put forward to the state, proposing remedial measures to secure equality and tackle disadvantage.   This enables the rise of identity politics, in the sense that it provides individuals with the opportunity to freely group with those who share their identities and collectively put forward their claims (*Ibid*). Yet there is a danger of this type of identity politics as Sen (2006a) writes, that this could actually promote the side-by-side existence of a diversity of discrete communities, with very few meaningful interactions between them, a concept called 'plural mono-culturalism' (Sen 2006b).

Another charge that has been made against such form of identity politics is that rather than providing an authentic space for minority or disadvantaged groups to be heard in the public sphere, the types of community groups and forums that governments are likely to engage with, have had a tendency to be hijacked by individuals resembling the archetypal 'community leader' (Heyes 2012). In such a scenario, there is a danger that minority voices within minority communities are overlooked and organisations become preoccupied with furthering the political agendas or pet projects of those at their helm. Moreover, the continued exercise of identity politics could be blamed for encouraging governments to address communities, and for communities to view themselves, in a compartmentalised fashion, through the lens of their identity, as opposed to simply as citizens (*Ibid*).

So rather than appreciating the diversity of perspectives and aspirations within communities, identity politics can generate and entrench reification. This, in turn, promotes an inaccurate and unfair picture of the lived realities of citizens, as well as acting as a general barrier to integration and social cohesion (A. Phillips 2007). This in effect outlines how the Sri Lankan Muslim community have been mobilised. Although Spivak would later disavow the term, dissatisfied with the problematic ways in which the term has been deployed in nationalist enterprises that promotes essentialism itself (G. C. Spivak 2008), the fact remains that the term is still useful to consider in the Sri Lankan context, as it   attempts to transcend differences that might exist among members of the same group and focuses on 'essentialism' as a means for presenting a unified front. In other words, Sri Lankan Muslims felt and feel the need to find a voice for themselves as ethnic Muslims (linked with religious expression) regardless of the other elements that make up the multiplicity of their backgrounds. Yet in promoting this voice, an unfair reality has emerged with a disconnect emerging between the political elites of the Muslim community and the lived realities of citizens as it speaks to a fundamental aspect around identity politics in that no representative body can ever hope to accurately speak for its community.

1.3.3 Institutionalisation

This brings us to the second concept in the thesis to explore and that is the **institutionalisation** of Islam in Sri Lanka, namely, the social, religious and political organisations that have emerged to give agency to represent and provide stability to the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. As a term of reference, institutionalisation can occupy a hazardous position within socio-political discourse. Often thrown about without definition, interlocutors generally assume it simply means creating institutions to represent the interests, goals, or aspirations of a certain group (Hannan & Freeman 1989, Powell 1991, Zucker 1983). However, there is a school of thought that has put forward the thinking that institutionalisation is more or less when "all participants in a political process understand and accept the rules of that process, and the struggles over the framework within which politics takes place have been settled." (Gorges 2001, 155). The deployment of the term in this sense, points to its positive and homogenising attributes without much reference to its exclusionary and productive powers.

Whilst this is true to some extent within the Sri Lankan context as per the Muslim community, it is worth viewing the concept of institutionalisation from a Foucaultian lens, which looks at a process engendering normative practices, assigning subject positions, enabling insidious mechanisms of power-relations and establishing certain forms of knowledge and schemata through discursive practices and marginalisation of others (Foucault 1977). Thus far from being only a process in which the Sri Lankan Muslims, seeking political effectiveness and social agency through collective action formally organises itself, institutionalisation can be seen as an 'incitement in discourse', a demand for specific forms of knowledge; a whole *dispositif* surrounding Islam. Foucault (1977:194-195) defines this term *dispositif* as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions".

I refer at the end to what Asad (1986) argues about Islam being understood as a 'discursive tradition' producing doctrine and practice that are historically situated. While Asad's definition helps to challenge and overcome problems of the conceptualisation of change in Muslim society, by historically situating the production of doctrine and practice, it mainly captures the element of <u>time</u> and not <u>space</u>, the <u>vertical</u> element and not the <u>horizontal</u>. In Sri Lanka, Islam is produced by interactions and relationships (dialogical), horizontally, in demographic and other spaces as much as it is affected vertically by the context and situation at the time. The horizontal aspect of this is where the recognition of 'institutional' tradition comes in and where we explore its evolution in this thesis. Ultimately it is this discursive and institutional positions that accounts for Islam in Sri Lanka, because you can not have the discursive without the institutional association.

Hence, the thesis explores a <u>horizontal</u> and <u>vertical</u> relationship of the nature of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity, which considers the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements where the formation has at its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. Thus as evident from Foucault's definition, what he terms *dispositif* is the whole set of practices, measures, discursive and non-discursive features, even architectural norms which regulate the institutions that arise in response to an urgent need. Consequently, what we see in the history of the evolution of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity and its institutionalisation, is that the collective action and political effectiveness of the community engendered a complex system of regulation and production far exceeding the simple act of transforming an informal network of people into a formal organisation and also in response to critical junctures in history (<u>the urgent need</u>). It is through such activity, the link is made with the Foucaultian[7] take on institutionalisation which points to the importance of seeing all these heterogeneous elements as part of a wider network of practices. In this sense the horizontal and vertical element break through the tendency to represent the social and cultural world as a multichrome mosaic of monochrome ethnic, racial or cultural blocs (Brubaker 2002).

My thesis is thus concerned with examining how these two levels of institutionalisation interact, on the one hand, marginalised non-religious aspects of identity (ethnic expression); and on the other, alternative structures of Islamic expression (in terms of religious and theological thought). By adopting an essentialist strategy and as a result of the influence from global transnational Islamic reformation, the institutionalised representation for Muslims have evolved to mostly inadvertently, reduce several ethnic and cultural communities that subscribe to Islam to one representative 'model' while at the same time tailoring a formal structure for Islam that represents the community but also addresses rising Islamophobia.

An issue which wasn't really anticipated at the outset, was the level of engendering of the global discourse of Islamophobia in Sri Lanka. In particular, the rhetoric post 2009 after the end of the conflict in the country, often mirrored rhetoric and narratives from Europe and North America. This proved quite challenging for the Muslim community in many forms, but also in terms of how it navigated relationships with the other communities as well as with itself as it sought to address political and ethnic divisions whilst addressing issues to do with Islamophobia and ideological aspirations. For example, the visibility of the Muslim community in terms of identity markers such as dress code and mosques, were seized upon as an Islamic threat, perpetuating a growing Anti Muslim narrative reinforced with a growing anti-Western and extremist literature produced by it.

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[7] The Foucaultian concept of institutionalisation looks at a process which engenders normative practices and assigns subject positions. (Raffnsoe, Gudmand-Hoyer and Thaning 2016)

Whilst the thesis will not examine how these reductionist strategies were deployed or operated, it will explore the fact that these strategies lead to contradictory representations and knowledge constructs about both Muslims and Islam and, consequently, a failure to achieve maximum political effectiveness and grass roots agency.

This thesis will examine and reflect on the schemata, discourses and strategies adopted by the Sri Lankan Muslims in response to the realities engendered by colonial and other political challenges in the country. It will explore the transformation of the identity of the Sri Lankan Muslims over 130 years, as a spectrum of representation from colonial influences to present times and how the emergence of organisations to represent Muslims and their political concerns ended up advancing a specific interpretation(s) or discourse(s) about what Islam "is" or "is not." It will examine the political motives behind 'institutionalising' political representation and specific discourses about Islam to the exclusion of others and the role these played in promoting a mobilisation agenda that has emphasized the religious aspect of identity to the exclusion of ethnic, racial, cultural, social and economic variables of such identities. In some way this mobilisation agenda complements the notion of the 'triadic nexus' identified by Brubaker (1996) for similar cases of religious/nationalist conflict and will be discussed in the light of broader theoretical claims in the thesis. Finally, it will explore how despite this transformation, the representation of the Muslims became disconnected from the realities at the grass roots and became static. This therefore raises a larger question that the concept of minority bloc representation has a finite shelf life and thus it needs to be revisited and rethought to ensure relevance to the time and context to ensure adequate representation to its constituents. This was of course raised through my field research in Sri Lanka which uncovered the existential crisis that the Muslim community went and is going through as it tries to navigate a political identity with a religious expression.

1.3.4 Understanding Terminology

My thesis explores that in Sri Lanka the state, government, community and religion are all inter-connected with ethnic identity and representation. In this context these are all loaded concepts that have been subject to various different political and academic analyses in a situation of violence and conflict, and therefore require a level of unpacking and clarification for the purposes of this study. The nation-state in the Sri Lankan context is highly contested in terms of representation and agency. It is not a united concept and really symbolises a fractured, post-colonial construct than a strong representation of sovereignty, independence, peace and development (Bartholomeusz and De Silva 1998). What this means is that in reality as discussed in the thesis, every community has different and similar approaches to how they understand representation and identity in Sri Lanka and none has it more complicated than the Muslim community who navigate a religious and ethnic expression, constructed and reconstructed in a process of 'othering' or in response to the Other (Ismail and

Jeganathan 1995)*.*

My starting point in this thesis is to reassert that categories of identity, such as by ethnicity and religion, were colonial impositions that at the time had no real meaning to the people of Sri Lanka, but were used as political opportunism by the elites of that period (and then followed up post independence to the present age) to become decisive and competitive entities in opposition to each 'other'. What I show is that by virtue of these unilateral expression of identities, these categories somehow disregarded the lived experiences those so categorised, something that Wickramasinghe (2006) discusses in more detail. The discussion around the Muslim community identity in particular gave fixed boundaries and new meanings which ignored the reality of the lived experience of the community and in particular the political elite neglected this trait of the community as they tried to argue the representation of the community whilst not understanding the dynamics of the community. This is ultimately what I have been convinced off during the course of this thesis.

In undertaking this thesis, one has to have been mindful of the use of terminology and language that often confuses matters in Sri Lanka. The references to Muslims and the Muslim community in this thesis are to Sri Lankans with an ethnic representation of community, group or population that varies in a number of factors including gender, class, demography and social status, and to a group who believe in and practise the religion of Islam. This complicates matters as Islam is a religion but in Sri Lanka it is also about ethnic representation. Thus this thesis refers to Islam here not only as a system of beliefs, ideologies, world views, practices, rituals, symbols that are founded on monotheism and recognises Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as a prophet and founder, but also recognises the ethnic nature of the representation. Hence for Muslims in Sri Lanka, Islam is not just only about ethnic representation but an all encompassing system of truth, divinely constructed, eternal and universal. In practice what this means is that there are people who are from the 'ethnic' group considered as Muslims but may not practise the faith of Islam or even want to adhere to the faith of Islam but who would still identify themselves as being Muslim.

However, this thesis is not heavily concerned with the theological aspects of Islam (or the practice of the tenets of Islam), nor is it disinterested in it. It is just interested in recognising the different manifestations of religious bodies that have been developed due to the various manifestations of ethno religious identity (social, institutional and political). These various manifestations are a result of the transformation of changes started pre colonial period and that took place at critical junctures of history of the country and has lead to an existential crisis for the Muslim community that affects internal and external relations.

Thus as this thesis goes to show, the concept of a 'Muslim' in Sri Lanka constitutes an ethnic and religious identity which, although by definition dysfunctional, is strictly non-negotiable to them.

1.4 Situating within Contemporary Academia

This research addresses the need to develop a better understanding of the identity of Muslims in Sri Lanka and the challenges of ethno religious nationalistic expression, especially in how minorities strategically essentialise this expression but could also fall victim to being disconnected from the realities on the ground. In so doing, it seeks to fill a dearth in literature around contemporary Muslim identity that examines political and religious interactions and that explores the consequences of Muslim minority politics from a point of view of indigenous politics rather than immigrant politics. Thus, part of the challenge that has been experienced when doing this research is that there are two aspects that contemporary academia covers on Muslim politics and Islamic religious reform and identity.

The <u>first</u> is that very few academia covers these issues from a purely Muslim minority perspective, apart from few exceptions (see Mayaram 1997, Eickelman and Pscatori 2004) and as a consequence the present understanding and analysis of both subjects remains shaped, almost exclusively, from a Muslim majority perspective. For many years Muslim and Islamic politics were not considered a factor in Muslim minority populations or in non-Muslim states.

The <u>second</u> is that where these have been covered they have really looked at it from a western-centric perspective or looking at immigrant Muslim communities to the west. In other words, academia that cover Muslim minority politics explore the issue where Muslims are not indigenous but are new comers to society like in Europe and North America. Thus, there is a certain bias in which this topic is addressed such as Islamic fundamentalism or militancy or a specifically constructed definitional framework (Mandaville 2007, Roy 2004). As a consequence, they have examined how political Islam manifests in a Muslim minority context as a group engagement, but not necessarily considered how that very status of being in the minority affects the politicisation of Islam and a representation on an ethnic basis. Hence, there is no in depth analysis of exploring Islam as a religious and community marker and the tensions herewith. This is a particularity that the Sri Lankan case, as discussed in this thesis, adds to this literature.

While change, especially within a 130-year period, is arguably to be expected, it requires comprehensive study here because the nature and pace with which it occurred in Sri Lanka especially in the last 20-30 years was exceptional. The link from colonial to present day is important to get an understanding of how this has developed. The consequences are also wide reaching by which it is meant that it was an extreme and unusual form of change, and because it was so widespread with huge ramifications. This thesis will discuss that after nearly three centuries of colonisation, independence and then a three-decade conflict had significant impacts on the Muslim community, thus prompting varied forms of expression of their religious and ethnic identity and religiosity. The fact of the matter is that it was also mirrored by other communities means that these changes have not

occurred in isolation and thus needs to be understood in a wider perspective. These changes with regards religious reformation in conjunction with ethnic identification reflect a similar phenomena occurring in Muslim societies globally. This resonates with what Eickelman and Piscatori (2004) talk about when they mention the 'objectification' of Islam that preoccupies people with issues such as: "What is my religion?", and "How do my beliefs guide my conduct?". Yet the fact that there is a political ethnic element to the expression means that these changes are also specific to Sri Lankan Muslims and can be seen as a response to the ethno-political situation and the socio-economic issues in their own unique situation. This is the horizontal and vertical aspect of Islamic identity in Sri Lanka described above that makes it difficult to really explain Islam as understood within the confines of the Western epistemology.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three sections –

Part I is grouped around 'Understanding Issues of Identity and Conflict Context' and consists of two chapters:

> Chapter 1 is the '<u>Introduction</u>' which will provide a justification for why I personally want to do this thesis. It touches upon some of the theoretical concepts that will be elaborated further in the thesis, terminology and situating in contemporary academia. It then provides the structure for the thesis.

> Chapter 2 discusses the '<u>Literature Review</u>' in a few parts. The first is to provide a background into Sri Lanka, its ethnic makeup, challenges facing its identity question and specifically to take a look at work already done on Muslim identity (which will then be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters) followed by a justification of the gaps being investigated for the thesis. The second is to understand the grounding that this work is based upon within the whole body of work to do with identity politics, nationalism and conflict resolution which form the theoretical justification and relationship to the work. The third is to understand the rationale based on the first two for questions to be explored in order to understand the nature of the thesis which sees itself as analysing the transformation and evolution of the institutionalization of Sri Lankan Muslim identity following critical junctures in the country, primarily between 1889 and 2009. This, chapter explores certain key questions that underpin the thesis which will give direction to the rest of the chapters and the field work to be undertaken. It finally discusses <u>the field work</u> by exploring the methodology, discussing the practicalities of qualitative approaches, the Ethics and highlighting limitations on the study

Part II explores the 'Institutionalisation of Muslim Identity (Ethnic, Social & Political Identity vs Religious Framework)'. In this sense the following chapters explore understanding the evolution of the Muslim community identity based on certain two-level critical junctures (exploring inter and intra group dynamics) & the current representations of Muslim identity. What I illustrate is that the identity of the Muslim community was a response to the 'ethnic/religious' marking of the 'Other'. However, the same state of disillusionment and despair against the Sri Lankan state (and Muslim politicians) 'who neglected to serve and support Muslims', resonated as well with global Islamic reformation ideologies that have also experienced disillusionment with secularisation, modernisation, democracy or the nation-state. It is this resonance that allowed a mingling between Islamic ideological thinking and ethnic political representation and through its institutionalisation creating an existential crisis of two different, though inter-connected, processes.

Chapter 3 titled 'Developing an Ethnic Consciousness' discusses the development of a concept of a Muslim ethnic identity in the context of pre-independence Sri Lanka as a result of colonial engagement and traces the history of Muslims in Sri Lanka to Independence (pre 1948). It also contextualises the arrival of Islam and the history of the community on the island. It examines the reasoning behind the development of the ethnic identity and looking at how current understandings of history relate to this.

Chapter 4, 'Institutionalising Identity', discusses the crucial years (1948-1983) for Sri Lanka post independence which not only set the scene for the future conflict but also served as a catalyst to entrench the notion of ethno-religious identities. For the Sri Lankan Muslims, it also served as the next step in the evolution of their identity by providing an opportunity for social and cultural institutions. This chapter situates this factor of the identity within a larger premise as part of the evolution of the community

Chapter 5, 'Forging a new Political direction', examines a crucial part of Sri Lanka's history which is the conflict (1983 - 2009). It examines the conflict from the point of view of the Muslim community's relationship to it especially as it served to catalyse the birth of separate Muslim political parties and the concept of a standalone Muslim political identity.

Chapter 6, 'Identities under Pressure' examines the post conflict scenario (2009 - 2014) in Sri Lanka where the Muslim community is being challenged with respect its identity and where it fits in. In the wake of a global Islamophobia narrative, nationalist Sinhala Buddhists have revived new challenges for existence for the Muslim community.

Part III is all about exploring the 'The Search for A New Identity' and looking at overcoming the challenge for the community arising from Part II and proposing ways forward.

Chapter 7, 'Deconstructing the Narrative', seeks to tie all of the strands together by discussing the comprehensiveness of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity underpinned within a religious framework. It explores the evolution of the identity through 5 critical junctures leading to the notion of 'Imagined Community' with 'Imagined Geography'. In this sense, it is a religio- ethnic identity that by virtue of a series of factors, was institutionalised in Sri Lanka which was essential during the conflict, but in a post conflict scenario with external influence, leaves communities with a series of challenges. It discusses how the reification of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity doesn't recognise the lived experience or the external challenges faced, showing that there has been a process of a shift of boundaries of representation and thinking. It explores what the potential challenges are that arise not only from a concept of a Muslim identity, and from its institutionalisation.

Chapter 8, 'Reimagining Identity', starts a discussion as to what a new component of a Muslim identity could look like in the face of the end of the conflict in 2009 ultimately showing that there is no going back to what was or what could have been. The change of narrative proposed by this chapter is what the Muslim communities need to ponder moving forward if they want to overcome these tensions with others. Finally the chapter looks ahead at future work on this scope and discussing contributions to academia whilst being reflective of the challenges faced in doing the thesis.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review & Methodology of Field Work

Those who speak thus of the nation, beg the question, who is that 'nation' and who has the authority and the 'right' to speak for that 'nation' and express its will? How can we find out what the 'nation' actually wanted? (Luxemburg 1976)

2.1 Introduction

In undertaking this thesis, the literature review is in a few parts. The <u>first </u>is to provide a background into Sri Lanka, its ethnic makeup, challenges facing its identity question and specifically to take a look at work already done on Muslim identity (which will then be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters) followed by a justification of the gaps being investigated for the thesis.

The <u>second</u> is to understand the grounding that this work is based upon within the whole body of work to do with identity politics and conflict resolution. Therefore, this literature review will also focus on publications on the theoretical background of ethnicity and national identity. In particular, I discuss the need to understand terminologies and approaches when discussing these topics.

The <u>third</u> is to understand the rationale based on the first two for questions to be explored in order to understand the nature of the thesis which sees itself as answering a fundamental question being posed as to what can the Muslims of Sri Lanka do in order to help the country move forward in a post conflict era facing such complex political transitions? In answering this question, it seems we have to start at the beginning and that is to really understand the nature of the Sri Lankan Muslim within the context of Sri Lanka.

<u>Lastly</u>, the chapter will explore certain key questions that underpin the thesis and will explore the methodology related to the study, the field work undertaken. It will also highlight the scope and limitations of the study.

2.2 Background & Rationale for Study

Much of this thesis is based upon understanding and appreciating the historical journey of the development of the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka and, thus the following chapters will explore the the Muslim community in more detail. Though this section has the danger of finding itself being repeated in other subsequent chapters, needless to say that it is also important to elaborate on some of the generic history of the country as well as discuss the current identity formations in order to place some context.

Subsequent chapters will provide a better overview of the arrival and subsequent demographics of Muslim communities whilst this chapter will provide an assessment of the contributions of current academic literature in this field. This literature review will focus on what has been discussed regarding the concept of identity, nationalism and conflict. It will touch briefly on the identity formations of Muslims in Sri Lanka and the prevalent themes.

2.2.1 General Remarks on Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka being one of the oldest democracies in Asia is a country with an old culture and history (Bandarage 2009). Known as Ceylon until 1972, it is a small island in the Indian Ocean (approximately 65, 610 sq.km in area) and is situated at the foot of the South Asian subcontinent. Sri Lanka is about 400 kilometres/ 273 miles in length and about 220 kilometres / 137 miles at its widest point. The centre of the island is mountainous; its highest point, Mount Pidurutalagala, rises to 2,524 meters / 8, 281 feet (Dowers, Joachim and Erica 2007).

Social Differences

Sri Lanka is diverse in social composition with the heterogeneity being reflected in the various ethnic groups, religious faiths, and languages spoken on the island. Sri Lanka's religious and ethnic diversity echoes the multi-racial and pluralistic character of Sri Lankan society. Until 2012, no full census had been taken in the country since 1981 and thus any previously full demographic figures are bound to be out of date. What is known is that the Sinhalese people who are predominantly Buddhist are the major ethnic group in Sri Lanka, constituting some 74.8% of the population and were originally migrants who arrived from North India as early as around 500BC (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012).

The Sri Lankan Tamils, who are mainly Hindus, are the largest ethnic minority in the country. They composed 11.2% of the population in 1981 (A. Imtiyaz 2010) increasing to 15.4% by 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012). Again like the Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils have a close link to India, but instead of North India, their relationship is with South India. The Tamil population in Sri Lanka was reinforced with the arrival of the Indian Tamils or 'up-country Tamils' mainly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work in the British-owned estates as workers: first for coffee and then later for tea and rubber estates in the highlands. By 1921, Indian Tamils comprised 13.4% of the total

Tamil population, which in turn represented 24.8% of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka (A. Imtiyaz 2010). The Indian Tamils, however, as a result of the Ceylon Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949, engineered by the government of the day, lost their large share in the country's population charts and by 1981, Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka only accounted for 5.5% of the total population (Ibid) and in 2012 comprised 4.1% of the population (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012). Following the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka and the subsequent conflict, many Tamils fled the country seeking asylum elsewhere, thereby reducing their numbers (A. Imtiyaz 2010).

The Muslims, most of whom speak Tamil, are mainly broken up into two main ethnic groups known as Moors (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011) and Malays although there are other groups which will be discussed below. They constitute 9.1% of the island's total population in 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012) with many scholars saying that they are now the second largest ethnic minority (Bandarage 2009)[8]

Finally, there are the Burgers, who are also a small but significant minority group, tracing their ancestry to European settlers and often appearing to be western European in their physical appearance (and even some aspects of their culture and traditions). At the time of independence in 1948, Burgers comprised 0.6% of the total population (Bandarage 2009). However, since independence, the Burger population in Sri Lanka has declined as a result of migration to Australia, Canada and United Kingdom. They now only account for 0.18% of the island's total population in 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012).

Apart from English, Sri Lanka is home to two other major languages. They are the Sinhala language spoken by the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil language used both by the Tamils and Muslims[9]. Although, Sinhala and Tamil are derived from different sources, they share some common features and have influenced each other's linguistic evolution.

Identity Differences

Language is perhaps one of the most important elements in the creation of an ethno-national identity (Gill 2014). Sri Lanka is no exception and the issue of a 'national language' has been a dominant theme in both religious and political spheres since early after independence and it still remains a major bone of contention and difference between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (Feith 2010).

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[8] The statistics place the Muslim population at about 9 percent, slightly lower than the Tamils, but still close enough to be the third significant ethnic group and in some places like the eastern province, the majority (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2012)

[9] Although as I discuss later on in the thesis, depending on where they have settled, Muslims also speak Sinhalese although Tamil is considered to be the primary language.

Bush (2003) talks about factors that show that the communities themselves are also not homogeneous which leads to intra-group differences and also contributes to the conflict within the country. For instance, there is the fact that whilst language and religion could distinguish the communities, there are other distinguishing factors within communities such as "the nineteenth-century construction of the four principal social categories - caste, religion, language and ethnicity" (J. D. Rogers 1994, 13). Thus, within the Sinhalese community, the Sinhalese are divided culturally and geographically into the upcountry Kandyan Sinhalese and the low country Sinhalese. Differences between these sub groups are based on the historical fact that the Kandyan Kingdom (though later ruled by Tamils) successfully resisted colonial rule until 1815 when it was conquered by the British, and enjoyed special privileges within Buddhist hierarchy[10]. This also has a bearing on the type of Buddhist caste that one belongs to, with the 'Govi' Buddhist traditionally being the elite of the Buddhist and an unspoken rule of the Presidents (and Prime Ministers) coming from this caste (vijayanni 2013). The low country Sinhalese on the other hand have been exposed to the various influences of the colonial powers and are then more likely to be Christian.

The identity of the Sinhalese is largely influenced by two factors: 1) the Sinhala language and 2) Buddhism (A. Imtiyaz 2010), with the identity being mobilized through myths linking the two factors up through the Buddhist chronicles (The Mahawansa), often having dangerous consequences. "Sinhalas do die and do kill because of and for their history and especially when such a history contradicts the lived experience of myth" (Batholomeusz and de Silva 1998, 2). This in particular has been exploited throughout critical junctures of Sri Lanka's history by political parties towards their electoral advantage (ICG 2007a). Thus "the political manipulation of Sinhalese myths and symbols has become a common means of mobilizing support and legitimating actions of competing groups within the Sinhalese community" (Bush 2003, 46).

However for the Tamils, the identity link is not as deep with religion, as there is no Tamil equivalent of the Buddhist chronicles that the Sinhala Buddhist identity is based on (Bush 2003). Thus much that can be said of Tamil identity is in fact linked to culture, literature, heritage and so on (Cheran 2009). Understanding intra-group divisions of the Tamil community is undertaken through a geographical correspondence to major social, political and economic difference between Tamil groups within the country. Members within these groups also recognize a caste / status hierarchy which conditions their relations: Colombo and Jaffna Tamils at the top; east coast Tamils at the middle and up country Tamils at the bottom.

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[10] For instance, because of the presence of Buddha's tooth in Kandy at the Temple of the Tooth, Kandyan Buddhists are thought to be more senior in Buddhist standings

70% of the Sinhalese are associated with (the Theravada school of) Buddhism, which was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE by the Venerable Mahinda, the son of the Emperor Ashoka (Deegalle 2009). Buddhist Bhikkhus or monks play a leading part in the socio-political life in Sri Lanka and argue that anyone can live in Sri Lanka as long as Sinhala-Buddhists enjoy cultural, religious, economic, political, and linguistic hegemony (Houtart 1974). Hinduism, the second largest religion in Sri Lanka, is predominantly the faith of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Though ideological connections between Buddhism and Hinduism are very close, relations between Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka have not been cordial since the escalation of the conflict (A. Imtiyaz 2010).

Religion is also key to the self-identity of Sri Lankan Muslims who are mainly from the Sunni sect (Nuhman 2007) that also manifests itself in opposition to the Sri Lankan identity as well (de Munck 1998) largely due to this ethnic / religious conundrum. The Christians who comprise 7.5% of the population constitute the fourth main religious group in Sri Lanka. The majority is Roman Catholic, with Anglican, Calvinist, Methodist and Baptist minorities with both Tamils and Sinhalese making up the Christian community. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of the distribution of religion across the country.
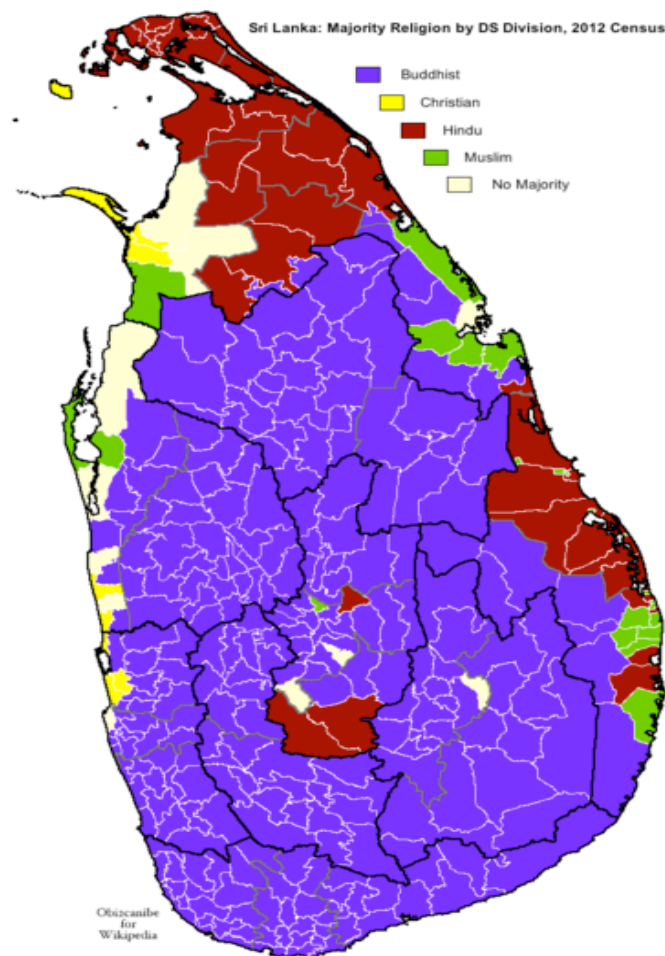
Figure 1: Distribution of Religion across Sri Lanka (Wikimedia Commons 2012)

In this scenario, the diversity of religious composition of the society should prompt a neutrality of the state in religious affairs, however this has been far from the case in Sri Lanka (See Bandarage 2009; Bush 2003; Deegalle 2009; ICG 2007a).

The Conflict

Sri Lanka was home to one of the world's most intractable wars involving an armed struggle between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE (Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Eelam). This vicious territorial struggle though concentrated in the north and east was felt island wide with a spate of suicide bombs. The war came to a bloody conclusion in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE and the death of its leader, sparking international calls for war crimes against the government (Havilland 2009). However, the conflict (its causes and effects) is not understood completely and "While a large body of writing exists on the Sri Lankan conflict, it is conceptually limited. It portrays the conflict largely as either 1) a terrorist problem between an extreme secessionist group and the Sri Lankan state, or 2) a primordial and intractable ethnic problem between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority" (Bandarage 2009, 3).

The reality though is the conflict, its causes and effects, was (and is) not as clear cut as this simple analysis of cultural identity and ethnic dualism. Whilst, it is a conflict borne out of a failure to establish a workable democratic mechanism post-independence (Edirippulige 2004), it is also made up of "irreconcilable religious, ethnic, political and nationalistic positions, which have continuously fed into further misunderstandings and accusations of injustice resulting in the bloody conflict" (Deegalle 2006, 2). Scholars like Bandarage (2009), Deegalle (2006) and Bush (2003) dispute the 'asymmetric' bi polar conflict model based on binary analyses built on the duality of 'Self vs. other'. They have chosen instead to develop a broader analysis of the Sri Lankan conflict by "examining multiple ethnic and religious groups and focussing on intra-ethnic social class, caste, regional and other divisions as they pertain to the separatist conflict" (Bandarage 2009, 7). In other words, "inter-ethnic group relations may both condition and be conditioned by intra-group dynamics" (Bush 2003, 11).

Thus unpacking the conflict in Sri Lanka, shows a conflation of different types of violence and victims, which are not necessarily discussed in the overall narrative of the Sri Lankan conflict. For example very little is mentioned about the violence within the Sinhalese community that arose between 1987 -1990 that claimed an estimated 40,000 deaths in a little over two years (Ibid)[11] in relation to the Sri Lankan conflict[12]. To overlook these dimensions would neglect understanding critical elements and scenarios of the conflict. It is thus a complex conflict

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[11] It is believed that the Tamil Tigers killed more Tamils than the Sri Lankan armed forces especially given the fratricidal wars among the Tamil militants in the eighties. Likewise the Sri Lankan forces are accused of killing more Sinhalese than Tamils by the end of the 1980s (Bandarage 2009)

[12] If anything this violence is mentioned as a side issue or not really in connection with the main conflict as attempts are made to draw differences between the two.

perpetuated by the confluence of factors in a complex world and requires deeper understanding of all stakeholders.

In Sri Lanka, the present dynamics of the conflicts and the ethnic identities upon which it is based needs not only to be understood but to there needs to be deeper reading 'between the lines' in order to appreciate the impact of sub-group dimensions of inter and intra group relations. In other words, no ethnic group is homogenous and there are competing axes of identity which have competing priorities and influences and thus needs to be better understood. Hence, the developing of an understanding of the conflict in Sri Lanka must start with a recognition that the major groups are internally divided into politically salient subgroups along a range of differentiating axes such as religion, caste and political affiliations (Bush 2003). In addition to this, since a catalysing element of the conflict seems to be 1) the competing representation of the past; 2) understandings of the present; and 3) linkages between the two (Ibid.), it is important that this is unpacked and examined in the light of representations of identity of the 'self' vs. the 'other'. In this regard, work done by Bartholomeusz and De Silva (1998) have identified several threads of identity and nationalism within the Sri Lankan narrative not only linked to Sinhala Buddhism but that tanscend them to other religious and ethnic minorities as well.

2.2.2 'Contested' Identities in Sri Lanka

Many scholars examining the conflict in Sri Lanka and its causes, whilst caught between the tensions between 'primordialist' and 'modernist' approaches, look at ethnic identity as the main cause (Kapferer 1988; Kemper 1991; Dharmadasa 1988 and so on). Those advocating a 'Primordialism' approach assume blood ties and ethnicity as a fixed biological phenomenon (Bandarage 2009), and have traditionally been a source for interpreting cultural and ethnic nationalism in Sri Lanka (J. D. Rogers 1994). For example, from this approach, Sinhala nationalism is thought to be old ideologies articulated in new ways. Those advocating the 'modernist' approach using Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' thesis in particular, justify that the primordial identities (nations and traditional homelands) espoused by various ethno-nationalist groups in Sri Lanka "formed in response to modern circumstances rather than primordial entities based on historical facts" (Ibid, 10). Thus the modernist interpretations trace the roots of ethnic and cultural nationalism to the indigenous responses to colonialism, namely the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century (Ibid). This perspective allows Sinhala nationalism to be developed as a modern ideology but based on distorted facts from the past (Kapferer 1988), through language.

What this points out to then is the need for some clarity in understanding how Sri Lanka ethnic identities are developed and relationships with and between language and religion.

The Language Issue

Language has emerged as the initial primary ethnic marker in the social formation of the two major ethnic groups—the Tamils and Sinhalese. Whilst the Muslims share close linguistic and cultural ties with the Tamils, including the Tamil language[13]; they have however, traditionally preferred to be recognised by their religious and cultural identity, and claims of a distinct ethnic group identity (Ali 1981). This is a position that expresses the key differences between the two Tamil-speaking communities (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011).

It is the introduction of the 'Sinhala only' act in 1956 by which Sinhala became the sole official language in the country, that is deemed to be one of the primary catalysts of the conflict, serving to corroborate Gellner's analysis of the importance of language for economic advantage (Gombrich 2006). The standoff with other ethnicities and thereby the conflict which emerged as a result of this, can also be justified by the fact that in the "Sinhala language, the words for nation, race and people are practically synonymous and a multiethnic nation or state is incomprehensible to the popular mind" (Little 1999, 42). There are other analysts though that blame the conflict entirely on the past with colonial history[14] in particular transforming inter-ethnic relations (Gunasingam 1999) whilst others look at economic compulsions and resources competition (Edirippulige 2004).

Thus there are many different narratives that relate to the cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka with ethnic accommodation being a dominant theme in the country's history as "the taproots of discord reach equally deeply into the fearful soil of past discord" (Rotberg 1999, 4). To some extent, a contextualist approach might be more suitable for analyzing ethnicity within the Sri Lankan context as "a socially constructed phenomenon that is also available for instrumental use" (Bandarage 2009, 10) or even a modernist approach influenced by the colonial period (Wickramasinghe 2006) could be useful. Rogers (1994) suggests that 'post-Orientalists' scholarship, influenced by Said and Foucault, which "provide a new variant on modernist interpretations of ethnic and cultural nationalism" (Ibid, 10), could help to bolster understandings of cultural and ethnic nationalism in modern Sri Lanka and that it is their approach that is most helpful. Using either of these various approaches lend themselves to the explicit questioning of social categories and the tracing of the historical development of these categories thereby also bringing fresh meaning to the notions that cultural markers can be frequently manipulated by ideologues and those seeking power (Mamdani 2001).

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[13] It is worth also noting that depending on which part of the country the Muslim community has settled, they will also speak Sinhalese, however the main mother tongue is Tamil (whereby most sermons and use of literature is conducted in this language). It is also dependent on the geographic location of the Muslims with for example the Muslims in the east sharing closer relationships with the Tamils

[14] In other words, the role of the colonial regimes intensified ethnic identities leading to the ethnic conflict.

History

It is clear that ethnic and linguistic identity based on comprehensive understandings of history are a starting point for any discussions to do with Sri Lanka, its conflict and community relations. Identity and indigeneity have been tied together in the public discourse on multiculturalism and rights and in popular perceptions of Sinhalaness and Tamilness. Resentments, remembered slights, perceived fears of the other and the dangerous awareness of envy are never far from the surface (Rotberg 1999), and there is an entanglement of religious and ethnic loyalty.

Wickramasinghe (2006) using the modernist and post-modernist approach alludes to contested identities in Sri Lanka. This is not uncommon when interpreting the origins of modern national and communal identity in South Asia. One interpretation sees "colonial modernity as a radical epistemological break and judges the content of pre-colonial pasts irrelevant for understanding modern politics" (J. D. Rogers 2004, 625). Thus, modern identities become responses to colonial constructions of the Asian 'tradition'. Another interpretation sees continuities between the late pre-colonial and early colonial periods. Hence, the origins of modern national and communal identities lie not only in colonial interventions, but also in non-colonial eighteenth-century social formations and in early colonial interaction between the British and South Asians (Ibid).

It is this dichotomy of interpretation that also leads to this 'contestation' of history in Sri Lanka, thereby causing it to evolve down two parallel routes of the 'historical path' and the 'heritage path' (Wickramasinghe 2012). The former has been explicit about their craft and methods and attempted to write an objective exposition of the past open to inspection and peer review according to accepted norms of the profession. The latter, the 'heritage' path, has also made truth claims which have not been supported by the type of evidence that professional historians would have considered acceptable sources. As is shown in subsequent chapters, it is this reasoning that seems to have gained more popular traction in the public discourse. However whilst the historical path constitutes a Sinhala disposition toward the past and the 'heritage' path a Tamil representation both Sinhala and Tamils are guided by a past that is at once transformed and determined by the present (Batholomeusz and de Silva 1998) hence bringing up the interest of the modernists. This could also be attributed to the Muslim community as well.

The historical development of the identities and nationalities is easily identified from the eighteenth century onwards, as the British established their domination in South Asia, causing new forms of identity to emerge following various muddled schemes of social differentiation across the subcontinent (J. D. Rogers 2004). The overall effect was to marginalize existing forms of social identification at the expense of others, and eventually to produce new social formations that were 'modern', fraternal, and enumerable. "These identities were the product of the

centralization of state power and its accompanying discourses of modernity, which in South Asia were shaped by the need to be consistent with British power. Across the subcontinent, efforts were then made to categorise the new identities within an encompassing sociology based on some singular 'ethnic' principle" (Ibid, 646). Within this rigid framework "the twentieth- century centralisation of state power and extension of the franchise led to the rise of ethno-nationalism and the Sinhalese-Ceylon Tamil polarisation that now dominates Sri Lankan politics" (J. D. Rogers 1994, 20). This polarisation in part was caused by policies, employed by Sinhalese politicians in a post independent Sri Lanka that were largely ethnocentric and favoured the Sinhalese. The politicisation of ethnic difference not only succeeded in marginalising the Tamil community but also succeeded in eroding the trust of all minorities in the state and its institutions (A. Imtiyaz 2008).

The emergence of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism (and for militant action leading to demands of separation) is consequently linked to policies of colonialism (and post colonialism) and the cultural, literacy and religious synchronicity between Jaffna and Tamil Nadu. Thus in the early days, it had little hostility to the Sinhalese or to Buddhism or even to the Muslims or Islam because there was no scriptural foundation or political cause for such sentiments at that time (Cheran 2009). It is not coincidental that Tamil histories have developed in the same period that has witnessed the rise of Sinhalese Buddhist fundamentalism – namely the 19th century to the present. Hence the late 19th century Tamils used history to prove their right to be in Sri Lanka, constituting a Tamil community identity distinct from but closely related (at least linguistically, religiously and culturally) to the Tamil community in India. Consequently, Tamils of Sri Lanka used identity and history to form a 'people' with a more proximate other (in India) and a less proximate other (the Sinhala). The Sinhala people in turn used history to claim to be rightful heirs to the land casting the Tamils as an enemy (Batholomeusz and de Silva 1998) and claiming their right (as Buddhists) for ownership, security and rule of the land. The Sri Lankan Muslim community also developed a unique identity, but ethnic identity and religious identity remain inseparable (Nuhuman 1998).

Challenges in Discussing Muslim Identity

The separate Muslim identity narratives involves an analysis of how it has undergone a political transformation based on colonial political representation and as a result of the actions of successive Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan governments post-independence. However in parallel to this, an identity fundamentally based on their Islamic belief and culture also developed (ICG 2007b). The validity of the ethnic vs. religious identity and the evolution of the nexus between the two is the precise subject for this thesis in terms of addressing challenges for the future.

There is a common acceptance that anyone who performs the rituals, such as the five daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimage, is a devout Muslim. As a

consequence, the default position is that Islamic scholars must answer where ritual, theology and dogma which form the most important feature in Islam, fit in with moral and social individual and collective responsibilities (Yakun 1990). It is also widely accepted that anyone who believes in the main tenets of Islam, albeit does not practice the main acts of worship prescribed by Islam, is for the benefit of statistics and research at least, considered to be a Muslim. Even when researchers have, in fact, taken a broader, more inclusive approach, it has often been to study those Muslims who are active participants in Islamic groups or organizations. The perspectives and experiences of those Muslims who are marginal to these organized forums have received little attention. If only in indirect ways, this too has nurtured the image of homogeneity by reducing the visibility of an important dimension of the Muslim experience. (Kibria 2011)[15].

Another issue that is raised is that 'Muslim' is used by Muslims themselves as both a religious, political and a cultural signifier, taking it as their identifier under which they pressure for action on issues that allow them to take on the concern of an 'ethnic' community. 'Muslim' thus becomes at once a political, ethnic, cultural as well as a religious affiliation and this is replicated in academic discourse. The term 'Muslim Community' to describe all Sri Lankan Muslims implies a level of homogeneity across the heterogeneous ideological and geographical groups that constitute Muslims in Sri Lanka, in addition to the challenges of using religious labels as ethnic markers.

Despite the huge diversity of the Muslim world, however, it is the case that a fundamental theme in Islamic discourse is based on the unity of Muslims, as differing communities united by faith; expressed through the concept of an ummah (community) that transcends internal divisions (al-Ahsan 1992). Because of this, narratives presented about Islam by Muslims err towards presenting the faith as unified and potentially monolithic, based on a perfected form revealed in the time of the Prophet Mohamed (Peace Be Upon Him - PBUH). Hence "... the key assumption of orthodox Islamic thought that doctrines have been set out in the unchangeable and faultless form of the Qur'an; and that therefore any belief of practice can be challenged only so far as it does not have a real basis in the original truths that were revealed to Mohamed" (Jacobson 1998, 112)

Consequently, for many Sri Lankan Muslims, this reflects how divisions are considered a 'private' layer of inter-community relations, and to the 'outside' there is a consensus to maintaining at least the veneer of unity, in keeping with the Islamic tenets of One God, One Faith. The replication of this conception of unified faith in discourse outside of the boundaries of Muslim communities can be seen in the articulation of a generally understood conception that there is such a thing

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15 For the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, this differentiation and description is important because it qualifies everyone under the ethnic grouping of being a Muslim, whilst from a religious perspective, one often finds the mistake that has been described being committed even by Muslims themselves based on the aspect of piety and practice of religion.

as 'mainstream' Islam. This is most clearly seen when looking at views and practices of individuals, that might differ from the mainstream, as 'un-Islamic', against the principle tenets of Islam, and therefore outside of the mainstream of the faith and hence not fit to be representative of the community[16]

Understanding practice and structure of Islam in Sri Lanka, therefore requires global reference to the Islamic traditions, cultures and politics. There have always been traditional differences among Muslims in Sri Lanka over issues of faith, most of which have not provoked serious conflict and have been accepted by religious leaders as part of a broader tolerance in the community. However, since the late 1980s there has been a strong growth in ultra-orthodox interpretations of Islam with a new identity that have provoked conflicts with other interpretations that have existed previously (ICG 2007b).

This push for a greater Islamic identity has seen an increased articulation of a 'pure' Muslim identity that is set in the context of religiosity (and religious practice) but also has transnational Muslim solidarity which is based on a strengthening of reactive identities as a response to the identity-stripping experience of the conflict, generational gaps and globalisation. However much of this is anecdotal and empirical and needs further rigorous study.

There are a number of competing discourses and narratives within the Muslim communities. While the institutions formed by Muslims have been created by a generation looking to consolidate their identity and existence, there has definitely been a cross over with regards the religious practice. Consequently, younger Muslims have begun to construct a narrative of religious practice that indicates that their "mainstream" practice of faith focuses on a return to the basics of Islam, away (and in opposition to) the cultural practices of the previous generations. The challenge for the Muslims is to articulate a national and ethnic identity whilst remaining true to the religious practices.

Community Polarisation

In Sri Lanka, many kinds of imagined communities are still concurrently sustained and what sustains them are not only ideas of representations in an exclusively Semitic sense but also definite structures of legal identification and representation (Wickramasinghe 2006, xv). The 30-year-old conflict has fuelled competing conceptions of nationalism and further led to the polarization of communities. A survey conducted by the Asia Foundation in 2011 showed that as the country emerged from decades of civil war, new challenges relating to ethno-religious dynamics were palpable. The survey shows that although the war ended, people were worried about extremist religious views and violence,

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[16] This raises the issue of the 'good' vs the 'bad' Muslim, whereby the conundrum of whether a 'bad' Muslim in terms of religious practice can be a representative of the Sri Lankan Muslim community and thus be a 'good' Muslim, or whether the perspective of representation is linked to the religious practice of the individual.

particularly in areas that were multi-ethnic (Sabharwal and Chinn 2012). The survey, which included 5,553 interviews across all provinces with the four major religious groups – Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Roman Catholics- provided a more grounded understanding of people's perceptions of religious beliefs and practices, inter-religious relations, and the role and influence of religious leaders. According to the results, Sri Lankans overwhelmingly perceived their society as becoming significantly more religious, and adherence to core religious practices and rituals was high among people of all faiths, especially Buddhists. Thus the problem of increasing segregation has the danger of playing out in communities across Sri Lanka especially on religious lines (Ibid.)

Another study conducted showed that "post war ethnic relations among resettled communities are deeply divergent than convergent. The absence of shared values and persistent distrust and suspicion, now marks the composition of the multi ethnic in former conflict zones" (Thaheer, Peiris and Pathiraja 2013).

2.2.3 Rationale for the Study
In Sri Lanka's case, particularly when the conflict is discussed, much attention is paid more to the two principle communities (and those directly in conflict with each other), the Sinhalese and the Tamils, with very little being said about the other minorities especially the Muslims. This is one of the important casing points to be made in this study. The conflict is not binary and has equally suffered from intra-ethnic divisions within the communities as it has perpetrated inter-ethnic polarization between the communities. Whilst the conflict is not the scope of this work, it is important to recognize the work of Asoka Bandarage in articulating the need to develop a multi-polar approach to the Sri Lankan conflict "examining multiple ethnic and religious groups and by focusing on intra-ethnic, social class, caste, regional and other division" (Bandarage 2009, 7), which Bush (2003) also alludes to with regards the multidimensional aspect of the conflict.

Sri Lanka's history narrative (pre and post-independence) reveals a focus on a singular identity at the expense of a multi-polar approach. In this absence has developed a communal and religious dynamic with the emphasis on the dominance between the two main ethnicities in the country which "pushes to the margins other numerically smaller groups unable to make the same claims to historical provenance and territorial occupation" (Rambukwella 2012).

"The history of Muslim identity formation is widely contested" (Lewer and Ismail 2011, 119), due to its diversity and it is due to this, that its study in Sri Lanka is not as well covered as the other two communities despite the work of scholars such as Dennis B McGilvray (1998,2007,2011); Imtiyaz (2007,2008,2009, 2010); Nuhman (2007). However, these pieces of work are largely piecemeal as the "Muslims are generally left out of the dominant discourse on the Sri Lankan separatist conflict" (Bandarage 2009, 6). In addition, whatever study that has been done has largely concentrated either on the conflict (Imtiyaz 2007, 2008) or

general ethnographic and historical studies (McGilvray 2007) with very little recent work being done following the end of the conflict on the challenges that Muslim communities face from Sinhala nationalist as a result of the transformation of their identity.

Developing such a comprehensive study on this topic has not yet been done and this is one of the first attempts to do so on the transformation of the Muslim identity, its institutionalization and politicisation in the country over this time frame in the light of challenges being faced today as an attempt to address the way forward. Understandably over the last 20 years, a lot of emphasis has gone to trying to explore the role of the Muslim community in the conflict and to some cases trying to justify their involvement in peace processes and so on (Imtiyaz 2007, 2008). However, without a comprehensive understanding of the past and how the community has transformed, it is difficult to appreciate how it is viewed currently and even more difficult to actually understand where it needs to get to.

2.3 Conception of Identity

The construction of identity plays a significant role in the social formation of any political group, picking up from Chapter 1. In discussing Sri Lankan identity, it is important to look at the concepts of ethnicity, nation, nationalism, religion and conflict. Whilst the first four are distinct and determinative elements in their own right, they cannot be considered in isolation whilst attempting to understand the shaping of modern history (Wan and Vanderwef 2009). In addition, I would also add that one cannot afford to isolate conflict which as another distinct element is intimately linked to the previous four and thus deserves interrogation. This is in particular because identity based conflicts (which it could be argued that Sri Lanka suffers from) also push us to rethink our understanding of collective identity (formation, mobilisation and politicisation) and ultimately its relationship with violence (Bush 2003). "There is a need to both build on and go beyond, well-travelled realists' paths" (Ibid, 4).

Hence a clear definition of the key-terms is important because authors use them in different ways.

2.3.1 Identity

Identity is one of the most overused but least understood or considered terms in contemporary humanities and social sciences. Consequently, it is dealt with paradoxically and subjected to a searching critique. Its "deconstruction has been conducted within a variety of disciplinary areas, all of them, in one way or another, critical of the notion of an integral, original and unified identity" (Hall 2000, 15).

Identity can be understood as "a provisional stabilization of a sense of self or group that is formed in actual historical time and space, in evolving economies, polities, and cultures, as a continuous search for some solidity in a constantly

shifting world – but without closure, without forever naturalizing or essentializing the provisional identities arrived at." (Suny 2001, 866). This concept of identity doesn't signal a stable core of the self that is unchanged through history and in fact accepts   that identities are not only not unified but are increasingly fragmented, fractured and multiply constructed across different discourses, practices and positions (Hall 2000). Thus identity needs to be understood as produced in "specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies" (Ibid, 17). In other words, when people talk about identity they seem to exclude a sense of historical construction or provisionality and instead almost always accept the present identity as fixed, singular, bounded, internally harmonious, distinct from others at its boundaries, and marked by historical longevity, if not rooted in nature (Suny 2001). Hence "identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" (Hall 2000, 17) which entails a relationship to the 'Other' (the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to its 'constitutive' outside) consequently meaning that identities can acquire a temporary form based on subject positions which discursive positions construct for us. Identities therefore become "the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' that they are representations from the place of the Other" (Ibid, 19). The language of identity reminds us of the concept of dialogical formation in that it is "in dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity" (Appiah 2005, 20).

Consequently, we can think, of identity as being the story of who we are and every memory we have ever had gets stored up, and contributes in some way towards how we understand the world with some having more impact than others. Thus narrative is central to identity formation, as it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities (Suny 2001). If this is unpacked even more, it might be possible to identify four dimensions of narratives (Somers 1994): ontological, public, conceptual, and meta. "Ontological narratives are about who we are and why we do what we do. Public narratives are those attached to cultural and institutional formations beyond the single individual, to intersubjective networks of institutions. Conceptual narrativity is the concepts and explanations that are constructed by social researchers, such as "society," "culture," "structure," and "agency." And, finally, metanarratives or master narratives are the grand overriding stories in which we are historically embedded, such as stories of the nation, progress, decadence, or the end of history" (Ibid, 617-620). Identities are then formed within these discourses and are related to the historic positioning of the subjects involved. Subsequently, the strength of identity is the mobilising potential that it has, by bringing people together around a particular issue or belief in order to campaign for a particular thing and creating forms of solidarity. The concept of the social movement arises from this phenomenon and we look at the concept of 'identity politics'.

The latter probably best signifies any political participation that is based around the self-interest, or the specific perspective, of a particular group within society. As will be discussed from a primordialist description of ethnicity and race, identity politics has often come to be equated to dealing with minorities. Historically, the second half of the 20th century has witnessed successive waves of political movements seeking to rectify injustices that had been suffered by disadvantaged or minority groups (Heyes 2012). The practice of identity politics then is used to remedy perceived injustices or disadvantages, often through challenging the dominant culture's account about the inferiority of the identity in question. By challenging this account, it seeks to redefine it on its own terms, often through raising consciousness within the various communities associated with the identity and using them to push outwards for recognition. This process then seeks to put forward political claims to the State (and other bodies) proposing remedial measures to secure recognition, equality and to tackle disadvantage. The second half of the 20th century which has seen a greater rise of identity politics mirrors the development of liberal democracies (in a post-colonial period) which has allowed people to share a sense of origin with others and collectively put forward their claims. In this context, modern nations may be defined "as those political communities made up of people who believe they share characteristics (perhaps origins, values, historical experiences, language, territory, or any of many other elements) that give them the right to self-determination – perhaps control of a piece of the earth's real estate (their homeland), even statehood and the benefits that follow" (Suny 2001, 6). Hence in this case, they could become arenas in which people dispute who they are, argue about boundaries, who is in or out of the group, where the "homeland" begins and ends, what the "true" history of the nation is, what is "authentic" about being national and what is to be rejected (Ibid). Like individuals, nations become articulated through stories spread through mythology and symbols, often talking about origins, sacrifice, glory and heroism.

The counter claim though is that liberal democracies have been incapable of catering sufficiently to the concept of identity politics, mainly because of their organisation around political parties. Interest groups and lobbies that individuals can join or leave at will, rather than identity groups (Brown 1995). This could also lead to the marginalisation of minority groups as we have seen in the case of Sri Lanka.

Part of my thesis will be to unpack the validity of politics based around ethno-religious identity formation for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. What we need to understand is the reasoning behind the transformation of the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka which also evaluates the practical meaning that Muslim identity politics holds for those who were engaged with it – including their key concerns and aspirations.

As a form of political engagement and lobbying, identity politics is nothing new, but in Sri Lanka, it has been the subject of much contention over recent years,

especially with regards minorities and their politics. In particular, this accusation is being brought forward to challenge Sri Lankan Muslims as well with regards their allegiances to the state and a national identity. The counter argument has been that the political system in Sri Lanka especially in a post 1956 era not only excessively fostered identity politics, but cultivated an unhealthy, divisive political landscape whereby minority groups competed with one another for the largest portion of official attention, and representation. This is a form of 'plural mono-culturalism' (Sen 2006a) where actual meaningful interactions between different communities are few and far between. In other words, the concept of identity politics as it is practised in places like Sri Lanka, promotes the idea of parallel communities and of the side-by-side existence of a diversity of discrete communities, to the extent that they 'might pass one another like ships in the night' (Sen 2006b).

The concept of the parallel communities fits into the theory of 'Imagined Communities' (Anderson 1983), where despite not actually knowing all other members of the community – or even having face to face contact, the community is 'imagined' in the sense of horizontal comradeship, despite actual inequalities and hierarchies and it is limited because of this 'boundary'. Hence Anderson argues that the community (or the nation, in the sense that he's particularly focussing on) gives the individual a sense that they are a part of something that is bigger than them, and that will still exist long after they themselves have gone. In this sense, you could build a case (and this is one that Anderson engages with, actually) that community identity takes the place of religion in the sense providing the individual with personal meaning. The complication comes when community identity becomes synonymous with religion as we have seen in Sri Lanka.

2.3.2 Ethnicity

Since ethnicity is one of the root causes for identity disputes in Sri Lanka, we need to discuss this. Yet in my opinion, a discussion of ethnicity is always complicated by the variety of related terms used to designate similar phenomena, such as race, tribe, nation and minority group. I tend to consider ethnicity to be a chapeau of these different terms. Yet some scholars use these terms interchangeably while others treat them as unrelated concepts. Given the intra-relationships between the terms is complex, there is a need to understand these relationships.

The concept of understanding ethnicity is that it is constructed both historically and symbolically around a particular cultural tradition (Bush 2003). Hence like identity, there is an aspect of ethnicity being relationship oriented and emerging from one's relationship to a particular ethnic group (Wan and Vanderwef 2009), which is distinct, separate and unique from all other groups. "Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a

minimum of regular interaction" (Eriksen 2002, 12). So ethnicity becomes an aspect and not a cultural 'entity' in itself; making cultural differences relevant in communications, being contextually influenced and above all requiring social 'interaction' with 'others'. This is something that Barth (1969) also discusses in terms of self identity with social interaction. In other words, one cannot have an ethnic identity in isolation. It needs to be declared in opposition to another person as it provides 'insider groups' with a sharper sense of their separate selves when confronted by the presence of an outsider group (Bush 2003).

Wan and Vanderwef (2009, 2) argue that this approach could be slightly problematic because it "pushes the researcher, often unconsciously, toward a primordialist understanding of ethnicity". It is this that sometimes leads to the mistaken conclusion of 'ethnic' to be 'minority'. In other words, "ethnic groups are defined as 'a distinct collective group' of the population within the larger society whose culture is different from the mainstream culture" (Ibid, 5). This often forms the basis of ethnic conflict in the sense that these ethnic (or minority) groups are often subject to prejudicial attitudes and actions by the state or its constituents (who comprise the majority). It is this type of analysis of conflict that makes it problematic and not all encompassing. In the case of Sri Lanka this type of binary analyses needs to be avoided as it doesn't fully grasp the complexities of the problems at the ground level.

Ethnicity need not always be the most relevant means by which people organize themselves in a society or are categorized by others. It requires enormous power for the mobilization of people around a predominant identity and could mean more than just a particular ethnic origin. In fact "when ethnicity becomes politically relevant and determines the life prospects of people belonging to distinct ethnic groups, it is possible to mobilize group members to change a situation of apparently perpetual discrimination and disadvantage or in defense of a valued status quo" (Wolff 2006, 31)

Thus understanding ethnicity can not only be difficult but problematic as various different definitions and understandings abound (Cashmore 2003, Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983 and so on). However, in dealing with ethnicity as a relationship process, that consists of communities and identities, with some foundational affirmation of kinship, this primordialist element could be 'tempered' with constructionism (Wolff 2006). It is consequently certain, that any approach to deal with a definition, approach and theory needs to clearly identified from the beginning and will do well to be complementary as opposed to exclusive.

In addition to this, with transnational migration and colonial expansion, ethnicity is also linked to nationality[17] especially with the rise of the modern state system

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[17] This could be understood by the concept of Collective Identities which could be considered a symbolic representation of 'commonness' among a group of people, in *contrast* to other collectives

in the 17th Century. Thus, in the West, the notion of ethnicity, like race and nation, developed in the context of European colonial expansion, when mercantilism and capitalism were promoting global movements of populations at the same time that state boundaries were being more clearly and rigidly defined. Modern states in the 19th Century then generally sought legitimacy through their claim to represent "nations." Nation-states, however, included populations that were largely excluded from national life because they were 'different' from the 'majority'. These excluded groups (minorities or ethnic groups) subsequently either demanded inclusion on the basis of equality, or sought autonomy.

Anthropological theories of ethnicity are normally grouped into basic categories: Primordialist theories and Instrumentalist theories whilst Gurr and Harff (1994) also place Constructivist theories as a third category to be considered, especially when considering ethnic conflict (See

Table 1 below). These theories broadly reflect changes of approach in anthropology over the past two decades, i.e. the shift from cultural evolution theories, to structural-functional theories, to conflict theories, and finally to postmodern theories (Wan and Vanderwef 2009). Thus it is imperative that when reading on ethnicity in Sri Lanka for example, one needs to be aware of which theory of ethnicity is being followed since this could in theory affect an author's perspective and conclusion.

Table 1: Three Basic Approaches to Understanding Ethnicity (Wan and Vanderwef 2009)

Perspective	Description
Primordialist Theories	Ethnicity is fixed at birth. Ethnic identification is based on deep, primordial attachments to a group or culture.
Instrumental Theories	Ethnicity, based on people's "historical" and "symbolic" memory, is something created and used and exploited by leaders and others in the pragmatic pursuit of their own interests.
Constructivist Theories	Ethnic identity is not something people "possess" but something they "construct" in specific social and historical contexts to further their own interests. It is therefore fluid and subjective.

Primordialist Theories of Ethnicity

The 'primordialist' way of thinking about ethnic identity is that one's ethnic group is fixed (Chandra 2012) and hence each of us belongs to one and only one ethnic group, that group membership remains fixed over a lifetime and it is passed down intact across generations. Identity then is something intrinsic and inherent (with importance being given to blood and descent, religion and language, custom and culture). Wars begin and end; states grow and die; economies boom and crash;

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with the boundaries being flexible and constantly reproduced through social interaction. (Tronvoll 2007)

but through it all, ethnic groups stay the same. Hence ethnicity is not only "deeply ingrained in human history and experience" (Wolff 2006, 33), but ethnic bonds are primordial and unlike other bonds: have an over-powering non-rational, emotional quality; are largely inexplicable; are ancient, enduring and recurrent; given, natural and immutable. The power of this theory lies in its immutability which gives it a sort of invisible power in the sense that it becomes the default position and tangible foundation for ethnic identification and from which discussions on issues of ethnicity, nationalism and conflict take place.

Primordialism's socio-biological strand further claims that ethnicity, tied to kinship, promotes a convergence of interests between individuals and their kin group's collective goals (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). Primordialist theories thus view human society as a conglomeration of distinct social groups. At birth a person "becomes" a member of a particular group and identification is based on deep, primordial attachments to that group, established by kinship and descent and hence "One's ethnicity is thus 'fixed' and an unchangeable part of one's identity" (Wan and Vanderwef 2009, 9). So for example a primordial analysis of the Sri Lankan context says that Sri Lanka has always been dominated by two exclusive and conflictual groups: Sinhala-speaking Buddhists and Tamil-speaking Hindus.

The criticism of primordialism is its intrinsic premise that ethnic identities are static, when in fact, they can be influenced by different contexts. This therefore ignores how ethnicity is formed instead choosing to focus on the nature of ethnic identification. This challenge arises when it comes to looking at Sri Lanka and the relationships between the communities. As Non-Primordial analyses illustrate, groupings within Sri Lanka based on language and religion have been historically variable and intersecting social divisions. So whilst there was never a perfect congruence of 'race', language, religion and political territory, current ethnic identities which are inherently political, are a by-product of the colonial era and have inherently drawn on history and heritage to generate a conflict within the modern state.

Instrumentalist Theories of Ethnicity
Proponents of instrumentalist theories on the other hand view ethnicity as something that can be socially and politically changed, constructed or even manipulated over time to gain specific political and/or economic ends (Wan and Vanderwef 2009). Thus this theory posits the notion of an 'elitist' approach which says that leaders in a modern state (the elite) use and manipulate perceptions of ethnic identity to further their own ends and stay in power. Consequently, ethnicity is more of a product of political myths brought about by the manipulation of elite competition determined by economic and political realties (Ibid). Thus ethnicity is "foremost a resource in the hands of leaders to mobilize followers in the pursuit of other interests" (Wolff 2006, 33). Ethnic bonds are related to political and social projects; instrumentally mobilized as a means to gain material goals.

Instrumentalism however fails to understand the non-rational, emotional depth of national identity, which have to do with the passion of belonging or the sacrifices made in its name. It also fails to distinguish the fact that ethnic disputes are not all about economic and political interests and could arise as a struggle over ideals and values.

What both the primordial and instrumental schools have in common is that they agree that ethnicity has a number of tangible aspects such as common history, customs, traditions and so on (Wolff 2006). Whilst this may be important components for an individual's ethnic identity, it is slightly different in making this an acceptable characteristic of group membership. Technically even though everyone has an ethnic identity, this should not mean that every aspect of people's lives has to be organised on the basis of ethnic 'in-groups and out-groups'. Unfortunately, this is often the case today in many countries, where ethnicity is reduced to this base determinant. It can be argued by some that Sri Lanka is a classic example of this type of reductionist determinant for ethnicity. However, this doesn't fully explain the phenomenon in relation to intense emotions such issues bring up. There is explanatory power for some groups in some situations, but not for all and hence the concept of ethnic conflict arises. Arguably neither school of thought accurately captures the entirety of processes of ethnic identification or fully explains the varied elements of ethnic mobilization towards conflict with the 'other'.

Constructivist Theories of Ethnicity

Constructivists view ethnic identities as a product of human actions and choices (A. Imtiyaz 2009). In other words, ethnic identities are not singular, nor are they fixed. Hence identity is a created sentiment, based on social, political and cultural resources. Therefore, it can be flexible (albeit) manipulative but processual, leading to ever-changing perceptions of identity. Constructivism can involve not only large scale changes but "can be a product of the very political and economic phenomena that they are used to explain" (Chandra 2012, 5). Thus identities are constructed and transmitted, not genetically inherited, from the past (Taras and Ganguly 2002). This is used subsequently by constructivists to explain that the concept of nationalism and ethnic identity is an eighteenth-century European phenomenon and an ideological creation.

What this indicates then is that under certain circumstances / problems, ethnic identity could be formed by appropriate political actions but also 'abused' by political actors anxious to obtain and retain power (A. Imtiyaz 2009). This type of analysis is probably one of the better approaches to looking at the Sri Lankan scenario, especially in approaching the transformation of the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity, as has been done by Imtiyaz 2009; Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008 and so on. However, as Ismail (1997) points out, the Muslim political elites

well before independence had succeeded in constructing their identity largely based on the Islamic faith to distinguish themselves as a group from the Tamils.

What constructivism provides then is an opportunity to ascertain a relationship between ethnicity, politics and economics looking at the process of the formation of ethnic identity, in particular "how to incorporate the possibility of fluidity and endogeneity of ethnic identity" (Chandra 2012, 5). In other words, ethnicity can be a process which continues to unfold as it is negotiated and constructed in every day living (Wan and Vanderwef 2009)

The concept of constructivism then develops the notion of multiple identities that can change endogenously to political and economic processes. The key is to understand the process, speed, phenomenon (in other words, who what, why, where, when and how) that drives these changes. Constructivism cannot serve as the basis for new theories unless these disagreements are made explicit and synthesized into a coherent set of propositions" (Chandra 2012, 5).

Constructivism focuses on the role of identity in explaining state actions. In particular, it allows the claim that state identities and interests are an important part constructed by these social structures, rather than "given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics" (Ibid, 216). Thus this approach claims that states possess identities and interests that are socially constructed.

What this then opens up is a notion of an expanded discussion on the concept of ethnicity, identity, ethnic groups and boundaries and a hybridity of these concepts that arise based on the different contexts and pressures. Hence in the quest now to understand nationalism, identity and so on, our understanding of "…ethnic identity should perhaps rather be seen as something that has roots in a group's culture, and historical experiences and traditions, but that is also dependent upon contemporary opportunities that can be a useful instrument for mobilizing people for social, political, or economic purposes that may or may not be related directly to their ethnic origins" (Wolff 2006, 36-37).

2.3.3 Nations & Nationalism
The concept of Sinhala identity is premised around the mythology of a nation and nationalism and the interactions between the two. There is still no consensus as what defines a nation, nor is there any wider societal consensus of the relationship between modern nations and entities from which members of modern nations claim linear descent (Wolff 2006), hence "the key to our understanding of nationalism is appreciating how it operates as an ideology" (Cordell and Wolff 2011, 5).

Any discussion of 'nations', nationalism, ethnicity and even ethno-religious nationalism is immediately confronted by the continued controversy that

surrounds the main terms of the debate. This is because "the 'nation' is a fundamentally contested concept" (Jackson-Preece 2011, 15). Whilst one of the most influential doctrines in modern history is the fact that "all humans are divided into groups called nations" (Wan and Vanderwef 2009, 13), it is also a fundamentally contested concept as "the precise meaning of the term defies an easy explanation" (Jackson-Preece 2011, 15). For example, the concept of the Nation could be "a clearly delimited, compact, and recognized homeland; a mass, public culture; a centralized economy with mobility throughout; and common rights and duties for all co-nationals, usually to the exclusion of outsiders." (Smith 1993, 34). In other words, it is simply a membership in 'a people' and could be construed to be about political representation and how it conceives (as opposed to ethnicity) relationships with the state.

On the other hand, a nation could be "A human group consciousness of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future, and claiming the right to rule itself" (Guibernau 1999, 14). Thus national identity becomes a modern phenomenon of a fluid and dynamic nature, which consists of fulfilling certain attributes related to psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political dimensions (Guibernau 2007).

It is clear, how contested the debate on nations (and nationalism) can become. Like the discussion on ethnicity there are several categories for theories related to the origins of nations (See Table 2 below)

Table 2: The Four Basic Theories of the Origins of Nations (Wan and Vanderwef 2009)

Theory	Description
Nationalist theories	Nations have existed as long as man has existed. It is part of being human to seek to form nations.
Perennialist theories	Nations have been around for a long time, but have taken different shapes at different points in history. National forms may change and particular nations may dissolve, but the identity of a nation is unchanging. The past (history) is of great importance. (Anthony D. Smith)
Modernist theories	Nations are entirely modern and are socially constructed. The past is largely irrelevant. The nation is a modern phenomenon and socially constructed, the product of nationalist ideologies, which themselves are the expression of modern, industrial society. This is currently the most prevalent scholarly position (Ernest Gellner)
Post-modern theories	While nations are modern and the product of modern cultural conditions, modem nationalist leaders (elites) "use" the past for their own ends V i.e. they select, invent and mix traditions from the ethnic past and offer them as justification for their actions. The present creates the past in its own image.

Nationalist Theories

This first basic theory of the Origins of Nations which is called the "Nationalist" theory sees modern nation-states as direct descendants of ancient primordial ethnic groups. Hence the theoretical underpinnings of this approach rest on a primordialistic view of ethnicity and that to primordialists, nationalism is a natural phenomenon (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). Primordialists focus on ancient and inherited social practices as the source of authentic national community. Consequently, nations are considered to be primordial entities that are identifiable through history, that have ancient roots and through their distinctive way of life, attachment to a particular territorial homeland and their striving for political autonomy.

It is this reasoning that perhaps seems to justify its presence in many discussions today especially when it comes to justifying ethnic conflict (Sri Lanka is no exception to this argument). The resurgence / persistence of ethnic conflict disputes early modernization theory which predicted that modernization would break down people's localised ethnic identities and replace them with loyalties to larger communities. Primordialists would argue that the antiquity of the ethnic nation and superiority of culture means that this is never the case, and conflicts arise when ethnic consciousness is realised as a result of the 'group' being threatened (culturally, politically, socially) by external forces thereby giving it a fundamental right to self-determination or autonomy, a form of 'Neo-primordialism' (Comaroff 1995)[18]. In other words, ethno-national conflict is inevitable under primordial analysis. This becomes many of the position of right wing (Tamil and Sinhalese) nationalist historians (and professionals) in Sri Lanka.

Perennialist Theories

This group of theories sees ethnic groups as stable, even ancient units of social cohesion (Wan and Vanderwef 2009). Largely proposed by Anthony D. Smith, this theory accounts for the gap created when an ethnic group evolves into a nation (Smith 1998) and in some ways explains the evolution of the first European nations from their pre-modern ethnic cores[19]. Thus before the rise of nation-states, citizens owed loyalty to kingdoms or empires and the ruling dynasty with the focus of people being mainly local (Wan and Vanderwef 2009). All of this changed with communication and education and the connection of villages and towns. As people began to develop a feeling of a collective cultural identity with others who spoke their language and practiced their religion, and dynasties expanded for financial and political gain, the nation state began to emerge. Hence ethnic unity, which relates to the existence of coherent mythology, and a

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[18] Comaroff (1996) puts forward this premise of 'Neo-Primordialism' as an attachment of instrumentalism to primordialism

[19] There may be 6 attributes for this group 1) a collective proper name 2) a myth of common ancestry 3) shared historical memories 4) one or more differentiating elements of common culture 5) an association with a specific 'homeland' and 6) a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population (Smith 1998)

symbolism of history and culture in an ethnic community, is a necessary condition for not only national survival and unity but for the ethnic community to become a nation state (Wan and Vanderwef 2009).

Modernist Theories

Modernists (e.g. Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm) view nations as specifically modern, owing nothing to ethnic heritage as they are the result of political and economic developments in European history, traced to the last quarter of 18th century (Enlightenment) and spreading across the globe through colonisation, thereby answering the question 'where does sovereignty lie?' The first conceptions of nationalism were primarily civic and territorial. Civic/territorial conceptions of the nation regard it as a community of shared culture, common laws, and territorial citizenship and that residence and political participation in a public culture tends to determine citizenship and membership of the nation (Smith 1993).

Ethnic nationalism rose in importance in 19th century and it is from this point that "the discourse of modernity was infused with a national rhetoric" (Jackson-Preece 2011, 16). As discussions on history and culture, take prominence, they also centre around 'national economies', 'national interest' and so on. Therefore, ethno-nationalism involves the politicisation of ethnicity and usually consists of both territorial as well as political claims.

In his classic work, 'Nations and Nationalism', Gellner (1983, 15) defines nations as "groups which will themselves to persist as communities. Crystallisation of these groups could be by "will, voluntary identification, loyalty and solidarity, as well as fear, coercion, and compulsion". Thus Gellner argues that both nations and nationalism are essentially modern phenomena that emerged after the French Revolution as a result of modern conditions such as industrialism, literacy, education systems, mass communications, secularism and capitalism. "For Gellner, the transition from agrarian to industrial society was the key to explaining the emergence of 'nations' and its concomitant ideology of nationalism" (Jackson-Preece 2011, 17). This is opposed to the theories of Elie Kedourie who connects nationalism with a top-down intellectual revolution connected to ideas of the Enlightenment (Ibid.)

Hence the 'nation' has no existence beyond our subjective meanings and there is no need for cultural homogeneity of national identity before the modern era. Whilst, a sense of shared national identity can be forged, "Gellner suggests that ethnicity is neither a prerequisite nor a required element in the formation of nations" (Isiksal 2002, 5). So according to arguments the nation depends upon political and intellectual elite imposing a shared culture on the whole population in a territory particularly through the national education system. Thus modernism presents national consciousness as a complete construct, which is developed as an educational process on the masses.

Nations then take the form of (Hutchinson 2005):
- Secular political units infused with ideas of popular sovereignty seeking an independent state with universal citizenship rights
- Consolidated territories with a bureaucratic state and market economy that erodes regional and loyal loyalties
- Ethnically homogenous by virtue of state policies including the promotion of official languages, the inculcation of a patriotic ethos is education and the expulsion of minorities
- High cultural unity based on a standard vernacular language, literacy and print capitalisation
- Industrial urban societies with a high degree of territorial integration and new middle class social mobility.

Post-Modern theories

"Benedict Anderson is the most well-known proponent of the postmodernist perspective on nations" (Wan and Vanderwef 2009, 18). He perhaps offers a compromise between the materialism of Gellner and the idealism of Kedourie (Jackson-Preece 2011), where in the concept of the nation, he says

> "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…In fact all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined…. The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lies other nations…It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical, dynastic realm…..it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson 1983, 7-8)

Whilst Anderson shared Gellner's conception of nationalism as a modern phenomenon, he focused on nationalism as a mode of political imagination. In particular, he credits the rise of mass vernacular print media and its effect of a unified 'national' identity as key components in developing this new found concept

of the nation state. For Anderson, the role of the vernacular media was crucial to the rise of the nation, because it allowed the elites to create a context by which individuals imagined themselves as members of a greater community beyond their immediate locale (Jackson-Preece 2011).

Criticism of the Modernist Theory

The criticism of modernist theories however is perhaps the fact that it fails to take into account historical facts and fails to "acknowledge the many different sources of dynamism and unpredictability in the pre-modern era that can act as catalysts of ethnic formation" (Hutchinson 2005, 12). In this there is also a criticism for stressing the role of the elite in terms of manipulating mass consciousness whilst perhaps 'dismissing' the hopes and aspirations of the ordinary people. The presence of 'national consciousness' in the 14th century within a largely illiterate English society suggests that the concept of nationalism is much more than its 'manufactured' nature   that is attributed to favourable conjunctions of technological, social and economic conditions,   This perhaps challenges Anderson's theory (1983) of the importance of print capitalism and the growth of vernacular usages amongst elites (as envisaged by Anderson) were not the necessary conditions (as he has assumed) but the facilitators for national consciousness formation.

Nevertheless, what modernist theories highlight is the possibility that national consciousness can not only be manipulated but it can be used to polarise elite interests in a neglected cultural heritage. What it is perhaps slightly weak in, is explaining how this consciousness can get mass support. Another challenge for the modernism theory is that it requires cohesive political communities for consent to govern which could be a problem for the 'internal other'. It detaches rationality and technical efficiency from morality and hence for example, it is possible to explain that the holocaust was enabled by processes of modernity (Bauman 1989). It fails to understand the multi-layered concept of ethnic cultures which can provide ethnic communities with alternatives at times of crises (Hutchinson 2005).   As the configurations of power shift (i.e. in some case, the concept of the nation state no longer becomes as important as it did in the nineteenth century), we now need to understand how to represent these new identities and the new cultural politics that are formed.

Ethno-symbolism

This theory is seen as a compromise between the primordial and modernist positions, stressing both the ethnic origins of national consciousness but also the way this can be developed or manipulated. In particular ethnicity is seen as a product of culture, history, and/or foundational myths, symbols and memories (so in a sense a 'soft' form of primordialism). Whilst myths, memories and symbols, reinforce collective consciousness, there is a role for the intelligentsia in mobilising ethnicity around a collective threat, thereby galvanising a sense of nationhood (hence the link with modernism). This is one of the key principles of Anthony D Smith, who claims that national identities are collective identities and

that the defining elements of ethnic identification as psychological and emotional, emerging from a person's historical and cultural background (Smith 1995).

Smith argues that whilst the core of ethnicity resides in the myths, memories, values, symbols and the characteristic styles of particular historic configurations, there is a myth-symbol complex (Wan and Vanderwef 2009), which embody certain recurrent dimensions of cultural community and identity including a sense of stability; a sense of difference; a sense of continuity and a sense of destiny and mission. These form the body of beliefs and sentiments of a collective identity of an ethnic or 'ethnie[20]' community, which its defenders wish to preserve and pass on to future generations. The durability of the ethnie thus resides in the forms and content of the myth-symbol complex. Of pivotal importance for the survival of the ethnie is the diffusion and transmission of the myth-symbol complex to its unit of population and its future generations (Ibid). Although Smith does not systematically focus on the intellectuals, he acknowledges their pivotal role as the creators, inventors, producers and analysts of ideas, mainly as 'chroniclers' of the ethnic past, elaborating those memories which can link the modern nation back to its 'golden age' (Conversi 2006). This then opens the doors for anyone who 'conveys' ideas to be part of this pool of people who use national symbols to awaken the imagined community and to popularise it as well.

Thus the central focus of ethno-symbolism is the relationship between ethnie and nation, with there being both physical and 'moral' aspects of the relationship (Hutchinson 2005). Consequently, in this framework, the concept of ethnic and national identity could also be influenced by religion, empires, interstate competition, trade and migration (Ibid). Hence Smith (1995) defines nations not only as specific subsets of ethnic communities (based on characteristics of the ethnic) showing a definite historical territory; a common economy; shared public mass education-based culture and common legal rights and duties for all members. In addition, to this, he proposes a five stage formation for nations which consist of (Ibid):

1) Ethnic origins with the coalescence of clans and tribes into wider cultural and political networks, from which foundational myths of ancestry etc. emerge

2) Ethnic consolidation associated with the flowering of the ethnic culture, military exploits, saints and heroes

3) Development and divisions (often seen as a decline) where the old order ossifies around the upper class and there is conquest of the community

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[20] An ethnie is considered to be a definite historic cultural community with main features such as a collective name; a myth of common origins; a shared ethno-history; one or more cultural characteristics to demarcate members from non-members; an association with a historic territory; a sense of solidarity (Smith 1995)

4) Nationalism finds fertile soil in the wake of opposing the conquerors. As part of this, old myths of a pre-existence nation are roused and tied to a vision of the future.

5) The period of modern nation with the provision of the national constitutions and so on.

Thus nations are built on ethnies according to Smith which has some semblance of correlation with what has transpired in Sri Lanka as well. From a nation building perspective, it is implicit of the role of historical myths (Coakley 2004). The function of definition is filled by myths of origin which are used to persuade people as to their distinguished ancestry. This reinforces the need for the nation to express itself in ways in which it can feel proud. Myths also evoke commiseration in the wake of alien intervention and oppression and legitimise any national struggles to re-create the opportunity to once again express the individuality of the nation (Ibid.). "The great value of nationalist historiography to ethno-national political elites is, the, clear: it can be used to justify not only past actions but also current or planned political programs" (Ibid, 554)

Criticism of the Ethno-symbolist Theory

Although ethno-symbolism remains broadly unchallenged on its own ground, some internal weaknesses may be signalled. Firstly the complex set of elements that Smith tends to use interchangeably, often without sufficient specification does not allow for critical analysis or easy application (Conversi 2006). It has some fragile conceptual foundations. Smith's definition of the nation as "a named human population occupying an historic territory, and sharing myths, memories, a single public culture and common rights and duties for all members" (Smith 2004, 65) remains slightly unclear. Whilst the inclusion of 'common rights and duties' in the definition seems to refer to citizenship rights, it can only be fully granted by the existence of a state or autonomous region. So how does this explain, many minority groups trying to distinguish themselves as a nation? Hence there is something to be said about Smith's rather too inclusive definition of the nation (Conversi 2006). This then leads onto another weakness which relates to its apparent difficulty in explaining the variability of nationalist movements and their different motivations based on its limited engagement with the problem of distortion of ethnic myths by political elites.

Combining modernism and perennialism, ethno-symbolism focuses on the centrality of myths of descent in ethnic persistence. It also focuses on the role of the intellectuals and the intelligentsia as interpreters, rather than manipulators. Failing this task, ethno-symbolism risks remaining a descriptive endeavour and thus "In accepting that ethno-symbolism is one of the most sophisticated approaches to the study of nationalism does not bring us nearer to a general theory of nationalism….it remains conceptually opaque and politically unnuanced" (Conversi 2006, 26).

Finally, ethno-symbolism has not addressed the wider context, or the precipitates, or the different outcomes of various ways of mobilising ethnic myths and symbols. So far, ethno-symbolism has largely disregarded the changes in and adaptations of these myths to the goals of elites. Hence, there is the risk of drifting towards an agency-less approach. Furthermore, by dismissing outright the role of elite manipulation in the enormous emotional appeal of nationalism, ethno-symbolism leaves out of consideration the dynamics of power.

Nationalism

The road that leads to the full understanding of nationalism in all its complexities is still a long one. Lacking a general theory, there is still a need to explore several approaches, each of which will, 'illuminate a corner of the broader canvas only to leave the rest of it in untraversed darkness' (Smith 1998, 220).

Nationalism is thus an ideology which is ubiquitous. Unlike other ideologies, such as socialism and liberalism, it is often taken as given, as part of the natural order of things. It is then contested depending on which theory is used. For the modernists, nationalism is concerned with economical transition and democratisation (i.e. shared political and economic experience) but for the primordialists, nationalism is fundamentally concerned with a cultural politics of authenticity. Hence for "modernising nationalists, both language and ethnicity is a means to an end (the modern nation-state); for primordialists, language and ethnicity are needs in themselves because they disclose an intrinsic organic national community." (Jackson-Preece 2011, 20).

There are consequently many different forms of nationalism: dominant/state; settler-state (or settler-colonial); anti-colonial; post-colonial; indigenous; linguistic (integrally connected to ethno-nationalism); revolutionary socialist or communist nationalisms; etc. Most political scientists distinguish between two ways of structuring society in a nation state: ethnic nationalism and civil nationalism (see Table 3)

Theory	Description
Civic Nationalism	- Civic/territorial conceptions of the nation 'regard it as a community of shared culture, common laws, and territorial citizenship'. - With civic nationalism 'residence and political participation in a public culture tend[s] to determine citizenship and membership of the nation' (Smith 1993 - Celebrates the freely chosen and purely political identity of participants in modern states - Primacy of "individual rights" (the individual) - Exemplified by France, Canada, and the United States. - Focus on *demos* "Multi-culturalism" and diversity valued - Equal rights for all ethnic groups
Ethnic Nationalism	- Ethnic conceptions of the nation 'focus on the genealogy of its members, however fictive; on popular mobilization of "the folk"; on native history and customs; and on the vernacular culture' (Smith 1993). - Therefore, ethno-nationalism involves the politicisation of ethnicity and usually territorial as well as political claimsCelebrates inherited cultural identity - Primacy of "collective rights" (the ethnic *nation*) - Exemplified by Nazi Germany, pre-WW II Japan, and some Eastern European countries. - Focus on *ethnos* "Ethnic purity" valued - Special rights given to the dominant ethnic group

So there are problems with both ethnic and civic conceptualizations of the nation-state. Whilst these theories are useful in most societies there are people who aren't members of the hegemonic nation (in ethnic or civic terms); some members of national collectivities live in other states; some nations have never had a state. The concept of ethnic-nation states is very rare in the world except for a few countries (although there is an aspiration for this by countries such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka).Civic nation-states on the other hand require difficult nation-building project and can have ethnic undertones that make minorities feel excluded. As Gellner (1983, 1) says

> "In brief, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state . . . should not separate the power-holders from the rest."

National Identity

Finally based on what has been discussed in terms of a framework, there is now an opportunity to explore how national identity can be conceptualised. Again there are many different models that can be used, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Conceptions of National Identity (Wan and Vanderwef 2009)

Theory	Description
Primordialist Perennialist Ethno-symbolic	Theories that are essentially primordial, i.e. that view national identity as emerging from kinship, cultural or historical ties that are enshrined in the collective memory of the culture.
Modernist	A constructivist approach that views national identity as an elusive socially constructed and negotiated reality, something that essentially has a different meaning for each individual. This can then be developed into the following (Bellamy 2003): **The "big stories" -** The first level is an abstract level of 'big stories' that distinguish the nation from other nations **The instrumental usage of the "big stories" by elites -** The second level looks at the political and intellectual elites who attempt to make sense of these 'big stories' in order to legitimize particular political programs. **"Banal Nationalism" at the local and individual level -** The third level examines how narratives of national identity articulated by political and intellectual elites are constantly reinterpreted in social

Thus national identity is made up of a complex relationship between different factors based on intangible cultural traits, the collective memory (like customs, myths, religion) and a continually changing expression of national identity which ultimately do slowly change the latter. These factors end up being manifested at a local level and impacting individualism multiple social spheres. 'National identity… becomes embedded in the lived out experiences of people. Hence, these dynamics make national identity complex, overlapping and often contradictory" (Wan and Vanderwef 2009, 38).

Based on this notion of the complex relationship, it is worth exploring the work done by Brubaker (1996, 2009) which explains this complex relationship especially for minorities, and could be useful in a Sri Lankan context to be aware of. Brubaker explores the concept of 'triadic nexus' which he terms as the relationship between three distinct and mutually antagonistic nationalisms. The first is the aspect of the 'nationalizing' nationalisms of newly independent (or newly reconfigured) states. This involves claims made in the name of a 'core nation' or nationality, defined in ethno-cultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole. The core nation is then understood as the legitimate 'owner' of the state, which is conceived as the state of and for the core nation, in other words the 'majority. Despite having 'its own' state, however, the core nation is conceived and perceived (largely internally) as being in a 'weak' cultural, economic, or demographic position within the state. This weak position - seen as a legacy of discrimination against the nation before it attained independence - is

held to justify the 'remedial' or 'compensatory' project of using state power to promote the specific (and previously inadequately served) interests of the core nation, largely against the 'other'.

Directly challenging these 'nationalizing' nationalisms are, transborder nationalisms or what Brubaker calls 'external national homelands.' These 'homeland nationalisms' assert the rights of states to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights, and protect the interests of 'their ' ethnonational kin in other states. Such claims are typically made when the ethnonational kin in question are seen as threatened by the nationalizing (and thereby, from the point of view of the ethnonational kin, de-nationalizing) policies and practices of the state in which they live. Homeland nationalisms thus arise in direct opposition to and in dynamic interaction with nationalizing nationalisms. This could be akin to the Indian Government engaging with its diaspora and overseas citizens both for internal and external purposes. 'Homeland,' in how Brubaker approaches it, is a political, not an ethnographic category. A state becomes an external national 'homeland' when cultural or political elites construe certain residents and citizens of other States as co-nationals, as fellow members of a single transborder nation, and when they assert that this shared nationhood makes the state responsible, in some sense, not only for its own citizens but also for ethnic co-nationals who live in other states and possess other citizenships.

Caught between these two mutually antagonistic nationalisms - those of the nationalizing states in which they live and those of the external national homelands to which they belong by ethnonational affinity though not by legal citizenship - are the national minorities. They have their own nationalism: they too make claims on the grounds of their nationality, a political stance that make them a minority. Whilst it is not an ethnodemographic fact, the minority nationalist stance characteristically involves a self-understanding in specifically 'national ' rather than merely 'ethnic ' terms, a demand for state recognition of their distinct ethnocultural nationality, and the assertion of certain collective, nationality-based cultural or political rights.

Religion

In Sri Lanka as has been discussed and will be discussed further, religion plays an influencing role in navigating the ethnic consciousness and political expression. It is in this regard that the role that religion plays in the development of the collective memory and the development of a national identity should be explored although classical scholarship on ethnicity and ethno-nationalism carefully distinguished religion from ethnicity' for example, Smith's definition of Ethnie. Whist definitions are contested, there is some consensus that central to ethnicity is perceived territorial based descent. Religion is defined substantively as beliefs and practices concerned with the sacred, with particular religions identified in terms of institutionally based and bounded sets of such beliefs and practices (Ruane and Todd 2011). Hence "on Smith's definition of ethnicity,

religion may form the common culture that particularly constitutes the ethnie…" (Ibid, 68).

Whilst one of the biggest challenges is coming up with an understanding of religion that takes into account the diversity of faith based practices around the world, another challenges to understand the interaction between religion and ethnicity and how the former can inform and perhaps even define the other. The way religion's role in society and culture is understood varies from culture to culture.

Kaufmann (2012) however attempts to develop some workable theories by deploying nationalism theory to make better sense of existing frameworks in the theory of religion. In particular, he explores the 'primordialist-constructionist' typology, an ideal-typical distinction which structures debates in ethnicity and nationalism and allows the constructionists to consider nations to be modern, while primordialists assign them a pre-modern or even prehistoric origin. "This classification distinguishes between theories which posit the enduring, rooted and emotive nature of ethnicity/nations" (Ibid, 141) as summarised in Table 5

Table 5: Nationalism and Religion: Two Ideal Types (Kaufmann 2012)

Theory	Ethnic Group, Nation	Religion
Primordialist	Ethnic groups and nations have a primordial origin, and are deeply rooted in human evolutionary psychology. Therefore, they are unlikely to be superseded	Religion has a primordial origin, and is deeply rooted in human evolutionary psychology. Therefore, it is unlikely to be superseded
Constructivist	Ethnic groups and nations are constructed for political and economic reasons. Modernity causes them to emerge, rise, then to fall. Therefore they will be superseded by transnational cultural forms as material realities change	Religions are constructed for political and economic reasons. Modernity causes them to rise, then to fall. Therefore they will be superseded by secular cultural forms as material realities change

From the definitions above, there is a relationship between ethnicity, nations and religion in the commonality of culture being shared. Whilst most constructionist theorists of nationalism take it for granted that religion defined the pre-modern order from which nations emerged (Gellner 1983), there is of course a vigorous debate about how modernity and the modern nation state has now led to a process of secularization which is the process of moving from a religious to a secular order, in other words exemplifying the durable decline in the power of religion in the public or private sphere (Kaufmann 2012). "The conceptual relationship between religion and secularization is vital, and marks an important difference from nationalism. Whereas the alternatives to nation and ethnic group are various, i.e. empire, lifestyle enclave, city-state or status group, this is not true

of religion in relation to secularism. Indeed, religion and secularism are locked in an epistemic zero-sum embrace." (Ibid, 147).

Whereas constructionism perceives ethnic and religious demand to be human creations, primordialism considers them irrepressible psychological constants. Yet religions, like nations and ethnic groups, are cultural communities. Materialist accounts privilege economic and political sources of religious decline which arise in modernity while symbolists point to self-replicating cultural traditions as the key source of social power.

Primordialists, locate the motivation for religion's persistence in mankind's evolutionary psychology, which emerged in the prehistoric past. This religious need is held to override the periodic secularizing imperatives emanating from the material or cultural realm. Religion springs eternal, though its form may change. However, within constructionism, materialist theories consider secularizing processes to be modern and terminal for religion, while symbolist theories over that period of religiosity give way to those of secularism and vice-versa, in cyclical fashion.

Ruane and Todd (2011) take the discussion on this relationship further by investigating empirically the different ways that people construct themselves and how groups are formed.   In so doing, they illustrate that the way people construct and understand their sense of peoplehood (based on religions and ethnicity) is quite complex and needs to be deconstructed.

The political developments of the 1980s and 1990s in both the post-colonial and the western worlds have clashed with the globalisation debate that posits a collapse of parochial identities of ethnic and religious groups in favour of loyalty with larger communities in the wake of greater political and economic interaction among people, coupled with widespread education and mass communication networks. Ted Robert Gurr (1993) maintains that ethno-religious movements throughout the world in recent decades provide strong networks that form the basis for political mobilization.   He clearly identifies modernization as a threatening source of ethno-political and religious mobilization, as ethnic tensions are raised due to dominant groups wanting to build nations on their own cultural values, triggering a minority reaction for increased autonomy and separate development. Research "shows how state institutions and secular political movements may be permeated by assumptions deriving from religion" (Ruane and Todd 2011, 74)

2.3.4 Conflict
It is also important in this study explores conflict given that Sri Lanka experienced a 30-year-old conflict. The term conflict describes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible yet from their individual perspectives, entirely just goals, of which ethnic conflicts are a subset (Wolff 2006). Whatever the

concrete issues over which conflict erupts, at least one of the conflict parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms.

Conflict and in particular ethnic conflict remains one of the prevailing challenges to international security (Cordell and Wolff 2011). Social scientists need to study the concept of ethnic conflict in order to understand better what its causes are, how it can be prevented, managed and resolved. It is a subject of multidisciplinary study from political science to psychology (Cordell and Wolff 2011)

Ethnicity (and other markers of identity such as religion and so on) generates conflicts in a number of different ways. A sense of insecurity emerges among the members of a group when they feel that they are deliberately and systematically beleaguered by the dominant group of the society. This group that is methodically targeted by the dominant group due to its ideas, beliefs, lifestyle and/or identity tends to mobilize against the oppressors in all available ways, theoretically both in non-violence primarily by the moderate democratic leadership and violently by radical groups, if it thinks the former's strategies make no sense to win its rights. This punch line theory on mobilization facilitates the understanding of the process of group mobilization either against the State or dominant group or both (T. Gurr 1993).

Analysing conflict through the lens of the schools of thought discussed above, highlights the following (Varshney 2009):

1) Essentialism - Here conflicts are predicated upon the fact that ethnic hatred is old and historically rooted – "ancient hatreds". The primordialism of ethnic groups thus remains a stronger bond and a more powerful motivator of human conduct than the pull of civic ties of the new states. However, there are some weaknesses to this approach. If hatred was so rooted, why did ethnic violence rise and fall at various times? If the conflict is between a new migrant group and the older inhabitants, where does 'ancient hatred' lie? Can ancient ethnic animosities which are often on a small scale – local and regional be magnified into national issues given the modern construct of the nation state? However, it is still around because of the fact that it allows people to tap into the basis of fear, hatred, resentment and rage which can be given an ancient framework.

2) Instrumentalism – Here ethnicity is not inherent in human nature or intrinsically valuable. It masks a deeper core of interests, which are either economic or political. Leaders manipulate ethnicity in order to get political power or state resources. This approach raises interesting questions such as: Why should the masses listen/follow the manipulations of the leaders? Why do the leaders think that ethnicity is the means to power INSTEAD of mobilizing on economic or ideological programs?

3) Constructivism – Here ethnicity and nationality are constructs of the modern era as has been discussed above with the concept of the print capitalism and colonialism. However, it does not do a good job of explaining ethnic conflict

4) Institutionalism – here the core idea is that the designs of political institutions explain why some multi-ethnic societies have violence, and others, peace. Institutionalists believe that ethnic pluralism requires political institutions distinct from those that are more homogenous. Thus there is an ability to move beyond national-level institutions and to recognize the need to understand local and regional variations. This approach also understands the fluidity of identities.

Hence what these approaches show is that there is no comprehensive and widely accepted theory of the causes and consequences of ethno-political conflict (Gurr and Harff 1994). Instead, there are many factors that can lead to tensions between groups of people such that "identity doesn't mobilise individuals as primoridalist proponents would argue rather individuals mobilise identity…. the pattern of communal conflict is not simply determined by the interaction of communal groups like the action-reaction dynamic of billiard balls, it is also affected by the constellation of shifting factors within each communal group" (Bush 2003, 6). Thus in any international or regional conflict situation, there is no simple explanation for the causes and processes of the conflict – social, economic, territorial, political, ethnic and religious factors play important roles in any conflict as is evident in Sri Lanka.

2.4 Relevance of the Literature for this Study

"National identities are malleable rather than fixed and they can and do conflict" (Jackson-Preece 2011, 24) and thus none of the theories of national formation is entirely adequate. Whilst primordialism lacks the ability to explain the emergence of new nations; modernism fails to explain the emergence of nationalism at times earlier than the industrial revolution and a naked ethno-symbolic approach cannot do justice to the complexities of particular national circumstances. It is also limited in its power to explain how ethnic conflicts emerge and how nations are mobilised.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the ethnic conflict and in particular the case for the Muslim community, the concept of the nation is important as is the concept of identity as "identity is about hegemony" (Ismail 1997, 65). Theorists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson who are from the 'modernist' position view the concept of the 'nation' as a recent invention that is linked to the transformation of social, economic and political cultures that emerged from Europe in the 18th century. The inadequacy of the theoretical underpinnings outlined above is not necessarily a problem for this thesis. National consciousness formation is so diverse so it is perhaps unrealistic to think that any one theory can explain all cases. Different elements of different theories have great explanatory power.

Hence what I would need to do is to be aware of the limitations of all the theories and try and use a combination of relevant ones, mainly from the ethno-symbolist, constructivists and modernist approach. My justification is that the explanatory power justifies the element's use as long as it doesn't plainly contradict any other element of the explanation. In addition, it is important to stress that my thesis is not a theory testing one, instead the theory discussed above is really discussed as a way of making sense of the argument of the changing nature of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka.

Whilst many scholars emphasize the pre-colonial roots of the ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka, with the present conflict 'mirroring' ancient conflicts between the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms to extend their boundaries, others contend that the contemporary pattern of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka have been largely shaped by its colonial history (A. Imtiyaz 2009). The colonial process created borders, which included or divided ethnic groups and defined the demographic mixture of the colonies that eventually became countries. Colonialism's divide-and-rule policies, census taking, and promotion of ethnic identities all enhanced (and sometimes even created) cultural and ethnic distinctions in colonial societies, although these processes by themselves can hardly account for the nationalistic conflict unleashed in the post-colonial areas. As has been shown before, the modernization theory which further maintains that when colonies became independent countries, modern values would spread and indigenous inhabitants would be less influenced by traditional ethnic or religious loyalties, has largely been over turned.

In Sri Lanka, post-independence ethnic loyalty was strengthened, not weakened, by nation building efforts and the modernization of society. Rising competition among Sri Lankans to dominate economic and political resources, particularly between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, essentially diminished the chance for a common national identity to develop, especially as Sinhalese leaders established laws that grossly favoured the majority Sinhalese (Ibid), thereby leading to an ethnic conflict. This also led to the development of the distinct Muslim identity.

It is clear that the underpinning rationale for the discussion of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka is perhaps more in line with the Constructivist Approach (with some elements of the modernist and ethno-symbolist approach) to the formation of an ethnic identity and the ethnic conflict. This is viewed as a product of human actions and choices that are constructed, transmitted and not genetically inherited from the past (Taras and Ganguly 2002), in keeping with the Weber school of thought which looks at the social origin of ethnic identity based on a belief in a common ancestry (Stone 1995), thus not only leading to the formation of a community but forming under the right circumstances by appropriate political actions (Ibid.). Hence political actors will construct both identity and problems in order to gain and hold power. This forms the underpinning of the thesis,

I also propose to use the 'two level critical juncture' approach as envisioned by Bush (2009). Namely, the two levels of analysis refer to 'intra-ethnic' group formation (which refers to the interaction between sub-groups within the same ethnic group) and 'inter-ethnic' group formation (which refers to the interaction between sub-groups across ethnic group boundaries). Critical junctures, refer to "a turning point in which relations within and between groups are altered fundamentally" (Ibid, 15). For the purposes of my thesis, my intra-group analysis is within the Muslim community and the inter-group analysis is between the Sri Lankan Muslims and the 'Others'. Critical junctures for me represent important times in Sri Lanka's history which contributed towards the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity. I pick up four distinct periods: Pre-Independence to Independence 1948 (the ethnic identity formation); Independence (1948) to 1983 (the social identity formation); 1983 – 2009 (the political identity formation) and post 2009 till 2014 (a challenge to current Muslim identity formation)[21]. In addition to this, underpinning all of these periods is the evolution of religious identity and fervour brought about by a renaissance globally of Islam and Islamic thought and thus it is important to examine the relationships with religious identity in this period as well. Hence my thesis will attempt to understand the concept of Muslim identity in this context and will set out to address the following general questions. These questions will be elaborated in more detail in the field work, the interviews and focus group discussions as well as in in the research section:

1) Do Muslims understand the history of the development and the transformation of their own identity?
2) What are the critical junctures that drive Muslim identity and history? What are the intra and inter group dynamics related to this formation? How has Muslim identity evolved in response to these critical junctures?
3) How do Muslim Elites (political, civil society, academics) understand the development and evolution of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity? How do they understand its formation vis-à-vis others?
4) How do members from other communities understand the development and articulation of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity? How is Muslim identity shaped by institutions and how is institutionalization shaped by critical junctures?
5) What are the challenges facing the current narrative of Sri Lankan Muslims and how is this tied to their identity and history?
6) How and what do we need to represent the Muslim identity for the future?

These questions are certainly not exhaustive but can provide a general consensus in trying to understand the nature of the thesis.

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[21] I deliberately capped it at 2014, otherwise there would have been a tendency to have the thesis drag. In addition, 2014 represents a useful period in terms of governmental change in Sri Lanka where the Sinhala nationalistic forces were temporarily constrained in their political development.

2.5 Methodology Related to the Study

I will now elaborate upon the methodology that was used for my field work and research following the literature review. In this regard it is important to note that this thesis is based on a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study primarily because of my intent to dig deep into understanding how the development, evolution and transformation of the Muslim identity has taken place

2.5.1 Historical Analysis

The thesis is first and foremost a work of historical analysis, relying on a wide range of primary and secondary source material as the basis of its research. With the project's time-frame (1889-2014) being so recent, I found that there was also great benefit in utilising oral history (also based on my own knowledge and personal observation) as an important source of information, analysis and perspective. To this end, I conducted interviews with a number of individuals who have been involved with the events and developments that I have considered in my thesis. It is primarily a case of following a grounded theory concept (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) which really allowed me to study the phenomenon of the evolution, institutionalisation and transformation of Muslim identity over the 130-year period, through collecting and analysing data and verbal reports using a lens of positivism and pragmatism.

Thus my principle research strategy consists of the documentation and analysis of primary data gathered from interviews with key figures from the Sri Lankan Muslim community as well as those that are intimately involved with the community, in addition to indirect surveys[22] (particularly in the periods 2011 – 2015) and focus group discussions with relevant community groups. In addition, data consists of participant observation and an insider's reflective perspective. The interviews, surveys, focus groups and observations took place over a sustained research period and provide the voluminous and rich data on which this research thesis rests. Data accrued from the fieldwork is both original and compelling and facilitates research findings which broadly describe the evolution of the institutionalisation of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka for the last 130 years and how the elites have now gotten disconnected from the grass roots, such that the identity of the Muslim community needs to be reimagined, otherwise it runs the risk of becoming benign.

Whilst I fully appreciate that there might have been other methodological options for undertaking this research making it more quantitative such as quantitative data on public opinion or other demographic data, I took advantage of my personal links and accessibility to key informants and felt that this was a legitimate way to undertake this research. However, I did take the opportunity to

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[22] I call these indirect surveys, because as part of my profession and my job including writing a joint journal paper, I worked on some community surveys and perception studies. The findings of these were also useful and relevant to this thesis which I have used and referenced. Some of the studies did not end up getting published or were used in internal work but have been referenced here.

do some focus group discussions and a few surveys in order to get an understanding of the grass roots to complement the thinking of the elite. Yet this was and is primarily a thesis that is qualitative exploring the development of identity from an elitist formation. This was so as to get a first hand appreciation of the context and the problem in terms of how it is understood by the community. When I first started the thesis, a full census had not taken place since 1981 because of the conflict. A full census later took place in 2012 which I used some data for the research.

2.5.2 Grounded Theory

Using the grounded theory method, I undertook a constant comparative analysis to justify the hypothesis above. In this sense, in virtue of the interpretive nature of the method, this also allowed me to reflect on my subjective engagement in the material making note of what is referred to as 'theoretical memos' which I then used to understand insights that have proven to be grounded. Through some of the analysis of initial interviews and data collection, this resulted in an initial set of categories, which in turn guided the selection of new data and so on. I was able to do this concurrent collection and analysis of data until I understood that the different data sets and categories were 'saturated' and I could bring the study to a close.

While this is not the first research project to posit findings about the Muslim community, it is perhaps the first to explore the relationship of identity and institutionalisation over time conjecturing the theory that the identity has responded to critical junctures in time and is perhaps open to some change. In addition, it is one that has been explored in recent times (especially in the wake of the post 2009 rise of anti Muslim rhetoric and violence) and not really looking as is normal over the historical formation of the identity. It therefore has the advantage of providing a richer recent and holistic picture for what constitutes the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka.

In view of this methodology, qualitative methods were used, which are traditionally associated with theory-building approaches to data collection. Qualitative methods are also appropriate when ascertaining the subtle and complex meanings held by social actors. The study resorted to interviews a few questionnaires, both structured and semi-structured, surveys, focus group discussions and participant observation, in order to understand the degrees of subtlety involved when people formulate their views about Muslim identity, its development and institutionalisation and the relation to the other communities. To supplement and triangulate the findings from interviews and participant observation, the study amassed and analysed a large collection of material – articles and books.

2.5.3 Interviews, Focus Groups and Surveys

From the outset, a series of interviews, surveys and focus group discussions were undertaken with key civil society, community, religious, political and academic figures on top of conversations with individuals from different parts of the community. This was necessary in order to understand official and explicit views as well as to gain deeper insights concerning various issues relevant to the study, such as political strategies, deeper understanding regarding participation and non-participation in politics, and questions about organisations and operations in Sri Lanka. By doing this, the study avoids accusations of inaccuracy and misquoting, and does not rely heavily on third-party sources. Finally, meeting key figures from the outset helped me to familiarise myself with the atmosphere in which some of these organisations operate. On a practical level, it helped facilitate access to individuals, once they were made aware that the researcher was interested not in political or theological views but greater understanding of the identity process. What was also advantageous was how the researcher sought to interview those key individuals who had contributed to articles and books and thus in a way was able to corroborate second hand information with first hand accounts.

Interviewees were placed into the following categories: prominent Muslim figures (politicians, academics, activists); faith leaders and academics from other communities; individuals and activists from the Muslim community though not prominent but who would represent a more mainstream perspective of the community. The first category included Professor Ameer Ali (a prominent Sri Lankan academic based in Australia), Mrs Ferial Ashraff (former minster and head of the political party NUA and the widow of the founder of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress), the late Mr Izzeth Hussein (a former diplomat and prominent writer on Sri Lankan Muslim issues). The second category includes Rev Ebenezer Joseph (the general secretary of the National Christian Council) and the late Professor Ken Bush (from Durham University) as well as focus group discussions with young activists and business men. For a full list and titles of individuals interviewed, see Appendix 1.

The focus on meeting different individuals, community representatives and leaders belonging to the Muslim community was deliberate since they feature prominently in the politicisation and institutionalisation of Muslims in Sri Lanka. Meetings and interviews with leading community figures gave me the opportunity to directly hear statements and the stated positions on Muslim identity in the country rather than having to rely on second- or third-hand sources. In addition to being able to compare feelings on the ground with what was officially said at the top, this was also an opportunity to understand the disconnect between the two constituents. The feelings on the ground came from my own observations followed by perception studies and surveys carried out for other bits and pieces of work that were also relevant to this study. I have referred to these surveys as well towards the final chapters.

The style and format of my interviews varied – from extended face-to-face interviews, to extended telephone / skype conversations, email conversations and more informal discussions. The type of approach I used depended on a number of factors, including the availability and preference of the interviewee, the level of involvement that the individual had in events that I was covering, and therefore the amount and nature of subject matter that I wished to discuss with them in an interview. I prepared for interviews beforehand by considering the topics that I wished to cover and preparing some central questions. However, I maintained a flexible approach to interviews, allowing space for my interviewees to speak openly and at length. Most of my interviewees were specifically selected on the basis of my background research and knowledge. Nonetheless, I occasionally used a 'snowball' sampling method, whereby my interviewees recommended to me further people that I should approach for interview. When it was used, I found this method to be appropriate as it allowed me to hear alternative perspectives on issues or events, and to corroborate or verify information that I had obtained from other sources.

2.5.4 Personal Reflections

I must mention that I benefited significantly from my own personal position with respect to the Sri Lankan Muslim community landscape. Being a Sri Lankan Muslim myself, and one who has experienced close interaction and engagement with a number of the groups and individuals that I interviewed, I had the important advantage of 'trusted insider' status, in the sense that I possess extensive familiarity with the context and development of the community as well as being previously acquainted with some of my interviewees. In some cases, I did find this background to be of additional advantage, since a certain level of trust was already in place, interviewees did not find it difficult to 'open up'. In addition, as a result of my professional job, the access that I obtained to the communities for the surveys helped to build that trust as well as understanding of the context on the ground. This also allowed me to interrogate further my subjects for the benefit of the thesis.

Reflexivity was important to me in the course of my fieldwork, as my familiarity with the contexts and subjects that I was studying meant that I had to continually reassess my position in the course of my interviews. I took extra care as I framed my interviews and questions to search for accuracy and detail, and was acutely aware that my findings might be politically skewed if I allowed my own views to permeate into my interview style. I therefore made a conscious effort to remain unbiased and objective in my approach to interviews and the questions asked, allowing space for my interviewees' views and perspectives to authentically come through.

I took matters of research ethics very seriously and ensured that my fieldwork complied with the university's guidance notes for research ethics. In particular, this involved that my interviewees and focus group discussions were not made vulnerable in any way as a result in their participation in my research. It included

outlining clearly to them the nature and scope of my research, the details of what their participation would involve and making clear that they were free to withdraw their participation at any point if they so wished. Additionally, I explained to my interviewees that their conversations with me were being recorded and that they would be treated with confidentiality. Those interviewees who did not wish to be identified in the thesis were given the option of anonymity.

2.6 Scope and Limitations

In short, the approach and strategy employed in this study has been multifaceted, and which was aided by the author's local knowledge of the (Muslim and wider) community as well as meetings with key individuals and activists.

Whilst employing qualitative methods to understand the context of the community, the study needed to corroborate, test and examine some of the understandings from ordinary Muslim as well as relevant activists and academics. There was though a challenge with truly getting to the grips of understanding the problem. Not being fluent in the local vernacular at least to be able to conduct interviews and surveys, it was not possible to survey a very large section of the Muslim community, spanning different cities and languages. Doing this in English thus limited my research largely to give one an idea of the "pulse" of the Muslim community.

Although I also had initially wanted to do some specific surveys with a wider group of people around identity, I was unable to get much responses from people. This changed when I carried out perception studies of other communities as well as surveys related to specific incidents that had taken place in the country. As for the interviews, they proved to be useful in gaining greater insights into the issues, as they provided the opportunity to question the interviewees in depth.

Other limitations and problems encountered in the course of this study included doing this part time and a delay in submission and writing for personal and family reasons. I had intended to do this part time and I moved to Sri Lanka to undertake full time research. In addition, towards the end of my work, I changed jobs in 2017 which meant a relocation and more travelling. Thus I was not able to finish the writing as I originally intended to do.   Doing this PhD part time whilst working on an unrelated job meant that it was really due to self motivation that I could get through this.

Chapter 3: Developing an Ethnic Consciousness
(Sri Lanka's Path to 1948)

"To really understand the complexity of the problem, especially with regards the Sri Lankan Muslim identity context, we need to understand in history 'Who was the Muslim?' This entails properly understanding the history of identities in Sri Lanka"[23]

3.1 Introduction

In order to understand the current challenges and scenario facing Sri Lanka, it is necessary to start from the beginning. By tracing the context and history of the country, this will enable the understanding of the development of the differences within and between the minority communities and the majority community in the arena of identity politics and how these have been manipulated and abused for political and personal gain contributing not only to the conflict (Bush 2003) but also to the current relationships between communities. This shift in the political axes of identity that is reflected in a corresponding shift in the axes of conflict has been shown from studies where "the present dynamics of conflict in Sri Lanka and the ethnic identities upon which it is based are radically different from earlier conflicts and identities" (*Ibid,* 22).

This manifestation of identities has blurred ethnic and religious differences causing a "repression-reaction pathway" (Henne, Shah and Hudgens 2012, 59), perpetuating deeply delusive and divisive assumptions of single exclusive identities. Such exclusive identities are negative, stressing difference rather than belonging and 'opposition to' rather than 'support for' something (Commonwealth Foundation 2007). In particular in Sri Lanka, these exclusive identities are as a result of the steady growth of political activism on the part of a new generation of Buddhist monks post independence which was aggravated by the conflict but has sources in colonial history (Deegalle 2007). Hence understanding the Sri Lankan Muslim identity can not be isolated from understanding how identity in Sri Lanka in general was formed particularly in relation to colonial history. In addition, this understanding has to take into account the differences in characterising Muslim identity that exist between postcolonial theorists who see Sri Lankan Muslim identity being formed against and in relation to other ethnic identities as a result of colonial influences (Q. M. Ismail 1995); and the primordial identity theorists who choose to argue through a historical analysis that the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is predominantly of Arab origin (Shukri 1989, Deverajah 1994).

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[23] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed, November 2016

It is my contention in this thesis that both these factors: the belief held by many Sri Lankan Muslims of their 'Arab' origin and the efforts to redefine their space and position vis-à-vis the other; are not mutually exclusive and hence need to be considered in parallel to really understand the challenges that the community has faced and continue to face in terms of identity expression. What this chapter aims to do is to provide a wider historical conceptual framework for situating the Sri Lankan Muslim identity crisis in broad terms that also explores the expression of identity within a Sri Lankan context. The latter identity expression has often been used to discuss the Sri Lankan conflict of the eighties as either a terrorist problem or an ethnic problem between the majority and the minority (Bandarage 2009) that excluded the Muslims, yet it is clear that this binary construct is not helpful to understand underlying problems[24].

As this chapter will argue, the 'Sri Lankan' identity as constructed by the majority ethnic community is based on the supposedly close relationship between the country's majority Sinhalese population and their Buddhist religious beliefs, thereby sowing the seeds for the later conflict and proving problematic for the minorities as it blurred the religious – ethnic lines. In particular, for the Muslims, this identity formation of a religio-ethnic nature became problematic in their own search for belonging and in terms of how they relate to this in their own identity formation. The historical narrative of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity formation of descending from the Arabs, though serving to reinforce the important role of religion in the everyday lives and identity of the Muslim community (not very different to other communities) coupled with their position as a second minority, has meant that they have been marginalised and excluded from core political events, which has led them to search for alternative forms of identity creating space for transnational movements of belonging.

It is these seeds that pose a challenge for identify formation and expression in Sri Lanka. This religio-ethno-political identity that has come to define all the ethnic communities has to be understood as part of the root causes of the problems within and between the various communities. Thus it is important to situate this within a historical context of the country and how the communities themselves have developed especially in the wake of colonial pressures.

3.1.1 The Mahawansa
Looking at the colonial influence on Sri Lanka, it is also worth exploring the roots of Sinhala Buddhist identity. The psyche of the identity of Sinhalese is based on a holy land myth (Harris 2007) conditioned by an ancient chronicle called the Mahawansa[25] which traces the origin of the Sinhala civilisation from the mythical figure of King Vijaya who was said to come from North India. The Mahawansa

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[24] As highlighted by a skype interview with Dr Imthiaz Razak in August 2015 who confirmed other bits of research that in providing a binary lens to view the conflict without acknowledging the presence of the Muslim community, a vital part of the narrative is/was missed.
[25] The Mahawansa was reputed to be written roughly around 5th century but tracing back all the way to 534 BCE (M. Deegalle 2006)

was supposed to be a court document that addresses the relationships between the ruling elite and the Buddhist Monks - Sangha (Grant 2009), charting the account of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its subsequent protection by its monarchs.   "The narrative thus claims the whole of Sri Lanka as the Dhammadipa, the island of the Dhamma, a holy island dedicated to the Buddha and his teachings" (Harris 2007, 152). It therefore consolidates a relationship between the monarchy and the Buddhist religious establishment (or the Sangha) and by extension a duty upon the ruling elite to offer and maintain protection not only for the Sangha but for the concepts it represents. As was discussed in one of my focus groups:

> *"The Mahawansa is a foundational document for the Sinhala (and by extent 'Sri Lankan') existence and its formation is based on the 'other', those who are not part of the 'Aryan' race. Thus we see that any aspects of identity difference and conflict in Sri Lanka has to come from understanding this very basic foundation of the link between Buddhism and being Sinhala"[26]*

This narrative offered by the Mahawansa in terms of Buddhism, the monarchy and the Sangha, is important because it lays the foundation that Sri Lanka as a nation that cannot be united unless the monarch is Buddhist (R. L. Gunawardana 1990)[27]. In addition, it offers the justification from Buddhism for violence to be committed in its name (Harris 2007), in a 'Just War' perspective, to bring about and maintain political unity through a Buddhist state with the corollary being that any threat to the sovereignty of the island like the quest for autonomy and separation would come from the minorities (the non Sinhalese 'Buddhist' like for example as demanded by the LTTE) is "no less a threat to the dhamma, a threat to the continuation of 'pure' Buddhism in the world" (Ibid., 152).   By outlining a clear connection to North India, the Mahawansa also attempts to define a distinct Aryan nature of the Sinhala race as opposed to the Dravidian heritage of the Tamil population related to South India (Grant 2009), thereby quickly defining the difference between the two communities by stressing the 'other' in terms of the Tamil community[28].

Yet this type of mythology wasn't supposed to deal with group identity nor does it map directly onto late 19th and 20th century Sri Lanka[29] with the current context- social mobility, power dynamics, class status as well as the hybridity of the population. The significance of the link between the ruling elite, the Sangha (and by default a national identity) occurred in the late 19th century / early 20th century,

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[26] Key Informant from a Focus Group Discussion with a group of Buddhist monks, June 2016

[27] By extension of this, the assumption is that the government of the day has to preserve the Buddhist identity and nature of the country and that the 'ruler' whether it is a king, president or prime minister will be Buddhist (*Ibid*)

[28] It however glosses over the fact that Vijaya and his men married southern Indian women (i.e. Tamils) and thus 'diluted' Aryan and Dravidian blood ultimately with regards the Sinhala race (Grant 2009)

[29] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with a group of Buddhist monks, June 2016

when it was used by anti colonialists in the early 20th century, such as Angarika Dharmapala, to develop support for their cause.

What Dharmapala did was to re emphasise the fact that "Sinhalas are specially chosen by the Buddha and their political unity guarantees the survival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, just as their political identity is guranteed by their espousal of Buddhism" (Grant 2009, 51). In so doing, Dharmapala, once again linked modern Sinhala identity to religion and ancient chronicle tradition, claiming that the colonial period had corrupted the Sinhalese and diluted Buddhism by bringing in foreign elements (such as Christianity) and foreign people (a reference to Muslims).   By the early 20th century, Dharmapala was using racial characteristics to define the Sinhalese by explaining the 'others'. For example he characterised the Tamils as being "fiercely antagonistic to Buddhism" (Ibid. 74) and responsible for acts of vandalism against sacred Buddhist relics. In another place he described Muslims as "alien to the Sinhalese by religion, race and language and consequently there will always be bad blood" (Ibid. 73) between the two. In so doing, Dharmapala (and other influential Sinhala buddhists of the time) annexed Buddhism with Sri Lankan identity in opposition to colonial nationalism combining theories of race, language and religion to describe a Sinhala identity empowered by a sense of special religious destiny.

By re reading the ancient chronicle with a specific ethno nationalist agenda and projecting it onto modern Sinhala identity, the context of unemployment amongst youth; rural and urban disparities; political corruption and so on was missed in defining future challenges for the country. So for example, when the LTTE as part of the ethnic conflict (arising out of ethno-political grievances), initially attacked Buddhist monks (and subsequently Buddhist places of worship) at the start of the conflict, the Sinhalese public were provoked into a response that the government of the day manipulated into ethnic and later religious lines in order to protect not only Buddhism but also the very unity of the country[30].

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[30] This is an emotion that has carried on since then in the fact that any criticism or action taken against Buddhism or Buddhist monks is deemed as being an action taken against the country. This was also raised during the Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with a group of Buddhist monks, June 2016. However, it should also be noted that as the conflict proceeded, the LTTE would once again target Buddhist places of worship in the nineties, hoping to elicit the same response from the Sinhalese majority as it did in the eighties. Yet in this sense the Sinhalese public did not respond as it had done previously, but it did not stop the State from its conflict nor its harassment of the Tamil public which is the subject of another piece of work and has been covered substantially in other pieces of work but has been alluded to in my various face to face interviews and focus group discussions.

3.2 The Colonial Legacy

Like many post-colonial societies, Sri Lanka drew on pre-colonial culture, including religion, to form a national identity after gaining independence, a term that I call 'religously clothed national identity' in the light of the increasing visible involvement of Buddhist monks in political activism (Deegalle 2007). Despite this legacy, it should also be remembered that there are other much more complicated factors which have also attributed to these divisions (Bandarage 2009).

3.2.1 Debunking Myths

Many scholars emphasize the pre-colonial roots citing Tamil and Sinhalese kingdoms in Ancient Sri Lanka that existed at a perpetual state of conflict before the Portuguese captured the island in 1505[31] (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). Thus, many Sinhala and Tamil nationalists portray community relations from a primordial concept, based on distrust and violence spanning over more than two millennia[32]. As an interviewee put it

> *"In fact, there are some who seem to point to this primordial existence of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation-state as a way of justifying the Sinhala Buddhist consciousness with an ancient civilizational foundation"[33]*

As Fernando (2008) argues, there are many Sri Lanka scholars who claim an ethno-religious character that binds the Sangha, kingship and the masses together "forming a homogeneous ethno-religious community, namely Sinhala Buddhist, with an overarching hegemonic identity and a centralised system of state that covers the whole island" (Ibid,114). Fernando (2008,115) calls this a "'cultural appropriation' of primordialism, where despite theorising nationalism from a 'primordialist' version of nationhood, there has also been an adaptation to an essentialist cultural approach to identity formation". In other words, for many, the Sri Lankan civilisation (the dominant Indo-Aryan Sinhala population) has been historically formed and is treated as primordial inputs for the first stages of nationhood. In asserting these 'essential' differences among communities, it is clear that there is an intent to emphasise the power of Sinhala Buddhist culture in the formation of state and national identity ignoring the cultural and political impact made by the diverse ethno-nationalist groups in the island. As another interviewee put it:

> *"The danger is that these 'perennialist' and 'primordialist' approaches have transcended from the academic, theoretical assertions to form a political and nationalist ideology. We see people like Dharmapala and others being*

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[31] The more commonly asserted contemporary Tamil separatist position is that throughout history, the Tamils occupied the north and eastern districts of the island while the Sinhalese inhabited the interior parts (Bandarage 2009)

[32] As such this is also used in the narratives about the Sri Lankan conflict to not only justify the violence but also to justify the polarization of identities as a result of it. See Bandarage 2009, J. L. Fernando, 2008, and others for more details.

[33] Skype interview with Dr Imthiaz Razak in August 2015.

part of political organisations defining a national identity as a Sinhala Buddhist identity based on these assumptions. This has repercussions for relations in the current day and age, but it is clear that myth has become historicised and history has become mythologised. There is a need to debunk this"[34]

There has thus been a tendency to misread the past (especially the pre-colonial era) to talk about 'two opposed nations' projecting the Tamil-Sinhalese interaction within the current conflict as a continuity from the past rather than a recent upsurge (Bush 2003). These 'identities' and discussions are very much the product of a Nineteenth century[35] mind frame and to see them as conflicts between the 'invading' Tamils and the 'resisting' Sinhalese does not necessarily help in understanding the reality of earlier centuries (Feith 2010). This is because the interpretation of Sri Lankan history is mainly written from a partisan Sinhala or Tamil point of view with selective use of literature and archaeological evidence, presenting a narrative of opposition through warfare that seems to gloss over arguments (especially over events which allegedly occurred between the fourth century BC and the tenth century AD). With this ideological and political bias that reflects the respective author's ethnic or nationalist interest (M. A. Nuhman 2007) it is "often difficult to disentangle the historical evidence from the nationalist framework imposed upon it" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 22). So a Sinhalese nationalist will paint a picture of pre-colonial Sri Lanka prior to the European invasion that was "... a mono-ethnic and mono-religious Sinhala Buddhist state where the Tamils were migrant aliens" (Bandarage 2009, 18). In contrast, Tamil nationalists will argue that "Tamils were the earliest occupants of the island and that the 'entire island' of Sri Lanka was ruled by Tamil kinds even before the Christian era" (Ibid., 19). This colonial and partisan interpretation of the past has thus not only conditioned the analysis of history and community relations in Sri Lanka but cast it as a "bipolar interaction of relatively homogenous groups" (Bush 2003, 34). As Gunawardana (1995, 1) points out, in Sri Lanka

> "with the intensification of the ethnic conflict and accompanying polarisation within the academic community, scholars have been coming under increasing pressure to develop representations of the past which lend legitimacy to the claims of the ethnic group to which they belong. While they have been expected to challenge representations of the past in works of writers in rival ethnic groups, it has become difficult, and in certain situations, even risky for them to challenge or to be critical of represensations being utilised by their own ethnic groups. This development brought in its wake a notable relaxation in intellectual rigour in research."

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[34] Face to Face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015.
[35] Later evolving throughout the Twentieth century and into the Twenty First century

This partisan view on history has also been made difficult by the colonial period which put forward certain assumptions based on many influences, including the types of sources available, the broader trends in European historical writing, and the ideological and social positions of the authors and their intended audiences, but which were never challenged subsequently (J. D. Rogers 1990).

Despite the fact that Sri Lankan history is written by two different sets of communities, each stressing the claim of their own constituency, the pre colonial history of Sri Lanka in fact does not conform to this model of two opposing nations (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). There is Tamil ancestry amongst Sinhalese[36] with the Sinhalese language showing an influence from Tamil language, and the Sinhalese caste system being similar to that of south India, so much so that "… during these centuries the people living in this period would not have necessarily identified themselves as Tamil or Sinhalese…" (Feith 2010, 347) . In fact, "caste, not language or religion was the basis of social stratification in pre-colonial society" (Bandarage 2009, 5).   "Not only did Tamils and Sinhalese live together peaceably for most of the two millennia, but there was considerable social, political and economic commonality between them" (Bush 2003, 34). Thus the Sinhalese and Tamils, despite the best claims of extremist nationalists, are not two exclusive groups with separate historical pasts and "much of the long pre-colonial history of Sri Lanka was characterised by ethno-religious pluralism and co-existence over antagonism and conflict" (Bandarage 2009, 4) [37].

3.2.2 The Portuguese and Dutch Periods

The early 16th and 17th Centuries saw writings from early Europeans in Sri Lanka who discovered people in the North and East of the island who spoke Tamil[38] and were ruled by kings who had rivalries with other rulers in the island yet also commonly spoke Sinhalese (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990), whilst Tamil was included in the monastic education of Sinhala Buddhist monks (Bandarage 2009). Though this explains the dynastic wars that were fought and the differences existing between the diverse groups of people on the island, it does not explain the unique channelled Sinhala-Tamil communal violence that dated from after Independence (Bush 2003), and so "…the point is simply that differences of languages, custom and religion were made into something new by the devices of the modern state…" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 24). This is emphasized by Bush (2003) who further illustrates that even in the height of severe violence in the country, there existed pockets and process of inter-group cooperation and peaceful coexistence thereby implying that the violence (and group boundaries)

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[36] For example, as referred above with the story of King Vijaya.

[37] It is the colonial periods of the Portuguese, Dutch and ultimately the British which needs to be explored to understand the current fissures as has been highlighted by many of my interviews with academics and analysts on this topic. It is clear that there is a thread running through where people dispute the historical or pre colonial narrative of this essentialist reduction of history and in fact point towards the colonial periods as to the times when the issues of identity really became significant.

[38] And thus were called Tamil because these early Europeans recognized the similarity to the Tamil people of South India

were not continuous, undifferentiated and impenetrable. As an interviewee put it:

> "This notion that there has been a massive historical racial and ethnic tension between at least the Sinhalese and the Tamils is disputed and we have seen numerous times in ancient and even contemporary times to debunk this notion. Even now where there are tensions between the Sinhalese and the Muslims, it is not consistent and is debunked equally by the amount of engagement between the communities. So we need a more nuanced understanding of community relations"[39]

Thus prior to the Nineteenth Century the ideal congruence of race, language, religion and political territory assumed in current nationalist discourse was not clear-cut and in the pre-modern state of Sri Lanka, there could not have been signs of the incipient Sinhala-Tamil conflict as understood today because these categories did not bear the nationalist connotations that they now bear (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). There were no political claims to the existence of different identities and up to the 1870s "…we find an awareness of being Tamil, even an awareness of a historical tradition that differs slightly from that of the Sinhala, yet attached to one political unit, Sri Lanka, and a wider cultural region, India". (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990, 110).

Hence as the Colonial History theorists contend, the contemporary pattern of ethnic relations and tensions in countries like Sri Lanka is largely due to its colonial history, whose process created borders that included or divided ethnic groups and defined the demographic mixture of the colonies that eventually became countries (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). Whilst Sri Lanka being an island differs slightly, it is definitely true that the differentiation of ethnic identities (thereby creating distinction within society) and the selective favouritism of colonial rulers towards minorities to help in colonial administration, laid the foundations towards the nationalistic conflict that the country faced in the post colonial era.

This type of reasoning goes against the notion that Hutchinson (2005) put forward around ethno-symbolist continuity in that in spite of the cultural differences being exploited by colonial powers it did in fact exist prior to colonisation. Although he also does contradict that with his 'postmodern' emphasis on multiplicity and interruption. In other words, that not all national projects have premodern blueprints and that intergenerational national consciousness can be broken. To some extent, what Nissan and Stirrat (1990), Bush (2003), Bandarage (2004) and others have stated though is that there were differences between the communities based on caste as equally as there were commonalities. However, the differences that existed between the communities does not match the fervour

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[39] Face to face interview with Professor Ken Bush, November 2015.

of the ethnic formation that was created in the nineteenth century especially as a result of the British colonial experience.

3.2.3 The British Period

It is the history of modern Sri Lanka from the latter half of the 19th century (i.e. during the colonial rule of the British) that there is a conscious development of ethnic consciousness (and eventually conflict) among the major ethnic communities who hitherto had been 'living in harmony' throughout the pre-modern period (M. A. Nuhman 2007, N. Wickramasinghe 2006). It is this colonial period, especially under the British, that is often blamed by most analysts for sowing the seed of ethnic divisions that thrived in the post 1948 Sri Lanka, as it fostered and emphasised a new concept of colonial identity[40] (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999).

British interest in Sri Lanka had first been aroused by its strategic significance in the Indian Ocean, but it also later became an important arena for commercial interests with the British introducing an independent capitalist sector, improving infrastructure like roads and enhancing the coffee and tea estates which resulted in large numbers of South Indian Tamil labourers being brought in to tend the estates (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

Understanding Local Contexts

However when they took control of Sri Lanka in 1796, the British had little understanding of the history and customs of the island and began to create a body of knowledge that would provide information for both the practical needs of government and a general assessment of indigenous civilization on a universal scale of progress (J. D. Rogers 1990). As Wickramasinghe (2006) shows, the British, in order to exert control on the native population so they could be "counted, objectified and divided into social groups" (Ibid, 45) problematically devised categories such as nation, race, religion and caste through which they imposed a sense of difference on their subjects.

This was further compounded by the heterogeneous situation, faced by the British in coming across people speaking a variety of languages, wearing a number of costumes, and following different religions. Their response to this was simplistic: "…different groups in Sri Lanka were, it was argued, different races and different races had different customs" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 27). Thus language, religion, custom and clothes were taken in various combinations as markers of racial variation, and by the end of the nineteenth century a large number of

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[40] The British period had further emphasized Sri Lanka's three main ethnicities: Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Muslims or Moors (as they were initially classed) are classed separately because of a slight difference in culture, food and dress, whilst holding different religious traditions, rituals and practices. Within the Sinhala and Tamil Ethnicities, there is a further division based on religion as you have Sinhalese Buddhists, Christians and those who have converted to Islam and within the Tamil community you also have Hindus, Christians and those who have converted to Islam.

distinct 'races' were recognized by the authorities in colonial Sri Lanka. For example, in the 1871 census, where 'race' appeared for the first time, there were seventy eight 'nationalities' and twenty four 'races' (N. Wickramasinghe 2006)[41]. However by the 1881 census the number of 'races' had reduced to seven: Europeans, Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors[42], Malays, Veddhas and others (N. Wickramasinghe 2006). The Moors, were separately identified based on a number of factors including religion, culture and origin (Ibid). According to an interviewee:

> *"This in itself was quite a unique aspect of how the British ruled Sri Lanka and divided its inhabitants up as opposed to mainland India which was ruled in different way for example, Muslims were not considered as a separate ethnicity in the British Raj"[43]*

The identification of 'Moors' as a separate category of representation would coincide as well with transnational events happening (also as a result of the British colonial powers and what was happening in places like Egypt and also with the Ottoman Empire) that would affect how this classification of ethnicity would engage with the country moving forward. As an interviewee put it:

> *"The British had not really anticipated that providing the 'Moors' with an opportunity to define their identity also through religion i.e. Islam, would be an opportunity to further consolidate relationships with a global representation and identity"[44]*

Consequently by the uneven and unequal manner of integration into the polity, British colonial policies in particular contributed to new forms of ethno-religious competition and stratification and hence the "fault lines between the Sinhala and Tamil communities that show up in the modern Sri Lankan conflict were drawn during the period of British colonization from 1815 to 1948" (Bandarage 2009, 29). Nissan and Stirrat (1990, 29) also point out to the paradox at the centre of Sri Lanka's colonial polity which was "subject to one set of rules and one set of governors; in terms of citizenship, all should be equal. Yet...British rule substantiated heterogeneity, formalising cultural differences and making it the basis of social organisation and political representation". For example, the British like the Dutch before them promoted separate legal codes for ethnic groups such as Islamic personal law for Muslims and the Thesawalami customary law for Jaffna Tamils (Bandarage 2009). Thus these differences were instituted differently in the legal system than in the political system in that more groupings were given legal representation at the level of family law (based on cultures and

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[41] This included 'Up Country' and 'Low Country' Sinhala, 'Ceylon' and 'Indian' Tamils, 'Moors' (again divided into Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors i.e. those who came from India), Veddas, Burghers (divided into Dutch and Portuguese Burghers), Malays, Eurasians and Europeans. Furthermore, other groups were also considered 'races' like the Mukkuvars, the Vagga, the Rodiya and so on (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

[42] Referring to those who followed the religion of Islam

[43] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[44] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016

customs) than at the political level (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). All of this institutionalisation and dichotomy would eventually have an effect on how the different groups thought of themselves and the other[45].

Anti Colonial Revival

The British colonial ideology particularly, also served to influence perceptions of the past whereby the images that were developed during this period were produced by the use of nineteenth-century Western historical ideas and methods undermining the fluidity and inter-mixture that had hitherto prevailed in Ancient Sri Lanka (Ibid.). For the Tamils, their identity and history has been shaped by links with South India and the greater amount of assimilation between cultures and religions and hence Tamil Christians have been at the forefront of Tamil nationalism (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990). However for the Sinhalese, since their history is only available through the Mahawansa, their ideas of history and the past were essentially based on the assumption of the decline of a great ancient civilization and the presence of different antagonistic groups threatening the sanctity of the nation-state (J. D. Rogers 1990). This central idea of a rise and decline of an ancient civilization, was almost universally accepted and developed after 1840 by the anti colonial revival movements both because it was plausible—it was confirmed by the Mahawansa and the ruined irrigation tanks and cities around Sri Lanka—and because " it was consistent with the pattern of European historiography, which looked to the classical civilization of Greece and Rome" (J. D. Rogers 1990, 102). It was also promoted by people who were not professional historians but 'activists' from other disciplines such as law, who were not only influenced by the circumstances but in some cases were rebelling against it (Ibid.)

By developing this idea, the anti colonials from the Sinhala community, succeeded in articulating a 'Sinhalese' ideology as an essential part of contemporary Sri Lankan culture. Being a majority community and with its associations with language, race and religion, this ideology succeeded in thoroughly permeating such areas of intellectual activity as creative writing, the arts and historical narratives thereby radically transforming and refashioning the normative view of Sri Lanka's past. This ideology was also helped by the fact that from the beginning of the colonial period, the Sinhalese as a group were disadvantaged in the colonial system of political representation, for example being given "one slot out of a total of six of non governmental members in the Legislative Council created in 1832 to function in an advisory capacity" (Bandarage 2009, 32)[46]. Moreover the situation was made worse by the fact that the Sinhala representation was further given to a member of the Sinhala Christian

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[45] Something that has been picked up from a number of conversations with people outside of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka who point to these legal instruments as the cause of differences being formed especially with regards engaging with the Muslim community by people outside of the community.

[46] Bandarage also talks about how British policy split the Sinhala identity into two, the Kandyans and the low-country Sinhalese, whilst the Tamil identity of Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils were included as one Tamil group

community who were from the Govi caste rather than the disparaged Buddhist majority[47]. Coupled with the fact that as a result of the plethora of Christian missionary schools providing the elites in the north with English education, there was a 'structural imbalance' giving these Tamils favoured status above the Sinhalese (and other ethnicities) in the eyes of the colonial rulers. For example "in 1925, the Sinhalese constituted 42.5% of the government medical service and 43.6% of the civil service, whereas the Sri Lankan Tamils made up 30.8% of the medical services and 20.5% of the civil service although their respective proportions in the island's population were 67% and 11%" (Ibid., 31). [48]

It is important to remember that these anti colonial revival movements, which attempted to define an identity different from the English colonial rulers and also to differentiate themselves from the subordinate positions in which the colonial administration placed them, was not just concentrated with the Sinhalese. At the same time, the Tamil community in their own way, set about rediscovering ancient Tamil literature and heritage and as the next section and following chapters will show, the Muslim community also used this opportunity to develop a link to their unique heritage as well as develop their own distinct identity. In fact, as Nuhman (2007, ix) points out "Ethnic consciousness among the Muslims gradually developed in relation to the Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalisms from the late 19th century owing to the competition for economic and political opportunities". In addition, Ismail (1995, 64) is more explicit when he says that the identity representation for the Muslim community came from the "elite's desire to safeguard its economic and other interests as well as its fear of the forces of Sinhala nationalism and of the hegemonic Sinhala state".

Social Stratification

In developing this group consciousness, the social classes created by colonial rule and influence drew as much on European thought as on their own past traditions. The period during which the modern Sinhala (Tamil and even Muslim) consciousness evolved also witnessed the rise into prominence of racialist theories in Europe. (R. L. Gunawardana 1990). The British colonial rulers "believed themselves to be involved in a civilizing process" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 27) and introduced ideological capitalist imperatives, committed to the liberal values of nineteenth-century Britain. Thus the introduction of ideas about the individual, about rights in private property, "and about the various aspects of modern society which Weber referred to as bureaucratization and rationalization were all parts of this process" (ibid. 27). From the viewpoint of the British, ancient Sri Lanka might be one of the wonders of the world, and its achievements celebrated, but further progress depended on the 'successful introduction of

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[47] Bandarage (2009) talks about how in 1917, the govi-karava caste rivalry among the Sinhala elite was a factor in the choice of the election of a Tamil to the legislative council, not ethnicity.
[48] With Tamils having a disproportionate share of government, university and professional jobs – largely due to better education – many Sinhalese felt excluded from political and economic power. For example, in 1956, Tamils were 30 % of the Ceylon Administrative Service, half the clerical service, 60% of engineers and doctors and 40% of the armed forces despite the Sinhalese being 70% of the population (ICG 2007a)

European ways' (J. D. Rogers 1990). Thus from the mid-nineteenth century, the island's history was judged according to Victorian standards in the context of human progress and imposing "modern social categories, such as nationality, on the Sri Lankan sources" (Ibid, 90) and consequently from the beginning, political representation at national level was instituted by the British on a communal basis. For example, the Manning reforms introduced between 1921 and 1924, emphasized 'communal representation' for those groups recognized as 'legitimate interest groups' by the British. Thus those eager to secure communal representation therefore had to justify this both to themselves and to the government (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990).

Whilst these types of representations were contested by those anti colonial parties, who maintained that a great civilization had existed in Sri Lanka but had become weakened as a product of specific historical circumstances (namely the imposition of modern notions of nationality under the influence of nineteenth century western thought, including oriental studies), this was done so within an ideological framework of human progress and social categories. However the evidence that in ancient Sri Lanka religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities were often fluid and not always congruent (and therefore there was commonality between mainly the Tamils and Sinhalese) was either denied or portrayed as an indication of decay (ibid.) leading to a "particular colonial interpretation of the past which has conditioned the analysis of conflict dynamics and the definition of the groups in conflict, casting the conflict as the bipolar interaction of relatively homogeneous groups" (Bush 2003, 34).

Unfortunately, rather than seek to unify a Sri Lankan identity and history in opposition to a British colonial status that could be attributed to specific historical circumstances, the obsession with defining the origin and heritage of the different social categories in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka, meant that divergent narratives of ethnicity (and even religion) were developed (J. D. Rogers 1990) and it was the elites of this period who used these narratives to justify their own social and political primacy.   For example, it was the elites from both the Sinhala and Tamil communities who opposed the constitutional reform brought about by the Donoughmore Commission in 1931 that introduced universal franchise based on territorial representation making the island one of the earliest British colonies to receive the vote for men, women and the working classes (Bandarage 2009). In particular the Tamil elites felt that they would be changed from a majority community to a minority community (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990). Nevertheless, the elections of 1931 on the basis of these reforms would bring about drastic changes to the composition of the new legislature and would signify "the beginning of what came to be seen as a 're-conquest' of power by the Sinhala Buddhist majority who had been marginalised during 400 years of colonial domination and a diminution of the power of minorities especially the Sri Lankan Tamils who had 'benefitted' from colonial rule" (Ibid., 36).

Religion and Ethnicity

Thus ethnicity and religion, two overlapping but distinct forms of identity, would become primary markers for a form of Sri Lankan identity shaped by 'ethnic entrepreneurs' (Ibid.). Unfortunately in the years preceding and following independence, the prominent movement within the anti colonial parties for this identity were led by Sinhalese elites, who promoted the notion that equated race, religion, culture, and language as unchanging components of the Sinhala nation throughout the ages (J. D. Rogers 1990) but recognized the advantages that capitalism and modern technology had brought them. Hence Buddhism, which was considered the weakest link in the colonial chain, became the channel for the Sinhalese elite to voice their opposition not only towards the colonial power but also as a way of mobilizing popular support in search of an 'idyllic' past (Ibid). Eventually the concept of 'Sinhala-Buddhist' came into use to denote a group of people who are distinguished from the Sinhala of the other faiths and also from the Buddhists of other ethnic groups (Ibid.). This portrayal of the 'Sinhala Buddhist' as a victim of the colonial era and an underprivileged group[49], mainly by people such as Dharmapala[50], gained traction (especially after universal suffrage was introduced to the island in 1931), and the need to struggle for the "legitimate rights of the Sinhala Buddhists" (R. L. Gunawardana 1990, 76) became an essential part of the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideology.

Consequently, the Sinhala Buddhist construct entered the consciousness of the masses, tying together an appreciation of a common culture that underlined Sinhala as a linguistic entity and overarching local, regional and caste identities. Whilst this construct was predominantly Buddhist in definition, it glossed over the Sinhala Christian sections of the community, preferring a "…nationalist movement with certain anti-imperialist potentialities" (Ibid.).[51] In other words, this nationalist movement emphasized the achievements of an ancient past thereby offering an anti colonial channel for the Sinhala people to strive to achieve 'progress' (in a colonial sense) whilst maintaining their cultural pride. By using the Mahawansa ideology, it also allowed the elite to once again set themselves above 'the mass of poor people' who "needed the élite to help them rediscover indigenous culture and meet the challenges of the modern world" (J. D. Rogers 1990, 103).

Hence by the end of the Nineteenth Century, this Buddhist revival vis-a-vis nationalist identity succeeded in placing religion at the forefront of most social

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[49] As opposed to Sinhala Christians

[50] He was probably the first person to use the term 'Sinhala Buddhist'

[51] It is interesting that this narrative was changed according to circumstances. In some cases, it was necessary for the concept of Sinhala nationalism to consider both Buddhists and Christians. But in other circumstances, the more traditional Sinhalese élites, many of whom were Christian, were portrayed as being too conservative and subservient to the British to provide the leadership the island needed. Thus narratives by the middle class were used to justify historical images to set itself apart from the British, the poor, and the traditional élites, and to assign itself the role of leading Sri Lanka into the new age of progress (Rogers 1990).

debates and public activities (Ibid.). In particular, it also became another indirect anti colonial tool especially in the face of Christianity, by many of the 'upwardly mobile' Buddhist elites to challenge the authority of the British and the power and influence of more traditional élite families, many of whom were Christian (and often ethnically Tamil).   In this guise, for the Sinhala Buddhist, the Tamils became agents of a foreign power and helped on by British perceptions, the Tamil call for equal political representation was part of a grand design to deprive the Sinhala Buddhist community of what was theirs (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990).

Whilst many define the paradox created by the British as 'divide-and-rule colonial practices' to consolidate and maintain colonial regimes in the face of exploitation for economic gain (Bandarage 2009), Nissan and Stirrat (1990, 29) also classify this as "of misguided 'liberal' sentiments which sought to protect the different customs of different 'races'", influenced by racial theories developed from the relationship between contemporary studies of language, etymological and historical, and of evolutionary theory. Nevertheless, conditions were inevitably created for these revival movements to flourish into nationalist movements by the turn of the twentieth century and in the lead up to independence. The concept of Tamil and Sinhala nationalism in particular gained strength and the symbolic anti colonial rhetoric that promoted one 'nation' above the 'other' gained momentum, developing prominent polarising positions for both the communities which hardened in a post independence and a conflict era.

Thus the colonial period under the British in particular fostered and emphasised a new concept of colonial identities weakening the process of ethnic assimilation that had existed hitherto (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999). It is in this context that the exploration of Sri Lankan Muslims is considered exploring a development of a strong ethnic identity based on their religion but one that is vulnerable to Sinhala and Tamil ethno nationalisms.

3.3   The Case of Sri Lankan Muslims
Sri Lankan Muslims constitute about 9.1% of the total population based on the 2012 census. This is the first census taken in 11 years (and the first after the end of the conflict in 2009) and for the first time did not have approximations for figures from in the North and East which were present in 2001, due to the fact that the conflict had prevented any proper census from taking place(ICG 2007b)[52].

The Muslims are scattered all over the island and they do not account for an absolute majority (50% plus one) of the population in any district of Sri Lanka (See Figure 2). However, in two districts, with 44% in Ampara and 41% in

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[52] The International Crisis Group (2007b) states that though the figures from the 2001 census, show the Muslim population at about 8% of the total, the proportion is not known exactly as the census did not include large parts of the Tamil population in the north and east which are mainly approximations due to the LTTE preventing a full census being taken in the east and north.

Trincomalee in the Eastern province, they are the largest single ethnic group. In two other districts Mannar (North Western Province) and Batticaloa (Eastern Province) they account for more than 20% the population of the district. Thus these four districts, which are in the east and northwest of the island, account for only about 1/3 of the total Muslim population (D. B. McGilvray 2011). The remaining 2/3 are scattered over the island with more conspicuous concentrations in the Western coastal districts of Colombo, Kalutara and Puttalam[53] and in Kandy in the central highlands.
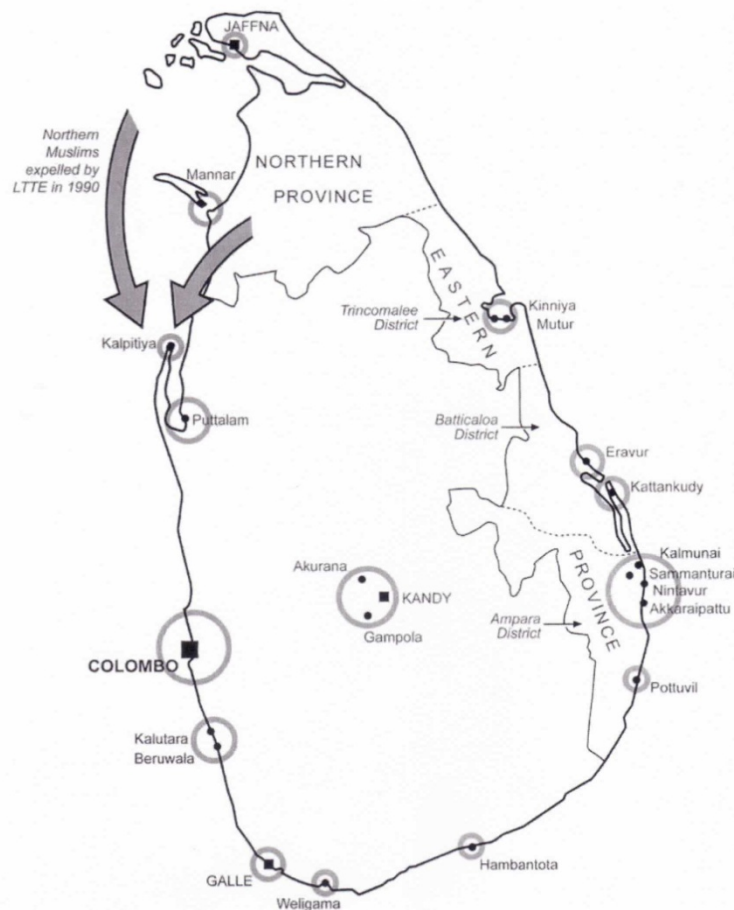
Figure 2: Important sites of Muslim population in Sri Lanka (McGilvray and Raheem 2007)[54]

By virtue of the geographical locus of the conflict and their historical legitimacy and also because of their "anomalous position in Sri Lankan ethno-nationalist identity politics" due to their definition of a defensive ethnic identity that is neither Sinhalese nor Tamil (McGilvray and Raheem 2007, 1), the Muslim community found itself not getting involved directly with the 28 year old conflict. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of the Muslim community speak Tamil but reject their linguistic identity in favour or a religious identity as their ethnic marker (M. A. Nuhman 2007). Yet this approach has had a detrimental effect with the

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[53] Puttalam has a conspicuous size of Muslims due to the expulsion of Muslims from the North in 1990 as Figure 2 illustrates and Chapter 4 will describe in more detail.
[54] This is cited in both McGilvray (2011) and McGilvray and Raheem (2007) but has been obtained from an online version of the report (Sangam 2011)

Tamil community during the conflict and with the Sinhalese community post conflict in 2009. As an interviewee aptly put it:

> "When I was growing up, there used to be this Sinhala folklore: 'The fox sits on the side-lines to watch the tigers and the lions fighting it out, just to see who would win, so it could take sides'. The tragedy is that you hear that being repeated now again when it comes to the political positions taken by the Muslims before, during and after the conflict"[55]

3.3.1 Early History

The history of Islam in Sri Lanka is a story of cultural, economic and geographical diversity which has led to the development of a heterogeneous community with diverse interests and "plural political adaptations at the local level" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007, 2). Yet, the historical narrative of Sri Lankan Muslims is relatively unknown and in fact "there has been a dispute about the precise date of the arrival of Muslims in Sri Lanka and the start of their settlements. Here historians have relied upon what they saw as the treasured traditions of the community" (K. Asad 1993, 2). This was further reinforced by a focus group discussion which revealed:

> "The problem is that we don't have one fixed narrative of the Sri Lankan Muslim component. People are sketchy about the origins of Islam but certain that we, i.e. the 'Sri Lankan Muslims / Moors' or at least the majority of us are descendent from Arabs."[56]

What is generally known, understood and widely accepted is that the history of the SL Muslims mirrors that widely of Muslim communities on the coast of South India who are mixed race descendants of Arabs and (also Persian sea-faring merchants) who traversed the Indian Ocean between the Middle East and south-east Asia (Ali 1981). With the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in the first half of the seventh century and the subsequent conquest of Persia thereafter, trade became increasingly dominated by Arab Muslim merchants operating from the ports on the Red Sea and the Gulf heading towards south-east Asia and using the island of Sri Lanka as a stopover. Thus, this explains why the Islamic impact on Muslims in Sri Lanka and south India is similar to that of south east Asia which is predominantly Arabic in culture, following the Sunni tradition of the Shafi'[57] legal school, which is different to the Persian and Turkic invasions of north India, who established major states and empires. (McGilvray 2011).

This mercantile motivation enabled the Arab merchants to not only settle and marry locally within the medieval Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of South India

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[55] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[56] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion conducted with Muslim professionals in May 2016

[57] The Shafii' school of thought is one of the 4 recognized schools of thought and jurisprudence within the Islamic tradition (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shafi%E2%80%98i)

and Sri Lanka respectively but also to establish dominant economic positions in port settlements such as Calicut and Colombo, in return for revenue raised for the kingdoms as a result of overseas commerce (McGilvray 2011). For example, in the wake of Vasco da Gama's 1498 naval crusade against the 'Moors' of Calicut, the Portuguese encountered Muslim traders in Sri Lanka who were Tamil speaking, had links with Muslims in South India and more importantly, had "royal permission to collect custom duties and regulate shipping" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007) in the major south-western ports under the auspices of local Sinhalese kings (*Ibid*). Asad (1993) describes how in thirteenth century A.D. a mission was sent by Bhavanekabahu 1 of Yappahu to the Sultan of Egypt headed by a "Prince of Ceylon" (K. Asad 1993, 6) named 'Al-Haj, Abu Uthman'. What is particularly striking about this is not that a Muslim ambassador was sent on a mission to a Muslim court but the description of him as 'Prince' suggests a degree of eminence for a member of a 'recent immigrant' community (Ibid.)

In addition, as a result of increasing contacts, (commercial and cultural), with the Muslims of Malabar, a new identity element, of South Indian composition, was added to the composition of the Arab (Muslim) society of Sri Lanka, thereby losing its exclusive Arab character (K. Asad 1993). What is also important to note here is that those Arab / Muslim sailors, travellers and traders who came to Sri Lanka did not bring with them their families, but often chose to marry from the local Sinhalese and Tamil population, converting them to Islam and perhaps even justifying the need to talk about 'Tamil' Muslims or 'Sinhala' Muslims. This is where the discussion about the history then becomes slightly blurred as an interviewee said:

> "Somehow then this Arab link is superimposed to a Muslim connection and things get confused as to who, what, where. We are descended from Arabs who are Muslims and that's how we became and remained Muslim. Yet it is not the full story of how the Sri Lankan Muslim community developed and evolved. Part of the story is connected to the Arabs but another part is indigenous"[58]

The Arabs of Pre-Islam

It is the type of primordial link to Arabs and Muslims that is mainly espoused by community leaders who currently refer to the work by Lorna Devarajah and others to justify difference and by extension not belonging to the 'other'. In some cases, it has even become cited as the 'official history' such as for example, a national heritage museum that opened in 2015 in the east of Sri Lanka, aiming to showcase the heritage of 'Muslims in Sri Lanka' (Lonely Planet 2015) that highlights the aspect of the Pre-Islamic and Post -Islamic Arab past (See Figures 3-5)[59].

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[58] Skype interview with Dr Imthiaz Razak in August 2015.
[59] When I visited the museum in December 2016, I was struck by this particular focus on the narrative of the Arab connection in a pre and post Islamic Sri Lanka
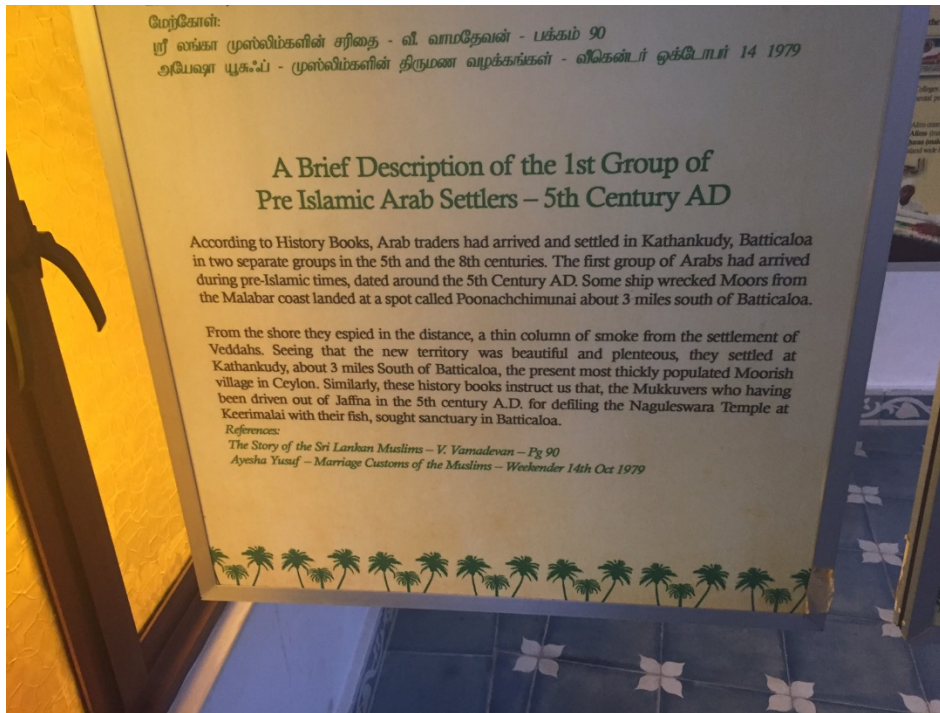
Figure 3: A Brief Description of the Pre Islamic Arab Settlers at the Muslim Heritage Museum (picture taken by author on a visit to the museum in December 2016)
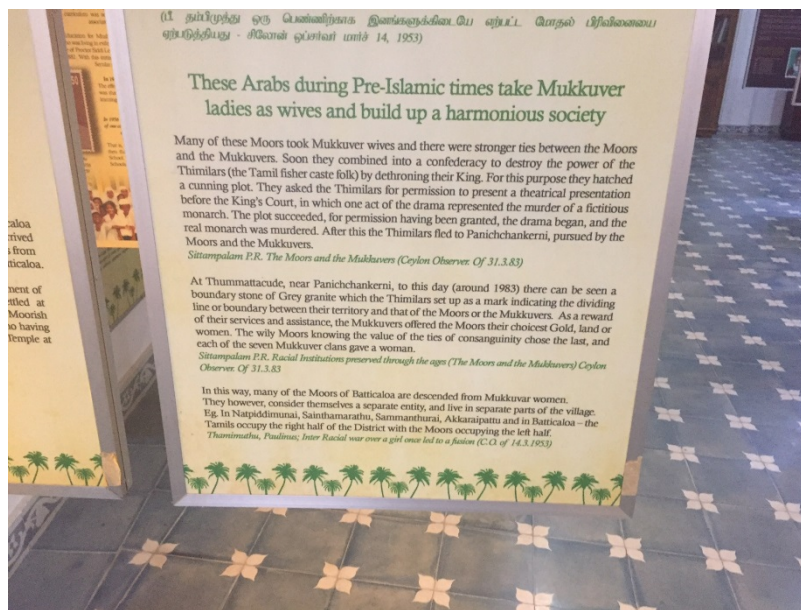
Figure 4: Brief description of the interaction of Arabs with Natives in Sri Lanka at the Muslim Heritage Museum (picture taken by the author on a visit to the museum in December 2016)
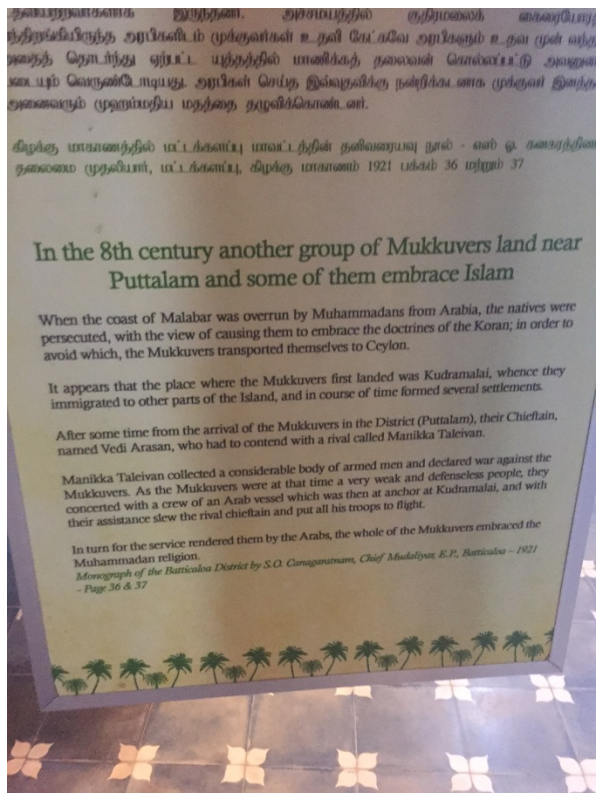
Figure 5: Brief description of Arabs / Muslim in Sri Lanka at the Muslim Heritage Museum (picture taken by the author on a visit to the museum in December 2016)

What the figures above show is the narrative of Arabs coming pre-Islam, as traders to the island and often settling marrying local women and having children who had mixed Arab and local blood[60]. Then, with the onset of Islam, Arab traders who were now Muslim also came and settled in the country thereby introducing Islam to the island and more importantly through marrying the locals. Hence at best the Muslim community (like the other communities in the island) are a hybrid of the intermarriage of different communities and thus depending on where the original Arabs settled, could be mixed Sinhala and Tamil communities as well. As an interviewee said:

> "So we have the status of hybridity of the Muslim community which actually mirrors a lot of how the other communities historically emerged in Sri Lanka. We had Arabs (and later Arabs who were Muslim in faith) who came and intermarried local women (mainly Sinhalese since the Arab traders were dealing with the Sinhalese royalty but in many parts of the island, like the east, they were dealing with the Tamil community), and their progeny who had a mixed Arab and local blood and often took the patriarchal faith emerged as what can be called the 'Muslim' community"[61]

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[60] These Arabs were often rewarded for their services to the local Kings in the island who were often Sinhalese, with being married off to local women who were Sinhalese, although depending on where they landed in the island, there was intermarriage with Tamils as well

[61] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

This notion challenges the concept of what the Muslim community represents about itself in Sri Lanka. It firstly points out that rather than be different to the 'others', the community could be said to be also descended from Tamils and Sinhalese with religion effectively binding them together. It thus points to a heterogeneity of the community in terms of cultural practices and understanding, with many of the Eastern Muslims displaying different cultural practices[62], to those in the Southern parts of the country. This is something that McGilvray (2008,11)[63] alludes to when he discusses the 'matrilineal' zone on the east coast of the island, where matrilineal descent along with embedded cultural patterns such as the dowry and 'matrilocal' residence are practised by both Tamil and Muslim communities (something that Muslim communities from other parts of the island do not necessarily practice).[64] Yet these nuances all seems to be glossed over in a general understanding how the Muslims as per some of my interviewees' understanding:

> *"Our understanding of history as a community doesn't really go into details of a pre and post Islamic arrival of the Arabs nor of course into the regional disparities. What we are told and generally understand is that Muslims came '1200' years go. The concept of the intermarriage between locals and Arabs isn't really unpacked to distinguish Muslims who could be descended from the 'Tamils' and those who could be descended from the 'Sinhalese'. A better understanding of the nuances of history especially with regards the arrival of Islam to the island could go a long way in helping to understand the roots of identity for the Muslim community and the subsequent identity crisis many young Muslims face. It will help to celebrate the heterogeneity that we apparently have as a community. Yet it also poses some difficult questions for everyone: you can have the possibility of a 'Sinhalese Muslim' and a 'Tamil Muslim'"[65]*

Challenges

It is this ambiguity that poses a lot of challenges for the Muslim community. The first challenge is with the classification and representation of the Sri Lankan Muslim as an ethnic identity. This initial precept is based on a contradictory classification, in that most Muslims in Sri Lanka classify themselves as the

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[62] This is often seen as being close to Tamil/Hindu practices by Muslims from other parts of the island (D. B. McGilvray, 2008).

[63] McGilvray (2008), "explores in more details the anthropological status of his work

[64] I can also attest to this difference in some of the cultural patterns (and often how this manifests itself in terms of religious practice and piety) as well given that my family is from the east and my wife's family is from Kandy. When it came to the time of our wedding, it was interesting to see how both sides of the family approached this and thought about what were 'cultural' practices and traditions around the wedding process. What was even interesting to note that despite the religious bind of being Muslim, there was definitely a difference in understanding and approach to the process. In many cases, this can cause misunderstandings and misperceptions to arise and is definitely not understood by the other communities who often see the Muslim community as one homogeneous bloc.

[65] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Muslim professionals in May 2016

descendants of Arabs or 'Moors'[66], despite it originating as a derogatory term from the Portuguese colonial rulers, that was used to refer to people they regarded as Arab Muslims, applied solely on the basis of religion and not origin (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011). In some cases especially during the British time, a further distinction was made between 'Ceylon' Moors and 'Coast' Moors, with the latter referring to those who came from South India under the British rule (K. Asad 1993). Thus the discussion around the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka is not as straightforward as originally thought. As an interviewee said:

> *"The starting point for the discussion on identity is flawed. We take a derogatory term such as 'Moors' and we venerate it and give it a place of pride as an identity marker despite not knowing the significance of the term throughout history and how that term was used to signify something bad"*[67]

Yet this in itself has undergone a transformation from the concept of a Moor to a more general understanding of Muslim which denotes a transition in thinking about identity and the role of religion within the psyche of the community. As an interviewee said:

> *"The concept of Muslim becomes problematic and really shows an evolution of the thinking of the community that has been influenced from outside. Yet the mere fact that we move between 'Moor' and 'Muslim' is a problem of representation and an identity crisis for the Sri Lankan 'Muslim' community. We really mean one thing when we talk about another identity. This is hugely problematic because how can 'Muslim' refer to an ethnic identity?"*[68]

The problem is that the very definition of Muslim does not relate to an ethnic representation but to a religious connotation of someone who has "become comfortable with the teachings of Islam and following them in every aspect of life" (Yakun 1990, 3). Thus, in Sri Lanka the concept of an ethnic 'Sri Lankan Muslim' is slightly misleading and confusing as it denotes ethnicity when the concept of a 'Muslim' is essentially an expression of faith. However, it also goes further than that as the Sri Lankan 'Muslim' ascribes a type of homogeneity beyond just religious practice to cultures, traditions, experiences and language which is made difficult by the heterogeneous nature of the geographical location and the lived experience of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

This homogeneity stems from the concept of being a 'Moor' descended from Arabs. Over time, this 'Arabness' has become fused with being Muslim because the Arabs were Muslims and so a racial link has become a religious link. Yet even

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[66] The concept of a Moor comes from 'Morisco', a term which was given by the Portuguese as a derogatory reference to Arabs, who them considered as rivals both in faith and in trade especially in the Indian Ocean (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011)

[67] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[68] *Ibid.*

this concept of homogeneity is misleading, because it does not do justice to the other ethnic communities that make up the Sri Lankan Muslim community. For example, there are also the presence of Malays who are descendants of people from Java who were brought to Sri Lanka by the Dutch; a fair number of Indian Muslims who had migrated from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka for the purpose of trade and then settled down; and small communities of the Memon[69] and Bohra Ismailis[70], all of which adds to the heterogeneity of the Muslim community (D. B. McGilvray 2011, D. B. McGilvray 2008). Yet somewhere in the classification of the 'Sri Lankan Muslim' this heterogeneity isn't included adding further to the confusion. As one of the interviewees said:

> *"There is almost a sense of hypocrisy in how the Sri Lankan 'Muslim' frames their identity question. Though Muslim is supposed to mean homogeneity and affinity, in practice what it means is that it refers to those descending from the Arabs or the Moors and not the other ethnicities who also happen to be Muslim. In this sense, the 'Moors' are quite racist in how they relate to other communities"[71]*

In addition, the homogeneity of a 'Muslim' as an identity also has a global significance in terms of an affiliation with fellow believers around the world in what is known as the Ummah which is essentially a community which developed in the process of following Islamic Law (al-Ahsan 1992). This theme has problematic connotations for many Muslim communities who are indigenous (or migrant) and who are minorities since the discussion of Ummah is an intellectual predicament of the Muslim world that finds itself often at odds with the concept of nationalism or the nation-state (*Ibid*.). In other words, the concept of the Ummah and the homogeneity it presumes poses difficulties for Muslim communities in minorities as it is assumed that their 'loyalty' is not to the nation that they live in but more 'extraterritorial' to a wider transnational Muslim community (Parekh 2008).

The duality construct of a 'Muslim' identity becomes problematic for the Sri Lankan Muslim community as they profess their Sri Lankan identity (and sense of belonging) and tackle the issue of a religious representation (and a possible

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[69] An ethnic (linguistics) group that originated from lower Sindh near the Indus delta region. They are well respected Muslim Entrepreneurs, Philanthropist and Humanitarian in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere. Memon are, generally, well known for being honest, hardworking and innovative that contributed greatly to their commercial success. Beginning of 19th century, a mass settlement of Memons began throughout India, and a few decades later they also emigrated beyond its borders, chiefly to the countries of the Indian Ocean basin. By the end of the 19th century, rich communities of Memons were appearing in the ports of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, in Ceylon, Burma and East South Africa. By the end of 19th century, a sizeable Memon community was reported to have entrenched itself in East Asia. Memons have also established themselves in the Republic of Mauritius. (Hussein and Bhoja 2006)

[70] This is the main branch of the Bohra, a Musta'lī sub sect of Ismā'īlī Shī'a Islam. While the sub sect is based in India, the Dawoodi Bohra school of thought originates from Yemen, under the guidelines from Fatimid. This small and unique community is made up of approximately 1 million Dawoodi Bohras worldwide. Dawoodi Bohras have a unique blend of cultures, including Yemeni, Egyptian, African, and Indian. (Blank 2001)

[71] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Muslim professionals held in May 2016

transnational affiliation which their protagonists accuse them off). Whilst Nuhman (2007) charts the discussion on this issue, that has concluded that the definition and concept of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity has changed from a racial into a religious one over the past few decades, he himself (2007, 6) states that "In the Sri Lankan context, the term 'Muslim' has gained an ethnic sense and denotes a distinct ethnic group which consciously differentiates itself from the other major ethnic groups, namely, the Sinhalese and the Tamils".[72] This in turn can pose a challenge as a couple of interviewees said:

> *"This development of an 'ethnic' classification of the Sri Lankan Muslim becomes highly problematic because it tends to justify the thesis of primordialists such as Devarajah who imply an en-masse 'migration' of a race called Muslims to the island"[73]*

> *"We have a problem with this classification, because many Muslims then keep on referring to 'their' arrival on the island '1200' years ago as if they were migrants or recent arrivals because this is how they understand it. This compounds the us and them narrative and almost justifies that we do not 'belong'. Yet the truth of the matter is that Arabs came as traders in the pre Islamic times, they settled and intermarried and later when Islam came through the Arab trade, it was spread by affinity or intermarriage. Islam was spread through deeds and intermarriage not that there was a special race coming to Sri Lanka. To speak of 'Muslims arriving here 1200 years ago' speaks to a mythology that is not helpful. Islam came to the island NOT Muslims. Like any islander, our heritage is mixed. Arabs who followed Islam came and intermarried indigenous people and that was how Islam was passed down generally. We have both types of blood. We also end up being racist and exclusivist because we certainly don't include other followers of Islam from other ethnicities within this classification "[74]*

This implication by default has wider ramifications because it can be seen to justify a primordialist narrative that also implies that the 'Sri Lankan Muslim' are 'new comers' to the island tracing their history back to about thousand years unlike the Sinhalese and Tamil prehistory that can be traced back to at least the first millennium BCE (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). However, "there are plenty of archaeological and historical records which have been unearthed in recent times, all of which establish the fact that the Muslims of Sri Lanka are as indigenous to its soil as the Sinhalese and Tamils" (Ali 1997, 254). As an interviewee said:

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[72] To qualify this statement, Nuhman (2007) highlights how other minority Muslim groups in Sri Lanka such as the Malays, Borahs and Memons primarily identify themselves by their distinct ethnic labels rather than the term Muslim and it is only the Sri Lankan Muslims that are meant to denote an ethnicity that is different and that excludes the other ethnic groups who profess an Islamic faith in a racial identitarian discourse.
[73] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[74] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Muslim professionals held in May 2016

> *"We have lost and continue to lose the grip on the narrative of indigeneity from our history somewhat bizarrely choosing to feed into the Sinhala/Tamil nationalist discourse. This adds to an identity crisis for the Muslim community"[75]*

This identity crisis compounded by history means that there is a challenge in classifying the Muslims simply based on 'Arab' heritage which was further made worse with the colonial period and encounters and reactions from this period. It also means that the ethnic identification of 'Muslim' hitherto justified from a primordialist perspective can be misleading and has to be challenged.

3.3.2 The Portuguese and Dutch Period

The periods of Portuguese[76] and Dutch colonial rule was especially harsh for the Muslim community not only due to restrictions being placed upon the practices of their faith but also due to the threat they posed to the European monopoly of overseas trade, there were limitations placed on the movement of Arab and Persian traders especially during the time of the Portuguese in the 15th century (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). As a consequence, there was greater interaction between the Muslims of Sri Lanka and the Muslims of South India (who were mostly Tamil speaking as well as ethnically Dravidian). This thus explains why the overwhelming majority of Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil and not Arabic, Persian or Sinhalese as their mother tongue (Ali 1997)[77].

Another effect of the Portuguese policies (by the 17th century) was to force Muslims living on the West coast of Sri Lanka to migrate inland to the Kandyan kingdoms. Subsequently some of these Muslims were then resettled in Tamil speaking Batticaloa in the east by the same kingdom as protection against Portuguese attacks. Ultimately, Muslims settled throughout all of the Sinhala regions of the island as well as on the east coast – where they intermarried with local Tamils and shared a common matrilineal social structure. Currently although about two thirds of the Muslim population live in the Sinhala regions of the island, it is in the east coast where there is the highest concentration of Muslims in the local population (McGilvray 2008). Thus it is safe to say that Muslim ethnicity is a 'historical conundrum' (Williams 1951) as it seems to be a mixture of Arab, Persian, Dravidian and Malay blood of which 'the Dravidian element, because of centuries of heavy Indian injection, has remained the dominant one' (Ali 1997).

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[75] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

[76] One of the challenges though, is that much of the history of Sri Lanka during the Portuguese conquest owes much to the records kept by the Portuguese themselves, which means that there is a bias in the narrative about Muslims due to trade and religious rivalry with the Portuguese (Asad 1993).

[77] Although this is now changing in modern Sri Lankan contexts where a large number of the new generation of the Muslim community (especially those in Colombo and the southern areas of the country) speak Sinhalese, as observed by the author through his interactions with friends and family.

The Dutch sought to control Sri Lanka primarily for trade, and arriving from south East Asia, were able to infiltrate both the east and south of the Island. Again the Muslims were initially seen as 'rivals' in religion and trade (K. Asad 1993) with Muslims being forced out of Colombo to the coastal regions of the south, however by the eighteenth century, the initial hostility had declined. For example, there was an attempt to formulate a code for the laws and customs of the Muslim community in the island. According to Asad (1993, 11), the reasons for this improvement of relationships between the Dutch and the Muslims was that "they were seen as fellow outsiders to Sri Lanka, therefore potential allies" and also to increase the trade. According to an interviewee:

> *"We see the concept of a recognition and institutionalisation of 'Muslims' in Sri Lanka as a separate entity during the time of the Dutch as political pragmatism. The Dutch and earlier the Portuguese periods served to create this mix cocktail of the community and creating this heavy influence from South India. However by the time of the British occupation, this agency of 'Muslim' identity was beginning to find some way of expression"[78]*

3.3.3 The British Period

By the start of the British occupation of Sri Lanka, the Muslim community was already in a process of a construction (and de-construction) of an identity for what constituted a 'Sri Lankan Muslim'. There are a number of competing influences for how this construction and deconstruction came about. It would be simplistic to assume that this whole conversation was solely around political representation, although this was a significant catalyst. There were other competing factors that prompted the conversation along these lines.

Rise of Ethnic Nationalism

One of the key catalysts for political galvanisation has to be understood in a wider context as Muslims (particularly those from the elitist community) were confronted with rising Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu consciousness in response to the British occupation. "Ethnic consciousness developed among Muslims also in response to the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 135) which was sustained as well because of competition in trade and commerce. As an interviewee said:

> *"The history of Sri Lanka in the Nineteenth Century is about two things: the development of ethnic consciousness which went hand in hand with the rise of competition in trade and commerce in the urban areas. Thus the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism was supported by commercial interests who viewed the Muslim traders as a threat. Hence it was not a*

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surprise that the pressure on the Muslims from Buddhist nationalists centred around trading"[79]

Drawing heavily on the mythology of the Mahawansa, a Buddhist revivalism movement, arose as a resistance to Christianity[80]. As an interviewee said:

> *"The first incidents of Buddhist nationalism really arose out of the famous 'Christian-Buddhist' debate of 1873, where a Buddhist monk and a Christian priest went head to head on theological arguments. Both sides declared themselves to be the winner of that debate, but what this did for the Buddhists is to embolden them in the face of Christianity and by extension the colonial context. This served to rejuvenate the Buddhist revival movement."[81]*

The main proponent of this agitation was Anagarika Dharmapala who became the face of the Buddhist revivalist movement and became the ideologue for Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. "His conviction was that Sinhala Buddhists were the 'sons of the soil' and the minorities were 'alien' people" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 101), and none were more hated than the Muslims whom Dharmapala referred to as 'shylocks' (Ibid.). For Dharmapala, he saw the struggle as one reflecting European nation-states in the lead up to the First World War, with economic interests interacting with cultural and religious awareness(J. L. Fernando 2008). At the beginning of the 20th century, Dharmapala sought to compare the war between British and the Germans with the 'war' between the Sinhala Buddhists and minorities, which led to "a recycling of pre-existing ethno-religious narratives with a racialized perspective" (Ibid,174). This antipathy towards the minorities and Muslims in particular was also supported by the Sinhala mercantile class, who faced severe competition from the minority communities.[82], and who saw the movement as a useful opportunity to indirectly resist the colonial powers.

It is with this support of the mercantile class that the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists began to agitate against the Muslims which culminated in the first communal riots in 1915.

The 1915 riots
The 1915 riots remain a bit of a paradox within the Muslim community historical narratives. In basic terms it is often portrayed as a Sinhala- Muslim riots. To some, the 1915 riots reflected a change in the attitude of the Sinhalese towards the Muslims especially since during the Portuguese and the Dutch, Muslims had

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[79] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

[80] The irony of the situation being that these Buddhist nationalist movements which arose in opposition to Christianity "borrowed their organizational and prostelysing techniques as well as some of their 'Protestant' attitudes towards work and sex" (Tambiah 1986, 69)

[81] Face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph, October 2015

[82] Jayawardena (1990) details some of the situation in trade in the late 19th century where according to her, the main trade in Colombo was dominated by Muslims and other minorities.

been protected by the Sinhalese (K. Asad 1993). Yet the history is a little bit more detailed than that according to an interviewee:

> *"The 'Sinhala-Muslim' riots of 1915 is often cited as the first sign that Muslims and the Sinhalese did not get along and there have been subsequent riots[83] since then, yet the simple matter is that the origin of this riot was between the so called 'coast' moors (those originating from India) and had nothing to do with the 'Ceylon' Moors. In fact some of the 'Ceylon' Moor community and political leaders initially supported the riots as they also saw this as an opportunity to decrease the influence of the 'coast' moors who they saw as foreigners"[84]*

The immediate cause of the riot was actually a religious controversy that erupted in Kandy between the 'Coast' Moors and the Buddhists, over an annual religious practice which with its loud music and parade was passing by a newly constructed mosque (M. A. Nuhman 2007). With this as the foundation, anti Muslim riots started and spread across most of the island with many Muslim shops being looted and burnt. It lasted for more than two weeks and the Government had to proclaim martial law to suppress the riots. Most of the writing on this incident put the blame on the Coast Moors who were seen as exploiters and plunderers of the poor Sinhalese village(Ibid.) Yet what is interesting though is that it also illustrated an interesting tension for the Muslim community. As an interviewee said:

> *"There was no doubt in the mind of the natives of Ceylon that the Indian 'Coast' Moor was a bird of passage whose main objective was to maximise his economic fortune before leaving back to India. It was this dissatisfaction with his economic exploits of the Sinhalese that was truly the cause of the riots. Yet for the Muslim communities they were split with some leaders supporting the riots as they also saw the coast moors as a threat to them and other leaders wanting to support the Indians because of the common religious bond. As a consequence, the local Muslims came under attack as this was exploited by the Sinhalese merchants supporting the nationalists who saw this as an opportunity to rid their trade competition"[85]*

It is this image of the Muslim trader that still prevails today in the mind of the Sinhalese (Ibid.). Following the riots and response of key Tamil leaders in support of the riots and against the Muslims, it became clear to the Muslim

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[83] In my face to face interview with her in July 2016, Dr Farzana Haniffa mentioned that though 1915, was seen as a big communal riot between the Sinhalese and Muslims, there have been at least 3 others in that time since with the last major one happening in July 2014. (Since that interview another major communal riot / violence took place in February of 2018 during the final writing up of this thesis and also in May 2019 during the final edits of this thesis)
[84] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[85] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

community that they were the 'other' as compared to the other communities and would have to forge a path towards their own identity (M. A. Nuhman 2007)[86].

The 1915 riots were a perfect storm of religious, economic, social and political developments in the island as a result of centuries of colonial encounters. "To interpret the riots of 1915 merely as a reflection of religious tensions is to disregard a number of significant economic, social and political developments, which influenced the course of events" (K. Asad 1993, 67). Despite the Coastal Moors being initially at the forefront of the problems[87], the paradox was that even within the Muslim community there was an intra community rivalry based on trade. However due to the nature of the representation of Muslims as a homogeneous community it was clear that by the end of the riots, the coast Moors were the minority of the victims. Trade was also seen to be one of the key catalysts of the problem as the "Buddhist anti-Muslim campaign was largely sponsored by Buddhist businessmen who were commercial rivals of the Muslims" (Ibid), and thus the riots spread to the wider Muslim community. What it succeeded in doing was to create a series of doubts between the two communities which would prop up from time to time and became prominent in 2014, when another Sinhala-Muslim communal violence erupted. and trade was again seen to be at the forefront of the problem. The 1915 riots convinced the Muslims that they were a separate minority and forced them into "a cocoon mentality" (K. Asad 1993, 89).

Political Representation

Suffice to say that by the British colonial period, the Muslim community (led by the 'leaders' from the elite based mainly in Colombo) were distinct in espousing their 'racial' Semitic identity comparable to the Aryan (Sinhalese), the Dravidian (Tamil) and Burgher (European mixed race) communities in Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2011). This put them on a collision course with the Tamil political elite, who considered the Tamil speaking Muslims as an extension of their own community. In fact a scholarly article written by the leading Tamil statesman in 1888, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, used linguistic and ethnographic evidence to claim that not only were the Moors 'Muslim members of the Tamil race' (Ramanathan 1888), but because they shared a great many cultural and linguistic traits resulting from conversion and intermarriage over the centuries, they should be represented by the Tamil leadership in the communal (racial) system of representation that had been instituted by the British colonial power. This argument however neglected to take into account the Muslims settled amongst the Sinhalese in the West and South (and the subsequent conversions and intermarriage there) and was also subsequently dismissed by Muslim community leaders as an academic excuse for the continued political domination of the

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[86] Something that Prof Ameer Ali in his interview with me, also referenced.
[87] This is also discussed by Asad (1993) who states that though there were some of the Ceylon Moors who were also responsible for initiating the violence against the Sinhalese, there were some who had supported the violence by the Sinhalese against the Coast Moors as the latter were seen as a trade rival by the Ceylon Moors.

Muslim community by the Tamil leadership. For the elite Muslim community leaders at that time, the term 'Moor' put forward by the Portuguese and then adopted by the Dutch and subsequently by the British, was not a mistake but deliberate because the people they encountered in Sri Lanka "a class of people who resembled in religion and other characteristics, the Arabs of Spain" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 128)[88].

At that time, Muslim community leaders' assertion was that Tamil was "not their inherently native language but merely a borrowed one and the language test cannot be applied to them in determining their racial origin or ethnicity" (Ibid, 131). As an interviewee said:

> *"This rejection of linguistic identity of the Muslims is very interesting because it was used to assert a difference based on appearance and of course religion. The assertion for many of the proponents of a 'distinct' identity for the Muslim community was that due to the Portuguese cutting off the ties with the Arabs, the Muslim settlers in Sri Lanka thus came into contact with Muslims of Malabar (South India) and thus Tamil became the vernacular for speaking and also learning about Islam as well as trade with India and so on. What is interesting in this debate though is that there were definitely intermarriages[89] between the Arabs and Sinhalese and also Tamil but Tamil became the medium of language for the Muslim community. So on one hand there is an acceptance of a mixed origin for the Muslims but Muslim historians give more importance to the patrilineal descent since patriarchy is prevalent among the Arabs."[90]*

So in the first instance, there is a determined definition of a separate 'ethnic' identity of the Muslim community which at the outset was linked to religion and culture. As an interviewee said:

> *"When Ramanathan made his speech in 1888, the outrage of the elite Muslims and their political representatives was one of outrage. It is reported that I.L.M Azeez who became the public voice of argument against Ramanathan effectively said 'We can not be called Tamil Muslims. We are of a different colour and stature to the Tamils. Our origin is Moors[91]. Our cultural, dress and social practices are also different. Even though we*

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[88] Nuhman (2007) cites many writings from that time especially of I.L.M Azeez which says that the Portuguese also had been in India before visiting Sri Lanka. There they had encountered Muslims as well but had not given them the name of 'Moors' which was only given to the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

[89] It is interesting that though this was admitted by the Muslim elite in terms of the racial mix of the Moors, there is a gendered nature to the conversation and that only the masculinity of the Arab male descendent was observed and not the femininity of the mother. (Ismail 1995)

[90] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[91] There were a group of people who in the early nineteenth century who rejected the label of Moor seeing this as exclusive and instead opted for a more inclusive label of 'Muslim' identity which allowed them to accommodate other ethnic groups beyond the 'Moors' (Nuhman 2007).

speak Tamil, it is also infused with Arabic'. In saying this, the assertion was quickly made that the Muslim community was different because of the fact that the faith it followed inspired a different social and cultural practice."[92]

Ismail (1995) goes a bit further when he says, that to some extent Azeez followed what the Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists had been saying about their Aryan and Dravidian (respectively) roots, by invoking the direct link to 'Arab blood' as the core of being a Moor. This statement served to represent the Muslim presence in Sri Lanka as "originating from a conscious migration to a place of symbolic importance to all Muslims" (Ibid, 74). In doing so, Azeez set the seeds for this culture of thinking within the Muslim community that somehow they did not belong and had come from outside. This sense of being 'foreign' still pervades much of the community's thinking today as well.

This position by the Muslim community of distinguishing themselves from the Tamils[93], would later be justified in the wake of a blood outbreak of anti-Muslim violence by Sinhalese mobs in 1915 when Ramanathan conspicuously defended the Sinhalese rioters in the Ceylon Supreme court (McGilvray 2011) and made representations to the King of England on behalf of the Sinhalese accusing the Muslim community of causing the riots. This action prompted Muslims to consider Tamil hypocrisy about 'Tamil-speaking' linguistic solidarity (Ameerdeen 2006). It is most likely that this acrimony over the ethnological thesis has been the main source of tension between the two communities prompting Tamil chauvinists, particularly the LTTE, to think of "Muslim disloyalty to the Tamil nationalist cause" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007).

There is also a political context underlying this disagreement with Ramanathan's thesis in the sense of political appointments to the legislative council. The legislative council which was set up by the British between 1833 – 1912, to engage with all ethnicities within Sri Lanka had previously had a representative of the Tamil-speaking community to represent both the Tamils and the Muslims, which was Ramanathan himself. This was later reformed in 1889 when a Muslim nominated representative was included in the council (Ameerdeen 2006), which has led many analysts to claim that Ramanathan's opposition was more of a political gamble in order to retain representation and power for himself (Ibid, Ali 1997, McGilvray 2011).

Ali (1997, 259) states, that by arguing the case that "Muslims had no separate ethnic identity, that they were in Tamils in origin and that their interests could be looked after by Tamils", Ramanathan's claim provoked the Muslim elites of that

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[92] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016.
[93] It is also interesting to note that even in these distinctions between Moors and Tamils, there was also a distinction made between "Ceylon' Moors and 'Coast' Moors, with the latter being identified as coming from South India (and having Tamil connection) but being different to Moors who had already been settled in Ceylon. (Nuhman 2007)

time to establish "the claim that the Muslim community had a separate identity and that they were neither Tamils nor Sinhalese but Moors of Arab origin". McGilvray and Raheem (2007, 10) elaborate this further by stating that "this Moorish racial identity for Sri Lankan Muslims was constructed to emphasise the idea that Muslims were peaceful Arab traders who valued the sanctity of the island whilst ignoring their maternal connections to Tamil wives and mothers and classifying the Moors' Tamil heritage as a borrowed trade language." Ismail (1995, 75) puts it more crudely in describing this when he says "it would appear that Arab men gave birth, by themselves, to the Sri Lankan Muslim social formation". To put it plainly, the claims were to enhance a racial distinction to the Tamils, assert a religious identity whilst also preserving the emergence of the Muslims as a politically conscious minority and also trying to safeguard their socio-political interests and forgetting the reality on the ground.

Needless to say the British administration did not go with Ramanathan's assertions and created a seat for the Muslim representative. Thus by "institutionalising Muslim difference, the British, in a crucial sense, helped 'create' Muslim identity" (Q. M. Ismail 1995, 73). If not create, certainly this acceptance by the British colonial administration provided the Muslim community with agency with which it would grow.

From 1920 onwards there were a series of reforms enacted for representation in the Legislative Council which provided mixed opportunities for Muslim political participation, though the number of Muslim representatives was increased to three. This was then finally changed in 1931 with the formation of a State Council consisting of elected and nominated members participating in the actual processes of decision-making through a legislative body (Ameerdeen 2006). However, one of the failings of the council was the lack of opportunity for minorities especially the Muslims to elect representatives based on their ethnic ration and thus the council was later amended to provide representation on the basis of a certain amount of area. This form of iterating the political representation of the minorities would continue to Independence in 1948 as well as much afterwards, becoming a catalyst for later communal problems (Ibid).

This also caused intra community challenges as from the 1920 onwards, various 'Moor' and 'Malay organisations began to emerge to compete for the political status of being the Muslim voice on the island (K. Asad 1993). These divisions had not been helped by the 1915 riots where for instance, the Malays had not been attacked. The British also ensured that the differences were extenuated when Malays were employed in the police force or in the government clerical service. However, by the end of the 1920s as political reform came in, it was clear that there were bitter differences between the 'Malay's and the 'Moors', which could be exploited.

Islamic Revivalism

The concept of political representation and ethnic nationalism can not be examined without also looking at the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism which occurred during the same time. Largely led by an elite group representing the affluent mercantile class and the emerging middle class mainly centred around Colombo and Kandy, this group drew inspiration from the Turkish, Egyptian and Indian revivalist and political movements of that time (M. Nuhman 2002). As an interviewee said:

> *"The development of the identity and consciousness of the Muslim community was not done in a vacuum. Due to internal political and economic reasons, the elite within the Muslim community were trying to seek another sense of identity and belonging. In part it is this nostalgia of descending from the Arabs and the keenness to seek that transnational link with the Muslim community globally that made the elites look outside of the country. This coincided with an Islamic revivalist movement that was largely in part an anti colonial process that was beginning to occur at the end of the eighteenth century"[94]*

Like their Buddhist and Hindu counterparts that had emerged in an anti colonial and anti Christian wave, the Muslim elite seized on the opportunity to create awareness of a religious ideology which slowly evolved at the end of the 19th century as a religiously oriented ethnic ideology. "Muslim revivalism arose basically to consolidate the elitist interest through creating wider community awareness in response to Sinhala and Tamil revivalist programmes and encouraged by their activities" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 104).

The initial ideological framework for Islamic revival and Muslim ethnicity started with the concept of education. Yet the challenge was the fact that the Muslim community was not willing to enter the modern education system introduced in the 19th century due to a number of reasons including the fear of Christianisation (Ibid.) and the fear that education "could contribute materially little towards the improvement of the situation of the Muslims" (Ibid, 108). In other words, there was an element of the Muslim elite, who cultivated the notion that Muslims were traders having inherited that from the Arabs and that this should be preserved. However, this was far from reality as a few interviewees said:

> *"The Muslim elite during the 18th and 19th century in Sri Lanka it was true had ascended to their social position due to trade and the influence that this brought. We have to understand that this did not represent the reality of the Muslim community on the ground especially for a large portion of the Muslim community in the north and east of the country who were employed in agriculture"[95]*

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[94] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[95] Ibid

> *"We almost have a false premise in how the Muslim identity and its formation was fashioned. In claiming the trading identity, the elites of the Muslim community did a disservice to those who were not employed in the commerce sector and thereby had a different outlook. In particular we can see the ramifications of this when education became a key issue in the 1960s and how this was dealt with in the community"[96]*

Qadri Ismail (1995, 63) refers to this distinction when he describes Muslims not as an ethnic group or community but as a 'social formation', which are "not stable entities but sites of struggle over which (interest) groups would achieve hegemony over the formation and thus determine the nature of its (dominant) identity". In this case, Ismail points out that social formations refer to fissures and cracks and are sites of unceasing struggle and to interrogate class, gender and other interests involved. It is in this regard that Ismail represents the Muslim social formation as consisting of two 'distinct' groups, Southern and Eastern Muslims[97]. It is the former that Ismail argues was the dominant and hegemonic community, with the elite (of middle and upper class Southern Muslim men), representing the entire formation in its own image as a peaceful trading community of Arab origin and being an 'other' to the other communities.

The catalyst of this change would come in 1883, when the British colonial power exiled Arabi Pasha from Egypt to Sri Lanka, bringing with him a new insight into a transnational Muslim identity and an intellectual boost to a Muslim identity. As an interviewee said:

> *"The arrival of Pasha was well received particularly by the elites of the community. In the midst of this struggle against religious revivalist movements from the Buddhist and Hindus, and trying to navigate their own identity, Pasha gave the local Muslims a sense of agency and representation"[98]*

Pasha arrived at what was the culmination of a 'perfect storm' for the Muslim community. With an anti colonial movement growing around religious revival, the elites within the Muslim community were also looking to emulate a religious consciousness (Q. M. Ismail 1995).

The Islamic revivalism had been an effort to unite the Muslims spiritually and culturally based on Islamic principles but also to give them a sense of identity and purpose. With the arrival of Pasha who stayed in the island for nearly two decades, there was an intellectual inspiration for the Muslims which led to the

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[96] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[97] In this case, Southern refers to the Muslims of the seven Sinhala dominated provinces who form roughly two-thirds of the Muslim population of Sri Lanka and Eastern refers to those of the Eastern province (Ismail 1995)
[98] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

revival of Arab/Muslimness[99] as well as a push for political activism, and five years after, the Muslims made their first public claims in 1888/1889 about their distinct identity and Arab origin in response to Ramanathan's claims and to stake an independent claim on the legislative council.

Pasha himself was interested in English education, seeing this as necessary for the development of the community and also recognising the paucity of modern educational provision for Muslims in Sri Lanka (K. Asad 1993). Coinciding with the establishment of the Aligarh university, as the first Muslim higher level educational institution in India, as well as engagement with notable Indian Muslim scholars such as Sir Seyed Ahmed Khan, this gave the impetus for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka to start thinking seriously about education. By 1891, the Muslim educational society was established and a new school opened in Colombo in 1892 (M. A. Nuhman 2007).

The irony of Pasha's influence though is not lost on Sri Lanka, despite being responsible for the Islamic revival. Pasha's exile from Egypt came about because of his concept of patriotism and his thinking that 'Egypt for the Egyptians' (K. Asad 1993). So to some extent he also propagated love for the mother country and striving for freedom from foreign dominance. "He also propagated the idea that Sri Lanka should ultimately be administered by Sri Lankans" (Ibid, 50), which coincided with the rise of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist elements. Many of the Sinhala elites who were ultimately attracted to supporting these nationalist movements would have also come into contact with Pasha (*Ibid*), so it is an irony that if Arabi Pasha was a source of their inspiration, these nationalist elements would be later involved in the 1915 communal violence between the Sinhalese and the Muslims. There is also a lost lesson for the Muslim community as an interviewee said:

> *"Although, Pasha thought in the context of an Islamic revival as well as for local communities to think of themselves with pride and though education prepare for the modernisation of their societies, he was also a nationalist and very patriotic. Somehow this part was lost on the Muslim community who used the Islamic revival to bolster their chances of identity and recognition but at the expense of the 'other' and the nation. Perhaps this says something more about the state of play in Sri Lanka"[100]*

3.4 Conclusion

It has been shown in this chapter that it is important to explore the Muslim identity formation as part of a wider exploration of the identity dynamics happening in Sri Lanka, which is a complex formation and mobilisation process. On the one hand, it can be seen that identity formation in Sri Lanka was largely an elite-centric,

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[99] For example, male members of the elite began to publicly wear the Fez cap to identify their difference (Ismail 1995)
[100] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

second-order phenomena reproduced by ruling elites to secure governmental office, socio-political mobilisation and legitimacy. In this sense Rampton (2016) explores the reproduction of nationalism in Sri Lanka as an elite ideological project through which Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was created and stoked by political leaders to gain or remain in power. This is something that Bush (2003) takes further in analysing the ascendancy of Sinhala nationalism as primarily a result of intra-group "ethnic outbidding" dynamics led by "ethnic entrepreneurs". DeVotta (2004, 1-2) ascribes such an ascendancy to "linguistic nationalism as the functional 'mechanism' that Sinhalese elites used to achieve their preferences, resulting in profound institutional decay and ethnicisation. Thus Sinhala nationalism is largely as construed an elite-led ideology for legitimation and, alongside patron-clientelism, for the mobilisation of intra-group political alliances (and as a consequence is replicated with other communities).

On the other hand, there is also a historical nature of the consolidation of nationalist identities in Sri Lanka, stressing in constructivist fashion, the role of colonial authorities and postcolonial elites in the social construction utilization and political domination of identity (e.g. Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Jeganathan and Ismail 1995). Key to this emergence is the manner, in which colonial rule instrumentalising local nationalist mobilisation, transformed the logic of politics and identity, mapping potent governmental dynamics onto pre-existing communities with very different pre-colonial and early colonial logics of interaction. In this context precolonial Sri Lanka, had long traditions of dhammaraja (righteous Buddhist rule), grounded in a symbiosis between Theravada Buddhism and the rulers of the day, in which the latter patronized and protected Buddhism, whilst the Buddhist sangha legitimated their rule and sanctioned rulers with merit. Yet, despite this strong symbiosis, the relationship between statehood, population and identity remained extremely fluid in the precolonial and early colonial periods (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). This produced socio-political patterns, in which there were multiple, overlapping linguistic, social, religious and ethnic communities and tributary centres of power revolved around a central hub and in which there was little demand for congruence between the polity and ethnic, linguistic or religious identity (Feith 2010; Bush 2003: Bandarage 2009: Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Tambiah 1986).

Colonialism, in particular British colonialism, disrupted and transformed this state of being in a number of often contradictory, tension-ridden ways. First and foremost, colonialism sought to tame, isolate and ultimately displace the power of ethnicity, religion and patronage as a long-term project towards the governmental production of a 'liberal-secular-civic' population within a unified territorially integrated state. In both contexts, this signified the disassociation of state rule and administration from Buddhism and the seeking to replace ethnic law and custom within society with liberal practice. Yet there was an inherent contradiction as the colonial state also allowed certain communities to maintain their ethnic law and customs whilst also mapping, operating through and

ultimately rigidifying the ethnic and religious divisions they encountered in both societies, including their reproduction in administration, political representation and legislation (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Thus the emergence and the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity was really helped by this process.

Hence, it could be seen that Hutchinson's (2005) argument of ethno symbolist 'continuity' holds true. Local, regional, cultural traditions that existed prior to the British were simply opportunistically institutionalised by them. In other words, the differences that emerged during the British colonial period and that were exacerbated after independence had existed before and were simply given new life and agency by the British, thereby ensuring that identity formation in Sri Lanka was not just an elite discursive hegemony that is the cause for identity politics in the country but something that was 'demand' led. However, based on the interview evidence as well as the research, it doesn't point to this linear hypothesis as such. Though there were these differences within communities based on cultural, religious, socio-economic as pointed out by several authors (Bush 2003: Bandarage 2009: Nissan and Stirrat 1990), it simply had not the formation and thinking strictly set after British colonialism. There is no doubt that the differences as set out by Hutchinson (2005) existed after colonialism and were instrumentalised but it is not necessarily as simple as that. It is a combination of colonial power/knowledge structures and local social agency that resulted in a nationalist mobilisation that revolved around a Buddhist core rather than a wider and more inclusive reimagining and forging of social and political order on an all country scale and a response by the minority communities that mirrored that but existed in parallel. Thus in pre-Independence Sri Lanka, an elite-level consensus acceding to colonial reformism, constrained the hegemonising thrust of anti-colonial movement which was largely Buddhist nationalism, limiting these forms of mobilisation to cultural and educational regeneration, labour strikes (with ethnicised dynamics) and sporadic events like the anti-Muslim riots of 1915 (Jayawardena 1990; Rogers 1990).

In this sense Hutchinson's (2005) premodernist stance and ethnosymbolist stance seem to be at the same time validated showing that there is a mixture of ethno-symbolist continuity and a constructivist interpretation with elite led discursive hegemony and social-demand, making a complex mix of mobilisation and ideational development, a hybrid. The emergence of the identities is thus a result of multiple phenomenona and is complex not easily realistically attributed to one theory or another.

Hence the Sri Lankan Muslim identity was and is a reactive politico-cultural identity that was constructed as a response to late colonial Sri Lankan politics. It was largely 'constructed', evolved and transformed in response to the Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalism that emerged as a result of anti colonial movements largely from the late 19th century. In this constructed identity, it became instrumentalised by primordial conceptions. In other words, looking at some of

the available narratives around the Sri Lankan Muslim history, one sees a primordial conception alluding to this direct link with Arabs that preyed on ethno-symbolist continuity (Hutchinson 2005) but failed to understand the context of that time of political and social mobilisation by the elites and the colonial practice. In some cases, it could be argued that this type of conception in actual fact sees colonialism as a good thing because of a little 'agency' it was given rather than a bad thing.

Yet the irony is that the very political unity that the Muslims sought in 1889 and for the next decade would also forge an opportunity for the germination of ethnic, social, regional and ideological divisions for the country. Ultimately this would set the scene for how the Muslim community would evolve over the next century.

The construction of an ethnic identity embedded within a religious framework poses several challenges for the community. Despite its heterogeneity of an ethnic identity, the growing homogenizing tendency based on a religious outlook means that the overarching Muslim identity has evolved within this diversity. It is this tension due to prevailing socio-political conditions of conflict that the other chapters will explore and see what the transformation has been and where we are in the current context.

It is also important to note the overall country and transnational context in the early 20th century as Sri Lanka moved towards independence in the wake of independence movements in the Sub Continent. These contexts have as much to do with the pervading discussions around identity and representation as the critical junctures of that time.

Chapter 4: Institutionalising Identity (1948 – 1983)

"The entrenchment of the Sri Lankan Muslim community can not be confined just to one period but has to be evaluated over a significant period to understand its influences and how it was influenced"[101]

4.1 Introduction

Despite Sri Lanka's 'conspicuously un-traumatic' transition (as compared with the decolonisation experience of India) from colony to independent state (Bush 2003), by the time independence was declared, the pre -Independence tensions would corrupt the next 30 years or so for the country. Post-independence euphoria would quickly be turned to despair and a loss of hope as the burden of historical memories for the restoration of a pre-colonial past played a role in forging ethnic problems. As an interviewee said:

"The independence from the British colonial period was relatively painless compared to the Partition of India. Power was simply 'handed' over, yet even in this case, with that simple transition, there was a challenge that would manifest itself later on. Part of this problem was that the transition did not take into account the dimensions of the ethnic conversations taking place in the years from the beginning of the 19th century to independence"[102]

The climate of the pre-independence years where, "ethnicity seemed to provide the strongest and most reliable base for political action" (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011, 221) for Sri Lankan nationalists as well as the mistrust of Tamil leadership by Muslim leaders did not improve after the independence of the country in 1948. Post colonial nation building was seen as completing what the majority community had initiated from the end of the nineteenth century in terms of pushing for greater representation and an exclusivist nationalist ideology (J. L. Fernando 2008). From independence onwards, it was clear that the Sri Lankan polity of the day made up largely of the Sinhala Elite, was determined to stamp its hegemonic authority, from the cultural symbolism of the national flag, to the formation of new cities, to the suppression of the growing left movement and rising Tamil national consciousness as well as abolishing citizenship rights of the Indian origin plantation workers[103](Ibid).

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[101] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[102] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015
[103] This act was seen in two fold: 1) to impose Sinhala hegemony in the Tamil areas and 2) avoid a landless peasant revolt against the land-owning Sinhala political leadership (Fernando 2008)

4.1.1 Disenfranchisement

The first seeds of such ethnic tensions took place within a year of independence which was seen as a "puzzle" (Bush 2003, 76) with the rendering of the majority of Plantation Tamils as both "stateless" and "vote-less". Sinhala nationalism which had taken shape in the nineteenth century as a counter-colonial movement that used Buddhist identity to mobilise popular support against Christian missionaries (and unofficial state patronage for Christianity) and later British capitalist interests, especially regarding Indian immigrants who came to work on the plantations (Moore 1989), was to be exploited even more.

In the years preceding Independence, future Prime Ministers like leaders like S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and D.S. Senanayake of the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) would argue that the Indian immigrants were pampered by the colonial rulers (International Crisis Group 2007). This was a problem that had started from 1928, made worse by the depression of the late 1920s and 1930s when the Indian Tamils were presented as competitors in a tight labour market. Despite negotiations between governments of pre Independence India and Sri Lanka, from about 1939, Sri Lanka went into independence with the thorny issue of the Indian franchise not only unresolved but with no negotiations on the horizon (De Silva 1998). Thus one of the first acts of the new government was to disenfranchise[104] 800,000 estate (or Indian) Tamils, with the arguments being used that "they did not really belong to Sri Lanka, where they were only temporary residents, but belonged instead to India" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 34). The legislation passed was the Citizenship Act (No.18) in August 1948 which stipulated that citizenship was determined by descent or registration[105], thus implying that "Citizenship was tied not to one's birth in the country but to the birth of one's ancestors" (Bush 2003, 76). There was also fear that through the Indian minority, there would be undue Indian influence in the affairs of Sri Lanka once independence was obtained (De Silva 1998)[106]. Despite a second act[107] being passed in 1949 for those Indian residents who wished to become citizens of Sri Lanka, it was clear that what was at stake was the number of people who could claim the status of citizenship by descent. In hindsight it is quite telling in the sense of how the Citizenship Act was enacted about the intent of the new government and the influence of Sinhala nationalists and more importantly the role of the minorities in getting this passed. As an interviewee said*:*

> *"The Citizenship Act should have set off warning signals to the minorities because despite it being aimed at the Indian communities, the*

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[104] The disenfranchisement was made worse by the Soulbury Commission report of 1945 which came up on the side of Sri Lanka polity and in fact found fault with the Indian community in Sri Lanka for claiming a position of privilege (De Silva 1998)

[105] The condition of registration included proof of three generations of paternal ancestry in Sri Lanka (Bush 2003)

[106] It was seen that the government of India had unduly placed influence on representatives of the Indian community to vote against the acceptance of Britain's offer for a passage to semi-independence status in 1945 (*Ibid.*)

[107] The Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act (No 3 of 1949) (Bush 2003)

ramifications were wider for the minorities in how ancestry and relationship to the country was determined. In effect, the Act really was to control the demography of the minorities. Ultimately the Sinhala nationalists who had played a part in the transition from independence were worried about the 'numbers' of the minorities and how this 'numbers' game would play out in terms of representations. By the Citizenship Act, you effectively controlled this. The tragedy though is that this was not just the Sinhala nationalists who pushed for this but it was a collective effort from all communities who saw the Indian minority as foreign and therefore a threat"[108]

Whilst it was a case of 'simple' electoral politics[109] in terms of demographic changes to manipulate the electoral balance of ethnic sub groups to enhance the relative strength of the Sinhalese electorate (Bush 2003), what is interesting is that the native Tamils, like the Sinhalese, saw these estate Tamils as foreigners, different from themselves and did little to fight against their disenfranchisement (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). This was reinforced strongly by the formation of a government of national unity in August 1948, when the Ceylon Tamil Congress entered a ruling coalition with the Prime Minister, despite the universal franchise leaving the minorities in a vulnerable position (Bush 2003). In addition, there was also support from the Muslim community with one prominent Muslim leader of that time saying "We the Ceylon Moors have suffered most in the past for want of a Citizenship Bill….Any one in this chamber who opposes this Bill is really a traitor to the citizens of Lanka" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 30-31). In talking about Ceylon Moors, the politician was referring to the Indian Muslims who were viewed as competitors by the trading class of the Ceylon Moors, and thus there was an interest to get rid of them by denying their citizenship rights (Ibid.). As an interviewee said:

> *"This episode illustrates the tactical and political maneuvering by Jaffna Tamil politicians to mobilize political resources for future use in the parliamentary arena. This is classical sub-group self-interest where the inter-group collaboration in the disenfranchisement of the Plantation Tamils was also facilitated by the shared socialization process of the Jaffna Tamil and Sinhalese political elites[110]. However, what is also interesting in this was the fact that the Muslims also supported this move. So in a paradox situation, despite the dangers that the demographic moves should have signalled to the minorities about the intentions of the Sinhalese, the minorities were also behind this"[111]*

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[108] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

[109] The introduction of the universal franchise had a direct impact on the Indian Tamil community empowering them (at a time when they even outnumbered the Sri Lankan Tamil population) such that between the enactment of the 1948 and 1949 citizenship and voting rights legislation, Indian Tamils had 7 members in parliament which was reduced to none after the disenfranchisement (Edirippulige 2004)

[110] This could also lead to other conclusions that the axis of identity affecting voting behavior in the years following independence was class rather than ethnicity (Jayawardena 1990). We will see this later on also being played out in the Sinhalese community and its political elites

[111] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

The fact that the minorities were also complicit in this is not only of interest but it illustrates really the status and nature of the politics and minority relations in the country. Despite facing challenges in terms of representations by the minorities, they chose to act on a piece of legislation that would cause distress to another minority group. In other words, the minorities chose a piece of legislation that ultimately benefited the political leadership of the majority because it controlled the demography of the minorities, simply because it would disadvantage a certain section of the intra minority grouping to the advantage of the others.

Thus even from the outset of Independence the quest for ethnicity, representation and nationalism was selective. It therefore paints a cynical picture about ethnic representation and politics in Sri Lanka in the sense that the argument never was truly about minority rights but more about rights for the elitist representation of a particular ethnic group regardless of how other groups fared. This type of ethnic selfishness is characteristic of how ethnic relations have fared in Sri Lanka, clearly based on the interests of the ruling elite. So there is an element of class and racism, that groups were willing to sacrifice the landless and those who were of the same faith but different ethnicity, purely to push the agenda of the political leadership. For me in particular when one analyses the Muslim community and its role in this affair, I am intrigued by the mere fact that a group that was fighting for political recognition and right could afford to deny another group (in a similar situation) the same rights. Thus the challenge of political representation as well as institutionalization for the Muslim community for example becomes tainted with this legacy. Yet blame can't just be laid at the feet of the political representatives of the minorities, the system of governance inherited which would cause minorities to act the way they did also has to be examined.

4.1.2 Democratic Models

The situation was made more complicated as a system of parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model (of first past the post), came into operation. Between 1948 and 1956, the government appeared just to be continuing the policies developed under colonial rule (Nissan and Stirrat 1990), using English as the official language with parliament being controlled by western-educated, western-orientated members of the élite[112]. The rule was not only Anglicized but Anglo centric with the manners, symbols and styles of the colonial era persisting inside and outside of parliament (Bush 2003). Instead of a comprehensive and justifiable Bill of Rights (which could have allayed the fears of minorities with regards their position in post independent Sri Lanka), a provision based on section 5 of the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 prohibiting legislation infringing on religious freedom or discriminating against persons of any

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[112] This was the same for both Sinhalese and Tamil elites who shared a common socialization process which included attendance at elite English-medium schools in Sri Lanka and prestigious British universities. This experience bridged cultural diversities, developing intimate friendships, public purpose and a substantial common view of life. (Bush 2003)

commodity or religion, was adopted to the Westminster constitutional model [113] (De Silva 1998).

The consequences of this has been a "centralised system of government in which there was no formal protection of minority rights and in which the state dispensed goods and services on the basis of political expediency to build up electoral constituencies has led to the communalization of parliamentary politics" (Bush 2003, 83). Thus the aspect of the minority elite appearing to support the majority political leadership in political decisions (that would harm the community itself in the long run) for short term gains. As an interviewee said

> *"With this communalization of parliamentary politics, it was left to the minorities to 'fend' for themselves often driven by the political elites within those communities. As such you had a scenario as you had in the late nineteenth century where minorities only cared as to what their position was and how influential they became. You had the Muslims on one side calling for representation because they didn't want to be considered as part of the Tamil community and effectively trying to appease the rulers of the day in order to gain favour."[114]*

In post 1949, the Federal Party (led by Tamil elites[115] from the northern province of Jaffna), took up the cause of Tamils[116] as well as Tamil speaking people, a passing reference to the inclusion of Muslims. Ali (1997) states that tensions quickly developed though as there emerged 'ideological inconsistencies' from the party in terms of its public proclamations of a federal political structure and its private (to its Tamil constituents) proclamations of a Tamil state, which for many Muslims did not include them. Imtiyaz and Hoole (2011) further assert that these tensions were aggravated with the issues of 'religion, caste and purity of status' which became prime symbols of identity for Tamils, arguing that from 1952 the "Hindu resurgence in Tamil politics made it more difficult for all those groups on the periphery of Tamil – speaking society to identify themselves fully as Tamil" (Ibid, 221). This ideological inconsistency of the party as well as a parochial attitude from its leadership meant that the Muslim community never gained the full confidence that they would be treated as equal partners in minority politics

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[113] Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution, independent Ceylon's first, states: "No law shall make a person or any Community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable. No law shall confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions. Any law made in contravention of sub section (2) shall to the extent of such contravention be void". This only restricted parliament from enacting discriminatory laws but gave no protection against discriminatory practices (International Crisis Group 2007)

[114] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

[115] This was formed by Two Tamil MPs who resigned from the Tamil Congress in protest at the 1949 Citizenship Act (Bush 2003)

[116] Bush (2003) explains how despite this, the Federal party had limited success articulating Plantation Tamils interests namely because of the lack of political homogeneity and solidarity among Tamil sub-groups and the self-interest taken for political gain, in other words the Ceylon Tamil Congress backed the legislation against Indian Tamils for long term self-protection and/or benefit. It is this tactical inter-group communalist game played by Tamil politicians that would eventually contribute to the ethnicisation of the political system.

especially in the party's public articulations and gestures (Ibid.). This lack of confidence would not only eventually trickle down to the level of the Muslim masses (A. Ali 1997); it would remain historically ingrained between the two communities.

Once again there is a repeat of the situation of 1898 with Ramanathan, where the Tamils tried to 'include' the Muslims because of the similarity in language spoken, only for the Muslims to reject this label. It was clear that in the run up to independence that the Muslims, despite their internal differences, kept to the side of the Sinhalese leaders whilst disagreeing about the Tamils (K. Asad 1993). This concept of 'accommodating' politics whereby sides were kept with the Sinhalese politicians would become the singular trait of the Muslim politicians over the years as it was seen to be the only way to obtain opportunities and privileges for the community whilst 'supporting' the party of the day in power which was the majority community. As an interviewee said

> *"The run up to independence and just afterwards really shows a deliberate strategy employed by the Muslim political elites at that time. In effect it was a strategy of survival to join the Sinhalese and effectively support the latter in whatever political action that was taken provided that their (i.e. the Muslim community) demands were met which largely centred around freedom to educate their children in the way they wanted, to practise their religion wherever they lived and to earn their living through their own enterprise and effort. Of course the caveat of this representation and expectations of 'what the community wanted' is situated around the fact that those speaking for the Muslims were the political elite from Colombo who often remained disconnected from the rural masses especially those communities in the north and south"[117]*

The earliest signs of this would come even before independence when Muslim politicians were divided on how to approach the introduction of a motion at State Council to make Sinhalese the national language of Sri Lanka (K. Asad 1993). This division is symptomatic of the diversity of thought within the Muslim community as to how to represent the community and what the national interests are and thus there "was no consensus whether the community should merge into the tradition of the larger Sri Lankan society or maintain its separate identity by adoption of its own cultural and religious symbols" (Ameerdeen 2006, 73). Hence to many of the Muslim politicians, the concept was clear that they would back the Sinhala led national government provided that they were able to leverage that for the community benefit (Ibid). However, this incident is also symbolic of the concept of the accommodating politics that has been seen by many in a negative light because it pointed to a sense that the Muslim politicians were only engaged on issues when it suited them and the community. This would become apparent especially in the years post independence with one of the more prominent Muslim political leaders called Sir Razeek Fareed, who has also been nicknamed the

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[117] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

"somersault leader" (K. Asad 1993, 103), mainly because he spent most of his political life moving between the two main political parties during its time in government to such an extent that it was said of him "Governments may come and Governments may go, but Sir Razik Fareed goes on forever" (Ibid, 104). Further it appeared that the "Muslim politicians who got elected became classic examples of turncoats and opportunists" (Ameerdeen 2006, 73), thereby losing credibility with other communities and as we are to see within their own community as well. As an interviewee said

> *"The most common criticism that is levelled against Muslim politicians which seems to have historical significance is their fickle nature. They only seemed to back the government on issues of interest to them when it suited them with a condition of trying the get something back for the community. This is also evident from the fact that despite different parties coming to power, you will often find the same Muslim minister there fighting for 'the community'. So at one stage you ask the question, are the Muslims interested in principled national politics or politics that favour their community? Yet what is also an interesting twist is that especially in the past decades, these Muslim politicians are also being questioned by their own constituency[118] who are of the belief that they are 'selfish' and are not even concerned about the fate of the community"[119]*

This position of 'accommodation' in terms of the political strategy adopted by the political representatives of the Muslim community who were made up of the elites (largely from the south) with regards political patronage at the receipt of benefits was and has been tested in the aftermath of independence and especially with the rise once again of extreme Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in a post 2009 context. In hindsight, it is important to analyse whether the political strategy adopted by the political elite of the Muslim community in the wake of this rise, to preserve its own identity and for self protection, would be a future detriment for the community because it didn't work in the larger interests of the country. In some sense it was not a single vision and strategy that was developed but it grew organically as a result of the interests of the Muslim political elite largely from one part of the country. As an interviewee of a focus group said

> *"It is really fascinating to see that the minority politicians, particularly the Muslims, did not foresee that what happened to the Indian Tamils right after independence could happen to them. Somehow they were blinded into thinking that the Sinhalese nationalists would not mete out the same treatment to them. This naivety has somewhat come to bite them. It has been clear that there has been a misunderstanding of how deep and rooted the concept of the Buddhist nationalism within Sri Lanka"[120]*

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[118] We see this particularly when it is related to the incidents post 2009 with the conclusion of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the rise of Sinhala – Muslim tensions once again, where you had a belief that the Government of the day was behind these tensions and despite there being Muslim parliamentarians within the Government, it was felt that they were largely not influential in preventing the violence or looking at post violence justice. This disillusionment will be discussed in further chapters.

[119] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[120] Key Informant from Focus Group Discussion with Muslim professionals in May 2016

4.2 Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism Re-ignited

The concept of a Muslim identity and consciousness was given agency simply in opposition to the ethnic discourse and political formation of the other main ethnic communities on the island. Thus in understanding the journey of Muslim identity discourse in the period post independence, it is important to also explore what happened with the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist discourse after independence. Tambiah (1986, 74) describes "Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as the 'gospel' of excluding Tamils from competition". As an interviewee said

> *"We can't underscore enough the fact that the catalyst for the Sinhala Buddhist movement was the Christian influence which was seen to be supported by the British and which seemed to favour the Tamils who were seen to be educated in Christian schools and thus were at an advantage with regards resource acquisition. Hence even the discussions around independence was largely driven in this mindset and it was driven by people who had been influenced by Buddhist monks at least on the Sinhalese side"[121]*

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse as a primordial understanding of nationhood rose in opposition to the colonial influence with a perception that the Tamil community in particular was favoured by the British because they were educated in Christian schools and spoke English. Consequently, there were more Tamils in the Colonial civil service than other communities which led to the Sinhalese distrust and opposition. Though the Tamils in particular were seen as continuing the legacy of the British and being impediments to a righteous society in which Buddhism was the state religion and Sinhala the official language (Grant 2009), the Muslims were generally seen as traders also 'benefitting' from the Colonial rule. Thus in the wake of lack of and poor employment and education, minorities on the whole became a scapegoat for the social deprivation faced by the Sinhalese. Fernando (2008) highlights the fact that the political and economic conditions of the British Raj were also instrumental in providing a space for the Sinhalese to inherit power and ultimately a platform for the nationalists to spring from. The economic strand was largely based on the philosophy of utilitarianism which proposed that all the colonies should have the benefits of British liberalism characterised by democracy and individual liberty (Wickramasinghe 2006) and a shift in the belief of a British Moral State (Fernando 2008). "In practice, this meant removal of any type of state monopoly over the economy with the aim of the maximisation of profits" (*Ibid*, 147) and meant the liberalisation of the economy with a view to the maximisation of production. Whilst this changed the system of land ownership, creating a new social strata, the liberalisation of the economy allowed a new movement of labour, mainly from South India were brought in to work the new plantations, as the Sinhalese rice-farming peasants were unwilling to turn to wage labour (Tambiah, 1986). In this sense the Sri Lankan colonial economy was based on British capital, its land, Indian labour and an elite Sinhalese land ownership. Yet as the plantation economy gave rise to a new

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[121] Face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer, October 2015

native bourgeoisie class – who were predominantely Low-country Sinhalese- the tension in the social space increased. "Their need for further economic expansion was curtailed mainly by Muslim and South Indian traders: their hopes for social and political recognition were blocked by local aristocracy who were closer to the colonial government" (Fernando 2008, 163). Thus the only way to break through this was through a 'cultural resistance' as part of a "cultural recycling" (*Ibid*, 152) of a pre-existing ethno-symbolic system and cultural tensions between native traditions and Christianity which surfaced as a Buddhist revival and which was sponsored by this new class (Jayawardena 2003). The bulk of this new class also formed the main material basis of the emerging Sinhala polity. The most critical development in the Buddhist resurgence was a closing of the ranks, a growing solidarity and an advocacy of the return of Buddhist monks to prominence in the life of the society and the state (Tambiah 1986).

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement rise also coincided with the 'independence' movements of the Sub Continent. The privileged position of the Sinhalese post independence was not by accident but was associated with the construction of the unitary political structure in the island by the British, separating it from the rest of the Indian sub continent in light of its startegic location as was explained in Chapter 3. The Donoughmore Constitution of the 1930s and 1940s which brought about representation in the Legislative Council on the basis of territorial and demographic criteria became the dominant electoral principle. Territorial representation and universal suffrage (in 1931) gave the advantage to the Sinhala community in relation to the minorities (Tambiah 1986). Thus the situation emerged that the "Sinhalese who happen to be religiously different from the rest of the others were a 'minority' in the sub continent, but the 'majority' in the island, who were made to believe that they own the island as opposed to the Tamils who were a 'minority' in the island, but constituted a 'majority' in relation to Tamil Nadu" (Fernando 2008, 107) and the elections of 1931 helped to signify that stance (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990). Hence there was a perfect storm where those activists who originally had been inspired by the nationalist movement found themselves transitioning into a loosely associated element of the 'traditional' English-educated elite who had common backgrounds that the British transferred power at independence (Tambiah 1986), as a fixed notion of identities began to form and inform the making of the Sri Lankan unitary 'nation'-state post independence. This was especially as on the eve of independence the Soulbury Constitution had confirmed the primacy of territorial and demographic criteria for electoral representation and had rejected 'ethnic' minority pleas for special representation (*Ibid*). As an interviewee said

> *"There was no formal movement for independence such as you had in India where different ethnic communities had come together with the sole purpose of taking on the colonial master. Instead you almost had an 'accidental' grouping together of a disparate band of members each fighting their own ethnic nationalist corner for representation during the colonial period, being 'forced' to now come together as a result of the*

colonial movement. As such there was perhaps no 'plan' or strategy for what next"[122]

Hence those that were at the forefront at independence were those who had emerged from agitating with the colonial powers for 'ethnic' representation during the colonial period and more importantly had been agitating for what they perceived as favourable treatment of one ethnic group over the other. It wasn't helped as well by the fact that at "independence, the constitution of Sri Lanka was based on the 1944 Soulbury Commission report which had deliberately avoided the contentious issue of defining the criteria for citizenship" (De Silva 1986, 145-149). As an interviewee said

> *"By skirting the issue of citizenship, Britain sidestepped this messy political issue in the concluding years of its rule. However, despite the fact that the initial transition into independence was noteworthy for Sri Lanka, given the fact that many of those protagonists who were in power after 1948 were those who had been active in ethnic nationalist movements pre independence, it was clear that it was only a matter of time before the concept of ethnic nationalism and what constitutes citizenship would become a political agenda. Inevitably the 'Citizenship Act' of 1948 which was supported by all groups disenfranchising the Indians was the first sign of the Sinhalese ethnic chauvinism that would come to rear its ugly head time and time again"*[123]

The situation was compounded in the first few years post independence as the transfer of power was made from the British to a group of politicians who were deemed the 'traditional' English elite. On the surface, it seemed that the model was a good one, where this group (seemingly made up of all ethnicities) would take up power and forge a nation for everyone. However in this constructive developments, there were also destructive developments that laid the seed for momentous social and political shifts, from the universal franchise, territorial electorates and majority politics which worked against the interests of the minorities, to the erosion of traditional bases of leadership and power (S. J. Tambiah 1986). The latter in particular produced deep divisions within the Sinhalese society itself and was largely caused in the early stages of the post independence by the retention of English – the language of elites and the colonial regime– as in effect the state language which had the net result of thereby excluding most of the population from active involvement in public affairs. As an interviewee said

> *"It was clear that the early years of post independence Sri Lanka did not really bring about drastic changes as such. To many it was simply a transfer of power from the British to their representatives, the so called 'Brown Sahibs', who were intent on keeping the status quo. Although in hindsight, we know that this was not necessarily the case"*[124]

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[122] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[123] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015
[124] *Ibid.*

Another catalyst for the division and exclusion was that the new post independence administration had also proposed a new constitution which had as an integral feature, an emphasis on secularism, defined in terms of the limits to the power of the state in religious affairs. The first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka after independence whilst recognizing the state's special obligation to Buddhism emphasized the official policy of neutrality in religious affairs, drawing a distinction between "a government of Buddhists and a Buddhist government" (De Silva 1998, 81). He "always saw the pluralism of the Sri Lanka polity as a source of strength not weakness and identified the establishment of a sense of Sri Lankan nationalism through a resolute subordination of ethnic and religious identities as one of the principle and most urgent concerns of any transfer of power political settlement." (Ibid. 22) Thus it is to his credit that "during his time as Prime Minister, there was little evidence of the upsurge of religious fervor and linguistic nationalism that burst to the surface in the mid-1950s" (Ibid, 84)[125]. However, this was not understood by the masses who did not connect with the elite leadership in terms of language spoken as well as the practice of faith. The lack of political will amongst politicians to move away from Anglicised forms of government and social relations did not also help matters (Bush 2003).[126]

Consequently, between the ruling elite and the electoral masses a gap developed. In addition, there was little economic progress with little opportunities for employment. The gap increased between the rich and the poor and the mistrust between the elite and the grass roots would also escalate mistrust between communities[127]. The reason for this is that the ruling élite classified as the Colombo-based, English-speaking, westernized class from which the MPs and the top bureaucrats came were perceived to be favouring the minorities at the expense of the 'rural élite' or an 'indigenous élite' (Ibid.) traditionally known as the Sinhala-speaking, non-westernized class of the village teachers, small-time traders, Ayurvedic (traditional medicine) physicians, monks and students. With the inclusion of this group in the mainstream political process, the potential power of communal politics was not only realized but used to full advantage by the Sinhala political elite

It was in the latter group that Angarika Dharmapala's rhetoric of Buddhist Nationalism would also find resurgent support. For them, Dharmapala's 'dreams' provided a promise of power and status, as Independence had meant little more

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[125] Sadly, his untimely death in 1952 meant that he was unable to see this vision through and his immediate successors courted the Sinhala Buddhist element for electoral gains. In the process, the political validity of a Sri Lankan nationalism based on pluralism and the secularity of the polity was swapped for one based on a perception of pre-colonial Sri Lanka.
[126] Requests by Buddhist monks for greater state support for the Sinhala language and Buddhism, lest the Sinhalese race be destroyed were often treated with ridicule (Manor 1989 as cited in Bush 2003)
[127] The universal franchise of 1931 had empowered rural communities and diminished the political authority of the urban 'English educated' elite. (Edirippulige 2004)

than the replacement of the British by British educated 'brown sahibs' (Vittachi 1962). Thus Dharmapala's call for Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in the early part of the century was revamped to appeal to this group of 'rural elite', especially to young Buddhist monks[128] who emerged as vocal champions of religion and language paving the way for the growth of Sinhala nationalism and its entanglement with politics (Edirippulige 2004). It offered them a sense of identity and hope and ultimately by relying on the mythical tales of 'imagined' nationalism, it gave them a sense of purpose and destiny. As de Silva (1986, 35) writes the "Sinhala language, the words for nation, race and people are practically synonymous, and a multiethnic nation or state is incomprehensible to the popular mind". Thus the rural elite placed an emphasis more on what could be articulated as an emotional popular appeal rather than a meaningless abstract[129]. This further increased the disconnect that had emerged post independence as Tambiah (1986,69) says "Overall the most critical development in the Buddhist resurgence was a closing of the ranks, a growing solidarity and the engagement in a propagandistic activism with political overtones on the part of the Buddhist monks…In preaching the restoration of Buddhism to its rightful historical place, they were also advocating their own return to prominence in the life of the society and the state".

The revivalists in a bizarre way thought of themselves as recovering to a higher pristine form that had been corrupted by the colonial powers. In their logic, a pristine Buddhism represented a higher idealism espousing universal principles and a vindication of identity yet what they didn't realize was the seeds of discontent being sown (Grant 2009). Ultimately it was this support that lent itself to the social and religious upsurge that climaxed in the 1956 elections and the electoral defeat of the governing party, the United National Party - UNP (who had ruled from independence). The defeat came as a result of a coalition that included the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (a former deputy leader of the UNP), who were able to mobilize local-level rural élites by promising not only the restoration of Buddhism to its rightful position in Sri Lanka, but that Sinhala would become the official language.

4.3 The Perfect Storm of the 1956 Elections

1956 represents the perfect storm for Sri Lankan politics and a critical juncture in its history. As discontent arose amongst the Sinhala Buddhist public (led by the monks) for the government's apparent disregard for not providing the Buddhist religion with an 'autonomous constitution' (De Silva 1998),[130] the celebration in

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[128] De Silva 1998 points to the growing influencein the 1930s and 1940s of Burmese Buddhist monks who set the trend for the monks to get in involved in political decision making and radicalising the country's political agenda

[129] This seems to be one of the affliction that has remained in Sri Lankan politics to date where there is an inability to speak to the rural masses by the political elite in Colombo.

[130] In 1951, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress had sent a pamphlet to the Prime Minister entitled *Buddhism and the State*, which talked about the restoration of Buddhism to the paramount position

1956 of the 2500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha (the Buddha Jayanthi), provided an opportunity for Buddhist revival amidst the general public. The conditions were laid for a multifaceted 'nationalism' which conflated three elements: language (Sinhala); religion (Buddhism) and heritage (the fact that the Sinhalese were descended from the Aryan people)

Bandaranaike successfully exploited these conditions and the discontent amongst the masses and his new party (and coalition) sought to provide the Sinhala-Buddhist majority with a political party to fulfil their aspirations. Thus the electoral campaign of 1956 was fought in the background of communal identity of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (with an emotional evocation of the traditional values associated with the country's Buddhist heritage) with a pivotal element of the promise of "Sinhala Only"[131] – to establish Sinhala as the single official language for government business within 24 hours of election (International Crisis Group 2007), and to establish once and for all the primacy of the Sinhalese-Buddhists in Sri Lankan polity. By offering disgruntled groups, a means of articulating grievances with a promise of a response once in power and manipulating the powerful cultural symbols of language, religion and race, Bandaranaike managed to consolidate a wide range of Sinhala Buddhist sub-groups. Edirippulige (2004, 36-37) quotes Obesekera (1984) in saying

> "The victory of Mr Bandaranaike in 1956 was spearheaded by those who were directly or indirectly influenced by Dharmapala. Thus the post 1956 era saw the introduction of a new fundamentalist and militant Buddhism advocating the takeover of denominational schools to reduce the power of Christian missions; the compulsory teaching of (Buddhism) religion in schools; the propagation of the intellectualist view of Buddhism as being not a religion but a philosphy consonant with the spirit of science and above all, the use of Buddhism for political purposes. As a result Buddhism had effectively become the political and civil religion of the state".

What this move effectively did was exclude and alienate the minority groups speaking a mother tongue other than Sinhalese and practicing a religion other than Buddhism[132]. None felt this more than the Tamil community yet the Muslim

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of prestige; asserting the government to protect and maintain Buddhism and for the enactment of an act similar to the Buddha Sasana act 1312B E (1950) of Burma (De Silva, 1998)

[131] Ironically, Bandaranaike is on record in the Hansard (from parliament) in 1944, advocating not only for the replacement of English by the vernacular languages but for Sinhalese and Tamil to be reinstated as state languages so as to bring about 'amity and confidence' between the two communities (Edirippulige 2004)

[132] It is also worth noting that though all minority religious and ethnic communities were the 'other' for the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist, they differed in terms of hierarchy of difference. So the

community was also affected as well. Where hope had at least emerged that in a post independence era, there could be a semblance of 'all being equal', it was clear that with the new phase in 1956, politics had once again become ethnically focused. As an interviewee said

> *"The 1956 elections were not only a turning point for ethnic minority relations, but also politics as well as identity. Suddenly you had groups that were excluded simply because they couldn't speak the same language or were of a different faith. More importantly though and this is important to note the ramifications of this, you had the first inclinations of what a 'true' Sinhalese meant to these nationalists. As Tambiah[133] eloquently writes 'To be truly Sinhalese was to be born Sinhalese, speak Sinhalese and practice the Sinhalese religion, Buddhism'. You can see the implications of such thinking in the years since 1956"[134]*

The 1956 election also changed Sri Lankan politics from one based on democratic rights to one based on party patronage and ethnic nationalism[135]. This is where the main Sinhala dominated political parties would actively court the Sinhala Buddhist vote and any attempt by government coalitions to come to an agreement with Tamil political parties was undermined by those in opposition. It also represented not only " the rejection of the concept of a Sri Lankan nationalism based on the acceptance of pluralism as an essential feature of a democratic political system and its substitution by a more democratic and populist nationalism" (De Silva 1998, 24), that was effectively Sinhalese Buddhist in nature, but also highlighted the untenable contradiction between and consequences of a democratic system in which 70 per cent of voters were Sinhala and a state system in which Sinhalese were seriously underrepresented (International Crisis Group 2007)[136].

In the end the 1956 election serves as a symbol of the chauvinism that existed within both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities which could be galvanised and rallied by erstwhile politicians seeking to build intra-group support. It illustrates "how successful mobilisation of untapped political resources by one actor can stimulate competitors to seek to tap those same resources. Those that are unable to do so are either politically marginalised or forced to innovate and mobilize still other resources." (Bush 2003, 85). The political manipulation alienated many Tamils from the national political process, encouraging "reactive parochialism"

Tamils were the 'near' other, those who pose a threat to purity and other, whilst for example the Muslims (amongst others) were the 'far' other, those who are perceived and who perceive themselves as being from a totally different cultural tradition (Bartholomeusz and De Silva 1998)

[133] This is more eloquently written in Tambiah (1986, 69)

[134] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

[135] This also laid the foundations for minority political parties to be established due to the lack of confidence in the mainstream political parties to adequately address the concerns of the minorities.

[136] In 1956, Tamils were 30 per cent of the Ceylon Administrative Service, half the clerical service, 60 per cent of engineers and doctors and 40 per cent of the armed forces. For Sinhala nationalists this evidenced British favouritism and Tamil, specifically Jaffna-elite, collaboration with the colonial rulers.

(Ibid, 90), but also meant that like the SLFP, the UNP adopted its own 'Sinhala Only' policy engaging in its own provocative communalist acts as a way to 'connect' with the rural elite. As Bush (2003) analyses, it was not so much the inter-group dynamics between the Tamils and the Sinhalese that was the cause of 1956 and subsequent actions (although they were determining factors), it was actually the intra-active dynamics within the Sinhalese with competitions amongst sub-groups that was the main catalyst for the communalism. Thus the conflict was between "two Westernized elite factions in whom one effectively and instrumentally mobilized the support of the traditional, vernacular elite[137]" (Ibid, 92).

A similar nature of intra-group conflict was also present in the Muslim political elite during this time. There was a split in the support for the Language act with some Muslim members of parliament (mainly from the East of Sri Lanka) voting against it and those who were in Colombo and representing the traditional political elite voting for it. As Ismail (1995) writes, this support for the Sinhala policy act was principally a construct of the Muslim political elite, who were largely from Colombo (and the south) as opposed to the Eastern Muslims who were quite close to the Tamil language[138]. "One can also read in such a move the construction of a (Southern) Muslim identity by constitutively excluding Eastern sensibilities" (Ibid, 89).

The split support of the Muslims also pitted them against the Tamils. In so doing, there is once again have a scenario reminiscent of the Ramanathan-Azeez debates. As an interviewee said

> *"We have an appeasement of the Sinhalese by the Muslim polity of the day notably Sir Razik Fareed who chose to demonise the Tamils. In doing this, the polity managed to downplay the Sinhala violence against the Muslims especially the legacy of 1915. However, unfortunately, the message that was sent was clear that the Muslim elite would ultimately accept Sinhala hegemony at whatever cost"[139]*

This was seen with the reactions of the Muslim polity before, during and after the whole debate on language policy. "After the official language policy became law, the Muslims reconciled themselves to the new policy" (Ameerdeen 2006, 72),

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[137] Bandaranaike himself was an Oxford educated, English-speaking Anglican who converted to Buddhism in his mid-30s leading many to note the political expedience of this decision at a time when universal suffrage was creating a massive untapped Buddhist constituency (Bush 2003)

[138] It has been noted in many writings (Ismail 1995, Mcgilvray 1998, Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011 and so on) that the Tamil spoken by the Muslims in the Eastern Province appears to be a 'purer' form of the language in the sense of the vernacular and poetry. It is not an exaggeration that for many Eastern Muslims, they saw no contradiction in identifying with the Tamil language with many calling it their mother tongue. In fact a face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph in October 2015, also pointed to this phenomenon.

[139] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

helped by the fact that the new government tried to win Muslim's support by setting up a special government training school and by teaching Arabic at the primarily level by 'Moulavis' (religious teachers trained in madrasas[140]) all appointed by and paid for by the State. In doing this, the new government played on what was seen as the interest of the Muslim political elite in the provision of educational opportunities[141] and also a safeguard of the practice of religion. "By supporting the government, the Muslim community believed that it might gain some advantages" (K. Asad 1993, 106). Thus we see that in 1956, the 'Muslim Mosques Charitable Trusts and Waqf Bill' was passed in parliament whilst the Government declared the Prophet Muhammad's birthday a public holiday and in 1957, a concession was granted from the government for government servants to attend Friday noon prayers (Ibid.). As an interviewee said

> *"This is the first manifestation of a proper 'accommodationist' policy of the Muslim political elite that would define the strategy moving forward. They were willing to go ahead with whatever was proposed (even at the expense of other minorities) if they were looked after despite them being disadvantaged by the Sinhala Language policy. The reasoning given by many of the politicians at that time, was that the Tamil language did not have any cultural implication for the Muslims as it did for the Tamils"[142]*

It is though clear that this stance not only showed a lack of consensus amongst the political elites representing the Muslim community but also showed how far they (i.e. the political elites) might be willing to go to preserve the community. To some extent, this stance betrays a sense of hypocrisy in the community for the mere fact that language was and still remains the vehicle through which Muslim religious distinctiveness has been maintained, which meant that despite supporting the language policy, there was no consensus about merging into the tradition of the wider Sri Lankan / Sinhalese community. In this case, Tamil remains the main language that was and is spoken by the Muslim community and is how traditional teachings and interpretations were provided. Ameerdeen (2006, 39) generously says that "The Sri Lankan Muslims are pragmatic in their approach to language without sentimental attachment or antipathy". Yet many other commentators cite this as the main reason that the Muslim community was not able to build trust with both communities. Ismail (1995, 85) also refers to this style of politics by the Muslim community coming out of the "fear concerning its physical safety", a legacy of the 1915 Sinhala Muslim violence and a fear coming from the fact that it was clear that the Sinhala state was beginning to actively pursue a negative policy against the Tamils due to their opposition and thus it was one way of avoiding the same treatment that the Tamils were facing. However, to the Tamils, the strategy felt like a betrayal that the Muslims had

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[140] Islamic Religious Schools

[141] For example, Bandaranaike brought in a new law that required only 51% of the students to be Muslim for a school to be called a Muslim school and appoint a Muslim head teacher, when previously under the British and in the early years of independence, there was a law that required 75% of the student population to be Muslims to appoint a Muslim head teacher whilst a Tamil head teacher could be appointed with only 25% of the students being Tamils (L. Farook 2009)

[142] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

largely supported the 'Sinhala Language' policy and to the Sinhalese, it still did not answer the questions of whether the Muslims truly had integrated. This is because despite supporting the Sinhala language policy, it was seen to be conditional with the provision of certain safeguards and in later years, with the establishment of Muslim schools (which largely taught in Tamil), it was clear that the Muslim community was more intent in maintaining its separate identity through its own cultural and religious symbols, without getting involved in the national level policies, unless it directly affected the community itself.   In the aftermath of the 1956 elections though the accommodation style politics "had an unintended consequence: it reinforced Muslim subordination within identitarian discourse" (Ibid, 85). Ismail in my opinion is closer to describing the reality of how Muslim polity acted in terms of shifting allegiances to those in power with the need to preserve their own identity. It was a mixture of concern about physical safety, preservation of own culture and identity as well as the context that in a post independence structure not much was done to generate an expression of national identity.   In this sense the Muslim political elite played the accommodation style politics game by ensuring that they acquiesced with the ruling party of the day in terms of their political advantage whilst seeking out guarantees that would meet the needs and aspirations of the community.

Thus 1956 was the catalyst of a pattern with the intensification of "Buddhist Sinhala nationalism, leading either to ethnic discrimination or to half-hearted and ineffective anti discrimination policies became a key index of the occurrence of ethnic violence or of a disposition to resort to it" (Little 1999, 50).

4.3.1 From Rhetoric to Action

It is not an understatement to say that "Sinhala Only" was a disastrous policy which prompted decades of confrontation between Tamils and Sinhalese and set Sri Lanka down the course of politics that it finds itself stuck in. Inevitably "Sinhala Only" provoked protests from Tamils, who were now the ones who felt excluded by language policy and its effects on the availability of public sector jobs and services. However peaceful protests by S.J.V. Chelvanayagam's[143] Federal Party (FP) in 1956[144] were repressed violently, (after a clash with Sinhala-Buddhist extremist mobs) and which led to deadly anti-Tamil riots across the island.

With the election victory came the reality of moving from rhetoric to actual policy[145], as the Bandaranaike government sought to reconcile its commitment to

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[143] S.J.V Chelvanayagam was a prominent Tamil politician who in opposition tried to articulate a non violent means to the Sinhala nationalist discourse and though he succeeded initially in the sixties and seventies, he was not able to control the reactions from the Sinhala masses and subsequently the turning to violence by Tamil youth frustrated by the lack of progress as a result of non violence opposition (De Silva, 1998)

[144] And then again in 1958

[145] There was also a split in the coalition led by Bandaranaike in terms of the language policy. Was it 'Sinhala only'? In which case, what did this mean apart from the abrogation of a policy resolution in 1944 by the national legislature that Sinhala and Tamil would replace English as the official language within a reasonable time? For some members, the language policy was about parity of

make Sinhala the sole national language with the political and practical necessity to make some concessions to the Tamils about the use of their language. The new language policy was not only delayed but when prepared initially in draft form appeared to be slightly watered down "combining a strong commitment to Sinhala as the sole national language with the protection for the language rights for the minorities" (De Silva 1998, 50), in essence a pragmatic concession to political realities, which upset the more vociferous defenders of the 'Sinhala Only' bill. Thus by the time the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956[146] came to be introduced, whilst it set in train a process in which all dropped support for the Tamil language having equal legal status, its implementation was such that it could be done on a step-by-step basis over a period of five years, "a period which Bandaranaike expected to use to devise or negotiate modifications and adjustments to make the change in language policy palatable to the Tamils" (Ibid., 51)

The FP demanded greater protection of minority rights generally, including citizenship for Indian Tamils on plantations, parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil as official languages, as well as guarantees for some form of regional autonomy for the traditionally Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces. The latter was described as "the need of establishing 'a Tamil linguistic state within a federal union of Ceylon' to preserve Tamil cultural identity" (Edirippulige 2004, 46). The new prime minister began negotiations with the FP on concessions to minority interests and (with the approval of leading Buddhist monks) came up with a three-point proposal: "reasonable use" of the Tamil language; limited devolution of power to regional councils and constitutional amendments to guarantee the fundamental rights of minorities (International Crisis Group 2007).

Negotiations produced the 1956/57 Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact[147], which gave the status of Tamil as an official language for administrative purposes in the north and east and some aspect for regional autonomy, with some devolved power to regional councils, including the promise to grant local control overstate schemes to settle landless Sinhalese in Tamil areas of the Eastern Province (De Silva 1998). Thus the scheme of "regional councils was a precise attempt to devolve powers to the local units and to create rather independent regional administrative system with the consideration of ethno-territorial divisions of the island" (Edirippulige 2004, 117-118).

As Edirippulige (2004, 117) describes, the pact was an important landmark with regard ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. It developed an idea of devolution of powers to local authorities and granting some kind of regional autonomy to the Tamils: "According to the Regional Councils Bill of 1957, the Northern Province of the

status for Sinhala and Tamil (following the resolution) and providing full equality before the law and equality of opportunity for Tamils and equality of status for the two languages (De Silva 1998)

[146] In other words, the 'Sinhala Only' act as it came to be known popularly.

[147] The details of the pact were officially announced in 1957 raising uproar from the opposition who galvanized extremist thinking on this issue.

island was considered as one regional council whereas the Eastern Province was supposed to divide into two or more regional councils in accordance with the population distribution (the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese of the province). At the same time, the Bill stipulated the amalgamation of the Tamil regional councils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces subject to parliamentary ratification".

In its conceptual stage, the Bill bridged the gap between federalism and a unitary government, with elections to the regional councils and these councils having power over services such as agriculture, education, health, social services and so on ."In short, the Pact was a statesman-like compromise that seemed to possess the necessary ingredients for healing the distrust and antagonisms" (Bush 2003, 94), which had been built up between the two communities as a result of Sinhala power struggles.

However with a political expediency that was to become all too familiar, the main opposition party, the UNP (who had previously lost the 'Sinhala only' campaign), rallied Sinhala Buddhist opinion in protest[148] at the pact. In their initial opposition to the three point proposal, the UNP would accuse Bandaranaike of fraud and being under the influence of a small Tamil anti Sinhalese clique (Bush 2003). However, with a touch of irony, they would call upon the same resources which had enabled Bandaranaike to come to power to oppose the Pact, i.e. the rural elite and the Buddhist monks.

Bandaranaike eventually abrogated the pact in 1958 under severe pressure from his own ranks of members of his coalition, leading to a new civil disobedience campaign by Tamil parties, which sparked deadly ethnic riots across the island in 1958[149]. Nissan and Stirrat (1990) also note that during these two riots (1956 and 1958) Indian Tamils were not drawn into the conflict and the conflicts erupted over issues of language (the use of Sinhala or Tamil) and access to land.

A further compromise was suggested by the Prime Minister for the approval of a 'Tamil Language (Special provisions) Act No. 28 Bill' which included "the rights of Tamils to use their language in correspondence with the government, and in local government affairs, to continue educating their children in Tamil and to take the competitive examinations for entry into government and local service in Tamil with the provision that they would be required to gain proficiency in Sinhala to continue in service and to secure promotion" (De Silva 1998, 54). However this was once again opposed and Bandaranaike was assassinated in September

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[148] This is the first of a poisonous cyclical pattern that pervades Sri Lankan politics such that at critical junctures in the political process of the country, the party in power strives to foster communal accommodation whilst the major party in opposition manipulates Sinhalese parochialism to wreck that attempt (International Crisis Group 2007)

[149] In all, up to 400 people were killed and 12,000 made homeless, almost all of them Tamils (International Crisis Group 2007). Despite this, neither of these riots became the subject of an official inquiry as they should have been; hence there is a gap in the official knowledge of these events (De Silva 1998).

1959 by a Buddhist monk supposedly angry at his 'soft stance' towards the Tamils.[150]   This assassination illustrates that "the wielding of extremist rhetoric for short-term advantage inflates the expectations of a support group and invites political disaster when these expectations are not seen to be met" (Bush 2003, 85)

Bandaranaike's widow, though inexperienced politically, was voted in, out of sympathy in 1960 becoming the first women Prime Minister in the world. Her inexperience would show as she drastically continued and implemented the Sinhala Only act despite the misgivings of her husband. Her first (and second) terms in power would be disastrous especially on the economic front (Ibid).

4.4 New Governments, Same Policies

The political musical chairs of Sri Lankan politics meant that in 1965, the UNP came into power. Once again, with the need for political expediency in gathering Tamil support though engagement with the FP, in a reverse to its stance of 1958, the Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact was undertaken by the UNP (International Crisis Group 2007). In essence, it was a rehash of the 1957 pact (done between Bandaranaike and Chelvanyakam), offering use of the Tamil language in the north and east for administrative and court matters and a framework for creating district councils, with powers to be allocated after further negotiation, and covering issues involving the Land Development Ordinance and colonisation, prioritising landless Tamils' rights to resettlement in parts of the north and east. This time however it was the opposition SLFP that would object to the pact thereby rendering the Dudley-Chelvanayakam pact, a fading landmark in attempts at inter-ethnic accommodation. This despite the pact having the same roots as the one that they had proposed in 1958.

The intransigence of the government, the economic crisis of the 1960s, the growing unemployment, constrained by political inertia was made worse in the early seventies with an uprising in the south by Sinhalese youth in rural areas frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities. From 1960 – 1977, though Sri Lanka had spent nearly 10% of its GNP on programs such as education, it still lagged behind in economic growth, thereby not meeting the needs of the educated rural youth (Bandarage 2009) and not bridging the existing divide and in particular the gap between the English-speaking elite and the rural Sinhalese. Bush (2003) explains this as a politics of exclusion where if you were from the wrong family, wrong caste and had no finances, you had no chance to stand for political office.

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[150] The chief figure in the conspiracy was a Buddhist monk who had played a crucial role in organizing grassroots support to elect the Prime Minister although the actual shooting was done by another monk, a close associate of the conspirator. However there was a mix of powerful and sordid commercial motives, not to mention some sexual overtones, that also surround the assassination (De Silva 1998)

In circumstances almost mirroring the rise of Tamil insurgency in the north in the early eighties, the Sinhalese in the rural south started to agitate giving rise to the first armed insurrection in 1971 led by the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukti Peramuna – JVP). The 5 lectures given to recruited members of the Front were based on Marxism-Leninism as the Front identified perpetuation of a dependent economy through neo-colonialism (Fernando 2008). Whilst the JVP played on the undercurrents of Sinhala Buddhist ethno nationalism believing that "a revolution can not be won with the support of the 'minorities'" (*Ibid*, 198), their sole aim was to change the 'colonial' economy, in particular its staunchly anti-Indian posture that manifested itself in the treatment of the Plantation Tamils. "The sense of deprivation and disillusionment with the state and the ruling class was much greater among the Sinhalese youths than among youths belonging to the ethnic minorities because their expectations had been much greater" (Bandarage 2009, 54). With a hardening of social class boundaries, there was increasing discontent which resulted in a southern insurrection in 1971 by Sinhalese youth, directed solely against the Sinhala State and the ruling class and not the ethnic other (Ibid.). The violence of 1971 reflected the failure of the new Sinhalese-Buddhist social order to produce the results expected of it (J. D. Rogers 1987)

According to Bush (2003) the agitation of the Sinhalese in the south (leading to armed rebelling firstly in 1971 and subsequently in 1987) posed the only threat to state authority as opposed to the agitation (and subsequent conflict) in the north and east in the eighties and nineties. The prime reason for this was that the violence was predominantly 'intra-group' being confined to the Sinhala community and limited geographically to Sinhalese-majority areas of the country and being against the Sri Lankan government, not against the ethno-religious nationalist ideology of the state (Fernando 2008). However it is important to note that the strategy of the leadership of these Sinhalese agitators "intensified and harnessed the inter-group fears of the Sinhalese as a means of mobilising resources for use in the intra-group arena " (Bush 2003, 99).

The response of the government was twofold: one was a violent crackdown against the insurrection with a carte blanche given to the armed forces which led to widespread intra-ethnic killing among Sinhala Buddhists where it is estimated 10,000 young men and women were killed (Ibid.) The second response was to initiate a political solution to the insurrection. Thus the constitutions of 1972 and 1978 (again as a response to the Southern agitation) were changed to promote Sinhala Buddhist hegemony by centralising the state, giving Buddhism 'foremost' status, making Sinhala the official language and failing to adequately provide for the protection of minority rights (International Crisis Group 2007). The new constitution it seemed institutionalized and legitimized the growing dominance of the majority community in the state and polity (Shastri 1990).

In addition, the government introduced a 'standardisation' procedures related to university admissions, which expanded the education opportunity for rural Sinhala youth at the expense of students from the traditional educational elites of Jaffna and Colombo (International Crisis Group 2007). This policy meant a preferential system that required higher marks for Tamil language students than for Sinhala language students to qualify to enter the university science faculties[151] (Bandarage 2009). Thus the proportion of Tamils in state employment reduced as well as in the universities.

Consequently, the JVP would engage in a period of mainstream political activity between 1977-1983 with relative ideological moderation before being proscribed in 1983 and restarting its conflict in 1987 (Bush 2003). The experience of the JVP in the post 1971 era, is useful to be explained through the concept of blocked mobility and nationalism as explained by Cormier (2003). The concept explores how young university students see their upward mobility thwarted and as a result develop nationalist movements which, they believe, will provide them with an independent state and open up career opportunities for them. In the Sri Lankan case, it is perhaps best to see how the aspirations of the young upwardly mobile cohort are blocked by the older generation. The resultant conflict has more to do with differences in approach to the everyday running of the state than to anything else. In this sense the blocked mobility thesis acts as a grievance-based explanation for the rise of cultural nationalism. In this case the causal link to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism of the JVP and the causal mechanism at work is the resentment, and resultant manifestations of grievance, felt when career aspirations are not properly satisfied by the realities of the labour market. The resentment felt as a result of this is then channelled into movement activity in an attempt to rectify the situation. However, Cormier's (2003) theory explains the need to change the questions we ask about the emergence of cultural nationalism which forces us to recognise that there are any number of possible grievances motivating any one intellectual. This then allows us to understand what social processes were involved in shaping this particular cultural national movement. In this case, this type of approach helps us not to take binary approach to this aspect and also allows us to explore the formation of another social movement based on grievances bearing in mind the similar circumstances and context.

4.5 Formation of Tamil Separatism

In this case it is important to view the formation of the Tamil separatism based on the above concept. "To rise above the bipolar Sinhala vs. Tamil analysis, it is necessary to look at the economic grievances that the youth from both the Sinhala Buddhist majority and the Sri Lankan Tamil minority had in common. Rather than joining in a common cause, however, their grievances gave rise to

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[151] This system would eventually be scrapped in 1977 as a result of a backlash from communities (Bandarage 2009)

divergent movements given differential responses by elites of the two communities" (Bandarage 2009, 53)

Despite tensions between the Sinhala and Tamil groups that would exist post 1956, there were no major outbreaks of sustained violence between the two groups. However societal relations would be tested further in the Seventies with the addition of a flailing economy suffering at the hands of the political elites anxious to nationalize certain sectors and to control access to all sorts of resources, thereby subsuming the state to political alliances and party machines (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

One effect was that the already marginalized Tamils were effectively excluded from the channels through which resources were distributed. "Particularistic ties between MPs and their followers became of utmost importance, and, in such a situation, for any MP representing Sinhala area to allocate resources to a Tamil area was madness" (Ibid. 36).

With the changing of the constitutions both in 1972[152] and 1978 to favour and prolong the governments in power, those Tamils who were beginning to demand complete autonomous began to become more vociferous, characterized by sharp dissensions, disillusionment and despair (Shastri 1990). The controversial policies for university admissions in particular aimed at improving the opportunities for rural Sinhala youth had conversely struck at the very heart of Tamil middle class, affecting the economic mobility of Tamils from Jaffna. Consequently, this succeeded in alienating and radicalising in particular, the Tamil lower middle-class youth arousing in them deep suspicions and cynicisms about the Sinhalese (Ibid.)

The Vaddukodai convention in 1976 paved the way for the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) - a coalition of various Tamil political groups of which the FP was the leading component with a demand that moved away from regional autonomy to self-determination and the establishment of another state (Ibid). Thus in the 1977 elections, the TULF contested on the platform of total independence for the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka, dashing previous Tamil demands of some sort of parity with Sinhala, or at least for a system which would protect the rights of Tamils in Tamil areas. "With the foundation of the TULF, however, it became clear that sizeable numbers of Tamils, particularly in the north of the country, had lost all hope that such concessions could be obtained" ((Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 37).

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152 For example, the 1972 constitution subjected the judiciary to political control and declared Buddhism as the state religion while giving other religions the freedom of worship. It removed a section safeguarding the rights of minorities and replaced it with a clause on Fundamental rights. (L. Farook 2009)

The concept of self-determination was rooted in the Tamil concept of Eelam or Homeland intimately linked in both the development and the discrimination experienced by the region and its population. (Shastri 1990). Ironically, the Tamil argument for a separate state had been strengthened somewhat by the economic policies of the seventies which allowed the rural areas of the north and east to emerge as important paddy-producing regions thereby making it a viable economic base. Thus the development of the region had demonstrated to Tamils its potential for economic growth and opportunity. "The manner in which that development was being effected, through the instrumentalities of the unitary state and majority rule consolidated in ethnic terms, made them acutely aware that they would not be shareholders in this development but would be its casualties. Although their declining stake in the system explains their alienation from it and their acceptance of the separatist option, the region's perceived potential for development provided a strong, intense motivation to struggle for the goal of a separate state." (Ibid, 75).

From 1977, a process of the liberalisation of the economy was introduced inviting foreign investors whilst relaxing labour and tax laws. However, both the agricultural and the industrial projects reflected ethno-based measures (Fernando 2008). Industrial development promoted with foreign investments were concentrated in the Western Province, whilst the Mahaweli Development Project (seen as one of Sri Lanka's greatest hydraulic and agricultural development projects), despite it being in the dry zones bordering Tamil villages was accompanied by what was called "state sponsored colonizing schemes of Sinhala settlers who were later armed to guard the border" (*Ibid*, 201).

This liberalization process was made possible by the UNP winning the 1977 elections and once again changing the constitution in its favour sidelining the minorities. The constitution which brought in the presidential system of government, also made the judiciary subservient to it and provided absolute powers to the President with no accountability besides declaring Buddhism as the state religion. "In short, this constitution reduced the island's minority communities in general and the Muslim community in particular to the position of a nonentity" (L. Farook 2009, 48).

The elections which also allowed the TULF to emerge as one of the main oppositions is also telling of the support that it received more in the north especially in Jaffna than in the east (Shastri 1990). Unfortunately, with the election once again, communal riots flared up in many Sinhala-dominated areas where Tamils formed a minority fuelled by rumours that Tamils had killed Sinhala in Jaffna. There is some basis to these rumours as by 1975, small groups of Tamil insurgents, commonly referred to as the 'Tigers', began to appear in the north of Sri Lanka (Ibid). They focused their attacks on the representatives of the state in the north: police, soldiers, government officials and government property. They also attacked those Tamils whom they considered to be collaborators with the

Sinhala. Thus the period of the liberalization and the state colonizing schemes juxtaposed the gaining of momentum of the Tamil movement for self-determination who felt threatened economically and in terms of their existence. The government adopted two approaches to counter the Tamil demand for self-determination: one through the legislature prohibiting demand for separation and the other through militarizing the Tamil regions with Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Fernando 2008)

Subsequently the demands of the Sri Lankan Tamil ethno regional movement for greater independence from the Sinhalese-dominated centre had evolved not only to a call for a separate state in the mid- 1970s but an increase in the use of organized violence by both sides in the conflict as more youth joined the militant movements. After a shooting incident, the large numbers of Sinhala police who had been deployed to the north, went on a rampage in Jaffna (Nissan and Stirrat 1990) . The iconic Jaffna library - the second largest library in Sri Lanka and the main library for Tamil material in the country—was burnt; its destruction was interpreted by Tamils as a deliberate attack on Tamil learning, culture and history (Ganesan 2013). There was also rioting in the east coast, the tea estates and Colombo suburbs. In at least one case a government MP was active in organizing the anti-Tamil attacks (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). All of this would pale in comparison to the pogrom that took place 2 years later in 1983, of which more will be said in the next chapter.

4.6 Development of Muslim Institutions

As has been discussed already it is worthy to note that the Muslim community had been heavily involved with politics with the aim to preserve and maintain the security and identity of the community. Every cabinet since 1947 has had a Muslim representative (De Silva 1998), with the political elite of the Muslim community attempting to develop a separate identity from the Tamil community by articulating a 'Muslim' identity. As an interviewee said

> *"The number one prerogative for the Muslim political representative from the late nineteenth century through to independence and beyond, was the preservation of identity for the community and also ensuring safety and security in the wake of physical threats (for example from the 1915 Sinhala-Muslim riots and then in the late seventies and early eighties as Sri Lanka faced armed separatist movements). The preservation of identity for the Muslim community was seen through institutions as well as through a process of 'accommodating' politics"[153]*

The identity that Muslim politicians tried to articulate was through an expression and faith which seemingly also appeared to be homogeneous. Yet despite the attempt to maintain a separate identity, the Sri Lankan Muslim community was not homogeneous and the sub identities seemed to play off against each other,

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[153] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyas Razak, August 2015

with the 'Moors', adopting a more superior attitude to the rest of the sub identities, "a sign of the conflict between the elitist groups for political power, economic benefits and social status" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 40). As an interviewee said

> "We see the true 'limits' of the articulation of an identity through a 'Muslim/Islam' lens early on in the Muslim polity. There was and continues to be this struggle with also trying to define one selves as 'Moor' or 'Malay' and all of this boils down to class and political interests. So from the early twentieth century, there is a paradox whereby externally the Muslim polity were fighting to find representation for themselves but internally were fighting for who or what represented the Muslim polity"[154]

This dichotomy and tensions within the Muslim community is testimony to the challenge of trying to homogenise a faith identity that is not described in isolation to other ethnic and faith identities. This is ultimately the paradox experienced with the Muslim community in Sri Lanka and what this thesis is trying to unpack. As another interviewee from a focus group said

> "To some extent even from the early twentieth century we can see the dangers of wanting to use faith as an identity marker. The 'Moor' vs 'Muslim' debate ultimately also began to play out in terms of ideological difference amidst social status and political representation. Regardless of this, it was and is clear that a Muslim identity is not homogeneous and was certainly not considered an equaliser amongst people. This is surprising because the original intent for Islam was not to provide a divisive identity but more to provide a common uniting platform for all identities to find common expression and purpose"[155]

Tensions

The tensions in the articulation of the Muslim identity as homogeneous as protagonists have led to believe is the fact that the Muslim identity was only used to described those from Sri Lanka. In particular the Indian Muslims (like the Indian Tamils) were treated with a hostile attitude as an alien people (M. A. Nuhman 2007)[156], so very much taking to heart the Citizenship Act that was enacted just after independence. "The distinction and conflicts between the groups were merely a reflection of economic and political interests" (Ibid, 27). From the late 19th century onwards, the Indian Muslims were portrayed as ruthless exploiters of innocent Sinhalese by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists supported by the emerging low country Sinhala trading class (Ibid) which would be the precursor to the 1915 Sinhala – Muslim riots which subsequently also deepened divisions between the Muslims and the Tamils on the account of Ramanathan's defence of the Sinhalese. However, the irony as has been discussed above is that in the late nineteenth century, the anti-Indian Muslim movement was also tacitly supported by the mercantile class of the Sri Lankan

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[154] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein January 2016
[155] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with a group of Muslim professionals, May 2016.
[156] Nuhman (2007) writes how the elite of the Sri Lankan Moors thought themselves to be wealthier and superior to the Indian Muslims

Moors as a result of trading rivalry. This rivalry would play itself out in the 1948 citizenship debate when Sir Razik Fareed, who emerged as a leading Muslim spokesman and politician in the early days after Sri Lankan independence, also spoke out against the Indian Muslims by wanting to rid them of their citizenship right[157]. The question is whether this emerged as part of a colonial divide and rule strategy or whether it is a structural / instrumental interpretation of ethno-nationalism of the Muslim political elites? In a way it is both as the colonial strategy to entrench identities made use of and institutionalised the Muslim identity as something that was separate as Ismail (1997) has noted especially when it came to the representation on the legislative council. Yet it was also instrumentalised by the Muslim political elites of the day as is discussed below

Generally unlike the Tamils, the post-independent "political attitudes and behaviour of the Muslim community provided a strong contrast to those of the Tamils" (De Silva 1998, 259). Whilst the Tamils leaders had emphasised a distinct and separate identity of their community, which backed by a solid territorial and demographic base in the north, referred to regional autonomy based on an ethnic identity, the Muslims generally opted for a more accommodating stance towards Sinhala nationalism, supporting them (especially on some critical issues), in exchange for socio economic concessions and privileges, to maintain the culture and identity of the community (McGilvray and Raheem 2007, De Silva 1998). McGilvray (1998) explains how Sinhalese historians and political scientists approvingly view the Muslims' cultural assimilation into Sinhalese society, and their pragmatic accommodationist politics, as the mark of a 'good' minority, implicitly contrasting them with the troublesome and uncooperative Tamils. "There is also the crucially important fact that the island's Muslims never faced the prospect, much less threat, of assimilationist policies. All governments respected the ethnic identity of the Muslims and have, in fact, helped to protect and foster this" (De Silva 1998, 259).

It is also important to bear in mind that these pragmatic coalition politics were in fact being led by a majority of south-western urban Muslim political elites who were close in their relationship to the Sinhalese politicians and removed from the realities on the ground especially the interconnectedness of Muslim-Tamil political interactions primarily in the north and east of the country. It is these south western urban elites that not only downplayed Muslim grievances but supported general policies that favoured the business community often at the detriment of many in the north and east who were farmers and fishermen and thus felt under represented by the mercantile leadership.

Thus with the rise of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism in the 1950s, there emerged a real dichotomy for Muslim politicians who were divided on how to respond, often being influenced from the region that they represented. For

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[157] After the 1948 act and subsequent acts, most of the Indian Muslims silently disappeared (M. A. Nuhman 2007) leaving only small ethnic groups of Indian Muslims in Sri Lanka.

example, Sir Razeek Fareed advocated[158] the 'Sinhala Only' national language policy of 1956 in opposition to discrimination and "political genocide of the Moors under the Tamil yoke" (Mcgilvray 1998, 454). However, as Nuhman (2007, 66) points out a "close reading of his speech reveals the detachment of the English educated Southern Muslim elite from the Tamil language and long standing rivalry between the Muslim and the Tamil elitist groups".   In fact when he was sarcastically accused by a Tamil MP of being a Sinhala defector, Fareed rhetorically turned the tables asserting that the Muslim community could never be considered Tamil Converts, an apparent reference to the 'ethnological' argument that had taken place in 1885 (Mcgilvray 1998). Fareed's speeches consistently accused the Tamils of discrimination against the Moors in education and in local administrative appointments, as well as apathy and indifference wherever Moorish voters were politically underrepresented(Ibid).

The 1956 Language Act

There were however Muslim politicians who voted against the Bill but it appears that they were mainly from the east (with one exception being from the south), thereby displaying the rift between the Southern and Eastern Muslim leaders that had been there from pre-Independence and that would largely remain until the present times. Thus the language debate in 1956 points precisely to this sense of confusion felt by Muslim politicians in terms of ethnic and language identity. There was a theory that Muslims spoke 'Arabic Tamil[159], suggesting it as a distinct language different from that spoken by the Tamils (M. A. Nuhman 2007).   Whilst the Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil language is recognised as a social dialect and different to Tamil, the debates added to the discussion led by politicians on the need for Muslims to develop a separate ethnic and linguistic identity.   In fact, one Muslim MP is credited with saying the "... decision arrived at by certain individuals of Muslim faith in Colombo in regard to the specific question of language causes much controversy among us...we the followers of the Muslim faith...have no language of our own and that the only language that we talk and know is the language called 'Arabic Tamil' "(as quoted from the Hansard 11 June 1956 in Nuhman 2007, 69).

The situation was further not helped in 1956 when several Muslim MPs who despite being elected on the Tamil Federal Party tickets, 'crossed the floor' to sit on the government benches, an act that would forever condemn Tamil opinion to caricature the Muslims as 'untrustworthy turncoats' (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011). This caricature would be reinforced later by the actions of these politicians as they would continue to switch tickets to join whichever Sinhala party was in power, thus establishing their positions and privileges allegedly putting

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[158] Sir Razik Fareed had previously in 1944 voted against an amendment for a motion that declared Tamil and Sinhalese as the national languages of the country. (De Silva 1998)
[159] The concept of Arabic Tamil comes from the concept that there are many Arabic words blended into the language used by Sri Lankan Muslims owing to the inalienable relationship between Islam and Arabic (M. A. Nuhman 2007)

'community' interests ahead of anything else[160] (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). Many Tamils felt betrayed by what they viewed as the narrow self-interest frequently demonstrated by the Muslim community, believing that it should support the minority Tamil cause more strongly. This party political patronage and outbidding style of populist electoral politics which characterizes Sri Lankan democracy, was further exploited over the next 3 – 4 decades by the major Sinhalese dominated nationalist parties placating the Muslim politicians who in turn were opting for 'defensive and pragmatic coalition politics' (Ibid.)

The subsequent political volatility in the years post 1956 thus ensured that the Muslim community were offered opportunities for political bargaining which they used to the great advantage of their community and really the opportunity to develop and deepen Muslim identity consciousness (M. A. Nuhman 2007). This was also supported by the government's desire to maintain strong economic ties with the Muslim countries of the Middle East. For example, after the 1970 elections, an incoming prime minister Bandaranaike, under pressure from the Muslim polity, closed the Israeli mission despite the threat to boycott Sri Lankan tea (A. Ali 1984; L. Farook 2009). As an interviewee said

> *"The events around 1956 in particular are seen as a watershed moment for the Muslim community in general. This is where the Muslim polity really came into its own with its strategy of accommodating politics which resulted in organising separate social institutions in the public sector exclusively for Muslims and legitimizing some of the Muslim interests"[161]*

The Muslim elite succeeded in developing sustained Government institutions to look after the maintenance of Mosques and charitable institutions (as discussed above), but also through the Government owned media. For example in both radio and TV, there were exclusive 'Muslim' units dedicated to broadcasting weekly Muslim programs which especially during times like Ramadan was and is used widely (M. Nuhman 2002). In particular, two items of institution are of interest with regards the Muslim identity expression. The process of this institutionalisation was a way of developing a concrete platform for Muslim identity expression.

4.6.1 Educational Reforms
The immediate rewards for the support by the Muslim politicians to the government, were a series of educational reforms such as the establishment of a separate government Muslim school system for instance. The reasoning behind this was that a separate school system would enable the emergence of a Muslim professional middle class that could take up technical and civil service

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[160] Farook (2009) contests this saying that ultimately it became apparent that subsequent Muslim politicians were not really 'interested' in community interests but more about securing their positions in government. According to Farook the intransigence of these politicians to comment on national issues affecting the Muslims to the government of the day, was evidence that they did not necessarily wield the influence that everyone thought they had.
[161] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

positions whilst simultaneously preserving their Muslim identity (M. A. Nuhman 2007).

This call for educational reforms as well as for more engagement of the Muslim community within the educational sphere, had been one of the main concerns of the Muslim polity. These concerns had been there since the late nineteenth century largely held by the west coast urban elite as part of an Islamic revival catalysed by the British-imposed exile to Sri Lanka in 1883 of the charismatic Egyptian revolutionary, Orabi Pasha (Mcgilvray 1998).   The Muslim school movement was given special impetus in the period post 1956 with the help of a key leader, Badi-ud-din Mahmud, within Bandaranaike's party, the SLFP, who "demonstrated the value of a place in the Cabinet as a political base for a national leadership role on the affairs of the Muslim community" (De Silva 1998, 260). Mahmud is also credited with being one of the first people who wanted Sinhala as the official language in Sri Lanka, speaking about it as early as 1938, saying that "if the Muslims learn Sinhala, all the misunderstandings between the Muslims and the Sinhalese will disappear and peace and goodwill will flourish. Muslims did not get any benefit by accepting Tamil language; on the contrary it has been an obstacle for their progress.   Today or tomorrow, we will definitely get independence and Sinhala should be the official language" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 67). Yet despite this strong support for Sinhala, it is an irony that the measures that Mahmud brought in that promoted Muslim schools were in reality protecting the use of Tamil as the main vernacular for the Muslim community.   As an interviewee said

> "By aiming to uplift the place of Muslims within the educational system and redress some of the 'injustices' done to the community, Mahmud created opportunities for Muslim schools. This was done so that the Muslim community could benefit from better educational opportunities whilst preserving their Islamic identity. However, given that the lived experience of language for the Muslim community was and is Tamil, the only way that they could benefit from these opportunities for education was that their schools would largely be in the Tamil language. So on one hand you have Muslim politicians with a public support for the Language policy and on the other hand you allow for schools that teach in the Tamil language."[162]

In his quest to rectify what was seen as an "injustice"[163] done to the Muslims in the field of education, Mahmud established schools in predominantly Muslim areas and recruited a large number of Muslims into the teaching profession to give the Muslims a larger representation in the teaching profession visi a vis their national demographic numbers as opposed to the other communities. "As a

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[162] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyaz Razak, August 2015

[163] There was a perception of injustice towards the Muslim communities with regards education. Although predominately a business community, it was clear that the Muslim polity viewed education as the way of social mobility. Yet the perception was that this was blocked by the Tamils who were in the civil service at that time (*Ibid*)

result, a good number of Muslim men and women joined the teaching profession and in turn started contributing a great deal in promoting Muslim education" (L. Farook 2009, 42). Apart from standard academic subjects, the curriculum in the Muslim schools included Islam and an optional Arabic language, and eventually a distinctive Muslim school uniform[164] was introduced with holidays being given for Muslim holidays, such as Eid and Ramadan (Mcgilvray 1998). It represented a unique political concession[165] to the Muslim community which "vitiates the principle of non-sectarian state education which has been the declared policy of all governments since 1960" (De Silva 1997, 33).

As an appointed member of parliament[166], Mahmud remains a controversial figure. Whilst being credited for the improvement of the education of the Muslim community, his measures were deemed to have contributed to the worsening of ethnic tensions not only between the Tamils and Muslims but ironically between the Muslims and Sinhalese (Ali 1997, McGilvray and Raheem 2007) as ethnic tensions were worsened by restricting direct face-to-face contact between students and faculty from different ethnic communities. As an interviewee said

> *"Without pointing fingers, many critics point to the period of Dr Mahmud as the one that really institutionalised the tensions between the communities especially between the Tamils and the Muslims in the East of the country. As an education minister in the early 1960s, he put forth a policy of 'equality of opportunity'. He did so by taking over schools largely run by the Church, reorganising schools and the system of education. However, many also fault him with favouring the Muslim community who at that time needed more educational opportunities, but through the establishment of separate Muslim schools. At the time this was seen as favouritism by the other communities especially the Tamils who had been affected the most with the reforms. There was also a perception that these schools were exclusivist unlike many of the other schools at that time. In addition, the proliferation of Muslim schools during his time has meant that you had subsequent generations who grew up isolated from other communities as you had a process of self selection with the various communities then gravitating to faith / ethnic schools of their own (unlike previously where people would have studied together despite the denomination of the school). With the conflict, these tensions became more polarised"[167]*

With the Tamils in particular, despite the schools being in Tamil, it became very difficult for Tamil teachers to be employed and so on. For the Sinhalese they couldn't understand this dual nature and it raised concerns of favoritism.

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[164] The uniform was largely characterized by the head covering and abaya or dress shirt for the women and wearing of the Islamic head cap for the males (Ibid.)
[165] However due to its religiously exclusionary nature, despite the establishment of such schools, the Muslim community were still placed, far behind the Sinhalese, and even farther behind the Tamils, who had begun to enrol in Christian mission schools in Jaffna sixty years earlier (M. A. Nuhman 2007)
[166] He had two periods of Cabinet office, from 1960 – 1965 and 1970m- 1977 (De Silva 1998)
[167] Face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph, October 2015

Eventually this "led to anti-Muslim sentiments which turned into bloody anti-Muslim attacks in Gampola in 1975 and Puttalam in 1976, where the worst communal violence took place since the Sinhalese-Tamil riots of 1958" (L. Farook 2009, 45).

It is also important to note that the establishment of the Muslims schools was not necessarily done in isolation but as part of a government state system that "classified a large proportion of the schools in Sri Lanka on a racial, linguistic and religious basis such as Sinhalese, Tamil, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim schools and also formulated regulations to discriminate the segregate these children from the first day in school" (Ibid, 65)

Mahmud's second term in cabinet office saw the introduction of a change in university admissions policy in the early 1970s from open competition to a form of affirmative action, of which the beneficiaries were the Muslim community and the rural Sinhalese. This would prove equally decisive and reignite tensions with the Tamil community who were adversely affected.[168]   Thus the institutionalisation of education for the Muslim community though giving an agency also laid foundations for future community disagreements.

4.6.2 Personal law

Another area of important institutionalisation of Muslim identity was the concept of Personal Law, which really led to the concept of permanence in society whilst also addressing the core root of Muslim identity vis-à-vis marriage and divorce. There was a system of laws developed during the colonial periods which defined women's status and autonomy in the private sphere of the family such as the General Law, the Kandyan Law and the Muslim Personal Law. These laws were codified during the colonial times and successive post independence governments guaranteed their colonial existence (Kodikara and Zackariya 2014). From 1806 to the 1920s, the 'Mohammaden Code of 1806' was administered in the ordinary civil courts, but after reforms in 1929 and 1951, special courts[169] were given exclusive jurisdiction to handle all matters pertaining to marriage and divorce (M. Nuhman 2002). Once again like in the case of education, it was seen that the Muslim community was being given special dispensation. As an interviewee said:

> "The original intent of the Sri Lankan Muslim polity with regards personal law was about preserving identity and religious practices especially in the wake of foreign colonial practices. Yet it became clear that the Muslim polity using their strategy of 'accommodation' politics would derive special

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[168] The Muslims pursued a system of ethnic quotas, as a way of breaking free from Tamil tutelage in schools of the Tamil medium, whilst Tamils advocated open competition and academic merit, knowing fully well they would be at a greater advantage given not only the academic advantage they had with a pre-colonial bias of schools but also support for the pre-independence civil service (De Silva 1998)

[169] These courts were called Quazi courts and operated according to the Shari'ah with special relationships to the Ministry of Muslim Cultural affairs

dispensation with the establishment of Quazi courts. With the establishment of these courts, the jurisdiction of district courts was removed totally. It was also a significant development in the Sri Lankan legal system, since all other indigenous or customary laws were applied in the civil courts"[170]

Under this law, Muslim personal law is ruled on through looking primarily at the Quran and the Shari'ah, whilst judgments are carried out by specially appointed people to the court who normally have a religious qualification. The Muslim personal law has been seen as controversial not only from outside the community (as it is seen as the special dispensation given to the Muslim communities), but also within the community (especially by women and a select group of men, who see this law as discriminatory). As an interviewee said

> *"The Muslim personal law at the moment, is seen as being discriminatory against women in terms of how it is being currently carried out and the dispensations towards women. It has incorporated some traditional and patriarchal elements of culture which are not related to Islam but taken as coming from the Muslim community practice. As a consequence, the concepts of the law is very muddy. Not only are Sri Lankan Muslim women subject to personal laws that deny us equality in an integral aspect of our lives – marriage and family, but there are also no constitutional guarantees and safeguards of our fundamental rights of equality and non-discrimination in these very aspects. Thus Muslim women feel that they are denied fundamental rights as an individual citizen largely as a result of belonging to a faith group. Unfortunately any discussion on possible reforms gets caught up in a discussion on a challenge to the fundamentals of Muslim identity and their primary existence"[171]*

The origin of the law stems from a code of law on marriage and divorce exported from Batavia (present day Indonesia) in 1770 during Dutch rule. Between 1806 and 1951, this code of law went through a process of codification, review and modification, led on each of these occasions by a few prominent legal and religious individuals at the time. The present-day Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) was enacted in 1951 and embodies substantive provisions found in the preceding ordinances and codes, but also includes additional provisions based on Islamic legal practices and local customs, such as that of kaikuli (dowry) followed by Sri Lankan Muslims at the time (Hamin and Issadeen 2016).

As a result of this, there has been a wide call for reform of the laws not only to take into account the changing nature of family life, but also to incorporate this within a better understood concept of theory of Islamic personal and family law especially from other countries, whilst calling for justice and equality.

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[170] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016
[171] Ibid.

Sadly, though this has met with little success. In examining these challenges, one also understands the challenge of articulating a Muslim identity around cultural practices. As an interviewee said

"Currently how gender relations are conducted within the Sri Lankan Muslim community display a tension between theory and practice. On the one hand we have what we understand from the Qur'an and Sunnah, which constitute the theory on which Islamic theology is based and then we have the actual lived experience of Muslims. There is a difference and we see this in Sri Lanka as well. Sri Lanka after all is a South Asia country and like many of its neighbours, there is a conversation and reinforcement of patriarchal values. So in Sri Lanka, religion is not the critical factor that determines the women's socio-legal status but 'tradition and culture'. This has ramifications where lines of culture and traditions are blurred with religion"[172]

Thus women's subordination is not just within the Muslim community but has been part of the various ethno-nationalist projects of Sri Lanka which has served to justify and reinforce the subordination of women (F. Zackariya 2014). In this, the gender identity plays a large part and also illustrates the challenge between espousing an Islamic identity based on Islamic theological precepts and what happens in practice. Though it is another research, it is clear that the articulation of Muslim women identity for equality, really articulates the challenge and push for a community identity. The aspects of education, employment and finally dress sense really illustrate the dichotomies and tension of 'imagining' oneself as a community that is solely based on faith expression whilst also being influenced by contextual traditions and cultures, without understanding the delineation between the two. The debate on the Muslim personal law in particular underscore this tensions. As an interviewee said

"The debate around agency for Muslim women in Sri Lanka especially manifesting itself in the Personal Law tensions, but also around dress code highlights an underlying tension about what is Sri Lankan Muslim identity. By working on institutionalisation of items such as the Muslim Marriage Law, there has been a dilution of cultural, theological and social. Thus any attempt to even reform some of the institutions to make them more fit for purpose and realistic with the times means that there is a feeling that you are tampering with Islam. This has severe repercussions"[173]

This dilution and reluctance reform the law has been acutely felt over the last few decades where Muslim political leaders have held key government portfolios and could have facilitated, expedited and accomplished reforms to the MMDA. Yet the Muslim politicians have neither demonstrated the interest nor the ambition publically to give their support in addressing these concerns thus far. As an interviewee said

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

"There was a lot of talk by the Muslim political elite when establishing the Muslim Personal Law, yet when it comes to reform, there is silence. Whether this is due to the perceived fear of losing the support of the religious leaders and voter constituency, or due to a belief that any conversation about reforming the MMDA will diminish the value of Muslim political identity in Sri Lanka it is clear that there is a real tension"[174]

The tension between cultural and religious is apparent, when one way to diffuse the tension, is for Muslim politicians to pass off the MMDA reforms as a subject that the ulama (Islamic religious scholars) would not accept (Hamin and Issadeen 2016). Likewise, there is no evidence at this time to suggest that politicians have adequately engaged with their own constituencies on concerns that have emerged regarding the MMDA, or to gauge opinions on reforms. While not demonstrating required political accountability on this issue to the women, they have also been very vociferous in guarding the communal boundaries. For example, when non-Muslim politicians, raise questions about issues involving Muslim women in parliament or public forums, these discussions are not positively facilitated by Muslim politicians and Muslim media, but rather attacked and silenced (Ibid).

It is these tensions and how it is and has been dealt with post independence that defines the state of the Muslim community and its expression of identity currently.

4.7 Conclusion

It is clear that going into the independence and post independence era, the Muslim polity adopted pragmatic ways of engaging on a political front, whilst getting rights and privileges for the community. However, with the Citizenship Act in the post independence era, new constitutions in 1978 and communal tensions all within the first 20 years after independence, it was clear that the minorities particularly the Muslims were facing a rough ride and one that would define their relationship with the Sinhalese.

What is telling in this period is two fold. One is of the Government's response to the Sinhala uprising in the early seventies is that despite it mirroring the claims of Tamil youth (and also later of the Muslim community), the Government moved to try and accommodate the concerns of the Sinhala youth without much opposition. However with the Tamil youth, it was clear that both political parties could not move on suggesting any form of solution for fear of opposition[175], and as for the Muslim community, it would become apparent that there was absolutely no room for negotiation or understanding about the concerns (L. Farook 2009). It is this inability to make concrete decisions due to political losses that has plagued Sri Lankan politics and ensured that it is in a continuous whirlpool of negative ethnic

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[174] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016
[175] Despite this accommodating stance, it would not stop Sinhalese youth from an armed uprising in the early seventies

politics. Had there been any attempt to take a pragmatic stance, the late seventies and early eighties could have seen a different result. However, with the Tamils frustrated into taking up arms, it gave the government the excuse that it needed to undertake severe measures.

The tensions between the two major communities would spill over to the Muslim community and in 1976, clashes erupted between Sinhala and Muslims in a north western part of Sri Lanka (International Crisis Group 2007), apparently provoked by disputes over jobs and land. These clashes and subsequent clashes though show a hairline fracture in terms of relationships between the two communities that becomes communal even if there are personal differences between individuals from the two communities. It is this hairline fracture which as we will explore in subsequent chapters that has been exploited by extreme Buddhist-nationalist factions (often linked to local business or mafia groups), more recently, in the post 2009 tensions, causing a weakening of the relations between the two communities (Ibid.) "In most cases of violent confrontation, there are clear signs of manipulation of local economic grievances by political extremists. However, the resurgence of Sinhalese nationalism in the past few years, coupled with a rise in Muslim activism, and in some cases, more radical Islamic ideas, suggests that tensions may increase in the future" (Ibid, 5).

It is also clear that until very recently, the level of antagonism between the Sinhalese and the Muslim community was not as deep rooted and entrenched as that between the Muslims and the Tamils. For example, the Muslim political elite ever conscious of the Muslim-Sinhalese relationship and the need to remain as a minority with amenable relations with the Sinhalese community have also acted accordingly in politics and business (Ibid).

Secondly, unlike the Tamils, in order to maintain this amenable relationship with the majority community, Muslim politicians have always opted for a non-confrontation approach often remain politically quiet and cautious, "reluctant to draw attention to discrimination or ethnic tensions in public" (Ibid, 5). A casing point being the 1976 disturbances between Sinhalese and Muslims (where Muslims were killed by police) and no single Muslim politician raising the matter in parliament. Whilst this was often not popular amongst the public, this type of approach has also helped to resolve certain difficult situations which arose. Yet, this 'amenable' approach has led to accusations that the Muslims are guilty of playing party politics to gain concessions for their own communities, without any sense of the other. Thus this period covered by this chapter is very much deemed the period for the establishment of the cultural identity of the Muslim by solidifying its social constructs through institutions such as schools and the codification of the Muslim marriage law[176].

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[176] All whilst supporting a compromise with the majority community that ultimately was detrimental to the rights of the minorities (including the Muslim community)

However, there began to emerge a contradiction of relationships between the two communities exemplified in the political confrontations among the elites but the peaceful coexistence between masses of Tamils and Muslims in the north and east (Imtiyaz 2009). These moves by the Muslim politicians mainly made up of those from the elite communities of Colombo put them very much at odds not only with the Tamil community but ironically also with the Muslim community from the north and east of the country.

As the repercussions of the State's 'Sinhala-only' act and its Sinhala-oriented development policies led to state sponsored colonization of large parts of the north and east by Sinhalese, there was increasing sympathy for the Tamils from the Muslims (in these parts of the country) who found demographics altered and administrative policies biased against them. The new generation of Tamil leaders (who were more militant in strategy, uncompromising in attitude and separatist in ideology), anxious to overcome the shortcomings of the neglecting the interests of the Muslims by the traditional Tamil leadership, sought to exploit this by arguing for minorities as a whole in the face of the dangers of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism (A. Ali 1997). Despite the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 14 May 1976 that called forth the constitution of Tamil Eelam as a separate state (Ibid.), which pushed the majority of Muslims into opposing a unified North East Province (or an ethnic Tamil state) aspired to by Tamil nationalists, there was still an alliance with many north east Muslim community leaders (McGilvray and Raheem 2007), with a number of Muslim youth becoming convinced of Tamil militant ideology and joining the emerging militant organisations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which had begun to gain strength in the late seventies (A. Ali 1997). As Tamils began to become militarily organised in the Seventies, many Muslim youth joined them in the struggle for Tamil rights reflecting common concerns over land, language and the failure of the Sinhalese community to recognise the grievances of minority communities (International Crisis Group 2007). "Arguably these young revolutionaries were protesting as much against their own leaders' conciliatory attitudes as against Sinhalese domination. Muslims had been affected by various state-sponsored development schemes in the east that had resulted in an influx of Sinhalese settlers and the loss of some Muslim lands but these issues had not provoked any real protest from their national leadership" (Ibid, 5).

The LTTE in particular supported Muslim concerns over land acquisition by Sinhalese settlers whilst many Muslims though not content to engage in a violent separatist cause, nevertheless had little alternative channel for their disaffection. In the early years of the conflict itself, it was reported that refuge was offered by the Eastern Muslims to displaced Tamil civilians (and fighters) after skirmishes with the security forces (Ameerdeen 2006).

As a result of this, at the initial stage of the Tamil uprising in the mid – late seventies, there was considerable support from the Muslims of the east. This situation would have continued with the privileged Muslim political elites in the west of Sri Lanka and the socio-economically disaffected Muslim farmers in the east had not the education reforms privileging the Muslims began to bear fruit with a new nascent eastern Muslim intelligentsia anxious for social mobility with greater religious awakening brought about for the Muslim community. This new Muslim middle-class began to demand for additional practical socio-economic concessions (university admissions and job quotas, for example) and were also placated with abroad array of Islamic religious and cultural self-esteem programmes, some of them funded by rival Sunni and Shia regimes in the Middle East, which cost the government nothing but earned it greater allies. By the end of the seventies and early eighties, this religious and cultural self-esteem programs would also set in phase a theological and religious renaissance of the Muslim community leading to a religious identity at odds with a cultural and ultimately expressed national identity.

The debate around the MMDA reforms in particular illustrates these tensions around religious identity. The MMDA has come to be seen as an identity marker for the Muslim community despite its problematic provisions and practical consequences. Many individuals are 'indoctrinated' with this opinion that should the MMDA come under serious review and potentially be abolished, Muslims would lose this identity marker (Hamin and Issadeen 2016). As a result, certain Muslim political, religious leaders, influential individuals and community members have a highly protective attitude towards the MMDA. But the reservations expressed around the challenge to identity from the potential reform speaks loudly to the tensions and challenges within the expression of an identity congruent with the context of the country. Yet the expression of Muslim identity and the pursuit to maintain and develop that had and has had repercussions on inter community relationship[s].

This would not be helped with the development of an ethnic conflict in the early eighties which helped to polarise communities even further.

Chapter 5 – The Consolidation of a Political Identity (1983 – 2009)

"Some people criticize the Muslims for their political engagement but we have to understand that this was not done in a vacuum and was also part of a response to the context of that time. However there was something lost in how the Muslims developed their political identity"[177]

5.1 Introduction

This chapter covers probably one of the most challenging periods of Sri Lankan history (especially with regards the ethnic conflict) and in itself requires quite a lot of detailed research and study. However, for the purposes of this study, it will provide a slightly superficial glance at this time period choosing to largely focus on the Muslim community and their role / involvement in this period. It thus tends to gloss over other major incidents of the conflict and doesn't do justice to the nuances of the discussion. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is overly simplified and is broken down into significant time periods which are of relevance to the Muslim community but not necessarily of importance for considering the conflict as such. It also remains a crucial part of the Sri Lankan Muslim discourse that is constantly evolving into the current time period.

It however starts with a significant incident in 1983 which is one of the critical junctures and fault lines not only for the conflict in the country, but also in terms of the relationship between Muslims and the rest of the community. It is from this juncture that the rest of the relationship between the Muslims and the other communities changed.

The period of the conflict that evolved from this juncture is examined in crucial stages in order to understand the dynamics of relationships and politics.

5.1.1 Years: 1983 - 1990

The previous chapter discusses in detail the lead up to the early eighties and the fractious relationship that existed not only between the Tamils and the Sinhalese but also the sowing of the seeds of tensions between the Tamils and the Muslim communities.

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[177]   Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

The Anti Tamil Pogrom

After the turbulence of the sixties and seventies, the eighties saw a downturn into more violent incidents. Coming into the eighties, the relations between the communities especially the Sinhalese and Tamils was deteriorating. In 1981, following violence after local government elections in Jaffna, the main library (the second largest library in Sri Lanka and the main library for Tamil material in the country) was burnt down. Whatever the reasons for the burning down of the library, its destruction (mainly perpetrated by rioting Police), was not only interpreted by Tamils as a deliberate attack on Tamil learning, culture and history, but as justification of the inability for Sinhalese and Tamils to coexist (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). From that time on Tamil activists and organisations led the civilians to believe they could not be guaranteed safety by the government of Sri Lanka; and the Sinhalese police and army in the Northern Province were seen as enemy occupying forces (Feith 2010). The tensions (and related violence) would spread to other parts of the country as well and take a dramatic turn in 1983.

Following the killing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna[178], there was an outburst of retaliatory violence in July 1983 against Tamils in the south, made worse by its politicisation by the Government of the day. When the soldiers' bodies were returned to Colombo, anti-Tamil riots erupted. The armed services, the police and thugs from the ruling party were all alleged to be involved in attacks against Tamils and Tamil property (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Violence exploded in Colombo, where Tamil businesses and residential areas were set on fire and looted. The riots lasted for about a week, and during that time mobs of Sinhalese systematically attacked Tamil homes and businesses, looting, destroying and murdering. The mobs had electoral rolls that identified the Tamil properties, provided to them by people linked to the government, including government ministers (Feith 2010). Compared to previous bouts of violence against the Tamils, the pogrom of 1983 was different in that Tamils from all sections of society were targeted as they were perceived threats against the state. "So where there had once been limited violence between Sinhala and Sri Lankan Tamils, there came to be generalized violence between Sinhala and all Tamils no matter what their origin" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990, 38). As an interviewee from a focus group said:

> "1983 represented a watershed era in Sri Lankan politics and community relations. At that time, it was dismissed as a usual inter community riots. Its only years later that we are aware of what took place and not only that the fact that it`s very murky. Because just as it is billed as a Sinhala government instigated pogrom against the Tamils, there were Muslims who either participated or stood by and did nothing thereby being complicit. However, there were equally Sinhalese and Muslims who at the risk to their own lives sheltered and protected Tamils. Either way the pogrom in hindsight should have sent warning signals to other minorities about what could happen to them"[179]

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[178] In response, the Sri Lankan army killed more than 50 Tamils in the Northern Province, but it was the LTTE attack on the 13 soldiers that the media and the government focused on (Feith 2010).
[179] Key Informant Focus Group discussion held with Muslim professionals in May 2016

As many as two thousand Tamils were killed (with many neighbourhoods being destroyed) and nearly 100,000 Tamils in Colombo itself being displaced[180] (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). The pogrom succeeded in sending out a message of shocking atrocities committed by the majority Sinhalese community and creating an outpouring of sympathy for the Tamil civilians who sought asylum in other countries and for those militant Tamil groups who opted to take arms for their struggle.

The Sri Lankan government unfortunately also mishandled the political situation following Black July thereby not only turning "the island's crisis into a regional and international conflict" (Bandarage 2009, 110)[181], but helping to push the extreme elements of the Tamil communities out of the political process. There was no open condemnation from the Sinhalese ruling elite or state institutions neither were any meaningful immediate measures taken to prevent the violence against the Tamil civilians from spreading to the other parts of the island from Colombo (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). The then president of the country, J.R. Jayewardene, has in fact been put on record as saying "I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna (Tamil) people now. Now we cannot think of them. Not about their lives or of their opinion about us. The more you put pressure in the north, the happier the Sinhala people will be here… really, if I starve the Tamils, Sinhala people will be happy" (Ibid, 10)

Start of the Conflict

The pogrom against the Tamil community legitimized the claims of militant groups like the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) that the Sinhalese majority would not be accommodating to the rights and privileges of the Tamil community. Thus the financial, moral and physical support for the groups increased from the displaced Tamil community. The consequence was an escalation of the Tamil secessionists struggle in the north and east and a government attempt to maintain the territorial integrity of the country.

Close to a million Tamils fled Sri Lanka to the west and the Tamil guerrilla response took an organized shape in the LTTE, who received sympathetic votes from Tamils affected by the pogrom. The Tamil demand for a separate state, rather than for some degree of lesser autonomy became stronger supported by

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[180] This led to the mass migration of Tamils seeking refuge to places like Canada, UK and US thereby encouraging support for the 'Tamil' cause. It has been known as one of the darkest days in Sri Lanka's history and is often referred to as Black July, particularly as the security forces did very little to help the Tamils, supposedly at the orders of the government. Later on evidence has shown that the government of the day (and ministers at that time) had been part of the anti Tamil riots. In 2004, then president Chandrika Kumaratunge tended a public apology for this act.

[181] The regional interest came from India as a result of the outpouring of support for Tamils from the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. International interest came about as a result of the arrival of Tamil refugees in places like the UK, Canada and Australia, fleeing the black July pogrom. Supported by human rights organisations, perceptions were strengthened that 'all Sri Lankan Tamils were political victims' (Bandarage 2009), which further advanced the opportunity for people to immigrate for economic advancement.

the acts of violence carried out by the LTTE in pushing for this cause and as the Sri Lankan government responded in kind. The LTTE claim that they are a product of the Sinhala violence and chauvinism, and hold the belief that Tamils will not win any justice from the Sinhala polity (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008).

At first the LTTE attacked particular military or state targets. Later they broadened their attacks to include Sinhala civilians more widely. In 1985, for example, a major attack was launched on Anuradhapura, by then the northernmost Sinhala stronghold, in which many Sinhala civilians were killed and the central Buddhist temple of the city—a temple closely associated with the history of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation—was attacked. The attacks on predominantly Sinhalese 'civilian' targets succeeded in the politicization of ethnic distinctions (ibid) and creating further polarizations amongst and between the communities, in particular the future of relationships between the minorities and the majority would be affected.

Though the pogrom was directly against the Tamil community, it also consolidated the position of the Muslim community in terms of their representation and reaction. For many Muslims as well, the pogrom served as a cruel forecast for what they could be faced with in the future. Inevitably this is a position from which the state would not recover from in terms of perceptions of its relationships and attitudes to minorities often by minorities themselves. As an interviewee said

> *"I remember being in Colombo during the `83 riots. The people were coming house to house looking for Tamils and when they would find them, they would take them outside and kill them. They came to our house and I remember my father opening the door. We were scared. The people came in and then they saw my mother with her head cover and said `You are not Tamils. We will leave you but we know where you live. Don't worry, we will be coming for you very soon`. That still haunts me today especially as we later saw and learnt that there was state complicity in the whole affair often with government ministers leading the attacks on the Tamils. When I see some of the anti-Muslim rhetoric and what happened in 2014[182] to the Muslims, again with a similar lacklustre reaction from the State, I am reminded of what was said in 1983. We will be coming for you! "[183]*

The net effect was that not only many Tamils but "during the mid-1980s a large number of Muslims joined the ranks of the Tamil from Eravur (a town in the East of Sri Lanka) to fight the Sri Lanka state" (Imtiyaz 2009). The joining of the Eastern Muslims with the Tamil militant groups despite the Muslim political leadership in the South seemingly being supportive of the government and

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[182] In 2014, in the southern town of Aluthgama, there were Sinhala-Muslim clashes which many feared was similar to the 83 riots. Thankfully the scale was not as severe but the fears had been laid in the minds of the people about the potential for this to happen.
[183] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyas Razak, August 2015

mainstream Sinhala political parties, once again shows a sense of disconnect between the grassroots Muslim community in the East and the political leadership (of elites) based in Colombo. The latter were not only seen to be 'untrustworthy' especially in their co-operation with the Sinhala ruling political class but also in their complicity and involvement in the pogrom itself (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011). As an interviewee said

> "The 1983 riots ennobled Tamil militancy against the Sinhala state but also showed a public difference between the Muslims in the east of the country and the Muslims in Colombo and the South who represented the political elite. This difference speaks volumes for the disconnect between the two constituencies, with the Muslims of the East saying they didn't feel represented by the Muslim political leaders in Colombo. In the wake of this gap of leadership and in a spirit of solidarity and also because there was sympathy with the Tamils at that time, the Muslims of the East joined the Tamil militants. This caused a lot of concern for the Muslim political leaders of the East who could see that Muslims joining the Tamil militancy could have severe repercussions for the future and who were frustrated that political leaders from the community in Colombo were not sensitive to this"[184]

Tensions between Muslims and Tamils

This sense of unity in cause felt between the two communities in the east after 1983, would be short lived as tensions started to rise as a result of the cycle of violence (including extortion, robbery, political marginalization and killings) created by the Tamil militants harassing the Muslim community for 'mandatory contributions' to their cause (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). These tensions were consequently seized upon, exploited and aggravated by a deliberate government strategy to increase divisions between the two communities thereby preventing the formation of a united front (ICG 2007, Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011). The security forces in particular have been implicated in instigating and supporting violent confrontations between Muslims and Tamils such as the attack on the (Tamil) village of Karaitivu (Eastern Sri Lanka) in April 1985 when Muslim youths went on a rampage killing several people and burning hundreds of houses (ICG 2007), which was subsequently followed by another incident in the north west town of Mannar where three Muslim worshippers were said to have been gunned down by Tamil militants inside a mosque (A. Imtiyaz 2009). After the incidents in 1985, the LTTE appears to have lost its patience with the Muslims (Ali 1997), changing their compromising approaches towards them and increasing the number of violent attacks on the Muslim communities in the north east and east of the country. Some Muslims were subsequently armed by the government for their own protection but this provoked the situation as they were also involved in vigilante action against neighbouring Tamil villages, inciting more reprisals from the LTTE (ICG 2007).

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[184] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015

With the intensifying territorial struggles, the Muslims were inevitably caught up. The Tamil separatists led largely by the LTTE through their focus on the north and east of the country, started to lay claim to Muslim-held lands (especially in the east), thereby worsening differences and increasing hostilities between the Tamils and the Muslims (Bandarage 2009).

In addition, there was an outpouring of sympathy from Tamil Nadu in neighbouring India and over the next few years support and training was provided to Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups in India by the Tamil Nadu government and the intelligence wing of the Indian Government (Feith 2010). As a result, the numbers of Tamil militant groups proliferated and became increasingly severe with their response to the pogrom. At first the groups attacked particular military or state targets but they broadened their attacks to include civilians. Whilst this started off with Sinhalese civilians in mainly the western part of the country, by the end of the eighties, the attacks had spread to the east and north to include the Muslim civilians.

The Indian Government, largely concerned about the spill over effects of the Sri Lankan conflict on their shores, tried to unsuccessfully mediate between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government after the 1983 violence until the signing of the Indo-Lanka Peace accord in 1987[185] and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution.

The 'Indo Lanka' Accord

The 'Indo-Lanka' accord was completed after a period of 2 years of negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and Tamil militants mediated by India amidst growing violence. At these series of meetings, the Government had not engaged the Muslim community which had important implications for the latter (Lewer and Ismail 2011). In particular, the proposals put forward by the Tamil militants which eventually ended up with the Accord proposed for the formation of a new administrative Regional Council made up of a merged Northern and Eastern Provinces (effectively a proxy 'Tamil Homeland' as demanded by the Tamil militants) called the 13th Amendment. This would effectively place the Muslim majority areas in the East under Tamil governance which to some meant, under the LTTE control. In the light of this and the growing violence between the Muslims and the Tamils in the east, it had become clear to the Muslim politicos that the survival of the community could not be guaranteed under an LTTE/Tamil administration. As an interviewee said

> *"The 'Indo Lanka' accord too all intents of purpose was a milestone for the country in terms of hardening Sinhala nationalist sentiment as there was*

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[185] By the end of 1987, there were over 150,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the state of Tamil Nadu "and the activities of some Sri Lankan Tamil militants and the underworld were contributing to increased internal disorder there" (Bandarage 2009, 112). There is of course much more to India's involvement during this period in the Sri Lankan crisis which needs to be properly understood.

a fear of a loss of the sovereignty of the country with the intervention of India. For Muslims (especially those from the East of the country), the fact that the Muslim politicians had not been consulted in any talks on the merger of the north-east province which would affect the Muslims in the east showed the weakness of the `accommodation` politics that had been in operation especially after independence. The accord not only showed (in the eyes of the Eastern Muslims) the weakness to stand up the government but also in some eyes reinforced the idea that the Muslim politicians did not really care about what was happening in the east and to the Eastern Muslims. In this context, calls from the Eastern Muslims for their own political representation grew louder and became more justified"[186]

The calls for separate political representation for the Eastern Muslims would strengthen the formation of Sri Lanka's first Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which imbibed both religious and ethnic language, in its attempt to represent the Muslims (see below for for details). The talk of this type of political representation and the concerns expressed by the Muslims about the accord brought a different dimension to the conflict. As Sivathamby (1987:193) states, the violence between the communities in the east "highlighted an aspect of Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis that had up to then escaped attention". In other words, hitherto up to now, the conflict had been considered 'Sinhala-Tamil' (Lewer and Ismail 2011).

With the signing of the Accord in 1987 and despite repeated assurances that emphasised that "Muslims were a Tamil speaking group living in the Tamil homeland as a separate ethnic group, with their own separate ethnic identity and that the Northeast Province was the motherland of Tamils and Muslims alike" (Tharmakulasingam 2000, 330), it was clear that the accord did not articulate Muslim grievances nor acknowledge them to be separate from the Tamils (Lewer and Ismail 2011). As an interviewee said

> *"The Accord did not really acknowledge and address the violence between the Muslim and Tamil communities and as well the violence perpetrated against Muslims by the LTTE. The Muslims' security concerns and perceptions of threats were generally ignored, and this was an issue of great concern to the Muslims. The Accord which also brought about the controversial 13th amendment to the constitution that introduced provincial councils as a way of sharing power failed to provide sufficient attention to the effect on Muslims. Notwithstanding this, the effect of the Accord for the first time was also to show the influence of the Muslim politicians present in the mainstream political parties"[187]*

For the 13th Amendment to be confirmed, the Accord called for a referendum. In the context at that time, it was seen that the Tamils were generally for the merger

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[186] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[187] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

and the Sinhalese were against it, thus any referendum (and subsequent election) would be lost or won on the basis of the Muslim vote (Haniffa 2011). Thus the potential backlash from both the Sinhalese and Tamils over the merger vote influenced Muslim political thinking during the next decades. It was seen that Muslims would hold a key bargaining power, yet it also showed that Muslim politicians were unable to successfully counter threats to the community from within the national parties. As an interviewee said:

> *"Muslim parliamentarians' response to the accord was far from uniform and clearly party-based. It was remarked at that time that Muslim politicians 'only try to persuade the Muslim community towards their party point of view and never try persuading their party or their government ... towards the Muslim point of view'. The accord and the response remain an indication of the need for a different type of Muslim political representation, and the SLMC emerged in its aftermath as a successful political force. The party won a significant number of seats in the provincial council elections of 1988 and then again in the general elections of 1989 and 1994"*[188]

The story of the Accord shows that the complexity of politics and security concerns within the Sri Lankan context were not reducible to the protagonists with arms alone. By 1990, the Indo-Lanka accord would fail and the Indian government pulled out of any direct engagement in Sri Lanka. This would lead the Tamils to believe that there were no genuine political discussions on power-sharing possible emanating from 'southern' Sri Lanka (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). In addition to this, partly as a result of the accord, the response of the government to the Tamil crisis also succeeded in helping to push the extreme elements of the Sinhala community as well out of the political process. The government's response to ban parties such as the JVP[189] (and the TULF), thereby ensured that the vacuum of leadership would be filled by armed militants within both the communities.

With the failure of the Accord, the violence that ensued proceeded along the lines of mutuality, in the sense that the LTTE violence against the Sinhalese gave justifications for the Sri Lankan polity to continue perpetrating state military action against the Tamils (Imtiyaz and Stavris 2008). It also signalled to the Muslim community of a need to rethink their previous engagement in terms of an accommodation politics within existing government parties and perhaps the need to engage more widely and independently.

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[188] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed, November 2016

[189] An irony that this took place given the fact that the JVP had never been 'anti-Tamil'. However the move by the government shows that even in this very precarious situation, the government chose politics as a response instead of being moved by the national considerations for the country.

Hence by the end of the Eighties and leading into Nineties in particular proved to be the most violent episodes in Sri Lanka's young history but also complex in terms of political engagement[190].

The Sinhalese Insurrection

It would be remiss not to mention the parallel conflict that took place during this period as well. Though this insurrection were essentially 'intra-group' conflicts between state actors and a wide range of disgruntled Sinhalese sub-groups (Bush 2003) and confined to the 'Sinhalese-majority' areas of the island, it is clear that there were correlations with the wider community. As an interviewee said

> *"Conflicts in Sri Lanka have to be considered as much from the inter-group dynamics as with intra-group dynamics. Both mutually reinforce each other. The Sinhala insurrection was the culmination of how inter-group fears of the Sinhalese (namely against the Tamils and later the Muslims) were central points of reference in intra-group mobilisation. Put in other words, the Sinhala insurrection was the excessive culmination of how the fear of the Tamils could be mobilised to counter apparent policies that were not positive towards the Sinhalese. In this case it was the Indo- Lanka agreement of 1987 which was the catalyst as the disgruntled Sinhalese (especially unemployed youth) felt that more provisions were being given to the Tamils"[191]*

The Sinhala insurrection in the current narrative of conflict in Sri Lanka is not really given much headlines, but it still remains the singular threat to state authority (Bush 2003). It also is a period of extreme violence and atrocities which the Sinhalese majority state perpetrated on its own communities. As an interviewee said

> *"As much Sinhalese were killed during this time by the State as were killed during the 28-year-old conflict with the Tamil Tigers. Thus the narrative of the ethnic conflict has to be tempered with the question of power, inter and intra group dimensions. The key lesson from this episode is really the role of the State. So in one sense, its responses to how it engaged with the minorities should be seen in the light of how it engaged with the rural Sinhalese. Both categories were treated badly which illustrates the elite – rural class divide and also when it was suitable was co-opted into political rhetoric"[192]*

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[190]   Between 1987 and 1990, the Sri Lankan Government was effectively fighting uprisings on two fronts: one in the north with the Tamils and one in the south with Sinhala youth influenced by leftist communist tendencies. Ethnic issues aside, many of the causes of Tamil and Sinhala militancy were strikingly similar – the frustrations of unemployed youth with a failing economy and a class ridden political system that offered no channel for their aspirations. In the south, the uprising was dealt with bloodily setting aside almost all pretense of legality with death squads, mass human rights abuses and disappearances. This similar heavy handed approach was carried out in the North as well and has been largely part and parcel of the State mechanism (regardless of which party is in power) since then as an excuse to tackling insurgency but largely was seen as a tool to put down dissent and opposition.

[191]   Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

[192]   *Ibid*.

it is unclear how the Sinhalese insurrections affected the other communities, apart from the obvious implications for security due to attacks in Sinhala dominated areas. However, what is notable is the lack of rhetoric around this conflict that was apparent in the parallel conflict with the Tamils. As an interviewee said

> *"With regards the Sinhala insurrection, there was a deafening silence from Muslim politicians and civil society of the day on this. It was as if since the insurrection did not drastically affect the Muslims and their political representations, there was a feeling that this was not something to be involved in. Again it points to this real dichotomy of community relations. The Sinhalese insurrection was seen as a 'Sinhalese' problem and so other communities didn't respond. The Tamils were in any case involved in their own conflict. The Muslims were concerned about what was happening in the north and east. All of this points to the isolation and polarisation of the communities"[193]*

So heading into 1990, Sri Lanka in the middle of two conflicts was also on the brink of both inter and intra group conflict. The Sinhala insurrection serves as a reminder that mobilising ethno nationalism for an inter ethnic conflict and to challenge the 'other', if left unchecked and unfulfilled could be disastrous for intra ethnic relations, especially when this mobilisation is seen as a way of glossing over intra-group conflict. As an interviewee said

> *"What we learn from the Sinhalese insurrection is the fact that it was the result of frustration from Sinhalese youth who felt unfulfilled following their mobilisation on a Sinhalese chauvinistic agenda against the Tamils, from the 1956 era. By implication, a focus on the elimination of chauvinism as a means of managing ethnic relations, must consider both its intra-group origins, inter-group consequences and the interaction between the two"[194]*

This to some extent can also be seen in the light of the Tamil insurrection which itself became as much of an intra-group conflict as it was an inter-group conflict. The implications for the Muslim community were and still remain whether this would also follow a similar trajectory or how this could be tempered.

5.1.2 Years: 1990 – 2002

By 1990, the LTTE had emerged as one of the world's most ruthless terrorist organizations, as they perfected the use of suicide bombers and recruitment of child soldiers and through their record for overpowering the Indian Peacekeeping Force[195], the mass displacement of Muslim's from the north in 1990[196], and the

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193   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
194   Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015
195 A disastrous attempt by the Indian government to interfere both militarily and politically in the conflict in 1987
196 About 100,000 Muslims were given 24 hours by the LTTE (without warning or reason) to leave the northern province. They eventually settled around the capital Colombo or in an area called Puttalum (3 hours north of Colombo) where they have been in refugee camps till today.

assassination of key Sri Lankan political and military leaders, the Sri Lankan president, Ranasinghe Premadasa and former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Ghandi.

Attacks on Muslims

The two incidents that would finally damage community relations (between Muslims and Tamils) beyond any repair took place in 1990. Capping off a couple of months of massacres on the Muslim community in the east (A. Imtiyaz 2009), there seemed to be a premeditated counter strike by the LTTE in the north and east of the country against the Muslim community. On 3 August 1990 2 mosques in Kattankudi, a densely populated Muslim town on the eastern seaboard were attacked. In similar fashion, LTTE gunmen drove up to the mosques, locked the doors to prevent escape and began firing into the crowd inside with automatic weapons. More than 100 men and boys were killed and remains one of the most traumatic incidents of that town (See figures 6-7)[197].

Figure 6: The bullet holes are still present in the mosque and maintained as a reminder (picture taken by the author on a visit to the mosque in March 2006)

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[197] Even today, the mosque is preserved as it stands after those incidents as a memory of what took place that day. Having visited that mosque in March 2006, it remains a poignant symbol of the conflict and those attacks in 1990. Praying in this mosque after all this time does evoke certain disturbing feelings of a burden of history.

Figure 7: The mosque is still used for normal prayers but serves as a reminder of that day (picture taken by the author during a visit in March 2006)

The Kattankudi massacre was only the most graphic incident in two months of LTTE attacks on Muslims in the East that may have killed as many as 1,000 (ICG 2007) and was followed by reprisals against the Tamils. "Most Muslims who had been part of the LTTE and other groups were expelled or left forthwith. Some were beaten or killed by young Muslims outraged by the Tamil militants' actions" (ibid, 27). There is little to ascertain the reason for why this incident took place when largely the Muslim community had remained 'neutral' in the tensions, but some speculate that it was to do with the fact that revenge was taken on the Muslim community. This was after some of the Muslims who had joined the LTTE and later deserted were then subsequently executed, which was then exploited by the government, who aggravated the situation by introducing 'Muslim' home guards that were accused of collaborating with the government forces and promoting anti-Tamil violence (L. Farook 2009). The shock on the Muslim community was profound with broader ramifications of Muslims fleeing areas of predominantly Tamil populations to more secure Muslim towns and villages along the eastern coast. Others abandoned paddy lands they owned in rural Tamil areas, fearing for their safety if they went out to cultivate rice fields, with figures of 63,000 acres being quoted as the land lost due to these events (ibid)[198].   As an interviewee said

> "*The incidents of Kathankudi remain a very sore issue between the Muslims and Tamils of the East. In a sense it gave the first ideas that the two communities would be incompatible with each other. However, what it also confirmed was what many of the Muslim political leaders from the*

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[198]   Most of these lands have remained inaccessible for Muslim owners ever since and this issue of land rights and accessibility is still a significant source of tension till today.

east had been saying that they were not safe living under the Tamils and that they needed safety and security for themselves. In order to get this, the political leaders affirmed that they needed separate political representation because the government was not providing it and of course it was felt that the Muslims in government who were not from the East were not sensitive to these predicaments"[199]

Subsequently, this was followed by the expulsion of the Muslim community from Jaffna and towns in the Northern Province despite there being good relations between the two communities (A. Imtiyaz 2011). The expulsion of the Muslim community from cities in the north is especially shocking not only in its scale but also in its nature. Without any warning in the third week of October 1990, LTTE cadres went from village to village in the Northern Province, announcing over loudspeakers that Muslims had 48 hours to leave LTTE-held territory with just the clothes on their backs (and little money) or face reprisals (A. Imtiyaz 2011). In Jaffna, Muslims were given only two hours to leave and permitted to take just 150 rupees ($1.40) with them (Ali 1997). There are of course varying accounts of what exactly happened that fateful day, but it has been reported that the displaced Muslims left behind as much as 5,000 million rupees ($46 million) worth of property and valuables (ICG 2007). As an interviewee said

"If the massacres in kathankudi was a sign of the potential rift between Muslims and Tamils, the exodus from Jaffna and the north pointed to the reality that the Tamils fighting for a separate homeland did not consider the Muslims as allies. This single event remains at the heart of the distrust between both communities to this day. It signalled that the Muslims were not trusted by the Tamils, yet what was even more sad was that there was a muted response from the government on these expulsions, which some have argued showed that the 'Sinhalese' were also not that bothered by the expulsions because it wasn't Sinhalese who had been expelled."[200]

The irony of this incident is that despite this being the "single most drastic, and yet most tragically 'successful' act of ethnic cleansing in the Sri Lankan conflict" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007, 22), there was very little support (or even outcry) from the government forces and international humanitarian agencies. "A scholar claims that: 'International humanitarian agencies, some of which were working in the Northern Province, made no effort to give international pressure to prevent the forcible expulsion of the Muslims'" (ICG 2007, 8). This lack of support (subsequently followed by similar stances in later incidents) from international agencies (and the government) would strengthen the belief amongst the Muslim community and its leadership (Ameerdeen 2006), that the international humanitarian community was solely biased towards the Tamils (and in fact supported the LTTE) and that the government had isolated them and did not consider them as real citizens of the country (a fact that would become more apparent as Muslim parties sought to establish themselves as another key

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[199] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015
[200] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

stakeholder within the peace talks that would take place a decade later). As an interviewee said

> *"If the `Indo Lanka` Accord was a sign that Muslims were not seriously thought of within the makeup of the country and serious discussions about federalism, the muted reaction to the expulsions for the first time cast doubt in the minds of many especially those from the east, that the politics of 'accommodation' were in fact working. The calls for separate Muslim political representation which had emerged in the mid eighties from the east of the country, become louder after 1987, finally had a justification and national political support after the expulsions. 1990 perhaps was the turning point in which many felt that separate Muslim political representation was justified"[201]*

Though the number of those expelled is not known exactly and is disputed, it is estimated that about 75,000 people (ICG 2007) were caught up in the process of 'ethnic cleansing'. Most of those chased away ended up in refugee camps (with makeshift housing) in a town called Puttalam (3 hours drive north from Colombo), where they still survive or in the case of the rich business community, in Colombo (Ibid.)[202] A few did return after the 2002 ceasefire only to find their houses destroyed and lands overgrown by the encroaching jungle or their properties occupied by Tamils.

Plight of the Displaced

Any eventual return of these displaced poses significant problems. Under Sri Lankan law, property owners lose rights to property occupied by others for more than ten years, a legal issue that also affects many other displaced people (ibid). Rebuilding Muslim villages in areas where they have been abandoned also would be very costly and hence some of those expelled have lost hope and have sold their land in the north at low prices. Having worked in this region and with this community since 2004, I can also testify from personal experience about the lack of interest to move or the high expectation for people to move back into a fully developed place without the need to once again inhabit refugee camps.

Successive governments have singularly failed to provide adequate reprieve and support for the displaced who find themselves in a political wilderness without much of a voice despite having representation in the government. This itself became a trump card for many as an interviewee from a focus group said

> *"The displaced from Jaffna have always been seen as a political weapon. They are wielded out to justify the fact that separate Muslim political representation as well as civil society engagement is needed because one can't trust the Tamils or the Sinhalese. Yet even with this representation, nothing has really happened and where there has been some progress for*

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[201] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed, November 2016
[202] I am of course quite familiar with the region and the conditions felt by the refugees after working there for about 4 years, some of whom still live in temporary shelters, very often with two to three families to one hut

resettlement and rebuilding, it has been used by the Muslim political leaders only for the benefit of the Muslim community in their electorates and to shore up their votes. Hence you have a perpetual cycle of ethno-nationalism feeding into this quagmire of conflict and tensions"[203]

Problems with education, proper shelter and sanitation plague the refugee camps and so the displaced people are dependent on menial jobs or hand-outs from philanthropists, the government or humanitarian organisations. Studies claim a correlation between the rise of poverty in this particular region and the arrival of the displaced people, although there is still insufficient evidence to validate this completely (Poverty and Conflict (PAC) Programme 2008). However, it is true that unemployment is a massive problem for the majority of them who rely largely on seasonal demand for labour such as work in the salterns and various other odd jobs (Saleem 2011). There is also a competition for resources in this particular part of the country exacerbating a tense situation between the displaced and the host community which is also linked to issues of identity (for example, between host community / displaced community, between displaced communities and between host communities); ownership and user rights of land; issues related to service provision (for example, health); access to livelihood (for example undercutting of the wage market) and so on (Poverty and Conflict (PAC) Programme 2008).

Fault line between Tamils and Muslims

There is very little information on the thinking behind the LTTE's anti-Muslim pogroms and expulsions of 1990. One surmise is that this was the 'collateral' damage of a brutal war where hundreds of Tamils died at the hands of the security forces in the east[204]. Yet the sheer brutality of the attacks shows a well planned strategy to eradicate Muslims. This justifies arguments made by mainly Muslim Scholars (Ameerdeen 2006 Imtiyaz 2011; Ali, 1997; McGilvray,2008,2007,2011), that there was concern from the LTTE leaders that Muslims would act as a fifth column against the insurgency in the north and east at best or at worst that the Muslims as a substantial Tamil speaking, non-Tamil minority would pose a political threat in the north and east. This latter reason becomes even more clearer with the emergence of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC), the first Muslim political party, in the late eighties that seriously undermined the LTTE campaign for political control whilst also advocating a Muslim autonomous region as a result of the Indo-Lanka accord (ICG 2007). It is felt that the emergence of the Muslims as a separate political entity was seen by both communities as a threat. "The inference is that the LTTE had to resort to this forcible eviction in the view of the new developments that had emerged in ethnic relations in the Eastern

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[203] Key Informant Focus Group discussion with Muslim professionals, May 2016

[204] The LTTE made some half-hearted apologies in 2002 at the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with some promise that Muslims would be permitted to return "when conditions are right". In 2002 LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham described the 1990 expulsions as a "political blunder". But many LTTE supporters continue to defend them as unfortunate by-products of the Tamil struggle. Subsequently this remains one of the unresolved issues of the post 2009 end of the conflict.

Province between the Tamils and the Muslims" (Hasbullah 2001, 46), such as the Muslims claiming to be an different ethnic group and the exploitation by the Government of this difference. As an interviewee said

> *"There are several reasons for the LTTE turning against the Muslims in the nineties, but we can't deny that they were unsettled by the emergence of a separate Muslim political party that not only challenged their legitimacy but did it from 'outside the government' which was a departure from Muslim politics. In doing so, the Muslims were asserting their separate identity. What we didn't realise as a community was that this was exactly the same reaction being felt on the Sinhalese side that has come to fruition over the last few years"[205]*

This presents a paradox, because one can argue that had there been no separate Muslim political leadership, the expulsions and the massacres may not have occurred but there are those that argue especially from the Muslim community that these incidents would have happened and that the separate Muslim political identity would keep the focus on them rather than have it diluted. As an interviewee said

> *"The 1990 incidents were of significant concern for the Muslim political leaders from the East of the country that there were calls for the recognition of right for self protection and the creation of a Muslim unit in the Sri Lanka Armed Forces and the arming of Muslim Youth. In calling for this, the message understood by the LTTE was that the Muslims were not only a political threat but could be an armed threat: to the Sinhalese (and the Government), the message was that Muslims could potentially form a new threat especially as there had also been talk of an administrative unit following the 1987 Indo Lanka accord; to the Muslims, what this meant was that they would have to defend themselves and not be dependent on the government. Unfortunately, the circumstances of that time meant that Muslim political leaders from the east had lost confidence in the government to protect them and also had lost confidence in the important leverage that Muslim politicians in government were having. It is these misconceptions and misunderstandings formed by the events of that time that have contributed to some of the challenges being faced today"[206]*

Suffice to say though that the 1990 expulsions were and is a significant trauma experienced by the Northern Muslims and remains a fault line between the Tamils and Muslims, much as how 1983 remains one between the Sinhalese and Tamils. Recognising and addressing the problems faced by those expelled in 1990 beyond just political expediency, would have (and still could) go a long way in addressing the concerns of the Muslim community vis-à-vis their relationship with the majority community as well as recognition (and eventually compensation) for

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[205] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[206] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed, November 2016

their involvement in the conflict which to date had been assumed to be mainly between the Tamils and Sinhalese. As an interviewee said

> *"The expulsions of the Muslims from the north and how this has been dealt with since then, provides clear evidence of the serious failure of representatives to assert forcibly a solution to the case. In the case of the government, there was a failure to really deal adequately with the expulsion and also to hold the LTTE to account. For the Muslim politicians, it has been felt that they haven't really dealt adequately with the issue"[207]*

Intransigence of the Muslim Polity

After the incidents of 1990 for the next decade or so, there would be an impasse regarding the conflict as both sides would make advances and lose positions against each other, yet what was clear was that the Muslim community had effectively became caught in the middle, with little chance of their voices being heard within the conflict. For example, as peace talks in the late nineties took place, the Muslim community were effectively side-lined to a consultative role at best, "with the net effect of minimizing Muslim participation, denying them parity of status and marginalizing Muslim constitutional concerns" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). It thus became clear to the Muslim polity that they would have to take measures into their own hands in order to seek representation something that had not really happened previously. As an interviewee said

> *"The Muslims had become invisible. This was largely due to the intransigence of their political representatives to say anything to upset the majority government for fear that whatever 'privileges' that the Muslim community were getting would be removed. As a consequence, the government suffered from 'ethno-lunacy' which is a term I developed to describe what has happened in Sri Lanka since at least the Seventies if not the Fifties. In the sense that it means that those afflicted by this 'disease' believe in an irrational manner towards other ethnic or religious groups, by stereotyping them and apply essentialist primordial descriptions. The Sinhala majority government were guilty of this in 1983 and not learning from this, chose to maintain this with their treatment of the Muslim community during the periods of the conflict (and even in a 2009 post conflict era). The Muslim community were effectively side-lined during the incidents of 1990, as well as the peace talks in 2002. The impression that was given was that the Muslims especially those in the north and east (and at threat from the conflict) were 'on their own' and the government (and extension the country) was not looking after their interest"[208]*

 This insecurity of understanding of where they stood would come to prominence during 2002, at talks surrounding the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), despite being initially in the government delegation, Muslim politicians sought to bring an independent position and a separate delegation to the talks, though eventually

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[207] *Ibid.*
[208] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

when the agreement was signed, Muslims were not a signatory as they were deemed "not directly involved in the fighting" (ICG 2007, 9). What this displayed was effectively the reality on the ground that "neither the government nor the LTTE really supported Muslim demands" (Ibid.) and thus preferred to deal with them separately. As an interviewee said

> *"The CFA period really highlights the extent of the isolation of the Muslims. Despite being in the Government delegation for the negotiations, the Muslims once again found that like in 1997, certain strategic discussions were being held that had implications for the community especially in the East, but it was being done without taking the views of the Muslim community into consideration. In other words, the Muslim politicians despite being part of the government delegation weren't taken into confidence. The impression was that should the Muslims wish to have any discussions regarding their safety and security, they would have to do this bilaterally"[209]*

It could be argued though, that the Government of Sri Lanka viewed the Muslims as citizens of the country falling within the remits of democratic norms of the country which ensures rights, security and protection for all citizens, and not as a separate military entity external to the nation state (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). However, it still does not explain the unwillingness by the Government to address key issues of concern to the Muslims (especially in the North and East) such as security and livelihood during the CFA negotiations. It is most likely that the Government themselves were slightly uncomfortable and unsure about the presence and role of the Muslim community in the bigger picture and it shows how they were viewing the whole process and relationship with the two main minority communities. Of course from the LTTE's perspectives the Muslims were at best "ethnic rivals and potential demographic competitors for territorial control of Tamil Eelam" (Ibid.33) and at worst were traitors to their cause after they had 'sided with the Government'. The LTTE would later offer regret and a willingness to address the consequences and repercussions of their actions in 1990, without making an explicit apology (Ibid.), yet the fundamental issue was that there was a distrust of the Muslim community by the LTTE as well as a lack of clarity from the government. As an interviewee said

> *"2002 represented to the Muslims a reckoning of where they stood in the eyes of the government and it is fair to say that it was not very much. Much to the frustration of the Muslims, it was clear that the Government were not really that 'sympathetic' towards them. So the Muslims can't be blamed if they felt that they had to fend for themselves. In time to come, this would also mean that the Muslims would turn to an external dimension to ensure that their concerns were addressed. It does though throw into question, the validity of the 'accommodation' politics employed by the Muslims. The question that was asked at that time and perhaps continues to be asked*

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[209] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

is 'Why should we go along with the Government if at the crucial moments of need for our community, we are not able to leverage that influence?'"[210]

This is also my contention that in view of what was being done by the Government and the LTTE, the position taken during the 2002 CFA negotiations by the Muslim politicians in fact betray their lack of confidence in both parties which stems not only from the way that they were treated by both parties during the 1990 ethnic cleansing in the north, but also by the sense of disillusionment felt by the community in terms of where they stood vis-à-vis the other.   As such this reveals a much wider cleavage between the communities which also exposes the weakness of the strategy of accommodation as well as future relationships. As McGilvray and Raheem (2007, 32) state, "Muslim efforts during this period to achieve high-level participation reveals the political obstacles and binary ethno nationalist thinking that will continue to hamper any future thoughts for reconciliation" [211].

In other words, the 2002 experience show for the first time, the fact that the accommodation politics employed hitherto by the Muslim politicians was coming to the end of its shelf life. Previously the Muslim politicians had felt that by going along with the Sinhalese politicians, they could extract rights and privileges for the community, except when it came down to the final crucial elements such as the sanctity of the country and the nature of security, the considerations of the Muslims were not taken into account. Thus for the first time, a challenge was being experienced whereby the fact that minority politics could not really exert the influence that it thought that it could. Hence my contention is that by 2002, a flashpoint paradox had been developed whereby there was an evolution in the nature of the relationships between the Muslim politicians and the government.

It was clear that it was no longer given that with Muslim support for the government their (i.e. the Muslim) community would no longer benefit from rights and privileges.   In other words, despite the Muslim politicians patronising the government and supporting them since independence, and to some extent even against the Tamils, when it came to key issues and challenges to the Muslim community, they were not able to leverage that influence. Hence the government was content to provide certain superficial privileges but would not budget from exerting the Sinhalese supremacy on the minorities. As an interviewee said

"The Sinhala supremacy of the government became apparent to the Muslim community in 2002. The Muslim politicians were forced to find alternatives when it became evident that valid reasons for the safety and security of the community would not be considered. The political quietism of the Muslim political community became redundant and this had / has implications for how the community relates itself to the government. 2002

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[210]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[211]   Emphasis here is mine

in itself opened up serious questions of legitimacy for the community's political affiliations"[212]

Consequently, separate agreements were signed between Muslim politicians and the LTTE in 2002 that seemed to allow for Muslim participation in the ceasefire agreement talks and though the agreements would address a right of return for Muslims to LTTE controlled areas, this was never really followed on and it was announced that the "LTTE were unwilling to deliver on their promise" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007, 34). Again these agreements and failure to address the right of return show the impotency of the Muslim politicians and also the way that they were perceived by the other communities. This would be seen in the periods 2002 – 2009.

5.1.3 2002 – 2009

As already discussed, a realisation of the implications of the CFA in 2002 marked another milestone in the evolution of Muslim political thought. After its signing, it is the Muslims who appeared to be the biggest victims and losers of the agreement as they became subject to increasing taxes on businesses by the LTTE and victims once again of increasing violence as the LTTE attempted to consolidate its control in the east (ICG 2007). Between 2002 and 2004, there were a series of incidents of violence reported against Muslims in the east (Ibid.) which were largely overlooked by Norwegian facilitators of the CFA and the Government anxious to keep the process going. The CFA had failed to adequately address the unhealed wounds from the 1990 episodes or be sensitive to the deep levels of distrust between the two communities in the East. These had repercussions for the relationships moving forward.

Isolation of the Muslims

In the words of one commentator, the "CFA turned out to be a disaster for the Muslims, especially to the Muslims in the East but no one, including the Government, took notice of it. Despite all assurances on paper, Muslim interests were shelved when the CFA was negotiated, finalised and signed" (L. Farook 2009, 185). As McGilvray and Raheem (2007, 34) state, "such efforts to keep the LTTE on board by catering to their narrowly focused negotiating preferences had negative repercussions for the Muslim community" contributing to "a rapid crystallisation of Muslim national identity" (ICG 2007, 10), from 2002 – 2004.

The message that was once again being confirmed to the community was that, as Muslims, you do not have a stake in the future of the country and so you would have to fend for yourself. As an interviewee said

> *"In the wake of the CFA, the alternatives for the Muslim community was to seek their own path in the peace agreements. What this meant was that*

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[212]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

at some point you had a negotiation process whereby the LTTE were talking to the Government and the Muslims at the same time"[213]

An example of this was the creation of a Muslim Peace Secretariat similar to those being developed by the Government and the LTTE, which not only got involved in negotiations but also "played an active role in developing political ideas among community activists and providing much needed infrastructure for Muslim approaches to the conflict" (Ibid.).[214] Yet the Secretariat has come in for much criticism namely because of its failure to move beyond internal fractures whilst also failing to really articulate a role in the peace process (L. Farook 2009). In particular, the internal fractures namely led by political party patronage bears testimony to the deep lack of cohesiveness and sense of vision for the Muslim political leadership. It shows not only a disconnect between the urban elite of Colombo and the rest of the country, but it also shows an evolution of political thought to not only institutions for the preservation of identity but towards representation.

An additional request that came out by the Muslim community during this time and symbolic of the polarisation and institutionalisation was the request by the community for the government to recruit Muslims into the police force to protect them (Ibid.). What this indicates is the lack of trust and confidence in the government and state apparatus to provide support unless it as institutionalised within the Muslim community. In other words, the trend of asking the government to provide alternative and parallel structures for the Muslim rights and privileges to be met continued with regards the security forces. A further suggestion of a separate Muslim administration in the Eastern Province was mooted, in the wake of any discussion of the LTTE being granted some sort of devolved power within the central government amidst a merger of the North and East Province. This suggestion in particular was seen by many within the Sinhalese community (as well as the Tamil community) as a 'betrayal' signalling the Muslim community's intent to 'separate' from the country, which at this particular time was highly sensitive. As an interviewee said

> *"The move by the Muslim community to suggest a 'separate' administrative unit in the wake of the merger discussions stemming from the Indo-Lanka accord and security forces was not received very well by the Sinhala government. It smelt a little like a stealthy approach by the Muslims to ask for something that the Tamils were fighting for. For the Muslims, they had resorted to ask for this because of the lack of trust that they had in the government and the other communities in terms of their aspirations being met"[215]*

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[213] *Ibid.*

[214] Since the end of the war in 2009, the Muslim Peace Secretariat has been transformed to the Muslim Secretariat, though it is slightly unclear what that role, scope and remit is of this organization. (L. Farook 2009)

[215] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

This dual track negotiation seems illogical now in hindsight as it calls into question the role and place of the Muslim community and pits them as a 'third force' within the conflict. It also paints a light on how they were really considered within the government. What it does also show is that the whole argument from the late nineteenth century between Ramanathan and Azeez, still existed within the echelons of the community where the community wanted to be recognised distinctly as opposed to being part of a wider conversation and that the other communities implicitly also acceded to that. A reinforcement of the way Sri Lankan nationalist politics had really evolved and been sustained. As an interviewee said

"The Muslims were caught in this bind in the sense that there was distrust and frustration that the Government would not represent their interests. This had been the case in previous times, and the Muslims had resorted to asking for their own representations. However, (and perhaps rightly so), the Government and international mediators decided that the conflict was between the state and the LTTE and thereby chose to 'ignore' the Muslims. Of course, in one sense there was a legitimate reason for this, but they failed to acknowledge that the conflict had affected all three major communities and that a comprehensive peace can not be achieved without taking into consideration, the view points for all stakeholders especially the Muslims"[216]

Of course, an argument can be made that the alternative that was proposed by the Muslims was not really an alternative but to perpetrate what had been the status quo so far, which is for the Muslims to seek their own representation and stance as opposed to the 'others'. This is what had been reflected to date with examples from the education process where you would seek for own representation by developing a parallel structure for the community. So the question that arises is 'Should the Muslim interests particularly in this context of the north and east as a result of the conflict be treated as separately or not?' As an interviewee said

"The Muslim identity politics was always split between those who were in Colombo and those outside. During the conflict era, it became pronounced in the differences with the east of the country. The political and community leaders from the East felt that they were not getting the support from Colombo especially during the conflict. As a result, during the signing of the CFA, the Muslims from the east were frustrated that their interests were not only being overlooked but being marginalised by those in Colombo. Thus internally though the Muslims became split on how to respond it was clear that they couldn't rely on the government for their protection and safety"[217]

Thus this study shows this vicious cycle developing for the Muslim community whereby identity representation had created an impression that the community

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[216] Skype interview with Dr Imtiyaz Razak, August 2015
[217] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016

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had to deal with their own problems whereby they were left outside of any discussions thereby forcing them to set up their own channel for communication. An alternative would have been to seek an alliance with other political parties (and other groups) who also felt that the CFA did not represent them and come to some sort of consensus of the willing. However, fault can not perhaps be placed on the Muslim community response during this time as being faced with this scenario and the context, it was perhaps the best response that could be given.

Homogeneity or Heterogeneity?

Despite what was discussed above, it was clear that there was a surprise when the Muslim response to the CFA was not homogeneous in terms of how the politicians responded. What was not understood at that time and perhaps also now is that the Muslim community could not be homogeneous. Although overshadowed by the conflict, the "increase in different groups and sub-groups within the Muslim community since the 1950s has resulted in the splintering of the Muslim community, whereby Muslims have become their own 'other'" (Faslan and Vanniasinkam 2015, 3)[218]. There was a difference in how the Muslims in the east viewed the CFA vs the Muslims largely in Colombo. Whilst Muslims in Colombo called for a special status in the east and special recognition during the CFA discussions, a large portion of community leaders in the east demanded equal rights not special rights and were adamant that they could not be governed in an administrative unit run by the Tamils (Bush 2003). However, this nuanced discussion seemed to get lost in the discussions within the Muslim community. What was observed in Colombo was that despite the SLMC trying to prove its credentials as being the 'sole political representative' of the Muslims, it was being challenged to this[219] both internally and externally. As an interviewee said

> "The CFA brought to light the superficial homogeneity that the Muslim community for a large part of the nineties had been under the illusion of unity in the face of the Tamil danger. Yet the CFA showed the opposite. It showed that when the chips were down the Muslim politicians could not hold onto a unified approach"[220]

This pretty much sums up the whole challenge of the Muslim community in the sense that there is no homogeneous position that can be developed because of the various diversities and geographical spread. As interviewees said

> "The 2002 CFA period was symbolic for a variety of reasons but in particular for the Muslim community, its political dynamics were finally exposed as an Achilles heel. Whilst this in itself would not have been the

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[218] This had implications not only for the period in 2002 when it became clear that there were no other issues for the community, but also in the period after 2009, in the aftermath of the conflict

[219] In addition, the LTTE undercut the SLMC and weakened their by position when they stated, that they would talk to all parties representing the Muslim interests and not just the SLMC. This also had an effect of increasing incentives for the internal fissures within the Muslim community to be realized openly (Bush 2003)

[220] Face to face interview with Professor Ken Bush, November 2015

issue, what it did mean was that it did hamper the overall CFA discussions or so it was also made to seem by elements of the Sinhalese press"[221]

"The Muslim differences were compounded during this period and became very ugly. Not only were the weaknesses of the Muslim political thought exposed but it had negative consequences on the community and also some repercussions on the overall process"[222]

It must also be stated that underlying this factionalism was the desire for power resulting in power struggles within the community. On one hand, there was the dichotomy of the urban elite versus the (lower) middle class intelligentsia, and on the other there was the difference between the urban elite of Colombo versus the rest of the country (Faslan and Vanniasinkam 2015). The intra-group conflict and the lack of homogeneity within the Muslim community was exposed with the CFA and to some extent also exploited. The intra group dimensions had been suspended over the inter group conflict but this came to the fore at the crucial moment of inter-group discussions. Like the others, the Muslim community also had substantial internal fractures, which in the case of 2002 was expressed within a political dimension and not through a conflict to express their grievances[223]. Once again this made it clear that "the dynamics of conflict within groups appears to be tied to those between groups" (Bush 2003, 174) as an interviewee said

"Despite the political fractures which exposed a certain weakness of the community, it can also be argued that this political intransigence was able to deflect and channel the frustrations of the youth instead of pushing them towards violence. This was the message that was meant to be conveyed to the government. In the context of the Global War on terror in a post 9/11 environment, the Muslim politicians did do well to contain this threat. However, this threat remained and still remains a viability in the face of perceived injustice being meted out to the community. It is also viable given the historical trajectory of the country"[224]

Tsunami Effects

In 2005, the Muslim community would feel aggrieved at being at the receiving end of perceived 'biases' on the part of the Government, the LTTE and the international community.   The 2004 Asian tsunami that affected the south and east of the country meant that Muslims accounted for about a third of the total victims (McGilvray and Raheem 2007).   Once again the cleavages within the Muslim community were put on public display as one of the worst hit parts of the country, the east of Sri Lanka, remained virtually neglected whilst the south (which was also badly hit) got the bulk of the international and government

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[221] *Ibid.*
[222] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[223] Although there have been warning bells raised about the possibility for Muslim youth to take arms and seek support for 'oppressed' Muslims very similar to the Tamil and Sinhalese insurrections (L. Farook 2009)
[224] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016

focus[225]. Having worked in this region during that time, I was able to witness first hand how the east was neglected in this initial response to such an extent that even many Muslims in Colombo who hailed from the south were fundraising for the southern areas that were hit and not the east[226]. As an interviewee said

"The 2004 Asian tsunami affected disproportionately the Muslim communities in Sri Lanka especially those from the east in terms of sheer loss of life and damage to private property. As the tsunami-recovery process shifted from emergency relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, the Muslims of the Eastern Province became increasingly disgruntled as to how they were treated. They found the pace of rehabilitation and reconstruction to be too slow, and felt discriminated against in relation to the South. In addition, there was anger towards the failure of Muslim politicians especially from the east to provide an effective response"[227]

The incident of the tsunami once again showed that the 'accommodation' policies pursued by Muslim politicians had its inherent weaknesses. When it came to issues of key significance to the Muslim community, the politicians (especially those with the government) were unable to extract sufficient measures to meet the needs of the community. Thus the message was clear that on certain privileges, the government was prepared to engage with the community but when it came to key strategic issues of importance, the government was not prepared to engage. This really puts into perspective the impotence of the political strategies of the Muslims which exposed a gap in leadership for the community. In this vacuum, it was clear that there would be others who could step in to fill that gap. This was reiterated by another interviewee who said

"The intransigence of the Muslim MPs from the east showed the general lack of influence of the MPs and their inadequate use of leverage within the government, especially those serving as cabinet ministers. In addition to the inability of Muslim MPs to provide for their constituencies, the divisiveness of the Muslim political leadership and its attempts at gaining short term political mileage were cited as key obstacles to the development of clear direction in dealing with the tsunami disaster such as ensuring vote banks were not broken at the expense of not resettling tsunami affected people"[228]

The situation was made worse with the pollicisation of the aid process (Frerks and Klem 2011) especially with a structural mechanism proposed for post tsunami relief that raised significant political and social implications. For a short period of time, the tsunami seemed to have appositive effect on the peace

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[225] For the north where the Tamil areas were affected, through the CFA and the easy movement created, the Tamil relief agencies were able to respond quite quickly.

[226] In my experience, the international community chose to help the south as it was easy to access whilst the north was in any case supported through the international humanitarian community because of the conflict. It was the east that remained largely untouched (except for the areas which was still deemed to be part of the conflict). In my experience, this further compounded the feeling of frustration and anger.

[227] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

[228] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

process. Responding to the humanitarian challenges, the Government and the LTTE with advice from the international community took immediate measures to negotiate an aid-sharing mechanism called the P-TOMS (Post Tsunami Operational Managing Structure)[229]. However, it became clear that "the tsunami produced merely a temporary halt in the dynamics of the re-escalating war" (Frerks and Klem 2011, 179), with the response aggravating underlying conflicts and strengthening conflict structures. Although this was signed in early 2005 promising greater inclusivity, the P-TOMS compounded Muslim fears of a Government-LTTE deal that would ignore their political and economic interests (ICG 2007), especially as it appeared to overlook the enormous destruction in Muslim areas and gave too much control of resources to the LTTE[230]. This is despite it on paper acknowledging the weaknesses of the CFA with regards the engagement with the Muslim community. As an interviewee said

> "*The P-TOMS was one of the first institutional recognition of Muslims' stakeholder status as it allowed representation at the high level committee and regional committees from Muslim political parties. Yet there was a sense of paternalism about this as the representation was decided without consulting Muslim political actors and they were refused signatory status. Essentially the government and the LTTE were saying to the Muslims— we will take care of you, there is no necessity for you to be a party to the negotiations. So really in that sense there was no departure from the CFA time"[231]*

To the Muslim community, the PTOMs glossed over the fact that they were the community most affected by the tsunami and whilst some space was available for articulating grievances to the State, the priority from the Government was to keep channels of communication with the LTTE open (Haniffa 2011). The inclusion of Muslims was a salutary move on the part of the government and was recognised as such. However, in its enthusiasm to seem inclusive according to prevalent peacebuilding norms, the government lost sight of Muslims' own ideas regarding their participation and representation (Ibid). Unfortunately, the Muslim seemed ill-prepared to exploit the occasion productively. They articulated their dissatisfaction by stridently insisting that they had been the 'most affected' by the tsunami and overemphasised the rhetoric of victimisation which did not go down well with the other communities. This was especially so when they once again proposed a separate secretariat to help the Muslims recover from the tsunami, to mirror the government (and LTTE) established entities (L. Farook 2009). The suggestion once again shows the polarisation of the communities and the lack of confidence in government institutions whereby the impulse of the Muslim community was to seek a separate institution to meet its needs without trying to

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[229] P-TOMS was introduced by the Kumaratunge government in July 2005 for a joint government-LTTE reconstruction programme for the areas of the north and east affected by the 2004 tsunami. It was welcomed by a variety of progressive forces as a step forward in the peace process, the tsunami recovery process and the development of the north and east. By 2005 the 2002 peace process had reached a stalemate with little or no hope of resumption (Haniffa, 2011)

[230] The mechanism was eventually disbanded because of opposition from Sinhala nationalists

[231] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July2016

engage in the existing national entities, thereby illustrating where they feel that they were a part of the conversation.

If anything the PTOMS illustrated the need for Muslims to develop a common position (Ibid) that would rise above political agendas. Yet the reality was that there was not only distrust with and from other communities[232] but also within the community that made it difficult for any clarity on a way forward. As an interviewee said

> *"The significant lesson from this was the sounding of a wake up call to the Muslim community as to their stance with regards the future peace negotiation process. It was clear that the Government's priorities would be not to jeopardise discussions with the LTTE and thus the concerns of Muslims would only be accommodated up to a certain level. This was of utmost urgency that prevailed during 2005 and 2006"[233]*

From the perspective of the Muslim community there was a need for a concerted effort even though Muslim political parties claimed that they have long agitated for parity of status. However what this meant concretely has not been argued in any systematic way, something that the government also maintained that the Muslims have not developed a clear position on the issue not helped by the wounded posturing (Haniffa 2005)[234]. This in particular was felt with regards in the post CFA era where there were disturbances between the Tamils and the Muslims but was not articulated well enough (Ibid.). In particular, there was the fear that the Muslim villages in Mutur and Kinniya close to Trincomalee harbour (in the east of Sri Lanka) would be subject to ethnic cleansing in the LTTE bid to take over the harbour and its surroundings but was not acted upon. Sadly, in 2006, these fears would become a reality and once again the government and Muslim leadership and civil society was left unprepared.

Resurgence of the Conflict

In 2006 once again the fear that the Muslim community had expressed about being on the front lines of the conflict between the Government and the LTTE was exposed as the 2002 CFA started to weaken and a return to conflict became inevitable. In April 2006, the LTTE seized control of the water supply to the Mavil Aru Anicut, a densely-populated watershed to the south of Muttur, a remote coastal town in Sri Lanka's Eastern province see Figure 8) . Muttur lies in the Trincomalee district, a district characterised by a relatively equal split between Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims and long associated with inter- communal tension. Muttur's 57,000 population, however, is predominantly Muslim and since 1984, the town had come under repeated threat or attack from the LTTE, its

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[232] In particular, it was clear that the LTTE had been reluctant to acknowledge Muslims political identity and thereby no space for for the inclusion of Muslim representatives as a third political entity to the peace talks (Haniffa, 2005)

[233] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

[234] Calling for inclusion asserting that it is their right only reflected an inability on the part of the Muslim leaders to engage with the process at a level that was required or demanded (Haniffa, 2005)

physical isolation exacerbated by a pervasive sense of insecurity[235]. In response to the taking of the sluice, the government mounted an offensive to take control of the gate in late July. By the 2nd of August, roughly 150 LTTE fighters occupied the centre of Muttur. According to ICG (2007), the LTTE occupied Muttur to divert Sri Lankan government forces from the Mavil Aru Anicut, to kill pro-government armed groups and to relieve pressure on LTTE guerrillas in the area. "The LTTE wanted to drive out Muslims from the East as they purged off the Muslims from the North to achieve their dream of Tamil Eeelam, exclusively for the Tamils in the North and East with Trincomlaee as the dream capital of Prabhakaran" (L. Farook 2009, 289)[236]
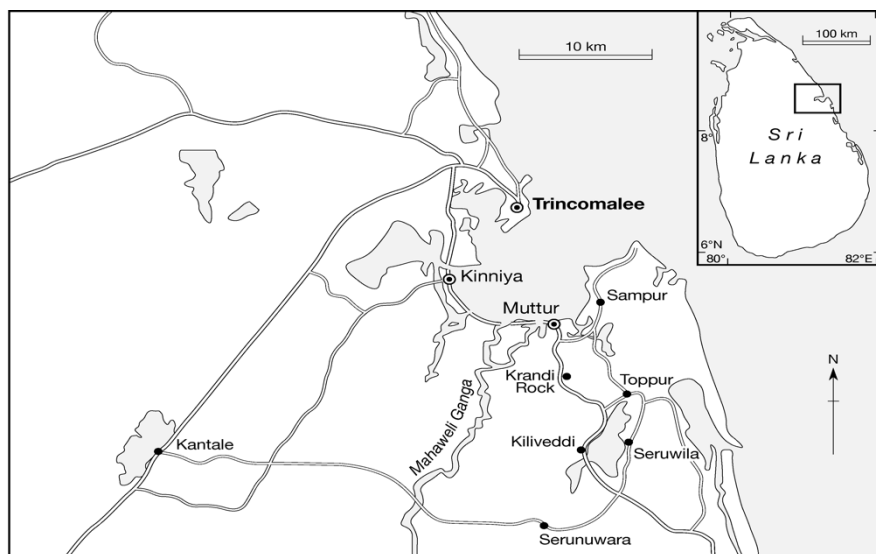

Figure 8: Map of Muttur and surrounding areas (Clarke 2008)[237]

After an initial attempt to reoccupy Muttur failed, the Sri Lankan military began to shell the town early on 3 August, forcing residents to flee their homes. Significantly, it was among faith institutions that people sought sanctuary (Clarke 2010). For example, thousands of people converged on the main Islamic Colleges and the three mosques within the town. The evacuation of Muttur began after morning prayers on Friday, 4 August, hours before the LTTE guerrillas began to abandon the town to government special forces, with residents walking to Kiliveddi where they were picked up by vehicles mobilised by local muslim organizations and taken to camps in Kanthale, at least 60 miles from Muttur (WSWS 2006)[238].

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[235] In May 2006, in a copy cat incident similar to what happened in Jaffna, notices appeared in Mutur ordering Muslims to leave within 72 hours (ICG 2007)

[236] Although It must be said that the slow response of the government to respond to the initial crisis, prompted fears that the government under pressure from Sinhala nationalists had its own designs to grab Muslim-owned land to be colonized with Sinhalese from the south (L. Farook 2009)

[237] This figure is taken from Clarke (2008) but the original source of the figure is from http://www.palgrave-journals.com/doifinder/10.1057/ejdr.2010.22

[238] A town of some 50,000 people, Kantale had a mixed population; 60% Sinhalese, 35% Muslim, and 5% Tamil. An inflow of 20,000 people threatened to overwhelm the local community and exacerbate inter-communal tensions and therefore required careful management and logistical support from all stakeholders

Once again it was notable that many international humanitarian organisations (and indeed the government[239]) failed to respond immediately to the crisis with many expressing scepticism on the morning of the evacuation that such an incident would take place[240]. Thus little preparation was made, and it was left to the local Muslim community organisations[241] and a few international humanitarian organisations to respond (Hovey and Saleem 2008).[242] When the government did eventually respond, it did so by pushing all its Muslim politicians to react, thereby turning this into a largely localised ethnic problem as opposed to a national humanitarian disaster that it was. This once again displayed the lack of clarity shown by the Government in terms of its dealings with the Muslim community. The Muslim community response (especially from the politicians) was not to challenge the government in terms of its dealings but to acquiesce to it.

Having been on the field during that time, it was clear to me that this was dealt with as a crisis within the Muslim community. Rather than waiting for the government (and the international community) to respond to this humanitarian crisis, the Muslim community through civil society and religious leadership responded immediately to provide relief whilst also appealing to the Muslim political leadership to intervene. As a consequence the governments response was to shift the burden of responsibility to Muslim politicians to respond[243]. Like in 1990, the evacuation of Muttur also was reminiscent of what had happened in Jaffna, and again displayed to the Muslim community, their position in the eyes of the LTTE as well as their standing within the government and the international community. "Judging from all what had happened, the Muslims concluded that the Mavil Aru water crisis was deliberately engineered by the LTTE to drive out Muslims from Muttur and Thoppur. They meticulously planned the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in these two areas in a manner which would avoid the negative publicity that they had faced when they drove out Muslims from the north at gun point" (L. Farook 2009, 311)

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[239] People pointed out that no senior government official or minister visited the displaced people until the fifth day when under pressure from various Muslim organisations, the president's advisor visited the area (L. Farook 2009)

[240] As someone who was involved in responding to this crisis, I can attest to the fact that this skepticism was expressed to me many times

[241] Some analysts point out that many Muslim organisations knew from prior experience that the government and others would not be responding and that is the reason why Muslim organisations collected the required food and other items long before the actual crisis started and were quickly on the ground (L. Farook 2009)

[242] I was involved at this time with this crisis working for Muslim Aid. This particular crisis has been documented quite well in Clarke (2010), Hovey and Saleem (2008), and so on

[243] This has been mirrored whenever there is any disaster affecting the Muslim community in the sense that the Muslim civil society and politicians are quick to respond with the government dragging its heels.

Nevertheless, 2006 signalled the start of what was deemed 'low-intensity conflict' but the war would escalate over the next three years before coming to an end in 2009. As the war started to escalate, those Muslims who had returned to the north after the 2002 CFA gradually fled LTTE areas back to the Government controlled areas. In addition, there were signs that there was a process of 'Sinhalisation' in the east through the appointment of numerous government officials in the Eastern provincial council; the declaration of certain areas in the east as ancient Buddhist and archaeological sites and so on (L. Farook 2009). As an interviewee said

> *"There is no doubt that since independence, through the result of state aided colonisation schemes, the demography of certain areas in the east were skewed in favour of the Sinhalese. This has played into the whole problem. The failure of successive governments to understand the delicate ethnic balance in the east has been its detriment. This has compounded the insecurity Muslims in the east feel with regards the Sinhalese (and the Tamils)"[244]*

End of the Conflict

The periods of 2006 – 2009 were the bloodiest as the conflict came to a dramatic and sudden end with the capture of and death of LTTE leaders. Whilst the end of the war is still a sensitive and controversial discussion point, the end of the conflict opens up doors for future reconciliation with a number of challenges. Yet the subsequent triumphalism of the government-orchestrated victory celebrations, the continuation of a militarised approach and the strong resistance to any political solution to the grievances of the Tamils (and the Muslims) all indicate that an inclusive and just political settlement remains distant (Goodhand and Korf 2011).

What is significant is that 2006-2009 showed that the "liberal peace experiment failed in Sri Lanka" (Ibid, 13) and this can be seen in the events post 2009. Despite the ending of the war in 2009, there was still some fear and security concerns expressed among the Muslims, particularly in the east. These concerns have emerged due to reports of planned efforts to change demography in Muslim majority areas, discrimination and state imposed hurdles in receiving post-tsunami assistance, state efforts to take lands belonging to Muslims in the names of archaeological sites and new conservation areas. Moreover, the seemingly protracted methodology to deal with the plight of the northern Muslims in terms of returning to their areas of origin, compensation and the need for restorative justice in terms of the injustice and atrocities they faced makes it currently difficult for Muslims to actively participate in a comprehensive post conflict reconciliation. The fear is that the conflict in Sri Lanka was used by successive governments to legitimise power against the minorities. "Sri Lanka's conflict is essentially a state formation conflict, in which the adversaries continue to give priority to war making

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[244] Skype interview with Pro Ameer Ali, March 2016

as the most effective and productive path to state making. For the Sinhalese political class, war is the most useful policy option to re-establish the hegemony of the unitary state with minor alterations." (Uyangoda 2011, 37). It is in this light that the post 2009 scenario is worth exploring in terms of the souring of ethnic relations especially with the Muslims as will be discussed in the next chapter. As an interviewee said

> "It is the post 2009 scenario that really shows much isolated and polarised the Muslim community had become in terms of how they were treated and with the rise of Islamophobia. Post 2009 for me is significant as it shows the results of the political accommodation that Muslims had chosen to follow"[245]

A post script is that many Muslim organisations (both international and local) were involved in the post conflict rehabilitation and humanitarian response working in the camps (Clarke 2010). This is quite telling especially in some of the northern areas and Muslims working with communities they were supposed to be against.

5.2 The Formation of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC)

It is clear from what has been discussed, that by the mid Eighties, the Muslim community (especially those in the East) were quite apprehensive in terms of the future of their security and the sense of threat that they were facing. This period of history is also important for yet another transformation of Muslim identity in terms of the development of its political identity with the establishment of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC). The SLMC occupies a unique position not only in Sri Lanka[246], as an interviewee said

> "The SLMC represented a break from the normal party political patronage and really wanted to make a mark in providing an alternative voice for the Muslims (especially from the east of Sri Lanka)."[247]

5.2.1 Growing Frustration

As a result of the first two decades of independence of a quietist and 'accommodation' approach to politics characteristic of the Muslim business and political elite (mainly from Colombo and the South), a growing frustration from the north and East Muslims (ICG 2007) would mean a change in tactics. This was especially so in the late seventies with the changes in constitution which many felt would have detrimental effects on the community (Ali 1997). "From the outset, the SLMC attempted to highlight the adverse impact on the Muslim community for not having their own political party" (Ameerdeen 2006, 129). As an interviewee said

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[245] Key Informant of Focus Group Discussion with Muslim professionals, May 2016
[246] Not only within Sri Lanka, but also within the general discussion on political Islam and the involvement of Muslims in democratic experiments.
[247] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015

"What we see as the genesis of the SLMC is the political context at that time. As a result of changing the constitution in 1978 which had detrimental effects for the minorities, it is interesting to see that the Tamils frustrated by this started their road into militancy and the Muslims opted for political engagement. Although the political reasoning for the Muslims was also based on the Pakistan example. The ideologues behind the SLMC formation, thought that if the Sri Lankan Muslims could unite under one political leadership as most sub-continent Muslims did under the Muslim League in the sub-continent, then they could rise to greater heights in all national fields. By the mid eighties as Tamil – Muslim relations grew worse, this added additional imperatives to the formation of this party"[248].

This tension between the 'North/East' and 'West/South' Muslims of Sri Lanka is a historical phenomenon as Muslims in the east had lagged behind Southern Co-religionists in education and representation in government service. As a consequence of this under representation, with the need to ensure amenable relations with the Sinhalese community, the southern Muslim political elite often remained politically quiet and cautious reluctant to draw attention to discrimination or ethnic tensions in public[249]. "The Muslim-Sinhalese relationship has had a direct impact on political consciousness among southern Muslims. Muslims in Sinhalese areas have always had a sense of being very much a minority and have acted accordingly in politics and business" (ICG 2007, 5). Whilst this also has helped to resolve difficult situations with the majority community through negotiation rather than confrontation, a lack of a clear strategy and plan for engagement with the majority community has also meant a "popular dissatisfaction with community political leaders, who have attempted to calm tensions rather than demand redress" (Ibid.) This is one of the challenges also currently being faced by community and political leaders currently. As an interviewee said

"The genesis of the idea for a separate Muslim political representation largely came down to the frustration that was felt that the Muslim political representatives at that time who were part of the two main political parties, were largely from the south. To some extent they did not understand the concerns of the Muslims form the east (who were in a different context) especially during the rise of the Tamil militancy which required a different reaction than the acquiescence that had so far been displayed. So you really see that to some extent the concept of a homogeneous Muslim polity was not really possible"[250]

However, it is this dissatisfaction and a frustration perpetuated by the inaction of the southern Muslim polity over concern of land acquisition by Sinhalese settlers in the east and a general downplaying of grievances from the north and east

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[248] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[249] For example, in 1976 police shot several Muslims in Puttalam (the north west of Sri Lanka) after clashes between Muslims and Sinhalese, apparently provoked by disputes over jobs and land. Yet following these killings, not a single Muslim political leader had raised the issue in parliament. (ICG 2007)
[250] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff August 2015

Muslim community, that along with the standardization policies of education from the sixties onwards providing greater educational opportunities, that began to produce "a nascent eastern Muslim intelligentsia" (ICG 2007, 5). As an interviewee said

> *"Part of the agenda for the Southern Muslim polity was to increase the presence of Muslims in education and through the standardization policies of the sixties, they succeeded. However, what also happened is that we had a burgeoning intelligentsia in the east as a result of this from people who were traditionally considered to be rural farmers. This new group started to challenge the urban / Colombo elite / intelligentsia as a result of this. An irony so to speak"[251]*

5.2.2 Political Experiments

Initially this 'intelligentsia' found a home (largely as an experiment) within Tamil politics and militancy which also built upon the close relationships between the communities in terms of cultural and linguistic ties and the interdependency of the communities in economic affairs[252]. The Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF) was established which partnered with the Tamil Federal Party reaching its peak in the 1977 elections. The Tamil militant groups especially the LTTE also overtly supported Muslim concerns during this period particularly over land acquisitions by Sinhalese settlers, in the hope of getting support for their separatist notions (Ibid). This support would extend into the early eighties and also reciprocated by the Muslim community, especially in the support of the LTTE by young Muslims entering the cadre force.

Despite this, the "coalition with the Tamils proved to have been short-lived and a failure in the long run" (Ameerdeen 2006, 90). The increasing activities of the Tamil militants from the mid-1980s onwards, particularly their attempts at extortion from Muslim businesses provoked more serious inter-ethnic tension. "This seems to have been accentuated by a deliberate attempt to increase divisions between the two communities, as part of a government strategy to prevent formation of a united front" (ICG 2007, 24).

M.H M Ashraff, a young lawyer from the East, who had initially been involved with MULF and had entered into an active membership of the Federal Party, later had differences in terms of candidates to be chosen to a district development council. Whilst Ashraff had wanted a Muslim, the Federal Party thought otherwise, leading the former to advocate this "as a sign of Muslims being let down by another numerically significant minority" (Ibid). Thus, Ashraff and other Muslim leaders especially in the East began to see that their interest would not be achieved

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[251] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[252] This was really in contrast to the previous decisions of the Muslim political elite who despite the 'similarities' between the two communities had chosen to distance themselves from the Tamils and forge their own political future (as discussed in the previous chapter). It seemed that the Eastern Muslims chose to embrace the similarity which showed a heterogeneous political stance from the community

through a violent separatist cause[253] and did not believe that the Tamil struggle for an independent state was an issue for Muslims" (Johansson 2007, 35). As Johansson (2007,5) states, the current leader of the SLMC has come on record saying "one important thing is that the Muslim community has never taken up arms in our political struggle and we have always had a moderate model for our party and this should be a model for Muslims all over the world".

Thus drawing inspiration from an ethnically motivated political movement that could provide an alternative channel for their disaffection with the mainstream political process, the SLMC which started off as a social movement, transformed into a political party by 1988 eventually transforming Muslim politics in the country.

To some extent, the SLMC evolution exemplifies the trajectory of social movement formation that is about a deep revision of the sense and experience of spatial belonging and integration. In this they have to take note of transformations both from material conditions but also people's definitions of selfhood and identity. (Hamel, et al. 2001), and this is to some extent how the SLMC responded to the context of the time.

5.2.3 Effects of the Conflict

With the effects of the intensifying conflict in the north and east of the country towards the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, this would provide a justification for the SLMC to advocate for greater and increased security for the Muslims of the East which along with the espousal of Muslim grievances and refusal to follow the accommodating politics of the community's traditional leaders, gave them a notable following. "The manner in which the LTTE cadres were committing crimes against Muslims was the main driving force for the creation of a political party. When the SLMC raised the slogan of Muslims' security, the community in the North and eastern province" (Ameerdeen 2006, 108) As an interviewee said

> "As the conflict intensified in the north and east, it was clear to the Muslim polity especially those from the east, that their security was compromised. The confidence they had in the existing community leadership who were part of the mainstream political parties had waned. The feeling was that the security of the Muslims in the east could only be guaranteed if they had representation from the east"[254]

It is this Eastern drive that would form the basis of the SLMC support thereby causing some to accuse it of being "a Muslim party for the east" (Johansson 2007, 9). To many these accusations were unfounded as the SLMC was seen as meeting the specific contextual needs of the community in the east. Yet to others, it was clear that the SLMC was actually a 'regional' party based mostly on the

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[253] This is despite the Muslims being provide arms by the Government as 'Home Guards' to defend themselves against the Tamils (ICG,2007)
[254] Face to face interview with Mrs Jezima Ismail, July 2016

support of the Muslims from the Eastern Province (Ali 1997). Ultimately with the signing of the Indo-Lanka accord in 1987, the mosque massacres in 1990 and the expulsion of Muslims from the north in 1990[255], the SLMC's claim to be representing the security interests of the Muslims at a national level were justified and there emerged national support. Ashraff had been vindicated in his fears and through his rhetoric had really emerged as a genuine alternative Muslim politician. However according to Knoezer (1998), though whilst the SLMC organized and amplified the Muslim voice, it still remained largely a Muslim party for the east, speaking vociferously on their issues such as education, employment and security. As an interviewee said

> "The story of the SLMC is in itself a story of the complexity of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. It used Islam as a basis to unite the community on a homogeneous basis but failed to account for the heterogeneity of the community based on geographical location. This is the crux of the problem in Sri Lanka that as much as Muslims are united by Islam, there is a contextual difference in them which needs to be understood and accepted. This is an irony in itself, because it was formed largely because the feeling was that Muslims from the east were being neglected yet after coming into prominence it tried to speak for everyone which was impossible. Muslims are as much heterogeneous as they are homogeneous"[256]

What is interesting and unique about the space occupied by the SLMC is the fact that unlike the Tamil parties, despite taking a clear stance in their ethnic agenda, the party did not distance itself from the major Sinhalese parties. Like other Muslim politicians, the SLMC instead chose to collaborate with the major parties and over the last twenty years has succeeded in being part of the government in power whatever the party with some influence as well. In hindsight, the emergence of the SLMC has been perceived as an attempt by the Muslim community to assert their political and ethnic identity, often in a negative sense, claimed to be isolationist. As a respondent from a focus group said

> "Previously we as Sinhalese knew that the Muslim politicians belonged to the 2 main political parties and chose their battles along party lines whilst striving to get some privileges for the community. The SLMC changed that as we suddenly had a political party that was attempting to 'blackmail' the government of the day into giving into demands of the Muslim community or fear losing the majority in government. As a consequence, it was felt that the SLMC were only interested in the affairs of the Muslim community and were only in the government for that reason, which means that whatever government that was in power, the SLMC were there regardless of the effects of the said party in power for the country"[257]

Whether or not, this was the case, the SLMC challenged and changed the conventional leadership shifting the centre of Muslim politics from Colombo and

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[255] These incidents made any further involvement in the Tamil nationalist movement untenable for most Muslims. Instead, many young people in the east switched their support to the SLMC
[256] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[257] Key Informant Focus Group Discussions with Buddhist monks, June 2016

the south to the rural east, which lead to a dramatic change in balance for Muslim politics (Ameerdeen 2006). As an interviewee said

> *"The SLMC put on notice the Muslim politicians from the main stream political parties. For the first time they asserted in the national discourse that Muslims were a community as well to be engaged with. Of course the context at the time demanded it"[258]*

5.2.4 Challenges of Muslim 'Nationalism'

The SLMC in choosing 'Muslim' nationalism had another challenge in defining a space and role for themselves that kept an ethnic difference, a language bias of Tamil, and a religious identity.   "The emergence of the SLMC was initially perceived as an attempt by the Muslims to assert their identity" (Ameerdeen 2006, 129). Hence SLMC is one of the first twentieth century manifestations of an 'Islamist' party (i.e. using the concept of political Islam as tool to engage in the political process) in today's contemporary discourse. Yet in contrast to other forms of 'Islamist' parties (around the world within a majority setting such as Turkey or Egypt), the SLMC as a minority party initially developed a dual identity of a 'Muslim nationalism'. In other words, whilst the SLMC used religion to articulate their political rhetoric[259], they situated their politics within a nationalist discourse and view of the nation-state of Sri Lanka as evident from the discourse of its leaders. "The Muslim party SLMC's identity is built on nationalism of a non-Islamic state" (Johansson 2007, 12). This statement and many others like it show that the SLMC did not fight for a new Muslim state within Sri Lanka or necessarily had the focus of a Muslim Ummah, but considered it their duty to safeguard the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Despite this, the party also became adept at moving from 'Muslim' issues to 'national' issues whenever it was suitable, which became more apparent in the late eighties when the SLMC would demand a separate administrative provincial council for the Muslims in the south eastern province in response to proposals to set up a Tamil council as part of the Indian-Sri Lankan peace negotiations. This manifestation was mainly as a result of the failure of the 'Indo-Lanka' accord to address Muslim concerns (Faaiz 2009) and was not based on any theological or religious demand for an Islamic homeland but something identified as "an outcome of the manifestation of Muslim nationalism in Sri Lanka" (Johansson 2007, 11).

In other words, it was evident that the party's decisions were made on ethnic and community lines and not necessarily because faith played a perspective. Yet to many critics, there were many contradictions with how the SLMC used religious identity on the one hand to mobilise people whilst approaching political problems with a certain level of finesse (Ameerdeen 2006). This though raised some confusion in the minds of many people including the Muslims as well (during that

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[258] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[259] For example, the constitution of the party, talks about the basis of its operations being guidelines from the Qur'an

time and since then). Were party decisions made on ethnic and community lines or did faith play a perspective in them? How could one balance faith decisions (that by virtue of being Islamic have a transnational link) with ethnic concerns? These concerns underpin a lot of the challenges facing the identity question of the Muslim community. "The ethno-political environment of the country facilitated its assertion of identity" (Ameerdeen 2006, 134). As an interviewee said

> *"For the first time, identity politics took a different turn with the SLMC. By espousing a religious line but also basing a narrative on ethnic lines, the lines were blurred for the Muslim community identity. On the one hand, there was the sense that this was a community who thrived and used a religious identity, but on the other hand, it also played the ethnic card well. To some extent this worked during the times of the conflict but became more confusing in eras post conflict"[260]*

The 'Indo-Lanka Accord' in particular afforded an opportunity for the SLMC to seize the moment to 'unite' the community and provide some political leadership to the Muslims in the wake of what was felt to be a snub. The SLMC raised concerns that the accord did not acknowledge the Muslims to be a distinct community (as described above) and in fact changed the political power of the Muslims in this new 'merged' Northeast province. In essence, "it meant that the percentage of Muslim votes had dropped from 33% to an overall of 17% (Lewer and Ismail 2011). Thus the SLMC stance was that subject to a permanent merger of the North and East (as advocated by the accord subject to a future referendum), a separate Muslim administrative unit within the region should also be created based on a perception amongst Muslims that they would be discriminated against in terms of resource allocation and employment opportunities (Lewer and Ismail 2011). Effectively the accord and subsequent amendment had the effect of pitting the Muslims of the Eastern Province against the Tamils with whom they had been coexisting for centuries (Faaiz 2009). However, in providing that voice, the SLMC succeeded in channelling the frustrations felt by Muslims in the East against the Tamil leadership, into realising political aspirations in a more peaceful manner. "It is widely acknowledged that if not for a political force such as the SLMC, the Muslims would have naturally been drawn to the path of violence and presumably radicalism" (Ibid, 111). As an interviewee said

> *"The SLMC really emerged out of an idea to channel the frustrations and fears that Muslims in the east had about central rule from Colombo. There was this feeling that despite have 'Muslim' representation in government, those in the east were disadvantaged. So when the LTTE first emerged fighting for 'minority' rights against the Sinhalese, there were a lot of Muslim youth from the north and east who sympathized with them and in fact joined them. The founder and leader of the SLMC, Ashraff wanted to provide an alternative for Muslim youth to take to arms and join the LTTE.*

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[260] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

He talked abut an alternative 'jihad' for the Muslims. The SLMC was seen as this channel, because he foresaw that the LTTE were only interested in themselves and the Tamils and this would eventually backfire on the Muslims"[261]

5.2.5 Electoral Success
In taking the stance as described above, followed by subsequent electoral victories in provincial council elections the following years, the SLMC emerged by the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties as "an important actor in the competitive electoral politics of Sri Lanka, proving the democratic character, vibrancy and resilience of the Muslim community" (Ibid, 112).

By 1990, in the eyes of the LTTE, the SLMC providing an assertive leadership role to the Muslim community had also become an 'obstacle' and a clear political threat to the LTTE domination of the region (ICG 2007). For the SLMC, its fear of the security of Muslims was heighted by the withdrawal of the IPKF thereby creating a security vacuum for the Muslims in the east and north of the country. These fears would become realised with the subsequent expulsion of the Muslims from Jaffna in 1990, Muslims being killed at prayer time in their mosques in the east and the confiscation of Muslim agricultural land by the LTTE. It is this theft of land that was and still is a crucial element contributing to the environment of mistrust and tension between Muslims and Tamils especially in the east (Lewer and Ismail 2011). As has already been discussed, there is nothing to say what prompted the LTTE action in 1990, but needless to say that the stance of the SLMC somewhat helped to accelerate the action.

With Muslim ethno-religious nationalism being further aggrieved by these expulsions the SLMC managed to convert these grievances to electoral gains (A. Imtiyaz 2012). The general election victories of 1994, 2000, and 2004 and the provincial council elections in 1993 proved that the SLMC's election campaigns employing ethno-religious Muslim nationalism coupled with anti-Tamil/Tamil Tiger rhetoric over and over again engendered the support of the Muslims. The SLMC managed also to bridge the gap between the Northern/Eastern Muslims and the traditional southern Muslim polity. The rise of the SLMC brought the Muslim factor to the frontline of any permanent solution to the ethnic crisis (Ali 2004) however this was not necessarily welcomed. As an interviewee said

> *"the rise of the SLMC created a major challenge firstly to the national Muslim leadership which traditionally came from Colombo and its suburban areas and which did not favour the formation of any independent political party for the Muslims, let alone the SLMC. Throughout the parliamentary history of Sri Lanka, the Muslims were able to steer their political destiny quite creditably without the necessity of a political party of their own. By dividing their support between the two major national parties, the UNP and the SLFP, they were able to avoid the ethnic party politics of*

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[261] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015

the Tamils which, given the inevitable logic of such politics, had driven the country to its current state of political tragedy. In the views of the traditional Muslim leadership, Ashraf s strategy appeared to be damaging that healthy trend.   Yet from Ashraff's perspective this had not worked especially in the case of the Eastern Muslims"[262]

With this political capital that the SLMC earned from the Muslim voters, it was clear that the SLMC was in a position to negotiate with the Southern Sinhalese polity to secure jobs and other non-territorial concessions for Muslims (A. Imtiyaz 2012). It had emerged as a political force using its parliamentary seats to form alliances that lent it political influence beyond its limited vote base. For instance, whilst the parliament during 1989-1992 was dominated by the UNP with a majority of over 50% the SLMC and its leader Ashraff supported the UNP and Ashraff received the Portfolio of Minister of Port development, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (Johansson 2007). In spite of the changes introduced by the 1978 constitution to reduce the political clout of the minorities, Muslim support became crucial when the SLFP won the general elections of 1993 but with a slender majority. Without the support of the SLMC the coalition government under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaranatunga could not have emerged (Ali 2004) and it would not enter the government thereby further increasing Muslim opportunities in public service. As an interviewee said

"In return for his support in 1993/1994, Ashraf was appointed as the Minister of Shipping and Rehabilitation Affairs by the new government. This appointment in- creased the number of Muslim ministers in the cabinet to three; the other two being members of the SLFP. This was something which the Sinhala Buddhist supporters of the SLFP could not digest. To them, although the emergence of the SLMC was a welcoming factor in the fight against the Tamils, the position of Ashraf, as a minister in the present government in addition to two other Muslim ministers and Ashraff's flamboyant braggadocio that it was he and his party which were responsible for the formation of this government, was totally intolerable[263]."[264]

Ashraff would hold many different significant portfolios under different governments along with his party colleagues (who also got government and diplomatic appointments) till his untimely death in 2000. With his death, his dream of unity was shattered with personal feuds and political infighting which led to several Muslim leaders breaking away from the SLMC and forming their own small Muslim political parties. This was also exploited by the nationalist government who offered carrots to various Muslim representations resulting in

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[262] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

[263] It was statements like this that agitated many from the Buddhist community including monks who felt that Muslims were holding them to ransom. In a focus group I held with Buddhist Monks in July 2016, this was one of the statements that participants pointed out as causing the sense of anxiety between Muslims and the Sinhalese and in fact leading to many Sinhalese distrusting the Muslims in terms of their intentions towards the country and national politics.

[264] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

the general weakening of the bargaining power (Ameerdeen 2006). As an interviewee said

> *"With the death of the founder, the SLMC was exposed to its Achilles heel in that it was difficult to articulate a clear political strategy for the Muslim community due to its heterogeneity. The Eastern Muslims had clearly different challenges and aspirations than those from the South. The SLMC was relevant to the population landscape of the Eastern Province but in the other provinces where each Muslim politician has his own bailiwick, a centralized Muslim political party is bound to be fragile. It begs the question as to whether there can be a whole strategy for the community or whether something else is needed? This nuance was somewhat lost on those who took on the mantle of leadership from Ashraff and this led to the infighting that we see now."[265]*

5.2.6 New Leadership & New Challenges

The new leadership, led by Mr Rauf Hakeem, severely weakened of its bargaining power, though decided to follow in the footsteps of the late Mr Ashraff in terms of cohabiting with the Sinhalese polity and its leading political parties yet increasingly found itself at odds with a changing context. The changing context is indicative of the fact that the Muslim politicians were increasingly becoming considered irrelevant as per their demands for the community. This became apparent during the 2002 and also during the tsunami response, but it would become more clear in the post conflict experience. As an interviewee said

> *"The SLMC effectively did what Muslim politicians had done in the past but with a difference. In response to getting privileges for the community, they negotiated based on the concept of a 'block vote' of the Muslim community for the party in power. However, it was clear a lot of this also had to do with the leadership of the time and after the death of its founder, the SLMC were unable to garner the same support from the community as well as from the mainstream polity. This was evident not only from the post 2002 experiences, but also from how the community responded after the death of its founder"[266]*

This disunity continues to plague Muslim politics and in fact is symbolic of the challenge facing the community in terms of articulating a political identity. The divisions within the Muslim political elite were due partly to personalities but also to the lack of an overall political strategy. As a result of the heterogeneous nature of the community with competing priorities, and a difference between the 'southern', 'northern' and 'eastern' Muslims, there were no cohesive policies on the whole with regards the community. Consequently, the main political parties between them have succeeded in dividing the Muslim politicians based on personal motivations as opposed to community interests (ICG 2007). "The Muslim political elite's inability to make the right choices and policies to win

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[265] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[266] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

Muslim interests largely frustrated the eastern Muslims" (A. Imtiyaz 2012, 57), with the SLMC in particular being accused of being "preoccupied with the leadership problem" (Ibid).

A real test how much 'clout' the SLMC would have with the Sinhalese polity would be around the signing of the CFA in 2002. Whilst this milestone within the history of the conflict should have proved an ideal opportunity to test the solidity of the relationship between the Muslim and Sinhalese polity and prove the value of the Muslim community to the nation, as discussed in previous sections, it turned out to be otherwise. The CFA agreement showed the Muslim polity that if they wanted security for the Muslims in the north and east, they would have to do it themselves. This is what happened with the signing of the memorandum of understanding being signed in 2002 by Rauf Hakeem (leader of the SLMC) and Pirabakaran (leader of the LTTE). Despite this as discussed above, violence against the Muslims increased after the CFA. Muslims would be further ignored during the discussions of the establishment of the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). As an interviewee said

> "The emergence of the SLMC created problems during the CFA. Its stance and positions were not understood by both sides and thus an impasse was created. This lack of clarity very much haunts it today as well"[267]

As the conflict restarted under a new president following the abrogation of the CFA in 2006, namely the Muttur conflict as discussed above, it was clear that the Muslims had lost the edge that their polity had once held. "The Muslim leaders were impotent witnesses to the devastation that followed and the displacement of the Muslims of Muttur and the deaths of many" (Ibid, 57). Moreover, the Muslim leaders of the east and those of the south found themselves completely ignored in matters relating to the military offensives against the Tamils[268]. By the end of the conflict in 2009 and the follow up years, it became clear that the SLMC (and other Muslim polity) despite being part of the government were not able to apply the leverage on Government. With the subsequent military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, the minorities in general and the Muslims in particular found themselves more and more marginalized.

The scenario also brings into question whether the validity of having a separate Muslim political party was working as it can (and has been argued by many) that the SLMC has lost relevance as a political party. "Without a coherent political message, the Muslim political parties risk being regarded as irrelevant" (Lewer

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[267] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[268] At the provincial council elections that took place subsequently in the east in 2008, Hisbullah, a prominent Muslim leader who should have been made Chief Minister, had to give in to the pressure of President Rajapakse and let Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan, an ex-militant, to be appointed to that post. This again is indicative of the government stance towards the Muslims of the east. (A. Imtiyaz 2012)

and Ismail 2011, 130)

5.2.7 Changing Priorities

It is also argued that Ashraff in the final year before his death also realised the shelf life of the concept of the SLMC and set about creating a new more inclusive political party called the National Unity Alliance (NUA), which was made of more main stream and other minority groups. As an interviewee said

> *"Ashraff began to realise the fact that the SLMC was a limiting entity as regards fulfilling the entirety of the agenda for Muslim rights. He realised that the SLMC should have remained a geographical party in other words one focussed on the eastern province Muslims. His realisation that the heterogeneity of the Muslims meant that a wider coalition of actors was needed to articulate their rights. Hence he floated the idea of NUA as exactly this coalition for a broader perspective whilst he tried to align the SLMC with the eastern province Muslims and their concerns on security issues. To some extent I think he foresaw what would happen if he were to leave the SLMC and he wanted to avoid this. Unfortunately, his death meant that this was not fulfilled and in his death he attained a sort of martyrdom and those who acquired the leadership of the SLMC capitalised on his name and legacy for the preservation. Who knows what would have happened had he lived? Perhaps Muslim politics would have been different as he would have realised that the context for communal politics was changing"[269]*

The vision for NUA at that time remained a long term one with the "establishment of a new democracy without Opposition" (Salman 2015) with the concept of the freedom of the individual, abolition of the Westminster type of adversarial politics, constitution of committee system where every Member of Parliament shares executive power, accountability of the Head of State and the strengthening of the rule of law and the independence of the Judiciary. It is ironic that fifteen years after his untimely death there was a unique situation in Parliament where the majority of the Sri Lanka Parliament are members of one coalition of which the President Maithripala Sirisena is the Chairman of the biggest constituent party, the SLFP. Yet a section of the SLFP MPs supports President Sirisena and the Prime Minister of the UNP from the government ranks and the rest support him whilst remaining in the Opposition.   As an interviewee said

> *"Perhaps this what Ashraff meant where he saw this period of cohabitation between the main Sinhala political parties as well as a Tamil national opposition leader as a process of reconciliation. No one would ever know, but it was clear that he was keen on this concept of 'One Sri Lanka'"[270]*

This is an irony in the sense that the SLMC was formed on the basis of a dis satisfaction that Muslim politicians embedded within the mainstream political

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[269] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015
[270] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015

parties were largely ineffective and hence a separate party was needed. By insisting on the NUA, it was clear that Ashraff realised that the evolution of politics meant that the context determined the nature of the politics and that a unified approach was needed.

5.3 The Evolution of the Political Thought

The Sri Lankan conflict has been understood internationally as a two-party affair, between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. This logic excludes other stakeholders, like the Muslims, who have been affected by the conflict in different ways. Efforts to resolve the conflict overlooked or only minimally accommodated Muslim interests. Regardless of the constant threats to their security and their perception of conspiracies against them, Muslim ideologues and political leaders have never actively proposed armed struggle. Community groups and politicians depended on their status as citizens of a putatively ethnically neutral state and called on the government to fulfil the community's security needs. Yet what we have seen in this chapter is that several national milestones associated with this security concern impacted the development of the Muslim political community and the emergence of a Muslim nationalism in response to a growing Tamil dominance. This evolution is synchronised with the emergence of an educated middle class, empowered from the sixties and seventies educational reforms (Ismail 1997), also supported by a parallel rise in religious understanding and practice (O'Sullian 1999). All of this coinciding with the political and security context of the 1980s meant that there emerged demands for Muslim 'rights' and Muslim 'development', promoting the political interests of the community (Lewer and Ismail 2011). In the context of the changed systems of political representation and altered security situation in the north and east in the late 1980s, the emergence of a political party was inevitable.

The Muslim dissatisfaction articulated on a variety of different registers can be summed up as stemming from two main grievances (Haniffa 2011). First is the consequence for Muslim participation within the conflict and the peace process. The manner in which the agreement was entered into, with Muslim members of the government and the Muslim Peace Secretariat consulted rather late in the process and allowed only very minimal input, with no place in the discussions and no possibility of having signatory status, were seen as a betrayal of the Muslims by the government. Their being deprived of any ownership in the process was resented. Secondly a mechanism framed as Tsunami relief was seen to pay little heed to the losses suffered by the Muslim areas that it sought to address. The Muslims felt that there was little acknowledgement of the loss suffered by them as a community and they felt that the memory of their dead and the suffering of the living was not sufficiently given credence by this action of the state.

The complexity of politics and security concerns within the Sri Lankan context can not be reduced to the protagonists with arms alone and required a wider

conversation and this was the discussion around the politicisation of the Muslim identity. However, this politicisation has only brought about minimal improvements for the Muslim community as a whole, and as the tsunami highlighted, there was a political impotence of the Muslim politicians who were unable to mobilise support and resources for the post tsunami reconstruction. As an interviewee said

> *"The inability for any effectual change to be done by the Muslim politicians is only partly the fault of the politicians concerned. There is culpability from the governments of the day who faced with the prospect of coalition governments meant the manipulation of elected officials as well as the splintering of smaller political parties such as the SLMC. This policy of co-option of minority parties especially in the post conflict period of 2009 had the effect of neutralising any influence of the minority parties as well as ensuring that minority and concerns are put to the back burner."[271]*

Thus moving forward, questions are raised around the relationship separately between the Tamils and the Muslims, the Muslims and the Sinhalese and also between the Muslims and the Sinhalese and Tamils in the context of the national politics (Ali 1997). It is clear that there can be nothing taken for granted with regards community engagement and there are many considerations. The North and East of Sri Lanka is as much the traditional homeland of the Muslims as of the Tamils. The Muslims of this region are an integral part of the Tamil milieu. Even outside this region the Muslims play the role of a Tamil missionary in the spread of Tamil language and culture. Their contribution in this field is unique and massive in many respects (Ibid). For example, if not for the Muslims there may not be any Tamil schools in the Sinhalese districts. The Tamil daily Thinakaran is almost totally patronized by the Muslims and has the largest Tamil newspaper circulation in the country. The Muslim cultural programs in the national broadcasting services is an additional vehicle through which Muslims have enriched and spread the Tamil language and traditions on a national level. Tamil literary conferences, seminars and orations which are conducted in the Sinhalese districts are organised and patronised almost totally by the Muslim community. The little communication that there exists between the Sinhalese and Tamil literary persons in Sri Lanka, is solely through the Muslims. In fact, Tamil culture cannot exist in Sri Lanka without the cross-fertilization of the Muslims.

Already, because of the decision made by the Muslim leadership in the fifties to support the Sinhalese Language Bill and encourage Muslim children to opt for Sinhalese as the medium of education, a generation of Muslims have grown in the Sinhalese areas without any ability to understand Tamil.

On the other hand, the Sinhalese can not underestimate the link between the Muslim community across the island that has been made stronger through politics

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[271] Face to face interview with Dr Farah Haniffa, July 2016

but also through the spiritual awakening among the Muslims since the seventies. The international implications of outright injustice to even a section of the Muslims will be costly to the government, and the presence of hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan Muslims in the Middle East as expatriate employees adds even more weight to this argument.

5.4 Conclusion

The transformation of the institutionalisation of Muslim identity took a new form with the concept of a formal Sri Lankan Muslim political identity which took shape and was institutionalized in the mid eighties with the development of a Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). It has been argued that the development of the SLMC was inevitable within a country whose politics is dominated by communal parties (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1999). However, it is hard not to argue against the existential threat that Muslims faced with the rise of the conflict in the country which seemed to trump the grievances of the politics which had somehow been 'contained' through the accommodation politics practiced since the country's independence. The foundation of the SLMC based from the east of the Sri Lanka and away from the traditional Muslim political elites (based in Colombo hailing from the south and being part of the main political parties) is also illustrative of the divided social formation where political and economic considerations were more important for the eastern Muslims than simply religious unity (Ismail 1997). In other words, "the SLMC transformed and Islamicised Muslim politics in Sri Lanka…" (Lewer and Ismail 2011, 122), and there was the beginning of a Muslim ethno-nationalist political movement with national politics impact.

Yet it was clear that the geographical dispersal of Muslims would always make any common political position very difficult on top of personality differences and party politics aside. The SLMC's attempt to be a 'sole representative' for its co-religionists proved in the long run to be untenable. In particular, after Ashraff's death, the SLMC increasingly were not accepted by all Muslims as their political representatives (ICG 2007) and do not necessarily represent their interests. This is also not helped by the age old problem in Sri Lankan politics of party patronage which means that there is inadequate democracy in Muslim politics at the lower levels.

The constant search by politicians for a reliable vote bank and the willingness of many Muslim voters to be directed towards one or another candidate by local leaders, businessmen or religious leaders has skewed policies towards winning elections rather than achieving inter-ethnic harmony or developing proper public services for all. Unfortunately, even the Tamil community felt this even more keenly complaining that Muslim representatives ignored them and were primarily interested in their own community (ICG 2007).

However, it is clear that this was not just a problem with Muslim politicians, but with everyone including the international community. As for example, the whole period of the peace process in Sri Lanka exemplified, Muslim politicians were marginal in the 2002 (and subsequent negotiations) and their issues were not prioritized by the government. (Lewer and Ismail 2011).

The political institutionalization of the Muslim community in response to this and as a result of this and also not helped by the lack of a united political front have not only weakened the Muslims' case for more political negotiation, but also the case for representation. Its institutionalization was altogether weakened by the political infighting.

The Muslim community can not receive redress to their grievances by playing ethnic politics. Ethnic based political parties and ethno – nationalisms have ruined the peace and prosperity of the country. There has to be a return to inclusive politics and to that they should first build the intellectual and independent forces to create that channel.

However, in the absence of any credible Muslim political leadership, the question that is posed is what happens when the political influence is lost and who takes up the slack? This question is important on the whole because of the new pressures facing the Muslim community particualrly after the end of the conflict (as the next chapter will explore). It was clear that the influence of the Muslim politicians had waned and where they had previously been able to have some influence this was no longer the case. In the gap that emerged in terms of leadership, Muslim civil society stepped in, which would later be taken over by religious leaders.

Within such a context Muslims need to find a new way of articulating their grievances that will not be routinely dismissed. As we have seen and will see, greater organisation and commitment from Muslim civil society groups has been required to articulate Muslim concerns to the government, concerned international actors and local civil society. Articulating the specific effects of the problems – political marginalisation, rising hate speech and needed development initiatives – remains a challenge for Muslim community groups. This is particularly important mainly because it is important to realise that the Muslim community have not only had to face challenges for survivial from the Tamils in the North and East, but also in the Sinhala dominated South and West (Nuhman 2007)

Thus at a moment when both Muslims and Tamils fear the growing Sinhalising imperative of the state, it is essential that some collective mobilising for addressing community concerns is undertaken. It is perhaps in this context that the idea of the formation of the NUA should be considered. In fact, as intimated,

we can see that there was a thinking that this type of political engagement was no longer the way forward for the Muslim community. Lewer and Ismail (2011) allude to this when they talk about the next steps for the Muslim community in the east. Elaborating on this, there is perhaps a need for three pronged approach of Muslim political thought: one that is really regional and context specific so for example, how in the East the Muslim polity engages with their Tamil counterparts; how these regional politics renogitiates a position with the Government of Sri Lanka and the central perspective; and a politics that stands for a more nationalistic solution. This is perhaps what the NUA was aiming towards.

Ultimately what the formation of the NUA posits is that fifty years of post independent politics could not bring in unity among various communities and the country was facing one of the greatest challenges. Inter community relations were strained irreparably and one of the causes was the inability of the people to interact with each other freely due to language barrier and separate politics.

Chapter 6: Identities under Pressure (2009-2014)

> *"After 2009, we see the true relationship between the Muslim community and the 'others' coming to a head and it is not that favourable in terms of the tensions between all"[272]*

6.1 Introduction[273]

On June 15 2014, the southern town of Aluthgama became a focal point for ethnic clashes between Sinhala and Muslims (Tegal 2014). For a couple of days, violence ensued in an eerie comparison to the 1983 pogrom that had taken place against the Tamils and referred to in Chapter 5. Whilst reports as to what sparked the violence are sketchy and there is still a debate as to 'who threw the first stone?', it is clear that the backdrop for the violence had been a greater increase of underlying tensions between the Sinhalese and the Muslims especially since the end of the conflict in 2009, but that has been there since at least 1915. As an interviewee said

> *"The 'Muslim' problem did not arise after 2009. Since 1915, there have been anti Muslim problems (or problems between the Sinhalese and Muslims) since 1915 and especially in earnest since 1976, where every couple of years there has been a flash of issues. What has been symbolic here has been the inaction of the Government to do anything to quell or stop these from happening"[274]*

The question that was asked then and to some extent that is being asked now is why should something like this have happened? This question in particular is also related to how this violence was/is linked to the evolution of Muslim identity as discussed in the previous chapters especially in the backdrop of the infamous 1915 Sinhala-Muslim riots? These questions are pertinent, given the relationship that has existed between the Muslim minority and the majority Sinhala (mainly Buddhist) community, any lessons learnt and the state and an apparent deterioration of relations between the two communities. The question is also pertinent to address issues of nation building

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[272] Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015

[273] I added this chapter in mainly as an afterthought because of the incidents that transpired at the end of 2014 with the election of a new president and an opening up of a previously closed space. With this opening of the space, it was also possible to examine in details what happened after the end of the conflict till the presidential elections of 2014, especially as the period 2012 onwards proved to be crucial in the relationships between the Muslims and the Sinhalese Buddhist.

[274] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

6.2 Start of Religious Tensions

The violence in Aluthgama came on the back of a larger coordinated hate campaign orchestrated by an extreme Sinhala Buddhist organization called Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS) against the Muslim community. It is not entirely clear as to what the origins of the organization are but it is clear that it was behind a systemic campaign inciting hatred that came to a head between 2012-2014 (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). "The BBS unleashed a cancer"[275] in terms of relationships between the Sinhala and the Muslim communities. The tensions emerge in one aspect out of the end of the 28 year old conflict, which extenuated fragile cracks between different ethnic groups, along faith lines (Mohamed-Saleem 2013). As an interviewee said

> *"From 1976 to 2002, there have been a series of anti Muslim ructions, often of a minor order but sometimes extremely serious. What has been clear has been how they have been depicted. These make it seen that there has been anti Muslim racism for a while"[276]*

Identity was further exacerbated not only by an insecurity of religious affiliation but a religious affiliation that is borne from a sense of the 'other' who is not only someone of a different ethnicity but someone of a different religion. Calhoun (2016,66) identifies this as part of a wider problem of the era we are living in at the moment, where it is hard "to articulate a shared identity that is strong enough to really bind us to each other and at the same time capacious enough to recognise differences among us".

In Sri Lanka, whilst this insecurity of identity has been felt on all sides, it is the Sinhala Buddhist, who form the majority of the population, that exhibited the most extreme of strains. As Tambiah (1991, 92-93) said "[t]he Sinhalese manifest the features of a 'majority with a minority complex' that is partly the product of Sri Lanka's miniscule size, both territorially and demographically, and the nature of the exchanges with India, especially South India, that have been interpreted in certain (tendentious) ways…". An interviewee also reflected

> *"Tambiah's description of the Sinhalese as a 'majority with a minority complex' has best been understood in the current context of the post 2009 era. During the war, it was assumed that the conflict was what spurred this rise of nationalism rhetoric, but with the war ending and a new threat being found from the minority Muslims who for all intents and purposes are more visible in their identity, it has been clear that the insecurities of the Sinhalese go more deep. Their insecurities with the Muslims now go to the transnational link with the rest of the Muslim world that they accuse*

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[275] Key informant focus group discussion of Muslim civil society activists undertaken in November 2016.
[276] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

Muslims of having and thus the fear that Sri Lanka will be taken over by Muslims[277]

This can be seen in the current context with the absence of conflict, they are beginning to exert this religious based ethnic identity thereby posing the greatest threat to religious freedoms in Sri Lanka (Mohamed-Saleem 2013). In particular, the ideological strand of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka has undergone a massive change and reinterpretation of its doctrines as a result of the conflict (M. Deegalle 2007), becoming more militant, violent and ultimately intolerant towards other ethnicities and religions largely led by the clergy (K. Noble 2013).

Post conflict, the concept of 'Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism' has emerged as a potent force (Zuhair 2016). This has manifested itself especially between 2012-2013 in a rise of violence against religious sites and members of religious minorities characterized as 'chronic'[278] and 'acute'[279] violence (Gunatilleke 2015). Of the accounted reports, most have been mob attacks on places of worship; robberies and vandalism; the killing of clergy; protests against communities and the proliferation of hate speech on social media, the internet and via the audio – visual media (CPA 2013). Whilst the majority of cases have been from the Christian community[280] (mostly against the non-traditional evangelical churches accused of forced conversion); Buddhist temples from the non-Theravada sect and Hindu places of worship, the more visibly aggressive incidents has been the rising anti-Muslim rhetoric and acts of violence such as the high profile case of the attack on a mosque in Dambulla in the north east of Sri Lanka in 2012 (BBC News 2012) and the attacks in Aluthgama in the south of the Country in 2014, as part of coordinated hate campaign by the BBS, targeting the Muslim community in particular from a commercial, social and religious perspective (BBC News Asia 2013a) and specifically targeting attacks on Muslim businesses. For example, on 28th March 2013, Fashion Bug, a popular Muslim owned garment chain store was attacked (BBC News Asia 2013b). Footage shows Buddhist monks leading a crowd of people and then throwing stones at the warehouse in Pepiliyana, while the police stood by and failed to stop the events from unfolding (ibid). Prior to the incident, BBS had circulated a text urging people to boycott Muslim shops and another Buddhist political party the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) had issued a statement saying: "Sinhalese Buddhists should be determined to teach such Muslim extremists a lesson that they will never forget" (Bangkok Post 2013)[281]. In particular the Secretariat For Muslims (SFM) itself has recorded 284 incidents of threats, attempted attacks, harassment, incitements and provocations directed

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[277] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[278] Continuous, low-intensity attacks ranging from hate campaigns and propaganda, to threats, intimidation, minor destruction of property and occasional physical violence
[279] Sporadic episodes of high-intensity violence characterized by widespread physical assaults, destruction of property and a general breakdown in law
[280] The National Christian Evangelical Alliance (NCEASL) recorded 103 incidents in 2013 and 69 incidents in 2014 (Zuhair 2016)
[281] However interestingly enough, though BBS condemned the attack and refused to take responsibility for it, all signs pointed to it being part of their modus operandi (Daily Mirror 2013)

at Muslims in 2013 (Secretariat for Muslims 2013) and continued to do so well into 2015 (Secretariat for Muslims 2015) even after there was a government change which brought about a hope that there could be a better respite for the Muslims. As an interviewee said

> "In 2015 following the presidential elections, a new government of 'good governance' was brought in largely with the votes of the Minorities (Tamils and Muslims). The perception especially from the Muslims was that the government that had been removed from power were complicit in the anti Muslim pogrom that had happened in Aluthgama in 2014. However, what the SFM has showed that even into 2015 these incidents continued which points to a deeper structural problem within the government that goes beyond party politics. These deep fractures deserve to be understood and addressed as these incidents have continued and will continue to take place"[282] [283]

The emergence of such rhetoric and violence has also to be seen in the backdrop of what is being seen as the 'Sinhalisation' of areas, particularly in the North and East that had little or no Sinhala Buddhist population previously with state complicity and with the direct involvement or assistance the military (CPA 2013, Zuhair 2016). This state complicity has also paved the way for Sinhala-Buddhist groups such as the Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS) to emerge and launch campaigns aimed at soliciting a reaction particularly from the Muslim community (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). As an interviewee said

> "the complicity of the state (regardless of the party in power at that time) in these incidents whether it is the troubles in the seventies, the 1983 riots or the 2014 troubles in the south point to a structural problem in the Sinhala – Minority (Muslim) relationships. In particular, the 2014 disturbances really showed that the inter community fractures went deeper than just political grievances. These were exploited by the extremist groups and given air by the state"[284]

6.2.1 The Rise of the Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS)
In the discussions of post 2009, it is also important to understand the rise and influence of the BBS. The BBS was launched on 07 May 2012 and its membership is made up exclusively of Buddhist monks (J. Fernando 2015). In its first national convention, there were five resolutions that were passed related to protecting Buddhism in the country whilst strengthening the State in supporting this (Haniffa, Amarasuriya, et al. 2014). As an interviewee from a focus group said

> "The initial call of the BBS to the mainstream Buddhist were not

[282] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

[283] In November of 2017, similar violence to 2014 too place in a town in Southern Sri Lanka. Once again the Sinhala- Muslim tensions were at the forefront despite it being a simple argument between two individuals (BBS News 2017)

[284] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

threatening. Sri Lanka has been traditionally considered as a land of Buddhism and the rulers being obliged to protect the call for Buddhism. A lot of the concerns that the BBS raised re the minorities especially the Muslims were 'valid' in the sense that these were concerns that many of the Sinhalese masses felt. However there is a difference between how these concerns were articulated and then carried out"[285]

In addition, there have been those who take issue with the BBS articulation of the grievances against Muslims. As an interviewee said:

"The BBS raised several concerns about the Muslim community in terms of their identity, dress code and so on. A lot of Sinhalese Buddhist moderates appeared to agree with these concerns even though dismissing the methodology of how the BBS carried it out. This is where the conundrum lies and also where the issue of challenging the BBS"[286]

Though the BBS resolutions themselves are not threatening, what has been clear is that the BBS have marked differences in how they attempt to interpret the implementation of the resolutions and how they related their grievances on which these resolutions were based, with the other religious communities[287]. The intentions and angle became very clear by the end of 2012, when the BBS 'identified itself as an unofficial police force'[288] and in 2013, they raised the claim that "Sri Lanka is not a multi-racial or multi-religious country but a 'Sinhala Buddhist' country and that people should be prepared to 'rally against Christian and Muslim extremist groups operating in the country'" (Colombo Gazette 2013).

There are of course many from the Sinhala Buddhist majority community who were against the BBS with some in fact going as far as speculating that "the main force behind the BBS was the Tamil diaspora, mainly because it appeared that the BBS were trying to disrupt the unity of the country and thus it was 'logical' that the main force behind the BBS consisted of those who are not reconciled to the unity of Sri Lanka" (I. Hussein 2014b). Yet it was clear that the BBS threat to 'rally' against minority extremist forces also extended in part to Buddhists who attempted to show solidarity with the affected minorities as well. For example, on 19th April 2013, BBS disrupted a peaceful candle light vigil which was organized by the Facebook group calling themselves 'Buddhist Questioning Bodu Bala Sena' (Sunday Leader 2013). "This incident sent a powerful message to many Sinhala Buddhists opposed to the acts of the BBS not to 'interfere' and really created a conundrum for many of the minority communities"[289]. This conundrum being how do you counter the extremist narrative of the BBS whilst attempting to build bridges with the majority Sinhala community. For the Muslims in particular,

[285] Key informant focus group discussion with Buddhist monks in June 2016
[286] Skype Interview with Dr Imthiyas Razak, August 2015
[287] For example, see the remarks made by the head of the BBS Galabodaththe Ganasara in November 2012 pursuant to the destruction of a Buddhist temple by an unidentified group in Ampara, Eastern Province (Haniffa, Amarasuriya, et al. 2014)
[288] Key informant focus group discussion with business leaders from the Muslim community, May 2015
[289] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslims civil society activists in November 2016

this became a challenge in determining what was the best course of response. As members of the key informant group discussion noted

> *"The BBS demands posed real problems for how the Muslim community should respond. Do you address some of the concerns raised by BBS no matter how preposterous they may be knowing that they would never be satisfied? Do you seek to define a response? What is the appropriate level of response? In any case, the BBS questions really caused a mini existential crisis within the Muslim community as it caused them to start questioning their own identity"[290]*

Whilst to most commentators, "the BBS represents the worst of the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist expressions based on their social conduct"[291], what has been interesting to note has been the public support or at least silence from the majority community in the wake of such provocations (Saleem 2013). This is despite many of the allegations[292] argued by the BBS to generate public sympathy being unfounded[293]. Notwithstanding the support from outside Sri Lanka[294] for BBS, its public success has been attributed to several factors (I. Hussein 2014a). First, they were able to be successful because they launched effective campaigns across the country where the Sinhalese were not only a majority but where there was a small Muslim community living thereby capitalizing on existing local problems whether it be economic or social. The BBS also received tacit support from the government of that time, namely the defence secretary[295] which explained its exceptionally privileged position in breaking the law with near total impunity. Third, the BBS was able to win support both from local and state media to their campaign as well as capitalize on social media, attracting support from outside the country. "For a lot of people who support them, they make sense especially in terms of some of the concerns raised"[296], largely based on Muslim visibility and perceptions about the community.

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[290] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslim professionals in May 2016

[291] Skype Interview with Professor Ameer Ali, March 2016

[292] For example, in December 2012, an issue arose when the BBS protested against the high numbers of Muslim students entering law college that year, accusing the then Minister of Justice who was a Muslim of favouring them. The minister had stated that he had no connection with the education policies, examinations, and the preparing of question papers, maintained by Law College of Sri Lanka but the implications and damage was done (Lanka C News 2012)

[293] Face to face Interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[294] From the focus group discussion carried out with Muslim civil society activists in November 2016, it was clear that there was a feeling that the BBS survived on support from outside the country. This is also consistent with many media articles pointing to external funding for the organization.

[295] On 9th March 2013, the Defense Secretary inaugurated 'Meth Sevana,' the Cultural and Training Centre of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), in Pilana, Wanchawala in Galle, with the purpose of conducting training programmes for bhikkus and laymen. Head of Meth Sevana, Ven. Embilipitiye Vijitha Thera is reported to have said that the Defence Secretary commended the service of the BBS towards the progress of the Buddha Sasanaya. The defence secretary's participation at this event seemed to seal commentators' assessment that the BBS was a tool, if not a creation of the regime (Hussein 2014)

[296] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslim civil society activists in May 2016

This therefore just adds to the complications of tensions between the communities and it is important to explore how these tensions have manifested themselves especially if "the perception is that Muslims in Sri Lanka are becoming radicalized and causing upheaval in the country"[297].

6.3 Reasons for Misperceptions.

The tensions between the communities manifest themselves largely based on perceptions of each other. As part of a series of focus group discussions around this topic for some work I was undertaking for my job (which has some relevance with this research), with a group of faith leaders, civil society activists and Muslim professionals, the perceptions of one community about / from the others were examined. In these exercises, participants representing different communities (Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians) were requested to form exclusive groups of the respective community. Each group was tasked to come up with its impressions about the other three communities in this country. They were not to discuss religious precepts, and instead, they discussed socio-cultural manifestations as practitioners of a religion. Although these perceptions may not be factual or they may even differ under different circumstances they represent an interesting snapshot into perceptions of other communities at that time.

With regards this particular research, it is interesting to look at the case of the perceptions about the Muslim community from the others. Amongst some of the main misperceptions about the Muslim community, the issue of Muslims being prejudiced of other cultures and intolerant of other religions was brought up[298]. The evidence of this was cited through the apparent lack of social engagement between Muslims and other communities especially with regards social interaction between males and females; lack of inter faith / ethnic marriages between Muslims and other ethnicities/faith and so on. This lack of social engagement was also stated towards the perceptions that Muslims were intolerant of other religions and not giving space for the freedom of the choice of faith. Interestingly, through the discussions, the other communities highlighted the feeling that they felt that they were barred from establishing businesses or doing any form of economic activity or taking residence in Muslim dominated areas[299]. Politically, it was felt through the discussions that Muslims were ready to compromise their political principles. Examples were stated of how for example politicians such as those representing the SLMC had compromised their politics and principals by shifting allegiances from government to government in order to secure ministerial positions. The Muslim politicians it was felt could not be trusted to adhere to policies and principles and were more focused on their interests. The last bit of feedback from the community discussions reflected concerns about the public display of religiosity by the Muslims especially with

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[297] Ibid
[298] Key Informant focus group discussion with Buddhist monks in June 2016
[299] Key Informant focus group discussions with Muslim civil society activists in November 2016

regards the concept of halal certification and dress code[300]. This resonates with other studies that have looked at the negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims. "Slaughtering of animals, the way Islam spread, business dealings of Muslim, the ways Muslims demand their rights, the rights of the women in Islam, and the isolated nature of the Muslim community are some of key issues on which Buddhists have negative opinions". (Razick, Long and Salleh 2015, 65).

What these sets of different community perceptions show about the Muslim community is what could happen with a lack of engagement with the 'other' especially in the wake of conflict which polarises communities. This is also confirmed through studies such as (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015, Razick, Long and Salleh 2015 and so on). As a consequence, misperceptions have been formed with regards the Muslim community. The dichotomy between religious and cultural identity and the failure by the Muslim community to delineate between religious and cultural practices has meant that there is a real misunderstanding about the two in terms of where the lines were drawn vis-à-vis both. For instance, the display of head scarves and halal certification though a religious practice emerged as a cultural and social expression for the community anxious to delineate it from the 'other'. The concept of Muslim schools, Muslim personal law and even Muslim political parties meant that the political expression of the community also meant that the religious and cultural framework were viewed with suspicion as it became conflated with the thorny issue of politics. As a consequence, the community has become viewed with suspicion.

In addition, the issue of religious expression, cultural declaration and political identity for others perceiving the Muslim community, has become blurred as mosques are suspected of not only being used for religious propagations but for other purposes as well such as politics, business and so on. A point[301] was made that most demonstrations begin from the mosques after the mid-day special prayer on Fridays giving the impression that the mosques are the dissent-breeding places for which there is also sanction from the Mosque (religious) authorities. Hence there seemed to be an impression that unlike other communities, Islam was a politicised faith that could be used to mobilise communities. As an interviewee said

> *"The existential fears of the Sinhalese Buddhist were realised after the conflict especially with regards the visible identity of Muslims. In particular the population growth of the Muslims seems to have ignited a fear that Sri Lanka (like many other countries) could lose its Buddhist consciousness"[302]*

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[300] Key Informant focus group discussion with Buddhist monks in June 2016

[302] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

In 2013/2014 in another piece of work[303] the opinions of Muslims were solicited with regards the BBS. As such, a questionnaire related to the growth of BBS was distributed living in the North-Western Province (commonly known as Wayamba), located in the Matale District, Central province of Sri Lanka, localities in Anuradhapura, located in the Anuradhapura District, North Central Province, Colombo and Kalutara districts, which are two major districts in Western Province of Sri Lanka to Muslims. Two hundred and fifty Muslims who are 23–60 years of age from both genders were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire which was later also used in a paper that was written on this subject (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). The findings, from this, though limited can be extrapolated to consider the feelings of the Muslim community living in Sri Lanka especially those living in areas with the Sinhala communities.

A large portion of the Muslims surveyed (about 72%) drew an economic link associated with the rise of the Sinhala-Buddhist forces and Sinhala-Buddhist traders in the areas where Sinhalese are majority, but Muslim traders pose serious trade rivalry against the Sinhalese traders (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). Hence the problem as its roots in an economic dispute over territory which has manifested itself within religious and ethnic communal lines[304]. This reason was also attributed to the inability of the government to take any solid action[305] when there were attacks on Muslim businesses[306] as well as the issue of the halal certification, which in turn affected consumption, export and trade. The inaction of the government to respond to these tensions further weakened confidence in the state structures and state law enforcement officials[307] especially as the focus of the Buddhist nationalists shifted to fundamental markers of Muslim identity[308] being particularly targeted in the form of attacks on mosques, the Halal certification issue (which was also an economic issue) and the challenge on women's clothing. Thus, it became apparent that people felt that their very existence was being called into question with state complicity. Two important parts of the survey show that about 75% of the Muslims questioned said that they would be the next target in the absence of the LTTE and that 25% of respondents strongly believed that there would be a repeat of the 1983 pogrom against the Tamils.

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[303] The questions were used for this for a joint paper written in 2014/2015. See (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015) but also proved useful for this research

[304] In a focus group discussion carried out with Muslim business men in May 2015, this was a similar sentiment that was expressed in terms of suspicions about the motives for the attacks.

[305] About 30% of these Muslims said that they strongly believe that ruling class either directly or otherwise sanctions the anti-Muslim campaign. (Ibid.)

[306] See for example (BBC News Asia, Sri Lanka crowd attacks Muslim warehouse in Colombo 2013b)

[307] About 48% of the Muslims surveyed said that Muslims security has been severely compromised since security forces did not react to the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist violence. (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015)

[308] About 97% of the Muslims surveyed said that they condemn Sinhala-Buddhist extremists' attack on mosque, which is the major identity marker and play central role in their life (Ibid.)

Reflecting on my consultations with Buddhist monks[309] looking specifically at their perspectives on the Muslim community. Generally, it was felt that there were certain elements within the Muslim community that had an extremist ideological thinking and there was interest to know how these groups were seen within the community as well. There was also concern raised about the role of external forces such as Saudi Arabia with regards these extreme groups but also in helping to shift attitudes and ideas in terms of socio cultural practices. Questions were also raised as to how the Muslim community had seemingly evolved from an older generation in terms of appearance and practice. This was not necessarily understood by the Buddhist community. The question of politicisation of faith was once again raised as there was a misunderstanding between the role of the political leaders vis-à-vis community and religious leaders.

The community discussions have been reinforced by yet another perception survey[310] done in the wake of the Aluthgama incidents which highlighted some interesting aspects vis-à-vis the Muslim community. Muslims were seen to be different as the 'outsider' mainly because they did not necessarily speak the same language, nor follow the same religion, or be a neighbour, not being the same ethnicity, caste or not dressing in the same way. One of the responses from the survey is worth highlighting here: "The difference of Muslims to the Sinhalese cannot be put into words; you have to feel it" – Sinhala (Galle)"[311]. Though, whilst the Tamils shared the same differences as Muslims, they were somehow perceived to be closer to the Sinhalese with the main difference being language and politics. The Muslims were somehow seen to be more 'de-linked' than the Tamils with the differences being more structural.

Much of these surveys and perceptions also tally with what the Asia Foundation conducted in its 'National Values in Sri Lanka' Survey in late 2011 to gain a more grounded understanding of people's perceptions of religious beliefs and practices, influence of religious leaders, inter-religious relations, and tolerance for religious expression. The survey revealed some interesting results showing that religious minorities were less positive about the country than Buddhists especially in the feeling that the conclusion of the conflict in 2009 had not brought an end to ethnic conflict (The Asia Foundation 2011). In particular, the survey found that religious minorities were more likely than Buddhists to perceive discrimination by the government with Buddhists themselves believing the improvement of the rights of minorities had been much more substantial than minorities themselves who were more likely to feel only minor or no change has taken place. 90% of the Buddhists surveyed believed that people of all religions were treated equally in the government job market, compared to the 66% of Muslims and 45% of Hindus. Roughly twice as many Muslims (41%), Hindus (50%), and Catholics (41%) than

Buddhists (21%) strongly believed that government should enact special initiatives to protect the land and assets of minorities. The survey also identified that Sri Lankans overwhelmingly perceived their society as becoming significantly more religious as well as adherence to core religious practices amongst people of all faiths. More Buddhists (70%) and Muslims (53%) surveyed said they were "much more religious than other either Hindus (39%) or Catholics (44%)". Local religious leaders were also identified as highly influential and by far the most respected leaders for Sri Lankans of all faiths. Interestingly while the majority of Sri Lankans (66%) believed religious leaders should not be involved in politics, Muslims were relatively split on the issue, with just under half (42%) believing religious leaders should have some role to play in politics despite the fact that among Muslims the rate of involvement is quite low (17%). In addition, the survey found that religious leaders needed greater involvement in community level development with 84% saying that religious leaders should be involved in the development of neighbourhood amenities and a further 81% believing that if religious leaders are not consulted on the problems facing an area, political leaders will make mistakes.

What is interesting from the Muslim community survey is the expectation for a greater involvement of the religious leaders in issues of politics and community affairs beyond their religious duties. "Therein lies the problem in how our community is not only constituted but also perceived. There has been a blurring of the lines between religious leaders, political and civil society leaders. This blurring means that those outside of the community remain sceptical as to the 'true' intentions of the Muslim leaders"[312]

6.3.1 The Trends of Violence and Intimidation.
In another landmark study conducted, importantly the problem of religious violence that has been reinforced by the perception studies was unravelled. It showed an important trend emerging when geographic data on religious attacks is compared with demographic data (Gunatilleke 2015). Areas with low or medium levels of religious diversity and relatively low concentrations of religious minorities appear to be more likely to witness chronic violence against religious minorities. It is thus possible to hypothesise as to why such areas might display greater tendencies towards chronic violence. On the one hand, the relatively low number of persons belonging to the targeted minority community exposes them to the risk of being perceived as defenceless. Perpetrators from the majority community in the area may not fear retaliation, and may therefore be somewhat emboldened. On the other hand, low diversity may produce a 'host-guest' dynamic, where the majority community view themselves as the 'hosts' of the area, and the minority community as the 'guests' (Ibid). As an interviewee said

> *"It is this understanding of the relationships between the majority and minority that creates a power differential between the two. When the minority community oversteps the perceived limits of this arrangement, i.e.*

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it oversteps the duties and privileges of the 'guest", then these attacks serve to remind everyone of their rightful role in society"[313]

However highly diverse areas appear to be confronted with relatively fewer instances of chronic violence, but they encounter acute violence where certain communal fault lines exist as a result of a particular local context. What the perception studies described in the section above do is they validate the suggestion by Gunatilleka (2015) that communal fault lines allow for a situation to arise such that a trigger event together with incitement by organised groups could create the necessary conditions for acute violence to erupt. In this case, violence takes place when certain contextual factors (such as socio-cultural, economic and political) converge to exacerbate the communal tensions. Thus as seen in numerous examples of religious violence in 2013 and 2014, a particular local context may explain the eruption of violence in far more accurate terms than broad contextual factors.

For example, the violence reported in Sri Lanka between 2012 and 2014 against the Muslims Grandpass and Aluthgama certainly demonstrates the manner in which particular local tensions might erupt into acute violence owing to certain trigger events alongside instigation by hate groups[314]. In this regard, it is worth noting that there was an estimated (Secretariat for Muslims 2013) 241 anti Muslim attacks in 2013 of which 166 were location-specific (for example, an attack on a specific place of worship) and a further 75 incidents were not location-specific (for example, hate campaigns in the media)[315] and more related to contextual factors. In addition, data collected from 2012 – 2014 (Ibid.) by the Secretariat for Muslims reveal two trends in terms of attacks on Muslims. First, more than 50% of the attacks were non-physical and related to hate speech and propaganda. Second, political actors or political or social movements perpetrated more than 50% of the attacks. More than a quarter of all attacks were in fact attributed to a single perpetrator—the BBS. Hence the increase in attacks against Muslims during 2013 and 2014 corresponded with the rise in the prominence and influence of particular organisations which according to the surveys also received political patronage (Ibid.). The contextual factors that underpin the violence can not be ignored. As an interviewee said

> *"The BBS campaign is about resources; it is about Sinhala businesses challenging the 'perceived' monopoly by Muslim businessmen and using monks as the scapegoats"[316].*

This clearly was seen in the 'Ban Halal' campaign conducted by the BBS in 2013 which was aimed at imposing a ban on halal certified foods (Karunasena and

[313] Skype interview with Professor Ameer Ali, March 2016
[314] Key Informant focus group discussion with Muslim professionals, May 2016
[315] It is also important to note that these attacks also highlight ones that are not necessarily religiously motivated as such for example, a land dispute between Sinhalese and Muslims
[316] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed, November 2016

Rupasinghe 2013). As an interviewee said "*The 'Ban Halal' campaign was clearly seen as an attempt to cripple Muslim businesses and those supplying the Muslim community*"[317], yet it appeared for many to be more than that.

For many in the Muslim community, the concept of Halal very much speaks to a recognition of identity within the mainstream and an expression of being Muslim. Though there is a warped understanding of what halal truly means with "*some exaggerating the extent of halal certification*"[318], it was clear to many Muslims that the BBS campaign was designed to attack the very identity and nature of the Muslim community. In other words, "*by focusing on halal, the message was clear to the Muslims: we don't necessarily want you here dictating to us what is 'right' or 'wrong' and enforcing your identity on us*"[319].

There was a resolution of this campaign when the clergy of both Buddhist and Islamic faith in collaboration with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce met and announced that the controversial Halal logo would no longer need to be compulsorily displayed on the packaging of consumer products (Bastian 2013). However this was also met with concern from many in the Muslim community, who felt that a "compromise on identity had been reached and that this would be the start of a more vicious campaign of intimidation and incitement to violence".[320]

The fears of the Muslim community about physical violence would be realised in June 2014, when ethnic riots erupted in Aluthgama, Dharga Town, Valipanna and Beruwela—towns located in the South of Sri Lanka. The area has a large Muslim population that lived alongside a larger Sinhalese community. Despite there being previous tensions this particular riot has to be evaluated especially in the wake of the current discussions of causal and contextual factors. Following an alleged altercation in between a Buddhist monk and three Muslims from the area, the BBS organised a rally to condemn the alleged attack on the Buddhist monk where racist and inflammatory remarks were made against Muslims at the rally (Haniffa, Amarasuriya, et al. 2014). At the rally, the leader of the BBS incited the Sinhalese to finish off the Muslims (derogatory referred to as 'Marakkalayas') telling the rousing crowd, "If one Marakkalaya lays a hand on a Sinhalese that will be the end of all of them" (Young 2016, 78). As an interviewee said

> "The manner in which Muslim property was targeted in Aluthgama leaves several unanswered questions especially in this element which seems to be a phenomenon of the anti Muslim riots. Many anti Muslim violence in 1915/ 1976 / 1981 / 1992 / 2001 and 2006 all show this destruction of property as the pattern of anti minority anti-Muslim violence. However, these incidents have not become part of the narrative of the history of the

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[317] Ibid.
[318] Skype interview with Professor Ameer Ali, March 2016.
[319] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslim civil society activists in November 2016
[320] Ibid

Muslim community at least in English. This gap is part of the problem, because we forget every time it happens that it has happened before[321].

Whilst it is not the intention of this chapter to go into the details of the actual violence and so on, what is eerie about the riot was its similarities to the 1915 Sinhala – Muslim riots when after the rally, the crowd led by BBS marched into Muslim areas chanting anti-Muslim slogans, despite there being some 'damage control' being done after the alleged altercation between the monk and the three Muslim men[322]. What is unclear is what happened next but in the confusion, stones were thrown and violence erupted[323]. However, for many Muslims in general, they are less interested in the 'who-started-it' narrative given the recorded eyewitness reports of the organized nature of the looting and violence. The situation was made worse by the inaction of law enforcement officials to contain the violence and with witnesses claiming that many of the attackers wore boots and helmets[324], suspicions were raised of the strong suspicions of state involvement in the riots. As an interviewee from a focus group said

"It was clear that this was a planned attempt to incite the Muslims into a violent response akin to 1983 and as well as a reminder of the 1915 incidents."[325].

Indeed, these sentiments underpin the analysis of the 'Aluthgama' riots, because, though amity between the two communities has remained somewhat fragile, as communal violence had erupted previously, almost a decade earlier, it was clear that it was different this time. The Aluthgama campaign was seen as the 'testing ground' for future anti Muslim campaigns and was directly correlated to the hate campaign carried out by the BBS in the preceding months[326]. The mere fact that there were evident signs of organization and orchestration implying state complicity did nothing to quell the fear from the Muslim community that "not only was their existence at threat, but they were going to be subjected to the same type of harassment that the Tamils had faced from 1983 onwards"[327].

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[321] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

[322] Muslims of the area had attempted various forms of "damage control" in the aftermath of the incident by persuading the two young men involved to surrender to the police and obtain the monk's forgiveness. The men – two who were at the scene and a brother who had gone to the Police Station as an act of good faith on the part of the Muslim community--were made to kneel in front of the monks while at the Police station, according to one source, and were slapped by the monk in the presence of officials of the Aluthgama police and a large crowd of by-standers. (Haniffa, Amarasuriya, et al. 2014)

[323] Raw footage as well as edited clips has been circulating on social media with the discussion point being who – Muslims or Sinhalese—were the ones to cast the first stone that set off the violence. (Ibid).

[324] Suggesting that some of the perpetrators had access to military equipment that an ordinary civilian would not have access to (Ibid)

[325] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslim civil society activists, November 2016

[326] Ibid

[327] Skype Interview with Dr Imtiyaz Razak, August 2015

6.3.2 Understanding the recent anti Muslim campaign

So how do we explain and understand the anti-Muslim campaign? After all, the Muslims were described as the 'model minority'[328] by the Sinhalese because they are perceived to have remained largely loyal to the state during the 30-years of ethnic conflict and civil war and even thereafter, and also in terms of the fact that they have hitherto been submissive, have consistently sided with the Sinhalese against the Tamils ignoring all ethical norms[329]; and the wider Islamic world has been immensely beneficial to Sri Lanka economically, militarily, and politically. Yet they are now expressing the fear of religious marginalization which increased uncertainty of their co-existence and long-term cordial relationship with other major ethno-religious groups, especially with the Sinhalese (Yehiya 2013)

It is clear from the perception studies especially those carried out by the Asia Foundation, that the emergence of Buddhist-Muslim religious confrontation in Sri Lanka in the post-2009 period is a phenomenon driven by the convergence of multiple factors: a sense of beleaguerment within the Buddhist (and Sinhala) community, despite the defeat of the LTTE; a sense that Buddhists and Sinhalese do not occupy the proper place within the Sri Lankan nation as a majority; rapid commercialization of society and a fear that religion and religious institutions are becoming irrelevant, which is a narrative that cuts across both the Sinhala and Muslim communities; the fear of Muslim expansionism and public displays of religiosity and what is perceived as the increasing isolationism within the Muslim community i.e. that there is a concern about the growing visibility of the Muslim community has displayed by their religiosity which then has implications on social / cultural and political expressions; the tendency by both Muslims and Buddhists to see each other as homogenous blocs; and inadequate sensitivity to the internal conflicts and contradictions within both communities. In addition, it is important to consider other contextual factors including socio economic and local political priorities, especially the role that the macro political environment in the country can also play a significant role in shaping ethno-religious relations. The increasingly vociferous presence of extremist Buddhist groups happened in a context where the post-war government until January 2015, deliberately propagated and sustained a discourse of Sinhala triumphalism and at the same time used the media extensively to keep alive the possibility of an LTTE-like threat remerging (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). Such a government sanctioned discourse obviously has/had implications for majority-minority relations in the country. Notwithstanding a global Islamophobia process as well as "the sinister machinations of foreign devils who want to keep the Sri Lankans divided" (I. Hussein 2014) , the campaign has sought to play on the fear psychosis among the Muslims (from the 1915 riots) which endures to this day.

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[328] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein January 2016
[329] "The Muslims also did not really oppose the end of the conflict in 2009 and didn't really raise any issues of corruption and nepotism until they were targeted" – as discussed in a key informant focus group discussion with Muslim civil society activists in November 2016

The campaign has also been grounded in the aspect of social mobility in the wake of an expanding modern economy. There is the competing economic interests which is the other narrative that underpins misperceptions about the Muslim community and that characterizes perceived Muslim ascendency through the visible success of certain Muslim enterprises, though there is little evidence to suggest that the Muslim community as a whole is economically better off than any other community in the country (Herath and Rambukwalla 2015). The campaign which manifested in both online and on the ground is symptomatic of one major common denominator. It is about opposing signs of visible Muslim identity that also has an economic dimension; ranging from calls to boycott Muslim companies and Halal products, Halal certification, women's clothing, to protests outside Muslim-owned retail outlets (Mohamed-Saleem 2013). Interestingly, a significant portion of the members and supporters for BBS not only hail from middle and upper class backgrounds in urban areas that have decent education and affiliated to good money-making professional jobs, but there is also a lot of support from Sri Lankan expatriates living abroad (Ibid). The growing disenchantment in the Sinhala-Buddhist community on many fronts, their economic and cultural insecurity in particular, at least in part has made it easier for nationalistic political posturing to re-capture its lost appeal. Thus there is a heavy interest of Sinhala business involved in these campaigns[330], which has been capitalised on by certain nationalist political parties for their own gain (I. Hussein 2014). As an interviewee from a focus group said

> "a large part of the initial campaigns by the BBS were seen as targeting certain Muslim businesses within the community. Not the high range elite companies but those that had daily dealings with the Sinhala majority community and were a good opportunity for Sinhala businesses to get into. So what better way than to see the success of certain Muslims entrepreneurs as representative of the disproportional success of the Muslim community as a whole. And then to use that as a cause of envy and motivation for violence?"[331]

In the calculations of the Sinhala nationalists, the Muslim community is alleged to be posing a demographic, religious, security and economic threat to Buddhist supremacy in the island[332]. The demographic threat is manufactured from a simplistic comparison of statistics provided in the census reports of 1981 and 2011. They show that while the Sinhalese population has increased from 73.9% to 74.9% and that of Tamils have declined from 12.7% to 11.2% Muslim population has increased from 7% to 9% and hence the danger of Sri Lanka becoming a Muslim country (A. Ali 2014). Yet this simplistic calculation ignores the phenomenon of migration (as a result of the conflict) which has caused hundreds of thousands of Sinhalese and Tamils have left the country permanently

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[330] Again a sentiment expressed when talking to Muslim businessmen in May 2015 about the 'Ban Halal' campaign.
[331] Key informant focus group discussion with Muslim business men in May 2015
[332] Face to face Interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein in January 2016

in search of greener pastures while the Muslims, for various reasons, have found themselves unable to do so, between the two censuses[333].

Thus, what we have seen is that these discourses are successful because they can tap into fears and prejudices that are already present in the collective consciousness of these religious communities. The incidents so far described have created a suspicious and tense situation and the feeling of marginalization among the Muslims, especially those who are living in the Sinhalese majority areas in the country. Further, these incidents have contributed to the clashes of opinions and misunderstanding, thus widening the gap of healthy relationship between the Sinhalese and the Muslims in Sri Lanka. All these incidents pose a question that to which extent the new re-emergence of the religious- based hegemonic nationalism and extreme anti-Muslims sentiments have impacted on the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Muslims who have been maintaining 'historic cordial' relations in Sri Lanka?

6.4 Conclusion

Yet it is also clear that the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists do not subscribe to these extremist views as evident from views on the ground where most of the local Sinhala Buddhist residents of areas where these demonstrations have been taking place, clearly disapprove of the demonstration and do not in any way participate or encourage it (Imtiyaz and Mohamed-Saleem 2015). However, these incidents have thrived and the discourses are successful because they can tap into fears and prejudices that are already present in the collective consciousness of these religious communities.

It is, however, important to note that the macro political environment in the country can also play a significant role in shaping ethno-religious relations. The increasingly vociferous presence of extremist Buddhist groups happened in a context where the post-war government until January 2015, deliberately propagated and sustained a discourse of Sinhala triumphalism and at the same time used the media extensively to keep alive the possibility of an LTTE-like threat remerging. Such a government-sanctioned discourse obviously has/had implications for majority-minority relations in the country (Herath and Rambukwalla 2015).

We must also take into account the fact that the Sinhalese power elite has shown a fierce hierarchical drive – for cultural reasons that cannot be explored here – which leads to a resistance to giving fair and equal treatment even to the Sinhalese. It is not accidental that for the greater part of the period since 1977 Sri Lankan democracy has been deeply flawed, and everyone has suffered from this.

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[333] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali in March 2016

All these incidents pose a question that to which extent the new re-emergence of the religious- based hegemonic nationalism and extreme anti-Muslims sentiments have impacted on the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Muslims. The question that is being asked is "What should the Muslims do to secure and promote their legitimate interests?" [334] It is not difficult to work out the answer to that question. Obviously all the irritants that have been be-deviling Sinhalese-Muslim relations for decades should be addressed by both sides and removed as far as might be possible. But if that is obvious, why on earth has that not been done over several decades? As an interviewee said

> *"As long as there is no drive to build a multi-ethnic nation, we can expect the Sri Lankan Muslim problem to continue"[335]*

It is perhaps, best seen as a dialectical process where pre-existent discourses become reconfigured and circulated when public and political discourse in society at large support and nurture such discourses. What is at stake is how the Muslims identify themselves. To a large extent the shape this discourse takes will depend on the macro political environment but a reimagining of the Muslim identity will also have an important role to play in shaping the future of these discourses.

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[334] Questions asked at a Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Muslim civil society activists in November 2016

[335] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

Chapter 7: Deconstructing the Narrative

"Who is the Muslim? Ultimately the Muslim identity has come out of wanting to be different in the light of the Sinhala & Tamil identity. As a consequence there is a confusion within the Muslim community in terms of their identity, how they relate to the other communities and where they are within the history and the narrative of the country "[336]

7.1 Introduction

This statement indicates the conundrum currently faced by the Sri Lankan Muslim community as it navigates being caught in between trying to find an ethnic identity and remaining true to religious values. This conundrum faced by the Muslim community pretty much speaks to what Barth (1969, 10) wrote about when he referred to not only how "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves", but how the formation and continuation of the ethnic groups are dependent upon interaction with 'others' and how ethnic boundaries entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained, despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories. Thus the question for the Muslim community is 'how does one navigate religious expression in an ethnic identity discourse that is also challenged on a political basis?'

In addition to this, whilst the overwhelming literature about the conflict in Sri Lanka has talked about 'ethnic' divisions, it is clear from its cultural diversity that there is more to the Sri Lankan identity including "how religious identity is connected to the outbreak of 'ethnic' conflict" (Hoole, Senanayake and Perera 2013, 96). This to some extent explains why there is not much in terms of discussions around religious identity and ethnicity.

This gap also extends to much of the scholarly work on Sri Lanka which does not adequately discuss the conundrum of the Muslim community identity. This is as much a problem that is internal within the Muslim community as well as outside the Muslim community. In the course of doing the research for this piece and in my formal and informal conversations with people (particularly from the Muslim community), I have been struck by the ignorance of the history about the Muslim community as well as a superficial understanding about the Muslim community narrative. Statements such as 'The Muslim community has been in Sri Lanka over the last 1000 years and have coexisted with the Sinhalese' display an ignorance not only about the history but how the Muslim community interacts with history as well as the relationships with the rest of the communities. To say that

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[336] Face to Face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed in November 2016

the Muslim community has been in Sri Lanka over the last 1000 years, indicates that en masse, there was a migration of an entity of a race called 'Muslims' who came to Sri Lanka, settled down and populated it. At best this is a disingenuous process which reinforces the 'us' and 'them' perspective. This is farther from the truth because as we have seen, Islam through the Arabs came to the island and through inter marriage spread to the inhabitants here. To indicate otherwise is not representative of the situation. Unfortunately, the Muslim community is as guilty of this as others (such as the Sinhala Nationalist Buddhists) as it reinforces the narratives that predicate the relationships currently. This does not help to ground the narrative of the community within the country and being from the country. It also means that the basis of a conversation around identity becomes even more problematic moving forward because of a misunderstanding of history.

This is also a gap that essentially also does a disservice to the Sri Lankan context as Sri Lanka is a country of the 4 major world religions that have interacted in a dialogical manner and where faith plays a major role in shaping peoples lives and identity[337]. Furthermore not understanding this particular element means that you ignore the process of polarisation between ethno-nationalist communities as well as religious communities that is manifesting itself, particularly in the post 2009 era with a growing Buddhist Christian tension and the emergence of an anti Muslim campaign[338].   As Fernando (2008,7) writes "A careful study of the complex situation shows that the conflict in Sri Lanka which revolves around a dogmatic belief in a nation state reflects the complicity between the dominant Sinhala Buddhism nationalism and western imperialism. The cultural nexus of this complicity lies in the representation of the other in the projects of colonial practice and postcolonial nation building. It operates with an Orientalist-Occidentalist interpretation of each other within a network of asymmetrical local and global power relationships initiated by colonialism and continued by postcolonial nation-building and the present phase of globalisation. This belief is mainly supported by dominant interpretations of ethical and religious traditions where the particular cultures and religions have been interpreted and continue to be interpreted in unchangeable homogenous categories. Its main characteristic is the essentialist perception of ethnicity, religion and nationhood, through which ethno-religious myths have been transformed into political myths of exclusivist types of nationalism and national identity."

Thus it is in this light, that the discussions of Muslim identity need to be framed, understood and discussed. This identity has occupied a perilous position, being compressed between two dominant identity groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, whilst also being subject to a context of Sri Lanka of "cultural and religious beliefs that imbricate with economic and political factors in forming the dominant

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[337] Face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph in October 2015
[338] Again this is something that came up from the face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer who expressed concern about the deterioration of religious relationships.

power structures such as nation-states in a network of local and global powers" (Ibid, 8).

This 'politics of interpretation (within and without the Muslim community) has undoubtedly created a tension in the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity as it wrestles between the distinction of faith as a theological marker, i.e. a religious motivator, and faith as an identity marker, i.e. a communal galvanizer. This tension for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka centres around the nexus of political and ethnic identity vs religious expression which the latter incorporates personal (and social) capital for whilst the former incorporates social capital. In this regard, Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' thesis is transformed into an 'imagined Muslim community' with a schizophrenia of being split between the local and the universal, i.e. the local community vs the global transnational Islamic community or the 'Ummah'. As such there is always a dynamic tension between the relatively local focus and the civilizational focus, and the concept of moral patriotism and how it may inform notions of giving and conceptions of belonging to a larger collective such as the Islamic community. In this perspective the tension and challenge for the Muslim community is how it interprets its relationship on a transnational scale and within the local context. For example, it is interesting to see how Muslims in Sri Lanka mobilise on the issue of Palestine versus issues in Sri Lanka whilst reflecting on issues in Sri Lanka. As a member of a focus group stated

> *"There is a concern that the Muslims in Sri Lanka mobilise greater when there is an issue of Muslims in places like Palestine or Myanmar, but are less likely to mobilise on issues of social concern in Sri Lanka"[339]*

This sentence illustrates the challenge that the Muslim community faces with regards the perceptions from the others. For many the representations and feelings towards Palestine for example, are because of the affinity of the transnational concept of the Muslim based on the theory of the Ummah and yet this seems to be at odds with feelings of affinity with similar causes within the country. As an interviewee said

> *"In this perspective from a theological perspective, every Muslim is supposed to feel the pain of other Muslims. There is even a saying from the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) to this effect. This is the concept of the Muslim nation, the Ummah, and has been used and abused by the community. Hence the impression given is that Muslims care more for other Muslims and not really concerned about their own country because they are not able to respond to internal crises unless if affects them directly. The impression then is one of apathy and not caring about the country which is seized on by nationalists. "[340]*

[339] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Buddhist Monks, June 2016
[340] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

Thus this is a real confusion and challenge for the community yet must not be seen in isolation to the context of Sri Lanka at the time it also emerged. This has been a trend that has been replicated in other communities, within the context of an emerging religious identity connected to ethnic expression, particularly in the late 19th century and earlier 20th century as a result of colonial activity[341].

7.2 Fear of Small Numbers

Appadurai (2006) writes that for extreme violence to occur against ethnically different but nonetheless neighbouring groups, there must be a confused mixture of high certainty and grave uncertainty within the in-group about the intentions of their neighbours. This in all intents and purposes exactly defines the approach of the Sinhalese to the rest of the minorities in Sri Lanka.

This type of confused mixture of certainty and uncertainty is caused by a couple of factors (Ibid): 1) the empiricisation of minorities via census data and other forms of survey. This creates an empirical count of the "other"; 2) Minorities remind the majority of the failure to collectivize a national unity; 3) minorities end up being the site that nationalisms find an outlet for their own anxieties about global insignificance. In other words, minorities blur the idea of nationhood because they aren't the majority; therefore, the majority often maps the globalized ephemeral onto their reality in the social imaginary. "The worry this produces is that the ordinary faces of every day life (with names, practices and faiths different from one's own) are in fact masks of everydayness behind which lurk the real identities not of ethnic others but of traitors to the nation conceived as an ethnos" (Ibid, 91).

So as has been seen on the ground, the Sinhalese have displayed all of the above in terms of their engagement especially with the Muslim community. From the fear of the increasing visibility and numbers of the Muslim community, to a narrative that Muslims are not part of the nation, one can see that this confusion has been built up over time and fed into a narrative of an 'ethnocide momentum' (Appadurai 2006) where Sri Lanka's idea of national ethos has been shaped especially in the last 30 years, from the rhetoric of war, sacrifice and the subordination of local traditions. With the end of the war, the concept of sacrifice was brought even more to the fore with the 'anxiety of incompleteness' (Ibid) based on the fear of small numbers. Thus the Muslim minority threatens the nationalist majority of the Sinhalese because they remind the majority that the unsullied and complete national whole doesn't exist. There is thus a 'fault' with Muslims and to fix this, they either must be "assimilated", integrated or there must be extreme and spectacular violence that can be mobilised to overcome the volatile deficit of that 'incompleteness'.

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[341] Ibid.

The dominant tale of this kind of fearful symmetry between the fear and power of small numbers is further not helped by a minority is on its own trajectory for its identity expression. The Muslims were pushed to respond in one way and in so doing reinforced the polarisations. So to some extent the fault comes from the majority community in how they perceive engagement with the minorities but equally there is fault from the Muslims in how they responded to this situation. By pushing for the 'other' identity in the face of hegemonic aspects and as part of a colonial process, the Muslims chose religion and then sought agency by the institutionalisation of social, ethnic, religious and political identity. It is the last aspect which they relied on over the last 30 plus years in the wake of the conflict and a way of legitimising their interest. However, what they couldn't and didn't realise is that identity is multiple and it is difficult to unite a group no matter how much the image is of homogeneity, actually into something else. It is even more difficult to do that under religion and then to combine that religion with ethnic and political entities

7.3 Nationalising Religious Identity

Though there is no durable link between religion, language and ethnicity when it comes to the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist expression, it is clear that this first emerged and then changed as a result of colonial encounters. With Independence, a fixed notion of identities began to inform the making of the Sri Lankan unitary 'nation' state with a Sinhala Buddhist majority-dominated ideology and a movement leading to the polarisation of diverse communities (J. L. Fernando 2008).

As Stanley Tambiah (1992) writes, the Buddhist establishment went through a religious revival in the 1880s not only as a counter to the colonial missionary influence but influenced by salient political and economic dimensions. Through the likes of people like Anagarika Dharmapala (as previously discussed in chapter 4), this new revival also took place in a period when local capitalism was linked to the nationalist stirrings of Buddhist sections of the emergent bourgeoisie. As Jayawerdena (2003) shows, the growing relationship between the Sinhalese Buddhist politics and the commercial and middle classes during the colonial and post colonial phases was accompanied by an essentialist perception of culture.

On the one hand, religion, ethnicity and race were depicted as inseparable, serving to infuse a new nationalist identity. However, on the other hand, Dharmapala's brand of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism was supported by and served the interests of the rising Sinhala Buddhist middle class going through their own changing phase of social class structures, thereby enabling them to identify with the concept of a 'Sinhala Buddhist Nation State'. It is thus no surprise then that some of these Buddhist middle class were later implicated in the 1915 'Sinhala-Muslim' riots (Jayawerdena 2003) as economically there were growing tensions between the new Sinhala Buddhist rich and the other ethno-nationalist groups who engaged in trade.

Hence this growing relationship between Sinhalese Buddhist politics and the business minded middle classes helped to inform an essentialist perception of cultures in terms of how Buddhism related to Sinhala nationalism. These perceptions reflected a selective reading of the pre-colonial ethno-religious narratives within the colonial and post colonial politics of control, domination and manipulation. An essentialist representation of nationhood and the centrality of the nation state defined in terms of developing from primordial categories gained predominance, within the context of economic tensions between the groups, thereby blurring out collectivities, both global and local. Put simply, the narrative held "the minorities responsible for limitations that the Sinhala Buddhists faced within the colonial economy ignoring the fact that these limitations were the very result of the colonial economy of the Empire" (J. L. Fernando 2008, 173).

As Appadurai (2006) writes, the lines between the majority and minority have been blurred at the boundaries as nations lose national economic sovereignty. Hence minorities become the site for displacing the anxieties of the majority about their own marginality in a world of unruly economic flows and can be the flash point for a series of uncertainties and other collectivities have become blurred. "Majorities can always be mobilised to think that they are in danger of becoming minor and to fear that minorities can easily become major" (Ibid, 83). Thus in Sri Lanka, there emerged a concept of 'political Buddhism', a Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism with its manufactured 'mythohistory' (Thambiah 1986), turning into an 'anti-minority' movement, envisaging Sinhala-Buddhist nationhood as an ideology of national identity in which all non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists are the distant 'other'[342]. What this meant in practice was the emergence of a narrative that being Buddhist in Sri Lanka became intimately tied to Sinhala cultural and political identity and representation. The normative assumption was that if one is Buddhist, that he or she is Sinhala, though not vice-versa because there is a significant minority of Sinhala Christians. The converse of that was that non Buddhists were largely non Sinhalese and thus did not 'belong' to the country and had less rights. In this regard the Sinhalese Christians occupied an interesting and often dangerous space as well.

However, it is clear that this narrative didn't really have too much of an implication in the country despite the pre independence symbolism until the post conflict scenario in 2009. It is really in the period of post 2009, that we saw a real articulation of this symbolism, with the rise of the BBS and in particular against the Muslim community, a reminder of the 1915 tensions, with theological causes being an additional impetus, leading to a '1915 V 2.0', so to speak. As an interviewee said

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[342] One of the themes brought up in a skype interview with Dr Imtiyas Razak in August 2015 where he stated that this is an emerging trend that is also replicating what was taking place in Myanmar at that time.

> *"The end of the conflict which so far had distracted the Sinhala nationalists, now empowered them (with tacit support from the government of the day) to try and articulate this utopian vision of the nation and to assert the rights of the majority and the minority"[343].*

In this sense, Buddhism has evolved from a transcendent category to something that is fashioned out of the everyday socially embedded practices of Buddhists – either lay people or monks. With a growing involvement of the latter in politics, a sharper emphasis began to emerge on Buddhism and violence (S. Tambiah 1992), which has also been supported by Deegalle (2007) who talks about this massive change and reinterpretation of doctrines in Sri Lanka largely as a result of the conflict.

In this trajectory one can see the trend of ethno-religious nationalism as nothing new within Sri Lankan history. However, the result of such ethno-religious nationalist fervour has been the politicisation of religion where all religions have a political element to them and people are aware of different communities also having religious and political identities (Flanigan 2008). Thus the Sinhalese had been effectively mobilised through Buddhism, whilst Hinduism was also used to express 'pure' Tamil roots, although the conflict served to split the Christian community between Sinhalese and Tamils, with Tamil Christians expressing some sympathy with the LTTE and Sinhalese Christians largely siding with the government. This has also left Muslims with a unique position. As an interviewee said

> *"The Christian community has not had the same challenges as the Muslim community as ethnicity plays an important role in community identity, but this certainly had an effect on the Sinhala – Tamil relationship in terms of the church. However the Muslims were very good at keeping to their own political and religious points of view."[344]*

In "fearing that their particular socio-political and economic interests would be marginalised in a broader Tamil-speaking coalition" (Hoole, Senanayake and Perera 2013, 97), the assertion of a Muslim identity has also become a conundrum for the Muslim community caught in between transnational questions of religiosity, national questions of identity and local challenges of polity. As an interviewee said

> *"The Muslim community at best remains confused as to how it expresses itself and this dichotomy lends itself to the challenges being faced"[345].*

However, in this perspective it is also worth noting that this religious political representation is one sided. Whilst Buddhist monks are seen as an influential

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[343] Skype interview with Dr Imtiyaz Razak in August 2015
[344] Face to face interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph in October 2015
[345] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali in March 2016

force behind the Sinhalese politicians, they somehow are given a special status than other religious leaders, who are shown in a negative light if they are seen to be influencing political leaders. As a number of interviewees have said

> *"There is a classic example of there being a difference in how the religious leaders are treated. When the national anthem is played, it is customary for everyone to stand and pay respect to this, religious leaders included except for Buddhist monks. The latter are allowed to sit down during this time. If any other religious leaders were to do the same, they would be accused of treason and being against the country. This hypocrisy becomes more apparent when some of the Sinhalese majority and politicians tend to refer to the Buddhist monks but make a fuss when other minority politicians refer to religious leaders"[346]*

> *"Buddhist monks are seen to exert undue influence on the Sinhalese politicians and even though there are some who oppose this, the fact of the matter is that the Buddhist monks are and have been present in the politics of the country. For example, we have had a number of occasions where the monks have changed country legislation through their protests. In fact, the first head of state to be assassinated in Sri Lanka was killed by a Buddhist monk but people do not see this as a religious influence. However when members of other faiths do it, this is seen as negative"[347]*

The evolution and institutionalisation of Muslim identity intertwined with religious expressions of piety has proven to be a dilemma for the community. Being Muslim in Sri Lanka is both an ethnic category as well as a religious one and the two are used interchangeably. In Sri Lanka being a follower of the Islamic faith means automatically that the assumption is that one is of the Muslim ethnicity – though there are other ethnicities that have converted to Islam, their ethnicity is not something that is discussed in much detail or given much credence to[348]. Hence there technically can be 'non-Muslim' (in the ethnic sense) followers of Islam in Sri Lanka unlike in many other parts of the world, where one's ethnic identity can be distinct from one's identity, but in Sri Lanka it becomes difficult to discern the differences. Fernando (2008) calls it 'cultural recycling' in that all ethnic communities developed a sense of 'cultural nationalism' in response to the colonial experiment. Yet instead of uniting and articulating an alternative vision of a post colonial independent state, these racialized perceptions of 'nationalism' and 'nationhood' remained within the realm of competing for cultural space.

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[346]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[347]   Face to face interview with Prof Ken Bush, November 2015
[348]   In his interview in November 2016, Naushad Majeed lamented about the fact that despite the close solidarity based on faith, there is still a sense of `racism` amongst the Muslim community with regards to converts from other ethnic groups. In this sense, converts to Islam from the other ethnic communities are still treated as the outsider and often excluded and referred to as 'New Muslims'

7.4 An Imagined Community with Imagined Geographies

The Muslim identity in Sri Lanka has emerged from a constructivist perspective, constructing an ethnic identity for political reasons but also instrumentalising religion for the same reason to achieve that political end. In this sense they are unique in that they have become an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) with an 'imagined geography' (Said 2000). I have deliberately chosen both concepts because I think they are particularly pertinent to the discussion about the Sri Lankan Muslims and their identity formation and in fact influence. It also illustrates the particular predicament that the Muslim community is in, which I will explain below.

Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities is useful to anchor the Muslim community, since, despite not actually knowing all other members of the community – or even having face to face contact at the time of discussion, the community was 'imagined' by political elites in the sense of horizontal comradeship and shared history; despite the actual inequalities and hierarchies that existed in reality; and the limitations because of an understanding of a 'boundary' (Anderson 1983). This boundary is better explained clearly through the imagined geography narrative, that Edward Said (2000) has used to evolve this thinking as a form of social constructionism from the imagined community narrative. In this term, "imagined" is used not to mean "false" or "made-up", but rather "perceived". In Culture & Imperialism, said (1993) pointed to how none of us are completely free from the struggle over geography, over territory, over space, and over place.

In this sense, the formation of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is one of perception – a perceived link to history, time and space; to define oneself against the 'other'. This imagined geography for the processes of cultural intervention of the Sri Lankan Muslim narrative has been shaped by a long tradition of efforts to forge effective political formations in times of global crisis, in other words, efforts with transnational ambitions that have profoundly shaped the history of the 20th century— including, in particular, the legacies of anti-colonial movements and other internationalist thought. According to Said (1993,2000), imaginative geography is a form of invention used by practitioners of empire to re-interpret the meaning of certain territories and create discourses justifying the need for control over such re-imagined places. This exercise in imagination begins by reconstructing the history of those places coveted by empire builders. This practice of constructing alternative representations of places and people is what Edward Said refers to as the crafting of "imaginative geographies." (Ibid.)[349]. Thus "institutionalising Muslim difference, the British, in a crucial sense, helped 'create' Muslim identity" (Q. Ismail 1997, 73).

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[349] It is clear that the formation of the Moor / Muslim identity by the political elites in response to colonial periods, also tried to imagine a `geographical` space with links to a pan Arab citizenship and transnational Islamic expression.

Thus it is worth referring to how Barth (1969) explores that discussions around 'ethnic boundaries' canalizes social life entailing a frequently quite complex organisation of behaviour and social relations whilst recognising a limitation of shared understandings and differences in criteria for judgement of value. In this sense, the argument is that ethnic groups persist as significant units if they imply marked differences in behaviour and allow the persistence of cultural differences. What this means is that ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka have been formed and reinforced as a result of the boundaries placed by them and the interaction between them.

It is in this vein that we see how the Muslim identity developed and evolved depending on the context of the time. The Muslim identity in Sri Lanka has become perceived and imagined and determined vis-a-vis the identity of the Sri Lankan nation and has been formed based on (Guibernau 2007):
   1. The construction and dissemination of a certain image of the 'nation'
   2. The creation and spread of a set of symbols and rituals
   3. The creation of common enemies

In doing this, the Muslim community led by the political elites, institutionalised their identity founded on an imagined assumption. In this sense, identities have been imagined where global, regional, national and local spaces have entered into relationships of replication, consequences and repercussion. Appadurai (2006) calls this phenomenon, 'geography of anger', stating that this "is one way to examine how the fear of small numbers and their power shape the mutual relationships of different spatial scales and sites" (Ibid, 93). Thus the concept of imagined communities and geographies lead to this concept of the geography of anger, where global concerns and tensions can produce complex replicas of the larger struggles and that creates "a freshly charged relationship between uncertainty in ordinary life and insecurity in the affairs of states" (Ibid, 101).

In other words, this imagination which has led to a blurring of certainty and identities has become a flash point for insecurities, and the minorities subsequently evolve to face those circumstances. This is indeed the predicament that is faced by the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. As an interviewee said

> *"The Muslim community is at a cross roads in how it forms its identity and there needs to be serious thinking about what and how they move forward"[350]*

In so doing, we need to understand how the identity and institutionalisation of the Muslim community has evolved in Sri Lanka in different phases as a consequence of the 'othering'.

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[350] Face to face interview with Mr. Naushad Majeed in November 2016

7.4.1 5 Phases of Imagining Muslim Identity

As I have come to understand, believe and have used the earlier chapters of this thesis to argue, there are 5 significant phases for the evolution and the institutionalisation of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka, all influenced by 'critical junctures' of the country's history. "A critical juncture is a turning point in which relations within and between groups are altered fundamentally" (Bush 2003, 15). This is evident for example in how intra-group and inter-group relations have been constituted leading to polarisation, fragmentation, tensions and so on[351]. It is also clear that these junctures are not mutually exclusive and there is a fair amount of overlap in terms of time frames and events that could ensure that different junctures leading to an evolution of the Muslim identity, could have also happened simultaneously. It is this that forms the basis of the discussion not only of the evolution but also in terms of navigating complex political transitions.

It is obvious from the previous chapters that this discussion on Muslim identity is implicitly linked to inter and intra group dynamics and can't be treated in isolation. As an interviewee said

> *"The narrative of the concept of the Muslim identity has its origins in trying to define themselves against the `other`. This has implications for community relations (both inter and intra) overall"[352].*

In understanding these dynamics, it can then help us to understand the conditions for improving relations between the communities. These critical junctures have led to specific representations of the Muslim community identity.

Critical Juncture 1 – Framing the Ethnic Identity

The framing of the ethnic identity remains the by-product of as well as the first critical juncture for Muslim community representation and identity. The incidents leading up to the framing of the ethnic identity, has been already discussed, as the framing of the identity began really in response to other nationalist and anti colonialist currents that were affecting the country.

In examining the national identity of Sri Lanka that has evolved to its current circumstance as a result of these movements, we can see that the image of the 'nation' is based very much on constructing a Sinhala Buddhist image which is best represented through the symbol of the national flag as represented by Figure 9. It is also the symbol that visually illustrates the country's underlying problem of ethnic rivalry and compartmentalisation (D. B. McGilvray 2011), where the Muslims are represented by a vertical green (Islamic) stripe, and the Tamils by a parallel orange (Hindu) stripe, while the Sinhalese majority (the "people of the

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[351] This is something that was discussed in the face to face interview with Professor Kenneth Bush in November 2015

[352] Skype interview with Prof Imtiyaz Razak in August 2015

lion") are represented by a regal sword-wielding lion and four leaves from the sacred Bo tree under which the Buddha is reputed to have attained enlightenment.
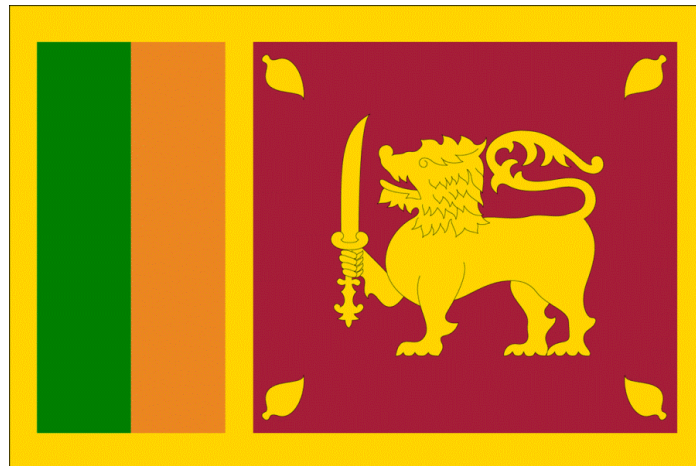
It is clear that there is no unifying Pan-Lankan symbols of national identity or citizenship, with the flag said to be the royal red and gold panel spanning two thirds of the flag portraying the legendary lion ancestor (Sinha) of the Sinhalese people, their distinctive religion (Theravada Buddhism) and their sword-wielding pre-colonial political sovereignty over many parts of the island. The smaller, separate bloc of space on the left side of the flag that represents the minority Muslims and Tamils towards whom the Sinhalese lion brandishes his royal sword, in an interpretation of the 'awareness of the danger' posed by the minorities to the majority (Ibid). What in fact, the national flag represents, is a virtual schematic of the island's ethnic divisions and a clear proclamation of Sinhalese Buddhist (ethnically specific) domination of the Sri Lankan state with two compartmentalised ethnic totems, which are small and religiously generic. Hence the conflict in Sri Lanka has been and actually remains[354] predicated on the continuous legitimacy over time not only of ethnic uniqueness but its differentiation from the 'other'. As an interviewee said

> *"Identity is Sri Lanka is primarily essentialist, based on perceptions of ethnicity, religion and nationhood which have allowed ethno-religious myths to be transformed into political myths. The predominant feature for Sri Lankan identity as represented by the flag underscores the centrality of the Buddhist symbol and the mythology of the Lion, and the minorities are reminded of their place in the country under the watchful eye of this*

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[353] Taken from the internet http://www.upul.com/category/about-sri-lanka/sri-lanka-flag/ (accessed 9th August 2012)

[354] As was raised in a focus group discussion in May 2016 with a group of Muslim professionals, the flag remains a symbol of the division in the country on ethnic grounds and which has been hijacked by the extreme Sinhala nationalists who use a distorted form of the Sri Lankan flag without the stripes depicting the minorities as a way of arguing that this remains the `true` flag of the country.

lion with a sword. Consequently, the Tamils relied on their symbol of the Tiger to counter the Lion symbol. The Muslims were caught in the middle and relied on the crescent. However the issue is that there is no one symbol uniting communities and each one has relied on their own understandings to be able to articulate agency and representation"[355]

Thus it is no surprise that the Sri Lankan Muslims also constructed their identity as a 'differentiation from the other' as it was based on the socio-political condition facing them at that time (M. A. Nuhman 2007). Despite Tamil being the major mother tongue of the Muslims (and the vernacular of Islamic scholarship from South India), in order to differentiate themselves and to safeguard their political and economic interests, they chose religion as their primary ethnic marker. Nuhman (2002, 15) calls this "disowning linguistic identity" and refers to this as a total differentiation from the Tamils due to the safeguarding of socio-political interests. This is in sharp contrast to Muslims in South India who never hesitated to call themselves 'Islamic Tamils' using both religious and linguistic identities (Ibid.) As an interviewee said

> *"In this sense religion was associated with a cultural expression as opposed to a theological discussion which poses its own challenges to identity formation"[356].*

Yet there is a paradox to this representation.   Even though a religious interpretation of Islam is supposed to transcend ethnic and cultural identities, the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is only representative of one 'racial' element of the diverse Muslim community based in Sri Lanka. It is a name that is used to define ethnically those Muslims that claim that they descended from the Arabs[357] , so called 'Moors', as opposed to the other ethnicities described in the earlier chapters. As a key informant from a focus group discussion revealed

> *"Therein lies the paradox of the Muslim identity which from a 'religious' perspective was supposed to be inclusive encompassing a heterogeneous diversity with religious similarity, but has boiled down to who you were descended from. So the Muslim in Sri Lanka becomes synonymous with being 'Moor' ie descended from the Arabs, and thus this becomes a symbol of status"[358].*

It is this paradox which continues to provide challenges for the community since the religious identity is of course used by all Muslim ethnicities but there are still cultural differences, in other words, between the Moors, Malays, Memons and so

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[355] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali in March 2016
[356] Skype interview with Dr Imtiyaz Razak in August 2015
[357] Nuhman (2007) talks about a change of description from the identity of Moors (as given by the Portuguese and then adopted by the Dutch and British and later enforced by Colombo Muslim elites to distinguish themselves from the Indian Muslims and the Malays) to the concept of Muslims (again as a political tool) to ensure political inclusivity of all ethnicities. Yet in recent times it has reverted back to a de-facto identity for the Moors especially after Independence as a result of the action of the elites.
[358] Focus group discussion with Muslim professionals in May 2016

on. However, the religious identity has also proved problematic in terms of the developing visible homogenizing tendencies amongst the Muslims of Sri Lanka as a result of religious awakening.

The claim for identity from Moor to Muslim in Sri Lanka is also a tale of politics at the basic element: the rivalry of two families, "conflict between elitist groups for 'political power, economic benefits and social status'" (M. A. Nuhman 2002, 40) which resulted in the establishment of the All-Ceylon Muslim League and the All Ceylon Moors Association. This rivalry continued for decades that "at one point in 1945, the leaders of the Muslim League threatened to pronounce a fatwa expelling anyone who calls himself a 'Moor' from the Muslim faith" (Mcgilvray 1998, 452).

This rationale for the discussion of ethnic identity in Sri Lanka is in line with the Constructivist Approach to the formation of an ethnic identity which is viewed as a product of human actions and choices that are constructed, transmitted and not genetically inherited from the past (Taras and Ganguly 2002). In keeping with the Weber school of thought which looks at the social origin of ethnic identity based on a belief in a common ancestry (Stone 1995), the Muslim identity has not only been formed as a community but has been formed under the right circumstances by appropriate political actions (Ibid.) The development of the Muslim identity thus has been <u>political</u> from its inception as political actors have and continue to construct both identity and solutions to problems in order to gain and hold power.

In doing this though, a sense of insecurity can emerge among members of a group when they feel that they are not only deliberately and systematically undermined by the dominant group in society but methodically targeted by the dominant group due to its ideas, beliefs, lifestyle and/or identity (A. Imtiyaz 2009). Thus there arises a mobilisation against the 'oppressors' in all available ways, theoretically both in non-violence primarily by the moderate democratic leadership and violently by radical groups, if it thinks the former's strategies make no sense to win its rights (T. Gurr 1993), a scenario that has played itself out in Sri Lanka time and time again and that will continue to be a problem

This Constructivist Approach aptly describes how because of Sri Lanka's ethno-nationalist identity politics, the Muslim community, led by the political elites, have also been forced to define themselves as an 'other' that is neither Sinhala nor Tamil and one that is largely based on Islam as a faith to maintain this distinct group identity mainly from the Tamil community (Q. Ismail 1997). This has led to some controversy in determining whether the Sri Lankan Muslim identity is ethnic or religious (M. A. Nuhman 2007). Qadri Ismail (1997) in fact argues that the Sri Lankan Muslim identity has changed from a racial one into a religious one over the past few decades, stating that "the Sri Lankan Muslim social formation 'lost'

its ethnicity in the post colonial period or to be precise 'lost' its racial / ethnic identity" (Ibid, 59)

However, as Nuhman (2002, 2) states, "the Muslim identity is a reactive politico-cultural ideology that has been constructed and developed in relation to and as a response to Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalistic ideologies". This reaction that was born at the start of the 20th century became more mature as a consequence of the ethnic strife. The 'composite Islamic identity' that has been developed not only promotes and promotes Muslim cultural and religious life but also envelopes a passion for socio economic advancement and social recognition (O'Sullian 1999).

What this means is that the situation today is that the Muslims are the only Sri Lankan ethnic group bearing a religious rather than a linguistic, ethnic or racial name, i.e. faith is not only a theological marker (a religious motivator) but also an identity marker (a communal galvaniser), which means there remain tensions and fault lines along racial and religious lines. In defining themselves as such, their identity has been developed not only based on ethno-nationalist tendencies but also from a theological and spiritual basis. This has caused some tensions of manifestation and representation especially in trying to navigate the heterogeneity that naturally exists within the Muslim community in Sri Lanka on an ethnic and demographic basis (McGilvray and Raheem 2007), with the homogeneity that is being developed as a discourse on Pan-Islamic basis which seeks to discuss the concept of the global Islamic community or Ummah.

It is this homogeneous element that is being seized upon as a negative trend in the sense that the 'Islamization' of Sri Lanka is perceived as opening the door for extremist tendencies (McGilvray 2011).   This is also being echoed by extreme elements within the Sinhalese (and Tamil) communities who have used the global language against increasing Islamic extremism to criticize and justify a potential suppression of the Muslim community[359].   It is this fear of the Muslims tainted with an Islamophobic discourse that seems to cause the greatest threat to community relations.

Yet as we have seen this homogenising quality has not necessarily been an advantage to the community as at different times in history, as they have been in conflict with both Tamils and Sinhalese which has also not been helped by the political naivety and expediency (on the part of the Muslims). As an interviewee said

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[359]   In an interview with Rev Ebenezer Joseph in October 2015, he mentioned this based on his interactions with Buddhist monks (as well as members from within the Church) who were concerned not only about the increasing religiosity of Muslims but were scared about the implications of this vis-à-vis extremism and terrorism as outlined in a global discourse about Muslims and violence.

> *"The seemingly duplicitous nature of the Muslim politicians (and by extension, the Muslim community) has meant that both the Sinhalese and Tamil leadership view them as highly suspicious and opportunistic"[360].*

Critical Juncture 2: Consolidating Social and Cultural Identity

It is in the second period, which I have classified as the formation of the social / cultural identity phase for the Muslims where most of the institutionalisation took place. As an interviewee said

> *"Institutionalisation is about developing a separate identity and organising separate social institutions in the public sector. So for the Muslim community the legitimacy of its ethnic identity around the end of the nineteenth century was about getting it ingrained within society through representative institutions. Hence there was a need to develop institutional representation to further the agency and expression of that ethnic identity"[361]*

Thus here in Sri Lanka we are talking about separate social institutions in the public sector exclusively for Muslims and legitimising some of the Muslim interests (M. A. Nuhman 2002) based on this understanding of a separate identity for Muslims. Though a large part of the discussion of institutionalisation started in the late 19th century and early 20th century in part due to the influence of transnational elements, it is only really after independence that the issue of identity, ethnicity and said institutionalisation had much more poignant ramifications with political leaders taking great strides to deepen institutionalisation. It is this juncture that has been described as the period when "…a culturally conscious religious community gradually transformed itself into a strong politically motivated ethnic community in Sri Lanka" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 92).

Largely brought about by the arrival of Ahmad Orabi Pasha[362] in exile from Egypt, the Muslims in Sri Lanka, at the peak of their economic prosperity were receptive to new influences, namely the concept of a transnational Muslim identity with the concept of a 'revival' of Islamic thinking (M. K. Asad 1993)[363]. Pasha in particular spoke to the sensitivities of an elitist (and affluent) group of Muslims mainly in Colombo who were seeking a sense of political expression and representation against the 'other'[364], whose own identity spoke to the religious revivalism common amongst all the communities in Sri Lanka as an anti colonial struggle

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[360] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali in March 2016
[361] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[362] See Chapter 3 for more details about Orabi Pasha
[363] Orabi Pasha is also credited with arousing in the Muslim community searching for a separate identity, this fascination with the Fez cap which came to be seen as a symbol of the Muslim identity of many of the politicians in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The fez cap was seen as this link with the Ottoman empire to express this 'other' identity. It has since died down but wearing the fez cap is seen as a cultural piece of many Muslim households in Sri Lanka especially during a wedding when the groom is sometimes seen to wear the cap.
[364] Not Tamil or Sinhalese

and a way of seeking an ethnic consciousness based on a separate ethnic identity, cultural ideology and traditional mythology[365]. For the Muslim elite, they found that identity within what Pasha represented, a link with a grander and transnational identity represented in Islamic nationalism (against colonialism)[366] and the Ottoman empire and a glorious Islamic history. This thinking of a more expressive identity received support from Pasha who recognised the paucity of modern educational[367] provision for Muslims in Sri Lanka, especially in response to the rise of Christian missionary schools.

Up to that point, the Muslim community had not really entered the modern educational system introduced in the 19th century, one reason being the fear of Christianisation. Yet there is another theory which was postulated that Muslims were perceived as a trading community whose social mobility would be assured through wealth and not necessarily through education. As an interviewee said

> *"This is a colonial construct of the Muslim community which gives the false impression even today that Muslims are a wealthy community despite the fact that there is widespread poverty amongst the Muslims whilst a large portion of them were not traders but often farmers"[368].*

However this construct was also accepted by the Muslim elites as it served their 'hegemonic interests' (Q. Ismail 1997) and who were keen to trace their origin to Arab traders of the medieval period in order to ensure the legitimation of difference from the 'other', the Sinhalese and the Tamil[369]. Nevertheless, in recognition of the changing times, with external influences such as Pasha, from India, and a realisation of the need to maintain influence, the concept of opening separate schools for the Muslims was developed. "'Giving modern education in a religious environment' was the common feature of their ideology and this was a kind of mixture of tradition and modernity" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 110). For the Muslim community, the issue of separate schools became problematic because unlike the Sinhalese/Tamil (where the major differentiation was based on language and secondly faith and culture despite following similar curriculums), here it was based on ethnic makeup. The problem of the Muslim schools in a way became representative of the larger problem that the Muslim community faced and faces in terms of how it represents itself. Muslims schools largely had

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[365] The Sinhalese elite had sought their identity in Buddhism and an 'imaginative' historical mythology whilst the Tamils sought their identity first in Hinduism especially Saivaism and later in their glorious linguistics and cultural heritage (Nuhman, 2007)

[366] This was the period that Turkish, Egyptian and Indian Islamic revivalist and political movements were struggling against European colonial rule, with the Caliph of the Ottoman Empire being seen as the spiritual leader of the global Muslims. All of this served as external inspirations to the Muslims of Sri Lanka

[367] The Sri Lankan Muslims were in particular inspired by Indian reformist leaders like Sir Seyed Ahamed Khan, who established Aligar University (*Ibid*)

[368] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

[369] This also was stressed in the face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein in January 2016, who reiterated the point that the concept of the Moor (or Arab heritage) was emphasised by the Muslim elites post Independence in order to justify the differences from the other communities.

/have Tamil as the language of instruction but follow a separate calendar to accommodate religious holidays like Ramadan (M. A. Nuhman 2007). It is this 'difference' that is seen as the fundamental aspect of the isolation of the different communities. The schools issue is thus seen as important because it is also one of the key political leverages used to justify support by politicians. As a key informant from a focus group discussion said

> *"It is this segregation of different communities in their schools that is seen as the start of the breakdown of relationships between communities. For the Muslim community because they chose a different medium of education it meant that they were isolated from both communities thereby leading to a misperception about them from the others and also a misperception of the others by the Muslim community"[370].*

Another area of institutionalisation for the Muslim community was in personal law with the establishment of the 'Mohammaden Code' of 1806[371] which had a complementary and integral system of legislation and which later emerged as the 1951 Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act - MMDA (M. A. Nuhman 2007). "The introduction of special Quazi Courts was a unique development in the Sri Lankan legal system, since all other indigenous or customary laws are applied in the ordinary courts" (Savitri Goonesekere as quoted in Nuhman 2007, 149). Currently it is the current discussions around the reform of the MMDA that has created a space for an examination of the cultural and religious identity of Muslims and where the two blur lines. Activists have been calling for the reform of the MMDA claiming that it is unfair to women and also that it boasts certain cultural practices not found in the practice of the religion (Hamin and Isadeen 2016), yet those opposed to the reform largely led by the council of Imams have argued that to demand a reform of the act is to delve into religious jurisprudence and by extension, to question Muslim identity and existence in general (Daily News 2017). This argument represents the crux of the matter with regards 'who or what is the Sri Lankan Muslim?' With the arguments between faith and cultural practices taking place, it is clear that the MMDA and any other discussions around institutionalisation goes deeper to the heart of the question beyond just a law. It raises the main concerns about how to deal with the challenges between the ethnic, political and religious representation of the Muslim community. As a key informant from a focus group said

> *"The discussions on the MMDA reform to me symbolise the existential crisis that the Muslim community faces. The initial introduction of Muslim Personal Law was done to appease the Muslim community and allow them to feel some religious agency in marriage which was seen as something sacrosanct. Accordingly, to the time when it was first brought in, it incorporated certain cultural and traditional norms which have now*

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370 Key Informant Focus group discussion with Muslim businessmen, May 2015
371 This has subsequently been replaced by the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance of 1929, which has separate legal (Qazi) courts set up exclusively to deal with matrimonial disputes in the Muslim community. This was subsequently changed in 1951 with Qazi courts given exclusive jurisdiction to handle all matters pertaining to marriage and divorce.

evolved over time and perhaps are seen as out of place and out of date. The MMDA reforms have been really about ensuring that justice is maintained which is the original precept of the faith, yet there are those opposing it saying that this is challenging jurisprudence itself and should not be allowed. This has wider ramifications for how the Muslim community views itself and any changes. The danger is that any call for reform within the Muslim community against patriarchal cultures or institutional evolutions can be misinterpreted as a call for the evolution of faith and a challenge to jurisprudence. Hence any real discussion is forgotten and everything else becomes cosmetic"[372]

In order to preserve a religious identity, government institutions were established to look after the maintenance of mosques and charitable trusts, with the development of the Muslim Mosques and Charitable Trusts or Wakfs Act of 1956 (M. A. Nuhman 2007). "Under this Act, a separate government department with an executive Wakfs board was established" (Ibid, 149). These effectively had the effect of ensuring a solidity to the identity formation of the Muslim community which very much focuses centrally around the practice of faith and the primary place to worship. As an interviewee said

"*To the average Muslim, freedom to worship especially with the ability to go to the mosque is key. Thus for the Muslim community, the fact that the government established separate mechanisms to look after this was an achievement towards helping to recognise that identity and accept it. Of course, it was achieved due to the 'accomodationist' stance of Muslim politicians post independence and then it was used to cement a separate identity. In other words, although freedom of worship entailed mosques and so on, the fact is that these institutions with a separate governance structure became key indicators for the expression of the Muslim ethno-religious identity. To challenge them was tantamount to challenging the existence of the Muslims which is interesting, because traditionally the Mosque was simply a place where people could gather to say their prayers. It hadn't really developed that institutional aspect"[373]*

Muslim identity was also institutionally recognised in government owned media. A separate Muslim unit was set up in the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation, broadcasting a separate Muslim service exclusively for Muslim affairs (M. A. Nuhman 2007). Mirrored in the national television service as well, the media access "promotes ethnic and religious awareness among Sri Lankan Muslims" (Ibid. 149)[374].

With all of these moves, the social and cultural identities of the Muslim community were well and truly developed and ingrained as key non negotiable determinants.

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[372] Key Informant Focus group discussion with Muslim professionals, May 2016
[373] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[374] Funnily enough, there is no strong state backed print media for the Sri Lankan Muslim community although there are small tabloids and magazines that are published which are ethnically and religiously very sensitive.

Critical Juncture 3: Building a Political Identity

Though the political identity of the Muslim was formed on the "anvil of Portuguese religious persecution of them as 'Moors'" (D. B. McGilvray 2008, 10), it was only under the British colonial regime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in response to the prevailing British colonial model for categorising and representing indigenous Ceylonese by 'race' in the census and on the appointed Legislative Council, that the Sri Lankan Muslim elites energetically constructed their 'racial' identity as Arab descendants.   It can be said that the central innovation in the period leading up to independence in 1948 was not the bifurcation of Sinhala vs. Tamil political identities but the development of 'the political separation of the Ceylon Moors as a distinct ethnic group from the larger Tamil-speaking community' to ultimately distance the Muslim community from the characteristic Dravidian linguistic chauvinism but also to "safeguard their socio-political and economic interests" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, 13) As an interviewee said

> *"The mere fact that post independence, the Muslim community managed to institutionalise their social and cultural identity speaks to the accomodationist stance of the Muslim politicians of the day who were largely political elites from Colombo and the South. By emphasising their differences as articulated towards the end of the nineteenth century, they were able to use these as 'bargaining chips' to ensure that the interests of the community were met"[375]*

What history shows is that the Muslim political elites of the South used this development to cooperate with the Sinhalese political parties, which formed the successive governments since independence to win and consolidate their interests (A. Imtiyaz 2009).   Whilst the Sri Lankan Government's enthusiasm to accommodate Muslim demands helped them in their quest for a separate identity (A. Imtiyaz 2012); it is no surprise that the continuous Tamil indifference towards the Muslims and the strained political relationship between the two communities since the end of the 19th century, was the real catalyst for why sections of the Muslim political leadership opposed the Tamil nationalist struggle for political autonomy and developed the full expression of political identity as an independent community (A. Ali 1997).

This political expression of Muslim identity where faith is an identity and community galvaniser has also meant a blurring of the boundaries with a Muslim identity based on a theological construction where faith is a theological marker (A. Imtiyaz 2012) in the sense of identifying the level of ones piety and practice of the religion. This blurring of the boundaries has also meant that being identified as Muslims, rather than Moors, has placed them in a religious category beyond the Sinhala–Tamil ethnic and linguistic binary leading to other underlying challenges facing the identity politics of the Muslim community in particular the relationship with the other religions in Sri Lanka. This is not about saying whether the label of Moor or Muslim is better or worse, but certainly this blurring of

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[375]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January2016

boundaries has meant that people from other communities are left confused as to where Muslims are and also sceptical about their 'true' belonging to the country. For example, the celebrated Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist of that time, Anagarika Dharmapala, was a leading campaigner against Muslim presence in the country. To him Muslims were "'aliens' and 'foreigners' and deserved to be expatriated to Arabia" (A. Ali 1997, 260), as it was felt that there was a threat to the existence of Buddhism in the country and that Muslims were never part of the country and 'belonged' elsewhere. Thus, the Muslim identity became and still remains a challenge as two thirds of all Muslims live and work in Sinhala-majority parts of the island, where Muslim business people and professionals are aware of the potential for Sinhala animosity (D. B. McGilvray 2008). One can not underestimate this antipathy towards the Muslim community on the part of the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community, as incidents in 1915 and others throughout the twentieth century have not only displayed the outright hostility, but also have been manifested in the formation of a political party formed by Buddhist clergy called the Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU, or National Heritage Party) that represent the most xenophobic wing of the Sri Lankan Buddhist monkhood (ICG 2007).

O'Sullivan (1999) states that in the context of ethnic competition, the composite Muslim identity developed into a political force with demands for 'Muslim Rights and Muslim development'. Thus the situation would become even more complicated with the founding in 1981 of a direct Muslim political party, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), in direct response to Muslims in the North and East feeling vulnerable to and seeking protection from Tamil Tiger violence and extortion (D. B. McGilvray 2011), an issue which it had been felt was largely ignored by Southern Muslim politicians who were practising the politics of accommodation with the main Sinhalese political parties. The emergence of the SLMC centred in the Eastern province provided an anomaly in Muslim political representation, by challenging the strategies of the Colombo-based Muslim political elite through explicitly promoting the interests of the Muslim community as a whole, attempting to cohabit with the Sinhalese polity (A. Imtiyaz 2012), developing the concept of a separate 'other' and eventually posing a "Muslim nationalist threat to the Sinhalese and the Tamils" (ICG 2007). The SLMC also prided themselves on invoking a religious identity on top of the evolution of an ethnic identity (Johansson 2007), which meant that this shifted the centre of Muslim leadership to the east (Ameerdeen 2006). As several interviewees said

> "*The underlying premise for the formation of the SLMC was the fear that many in the east felt about their security especially in the wake of the rise of the LTTE. In addition, with the signing of the Indo-Lanka accord, it was felt that the safety and security of the Muslims had been compromised with very little push back from the Muslim political elite at that time. Since it was felt that the elite were largely from the south, they would not have*

much interest or knowledge about the east. Hence it was felt that the east needed their own representation"[376]

"The SLMC represented a game changer within Muslim political circles because it challenged the status quo of the elite. It emphasized the need for a separate representation outside of the mainstream political parties, largely because it was felt that the security of the Eastern Muslims was being compromised and not being addressed. Thus the message was clear to the Muslim political elite of the day that they no longer spoke for the eastern Muslims"[377]

"With the frustration of the Eastern Muslims being felt as a result of the 'inaction' of the political elite from the south, the SLMC not only capitalized on this but also on the Islamic awakening that was sweeping the country in the late seventies and early eighties resulting in a rediscovery of Islamic piety. What this meant is that the SLMC noticed a gap whereby they saw the ability to capitalize on Islamic awakening, become more 'religious' than other politicians and push forward their agenda for the eastern Muslims. This is why a lot of their initial formations was colored with religious language which appealed to a wider community of Muslims than the eastern Muslims"[378]

Though initially, the key policy issues for the SLMC were to do with security and peace in the north and east of the country, especially in guaranteeing the livelihood and security concerns of Muslim farmers and fishermen in the north-eastern war zone (ICG 2007), it also attempted to address the needs of Muslims living in close proximity to their Sinhalese majority neighbours in the dense urban areas of the island's south-west. Thus the difference from other communities was that the SLMC effectively encouraged Muslim nationalism through religion, while other ethnic communities did it by language (O'Sullian 1999) thereby emphasising the difference of 'others'. As an interviewee said

"There is a paradox in the thinking of the SLMC. The original premise was that the southern Muslim political elite couldn't understand the problems being faced by the eastern Muslims, which indicates that the SLMC indirectly felt that a homogeneous representation of the Muslims beyond a religious aspect was not possible. Yet the SLMC forgot this as they sought to move beyond the east to the rest of the country. The issue is that the Muslims of Sri Lanka are not necessarily homogeneous as they have different priorities and it is a fallacy to think that only faith linkages can be enough of a uniting factor. This was a move that ultimately backfired especially in the eyes of the majority community"[379]

By articulating a vivid religious identity fused with geo-political interests, it was not long before the Muslim urban elites of the south west (who had previously controlled the political representation of the Muslim community) were expressing

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[376] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015
[377] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[378] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016
[379] *Ibid.*

concern about the potential of antagonising relationships with the Sinhala majority community, especially when the SLMC started to put forward in 1990, a proposal for a Muslim Self-Governing Region (MSGR) as a means of guaranteeing the safety and rights of Muslims in the north east (McGilvray and Raheem 2007)[380].   It was this proposal for a separate Muslim 'homeland' in particular that prompted the southern Muslims to oppose the SLMC for fear that there would be a Sinhala backlash (A. Ali 2004). As an interviewee said

> *"The concept of the MSGR was ill thought and ill timed. Though it spoke to the fears of the Muslim community following the Indo – Lanka accord, to the Sinhalese it raised concerns that like the Tamils, the Muslims (another minority) would be asking for 'independence' and a homeland. Thus the suspicion was roused about the intent of the Muslim community. To the Southern Muslims, this was out of the question yet people could not distinguish between the eastern and southern Muslims as both sides had used the transnational link of the Muslim community to their advantage, and hence the Sinhalese would view the southern Muslims with suspicion. It is this backlash that the southern Muslims still blame the SLMC for even today"[381]*

By developing this counter narrative of a separate and distinct Muslim nationalist identity, it is also thought that this put the Muslim community on a collision course with the LTTE, which could explain their changing attitudes towards the end of the eighties (A. Ali 1997), especially in the increasing attacks in the east as well as the expulsion of Muslims from the north. Though very little information has emerged on the thinking behind the LTTE's anti-Muslim pogroms and expulsions in 1990, it was obvious that these incidents did not happen in a political vacuum.

Although many scholars (McGilvray 2011, Ali 1997, Imtiyaz 2009, ICG 2007 and so on) believe that the LTTE's anti-Muslim violence in 1990 was a natural consequence of the exclusivist politics of Tamil militancy and an expression of deep seated Tamil ethnic chauvinism unleashing collective punishment for Muslim collusion with the state, it is clear that the emergence of the SLMC seriously undermined the LTTE campaign for exclusive political control in the region. "There seems to have been a concern on the part of LTTE leaders that Muslims would act as a fifth column against the insurgency in the north and east" (ICG 2007, 9).

It does appear that the increasing militant threat as the LTTE strengthened their hand amidst a weakening influence from Muslim politicians in the mainstream political parties, meant that the SLMC emerged as a party providing a "political voice and leadership" (Ameerdeen 2006, 109) to Sri Lanka's Muslim community.

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[380]   The MSGR not only gave security but also political legitimacy and meant a demarcation of a separate Muslim homeland or sub-provincial unit, modelled on the idea of an autonomous power sharing unit for the Tamils which had been the subject of many debates by the Government in the eighties and nineties in an attempt to deal with the LTTE issue (McGilvray and Raheem 2007)
[381]   Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

Understanding the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress

At this stage, one needs to explore the position of the SLMC when it comes to the concept of nationalism and Muslim issues in the country. The constitution of the SLMC includes references to the fact that the "Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet shall be the supreme guidelines of the Party" (Johansson 2007, 36), but also talks about upholding and honouring the principles of democracy, the fundamental human rights of the people of Sri Lanka and recognising and respecting the distinct linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious identities of the communities of Sri Lanka (Ibid.). This to some extent really underlines the paradox that the SLMC faced but also that faced by the Muslim community on the whole. It also highlighted the confusion faced by members of the other community when dealing with the Muslim community. As an interviewee said

> "The SLMC largely employed the Islamic religious and ethnic symbols for the electoral purposes and used mosques as its base. They participated for the first time in the December 1988 Provincial Council elections. This combination of religion and ethno politics created an emotional appeal for Muslims of the region but also created issues for other communities since they did not understand the intertwining nature of religion and ethnicity."[382]

However, these perceptions of the other communities vis-à-vis the Muslim community which in particular came out during the post 2009 incidents with the BBS has to be placed within a caveat. This is because to some extent the SLMC mirrored how the Sinhalese community mixed religion and ethnicity. For example, since 1956 the Buddhist monks had played a large role in influencing the Sinhalese politicians and national politics. However, it seems unthinkable for the minorities to do something similar. As an interviewee said

> "What the SLMC did was to articulate in a clear manner the relationship between religion and politics which was very similar to how the Buddhist monks engaged with the Sinhalese politicians in an indirect manner. However, the mere fact that this was done caused outrage to the Sinhalese as this was seen as a problem vis-à-vis the Muslim community and by the extremists as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation and a betrayal of the Muslims of the country. This is where the challenge arises"[383]

However, it is clear the SLMC as an Islamic political party was not initially seeking to create a new Muslim state within Sri Lanka or with the wider Muslim Ummah in focus. Although the party manifesto pledged a platform based on 'Islamic principles', it was more to do with conveying honesty and incorruptibility than anything more detailed like an Islamic state (D. B. McGilvray 2011).Thus the SLMC is unique in the sense that though they wore the badge of Islam on their sleeves and claimed to be influenced by the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, they were in fact another ethnic nationalist party fighting for the rights of

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[382] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyas Razak, August 2015
[383] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

their constituents within the confines of the State. Its stand was mainly to create their politics from a nationalist point of view within the framework of the nation-state of Sri Lanka, and within the context of the ethnic confabulation of the conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. As an interviewee said

> *"The SLMC connection with Islamic theology was not to push forward an 'Islamist' or theological political thought. In a way it was to articulate and convince the constituents of the integrity and credibility as it sought to fight for the basic political rights of the eastern Muslims which included safety and security. The idea was to fight for these rights within the national system without trying to call for something 'different' but using a language that was in some sense acceptable to the Muslim voters"[384]*

This is in fact a very unusual scenario in terms of a Muslim political party, formed very much in the same guise as other well known Islamist parties, supported by religious foundations yet calling for nationalism and accommodation within a non Muslim state. This goes against the thinking of many who feel that Islamist or Muslim political parties are a threat because of the fact that their ultimate motive is to create the Islamic state or reunite the Ummah under a caliph[385] whilst upholding Islamic religious issues. As an interviewee said

> *"When one thinks of a Muslim political party, the immediate thought process is to associate those with the party of Erbekan in Turkey or even the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt which was seen as Islamists with an ulterior motive in terms of their politics and religions, all set to establish an Islamic state or caliphate. This is what the prevailing discourse is about. However, to this extent, the SLMC bucked this trend and whilst maintaining a charter of Islam, they were really pushing ahead with a national agenda. To this extent they can be compared to the Christian Democrats in Germany"[386]*

In the case of the SLMC, in terms of religious issues, their position would typically seek to preserve the status quo without demanding the radical changes that would appeal to ultra-conservative or ultra-progressive Muslims (D. B. McGilvray 2011). Having said this, there are however some anomalies concerning the SLMC and their makeup.

Whilst they cultivated ties with local mosques to increase voter mobilisation, during election campaigns Muslim ritual invocations and prayers were intensified, they also involved themselves with aspects of Sri Lanka's Muslim personal law (Zackariya and Shangmugaratnam 1997). Whilst respecting the distinctiveness of the diversity of Sri Lanka's communities within a united Sri Lanka, they also promoted the preservation of Shari'a law and the adoption by members and general Muslims of the entire code of Shari'a law in their private and community

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[384] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015
[385] The concepts of Islamists are that they view democracy as a tool to gain power to build an Islamic state because their 'visions' of rule are through Islamic law or even a restored caliphate. (Nasr, 2005)
[386] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

life (Johansson 2007). Another anomaly is that though the SLMC called for national unity, keeping the nation intact and developing a national identity (Ameerdeen 2006) and not about a separate state, their calls almost simultaneously for an autonomous administrative state for the Muslims in the east was a stark contrast. This confusion also extended to its discourse on issues to do with jurisprudence and laws where they talk about adopting the laws of the country but also preserving the entire law of Shari'a (Ibid).

It is this confusing shift between religious and political rhetoric that is not only problematic for Muslim identity within Sri Lanka but has also led to confusion from the other communities. However by stressing on Islamic principles and focussing on the minority politics of the Muslim community especially the security of the community in the east, the SLMC had a lot of success in the first 20 years of its existence (Ameerdeen 2006). By the start of the 21st century, with the death of its charismatic founding leader, the SLMC found itself splintered with internal disputes on its national agenda and the organisation would fail to exert its level of influence that it had previously. As an interviewee said

> *"Essentially, the death of Mr Ashraff undermined the unity of the SLMC. Several factions emerged within the party ranks. Many believed that Muslim political representations lost the common program to win the security and rights and they failed to articulate coercive policies to win Muslim interests. Once again the Eastern Muslims were left frustrated by a political leadership who was not largely delivering"[387].*

For example, following the ceasefire agreement of 2002 (when the SLMC tried to secure an official Muslim seat for the party at the ensuing peace talks) and the Indian Ocean tsunami that struck in 2004 (when the SLMC sought to intervene on behalf of the devastated Muslim communities along the eastern and southern coasts), in both instances, the Sinhalese and Tamil ethno-nationalists largely ignored their demands (McGilvray and Raheem 2007).

To some extent there are some who felt that the founding leader of the SLMC before his death was aware of the potential shortcomings of the SLMC and was striving for an alternative. As an interviewee said

> *"Before his death, the SLMC leader had put together an idea for something called a National Unity Alliance (NUA) as a way of an evolution of the SLMC. He had begun to realise that the SLMC was limiting to achieving the aspirations of the Muslim community and he started to articulate a political vision that encompassed other communities and that really challenged the two party political system of Sri Lanka"[388]*

[387] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyas Razak, August 2015
[388] Face to face interview with Mrs Ferial Ashraff, August 2015

Challenges for Muslim Political Leadership – a skewed model for Muslim Democracy

So where does this leave the challenges for Muslim political leadership and representation? How does one explain the behaviour of Sri Lankan Muslim politics?

Whilst it might be easy to dismiss the behaviour of the politicians especially the SLMC as purely self interest, it is clear that there is more to the conversation. In the wake of the Muslim politicians to extract benefits or commercial opportunities (not only for the community but also personally in the form of ministerial appointments), it is safe to say that the moves of the Muslim politicians including the SLMC were just pure political moves by Muslims as a path of least resistance (Ali 1997, Ali 2004, McGilvray 2011) in the context of the Sinhala-Tamil schism and the prospect of 'otherness' in the country.

However, it became apparent from the early eighties onwards that this system of accommodative politics was proving to be a detriment especially for the east and north Muslim communities. The circumstances of community safety and security prompted a rethink of the Muslim engagement vis-à-vis politics especially with the emergence of the SLMC promoting the interests of the Muslim community as a whole but also focussing on the security and well being of the Muslim community in the north and east. This rethink has not only meant a further division in political aims and motives but has meant that a single 'Muslim agenda' that can unify the entire Muslim electorate in the island has proved impossible for the SLMC (or any other breakaway Muslim political parties or politicians) to forge. As an interviewee said

> "There was great anxiety amongst Southern Muslim politicians that the Eastern Muslim parties were usurping their role as the leaders of the greater Muslim community. There was also uneasiness as to what repercussions Eastern Muslim ethnic politics would have on the Southern Muslims who live amongst the Sinhalese. While the problems of the Southern Muslims are clearly not as immediate as those of the East or the North the insecurity with which many Southern Muslims live in Sinhala majority areas, the incipient violence that flares up at various moments – the incidents of Aluthgama for example is the most recent—must also be kept in mind when discussing the consequences of Muslim political decisions in the east"[389]

The SLMC experience could be interpreted as one of the early models of 'Muslim Democracy' (Nasr 2012), which is the phenomenon of political traditions that integrate Muslim religious values – drawn from Islamic teachings on ethics, morality, family, rights, social relations and so on – into political platforms designed to win regular democratic elections. This concept of Muslim Democrats has particular relevance to the SLMC whereby Muslim Democrats view political

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[389] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

life with a pragmatic eye with the aim of crafting viable electoral platforms and stable governing coalitions to serve individual and collective interests within a democratic arena whose bounds they respect, win or lose (Ibid). In this sense "Muslim Democrats do not seek to enshrine Islam in politics, although they do wish to harness its potential to help them win votes" (Nasr 2005, 14)   The integration of the values should not also be thought of in absence of the prevailing context of that time which was that it happened at the same time as a steady increase of religious consciousness within the Sri Lankan Muslim society. As an interviewee said

> *"We can not look at the rise of the SLMC without also looking at the context of that time. From the late seventies after the Iranian revolution as well as the rise of the Gulf petrodollars, we see that there was a reawakening of Islamic religious consciousness. The quest for more piety and adherence to the faith meant that the community was more sensitive to this. With the need for security and safety of the community, the SLMC were able to capitalise on drawing the need for safety and security with spiritual wellbeing. Suffice to say if it wasn't for the rise in Islamic consciousness, then the rise of the SLMC perhaps would not have been so strong. So we have to look at both circumstances"[390]*

In addition, the SLMC succeeded also in gathering support from the Muslim private sector especially the middle class who felt isolated from the traditional political elites of the south. In this sense, it again speaks to the emergence of Muslim Democrats with the bourgeoisie, as it combines the religious values of the middle and lower middle classes with policies that serve their economic interests (Nasr 2005).

Certainly the early pronouncements and agenda of the SLMC points to this model, however this is where the comparison with the Muslim Democrats that Nasr (2005,2012) talks about then ends. The concept of 'Muslim Democracy' is sounder for Muslim-majority countries where the concepts of Islam and democracy need to interact and there is no discrepancy about the identity (either ethnic or faith) of the constituent members.

It therefore doesn't fully give justice to the whole predicament facing the Muslim community in Sri Lankan politics. I feel that to understand this, one has to go deeper into the roots. By identifying themselves as Muslims, the Muslim political elites (from the south and subsequently from SLMC) played on blurring the distinctions between faith as a theological marker (ie a religious motivator) and faith as an identity marker (ie communal galvaniser). By deliberately blurring these lines, they were able to utilise it to serve their own interests to the detriment of their community. For example, it is the concept of the homogeneity of the Muslim community, through the concept of the Ummah or the religious motivator, that Muslim political elites played on when they pushed for Muslim schools or rights for the community, but they failed (especially those from the south) in

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[390]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

realising the heterogeneous nature of the community, or the communal galvaniser, with regards the threats to security and livelihood facing the Muslims in the north and east. As several interviewees said

> *"Based on the experiences of the SLMC, certain civil society organizations in the East articulated a position that was becoming clear for some time now; they claimed that the Muslims of the North, the East and the South were three distinct groupings with distinct problems and interests with the conflict affecting Muslims differently in the different regions. Their problems, therefore, were regionally specific and required specific redress. For instance, the interests of the concentrated Muslim populations living in the Eastern Province are different from those displaced from the North contemplating return and those living in Sinhala majority areas in the South. Recognizing this specificity of interests is a perspective from which the most useful kinds of conversations as to what Muslims' options are could be undertaken for the future."[391]*

> *"Muslim opinions in the East held that the disunity and factionalism among the Muslim politicians undermined the Muslim interests both at the peace talks and beyond. Such frustrations could de-legitimize political alternatives and weaken the trust of the Eastern Muslims in the Muslim political establishment if the Muslim political representation continuously dissatisfies the Muslim masses. Also, it may lead frustrated Muslims to seek violent means as their only choice in conditions that are beyond their control when their moderate political representation was weakened. Such a scenario had ensued in relation to the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka against the State and its institutions"[392]*

As such there has been a lack of clear articulation and policy from the Muslim political leadership instead choosing to move between both notions as and when circumstances provided. This I feel is a mistake because had they understood their religious motivation properly and looked within Islamic teachings to provide solutions, they would have been able to provide alternatives for communal galvanisation as well as helping to bridge the schism within Sri Lankan society. Fed with the theological motivation for justice and peace, they could have used their heterogeneous diversity to ensure that a bridge between the communities could have been built. Instead of focussing on this strength of their theological construct to articulate issues of deep meaning, they instead chose to focus on theological issues of a superficial nature such as issues of worship or law whilst choosing to develop a separate political identity. As an interviewee said

> *"There should also be an appreciation of a past where coexistence amongst ethnic groups was the norm—especially in the case of Muslims and Tamils in the east. However, it is essential that such a step is matched by an understanding of the interests of the larger Muslim community, their*

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[391] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016
[392] Skype interview with Dr Imthiyaz Razak, August 2015.

mixed settlement patterns and the consequences to all Muslims from a settlement that involves the east" [393]

In the wake of rising religious consciousness by the Muslim community and by neglecting the necessary theological discussions necessary for developing identities, and contextualising faith and failing to provide leadership in articulating this, their sole aim of developing a separate identity has fallen prey to the global malaise afflicting Muslims, which is the push for a 'pure' Islamic identity based on a theological construct but taking the identity of a global community / race, neglecting local contexts and cultures. This is a new phenomenon within Islamic teachings and history because there is no such thing as a pure community identity. There are different manifestations of Islam and Muslim communities united with a pure theological marker, of which the latter is mistaken to be the identity. It is this that is now causing global concerns and issues of the rise of 'conservative' Islam.

By pushing for a new political identity, what has happened is that the doors have been opened for discussions on a religious identity that is not only foreign to Sri Lanka but fails to take into account local contexts and cultures, making any future discussion of post conflict reconciliation even more challenging, as people feel that the Muslim community is more isolated (linguistically, culturally and socially) than before.

Thus the question remains can a Muslim Democratic party exist in the situation of a minority where the faith identity also becomes an ethnic identity? The experience from Sri Lanka is that such a scenario is very difficult or at least difficult to maintain and sustain as circumstances evolve which should cause changes in how identities are represented.

Critical Juncture 4: Consolidating Religious Identity

For the Muslims of Sri Lanka, language is not the defining and uniting factor. "Sri Lankan Muslims are becoming defined, interpellated exclusively in religious, not ethnic terms" (Q. Ismail 2013). In particular, it is the religious ties or the concept of the Ummah (community) that means Muslim representatives refuse to consider themselves as a divided community. Thus despite the heterogeneous nature of their geographical locations, religion becomes a homogenizing factor. As has been discussed above, the rise of the SLMC could not have been possible if religious consciousness was also not a factor in Sri Lanka and had contributed to this thinking of the SLMC in terms of trying to articulate a national voice for the Muslims. As an interviewee said

"The Muslim social formation was empowered by the Iranian revolution in the late seventies as well as the Middle East petro dollars which aided a

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[393] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

gradual rise in Islamic religious consciousness. Empowered by this, religious groups started to put another dimension into the Muslim consciousness in Sri Lanka. However given the political and ethnic challenges that the early eighties posed for ethnic representations, there was a perfect storm in terms of the religious identity finding a channel for expression for the Muslim community"[394]

One should not underestimate the concept of Ummah as understood within Islam. It is the very essence of the Muslim personality that the declaration of their faith, or their shahadah, which supported by the other pillars of worship[395] reinforces the community feeling and forms the basis of a common global identity (Ramadan 1999). Thus the Ummah becomes the community of faith, feeling, brotherhood and destiny[396] that is subject to the principles of Justice. "To be Muslim anywhere in the world means to experience and develop this feeling of belonging to the Ummah as if one were an organ of a great body" (Ibid., 158).

It is this homogenizing tendency tempered with the global context of the Ummah that explains the growing religious consciousness and its rise to prominence in Sri Lanka especially as a consequence of global trends from the 1970s following the revolution in Iran (M. A. Nuhman 2002). However it should not be underestimated that the Sri Lankan Muslim elite who had sought a political / ethnic differentiation were also motivated by a religious identity in Islam and a link to the 'glorious' Islamic historical past (M. A. Nuhman 2007). In fact, as stated before, along with the arrival of Arabi Pasha in Sri Lanka and religious revivalism in the late 19th century due to Turkish, Egyptian and Indian Islamic revivalist and political movements, the Muslim elites would have also been influenced by this (Ibid.) It was also fortuitous because this revival was seen in response to the 'other' which in this case was a response to a revival of a Buddhist identity (and Hindu nationalism) at the same time against Christian domination (and the colonial yoke). As an interviewee said

> *"It is hard to disassociate the competing externalities during the late 19th century and early 20th century which meant that as a process of 'othering', the concept of identity (often introduced and encouraged by the colonial powers) which was formed as an opposition to colonial rule, layered off each other. Religion became intertwined with ethnicity and also took oxygen from other competing global factors which were at play. Hence in the case of the Muslim community, as they strove to identify themselves separate to the Sinhalese and Tamils, there was a parallel process of a*

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[394] Skype interview with Prof Ameer Ali, March 2016

[395] The 5 pillars of Islam are: 1) The declaration of faith: 2) the establishment of prayer; 3) the payment of charity; 4) fasting; 5) pilgrimage to Mecca.

[396] The caveat is that this is not the only parameter of judgment of belonging. The belonging to the *Ummah* is also about defending and spreading justice, solidarity and values pertaining to honesty, generosity, brotherhood and love. The feeling of belonging does not signify that a Muslim is allowed to accept or support an injustice just because its originator is a brother in faith (Ramadan 1999).

revival in Islamic religious thinking (which was also taking place globally) which helped with the identity formation"[397]

Hence the late 19th century saw a first wave of 'Islamisation' led by the educated Muslim elite of the time, anxious to counter Christian domination but also to promote and encourage the social mobility and ethnic consolidation of the Muslims. Through the establishment of Jamiyatul islamiya in 1886, Islamic awareness was promoted among Muslims in order to consolidate the Muslim identity and to work towards the social and political progress of the Muslims (M. A. Nuhman 2007). Thus Islamisation in the late 19th century was essentially an effort to unite the Muslims spiritually and culturally, based on Islamic principles. However, this rise of the religious identity has proved to be problematic in relation to the political identity especially in a perceived 'Islamisation' of the country. The Muslim social formation that is deployed to discuss construct as opposed to an ontological entity is problematic because unity is a problem (Q. Ismail 1997) and there is a need "to examine the construction of that unity, of the stakes and antagonisms involved and of the many exclusions required to constitute and maintain it; to show that social formations are not stable entities but sites of struggle over which (interest) groups would achieve hegemony over the formation and thus determine the nature of its (dominant) identity" (Ibid, 63). In this sense, what Ismail (1997) describes is what happened with the Muslim community where the interest groups for religious identity got agency and were able to establish their dominance. As an interviewee said

> *"With the advent of the 'piety' movement, religion has come to override all other forms of collective identity for Muslims, even those of language and region. Any analysis of the success of Muslim piety groups in the country cannot be conducted without taking this peculiarity into account."[398]*

As a consequence, it was left open to interpretation by the modern educated elite and the traditional Ulema (religious clergy) which would lead to controversy and conflicts (Ibid.) For example, this development of a pure identity has been manifested in a move away from the traditional clothing to one that is more Arab in nature[399] (D. B. McGilvray 2011). As an interviewee said

> *"The expression of the Muslim identity evolved into expressions of religiousness and piety. However, what was quite apparent was the fact that expressions of piety soon became acquainted with superficial representations of expression namely in the form of clothing. So to be 'Muslim' was to be 'seen' to be Muslim which in many cases meant wearing clothes inherited from Saudi Arabia. Thus the question was 'are we becoming more 'Islamic' or more 'Arab'?'. Nevertheless this confusion*

[397] Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016
[398] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016
[399] The perceived Islamisation of Sri Lanka comes from the visible appearance of a social religiosity on the ground in Sri Lanka in terms of the wearing of the hijab (by the women), the greater wearing of the Arab style thobe amongst the males, and a shift away from 'ancestral' rituals and practices by the community (D. B. McGilvray 2011). Many of these rituals are Sufi in origin but have become embedded in more rituals than fundamental points of worship within Islam.

of expression has led to an existential crisis of representation for the Muslims"[400]

Organizations like Jamaati Islami[401] and Tabligh Jamaat[402], which have its historical basis from the Indian Sub Continent as a result of Colonial interventions (Hirst 2011), in particular have been 'blamed' for the 'Islamisation' of Sri Lanka during the last few decades which has been perceived largely as negative by analysts who feel that this has led to a psychological conflict within the community (D. B. McGilvray 2011) in terms of a tension between the religious and cultural influences of the global Islamic movements and religious ideologies of the local context. However, to blame these two organisations solely for the large scale Islamisation of the country is not only naive but doesn't take into account other factors and contexts. Whilst it is true that both organisations are credited with playing positive roles in uniting Muslims under an Islamic umbrella to give political weight to a largely constructed religious identity (A. Imtiyaz 2012), it must also be noted that an increased social religiosity and display of religious clothing is also as a result of the large numbers of Sri Lankan Muslims – both men and women – who were employed on labour contracts in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Gulf Emirates, and who when they returned back to the country brought the traditions and cultures inherited from the Middle East (D. B. McGilvray 2011). In addition, one should not also discount this 'existential' crisis that the Muslim community faced with regards the 'othering' caused by the ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and the need that the community felt to chart its own course separate to these two. Hence the evolution of the religious identity is one of a 'perfect storm' when all elements seemed to coalesce together. As an interviewee said

> *"The piety is perceived and propagated among Muslims in Sri Lanka must be understood as located within the context of ethnic conflict and the polarization between ethnic groups that occurred in its wake"[403]*

However, it is in the expansion of the global electronic media where the greatest influence and casual effect has arisen which has led not only to a heightened awareness of 'Muslim issues' around the world, and thus a greater sense of membership in the global community of all Muslims (the Ummah) but also a greater strive to develop a Muslim identity. This global pan-Islamic reformist quest for identity is part of a much more complex deeply rooted malaise (Ramadan 2012). The quest for this identity has entailed a preoccupation with religion in

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400 Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

401 Jammat I Islami is an Islamic organization based out of Pakistan which explores Islamic reformation with the hope of acquiring political leadership (Qazi 2017), however it is important to note that in Sri Lanka, the Jammat Islamic which was inspired by the organisation from Pakistan, has no political ambitions and is more interested in social welfare and the spiritual upliftment of the community

402 The Tablighi Jamaat was formed in India in the mid 19th century. The aim of the group is to create an atmosphere of spirituality, solidarity and purpose which involves reviving the faith of weaker Muslims (Taylor 2009)

403 Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

terms of the framework, the structure of ritual, the rights and obligations of believers, prohibitions, the moral protection of the faithful and so on, much in opposition to the danger of cultural colonialism and alienation exacerbated by globalisation[404]. Thus contemporary Islamic discourse "has, however too often lost its substance, which is that of meaning, of understanding ultimate goals and the state of the heart." (Ibid., 141).

Hence the new pan Islamic reformist quest for identity has lacked spirituality and the understanding of value systems, traditions, habits and culture. What this has ultimately meant is the development of an identity that is at odds with a Sri Lankan identity and departure from what was seen as a 'traditional Sri Lankan Muslim identity'. "Discrediting traditional ritual practice is a common feature of new religious movements" (Haniffa 2008, 366), which has also meant the concept of framing one's own identity vis-a-vis the 'other'. Whilst the religious revival amongst Muslims has given them a greater appreciation of their own identity, it has also transformed the relations with the ethnic others (Ibid) and has been centred around the perception and propagation of piety in terms of their minority consciousness and the "cultivated distancing of the religious other and promoting a sensibility of community exclusiveness among Muslims" (Ibid, 366). As a key informant of a focus group said

> *"What we have seen over the last 30-40 years is a change both from a visible as well as a community engagement perspective. We always saw the Muslim community as close with their religious principles and practice, but what we saw over these decades a change in the attire of the community to become 'more religious' which in turn affected their practice and their engagement with the Non-Muslims. For us looking at it from outside, we perceive with some sadness that this increased religious practice has a change in the behaviour of the community. We don't recognise what and who we saw as the Muslim community. However to some others, they view with suspicion these changes as they seem it as an Arabisation of the community and ultimately the country"[405]*

One of the practical products of this new identity mark, globally has been the development of the term , kafir or infidel—as it functions today to refer to religious others within the everyday language of the newly pious (Ibid)[406]. What this means

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[404] One has to understand the context from the Middle East in which these reformist movements are being developed as resistance to globalisation and colonialism "as means of self-assertion, in direct proportion to the danger of cultural colonialism and alienation perceived and experienced in Arab societies" (Ramadan 2012, 141). Thus the mere appropriation of pan Islamic reformist ideology, traditions and practices without taking into account the context of where they have originated from and also where they are being appropriated to, such as the cultural heritage of the pluralistic society of Sri Lanka for example, means that cultural fulfilment will not be achieved and there are divisive, exclusivist and sectarian claims to culture, religion and identity.

[405] Key informant focus group discussions with Buddhist Monks, June 2016

[406] Some reformist groups have also gone to the extent of stating terminology identified with Islam is part of a strategy to place Islam at the centre of Muslim everyday lives. "It is an attempt thereby to foreground their Muslimness as the most fundamental defining characteristic amongst a populace that has a variety of different class linguistic, sectarian and regional allegiances" (Haniffa 2008, 366)

is that it maintains the ethnic exclusivity (through the religious otherness) and bolsters uniformity in personal and communal piety which ultimately affects the consideration of the Muslim community as part of a pluralistic society that includes people or other faiths (and ethnicity). Hence engagement with the other is minimal and often limited to supplying instrumentally the needs of everyday life, and does not extend to the qualitative social exchanges of an earlier era. As an interviewee said

> *"Religious revivalism amongst Muslims gave them a greater appreciation of their own identity, but also transformed their relations with ethnic others in a way that mirrored the polarization that took place amongst the different religious/ethnic groups during the conflict. To some extent the polarisation was extenuated by the practices of religion, which in a way called for the cultivated distancing of the religious other. In the end, it promoted a sensibility of community exclusiveness amongst Muslims."[407]*

This itself is an irony because despite the quest for political identity, there was a lot more interaction between Muslims (especially Middle class Muslims) and the wider society[408]. This is exactly what the Buddhist monk in my focus group said when he talked about seeing and feeling a greater sense of isolation from the Muslim community. What it does make difficult though with this dehumanizing reduction of the 'other' that occurs in the midst of Islamic reform groups, is that "it is almost impossible for adherents to consider Muslims' problems as issues which are commonly shared, with themselves understood as part of a common 'Sri Lankan community'" (Haniffa 2008, 367). As an interviewee said

> *"While the community is then being transformed in many positive ways, the piety movement is also affecting Muslims' place in the Sri Lankan polity, by the cultivation of ethnic exclusivity. This phenomenon—entirely predictable in the context of intense ethnic polarization—may have troubling consequences in the future. A most unfortunate result of piety groups' work to make Muslims informed and appreciative of their religion, is the manner in which religious community is being emphasized to the detriment of any other sorts of social participation"[409]*

In the wake of such ritualism and politicisation as well as isolation, the thirst for meaning is often solved through mysticism. What this new identity has meant is also a resurgence of the traditional popular Muslim Sufi mysticism in many different forms from the older traditional and ritualistic groups to newer controversial sheikhs (D. B. McGilvray 2011). One explanation for this trend is that the polarising harshness of the new reformist teachings have offered ordinary people few answers to their spiritual pursuit of meaning, faith, the heart and

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[407] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016
[408] For example, an earlier generation of middle class Muslims would spend time as members of multiethnic Rotary or Lions clubs, whilst today these activities are replaced by Islamic reform organizations (Ibid. 2008). Whilst there are still Muslims who participate in rotary and lion clubs, the latter are considered by the former to be less pious.
[409] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

peace. Thus the Sufi movements provide a kind of exile from world affairs, in contrast to the ritualistic traditionalism and the pan Islamic reformist traditions. However, this re-emergence of these mystical circles also seems to be either the educated elites / middle class urban sector in search for meaning or the poorer who feel a need for reassurance that verges on superstition (although the superstition reason is also attributed to the elites as well). Whilst a majority of these diverse groups are respectful of norms, a substantial number of these circles also yield to the temptation of the cult of the personality of the sheikh or guide or develop a culture of isolation, social and political passivity and loss of responsibility of taking action to solve social problems in the world (Ramadan 2012).   Hence these Sufi renaissance movement represents an expansion and diversification of religious expression but have also led to local religious conflicts that have arisen between heterodox Sufi groups and zealous orthodox Islamic reformers which are another cause for alarm for the community.   As an interviewee said

> *"The blurring of lines between political and religious affiliations has surfaced such that Islamic ideological differences such as with the practice of Sufism become internal cleavages and conflict between different Muslim groups within a certain area that can then take on a political form as well"*[410]

This split of the community within Sri Lanka between trying to maintain a link with the historic Sufi movements (often seen as deviant by newer movements) and the more well organised ideological movements of Islamic revitalisation is not just based on ideological reasons but is also broken into class lines as well with the more affluent elites or the poor being affiliated with the Sufi and the middle and working class with the reformist movements. This also relates to a difference in education as many of the elites and the very poor may not have gone to school and would have inherited their status and the middle class going onto have higher education. Hence there is once again a mirroring of the differences that took place in determining the political identity of the Muslim community, with the elites on one side and the intelligentsia and activists on the other side.

The counter argument to this criticism of the Islamisation process is that it has enabled a rediscovery of what Islamic identity, the proper norms for ritualistic practice and a benchmark of piety. However, what is apparent is the majority of the middle and working class to whom the new ideologies have appealed, view this as a rebellion once again against the elites. It is this quest for a purer understanding of Islam, away from the elite definition that is driving this new religiosity and articulation of a new identity which on its own is fine except when it is being dominated by one ideology or line of thinking.

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[410]   Face to face interview with Mr. Izzeth Hussein, January 2016

In this, there is a cause for concern. The 'Islamisation' of communities has largely been influenced and driven by funds and donations from the Middle East mainly Saudi Arabia and the other petro-monarchies, which propagate a certain type of ideology mainly of the 'Salafi / Wahabi' form, thereby leading to a straight-jacket of thought and a scaffolding of authority. As a result of the amount of funding for mosques[411] and Muslim organisations over the last 30 years or so, there is now a greater influence of Saudi Islam on the thinking of people in Sri Lanka. What this ideology has done is to devalue classical Islamic tradition and to narrow religious and spiritual sensibilities (Allawi 2009). "The concern with the minutiae of religious life, the micro-regulation of daily activity, the smugness that accompanies dogmatic certainty, the joylessness of a fastidious religiosity, the lack of interest or curiosity in the past or in multivariate aspects of Islam, have all crept into the religious culture of Observant Muslims" (Ibid, 121). Thus the culture of Islam becomes drained of vitality by a barren utilitarianism and a perception of a purity which divorces the natural diverse state of Islam and isolates it from the cultural inputs of the countries that it takes root in. This is an important issue to take serious stock of as culture is intertwined with religion as complex questions of values, meaning, spirituality, traditions and the arts are answered that give form to history, memory, nations and identities (Ramadan 2012). "Cultures, along with the religions that shape and nurture them, are value systems, sets of traditions and habits clustered around one or several languages, producing meaning: for the self, for the here, for the community, for life" (Ibid, 140).

As a consequence, the ideology of thought that is emerging currently in Sri Lanka is in fact been linked to one of the more conservative forms of Islam that has tended to try and articulate a 'purist' Islam which doesn't take into account culture and context. This pure Islam which fits in with what is the ideology from the middle east has caused quite a lot of concern in Sri Lanka in its framing of the Muslim vis-a-vis the other and as a consequence has meant a lot of antagonism as well as isolation from the other.

In addition to this, much has also been made about the potential for radicalisation amongst the youth mainly from the eastern province. The social, political and/or economic grievances that could motivate communities to rebel violently against the dominant actors (T. Gurr 1993) did exist for the Muslims from the East (in a similar vein to the radicalisation of Tamil and Sinhala youth). However whilst discontent has existed, the radicalisation has not taken the violent path[412], and has in fact been confined to what has already been discussed in the development of an Islamic religious identity.

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[411]   Another sign of departure from traditional worship and a mark of 'Pan-Islamic' influence has been the wholesale demolition and reconstruction of historic older-style mosques in accordance with imported models of Islamic architecture. For example, the new, brightly painted 'gingerbread' mosques with multiple minarets and ornate Arabian-inspired rooflines are quite different from the simpler whitewashed mosques with shady verandas and dark teak-pillared prayer halls (D. B. McGilvray 2011, xx).

[412] There has been some work done on this, but all in all much of the literature points to a lack of a structured and organised radicalisation of Muslim youth. (see ICG 2007, Imthiyaz 2009,2012)

Having said this, it is also important to note that the search for the 'purist' Islamic identity has also in a sense been driven by the conflict and the political ramifications of the desire to differentiate oneself from the other. What this means is that an outward appearance of 'piety' which fits in with the norms of a 'purer' Islam suddenly also becomes an indicator of a political identity of being part of the Muslim community. For example Muslim girls' school uniforms are now designed with a hijab and in some cases to include a face covering (niqab) that can be folded down when girls are walking between home and school, while boys' Western-style school uniforms include a Muslim cap as a way not of only religiously identifying themselves as Muslim (from a spiritual sense) but also serving as a political statement of identity[413]. In particular, the hijab which is the most visual form of identity, has become a marker of cultural difference in the sense of displaying to the other one's Muslimness in a multi ethnic polity and less of a newly and consciously embraced personal piety (Haniffa 2008). "Therefore the selfhood embraced is Muslim, but not always radically religious" (Ibid, 357).

Whilst the reformist groups make Muslims informed and appreciative of their religion, it is the manner in which the religious community is being emphasized to the detriment of any other sorts of social participation that is a cause for some concern. As an interviewee said

> "The religious self-assertion has given the community self-confidence in ways that the idea of a Muslim political community—a distant possibility as a geographically dispersed second minority—failed to do or even sustain. However the danger is that the preoccupation with religion has left little room for the political understanding of Muslimness as part of a constellation of different ethnicities and religions within one polity."[414]

Thus a case for Muslims as a minority with its own cultural and social identity has not been made in parallel to the political identity. Hence the end result has been a political entity that is not really supported either through culture or heritage. Since ethnicity and religion are seemingly inseparable with regards the Sri Lankan Muslims, there has always been a challenge on the development of either category as Islam is the primary marker of the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims (M. A. Nuhman 2007). As an interviewee said

> "Muslims are still struggling to find ways of articulating Muslim grievances in a manner that can change current misconceptions regarding Muslims' place in the conflict. The lack of fit between the practices through which Muslim society is transformed and energized and the practices of society at large means that there is as yet no meeting point between the language

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[413] It is noteworthy that in Sri Lankan popular culture through the media or even at government events, any public display of the different identities shows either a bearded man in a cap or a women with a hijab to show both the ethnic and religious identities of Muslims.

[414] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016

of the piety movement and the demands of activism in the larger Sri Lankan context."[415]

These are the challenges that the Muslim community faced moving into the last critical juncture and continue to face in their prospects. If they are unable to appreciate or understand this, then there are serious consequences for moving forward.

Critical Juncture 5: Facing a Challenged Identity

As the previous chapter showed, post 2009, the Muslim community faced some immediate threats from the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist extremists. However, as we have seen, this is not some isolated incident but is built on a precedence.   As an interviewee said

> "*In Sri Lanka, Muslimness is not validated within the dominant national culture and will always be difficult to reconcile. As we have seen since the end of the conflict, the only challenge with the Tamils seem to be political as there are no issues with the cultural or religious practices. With the Muslims it is entirely different and one is led to believe that the cleavages are more deep and almost existential in nature"[416]*

The preceding discussions have demonstrated that in the past seventy years the Sri Lanka political parties of various shades have instrumentalised the Buddhist religious symbols for political gains; and that a distinct Sinhala-Buddhist political agenda has been fostered and nurtured over this period.

Though the Muslim political elites adopted a policy of accommodation whilst ensuring their community interests were maintained which were largely around the preservation of religious and cultural identity, it is clear from the post 2009 era that this was not enough. The bottom line is that the Sinhala-political elites and politicians have intentionally politicized Buddhism as a means to advance their political agenda such that the state has to make disproportionate concessions to Buddhism and Sinhala-Buddhists and the ethnic and religious minorities are left outside. What must be underscored is that the agenda is not entirely invented by the political. In short, the political Buddhism must have been present in the society; even if within a small minority of the population. The worldview of an influential segment of the Sinhala-Buddhist population, a 'nationalist' response to the westernization, fear and anxiety of a perceived outside connections of other ethnic/religious communities are some of these factors which have played significant roles in politicization of Buddhism.

Despite this, the Muslims did undertake a policy of accommodation, yet somehow this has also become a challenge to the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists insecure in their majority and insecure in the religiosity of their fellow countrymen.

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[415] *Ibid.*

[416] *Ibid*

Coupled with a growing international Islamophobia campaign, the Muslim identity and its expression became and still remains a challenge. This explains the attack on the elements that visibly describe the Muslim identity such as the halal certification, the issue of mosques and the dress code. All of these that show a visible religiosity of the Muslim community and therefore enables them to be visibly seen above the radar screen became a problem for the Sinhala nationalists. Thus the critical juncture becomes a challenged identity as the narrative of belonging to the nation was thrust on the Muslim. Muslims were challenged to show that they were part of the system and thus there became a lot of emphasis on explaining this. As a key informant said

> *"Suddenly, you see a lot more 'Muslims' celebrating national occasions such as the Independence day or paying respect to senior dead Buddhist monks and going out of their way to do it. Its not like we suddenly accepted these national so called cultural elements but mainly we have been forced into it to show we belong"[417]*

Thus it is a case of the 'roosters coming home to roost' as the Muslim mind which is often split between the local and the universal, i.e. the local community vs the Ummah has to get over this conundrum. How can they focus on the relatively local and whilst focussing on the civilizational?

The post 2009 era should have really been a chance to rethink ethnic based politics and explore a return to more inclusive politics given the fact that the circumstances had changed. It also should have represented an opportunity for a rethink in terms of how the Muslim community represented itself vis-à-vis the others. However, for the Muslim political elite, they had failed to recognise this shift. The political institutionalisation of the Muslim community not helped by the lack of a united political front thus failed to grasp the opportunity brought about by a shift in the wind of Sinhala national politics, instead choosing to push for the same old status quo of political representation, thereby not only weakening the Muslims' case for more political negotiation, but also the case for wider representation and identity. By failing to really take into account the changing nature of the community as a result of other globalising external factors such as religious reformation, the rise of Islamophobia, a securitized agenda and also the changing nature of the country especially post 2009, the Muslim community can not receive redress to their grievances by playing ethnic politics. This has been apparent with the rise of the BBS and the violence in 2014 and other periods, where Muslim politicians were not able to gather support or to influence the Government of the day to really stop the violence before extreme damage was done or able to gather support after these incidents for redress or to prevent future incidents from happening.

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[417] Key Informant Focus Group Discussion with Muslim civil society activists, November 2016

However, in the absence of any credible Muslim political leadership, the questions that was and are posed is what happens when this political influence is lost and who takes up the slack? How can Muslims get the representation for their identity? This question is important on the whole because of the new pressures facing the Muslim community particualrly after the end of the conflict. It was clear that the influence of the Muslim politicians had waned and where they had previously been able to have some influence this was no longer the case. In the gap that emerged in terms of leadership, Muslim civil society stepped in, who would then abrogate that role to religious leaders especially as this happened in parallel to a global Islamic reformation[418]. With faith becoming an identity that was much more fixed and almost a refuge from insecurity brought about by the conflict and the subsequent identity politics, faith leaders were really expected to step up to fill that gap of leadership and representation. Unfortunately, they were not equipped to handle both and succeeded in putting a lot of emphasis on religious representation and identity. The incidents post 2009, exposed the weaknesses in this type of leadership who were unable to answer the questions being posed on religious identity and expression vis-à-vis political representation.

In addition, the incidents also displayed how entrenched the civil society and political leadership were in the past and how dependent they were on the religious leaders. Despite severe criticism of the weakness of the religious leaders, the civil society and political leadership were unable to not only provide constructive criticism (for fear of criticising religion) but also were not able to fully understand the depth and strength of the anti Muslim feeling. They instead opted to think about it in terms of a binary perspective of party political manipulation without understanding that the polity of the day were exploiting already deeply held insecurities about the Muslim community. The feeling held by many within the civil society leadership was to try and keep the accommodation politics going and that by changing the government (largely held responsible for the 2014 violence) with another political party and then working with the new Government, such violence and feelings could be avoided. Their false premise was that one Sinhala political party was better than the other and by bringing one into power over the rest, the problems of the Muslim community would be solved. The violence of 2018 effectively makes that concept redundant and brings back to the drawing board the questions of how and where the Muslim community position themselves. In effect, the serious situation which faces the Muslim community at the cross roads in 2018 is the future of Muslim identity and expression of agency.

As a 'third party' in the complex ethnic politics of Sri Lanka, the Muslim community have been transformed under its influence and forced to define themselves and seek their own discourse. However, this has also meant that there has been an element of naivety in how they have conducted themselves trying to forge their

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[418] It has been clear from a lot of my interviews that my key informants also recognised that the global process of Islamic reformation that was undertaken post 1979 after the Iran revolution and the rise in Saudi Petro dollars which influenced a lot of the propagation of Islamic ideology.

own identity, in particular with the simultaneous combination of balancing the combination of external ethno-nationalist rivalries with the internal Islamic doctrinal conflict i.e. How does the community defend itself against hegemonic actors whilst avoiding a global Islamist agenda? Muslims have struggled and continue to struggle to articulate their grievances from the conflict in a manner that is conducive to maintaining confidence with the other two parties and in a manner that perhaps changes the current misconceptions regarding Muslims' place in the conflict.

So what is the answer to the question posed as to what the Muslim community should do now?

Chapter 8: Reimagining Identity

8.1 Introduction

As I write this conclusion, there has been anti Muslim violence taking place in the central province of Sri Lanka, namely in Kandy (See Reuters 2018; Mashal and Bastian 2018). The worst fears predicted in the previous chapters of a recurrence of the Sinhala – Muslim riots of 1915, or the 1983 pogrom have been realised. What has been clear from the 2018 violence, was that the predictions of the Muslims being the targets of Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist in the post 2009 era have not only taken place but run the risk of creating an enabling environment for future conflict in two ways: the spreading of myths about the community that scapegoats the community in terms of representing them as a threat to the Sinhala-Buddhist economic dominance and racist population politics (Wettimuny 2018) and the indifference and silence of the silent majority (Gunasekara 2018). Again these are not new issues, but simply a reinforcement of what has been discussed and what has happened previously. The violence against the Muslims recently in 2018, 2017 and 2014 is nothing new and represents repeated Anti Muslim violence that has taken place in Sri Lanka over the past three to four decades (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017). As an interviewee said

> *"The Anti – Muslim violence in Sri Lanka was overshadowed by the armed conflict and extreme polarization precipitated by Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms. To some extent it was also forgotten within the narrative of the Muslim community and we seem to treat every new incident as a new phenomenon, without realising that there is a trend that is there that also reflects deeper relationships between the two communities which are under stress and threat".*[419]

8.2 Effects of Indifference

It is clear that this collective indifference, coupled with a fog of misconception of the Muslim community and the visibility of the Muslim identity are the fault-lines of the problems between the two communities[420] in the country.

However, the different periods of violence have shown a deeper issue, in terms of examining whether the violence are an "an example of an ingrained Sinhala Buddhist mentality, or in fact reflect a history of ideological and political reconfiguration" (Gunawardena 2018), or in effect something more like economics. What is clear though is that the distinct experience of political and ethnic violence experienced by the Muslims in the context of Sinhala-Muslim tensions requires greater empirical attention and theorizing than it has received.

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[419] Face to face interview with Dr Farzana Haniffa, July 2016
[420] Whilst this is the case for Muslim and Sinhala, there is also tensions between the Tamil and Muslims as a consequence of the conflict

Since 1915 there have been repeated incidents of Anti Muslim violence by Sinhalese and despite this, there has not been a formal call to arms to date by the Muslims[421] unlike the 1983 Anti Tamil pogrom which led to the consolidation of power by the LTTE. This in itself reflects a slightly different approach to how the Muslim community seeks to solve their issues with the Sinhalese and hails to that legacy of 'accomodationist' politics, although the Easter Sunday attacks could well change that. There is though a temporal, spatial, political, economic and social dynamic to the anti- Muslim violence and to some extent, the violence of 2018 represents a 'perfect storm' where such different competing factors such as economics, inter-ethnic relations, religious sentiments, mythology and so on, all consolidated together. So there can not be one cause for the violence but multiple causes that need to be understood and worked on and a separate study is needed to really understand these dynamics.

Yet, the fact that 103 years on from the first Sinhala-Muslim clashes that took place in the country, we had come full circle back to Kandy with the clashes can not be under estimated or over emphasised. As it then pushed the Muslim community to realise that they were at a crossroads in their relationship with the Sinhala and also as a minority in the community, so to the current wave of violence in 2018 represents a symbolic statement of a real cross roads for the Muslim community vis-à-vis- their relationship with the Sinhalese community and the rest of the country. Regardless of the single or multiple causes for the violence, the mere fact that the violence took place on the scale that it did and with the complicity of state actors (Fernando 2018, Wijesinghe 2018) poses important questions for the future of the expression of the Muslim identity as well as the representation and expression of their identity and identity in general in Sri Lanka.

In this sense, the institutionalisation of the Muslim identity proves Barth's (1969) argument that boundaries are also maintained between ethnic units by a limited set of cultural features, and that consequently it is possible to specify the nature of continuity and persistence of such units. His rich analyses, deep insights and acute perceptions advanced understandings of the complex social mechanisms that create and shape ethnic communities, as well as the emergence, constitution and persistence of ethnic groups (Verdery 1994). As Barth argues, ethnicity is the product of specific kinds of inter-group relations. An ethnic group cannot exist in isolation, its formation and continuation is dependent upon interaction with 'Others' (Barth, 1969). Thus Barth focused on ethnic boundary maintenance, interaction and identity change across the boundaries, stating that: categorical

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[421] As the corrections for this thesis were being written, Sri Lanka experienced its worse suicide bombing on Easter Sunday 21sy April 2019, when a number of churches and luxury hotels were attacked by what the authorities are saying was a local Muslim terror group affiliated with the Islamic State. Whilst the implications are still yet to be understood it will be hypothesized later on in this chapter.

ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (1969:9-10).   Barth's theoretical framework sets out the subtle and sinuous frontiers of ethnic boundaries, the interconnectedness of ethnic identities and the continuity and transformation of ethnic groups.   He elucidates that 1. Ethnicity is not defined by culture but by social organisation. 2. Ethnic identifications are based on ascription and self-identification. They are situationally dependent and can change. 3. The roots of this social organisation are not cultural content but dichotomization, so that the ethnic boundary is a social boundary formed through interaction with 'Others'.

In this case, the Muslim identity as a religious motivator and communal galvanizer really explains what Barth (1969) tried to argue in terms of setting out the subtle and sinuous frontiers of ethnic boundaries, the interconnectedness of ethnic identities and the continuity and transformation of ethnic groups. However, it doesn't fully explain the role of the elite in terms of their instrumentalisation of identity and how they balanced their interests vis-à-vis community expectations. It is important to note these dynamics in order to understand that identity is also dependent on elite dynamics.

It is also worth revisiting the triadic nexus of Brubaker (1996,2009), where in one sense the argument can be made that the Sri Lankan Muslim identity formation was indeed symptomatic of this triadic nexus.   There is the 'nationalising nationalism' or the core nation represented by the Sinhala Buddhist, the perceived transnational link or 'homeland' conceived as the 'Ummah' and the Sri Lankan Muslim community as an imagined political minority.   However, this is where the similarity ends, because the main implication for the Sri Lankan Muslim identity formation was for 'adequate representation' and a preservation of identity versus the 'other'. Though there is an imagined community and imagined geography, in reality there is no 'external national homeland' for the Muslims. There is no external state like that exists for the Indian Diaspora or the Chinese diaspora that would be able to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, assert the rights and protect the interests of their 'ethnonational' kin. Although the Sri Lankan Muslim community did try and push the envelope of this relationship in the wake of anti Muslim violence in 2014 / 2017 / 2018 when they made representations to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Muslim countries for support and the right for Sri Lanka to be censured by these Muslim nations for the treatment of the Muslim community. Whilst this was the intent of the Sri Lankan Muslim political elite, calling on the transnational link with other Muslims, in reality, other than eliciting some statements of concern from the OIC, it did not necessarily stop the attacks from taking place nor did it elicit the support that the community was hoping for. So in this case, the interests of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka are not protected by an external body despite its

expectations and perceptions of this and the 'other's perception of this[422]. Hence the concept of this transnational link is challenged and nullified and needs rethinking[423].

8.3 Reimagining Identity

It is clear from what we have discussed that there is a paradox in the Muslim identity and that the Sri Lankan Muslim community is at best a complex mix of different ideologies and thoughts processes. Faith is not only a theological marker (a religious motivator) but also an identity marker (a communal galvanizer), which means there remain tensions and fault lines along racial and religious lines. In defining themselves as such, the identity of the Sri Lankan Muslim community has been developed and evolved not only based on ethno-nationalist tendencies but also from a theological and spiritual basis.

This duality construct of a 'Muslim' identity has become a challenge for the Sri Lankan Muslim community as they attempt to profess their Sri Lankan identity (and sense of belonging). By identifying themselves ethnically as 'Muslims', politically constructed from the late 19th century, the Muslim political elites played on blurring the distinctions between faith as a theological marker (religious motivator) and faith as an identity marker (communal galvanizer). This meant that the Muslims energetically constructed their 'racial' identity as a distinct ethnic group that is founded on religious and cultural identity. They interchanged religious motivators and communal galvanisers as and when it suited them. Largely helped with a renaissance in Islamic theological movements and thinking globally, the concept of Muslim representation in Sri Lanka evolved into theological and ideological formations on top of political representations.

It is this that provides a challenge, with respect to the classification and representation of the Sri Lankan Muslim as an ethnic identity, whilst the generic definition of Muslim does not relate to an ethnic representation but to a religious connotation. Thus in Sri Lanka the concept of an ethnic 'Sri Lankan Muslim' is slightly misleading and confusing as it ascribes a homogeneity beyond just religious practice to cultures, traditions, experiences and language which is made difficult by the heterogeneous nature of the geographical location of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, religious practices and traditions and often at odds with
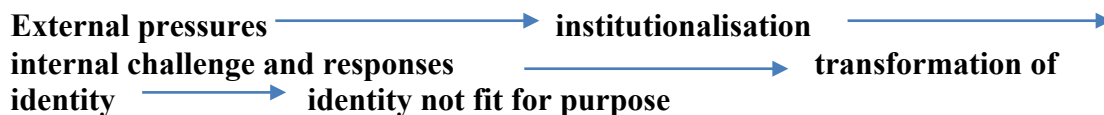
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[422] It is ironical that the triadic nexus concept could have been applied to the Tamil community with India at the early onset of the conflict but again this was lost because of the attack on Rajiv Ghandi and the losing of the support.   This reflects that divergence that Brubaker hints when he refers to homeland nationalisms being strategically adopted by the homeland state as a means of advancing other, non-nationalist political goals so that ethnic co-nationals abroad may be precipitously abandoned when, for example, geopolitical goals require this.

[423] Another irony is that the Sinhala community to some extent also in a post 2009 phase developed this transnational 'homeland' concept of Buddhist nations and to some extent could be seen to have reversed the triadic nexus so that they see themselves against the Muslims and the Tamils as the minority and the homeland is developed as a response to that. A greater articulation of Tambiah's (1992) notion of the 'Sinhalese being a majority with a minority complex'

the concept of nationalism or the nation-state. By deliberately blurring the lines between theology and identity, the political elites were able to utilize it to serve their own interests to the detriment of their community. Ultimately this also caused a sense of disengagement and isolation.

Hence this identity has emerged as a double edged sword, with a negative aspect being a minority but reifying an identity that is not singular and cohesive but that evolved influenced by global politics and a securitised lens. In that reification of a Sri Lankan Muslim identity, this process doesn't recognise the challenges faced by and from different communities, both internally and externally. This means that the singular point of identity doesn't negotiate the lived experience and challenges of the community and communities. There is thus a real tension between the reified identity (of a singular binary expression) and the lived reality of political experiences.

In other words, there has been a transformation, institutionalisation and politicisation of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity into a religious / ethnic identity over 130 years where Islamic became an ethnic boundary marker that was instrumentalised politically. However, this did not take into account the local and global lived experiences of the Muslim communities. This left the community with a political identity that was also influenced from outside but didn't take into account evolving individual identities. This meant that the identity was not fit for purpose and left it open to challenges. As the simple illustration below explains, this is the trajectory of the challenges for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

External pressures ⟶ **institutionalisation** ⟶
internal challenge and responses ⟶ **transformation of**
identity ⟶ **identity not fit for purpose**

So what does this mean?
There is a lack of clear articulation and policy of identity, instead choosing to move between both notions of religious marker and community galvaniser as and when circumstances provided. In the wake of rising religious consciousness by the Muslim community and by neglecting the necessary theological discussions necessary for developing identities, and contextualizing faith and failing to provide leadership in articulating this, the sole aim of developing a separate identity for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka has fallen prey to the global malaise afflicting Muslims, which is the push for a 'pure' Islamic identity based on a theological construct but taking the identity of a global community/race, neglecting local contexts and cultures. This is a new phenomenon within Islamic teachings and history because there is no such thing as a pure community identity. There are different manifestations of Islam and Muslim communities united with a pure theological marker, of which the latter is mistaken to be the

identity. It is this that is now causing global concerns and issues of the rise of 'conservative' Islam.

By pushing for a new political identity without understanding the changing dynamics of the context, what has happened is that the doors have been opened for discussions on a religious identity that is not only foreign to Sri Lanka but fails to take into account local contexts and cultures, making any future discussion of post conflict reconciliation even more challenging, as people feel that the Muslim community is more isolated (linguistically, culturally and socially) than before.

So what needs to be done?

It is here where one can start talking about multiple identities as elaborated by Sen (2006). The encouragement and retention of multiple identities means that people have several enriching identities: nationality, gender, age and parental background, religious or professional affiliation (Sen 2006). It is the recognition of this plurality and the searching for commonalities within this pluralism that will lead to greater respect and ultimately understanding and acceptance. Thus these new solutions will have to challenge people to accept diversity and create equal opportunities for diverse communities, ethnicities, traditions, cultures and faiths. This is in fact something that echoes what Barth (1969) acknowledged in terms of the need to possess and celebrate multiple identities and that is problematic and reductive to limit the individual to having one superordinate ethnic identity. By reducing these pluralities, we in turn risk reducing the dynamics, potential for creativity and future transformation and emergence of ethnic groups and identities. Thus the point is simply that "if identities are always constructed, then they can also be deconstructed, perhaps even reconstructed" (Q. Ismail 1997, 95).

So for the mainstream Sinhalese there needs to be a recognition of the plurality of the nation in terms of Non Buddhist and Non Sinhala people. Equally the minorities need to rethink the concept of multiple identities and pluralism.

This is also something that Brubaker (2002) raises when he writes about the need to rethink ethnicity, race and nationhood to construe their reality, power and significance in a different way, with the reality. In challenging the formation of groups Brubaker (2002, 167) calls for a thinking "of ethnicity, race and nation not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events. It means thinking of ethnicization, racialization and nationalization as political, social, cultural and psychological processes. And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable". Hence the implication of this rethink raises the prospect of raising the awareness of the interest that ethnic and nationalist leaders may have in "living off politics, as well as for politics" (*Ibid*, 176), and awareness of the possible

divergence between the interests of leaders and those of their putative constituents. This is one of the main conclusions that we have identified in this thesis as the disconnect between the political elite and the grassroots in terms of the experience and expectations for the Sri Lankan Muslim community. This approach also brings into analytical and policy focus the critical importance of intra-ethnic mechanisms in generating and sustaining putatively interethnic conflict. This is again something that was raised at the beginning of the thesis when discussing Bush (2003) and his two level critical juncture analysis and how he maintains that "inter-ethnic group relations may both condition and be conditioned by intra-group dynamics" (*Ibid,* 11)

Change of Narrative

There thus needs to be a holistic re-imagination of Sri Lankan Muslim identity, expression and agency and an approach to the conversation. This can be done in phases as part of an evolution. The **first phase** starts from a re-imagining of the historical narrative. The Muslim narrative is and has been the fact that 'Muslims have been existing and co-existing with other communities in Sri Lanka over the last 1000 years without any problem'. This in itself is a problematic statement. It presupposes that there is a noble race of people called 'Muslims' who decided one day to move to Sri Lanka, 1000 years ago, fell in love with the country, decided to settle, intermarry with the local people and it is their descendants who are living today in Sri Lanka making up the population of Sri Lankan Muslims and whose constituents are facing the problems of racism and xenophobia. This reasoning is completely simplistic, assumes homogeneity for a religion that thrived on heterogeneity, and simply does not consider the complexity of relationships and lived experiences between communities. This reasoning also assumes that Muslims are one race which again is not true. Muslims are a heterogeneous community from different races, ethnicities, languages and countries all bound by the simple, universal principles of Islam and its teachings.

The narrative of Muslims has to change in Sri Lanka starting from this simple fact. Islam came to Sri Lanka 1000 years and not Muslims. The latter are made up of a number of people who sought to believe in the former including definitely Arab traders who came and settled in the country, interacted with the locals and married local women (from the Sinhalese and Tamil community); Sinhalese and Tamil communities who converted to Islam; Muslim communities who came from Malabar in south India; communities who came to Sri Lanka as part of colonial migration and slave trade including the Malays, Memons and Gujaratis and other forms of migration and trade during the ages. Thus the Muslim community in Sri Lanka is a mosaic of people who are Moor (if they want to claim Arab heritage), Memon, Malay, Bhora, Pakistani, Afghani, Tamil and Sinhala. Even the Moor label is slightly disingenuous because it assumes a direct and pure link with Arabs instead of acknowledging the intermarriage over centuries between communities. This also reinforces what came out from a key informant in one of my focus groups

"I am not fully Moor, because I have a whole heritage of people descended from Malays, Memons, Sinhalese and so on, because of the intermarriage that took place over the centuries. We come from a place in Colombo where different communities coexisted and lived together and then intermarried. So the concept of Moor to define a Muslim is a fallacy for many. We don't have that link anymore and we are a cocktail of different people. Muslims in fact epitomise to some extent the pluralistic nature of the country" [424]

So the narrative has to move away from a label of "Muslims who have come from a 1000 years ago" to something that holistically represents in a true form the spectrum of Muslim ethnicity. We can't continue to have this narrative which then presupposes everything else including a need for institutionalisation of identity based on race and which becomes confused with a need for religious expression.

The **second phase** of this reimagination has to be around the political identity and expression of the Muslim community. What we have seen with the transformation of identity in Sri Lanka amidst the political and conflict context changes is that political elites from the Muslim community have failed to understand the change in political context in Sri Lanka.

The experience of the political challenges of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka also raises questions about complex political transitions (especially in post conflict scenarios), where politically active minorities have to tread a fine line in terms of balancing national plus community sentiments. In politically complex transitions, politically active minorities can't rely on block votes as this only works in the short run and depends on dividing the majority. However, this scenario is a narrow window. Thus in order to remain active and viable, ethnic block voting has to transition and evolve to produce another narrative of identity. This new narration of identity has to consider multiple identities that also splits the majority vote and to some extent this is what Sen (2006) alluded to as well. Identity is flexible and changing and minority polity has to be flexible and to evolve to respond to this. The process of minority block voting only works if the majority community is divided politically which was largely the case during the conflict, in Sri Lanka but the moment with the end of the conflict, the Sinhala community was largely aligned politically with the state, the Muslim community concept of block voting became irrelevant. In other words, block voting has a shelf life and can't be considered a panacea for minority politics. There has to be a realisation of an evolution of politics and thinking which is also affected when politically active ethno-religious minorities have a double problem in traversing their ethnic and religious duties and principles.

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[424] Key informant focus group discussion of Muslim civil society activists undertaken in November 2016.

What I show is that the transformation of a constituency at the grassroots in the light of changes in political and global contexts could undermine the legitimacy of political elites if they fail to understand, appreciate and respond to meet those challenges. What the example of the Sri Lankan Muslim community shows, which is useful for elsewhere is that whilst Muslim democrats (a Muslim political party) can protect the right of an ethno religious minority in the wake of political challenges, religious expression which can lead to a homogenisation of identity and the process of the homogenisation of the political identity of the Muslim community can lead to their isolation away from key political debates. So a Muslim Democratic (political) party can not exist easily in a situation of a minority where a faith identity is also part of a conversation of an ethnic identity. The experience from Sri Lanka is that such a scenario is very difficult if it is just managed as a binary expression. It works much better if there is a recognition of the multiplicity of identities as well as a changing context at the grass roots and at the top.

We see this taking place in Sri Lanka where political elites from the Muslim community failed to understand grassroots dynamics and is actually part of a cycle that has been experienced before. This happened in the mid 1980s which led to the formation of the SLMC as elites from the South failed to understand the security concerns of the eastern Muslims and thus it was felt that the eastern Muslims needed their own separate party to look after their secure interests. It then happened again in 2009 after ethnic politics lost legitimacy after the conflict and the dynamics of the community changed at the grass roots. From being largely a divided polity during the conflict, the Sinhala majority community became 'united' at the end of the conflict which emboldened extreme nationalists thereby weakening the Muslim polity. The grassroots also underwent a change in context as the political context also changed. In other words, at the grass roots, the Sinhala Muslim relation did not really improve after the conflict and in fact exposed all the weaknesses and fractures that had so far been masked by the conflict and the focus perhaps on Sinhala Tamil relations. During the conflict, the Sinhalese forgot about their relations with the Muslims and the Muslims were naively and blissfully ignorant developing their identity and expression almost in a vacuum to the conflict and those dynamics. This was exposed and exploited by the extreme Sinhala nationalists post 2009 leading to the violent incidents of 2014, 2017 and 2018 but the Muslim political elites did not understand this bottom up change in community dynamics and also did not understand the emergent of the nationalist mainstream politics. The Muslim community also being led by political and religious dynamics failed to appreciate these dynamics as well. Lewer and Ismail (2011) allude to this when they talk about the next steps for the Muslim community in the east of Sri Lanka as a three pronged approach of Muslim political thought: one that is really regional and context specific so for example, how in the East the Muslim polity engages with their Tamil counterparts; how these regional politics renogitiates a position with the Government of Sri Lanka and the central perspective; and a politics that stands for a more

nationalistic solution. So elaborating on this, thinking about a three pronged approach of Muslim political thought has to take into account the changing context and an evolution of the community in terms of influences and externalities. Although there was some attempt to do away with the ethnic nationalist politics by the founder of the SLMC with the formation of another party with Sinhala parties to get back the Muslims back to mainstream politics his untimely death meant that this legacy was not continued. And the question still remains what is the strategy for a nationalistic solution? Part of this starts from a rethinking around collective mobilising for addressing community concerns is undertaken. What we have seen especially in the past decade, is that this type of political engagement is no longer the way forward for the Muslim community.

The **third phase** is about the classification of identity. The concept of piety and spirituality has to be divorced from the political reality of identity expression. So the premise is that one can be a good political Muslim and a bad spiritual Muslim: one can practice the spiritual aspects of Islam, be a 'practicing' Muslim but a bad political representative; of course, one can also be both. However, the issue here is not to be too prescriptive on linking being Muslim in Sri Lanka to simply being about spirituality and piety.

The **fourth phase** of the reimagination to be addressed thus is around the deconstruction of an ethnic identity embedded within a religious framework, which poses several challenges for the community and the relationships with others. Despite a heterogeneity ascribed to an ethnic identity, the concept of a Muslim identity label can lend itself to a growing homogenizing tendency based on a religious outlook. This is especially given the global trend of Islamic reformation which based on influences from Saudi leads to a certain understanding around the concept of a 'pure' Islam which can lead to other issues around religious identity. This means that the overarching Muslim identity has evolved within this diversity. It is this tension due to prevailing socio-political conditions of conflict that leads us to think of a need for a reimagining of identity, agency and expression as a result of this. There is a need to take into account the changing circumstances of the context in Sri Lanka in order to understand that things are now different. It is perhaps, best seen as a dialectical process where pre-existent discourses become reconfigured and circulated when public and political discourse in society at large support and nurture such discourses. What is at stake is how the Muslims identify themselves. To a large extent the shape this discourse takes will depend on the macro political environment but a reimagining of the Muslim identity will also have an important role to play in shaping the future of these discourses. Thus the conversation has to centre around traversing a ethno-religious discourse whilst attempting to define a political stance. Thus we have to redefine who the Sri Lankan Muslim is!!

This is the contention of this thesis that the Muslim community have become victims of their own doing. Whilst the Muslim community (like the other two

communities in Sri Lanka) have succeeded in becoming an 'imagined' community, based on an 'imagined geography' that has an imagined political community that disregards the majority of the other inhabitants within the nation and reproduces their imaginations with cultural roots (Anderson 1983), they have underestimated the ethnic confrontation with the pan – Islamic influences that would result and the changing temporal and spatial dynamics of religious expression especially Islamic reformism from the late seventies. Hence there was a perfect storm as the global pan Islamic reformism coincided with the search for the Muslims in Sri Lanka to articulate a separate identity in the face of the conflict and trying to develop an expression for themselves separate from the 'other'. This was seized upon by the Muslim elites in Sri Lanka who somehow did not understand or comprehend that this would have a life of its own and evolve. With pan–Islamic influences, there became a preoccupation with looking internally as opposed to considering the external message of reform that is at the heart of the original Islamic message: that of changing the society for the better. This lack of synergy between the practices through which Muslim society is transformed and energized and the practices of society at large, exhibited by these reform groups, means that there was and is as yet no meeting point between the language of the piety movement and the demands of social expression for ethnic representations in the larger Sri Lankan context. The reification of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity assumes the homogeneity of identity because of a religious edict without recognising the diversity of individual communities and identities.

Recalibrating the Premise

Thus the premise is that the reimagining of the Muslim identity for Sri Lanka has to be one where Islamic reformism in piety and theology makes sense, in recognising the diversity and homogeneity of the Muslim community; in guiding an ethnic and local agency and expression whereby, cultural practices and traditions are enhanced not replaced by theology; to struggle for greater justice and against discrimination; defend civil responsibilities and the democratic processes and restore the dignity of conscience and human values (Ramadan 2004). In this sense Muslim political representatives and a Muslim political party (or even a reformist group) who define themselves with guidelines from the Qur'an and "Islamic principles", should have focussed on conveying honesty and incorruptibility, and with grassroots support, to have used those same principles towards building an identity and relations with other communities by emphasising an ethical system and orientation that promotes social justice through equal rights and opportunities.

This re-imagination of the community identity has to include rethinking what the Muslim community is, represents and ultimately identifies with. In its evolution it has undertaken a number of different forms of identity as it sought to carve a place in Sri Lanka, however it is clear that from the the recent anti Muslim violence, the community is now at a crossroads. The role that they carve out for themselves is dependent on them being seen as part of the solution and not as

an additional problem. This comes back to the fact that they need to articulate a comprehensive platform and identity (based on their Islamic principles of ethics) that takes into consideration the whole community and country. The community can not shed its religious label, and thus a rethinking of the identity has to start from understanding how one approaches Islamic reformation.

In this sense, it is worth exploring how Asad (1986) argues that Islam should be understood as a 'discursive tradition' producing doctrine and practice that are historically situated. So what Asad is talking about is a tradition that consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. This discursive tradition is constituted and reconstituted not only by an ongoing interaction between the present and the past, however, but also by the manner in which relations of power and other forms of contestation and conflict impinge on any definition of what it is to be a Muslim. Such a view of Islam, Asad suggests, helps avoid essentialist constructions that strive to judge all facets of Islamic thought, ideals, and practice in terms of how they relate to (or, more often than not, fail to relate to) Islam's foundational texts, even as it seeks to steer clear of the temptation to reduce the variety of religious and cultural expression to different, local 'Islams'. This is perhaps essentially how the Muslims of Sri Lanka fashioned their narrative. While Asad's definition helps to challenge and overcome problems of the conceptualisation of change in Muslim society, by historically situating the production of doctrine and practice it mainly captures the element of time and not space. This is what we see about the limitations of the construct of the narrative currently put out by the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

Thus in order for there to be a reimagining of this, we need to be aware of more than the discursive. We need to be aware of the dialogical process of relationships and religions in Sri Lanka, where the discursive is also met with interactions and relationships, in demographic and other spaces as much as it is affected by the context and situation at the time. Thus the complexity in Sri Lanka of an identity based on the history and heritage of the Muslim / Moor community versus the relationship and external facets of what happened when the community developed and had external factors. We also have to discuss the 'objectification' of Islam (Eickelman and Piscatori 2004) in Sri Lanka, whereby the process by which basic questions come to the fore in the consciousness of this did not occur specifically as a result of a disillusionment with secularisation,

modernisation, democracy or the nation-state. It came about as a significant push to define oneself against the 'other'. Hence any discussions around religion and theology has to take these considerations into context

There needs to be a rethink about the identity for the Muslim community (and beyond). We need to come back to the concept that we are not just Muslims but Moors, Malays, and so on as well as Sinhalese and Tamil. We are not homogenous but heterogeneous and made up of multiple identities. We are no longer one entity. We also need to more away from the concept of Muslims being in Sri Lanka for 1000 years. We have emerged and evolved and although linked with religion, we are different to regions and need to work on that to ensure some better relationships. So it is vital for the Muslims of the east that the Muslims in the south and central are in good relationship with the Sinhalese but equally it is important to the Muslims of the south and central to realise that there are cultural and other differences that they need to understand especially with Muslims out of those regions.

The gist is that the Muslim community cannot be ignored nor marginalised (by either the Tamil or the Sinhala polity) when considering the future of Sri Lanka in a post conflict scenario. However, the role that they carve out for themselves is dependent on them seeing themselves as part of the solution not an additional problem. This comes back to the fact that they need to articulate a comprehensive platform and identity (based on their Islamic principles of ethics) that takes into consideration the whole community and country. Their part in reconciliation and forgiveness (based from their Islamic references) is vital.

However, they cannot afford to be politically naive and need to develop a sophisticated argument and agenda. Because of global concerns about the rise of conservative Islam it is easy to conflate terminology and ideology with radicalisation, violent extremism and potential conflicts. In this case, Muslims especially those living in areas where Sinhalese are the majority and who have legitimate grievances, need to pay attention. While Muslims are aware of the challenges they are facing, they have to be able to understand where they have gone wrong. There needs to be a realization that exclusive social practices and values practice among Muslims themselves have to be curtailed. This allows the beginning of a potential conversation in ensuring that tensions can be alleviated.

8.4   Final Reflections

In Sri Lanka attempts at redefining politics and religion are not useful and in a practical context can be seen as meaningless mainly because of the interconnectedness between the two entities. My argument has been that Islam, ethnic and politics religion are intertwined and constitute a different perspective that creates a political / ethno / religious representation. This is definitely different to how we traditionally approach this classification where religion, ethnic and

politics through the state are understood as fixed and separate. Instead we need to look at how a hybrid of these representations are done with the process of how the boundaries between these concepts move, what factors cause these movements and its implications. The process of shifting, breaking and remaking the boundaries of religion whilst ensuring institutionalisation can indeed be described as the evolution of the institutionalisation of religious identity.

As a 'third party' in the complex ethnic politics of Sri Lanka, the Muslim community have been transformed under its influence and forced to define themselves and seek their own discourse. However, this has also meant that there has been an element of naivety in how they have conducted themselves trying to forge their own identity, in particular with the simultaneous combination of balancing the combination of external ethno-nationalist rivalries with the internal Islamic doctrinal conflict.

So what is the answer to the question posed as to what the Muslim community should do now?

The way forward has to be about a re-imagination of what the Muslim community is, represents and ultimately identifies with. It has to include thinking about how well the community manage the formation of attitude towards 'other' ethnicities and practices adopted to mitigate negative attitudes. In this regard much work is needed by the Muslim community to work towards possible behaviour change in order to experience 'other' communities.

Muslims have struggled and still continue to struggle to articulate Muslim grievances from the conflict in a manner that brings confidence to the other two parties of a sincerity of goals for the benefit of the whole country and in a manner that perhaps changes the current misconceptions regarding Muslims' place in the conflict.

However, the role that they carve out for themselves is dependent on them being seen as part of the solution and not as an additional problem. This comes back to the fact that they need to articulate a comprehensive platform and identity (based on their Islamic principles of ethics) that takes into consideration the whole community and country. This is one of the antidotes that can neutralize the advances of a minority of Sinhala Buddhist extremists.

The Muslim community has found itself caught between a rock and a hard place. Undoubtedly, their future prospects could be based on their past, but the past should not become a ball and chain for the future. Muslim politicians have made mistakes in reacting and developing a separate identity. Their naivety and quest for political representation obscured the gains that could have been made for the country. Coupled with the now rising religious consciousness of the community, which confuses religious and ethnic identity, there are real challenges for representation and identification.

Any movement forward needs to articulate a common space for all of these representations to take place.

However, the Muslim community will now have to advance this thinking and this re-imagination. As discussed earlier on in the chapter, whilst undertaking this revision, Sri Lanka suffered its worst suicide bombing attack with the Easter Sunday attacks on churches and hospitals. Carried out by locals belonging to a Muslim terror group aligned with the Islamic State, the scale of the attacks not only shocked the global community but in its aftermath have thrust a lot of scrutiny on the Muslim community. Though the latter have been quick to respond and distance themselves from the acts of violence, they are now under scrutiny in terms of their identity and action. Early indications are that that the Muslim community is under pressure to 'respond' and 'reform' according to concerns others might have of their conservative religious practices and identity, particularly as the likes of organisations such as the BBS and others (who were active in the post 2009 period pushing against a visible conservative Muslim identity and presence) have now been emboldened to come out and be strong in their push to 'regulate' the community. Already there have been public calls for the banning of the Burqa and Madrassahs and so on. In the emotional fervour of the attacks whilst this is expected, what is unknown at this moment at is what the future will hold. There is a lot to be observed and discussed in the coming months and years around this which at this early stage can not be speculated on.

My immediate analysis though is that I think that the relationship that the Muslim community had with both the Tamils and the Sinhalese (and with the Christians) has been changed and will take a long time to rebuild (if at all)[425]. The accommodation politics that the Muslim polity had hitherto been employing has probably now disappeared and they will have to employ if not forced to go through a different type of relationship. As scrutiny becomes securitised the Muslim community will be expected to change their visible identity and their expressions of religious practices and how they define themselves vis-à-vis the other communities and the country. How this manifests itself depends on how proactive the community and polity are versus how much they react to situations. The four phases described above could serve as a starting point for that conversation as the nation seeks a way of healing. It is clear though that in this vacuum created, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist narrative will become more prominent and minorities will now need to acquiesce even more. This has to be understood and followed through.

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[425] This is because both Tamil and Sinhalese Christians across the island were attacked

8.5 Looking ahead: contribution to academia, challenges and scope for new work

It is hoped that this research will fill a gap that exists around contemporary Sri Lankan Muslim identity especially in moving forward after the Easter Sunday attacks, where there will be more public scrutiny and calls for Muslims to assimilate and accommodate the 'Sri Lankan' identity. As I tried to do my work in this basis, I was struck by the lack of credible and volume of work in this aspect of Muslim identity in Sri Lanka especially in the contemporary times. This research thus stands out from much of the contemporary work primarily because in Sri Lanka a lot of work has been done around the conflict and the relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils, with very little being done on the Muslim community. This research also adds to the conversation around politically active minorities and how evolving circumstances and contexts need to be comprehended to ensure relevance and coherence.

There is also something to be said about the transnational similarities between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar that this study will go to some lengths to unpick. Like Sri Lanka, Myanmar has a similar trajectory of identity politics that are largely elite-centric to secure governmental office, socio-political mobilisation and legitimacy. Some of these approaches are explicitly instrumental looking at intra-group ethnic outbidding led by ethnic entrepreneurs, with a stress on "linguistic nationalism" as the functional mechanism thoroughly infused with the logic of majoritarian Buddhist nationalist and ethnic hierarchies. Both have parallel histories where the territorial integrity of the state and the protection of the majority populations' core values, culture and the Buddhist religion have become inextricably interconnected, to the extent that citizenship and development policies either explicitly or implicitly privilege the Burman or Sinhala identities, a dynamic that marginalizes minorities who do not remain faithfully subordinate, peripheral or assimilate within this overarching hierarchy. Thus such an instrumentalist approach demarcates distinct socio- political spaces and dynamics within Burma and Sri Lanka, of state and society, authoritarianism and democracy, elites and 'people', with nationalism and ethnicity residing in the elite and state spheres and obscures the socially diffuse hegemony of these identity practices. In this sense it will become interesting for the future to understand how such hegemonisation leads to contestation amongst and between the elites over the high ground of nationalist authenticity.

Taken in this vein there is also much to learn from the Sri Lankan experience to a wider regional perspective especially around the ethno-politics of market dominant or trading communities. As Chua (2003) hypothesised, democratization and globalization lead to ethnic violence in the presence of a market-dominant minority. As these minorities live by and benefit from 'the market', Chua aptly labels them 'market-dominant minorities' (MDMs). MDMs typically control large parts of the economy so that globalizing markets favour them disproportionally. In turn, growing inequalities lead to resentment among the majority which, in democratic settings, cannot be contained by repression -

or is even stimulated by office-seeking politicians. Chua's main argument is that such resentment causes a violent backlash against the MDM, against markets and against democracy. The case of Sri Lanka contradicts and validates that thesis. On the one hand it does show that the Muslims as a perceived MDM were under threat of resentment but it shows that the accommodation politics hitherto utilised had allowed it a safe space to operate whilst allowing them to maintain their exclusive identity. Yet there is a threshold that once past can prove fatal to the fact that these identity narratives need to be changed.

The experience of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka can speak to the situation of politically indigenous active Muslim minorities in non Muslim countries who have a challenge with faith as an identity expression whilst trying to develop a community identity and how they need to constantly balance both in order to create safe dynamics. In the Sri Lankan case you have this constant tension in maintaining the elite interest of representation with the grass roots expectation for privileges and rights. It is a hybrid approach that then challenges the normal integration of constructivist /ethno-symbolist theories.

This thesis challenges the common narrative about the conflict in Sri Lanka (and post conflict reconciliation) that there are two stakeholders in the conflict. What we see is that the Muslims are also a significant stakeholder in and victim of the conflict and need to be figured in any post conflict reconciliation conversation. In addition, it also challenges the Muslim community to really rethink its identity formation and narrative both internally and also lead an external conversation. This can be controversial but is definitely a needed conversation. There has to be a reimagining of how the Muslim community really identify themselves and also how they want to be associated with faith.

This research has shown that for minority politics there is nothing such as binary or a homogenous identity formation and minority political representation and identity expression that insist on this, is disconnected from the reality. As we have seen the Muslim political and ethnic identity which also depended on religious agency, manifested in monumental changes to Muslims and Islam. We can not explore the politicisation of Islam just as an ever changing process, without analysing and understanding the lived experience of Muslims during such a process.

In Sri Lanka political Islam was intrinsically linked to Muslims' position, not just as a minority group but as a 'second minority'. Their need for separation, to be identified and exist separate from the ethnic/religious other, came as a consequence of being compressed between two dominant groups who were engaged in a conflict with each other, a conflict that was itself primarily about identity and existence. The Sri Lankan case illustrates how being a minority population can be a critical contributing factor to nationalist majority politics during times of crisis, but how this can become irrelevant once a tipping point has been reached and there needs to be a rethink of that engagement, which takes into account changing grass roots dynamics. It is about understanding the complex

relationship of faith as a community galvaniser and a moral marker which when politicised manifests itself in a minority context but also how that very factor, of being a minority, causes the politicisation process. Also we have to consider the effect and influence of other groups on the development of the politicisation of Islam. As we have seen in Sri Lanka, the formation of the Muslim identity was largely in response to the formations of the identity of the 'Other' and has challenged theories around identity formation as this is really a hybrid argument.

What we see is that the discussion of the Muslim identity in Sri Lanka weakens an essentialist perception which is often utlised to create a binary representation of Muslims. Other groups in Sri Lanka also underwent religious reformation and also emerged with similar conservative religious interpretations which affected their co-existence with others.   The lived experience at the grass roots and the relations between communities is important to really understand how identities of communities and ultimately society needs to be developed.

This thesis also never was intended to be a theory testing piece of work. Instead theory has been used to make sense of the argument in the very least or to understand how the theory itself can be challenged as is clearly the case described above with regards Brubaker where it is clear that elements of his notion of 'triadic nexus' has been challenged because it shows that the lived experience of ethno-politics makes it very difficult to have binary representations of identity, their formation, relationships and engagement. Yet the thesis does show what Brubaker (2002) describes as the need to rethink classification of ethnicity preferably without groups, precisely because of the possible divergence between the interests of leaders and those of their constituents, which can keep us from accepting at face value leaders' claims about the beliefs, desires and interests of their constituents. We have seen this in the experience of the Sri Lankan Muslim community and thus the challenges being placed on theories of ethno politics.

I want to finally discuss some limitations with my work in terms of analysing my findings and in my discussions with key informants and others for this thesis. I found that there is definitely a binary approach to how people look at this identity and were not willing to think beyond that. For example, there is still a prevailing concept that Muslims came to Sri Lanka 1000 years ago and to think and say otherwise is considered wrong. This is from both the Muslims and the non Muslim community. No one wants to question the fallacy of an ethnic identity called Muslims. There is no starting point on this. We accept this as given. Hence if we really want to have a true in-depth conversation we need to start from there, otherwise anything else is a window dressing. Hence in doing my research, it was frustrating to find that no one even considered this or was willing to talk about it in detail. In addition, I am conscious that this was more of a qualitative study than a quantitative study. This was deliberate from my end to enable an initial discussion around this topic and felt that this was a legitimate way to start the conversation. Thus this was not a complete study but the beginning of the study

which needs to be continued. Hence the next phase after this thesis has to be more quantitative than qualitative to really add weight to the theory. It has to complement the elite approach taken in this thesis by being a more bottom up approach with more grass roots engagement.

Being a Sri Lankan Muslim myself, I felt able to bridge language, cultural, religious and other similar barriers that can affect research findings. I also understand and acknowledge that there can always be gaps in interpretation. However, I was unable to bridge the gap between the core beliefs of my subjects and my epistemological grounding. I found it quite problematic that the analysis of the phenomenon I have been studying was being conducted in an opposing paradigm to the phenomenon itself: two paradigms based on conflicting ideologies and world views.

In order to make progress on this thinking for Sri Lankan Muslims, we need to resolve this fundamental aspect of who are the Sri Lankan Muslims and where they came from.

Scholarly work across disciplines has begun a process of challenging Western academia to better understand the developments in Muslim societies and within Islam. This thesis contributes to this work and opens up new areas for further analysis. In addition to what has already been identified in this conclusion there are other areas which warrant further research.

As has been pointed out by other research and also this thesis, we need a better understanding of the causes of the anti Muslim violence especially by the Sinhalese as this has been happening over the last century. In addition, we need to understand the relations of trans-national elements of Buddhist-Muslim tensions as evidenced by what is happening in Myanmar and Thailand, as these are very similar in nature and rhetoric.

Further research on the lines of that conducted in this thesis, in the same areas, could provide an understanding of how the politicisation of Islam and the expression of identity continue to be affected by targeted attacks on Muslims. It should also explore the challenge to ethno-politics theory in terms of the binary representation on identity formation and relationships between minority and majority which are affected by the lived experience. It should also be used to explore how the community can move forward to face the pressures that are there and will come after the Easter Sunday attacks.

There is substantial literature on the spread of Wahhabism and that influence on a theological expression of Muslim identity. This can not be explained in isolation to the other factors for Muslim identity but there certainly needs to be more research done around Islamic reformations in Sri Lanka as well as religious movements. Again the Easter Sunday attacks will prompt this to be undertaken sooner rather than later.

Finally, the biggest contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate how Islam can be politicised in a Muslim minority situation, and how minority status can itself cause this politicisation as well as how it can become disconnected from the lived experiences of the heterogeneity of the Muslim community. I end my work with this call that there needs to be more research not only into this phenomenon as it challenges our understanding of contemporary Islam and lived experiences of Muslim communities, but also we need more research into Sri Lankan Muslims, their lived experiences in the past and present contexts of Sri Lanka.

Appendix A – Details of Interviews

Interviews were carried out in three forms: face to face interviews; skype interviews and focus group discussions.

Face to face interviews:

- Mrs Ferial Ashraff (August 2015) – former Member of Parliament and Minister, head of the National Unity Alliance. She is also the widow of the late M.H.M Ashraff the founder of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and was able to provide first hand accounts

- Rev Ebenezer Joseph (October 2015) – General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka and former president of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka. He is someone that I have engaged in conversations with in the past really to understand Buddhist / Christian relations which mirrors some of the challenges being faced between Muslims and Buddhists.

- The late Professor Ken Bush (November 2015) – An academic with Durham University who had done substantial work on Sri Lanka especially during the conflict with his work on Critical Junctures but sadly passed away unexpectedly in 2016. I have also referred to his work extensively in this research as highlighted in the bibliography

- The late Mr Izzeth Hussein (January 2016) – former diplomat and prominent commentator on Sri Lankan Muslim communities especially in the print media. I have also referred to many of his articles in my research. He sadly passed away in 2017

- Mrs Jezima Ismail (July 2016) – chairperson of Muslim Women Research Action Front. Well respected former educationalist and civil society leader known for her leadership on community issues especially around the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA). She is also recognised for her leadership in Muslim community affairs

- Dr Farzana Haniffa (July 2016) – academic at the University of Colombo and chair of the Secretariat of Muslims. She is also a well known writer and commentator on Muslim community affairs

- Mr Naushad Majeed (November 2016) – former Member of Parliament and local government politician from the east of Sri Lanka. Closely associated with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress in the past and being from the east of the country, he is a commentator on community issues

Skype interviews:

- Dr Imthiaz Razak (August 2015) – academic from Temple University in the USA. He has written extensively around Muslim social and political issues and I have also collaborated with him on several papers together. I have also used him extensively as a reference for my thesis

- Prof Ameer Ali (March 2016) – academic from the University of Western Australia and former president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. He also writes extensively around Muslim social and political issues. I have used him extensively as a reference for my thesis.

Focus Group Discussions: As part of my research on top of individual interviews, I carried out some focus group discussions with different constituencies, that enabled me to get a wider perspective of issues

- Muslim Business Men (May 2015) – a group of Muslim business men who I discussed many issues with around the halal certification,

pressures on economics from Sinhala nationalists and also to get an idea from them on their take around Muslim community issues

- Muslim professionals (May 2016) – this was a mixed group (gender and age) of professionals within the Muslim community all involved at different levels as well as having different approaches to how they understand the community
- Buddhist monks (June 2016) – this was specifically done to get a sense of the Buddhist understanding of the issues of identity and also the relations and current tensions between the Sinhalese Buddhist and Muslim communities
- Muslim Civil Society Activists (November 2016) - I conducted this focus group discussion with young (average age 22) civil society activists all involved in one way or another with the Muslim community. This was an interesting discussion to see how they perceive these issues.

Field Visits: In addition, I conducted some informal field visits to meet and discuss with people on the ground. Though these discussions were not formally recorded I still hold these interactions as valuable field research to get an understanding of the thinking on the ground. Field visits were conducted to the following places:

- Amparai district (September 2014) – this is in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka and the birthplace of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC). It was important to ascertain how people understood the birth of the SLMC, the politics of the conflict and the current issues facing the Muslim community. It was also important to understand how they viewed the history of the community and the conflict
- Kandy (December 2015) – this is in the central province and before the ethnic riots in 2018 was a place of close relationship between the Sinhalese and the Muslims. It was interesting to see here how the 1915 riots did not figure in most people's radar screens
- Kathankudy (December 2016) – this is in the eastern province of Sri Lanka and was the site of the conflict in 1990 and also of discussions around Islamic extremism.

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