THIRD WAVE POLITICS: VIOLENCE AND BUDDHISTS IN SRI LANKA

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THIRD WAVE POLITICS: VIOLENCE AND BUDDHISTS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The larger question that guided my dissertation concerns the relationship of Buddhists to violence. Between 1996 to 2019 there emerged in southern Sri Lanka a significant and unprecedented militant nationalist movement which comprises an array of political groups, organizations and parties: Sinhala Commission (1996), Jathika Sangha Sabha (1996), Sinhala Veera Vidahana (1997), Thrastha Virodhi Vyaparaya (1998), Sinhala Urumaya (1998), Jathika Hela Urumaya (2000), Bodu Bala Sena (2010), Sinhala Ravaya (2013), Ravana Balaya (2017), Sinha Le (2017), Sinhale Api (2018) and Mahasohon Balakaya (2019). My dissertation is a critical exploration of this militant Buddhist movement, particularly led by Buddhist monks who demanded to become sovereign in the country. I consider a contingent collective perception of this movement—a constructed imaginary that treats an increasing Muslim population, their businesses, and cultural practices as a form of Muslim fundamentalist terror. My project examines how this imagined terror by Buddhist militants informs the practical experience and consciousness of ordinary citizens leading to real consequences that exceed state sovereignty as a mode of governance (control) and monks' demands to be sovereign in the country—a process I call 'third wave of monks in politics.' Treating militant Buddhist movement as a discursive tradition, I explore what affective practices and sensibilities are made possible by persuasive, competing arguments within the recent movement.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

At University of Colombo, Geethika Dharmasinghe earned a B.A. in Sociology in 2009 and completed a year of course work of M.A. in Sociology in 2011. She received Fulbright scholarship in 2013 and completed her M.A. in Anthropology in Northern Arizona University in 2015. In Fall 2015, she continued her graduate study in the Ph.D. program in Asian Literature, Religion and Culture in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. Currently, she is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Religion at Colgate University. Her research and teaching converge around literatures on Buddhist modernity, violence, sovereignty, and the political economy of South and Southeast Asia with particular attention to countries participating in forms of Theravada Buddhist tradition.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Limits of Disciplinary Claims on the Relationship between Religion and 'Violence' of Social Movements

Between 1996 to 2019 there emerged in southern Sri Lanka a significant and unprecedented militant nationalist movement which comprises an array of political groups, organizations and parties: Sinhala Commission (1996), Jathika Sangha Sabha (1996), Sinhala Veera Vidahana (1997), Thrastha Virodhi Vyaparaya (1998), Sinhala Urumaya (1998), Jathika Hela Urumaya (2000), Bodu Bala Sena (2010), Sinhala Ravaya (2013), Ravana Balaya (2017), Sinha Le or Sinhale Api (2017) and Mahasohon Balakaya (2019). This study is a critical exploration of this militant Buddhist movement, particularly led by Buddhist monks who became vociferous about the Muslim population (9.7%)[1], the visibility of Muslim cultural and religious practices such as halalization, animal slaughter, and increasing hijab wearing, and who demanded to become sovereign in the country, a process I call third wave monks in politics. I use the term militant to suggest a style and, above all, a mindset that shaped their hostile attitudes toward Muslims, which in turn shape their political positions. The dissertation explores how 'anticipated terror' of Muslims gave rise to movements in Sri Lanka which interrupted state sovereignty and opened a space for decentralized but coordinated non-state actors to establish a new era of majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist hegemony on the island.

Treating Buddhism as a discursive tradition, I focus on the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Buddhist violence located outside of state control and how this is indebted to post-colonial avowedly secular electoral procedures. The overarching question that has guided

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[1] Population Statistics, 2019. Government of Sri Lanka.

my study concerns the relationship of Buddhists to violence in modern/ contemporary time. One of the major theoretical questions I have focused on is: how what counts as violence and what does not count as violence emerge in a given society? I demonstrate some of the ways in which Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka legitimize their actions, how what can and cannot count as violence is perceived within an authoritative discourse. More generally, this is a study of the formations of a cultural construction of 'legitimate violence' in Sri Lanka. I show how Buddhist monks and Buddhist activists in a mass movement emerged in the 1990s in Sri Lanka perceive themselves as embodying what they understand to be a continuous past of Sri Lankan history, a tradition or *the sampradaya*.

A number of critics, thinkers of varying disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. anthropology, history, and philosophy) have drawn attention to the categories, "religion" and "violence" and their relationship to "state sovereignty" in useful ways for a number of years. Their general view is that these categories, as either theoretical objects of specific problems or authoritative claims about them, emerged as contingently authorized in different material circumstances through discursive and non discursive relations. The critique in their varying projects is set against the central tenets of "postmodernist" positions such as "cultures are mobile," "cultures are unbounded," or "subjects are free-floating monads."[2] Though the anti-essentialist positions are strategically important in divesting the supposed assumption of authoritative discourses on culture or religion as homogeneous entities, they are not wholly unproblematic as they eventually

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[2] See David Scott's Formations of Rituals and Ananda Abeysekara's Colors of the Robe for a critique on the attempts at reading culture and religion as divested of any essential meaning. In particular, Abeysekara has shown that scholars like Arjun Appadurai's use of the concepts such as culture (see Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)) first indeed reject the essence of culture, but eventually fall back on a problematic essentialist view of culture. They further assert that this form of argument is grounded on a set of assumptions about "what culture is or is not" (Abeysekara 2002: 2). See also Gupta and Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," in Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) for a critique on "freedom and playfulness of the postmodern condition" that some postmodernist scholars seem to celebrate.

fell prey to an essentialism of their own (according to Talal Asad, David Scott, Ananda

Abeysekara, Thomas Blom Hansen and Georges Bataille, to name a few of those whose work

has been central to opening up a conceptual space for my work).[3] So I shall begin by rehearsing

briefly what I find to be the central thrust of the critics as a way of trying to resist hegemonic

ideologies, the authoritative discourses in the making.

As David Scott has suggested, following Talal Asad's useful concept of "authoritative

discourse," interpreting the formations and deformations of certain changing shapes of cultures

with an *a priori* notion that cultures are unbounded or mobile is misleading

> …since local discourses do in fact "establish" authoritative "traditions," discrete temporal
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> and spatial parameters in which it is made singularly clear to cultural subjects and their
>
> others what is (and who are) to belong within it and what (and who) do not (Scott 1994:
>
> xviii).

He suggests it is the "boundedness" or "authoritative subjects" that gets established in kinds of

authoritative discourse, whether scholarly theories or native discourses. For instance, part of the

antagonism between Sinhalese and Muslims in contemporary Sri Lanka has precisely to do with

the question of *how* the boundaries of their cultures are authoritatively established and

maintained. In other words, everyone claims that they have a long lived culture. The discussion

is about how their cultures are established and whether their claims are legitimate. Therefore,

Scott goes on to argue that the question should not be about whether the claims of boundaries are

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[3] See Talal Asad's Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology, 1979, *Man* 14 (4): 607-627; Ananda Abeysekara's *Colors of the Robe*, (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press) 2002; Thomas Blom Hansen's The *Safron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1999; and The Bataille Reader, eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers) 1997.

justifiable or legitimate. Instead, we should ask under what kinds of material conditions and their discursive and non discursive expressions, "claims about the presence or absence of boundaries are made, fought out, yielded, negotiated (1994: xviii). Scott turns to the colonial condition and its problematic views of colonized (in his examined case Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhists) and shows how the terms and parameters of Sinhala ritual (one especially, namely, *yaktovil*) and religion were defined and came to exist as authoritative discourses that not only govern local discourses but also the subsequent academic literature. In this effort of rethinking about these authoritative discourses, Scott suggests we turn to the question of how "historically specific local discourses come to be produced and maintained as authoritative" (1994: xxi).

In my view, directing attention to elaborating authoritative discourse(s) and the conditions that enabled them to be authoritative discourses helps us to clear a conceptual space in which to think about historically produced configurations of knowledge and power. These may be theoretical efforts –anthropological, historical or philosophical – or local discourses such as nationalist claims (of "Indian culture," "Buddhist nation," or "Burman nation"). In other words, if we are to understand the legitimacy of authoritative discourses and their shifting relations, we need to locate the conditions that enable them and how (e.g. nationalist) power altered the terrain on which legitimacy/ resistance was possible in the first place. Rather than attempting to overthrow colonialism (or the West), or to decolonize the West's representation of the non-West, what is important for this present is a critical interrogation of the practices, modalities, and projects through which authoritative discourses (say for instance, nationalist) inserted themselves into and layered the lives of the people. In this study, I have set out to carry out such a task as it provides a critical point of entry to talk about how citizens engage with power and authorize particular discourses and configure particular subjectivities.

I demonstrate modestly some of the ways in which certain authoritative claims are established in the name of *sampradaya*, in which people find the legitimacy to decide what counts as violence and what does not. That is, to demonstrate how people legitimize their present claims about community (in this case Sinhala Buddhists) and conditions of possibility that enable their authoritative claims and maintain them as authoritative. Here I will turn to the conceptual and material space that people find their legitimacy for their authoritative claims about the past: *sampradaya,* one's inherited language and acquisition of embodied practices and abilities by repetition. *Sampradaya* can be translated as "tradition," in a way commensurate with Talal Asad's rethinking of Egyptian politics and Islamic tradition in "Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today" (2015). While he has written much about it before and after, the essay constitutes, in my understanding, the most general framing of what he meant by tradition in his scholarship, which he outlined in the following way:

> I have used the term tradition in my writings in two ways: first, as a theoretical location for raising questions about authority, time, language use, and embodiment; and second, as an empirical arrangement in which discursivity and materiality are connected through the minutiae of everyday living. The discursive aspect of tradition is primarily a matter of linguistic acts passed down the generations as part of a form of life, a process in which one learns and relearns how to do things with words, sometimes reflectively and sometimes unthinkingly, and learns and relearns how to comport one's body and how to feel in particular contexts. Embodied practices help in the acquisition of aptitudes, sensibilities, and propensities through repetition until such time as the language guiding practice becomes redundant (2015:166).

As I understand him, Asad's central concern here is to show the *force* of tradition. People invoke it not only to assess their claims of past, present and future, but also to establish the authority of these claims. While MacIntyre proposes to reject groundings in "tradition" altogether on genealogical grounds, Asad says "its ground is today, the place from which one thinks on the difference between time present and time past and aspires to future time" (2015: 168). It is to this ground that people turn to legitimize their authoritative claims. To state this point differently, the authority of a tradition can be understood as what Marcel Mauss calls *habitus*, "an embodied capacity that is more than physical ability in that it also includes cultivated sensibilities and passions, an orchestration of the senses" (Asad 2003: 95). In other words, "habitus is not something one accepts or rejects, it is part of what one essentially is and must do" (2003: 96). Hence it is easy for people to legitimize their acts in the name of protecting the past because its authority is learned and tested.

Indeed, Asad goes on to say "tradition is to be given" (2015: 168) which I do not necessarily follow. For me, traditions are not given, it evolves but people who live in it take them as given. To be clear, the specific kind of knowledge about past, identity, native, myths, history is contingently authorized and does not remain as ready-made concepts or categories either for scholars or for locals to draw from. I here think of Ananda Abeysekara's influential suggestion in *Colors of Robe* (2012) that what counts as "Buddhism," "tradition" "difference," and what does not, is reliant on the political field and is made possible by different "minute contingent conjunctures" (2012: 3). We must understand such conjunctures to understand the formation and deformation of authoritative discourses of these categories. I readily endorse Abeysekara's suggestion that authoritative discourses are "made possible by and centrally visible by altering conjunctures of discourses and debates," giving priority to politics, as his framing allows me to

sustain a criticism of the hegemony of nationalism that "seek[s] to totalize and essentialize the identity of religion, tradition, nation, and so forth" (2012: 15). However, I insist on a crucial difference that enables me to think of how groups authorized certain claims as legitimate. Abeysekara writes that "the competing discourses that seek to foreground such definitions often do so in order to take precedence over formally authoritative discourses defining the terms and parameters of religion and difference" (2012: 3). It seems to me that if we say that authoritative discourse takes "precedence over formally authoritative discourse," it ignores the prior conceptualization carried out in the name of tradition or *sampradaya*. The new authoritative discourse inherits certain embodied sentiments of the past that do not necessarily fade away by the act of competing discourses that seek to establish its authority. For instance, certain privileges a monk would enjoy would not easily fade away as long as Buddhism exists as an institution and maintains state patronage for its existence.

What I want to point out here can be explained through particular arguments embedded within a postcolonial literature on colonial *influence* on the colonized, particularly in relation to South Asia. Certainly unmasking the persisting economy of colonial discourse and its continuous influence on locals has been central to the vast majority of the work on new forms of Buddhism and monastic activism, and their relationship to the governance of the country. However, I argue this preoccupation with the question of "influence" is problematic because it is grounded in a set of assumptions about what did or did not constitute influence. In other words, ideas about "influence" perhaps also assume stability/essence or core.

The most noteworthy example is the notion of "protestant Buddhism" developed by Gananath Obeyesekere and (later) Richard Gombrich. They use this term to describe the transformations and reinterpretations of Theravada Buddhism which occurred concomitant with

the power transition from British colonialism to the elites of Ceylon, an analysis which has guided many scholars in grappling with twentieth-century Sri Lankan politics. In this period, Buddhists remodeled Buddhism on Protestant models; not only because it is a protest against Christianity and its associated pre-independence Western political dominance, but because the existing Buddhism lacked formal modern organizational apparatus (Obeyesekere 1970: 46). Noting the encounter between Buddhists and Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka, they argue that the introduction of institutional and behavioral changes – such as new sexual moralities, monogamous marriage ideals, divorce rules, missionary public school systems, the "pastoral" role of the monk and the establishment of the Young Men Buddhist Association and many other new styles of practice – emulated Christian models.

H.L. Seneviratne's (1999) study of "modern Buddhism" draws on this work, and on others who followed this conceptual formulation. Linking the transformations with, specifically nationalism, politics and Buddhism, he developed a detailed account of Buddhist monks' and lay leaders like Anagarika Dharmapala's new role in reviving the Sinhala Buddhist imagination. It was monks, none other, Seneviratne argues, that were central to the formation of the modern Buddhist state.[4] He argues "in the absence of a king, no central authority emerges, and the polity seems to consist of conglomerations of innumerable village theocracies, where the monk, though not a ruler, is still the most important and benevolent leader, a little king" (1999: 32). Dharmapala deployed the monks to carry out certain tasks that not only relate to Buddhism that make lay people aware of Dhamma, but also a guidance to a higher standard of living. Monks were missionaries, carrying out the pervasive reform in habits and practices that was necessary to

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[4] See Anne Blackburn's critique of the terms such as "revival" and "nation" in *Locations of Buddhism*: *colonialism and modernity in Sri Lanka,* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 2010.

establish a modern nation of Sri Lanka in which "Sinhala customs, manners, language thoughtways, dress, and food were the norm" (1999: 36). Seneviratne writes that the ideal society Dharmapala imagined was to be established within a specific economic and cultural framework, that of Buddhist morality. It was "amounts to nothing less than a revival of the traditional Sinhala social order in all aspects" and invention of a new religion (1999:56). Note here that Seneviratne contradicts his own argument: if it was a revival, what was there to be invented? However, what these scholars are trying to argue is that it is this rather recent authoritative discourses—developed from the late 19th century— that monks and their supporters pointed towards to claim their duty to protect the country, religion, and nation from the dawn of the Sinhala nation. Likewise those who follow this line of epistemological inquiry to foreground the changes and shifts in Buddhism and Buddhist activism have argued that the colonialism and programs of modernization in the nineteenth century have profoundly transformed the social condition thus Buddhist tradition prior to British rule.

I do not entirely disagree with this view. By this I mean that I can readily agree that the transformations of Buddhism are not only influenced by but responded to the existing form of authoritative discourses, including forms of Christian and colonial discourse. My aim is not to criticize the use of concepts such as modern Buddhism or Protestant Buddhism. Rather, it is to discuss a set of conceptual problems and kinds of questions about tradition and the present that they open up: Locals reinvented Buddhism under colonial and post colonial conditions for new forms of power, new modes of social organization and political mobilization. And yet the idea that these conditions were completely able to displace or fade away the existing authoritative discourses (in this case practices of Buddhist tradition) are not so convincing. In other words, the narrative story of "modernized Buddhism" through the threshold of colonial modernity opens to

the question: is the colonial condition able to alter the entire social sphere to establish in their

place an entirely new authoritative discourse in which the existing thoughtways itself of any

practice was redefined? Indeed this question has been asked and answered in varying degrees by

the scholars who responded to the challenge issued by the work that followed the conceptual

model of "Protestant Buddhism," and "modern Buddhism."[5]

What I am after here is Anne Blackburn's criticism in *Locations of Buddhism* (2010) for

these conceptual frameworks. She argues that the arguments such as "the familiar horizons of

knowledge and social practice were washed away—leading to the adoption of new practices and

points of orientation" during the colonial period restrict our line of vision of intellectual inquiries

on new orientation of Buddhist social organization and religious practice unnecessarily (2010:

200). Critiquing the studies that understood "colonial-period Lankan Buddhists' collectives, in

terms of historically ill-defined Sinhala and Buddhist identities" (2010: 210), she argues that

most of the monks' social actions are not undertaken from positions as "Sinhala" and

"Buddhist," rather, "to a shifting congeries of collectives operating at different levels of

classifications and self-description, both narrower and wider than those of 'Sinhala and

'Buddhist'" (2010: 210). Hence she suggests that one must attend to the "locative pluralism" of

the persons whose histories and contexts we seek to apprehend (2010: 210). Blackburn states that

we can choose to examine spheres of intellectual and social activity in terms of their logics and

strategies: "locative pluralism, acting simultaneously in relation to plural and shifting collectives

of belonging to which they feel a sense of responsibility and emotional investment" (2010: 210).

In short, she goes on to argue, following scholars such as Charles Hallisey and Sumit Sarkar that

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[5] See Kitsiri Malalgoda, Buddhism in Sinhalese Society for an excellent analysis of story about the relation between religion and colonialism and, by extension, between religion and modernity in Sri Lanka. See also John Clifford Holt, "Sri Lanka's Protestant Buddhism?" Ethnic Studies Report vol 8:2. 1990: 1-8.

the idea of an "unprecedented sea change in Buddhist practice during colonial period," that many

scholars assumed under the categories "Buddhist modernism," "Buddhist revival," and

"Protestant Buddhism," is problematic because it leaves a little if any analytical space remaining

to explore "the long standing social logics, power relations, and sources of intellectual and

psychological comfort and stability" in a given society (2010: 200-201). As I read her,

Blackburn's central argument is that the preoccupation with social change conceived of at a high

level of generality and abstraction but also as comprehensive, *freezes* the plurality of possibilities

of searching out the question of how historically specific local discourses come to be produced

and maintained as authoritative.

I find Blackburn's remarks penetrating. She calls us to go beyond the suggested

authoritative discourses that some scholars have taken for granted, for instance, scholars like

H.L. Seneviratne and Gananth Obeyesekere's use of terms like "revival," "modern Buddhism",

"protestant Buddhism" and to reveal the 'shifting' and 'plural' nature of the context within which

they take place, which is, in my view, politically and epistemologically valuable. The critique

unites several key texts that present a narrative of time and life in premodern and modern

Buddhism by distinguished scholars such as Charles Hallisey (1994), John Holt (1991), Alicia

Turner (2014), Juliane Schober and Steven Collins (2017). These texts generally question the

limitations of attributing the temporal changes of Buddhist encounters with modernity to, for

instance, "Protestant Buddhism," which "glosses this encounter as a uniform and uni-directional

set of developments" (Schober and Collins 2017: 15). Their detailed analyses are not the same,

but their work calls for a rethinking of the historical trajectory of Sri Lankan history not as one

structured by "responses" to colonialism but as a context "emphatically marked" by the presence

of colonial rule (Blackburn 2010: 201).

Some of the general significance of this form of narrative of Buddhism and its changes and resistances can be seen as a critique of Eurocentrism. Unlike other major colonial and postcolonial narratives, this narrative does not centrally privilege the "west" as the Subject of History and initiates a voiceless third world subject. As Gayatri Spivak suggested, one could argue that scholarly attempts of this sort are a project of being conscious of the "epistemic violence of knowledge production" of colonialism. She goes on to say intellectuals who are interested in hegemonic accounts of history should be conscious of the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history. Spivak writes it is not to describe "'the way things really were' or to privilege the narrative of imperialism [colonialists] as the best version of history. It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (2004: 76). In my dissertation, I will show how certain discourses such as *Sinhalese Buddhists are in danger* [Sinhala Bauddhayin anathure]*, Buddhism is in danger* [Bududahama anathure]*, Buddhism is vanishing from the earth* [Bududahama me polaven nathi vee yanava], and *Muslims are taking over the state* [Muslim aya rata allanava] have been established as the reality.

Now at the risk of restating the obvious, I should note here what is important for me are above scholars' calls to question the limitations of single authoritative discourses, which promise to tell a conceptually coherent unified story about the link between Buddhism and historical change and the question of influence. However, I want to point out that not only are the scholars who use the concept of "Protestant Buddhism" to analyze the temporality of change grounded on a problematic assumption about the distinction between Buddhism and modernity or past and the present; but their critiques' logic is also governed by the same assumption which precludes us from thinking about the coherence of a discursive tradition and its authority. In other words, new

traditions emerged but they are discursive. It inherits languages and acquires embodied abilities by repetition (Asad n.d.). So new traditions are not new in the sense that they are *completely separated* from the previous tradition which they understand to be they were part of. Even during a reform proposed, someone who is part of that tradition knows what is essential to it.

It is important to note here that I focused on scholarship on colonialism as part of setting up a study of the contemporary world as Sri Lanka was a British colony and colonialism has played a fundamental role in shaping its destiny materially, and "colonial knowledge production" has become central to the discussion of the changes in Buddhism and monks' role in politics. So my task is not to critique or describe intellectual and social responses to colonialism or *decolonize* colonial knowledge of religious change. Rather, my inquiry is on the relation between Buddhist activism and violence against minority communities in contemporary Sri Lanka. In the light of thinking about the above discussion on embodied tradition or discursive tradition, and in thinking about the transformation of Buddhism and its relationship to politics, I attend to local authoritative discourses in their present moments. What I am proposing here is that to understand events and processes of Buddhist activism—whether in the premodern or contemporary period— we must turn to the micro-level examination of an individual's sense of problems and possibilities and their location in a given society. It is also important to turn to how their actions are shaped by context specific possibilities laid out by the institutional development, including the political competition for access to status, resources and patronage. More generally, one needs to attend to the discursive economy of the present socio-political context in which authoritative discourses are produced. Recent emergent "religious" "militant" groups are creating new discourses, but they simultaneously establish hegemonic ideologies that count as *sampradaya* in which they locate their foundation to legitimize their practices and claims. That is, knowledge

about what constitutes one's *sampradaya*, the "truth" of its claims, is produced in relation to and authorized by the past. In other words, new discourses are simultaneously established as hegemonic ideologies because the new discourse legitimize their practices and claims in the name and truth of sampradaya. In this sense, the "truth" of what is claimed in the present is produced in relation to and authorized by the past.

Now at the risk of restating the obvious, I do not, of course, claim that something called '*sampradaya*' and its authoritative claims essentially remain the same forever, or that we should take them at their face value. They are, indeed, whether in theoretical practices or local practices (such as authoritative claims of Sinhala nationalist superiority that justifies violence against Muslims and Tamils) historically produced configurations of knowledge and power under various epistemic and ideological conditions at different social and political conjunctures.

Deconstruction of these authoritative narratives has been the task of scholarly projects (namely critiques of colonialism, critiques of Eurocentrism, and critiques of chauvinism) for decades now. Something of the general significance of the emergence of deauthorizing the hegemonic narrative of nationalists can be framed or as Scott frames it, "problem of the "past" in the "present." More specifically, it can be found in the ways in which "the-truth-about-the past is mobilized to guarantee cultural-political claims in the present" (1999: 18). For instance, it can be found in the words of R.A.L.H. Gunawardena when he writes "the historian who undertakes an inquiry of this type [evolution of group identities and of ideologies] must constantly keep in mind that group consciousness, like all ideology, is historically determined and historically limited" (1990: 45).[6] Since Gunawardena, a number of scholars have set their task to dismantle the contemporary form of authoritative claims of the present and their justification of the past.

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[6] In his essay, "The People of the Lion," first published in 1979, he begins with an exercise in historical reconstruction of Sinhala identity and the assumption that they are [people of the lion] descended from the Aryan race. He goes on to argue that the race

Particularly in the decades that followed 1983 Sinhala-Buddhist riots, the 'violence' against Tamils, concerned Sri Lankan scholars grappled with the question of authoritative claims of Sinhalese identity and Buddhism. In other words, disarming the authoritative claims of Sinhalese and Buddhism and finding solutions to violence became a mission of many scholars.[7] I here think of a volume of essays, *Ethnicity and Social Change* (1984) as one of many examples of this type. The volume editors say, "we have now seen that the ideological and economic forces behind ethnic conflict can lead to savagery that puts in question the very civilizations we call ourselves heirs to. It is our hope that the papers in this volume will at least force some of the exponents of Sinhala and Tamil nationalism to look more closely at the myths, misinterpretations and misunderstandings that have nourished their ideologies" (1984).[8] The scholars here painstakingly endeavor to show that Sinhala claims of superiority are empirically unfounded and some traditions such as "Mahavamsa-Pujavali tradition" that people draw on to find the legitimacy for their claims need to be read in relation to the historical contexts in which these texts were written. The volume persuasively demonstrates that authoritative claims of continuous Sinhala identity consist of ruptures and discontinuities, and that they are not essential or natural but were constructed at varying times and in varying contexts. This creates a conceptual ground from which to argue that nationalists' historical claims are untenable.

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concept has a recent origin date only from about the sixteenth century hence the contemporary view of Sinhalese is a "view of the past molded by contemporary ideology" (1999: 45).

[7] In one of his influential texts, Sri Lanka: *Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* 1986, S.J. Tambiah explaining the causes of the riots of July, argued that the task of "imaginative" and "liberated' scholars of Sri Lankan history and Buddhism is to find archaeological and other forms of evidence and "deconstruct" the Sinhalese claims that they are a pure, unmixed Aryan (Buddhist) race (1986: 6-7). Readily endorsing Tambiah's suggestion, anthropologist Bruce Kapferer presents his work "culture of violence" in Sri Lanka as such a deconstructive project (1988: 22). For the decades that follow, "Buddhism," "violence," and "Buddhist monks" became the dominant objects of disciplinary inquiries and the violence, particularly in the context of 1977 open economic policies. It enabled the island as a "terrain of violence" (as Pradeep Jeganathan has put it) for the disciplinary inquiries that witnessed a mountain of scholarly writings (both Western and non-Western).

[8] C.f. David Scott 1994: 100. The quotations are from the unpaginated introduction of Ethnicity and Social Change (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1984).

But what I find problematic in these projects of deauthorizing or dehistoricizing chauvinistic claims is that their theoretical arguments are played out in the same epistemic terrain as those they oppose, namely Sinhala nationalist claims about the Buddhist nation or continuous Buddhist identity. They both turn to history for the legitimacy of their claims and limit the question to a matter of who is right and who is wrong about the past. Through this conceptualization of history, on one hand they have yielded a theoretical space for national ideologues to reassure their claims with "irrefutable" facts and on the other they have outrooted the authoritative claims from the politics of the present. Perhaps one could argue that the scholars and the nationalists, as Scott noted in his critique on this form of "historicism," repeat "the modernist dream, so naturalized since Hegel, so politically correct since Marx, that history can somehow redeem us, save us from ourselves" (1999: 104). What I seek to point out is not that deauthorizing nationalist discourses is ineffective in disarming authoritative claims. Rather my point is that playing out in the same terrain does not yield a strategic solution. Rather, it plunges us into an abyss of arguments about who is right and who is wrong. It is my contention that deauthorizing can do nothing much to the authoritative claims of the present. In other words, engaging with the nationalists' claims of the past is a form of accepting their claims as legitimate to be engaged with. So my proposal to attend to the present and how people produce these authoritative discourses and on what grounds and maintain them as authoritative is to make our analysis invulnerable to history and refuse to be governed by their claims on the past.

Further, I want to note here that if we cannot find our answers in history or in the past, we also cannot find them in the state power. Let me elaborate on this point: What is noticeable in this disarming authoritative claims of scholarly work is that many attributed the politics of monks or their violence against minority communities to the state or considered it as a political

and institutional failure of the state. Seneviratne pointed out, for instance, the articulation of a theory of "the Buddhist State" by scholars like Bechert and Tambiah is recent and indeed it followed an unprecedented turn of events in the history of Sri Lanka state formation, particularly after the Sri Lankan general election of 1956. Also, concerning with violence as something opposed to the Buddhist doctrine of "nonviolence," anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere argues that it is not "Buddhism" but "Buddhist history" that justifies violence that he calls a "dark underside," specifically which he refers to as the institutionalization of Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1984; 1995: 233-234). While seemingly presupposing a form of "essential" Buddhism, these scholars also attributed the institutionalization of Buddhism, or the violence that went along with these changes, to the effects of politics— a set of practices that aim for social order. Further, this notion of the 'problem of politics' seems to me presupposing the need for more violent institutional mechanisms to control the violent masses as the colonial government did, treacherously controlling the violent acts by killing, shooting, crushing, and arresting not only those involved but also those not involved.[9] Some also seem to reduce Asian modernity to a project that is failed or on their way to be achieved (Tambiah 1987; Jeganathan 1993) while some scholars have explained Buddhist violence not as a historically contingent condition but rather as evidence of a violent essence at the core of Buddhism itself (Juergensmeyer 2003; Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010).

The limits of this 'political' analysis on 'political violence'— the rise of 'cultural passions' to use Mahmood Mamdani's term— that cut across, rather than between, social classes are becoming clearer in the face of growing mass involvement in violent acts against 'cultural' and 'political' 'others'. For instance, almost everywhere in the world, the violence against

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[9] The 1915 riots controlled by implementing martial law for three months. See Tarzie Vittachi, Emergency, 1958: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots, (London, Andre Deutch) 1958 for a comprehensive account of the riots.

'others' is on the rise. Many who have tried to understand this phenomenon have attributed violence as a problem of state formation as the state has not been able to prevent them. That is, their analyses have understood violence, the conflict, the 'terror' not in terms of its 'presence' among the masses, but in terms of the desire to 'prevent' or 'control.' thus given its historical weight or as Pradeep Jeganathan described 'incomprehensibility' of violence, the nature or the unassailability of violence to the state apparatus. Inscribing 'violence' into the very nature of the state makes it into an 'ill potential' inherent in the state. It presupposes an historical order according to which violent acts did not exist prior to the state and in a logical order, so we cannot examine violent acts without direct and joint reference to the state. Of course, I am not suggesting the other way around. Rather, my ethnographic work shows if we are come to analytical grips with the spread of mass support against what is decried as "Muslim expansionism" in Sri Lanka, we must recognize that the emergence of contemporary movements against cultural or political identities[10] is not a failure of the state or its strength. Instead, it is an effect of the contingent nature and the power dynamics between these movements and the state practices. In this sense, although my work is theoretical in nature, it is also political as it stipulates that we must turn to the masses and their practices if we are to avoid the dangers of violence acts of these groups against other minority communities.

Organizing Arguments: *de facto* **Sovereigns, Violence and Economy**

In light of above theoretical exploration, I respond to two levels of questions: First, how, and *through what* kinds of practices, discourses, and persons, are distinctive authoritative claims established? And second, how and through what does one find political legitimacy for their

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[10] See for the formation of political identity defining through legal self. Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

authorized claims? I answer these questions in relation to a particular ethnographic enquiry, the emergence of Sinhala Buddhist movements against Muslims, particularly led by Buddhist monks with their demand to be sovereign in Sri Lanka. In other words, I examine how post-colonial religious ultra-nationalist discourses emerged and are imagined and contested in spaces in which Buddhists are the majority. Soon after the end of Sri Lanka's thirty years of civil war in May 2009—waged partly on ethnic grounds between a majority Sinhala state and Tamil militant organizations— Sinhala ultra-nationalist groups, led by Buddhist monks, started to characterize the island's Muslim minority population as terrorists. These groups shared a collective perception that reduces Muslim businesses, and Muslim cultural practices, to expressions of Muslim fundamentalist terror. For instance, on January 24, 2013 'No Halal' protests appeared overnight throughout the country. Halal, an Islamic religious practice, had been part of the tapestry of the country's religious pluralism until this recent wave of attacks (I turn to this in more detail in chapter four). The icon of the ultra-nationalist group Sinha Le (literally, 'Lion's Blood') has appeared with increasing prominence in public spaces (T-shirts, bumper stickers, pilgrimage sites, TV, videos, Facebook posts), and members of the organization have been vociferous in denouncing the visibility of Islamic cultural practices like halal, hijab, and animal slaughter. With these actions they stoke fear and claim their willingness to die and kill for the cause of combating anticipated "Muslim terror," a declaration that defies the prohibition of killing, a fundamental Buddhist *vinaya* (discipline) rule. In short, monks in Sri Lanka attack Muslims, legitimize their violence, and by doing so often, not always, interrupt state sovereignty. In this context, I ask how one understands how these monks' actions that often engage with violence interrupts the social order but also authorizes certain people with power?

The expanding body of academic literature on 'religious' politics and popular religious movements has drawn attention to issues of state sovereignty: its increased assertion within social life, and its growing monopoly on politics, in what Agrama (2012) calls the "problem-space of secularism" (see further Agamben 1998, 2005; Bernstein 2013; Fiskesjö 2003; Schonthal 2016b; Wallenstein 2007). These concerns on sovereignty in anthropological and political science literature have turned our attention to de facto sovereigns, or those with "the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 295). Consider for example, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat's recent attempt at rethinking the concept of sovereignty in the post colonial societies:

> abandon sovereignty as an ontological ground of power and order, expressed in law or in enduring ideas of legitimate rule, in favor of a view of sovereignty as a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighborhood to the summit of the state" (2006: 297).

Their proposal is important because it questions the privilege that is attributed to legal states. In other words, they want to divest the studies of "sovereignty" from law and move them toward "exploring more quotidian notions of justice, of 'legal consciousness,' and of punishment as they occur in everyday life" (2006: 297). These quotidian notions of justice are visible when monks' violence is not intervened in by the police. Their existence as a traditionally authorized force has left the state apparatus highly vulnerable. Here, using their authority, monks as an ethno-religious and local loyalties claim sovereignty in the legal sense, as in the legitimate right to govern, while also establishing them as de facto sovereigns—those who have rights over life, to

protect or to kill with impunity. I examine in what follows some openings and closures brought about by modern concepts of sovereign violence and political practice which help us think about authorities of monks in politics.

Return to conceptualizing the question of sovereignty is often occurs via Georgio Agamben's writings on banished life (*homo sacer*) and "bare life," the included outside upon which a society constitutes itself and its moral order. As he shows, the modern citizen has been included in the political community in this nature as a body with a multitude of rights by virtue, and as a biological body that can be stripped away from all rights and reduced to "bare life." Agamben argues that this latter power of the sovereign is expressed in its ultimate terms in concentration camps: in Spanish colonial Cuba; in British colonial South Africa; and in the US-run Guantánamo Bay prisons (Agamben 1998).[11] A great deal has been said about state sovereignty, and the threats and challenges that it has imposed on the masses.

My purpose is, however, not to review this already complex literature, but to come at the problem of sovereign violence from a different perspective; one contrary to the that which treats sovereign violence as something practiced on others, on the bodies of enemies. The sovereign violence that I focus on is not only about the state practicing life and death over others, but also about non-state actors performing death on one's own being.

I conceive the relationship between violence and sovereignty following J.A. Mbembe's "necropolitics" — subjugating life to the power of death. Mbembe built on Georges Bataille's conceptualization of sovereignty as a willingness to disregard the limits that the fear of death is done away with, that is to disregard one's body and one's own life (Bataille 1991). Bataille offers critical insights into death to engage with the concept of sovereignty. If death is the limit

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[11] See further Magnus Fiskesjö's *The Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon, the Death of Teddy's Bear, and the Sovereign Exception of Guantánamo*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 2003.

that defines life and if it holds great significance as a means to truth as in Hegelian terms,

Bataille locates death outside of the domain of meaning or reasoning. For Bataille, the sovereign

world is the world that one imagines life beyond utility—the domain of sovereignty. Death

belongs to the realm of absolute expenditure which constitutes the destruction, suppression, and

sacrifice, the acts that cannot be irreversible. This being the case, Bataille argues that the

sovereign world is the world in which

> the limit of death is done away with. Death is present in it, its presence defines that world
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> of violence, but while death is present in it, it is always there to be negated, never for
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> anything but that. The sovereign is he who is, as if death were not… He has no more
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> regard for the limits of identity that he does for limits of death, or rather these limits are
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> the same; he is the transgression of all such limits (Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds.
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> 1997: 318-319).

Building on Bataille, Mbembe seeks to avoid the normative sense of biopower that

explored its relation to sovereignty in terms of "state of exception" — the suspension of law and

order and conventions rendering a conceptual and ethical center from where the norms and moral

and legal order can be constituted.[12] Mbembe suggests that "modernity is at the origin of

multiple concepts of sovereignty," but he criticizes scholars for disregarding this multiplicity and

privileging normative theories of democracy. Further critiquing their attempt of making "reason"

as the mastery of sovereign power, Mbembe demands that we abandon reason as the subject's

truth and "look to other foundational categories that are less abstract and more tangible, such as

life and death" (2019: 68). It is a suggestion to look into politics that are not bound by the

dialectical movement of reason. It is the political exercise that transcends the limits of life, the

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[12] See Hannah Arendt, Georgio Agamben, and Magnus Fiskesjo for an empirical and philosophical discussion on
sovereign violence in relation to Nazism, totalitarianism, and the concentration/ extermination camps.

sacrifice of the body in terms of hunger strike (see Arextaga 1997) or fasting in the ultimate

sense that authorized a sovereign and power of sovereignty. It is the one who uses his or her

body as a weapon that authorized this form of sovereignty in what Mbembe calls modern

"necropolitics."

Here in seeking to conceptualize modern sovereignty as a will to disregard one's body or

one's own life, I do not imply that hunger strike or fasting is not violence. Such a view follows

the political legacy (and moral legitimacy) of Gandhian *nonviolence*. It is also led by prominent

scholars that conceptualized violence as purely and simply the moments of extraordinary

practices, enactment of physical destruction that involve human life and property. This notion is

evident in most anthropological and historical scholarship that sees "violence" in Sinhala society

as a product of a "breakdown of everyday restraint," "impulsive," "unpremeditated" action

(Spencer 1990: 614) or it is a result of ritual practices such as 'demon worship' among

Buddhists, a darker underside of Buddhism (Kapferer 1983). Some read it as an 'furious

eruption' of "irrational actions, a product of insecurity over personal status" (Rogers 1987a:

153). This conceptualization takes the category of violence to be self-evident and obvious.

However, as Allen Feldman suggested, if we need to understand the "political technology

of the body" we must turn to the "cultural construction of violence" (1991: 221). Feldman states

that though many viewed the 1981 Hunger Strike in Ireland as similar,[13] on the surface level, to

the "nonviolent and pacifist protests associated with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the Hunger

Strike in the H-Blocks was not a pacifist or religious action. For the Blanketmen, the 1982

Hunger Strike involved none of the moral superiority or obligations of a turn away from

violence. It was to be a prelude to violence (Feldman 1991: 220).

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[13] The 1981 Hunger Strike in the Maze prison is a five day protest that led with intercommunal rioting of 1969 in Northern Ireland. Blanketmen are the prison protesters that refused to wear prison uniforms.

He further writes, for the prisoners, it was a "modality of insurrectionary violence in which they deployed their bodies as weapons" (1991: 220). Then it is crucial to understand that what counts as violence, and what does not, depends on how certain acts are authorized by different people based on their *moral economy*. Similarly, Arextaga also reminds us of the importance of turning to emotional moves, enabled by one's narrative of history, to justify people's fight for their dignity with the last weapons left to them, "their bodies and their lives."

> For the hunger strikers, fellow prisoners, and many of their supporters, history constituted as much a moral narrative as an existential predicament. As narrative, the past gave meaning to the present; it legitimized politics and charged actions with emotional power. As existential predicament, the prisoners perceived themselves as embodying the history of their country, and as such, their actions effected as much the existence of the nation as individual lives. Consequently the hunger strike as a ritual of redemption was intended to bring an end to the suffering of the prisoners and, insofar as the prisoners were the embodiment of the nation, to terminate the suffering of Ireland under British rule (1997: 81).

So it is to the historical agents and their complex motives and sensibilities behind the violent acts one must turn to understanding the motives behind violence and how they have legitimized their actions using an embodied tradition in what E.P. Thompson described as "moral economy." These motives are "grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations" of several parties within a community in which a certain group finds legitimacy for their political activities. In his work, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), Thompson sought to remap the meaning of the term "riot," contrary to the popular notion of it as "distressed" behaviors of "the unruly tinners." On this account, riots are

not merely random eruptions or spasmodic. Rather, they are the continuous production of social processes in which certain forces, values and social norms are constituted. They operated within "popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices" (1971: 79). What Thompson is attempting here, it is important to note for our discussion about legitimacy of violent acts, is a subtle move from a view of "riots as spasmodic" to a view of "crowd action" as a representation of a moral economy. This moral economy is a notion of legitimacy that governs the institutions and thought processes of a given community. Instructed by this view of 'riots,' my purpose of this dissertation is to locate an answer to what and how crowd actions, protests, violence, and practices are legitimized or illegitimized in a given community.

In other words, I derive a question from this conceptualization of collective actions: First: how, and through what kinds of mechanisms, bodily technologies and practices, and in what kinds of state institutions and their supports, have monks and Buddhist activists established and authorized new visions for the country? Put it differently; through what kinds of practices, legitimized through what kinds of discourses, and how within these discourses do they gain authority for their distinctive demands? In an attempt at answering these questions, I show how Buddhist monks and Buddhist activists perceive themselves as embodying a continuous past of Sri Lankan history, and as such, their actions radically refashion the politics of contemporary Sri Lanka. My work is in no way an attempt to justify what Buddhists do in the name of protecting their *sampradaya,* or their country from the imagined threat of Muslims, for instance their willingness to die. Rather, I demonstrate the ways in which diverse persons establish certain practices, authoritative discourses, and institutions, and legitimize their practices within their *sampradaya*. Their activities to foreground a new vision for the country, most often merged a

totalitarian ideology and set of expectations that erase normative boundaries between the violence and the nonviolent, the secular and sacred.

Further, the refashioning of Sri Lanka with their new visions also appeals materially responding to neoliberal economic policies, a phase that coincided with loosening of state control over public life. Neoliberal policies have dismantled social welfare in post-colonial countries like India and Sri Lanka, increasing and aggravating class contradictions, and thereby further distancing the state from the people and their collective existence (Alavi 1972; Bastian 2013; Kadirgamar 2016). Addressing privatization and marketization policies of governments has become part of recent militant movements' techniques and process through which they produce authoritative discourses that involve violence against others. That is, discourses such as that there is a duty to protect the country against the imminent threat is produced in relation to, measured against, the other— persons, practices, and institutions. Thinkers such as Talal Asad and Rajesh Venugopal have proposed some provocative ways of conceiving the relationship between the emergence of authoritative discourses and neoliberal economic policies. They suggest that, contrary to popular arguments that violence or 'religious revival' are unintended consequences of market liberalization (what Asad called 'economic distress explanation'), or that violence is intentionally designed to implement economic reforms, any attempt to formulate a plausible hypothesis linking violence to economic reforms has to move away from making "a simple, reductive, testable cause-effect sequence" between economic distress and violence (Venugopal 2018: 81). What interests me in thinking about the relationship between violence and market reforms as a complicated interaction between (internal and external) political, economic, and ideological forces is that it allows me to look into the *peculiarities* of a society which aggravated this relationship. It is to suggest moving away from the meta-narratives or meta-arguments that

do not take into consideration the particular formation of a country, for instance. Every society has their own ways of organizing their way of life. It is our duty as scholars to look into these particular formations. In other words, it is a suggestion to look into how certain authoritative discourses with their aspirations and sensibilities appeal to the masses in the midst of this specific condition of political economy.

Asad proposes that we understand deteriorating social conditions "as the objects of a diverse and evolving religious discourse [even with its militant forms] that engages these conditions and gives them political force" (2014: 88). It is not that those who are part of an authoritative discourse exploit the conditions of social discontent for violence. Rather, their engagement with these conditions is central to one's tradition— "albeit in different ways in different classes" (2014: 86). Similarly, Venugopal in his *Nationalism, Development and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* proposes to look for the *universe of political morality*, an economy hinged on the role of the state in promoting social justice, to understand the relationship between violence and the market reform agenda that increases the space of the capitalist economy and diminishes that of the state (2018: 82). That is, any neoliberal attempt that disrupts this moral universe must give away the democratic values of a given country (see also Herbst 1993; Przeworski 1991; Gilmore & Gilmore 2007). It is important to note here that they both suggest that to understand the violence that accompanies economic reforms one needs to turn towards the complex formation of particularities of a given society.

Following this conceptualization of the relationship between 'religious revival' and economic reforms, I discuss how recent movements in Sri Lanka respond to widespread ideas of insecurity, deprivation and poverty, and how their response was framed as a moral duty to protect Buddhism and country. They frame their processes and techniques as a part of being a

virtuous or good Buddhist [honda bawuddayek], but in a way that involves an act of othering (It is important to note here that the stereotypes of Muslims and the processes generating them deserve a separate study). It is usually accompanied by the essentializing assumption that Muslims represent/constitute/ something of an economically successful community, and that a major purpose of these programs is to ensure the conditions that enable the Sinhalese Buddhists' success, competing with and ideally overtaking what is seen a Muslim economic power.

In this sense, this study is a critical investigation of the contemporary formation of Buddhist authoritative discourses, with their associations with violence and religion, that forms an essential part of contemporary Sri Lankan culture. It answers the two levels of question I derive from the arena of theoretical conceptualizations of authoritative discourse, tradition, sovereignty, and sovereign violence, in relation to recent forms of Buddhist politics and to the economic conditions in Sri Lanka. It is left, then, only to discuss the project I undertake in these pages and how it relates to these theoretical inquiries.

To begin with, this is an ethnographic and archival study of recent Buddhist movements against Muslims in Sri Lanka. My study deals primarily with Buddhist monks, members of recent emergent ultra nationalist movements, and leaders of *Dayaka samithi* (donors' committee or temple societies) and *Mudalali samithi* (trade associations), including both men and women. I did participant-observation in temple sermons, village social meetings, and protests to gain an understanding of local sovereignties in practice at the local level where people not only engage in their nationalist politics, but also often preempt anticipated Muslim terror with their own violence. Since monks are in the leadership of the recent movements, I interviewed both monk and lay leaders who appropriate the rhetoric that Buddhism and the Sinhalese are under threat, as well as officials responsible for deploying state sovereign power. Research with these three

groups (leaders, state officials, and laity) unpacked how this violent form of Buddhism fits into the social order and why it is prominent at this historical juncture. In this sense, my research subjects are "culturally repugnant" groups that are commonly described in oppositional terms as fundamentalists, backward, and irrational (Harding 1991; Mahmood 2011).

Many I talked to explained their politics through/with reference to a particular view of the past. They use *sampradaya* as the last resort for their claims. They claimed that their stories of the past are true, and that it is written somewhere. As I discussed above, I do not believe that finding out who is right and who is wrong about the past answers the contemporary questions. But their emergence accompanied a certain political history which led me to look for archival materials for evidence. Hence I did some archival research to make myself familiar with this political and economic history of the country. The archival sources included newspapers and journals in Sinhala, Tamil, and English that report violence against Muslims; websites and social media pages of militant groups; interviews with leaders of militant Buddhist groups; press conferences; and police and military reports. I looked for past instances where militant Buddhism emerged in dialectical interaction between economic and political levels, in order to compare these instances to recent developments. I also looked for evidence of global discourses that have shaped militant Buddhism. I focused on patterns and distinctions to understand what makes contemporary militant Buddhism different in the neoliberal and post- 9/11 social order, and to trace a genealogy of social imaginaries that could have been carried through time and mobilized in the new historical moment. To find the similarities and contrasts in political discourse in ethnographic spaces, I focused on pivotal periods and violent incidents of post- colonial state formation in which Tamils or Muslims became the "other" of Sinhala collective consciousness: aftermath of the 1983 riots against Tamils (as there is not yet any scholarship that explores

Sinhalese perceptions); the emergence of the first monk-led political party in Sri Lanka (JHU, 2004); the 2014 riots against Muslims in Aluthgama; and the emergence of Sinha Le and Ravana Balaya. The archives also contain Muslim population demographics, and leaflets distributed by these movements against Muslim cultural practices as they are used for evidence to prove ultra-nationalists' claims. My archival work accomplished two things—it taught me about past cases my interlocutors referred to, and it allowed me to recognize both continuity and innovation in the historical record of modern/contemporary Sri Lanka. I engaged in textual analysis as one key method to examine public cultural narratives of the 'represented' militant Buddhism (Steinmetz 1999). Such analyses permitted me to tease out shifts and conjunctures in the (re)production of the perception of terror. I asked how these politics question state sovereignty and whether it creates a 'precarious secular state' in Sri Lanka as Agrama (2010) has argued in relation to religious violence in Egypt.

Anti-Muslim movements such as the one in Sri Lanka have also arisen in nearby Myanmar. These groups in both Sri Lanka and Myanmar share a fear of an imminent "Muslim takeover" by referring to countries like Afghanistan or Indonesia, places that had ostensibly once been Buddhist but which have become predominantly Muslim. In 2013, Sri Lankan Buddhists responded to the recent militant Buddhist movements in Myanmar by supporting a regional alliance against Muslims. Group leaders from both countries held a conference in Sri Lanka[14] to build partnerships in their pledge to combat what they see as an imminent threat to the Buddhist way of life.

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[14] The militant Burmese Buddhist monk leader Ashin Wirathu visited Sri Lanka as a special guest of a "conference" organized by the BBS that reportedly attracted some 4,000 monks. Wirathu is known for his role in inciting violence directed at the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, and was featured on the cover of the TIME magazine as "The Face of Buddhist Terror."

Historically, Sri Lanka and Myanmar have developed deep ties in their efforts to establish Theravada Buddhism, the 'great tradition' they have come to consider central to their social political order. However, regional specificities exist. As anthropologist Melford Spiro claims, the different expressions of Theravada Buddhism are not a condition of Buddhism itself, but are determined by the specific historical conditions of each society (Spiro 1982). Similarly, Collins and Schober suggests 'Theravada Buddhism,' must be understood in continuity and innovation of religious thought and practices that went through modernizing reforms in the nineteenth century in light of modern conditions (2012). It is my contention that a comparative analysis between Sri Lanka and Myanmar is a fruitful method by which we can make evident the distinctions between their respective configurations of Buddhists and the State particular to their own political history. For instance, in both countries, by virtue of their religious roles and economic privileges, Buddhist monks have exercised considerable power and influence but rarely have their interests prevailed over those of the monarch (Malalgoda 1976; Mendelson 1975). During the post-colonial independent governance, these countries gave foremost place to Buddhism in their Constitutions, formalizing its institutional guarantee.

In Burma, the state not only considered protecting Buddhism to be part of its work; it also developed an institutional mechanism to control the Sangha if they showed impious or violent behavior (Spiro 1982). In Sri Lanka such efforts to establish state sanctioned disciplinary regulations have been a continuous failure. I found this comparative angle pertinent during fieldwork. I spent six weeks conducting observations, collecting newspaper materials, and interviewing Buddhist intellectuals in Yangon, Myanmar, which led me to recognize narratives against Muslims that were also shared by Sri Lankan Buddhists. These observations helped to clarify areas of comparative investigation such as regional and historical similarities and

differences of violence against Muslims in Theravada Buddhist countries. Both countries were a British colony, but they both experienced different visions for democracy. Looking into these differences and similarities would reveal the nature of violence against minority communities in these countries.

While my research on Sinhala Buddhist violence is informed by studies on the Burmese Sangha and State and contemporary Buddhist violence (Tin Maung Maung Than 1988; Schissler 2017; Walton 2016; Walton, Matthew J and Susan Hayward 2014), it looks at how the contemporary movements and violence is managed and brought forth by different social forces, fiscal flows, and temporal political governance in Sri Lankan society (Hansen 1999). Through this understanding, I hope to show the various ways in which politics, the configurations of the Sangha as the self-proclaimed 'guardian of the nation', state and people are involved in violence against Muslims in modern governance. Though my research is on the complex ways in which the Sangha and State are involved in, and dependent upon, local configurations of power and strategic possibilities in Sri Lanka, it will have some application in the Myanmar context also. I anticipate that the analysis developed in my dissertation based on extensive field work in Sri Lanka will provide a model for detailed comparative investigation by specialists on Myanmar, helping to open new pathways for understanding Buddhist anti-Muslim discourse and action there.

I expected that it would be difficult to contact people associated with these movements and to converse with them, but they were generally comfortable talking to me. I believe this was due to the fact they saw me as an authentic Sinhala Buddhist from a southern rural village. The majority of the leadership of these groups is from the south and was willing to trust me due to this shared regionalism, even going so far as to divulge secret organizing mechanisms used

against imagined "Muslim expansionism." Perhaps, the trust they held in me had something to do with my gender, in that they did not take me as a threat since I am a woman. And there were sometimes unexpected social overtures. Sometimes, I pointed out the contradictions in their ideology, or suggested that they harm the country rather than indicating a way forward. However, as my research matured, I began to see this as a waste of time. "You are there to listen to them, not to argue with them," my advisor reminded me.

To my surprise, the monks and businessmen also proved to be helpful, facilitating contacts and appointments. As my fieldwork matured and I became increasingly familiar with the networks of people involved in these movements, I noticed that everyone was known to each other despite their different associations, which overlapped with state structures. Once the executive director of one of the main organizations invited me to his office, which was actually in one of the core ministries of the government. Only after meeting him did I realize that he is an advisor [political position) to a Minister, a fact that was unknown to me as a regular citizen. This kind of knowledge of the publicly unknown was revealed to me through repeated visits to places and people.

For example, a well-known mosque called Kechchimalei is located on a rock foundation directly south of the harbor in Beruwala, on the south coast. People believe it goes back to the 11th century, as does the Sinhala and Muslim coexistence in this area. However, both the mosque and the harbor claimed ownership of a one-acre parcel of land. The dispute reached the courts, and the harbor authority won the case. Initially, the harbor staff told me that winning was important since the fishermen needed the land. But at a later meeting, the harbor director shared with me that "they [Muslims] never stop asking for more land. So winning the case was important." From this perspective, the victory was more than winning a piece of land, it was

fighting what he perceived as Muslims' "conspiracy" to take over the country. This transformation of public discourse in which everything is understood and interpreted in ethnic and/or religious terms has become the norm.

The ethnographic field, for me, is not only a source of the unknown known. It is also a place that keeps the known unknown. There are things that I had to bury in the field even before I left, as I promised my interlocutors not to reveal their secrets. They cannot be cited or mentioned directly in my writing, due to my obligation to maintain confidentiality. My time in the field raised many challenging questions about how to communicate my research findings, and the implications of these choices. To whom should I be loyal when my interlocutors themselves become perpetrators of violence? How should I write about such perpetrators, who are in some sense also structural victims?[15]

It is my contention that ethics is not something to be negotiated, it is to respect and adhere to though scholars can find reasons to justify even their unethical research endeavors. I use pseudonyms throughout my writing to conceal the identity of the people with whom I engaged, except for those who gave me explicit permission to use their names. I have also, for the same reason, avoided other details that would contribute to identifying them (though one could identify some familiar voices under my disguised names). Further, my American education, gender, origin, nationality and religion allowed me to conduct the research without

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[15] I was reminded of these same dilemmas again by the recent discussions on research ethics, accountability, transparency and oversight in the production of knowledge that involves extremely vulnerable populations in relation to anthropologist Saiba Varma's book, *The Occupied Clinic: Militarism and Care in Kashmir* (2020). Varma's research is on "entanglements between medicine and violence in…the world's most densely militarized place." Her non-disclosure of some crucial information such as that her father had worked for the Research and Analysis Wing—India's external intelligence agency–in Kashmir in the 1990s raised a controversy. An anonymous Twitter noted that concealing this information raised problems around "positionality, methods, consent, and especially honesty and transparency with vulnerable informants–mostly PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) patients who have suffered at the hands of the Indian military and intelligence establishment" (See Does Nondisclosure of Familial Proximity to 'Security State' Compromise Research on Kashmir? https://thewire.in/books/debate-does-familial-proximity-to-the-security-state-compromise-academic-research-on-kashmir). In a conversation about the controversy, one of my friends from Kashmir said, "first their parents came and started shooting us. We did complain. They did not listen. Now they come to discuss our vulnerabilities and how mentally disable. They write books and make carries. No one seem to listen."

much difficulty, as my identifications were acceptable in my interlocutors' eyes. However, my interlocutors employ those same identities to demarcate the boundaries between them and their "others" to define what, and who, is properly "Buddhist." These preconditioned characteristics of any field reminded me of what Hannah Arendt called the "banality of evil." Evil exists not in the way we think of as an obvious evil form, but in the very manner that things exist as normal (Arendt [1963] 2006).

Chapter 2 seeks to understand how what counts as "violence," and what does not, emerges in a given society, thinking from the specifics of recent events in Sri Lanka. Though militant Buddhist groups' political actions against Muslims in Sri Lanka—including hunger strikes, protests, and general hostility—interrupt state sovereignty, the repercussions of these acts are rarely considered to be "violent" by the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists. A popular review of recent scholarship on what counts as violence and what does not is that violence must be the result of random irruptions or spasmodic actions. I argue instead that we should focus on the process of legitimizing an act as violence or not etc. An exploration of Sinhalese Buddhists' legitimization of even violent acts as not-violence demonstrates how crowd actions operate within popular consensus: what were deemed legitimate or illegitimate practices are in continuous production of social processes in which certain forces, values and social norms are constituted.

In chapter 3, I discuss two previous waves of monastic sangha involvement in Sri Lankan politics—expressions of bhikkhus' struggle to be sovereign. The contemporary ethnographic present of Sri Lanka represents the third wave of the Sangha's claim to be sovereign in which they established "new politics" that defines our troubled present. I locate—both historically and genealogically—the formations of a contemporary Sangha's "new" demand to become the

sovereign. Indeed, as these monks argue, Sangha participation in politics is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. However, several key twentieth and twenty-first century transitions in monastic involvement with politics are evident and constitutional changes that took place very recently paved the way for this third wave. While monks involved in current Buddhist militant nationalist projects argue that they enact a deeply historical past precedent stretching to the early centuries A.D., I underscore the relative novelty of their current projects and ambitions, rooted only in the last two centuries. I argue that in Sri Lanka, what is distinctive about the era that makes possible the monks' claim to sovereignty is the new electoral representation arrangements, a democratic attempt to include the voice of the numerical minorities.

In chapter 4, I demonstrate how the Sangha, with their established monastic authority within the *sampradaya*, led their new political struggle to be sovereign. They established a totalitarian imaginary – a collective perception based on a pure, homogeneous, unified state with the absence of divisions and difference among the people—as a possibility for the contestation on which they build their claims for political power. They justify their struggle based on a contingent collective perception that treats an increasing Muslim population, their businesses, and cultural practices as a form of Muslim fundamentalist terror and they demand the eradication of their 'difference.' The unquenchable urge to create a uniform society is the drive that governs their politics; those who do not adhere to this drive are enemies and are to be eliminated. I argue that it is this enemisation that carries the totalitarian imaginary propagated by recent Sinhala Buddhist political organizations and groups in Sri Lanka, that I term the 'sovereignization of the Sangha'. It describes the organizing mechanisms of recently formed political groups and organizations through which monks articulate their demands to be sovereign and express their visions for their desired subject and model of the state.

In Chapter 5, I present an account of a new economic model which complements the novel form of organizing mechanisms. In the years preceding the recent violence against Muslims in Sri Lanka, a proposal for a new economy was pushed forward not only as a resistance to existing economic reforms, but also as an act of self-assertion against the economic power of Muslims in the country. Sinhala Buddhist groups and organizations assert that what they refer to as "Buddhist values" [Bawudda aganakam] must underly urgent improvements to the deteriorating political-economic conditions of society. Central to their framing of this deterioration is how they see Muslims, their businesses, and Muslim population growth increase as causes of this discontent, a process that they called "Muslim encroachment." They propose a new ideal society - a "Buddhist Brotherhood" - as a solution for their economic grievances. Further, I explore the characteristics of this new economic paradigm, its authors, practices and its ideology and their relations to contemporary Sri Lankan economic conditions, such as the shrinking of the welfare state for an open economy bent on export-led growth. I contend that the increasing influence, across social classes, of Sinhala extremist politics is a consequence of their economic ethic's appeal to the masses in the midst of these economic conditions. I argue further that these politics also contain the demand to identify the groups in the movements with the state. In particular, it is apparent that changes in the economic structure overwhelm the local businessmen and the people so they are working to develop a new economic ethic while demonizing Muslims.

One caveat: In these introductory remarks and throughout this work, I use the term "Sinhala Buddhists" to refer to discourses, practices and organizing mechanisms of people who identify as Sinhala Buddhist in the "ethnographic present." Their identifications are not unruptured, but are *historically* constructed. Hence, when they make authoritative claims in the

name of *sampradaya,* the embodied abilities and practices legitimized by repetition, it bears the potential for the emergence of violence against others. I want to emphasize here that my assertion of the importance of *sampradaya*, for example, is not to claim that it exists unruptured or has an essential core or character; rather I am interested in the ways in which how certain authoritative discourses are established and how they come into central view at a particular period of time drawing on a reified tradition and what political, social and economic conditions enable them to do organize against other ethnic minority groups in the Sri Lanka.

Further, I would like to note here that this study is not one of mass movements. It is the study of one such movement in depth. I did not do a deep comparison with other movements in the Western context though my analysis was informed by some literature on them. My approach is an anthropological one: to attempt to capture in their deepest possible contemporary dimensions, a related series of events and ideas in a period of time, as an ongoing phenomenon, (a) within its own terms and (b) within a structure reflecting my own theoretical standings, assumptions and hypotheses generated by the study itself. I hope that colleagues in other disciplines, trained to view the world in different ways, will find in this empirical study (of which there should be more on Sri Lanka and elsewhere) information on which to build additional theoretical analytics by which we may better understand the area. My dissertation provides a model for detailed comparative investigations across the Theravada Buddhist world (including Myanmar and Thailand) where militant Buddhist movements have been on the rise in the twenty-first century. The approach used in the dissertation also invites a reconsideration of other contexts where ethnic or religious chauvinism is at play, including contemporary India.

CHAPTER TWO

Legitimate Violence: Sangha Sovereign Authority in Sri Lanka

Abstract

Although militant Buddhist groups' political actions against Muslims in Sri Lanka—including hunger strikes, protests, and general hostility—interrupt state sovereignty, the repercussions of these acts are rarely considered to be "violent" by the majority of Sinhalese Buddhists. A popular review of recent scholarship on what counts as violence and what does not suggests that violence must be the result of random irruptions or spasmodic actions. However, an exploration of Sinhalese Buddhists' legitimization of even violent acts as not-violence demonstrates how crowd actions operate within popular consensus: what were legitimate or illegitimate practices are in continuous production of social processes in which certain forces, values and social norms are constituted.

A Political Setting

On 3 June 2019 organized masses across Sri Lanka took to the streets in support of Athuraliye Rathana Thero, a famous parliamentarian and monk on a hunger strike. Rathana Thero is a pioneer of what is claimed to be a newly emerged "national movement" (*jathika vyaparaya*) that aims to consolidate state power in the hands of monks. Sitting on the footsteps of the Dalada Maligawa, the island's iconic Buddhist temple, Rathana Thero demanded the resignation of a Muslim cabinet minister and two Muslim governors alleged to have supported the suicide bombers in the Easter Attack that killed more than two hundred and fifty people and injured five hundred others.[16] As the monk's health visibly deteriorated on the fourth day of fasting, his demands gained traction in the media as the circulation of grief, anger, and despair seemed to

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[16] On 21 April 2019, Easter Sunday, a series of coordinated suicide attacks were carried out in three churches and three luxury hotels in the commercial capital Colombo. Cabinet Minister Rishad Baidurdeen and governors of Western and Eastern provinces Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hiszbullah were asked to resign.

inspire people. From the morning of the fourth day, the media disseminated coverage of politicians and prominent monks in towns and cities who also engaged in hunger strikes in support of Rathana Thero. They pressured the government by stating that if the monk's demands were not met they would mobilize thousands of people across the country. Some private bus transportation owners also went on strike against the government, heavily disrupting daily life. For Muslims, ordinary life was put on hold. Hordes of Sinhalese (both Buddhist and Christian) wrought vengeance on Muslim personnel and buildings in several districts in the North-Western and Western Provinces. In some localities these attacks amounted to a mini-pogrom.[17] As one Muslim journalist put it,

> "Life has become a nightmare in their ordinary day to day living and virtually changed every aspect of life in the island's Muslim population. Harassment, discrimination and a well-orchestrated hate campaign has been taking shape in the public domain, demonizing, alienating and fostering a besieged mentality towards Muslims...There is total harassment of Muslims in public places, buses and trains, taxis and even in work places" (Farook 2019).

These horrendous acts of violence against Muslims were part of the context prefacing and surrounding Rathana Thero's intervention. As many commentators of our present moment have noted, the context echoes the long violent history of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The acts may

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[17] See Meera Srinivasan, 'Dozens arrested after anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka', *The Hindu*, published online on 14 May 2019, available at https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/one-killed-in-anti-muslim-riots-in-sri-lanka/article62006943.ece, [accessed 2 June 2019], and 'Sri Lanka police arrest 23 for targeting Muslims after bombings', *Irish Times*, published online on 14 May 2019, available athttps://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/sri-lanka-police-arrest-23-for-targeting-muslims-after-bombings-1.3891995 [accessed 2 June 2019] for facts about the violence spread after the horrid killings at churches and hotels in April 2019.

be new; the ideology, nauseatingly familiar (Haniffa 2016; Ismail 2013). Centrally, and critically, they mark the vengeance that Rathana Thero is staging through his fasting.

Through media coverage, Rathana Thero was able to attract a huge following from all over the country. Public and private TV channels live-telecasted the hunger strike and its supporters from early morning to midnight. They portrayed the deteriorating monk whose life was ready to be sacrificed on behalf of the country's security. When they telecasted the protest, cameras zoomed in on Rathana Thero lying on his right side, his head resting on his right elbow, reminiscent of the Buddha's *Parinirvana* posture. It was a spectacle designed to express qualities of the Buddha: Rathana Thero, with his peaceful and non-violent pose, was assuming the posture of the son of the Buddha (*Buddha puthrayan*). His physical position conveyed the opposite of vengeance and grief, as if he were attempting to remind everyone that neglecting his body would be a severe profanation.

These images and sentiments were effective. In Colombo, five hundred white-clad lay Buddhists were on the streets, ordering people to close their shops and join the march. Unedited videos of the unfolding events were shared through social media chat groups. People shouted: "This is our country, we should not give this to the Muslims, deport them to Arabia (*Meka ape rata, Thambinta denne baha, Arabiyata pannanna unva*)."[18] Some of my Facebook friends posted the call for people to gather and said they were ready to travel to Kandy. The buses carried banners that said: "Honorable Thero, you are not alone. We are here to support you—we, the Christians, who got attacked in *Kahatapitiya*."[19] The majority of the victims of the attack was

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[18] While "Thambi" is a derogatory term used to denote Muslims, "Arabia" refers to reminds them of their ancestry. These quotes were originally in Sinhala. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been made from Sinhala.
[19] These are my translations from Sinhala to English. Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations should be considered first were in Sinhala.

Christians in the country as three out of the six bomb explosions took place in churches during the Easter Sunday gatherings.

The protests and hunger strike produced a share of so-called heroes. Although the majority of demonstrators who marched on the roads were Sinhala Buddhist men, there were also women present.[20] Some Tamils and Sinhala Christians went to Kandy in support of the fasting Buddhist monk. Monks of various chapters (*nikaya*), politicians, and members of parliament as well as the Cardinal of the Catholic Church were shown visiting the fasting Buddhist monk.[21] Gnanasara Thero, another important Buddhist monk who had already gained prominence in the country by his repeated language about "Muslim expansionism" and "Muslim fundamentalism," was there, too. Previously jailed for contempt of court, he received a presidential pardon one week after the Easter Sunday Attack. Gnanasara further exercised authority by threatening to give the government until noon the next day to take action or he would force the resignation of the Muslim members of parliament duly elected by the people. "For those who have gone to jail, death is not a surprise,"[22] he said, reminding followers of their ability to rally against the state and their readiness to die. It was a reminder that his followers would protest all over the country unafraid of state power.

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[20] The 2011-2012 census has indicated that Sri Lanka's overall population is 20.3 million and the country has a long and complex history involving four main different ethnic and religious communities. The majority (74.9%) of them are Sinhala while 70.1% of them consider themselves as Buddhists. 9.7% of the population is Muslims. Tamils and Indian Tamils (the majority work in the plantation sector and were brought from India by the British colonialists as labourers) make up 15.3% of the population. Among them the majority are Hindus (12.6%) and Christians (7.4%). The Christians are both Sinhalese and Tamil.

[21] There are three major Buddhist chapters in Sri Lanka namely Amarapura, Ramanna and Malwatte. A monk's chapter is where he was ordained.

[22] From my personal notes on the fourth day of the hunger strike.

Indeed, vengeance has seeded and sustained numerous confrontations— affrays in which local majorities assailed minority ethnic groups for some perceived wrong. Rathana's act, therefore, becomes one episode in a tale of vengeance driven violence. One such episode is "the communal riots of 1915" or what Sri Lankans referred to as the *marakkala kolahalaya*. It is a violent event of 9-10 days in May-June 1915 against the bodies, spaces, and properties of Muslims of all classes by, broadly put, urban and suburban Sinhalese men. Though many said it was over an dispute in front of mosques, many have discussed the nature of long term cultural sentiments against Muslims that have led the riots (Jayawardena 1970; Roberts 1994). Similarly, sentiments around Rathana's fasting initiating conditions of possibility for emergence of deep rooted sentiments and paving a way for a moment of terror. In the ordinary course of events, Muslims are unpopular among the Sinhalese; they are enemy others of Sinhalese's country, or aliens who have come to destroy the 'sons of the soil.' During the time of event, many people shared these sentiments against Muslims and justifying claims such as that they need to be taught a lesson.

At least, for me it was a moment of heightened emotions that could have marked another "crucial punctuation point" in the modern history of Sri Lanka, as Pradeep Jeganathan discusses in relation to the Sinhalese violence against Tamils in 1983. The riots of that year—known among the people as *Kalu Juliya* ["Black July"]—refers to the massive riot against Tamils: killing, burning and harassing Tamil people and their property by Sinhala men from urban and suburban working- and lower-middle-class backgrounds. Thousands were killed and property worth billions of rupees was destroyed. It was terror on an unprecedented scale for Sri Lanka. The significance of '1983' made it clear that the dream of the new nation—political "modernity"—could turn into a nightmare" (Jeganathan 1998: 18). Jeganathan argues that until

the crucial punctuation point of '1983' scholarly narration of Sri Lanka's progress to modernity was full of hope for the new nation of 'Ceylon' with its happy "combination of democracy, development and (re)distribution."[23] Further, he writes that if the origin of this political modernity was marked historically by the introduction of Colebrook-Cameron reforms of 1832, the violence of 1983 made it an impossibility. So '1983' became a punctuation point in the modern history of Sri Lanka that made Sri Lanka 'a terrain of violence' for Anthropologists and other scholars to analyze and theorize violence in which I also take part in by studying 'violence.'

Similarly, Rathana Thero's fasting greatly aggravated emotions and dispositions among Sinhalese. It was an act that bears a socio-historical condition of the possibility of violence against Muslims as the center of Sinhala Buddhists' and Sinhala Christians' agony. If one person had thrown a single stone at a Muslim house or shop, terror against Muslims might have exploded all over the country. The hunger strike of Rathana Thero was evidence of a new reality: the object of Sinhala grievance was no longer the Tamil; now it was the Muslim.[24] Even though hundreds of police and army personnel were deployed on the roads, it was unclear whether the protesters or the police had more authority. The state's power of imposing order—its ability to control the mass mobilization of people in so many areas of the country—appeared to have been suspended.

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[23] See also Kingsley M. de Silva, "The Model Colony': Reflections on the Transfer of Power In Sri Lanka," in The State of South Asia: Problems of Integration, A. Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (ed.), (London: Hirst, 1982.)

[24]It was Tamils who represented the center of Sinhala majorities' agony due to the nearly 30 years of civil war between Tamil separatists, primarily the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and the Government of Sri Lanka. In 2009, soon after the end of the war, Sinhala Buddhist discourse began to promote the idea of the Muslim as the new enemy of the country.

Meanwhile, at the end of a media scene Gnanasara Thero spoke and underscored the need for Muslim politicians to resign: "I cannot give up the life of the feeble Rathana Thero for the three crooked politicians. Despite our ideological disagreements, we need to come together on the Muslim issue."[25] His words were met with applause. What is played out here is the expression of an ultimatum, at least in the eyes of the majority of Sinhala Buddhists and the monks: the life of a monk is not a life that can be sacrificed; it must be saved at the cost of Muslim politicians' careers. Gnanasara Thero was wading into deep water in Sinhalese majoritarian society in authorizing certain sentiments; chief among these was the perceived ideological and cultural hierarchy organized around Sinhalese being the sole owners of the country with Muslims as aliens. According to the popular discursive apparatus of Sinhala ideology, it is widely believed that since the origin of Lanka, "'Sinhala' with the Vijaya's inauguration of an authentic community; of the Buddha's bestowal upon that community of permanent benediction as the true island of his dhamma; of the rise of Anuradhapura as the site of civilization; of Dutugamunu's heroism against the Tamil King, Elara, and so on" (Scott 1999: 98), the people continuously survived under the constant threat of 'invaders.'[26] While the historical narrative presents the Tamil as invaders, Muslims are also portrayed as aliens who migrated to Lanka as traders. So the sensibility of Rathana's act was clear to the Sinhala Buddhists—they draw the boundaries between the life that matters the most, that of the Sinhala Buddhist, and the life that does not matter much, that of the Muslim. Thus, throughout the

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[25] From my personal notes on the fourth day of the hunger strike.

[26] A foundational myth of origin of Sinhalese is that they are sprung of Vijaya, the eldest son of Sinhabahu and Sihasivali who were born of a union of princes with a lion. See R.A.L.H. Gunawardena (1979) for a brilliant analysis of the foundational myths of Sinhalese origin. The story of Dutugamunu- Elara also is a foundational narrative of the origin of Sinhalese in which Dutugamunu, a Sinhalese King slayed a Tamil King Elara and unified the country.

hunger strike, the subtext seemed to be "Which life matters!"—not a question, but a decision: a decision which bears the character of sovereignty, or "a capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe 2003: 23).[27]

It did not come as a surprise that at 2 p.m. on the fourth day of Rathana Thero's hunger strike, a letter was circulated through social media conveying the news that nine Muslim cabinet ministers and two Muslim governors—all the Muslim representatives who held state power—had resigned in response to events. (Some Sinhalese Buddhists lamented that the resignation symbolized the 'brotherhood' among Muslims that they themselves lack and will never have.) Rathana Thero demanded an official letter from the president, accepting their resignation and requesting him to end his fast. Later, Rathana Thero received the letter. The event signified the latent force of monks and the state's submission to them.[28] It was an *insurrectionary* act, not in the Marxian sense of a violent takeover of state power, but by interrupting state power.

What is striking about this incident and its aftermath is the lack of action to claim that it was an act of violence against Muslims. Rarely do contemporary states respond to this kind of insurrectionary act by surrendering to protestors completely. The usual scenario when government representatives are forced to leave office is to see the insurrection as a violent act. But in this context, Rathana's act was not said to constitute violence except in the minds of a few politicians, liberals, and leftists. The issue was not taken to court as an offense against Muslims, not even as a gesture of justice.

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[27] Of course, this was not limited to this fasting event, a hunger strike. This 'making of which life matters' is taking place in local settings with their organizing mechanisms.

[28] See Ameer Ali's 'Thugs In Saffron Robes and GR's ATF' for examples that represents this latent violence within monks, available online at https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/thugs-in-saffron-robes-and-grs-atf/, [accessed on 23 September 2020].

This incident took place during my fifteen months of living in Sri Lanka, while I was researching the recent emergence of militant, ultra-nationalist Sinhala Buddhist movements from June 2018 to August 2019. These newly-formed groups (though with complex roots in earlier organizations) share a precarious collective perception that reduces Muslims, their businesses, and their cultural practices to expressions of Muslim fundamentalist terror. Buddhist participants in these militant movements stoke fear among the wider Buddhist population, and go so far as to claim a willingness to die and kill to combat anticipated "Muslim terror." In other words, governance by "fostering pervasive menace and fear, positioning minorities as a constant threat" is not only a part of the routine violence in Sri Lanka; it is integral to the Sri Lankan state as "political force and legitimacy are harnessed around the claim to protect people from fear—even where there is no immediate menace, some will surely arise" (Thiranagama 2022: 201-202). The constant fear necessitated the need to defend the community. It is along these lines that monks profess their allegiance to the Sinhalese nation and aim to restore its premodern sovereignty, the loss of which they attribute to colonial governance. Though their view of premodern Sinhala Buddhist sovereignty is historically inaccurate (Blackburn 2010; Seneviratne 1999; Malalgoda 1982; Gunawardena 1979), it has been generative for post-colonial political projects on the island, and helps to feed the most recent utopic projects of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists.

What follows is a discussion of why the state did not name Rathana's act and its consequences as 'violent.' Is it because he succeeded in interrupting the order of the country legally, through a kind of extortion rather than bloodshed? Why were his acts and their ramifications widely applauded by the Sinhala majority of the country, which denounced 'Muslim violence,' both before and after Rathana Thero's intervention? The 'Sangha Power' is

the term people use for the employment of symbolic force of Rathana against Muslims. How does the distinction emerge between what counts as violence and what does not?

Sangha Willing to Die: The State Surrenders

Repeated remarks of willingness to die for the country, nation, and Buddhism are a prominent part of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (see Tambiah 1992) and continued to be the discourse of the recently emerged groups and organizations in which Sangha demands sovereignty. Also Sangha interrupting the state by being willing to die is by no means entirely new in the post-colonial present of Sri Lanka. Rathana Thero's act is consistent with efforts of so-called "political monks" to reassert their power and privilege over the state. One among many comparable events in which monks established their authority over the state is the famous revocation of the Bandaranayake-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1958, which occurred a decade after Sri Lanka seceded from the British and gained independence in 1948. The pact saw a deep polarization between Sinhala and Tamil communities that was symbolic in the general election in 1956 and expected to resolve some of the grievances facing Sri Lankan Tamils (Wriggins 1960; Jeyaraj 2016). As the newly established government introduced Sinhala as the sole official language of the country and thugs attacking the peaceful Tamil Satyagrahis (protesters) in June 1956 paved the proposal for a limited devolution of power, though it was famously called a federal solution. In other words, Prime Minister Bandaranaike signed a pact with Tamil leader, SJV Chelvanayagam in April 1957 making Tamil the administrative language in the Tamil-speaking north and east regions plus many other measures to counter the adverse effects of Sinhala only Bill" (Jeyaraj 2018). However, this discourse of signing the pact preceded three days of "terrifying disorders" of anti-Tamil riots. On April 27, 1958, the pact had to be revoked

as a result of a protest by nearly 200 monks and 300 lay people in front of the Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake's house.

More recently, seemingly following this tradition, in 2005, Omalpe Sobitha Thero, a Member of Parliament representing Ratana Thero's' own party, JHU went on a six - day hunger strike against the Tsunami Relief Board (TRB). Since the TRB is a mechanism that was expected to share the internationally received aid even in parts of Sri Lanka involved in military conflict and sometimes under LTTE authority, Sobitha Thero and the rest who opposed the bill accused it as an attempt of liquidation of the unitary structure of the Sri Lankan state and this proposal would strengthen the LTTE. Sobitha Thero went on a fast demanding an end to it. After six days, Sobitha ended his fast after then the president Chandrika Bandaranayake gave assurance to withdraw the proposal and promised to consult Sangha before deciding on the aid distribution.

Similarly, Rathana Thero certainly employed this long tradition to exercise his authority. One's willingness to die is a force as it carries the possibility of violence. A careful consideration of the literature on sovereignty will shed some light on the broader argument; the Sangha's fasting, or their willingness to die bears the condition of possibility for the emergence of violence. While one genre of literature on sovereignty has taken this theorization of sovereign power to unravel the foundational violence, the "hard kernel of modern nation state" (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 9) and its use in periods of crisis (Agamben 1998, 2005; Butler 2009; Fiskesjö 2003),[29] some have suggest we move away from a legal notion of territorial sovereignty attributed to nation states and its institutions and international networks that treat sovereignty as

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[29] Since the Agambenian critique that sovereignty produces disposable lives and that the defining feature of our era's political structures is this built-in foundational violence: the sovereign is given power to suspend the legal order as it was manifested, for instance, in the camps in Hitler's Germany, the sovereign has come to be defined as the one who decides on the life and death of all others.

indivisible (Aretxaga 1997; Mbembe 2013). The latter theorization marked the historical

specificity of the performance of violence (actual or 'spectral') by locally authorized *de facto*

sovereigns. This particular genre of literature suggests to consider sovereign practice as an

always 'tentative effect' that produces forms of violence that work on the human body through

physical violence or disciplining bodies in defense of a particular political or moral community

(Stepputat 2012; Stepputat and Hansen 2005).[30]

In my view, this conceptualization of sovereign practice by locally authorized sovereigns

outside of state parameters enables us to clear a conceptual space in which to think of historically

produced and locally authorized sovereigns in the post-colonial state. What these theorizations

have in common is a reliance on the idea that sovereignty that is about exercising violence over

bodies and populations of [enemy] others (sovereignty as self preservation). Indeed, the Sangha's

new demand to be sovereign constitutes the possibility for the emergence of sovereign violence

as they are ready to exercise violence over enemy others by entering the field of sovereignty.

However, I locate my discussion on a second form of sovereignty: sovereign violence as self-

sacrifice. This emerges not only when one is ready to kill, or exercise violence over others, but

when one is ready to die, performing violence of one's own body, as in the case of Rathana

Thero. Through his hunger strike Rathana Thero performs a condition of possibility of sovereign

violence on his body—the death on his own being in becoming a sovereign. Georges Bataille's

critical insight on 'death' that informs sovereignty is important here.[31] For Bataille, there are

multiple forms of sovereignty but ultimately it is "the refusal to accept the limits that the fear of

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[30] Accounts on life and death in relation to the notion of sovereignty and exception are discussed in detail in the recent scholarship, see Agamben 1998, 2005; Butler 2009; Fiskesjö 2003; Mbembe 2003.

[31] See a discussion on the connection of death to sovereignty in the relationship of Buriyat Buddhists and the Russian states in Religious Bodies politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism. Bernstein (2013: 12-13).

death would have us respect in order to ensure, in a general way, the laboriously peaceful life of individuals" (1997: 317). He further writes, "killing is not the only way to regain sovereign life, but sovereignty is always linked to a denial of the sentiments that death controls. . . . It also calls for the risk of death" (1997: 317- 318).[32] Although the natural world includes prohibitions of violence, death, sexuality and excrement, Bataille argues, the sovereign world is "the world in which the limit of death or the prohibitions are done away with. Death is present in it, its presence defines that world of violence, but while death is present it is always there only to be negated, never for anything but that" (1997: 317). The sovereign has no more regard for the "limits of identity than he does for limits of death, or rather these limits are the same; he is the transgression of all such limits" (1997: 317). In other words, Bataille's insight on sovereignty is the one that is opposed to the servile or subordinate that is always rooted in necessity and alleged need to avoid death. In this sense, sovereignty calls for the strength to violate the prohibition against killing.

In my view, this radical readiness to violate the prohibition against killing and ending one's own life—for death is irreversible—and a willingness to reach the very limits of identity, is the sovereign practice that Rathana Thero performs. He denies the sentiments that death controls, and the fundamental Buddhist teaching that killing is prohibited. Thus, I assume that sovereignty is a violation of prohibitions and I contend that monks' claim to sovereignty is embedded in the possibility of violence, specifically their willingness to put their *form of life* at risk by violating a precept fundamental to monks, or *bhikkhus,* sons of Buddha. They may not kill. Let me explain.

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[32] See also Mbembe (2003) for a comprehensive discussion on Bataille's different forms of sovereignty.

A bhikkhu represents a *way of life*. It is symbolized by a style of dress and a life according to monastic or doctrinal enunciation of precepts and prohibitions. It is a form of life distinguished from the laity. According to the Vinaya regulations for monastic practice, the order of the Sangha, or monastic community, consists of two 'grades' of monks: *samaneras* (novices) and bhikkhus (fully ordained monks). Bhikkhus undergo the *upasampada* (higher ordination) ceremony (Malalgoda 1976: 54). Upasampada does not confer sacred powers: it merely uplifts samaneras to a dedicated life, a form of transformation of life. According to the Theravadin Vinaya, the tradition of Sri Lankan monks, candidacy for pravrajya (going forth), or the admission of a lay person to the status of bhikkhu, there are 227 monastic rules or rules of training (*siksa-sikkha-pada*) to be observed. There are 10 main precepts that are elaborated on in the practical application of these 227. If we single out one basic prohibition that is central to our discussion it is the precept that requires monks to refrain from harming living creatures.[33] This is not indeed juridical work, but a regulation of their habits in order to maintain a particular form of life aimed at the ultimate goal of being a monk, *nirvana,* according to the Buddhist tradition. Thus, by their dedication to not killing, and other prohibitions, they marks their transition from laity to being a monk.[34] When monks demand sovereignty by their readiness to die, they enter the political field—the field of contestation for hegemonic and sovereign power governed by the friend–enemy distinction (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The monks' demand means they may violate the prohibition against "killing or harming other creatures:" sovereign power involves

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[33] The rules of training involves, 1) to refrain from harming living creatures, 2) to refrain from taking what is not given, 3) to refrain from all sexual activity, 4) to refrain from false speech, 5) to refrain from eating after midday, 7) to refrain from attending entertainments, 8) to refrain from wearing jewelry or using perfumes, 9) to refrain from sleeping on luxurious beds, 10) to refrain from handling gold and silver (Gethin 1998: 87).

[34] See Micheal Cook's *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (2001) for a detailed analysis of the complex process of "encouraging right" that bound a person to a duty to "forbid wrong" in the exhortation of Quranic tradition. He finds "forbidding wrong" is expressed in a rich vocabulary besides 'command' (*amara*) and 'forbid' (*naha*).

deciding who may live and who may die. Therefore, being ready to take one's life is a violation of the vow that persons gave when they changed their identities from lay person to monk. And this change is not made casually, informally, or privately: it is made in a serious, formal, and public ordination ceremony.

The whole question of whether violence is allowable in Buddhism at any time, according to doctrinal tradition, comes from an extraordinarily rich corpus of scholarship in the disciplines of anthropology, religious studies and history that I will not engage in this discussion.[35] Instead, my labor is to emphasize what is at stake when monks enter the political field and use their willingness to die to authorize certain claims upon the political community in Sri Lanka. Their entrance onto the political field is important because they maintain a great deal of force rooted in their 'form of life' as monks. To state the point differently, it is the cultural 'difference' between a monk and a lay person, the cultural expectations of a monk obscured by monks' demands to be sovereign because they are ready to die—that allows them to get along quite well without much critique. This owes to interpreters' various conceptions of Buddhist historical precedent.

My point is that for the majority of the country, Rathana's sovereign act (that suspended the state's legal order) that put into question 'monkhood' as a form of life which also made Muslim politicians resign from their offices outside the proceedings of the legal order did not appear to be an act of violence. But what was it if it was not violence? How does one measure

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[35] See In defense of dharma: just-war ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka Bartholomeusz, Tessa J. *Journal of Buddhist ethics* Volume: 6 (1999), Gananath Obeyesekere, "Duttagamini and the Buddhist Conscience," in Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia, Douglas Allen, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993). Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity," in Fundamentalisms Comprehended, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Kent, Daniel W. 2015. Preaching in a Time of Declining Dharma: History, Ethics and Protection in Sermons to the Sri Lankan Army. Contemporary Buddhism, 16(1):188-223.

legitimate violence and violence that is not legitimate? I'll return to these questions later but first I will discuss the scholarly work on the violence in general and violence against minority communities. This might help us think about the questions.

Towards a Theory of Violence

Many scholars who have theorized violence share a central misconceptualization of the category of 'violence': they refer purely and simply to the enactment of physical destruction that involves loss of human life or property. This view is evident in anthropological and historical scholarship that sees 'violence' in Sinhala society as a product of a 'breakdown of everyday restraint,' that it is 'impulsive,' and necessarily an 'unpremeditated' action (Spencer 1990: 614). Or, it is a result of ritual practices such as 'demon worship' among Buddhists, a darker underside of Buddhism (Kapferer 1983). Some read it as a 'furious eruption' of "irrational actions, a product of insecurity over personal status" (Rogers 1987a, 143). Here their analysis seems to be based on the assumption that there are two polarized existences of the Sinhala society: the ordinary and the violent. To give an example, *Legends of People, Myths of State* by the celebrated anthropologist Bruce Kapferer ventures a thesis that there is an ontological relationship between Sinhalese "violence" and Sinhalese 'demonic" practices.' Kapferer writes "here is a reason, extraordinary as it may seem, for the sudden, almost inexplicable, transformation of a normally peaceful people into violent and murderous rampaging mobs" (Kapferer 1988, 101). Hence violence is sudden and irrational, as if it comes from nowhere.

I take a different approach. My suggestion is that in order to understand what counts as violence and what does not, one ought to account for the legitimizing frame in which the condition of possibility of violence—the force—is being justified. It is to apprehend the category

of violence without assuming it, analyze it without treating it as self-evident. It is my contention that, if apprehended otherwise, the conditions of knowledge production of the 'discourse of violence' tend to be motivated by the moral and personal motives or politics of its producers. And also it could be led by personal distaste for a particular form of tradition. For instance, critiquing the history of the modern Western thought and its employment in anthropological study of religion, Talal Asad argues that it is constructed historically by asymmetrical desires and indifferences towards non- Western traditions and in particularly this could be seen in the interrogations of Muslim beliefs and practices in Islamic traditions. He claims that most scholars dealing with the Muslim world tend to portray it as religiously intolerant and inherently violent and this has been a result of personal prejudice against Islam (Asad 1993; 2007).

In recent times, Ananda Abeysekara, creatively building on Pradeep Jeganathan's work on violence (2001), has argued that rather than treating categories such as "Buddhism" and "violence" as self-evident, they should be understood as contingent in the field of the political. These categories cannot be assumed to remain the same across differing contexts; rather, they are only available to scholars as fleeting descriptions. He argues that "violence"—like "religion," "ritual," "culture" and "nationalism"—is a historical concept whose meanings and parameters shift at different conjunctures of debates. For instance, he demonstrates that what made it possible for some scholars to argue that monastic participation in the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) uprising (1987-1989) constituted violence was that the JVP movement stands for "militant politics." But Abeysekara shows a temporal trajectory of events, debates and discourses in which monks engaged in the JVP uprising in the 1980s. In that, they were initially thought of as "Buddhist" or "non-violent" in later years came to be portrayed as "un-Buddhist,"

"criminal," and "violent. Hence one cannot treat these categories as given as they are unavailable for disciplinary canonization as transparent objects of knowledge, Abeysekara argues.

I find Abeysekara's remarks illuminating as they unmask some unquestioned essentialist ontological assumptions that govern many scholarly works such as those noted above and suggest a way out of it. Indeed, Abeysekara is correct in maintaining that what counts as "violence" and what does not is politically contingent, but as I will show, the conditions of possibility for the emergence of violence, the force and the frames by which this force has been legitimized are not so contingent, a characteristic that I attributed to historical accumulations. Following this, I argue that these conditions are ethnographically identifiable in any given conjuncture. Problematizing the dominant disciplinary narratives that violence is spasmodic in nature, my account will locate the forces of violence that are both legitimized and normalized within a given society through its traditional customs, norms and practices.

Further, the spasmodic view of violence obliterates the historical agents and the complex motives and sensibilities behind violent acts that have been legitimized in a tradition of what E. P. Thompson describes as 'moral economy' of political actions. These motives are "grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations" of several parties within a community in which a certain group finds legitimacy for its political activities (1971: 79). In other words, legitimacy is inextricably tied up with political acts. In his 1971 article "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" Thompson remapped the meaning of the term 'riot' in contrast to the popular notion of it as 'distress' behaviors of the unruly commoners (1971: 79). In his long history of the food riots in eighteenth century England, Thompson argues that there are much more complex, culturally motivated motives and behaviors involved in 'riots.' The old market practices of the poor and their consumption expectations,

eroded by growing schematic realities of commerce, led people to riot. Millers and bakers loudly echoed these expectations of the common weal that common ordinary people and their authorities are bound together. Revealing the moral economy of the distressed community, Thompson reestablishes and restores the common people's authority in the riots. In other words, riots are not merely random eruptions or spasmodic events: they are a continuous production of social processes in which certain forces, values and social norms are constituted. They operate within "popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices" (Thompson 1971: 79).

So are violent acts legitimate? Does it matter if a riot is seen as spasmodic or as an action of a crowd that is a representation of a moral economy? Does the legitimacy that governs institutions and thought processes of a given community include occasional rioting? Thompson suggests it does when "the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs" prevails; it matters, too, that the rioters are supported by the wider consensus of the community (Thompson 1971, 78). When direct popular actions are consensual, legitimized, and disciplined they enable, authorize, and oblige the crowd to override fear or deterrence.

Instructed by this view of 'riots,' when are violent crowd actions legitimate in a given community? And when can these actions be called not violent? I turn to Pradeep Jeganathan's great insight in his unpublished essay, "When Words Will Not Do: Theravada Buddhism and the Emergence of Violence." Here he suggests that "what counts as violence emerges when force breaks through its legitimizing frame (n.d. 3)." In other words, force—the condition of possibility for violence—is circumscribed within a legitimizing frame. A frame is a code, in the sense of both rule or law which can be thought of as symbolic, moral, ethical or political. To delve into the relationship between Buddhism and violence, Jeganathan critically follows Walter

Benjamin's insights about force and the emergence of violence in his 1921 essay, "Critique of Violence" [*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*] which has become a point of reference in disciplinary investigations of violence.

The main insight that Jeganathan points out in Benjamin's work comes from the translation of the German word *"Gewalt."* Benjamin uses the German word "*Gewalt*" that has been translated into English as 'violence.' Jacques Derrida, in his famous essay "The Force of Law" points out that the translation of Benjamin's text into English has not taken into account that *Gewalt* in German also signifies legitimate power, authority, and public force. So *Gewalt* is not only violence, it also means legitimized power and justified authority (Derrida 1992: 6). It not only represents violence in the sense of harm, but also the condition of the possibility for violence. In a similar vein, Samuel Weber (1997) points out in "Wartime" that 'violence' in the English sense does not correspond to '*Gewalt*,' in part it almost contradicts it. While the German word derives from the verb *walten*, "to rule or preside" [position of authority], violence, the equivalence given, is in English inseparable from the "notion of violation." In this respect, while the German *Gewalt*, the one Benjamin critiques, emphasizes the 'maintenance of rule,' though it also can entail an incursion, the English one's sole focus is on the "notion of external infringement of rule, by force" (Weber 1997: 82). So for Benjamin, *Gewalt* is always internal to the category of law—the legitimizing framework, *Gewalt* is latent within law and intimately bound to it (Benjamin 1996: 248). In other words, both 'force' and 'violence' (in the sense of harm) cannot be separated from their legitimizing framework.

The word *Gewalt* allows us to conceive of violence not just as an end in itself, a violation or infringement, but also as an authority and a means, a force that enables a violation. Jeganathan reminds us that Benjamin's insight in his formulation of *Gewalt* is to keep the means and ends

separate. This enables us to see the expressiveness of violence and the violence latent within a force as conceptually distinct.

To follow Jeganathan and Benjamin, violence emerges when force breaks through its legitimizing frame. If force were to remain within its frame, it would continue to be interpreted as force, a potential, the possibility of violence. Jeganathan, by examining popular biographies of the Buddha and the utterances and gestures he used to quell (*damanaya*) enemy unbelievers, shows that these words are not only political but also are accounts of a 'force,' namely the condition for the emergence of violence. However, in the biographies, the Buddha always persuades the enemy unbelievers that his practices never transform into violence in the sense of violation as they were not able to exceed its legitimizing frame. Take for example the stories *Damanaya*, (quellings) of the serial finger chopper, Angulimala[36] and Nalagiri, the drunken elephant set on the Buddha by his cousin Devadatta. The assassin and the drunken elephant both subdued before the Buddha's utterance and gesture, a commonest, the *Abhaya Mudra* which denotes the fearlessness and quelling of threats. It is this utterances and gesture that "produces a righteous and therefore legitimate force, that quells (*damanaya*), the violent unbeliever" (Jeganathan, n.d.: 13). What I want to point out here is that the force that quelled Angulimala and Nalagiri contained within a legitimizing frame and as the Buddha was able to persuade them, the force never had to exceed the frame.

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[36] Angulimala, taken as a moment in the biography of the Buddha has enormous force for Sinhala Buddhists, for it is an episode that is recounted in the great classic, Vidyacakravarti's *Butsarana*, a 13 century Sinhala text, that is taught in departments of Buddhist civilizations in Sri Lankan universities, from where many monks graduate, going on to preach and teach in Dahampasal, or Sunday school.

It is this latent force within the Buddha that monks like Gnanasara—a son of Buddha (*Buddha puthrayan*)[37]—uses to demonize and quell Sri Lankan Muslim authorities, whom he categorizes as a threat to the Sinhalese nation. According to Jeganathan, foundational conceptualizations of the Buddha as a *source force* persists into contemporary times. However, within the conditions of modernity, and the absence of the sovereign, Buddha, or King, monks attempt the impossible: to go beyond the work of kings as sons of the Buddha. Such monks as Rathana and Gnanasara Theros inhabit this frame, pushing, pulling, pointing and hitting at its edges, allowing for violence in its wake, Jeganathan claims. So unless monks break the frame, their acts remain legitimized. My main point here is that it is essential to understand a force within a legitimizing frame to apprehend what counts as violence and what does not. I return to the first question with which I began: how is what counts as violence adjudicated in particular contexts? I say this depends on one's legitimizing frame. Next, I focus on the 'efficacy of a strike'—a political event considered 'legitimate violence' in contemporary Sri Lanka, allowed by citizens of that modern state.

Rathana Thero's hunger strike reveals the great deal of force that the Sangha bears through certain processes of the interpretive framework of Sinhala Buddhists and how this force is been legitimized within what they understand as tradition. I argue there are two legitimizing frames to justify 'violence' or claim a political act is non-violent. One is the secular state frame—in which the life of subjects are protected owing to the founding state's responsibility

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[37] See Agganna Sutta "When someone has gained faith in the Tathagata that has taken root and become established, firm, and incapable of being swayed by any ascetic, brahman or god, by Mara or Brahma or anyone else in the world, then it right that he should say, " I am the Blessed one's true son, born of his mouth, born of Truth, created by Truth, an heir of Truth." Why is this? Because "the one whose body is Truth", "the one whose body is the highest", "the one who is Truth", "the one who is the highest" are all designations of the Tathagata (Gethin 1998, 120).

and to keep violent acts outside the law as legitimate. The other is the interpretive framework of a certain community—in this case the perceived traditional social norms and obligations of Sinhala Buddhist community that could go beyond the legal parameters of modern sovereignty. What follows is an exploration of what governs the parameters of these two legitimizing frames and their relevance of understanding what count as violence and what does not.

Efficacy of Rathana Thero's Fast

Although fasting has been a political weapon of lay people in post-colonial Lanka—members of university student unions, for instance, fasted to protest privatization of education and healthcare—it was not a common phenomenon among monks until very recently. To my knowledge, the very first mention of a fast to demand justice or in resistance in the history of Ceylon comes from the great chronicle of the 5th century Mahavamsa. It is a fast by King Elara to call for seasonal rain only at the right occasions (Mahavamsa 1990: 137). The oldest form of resistance in the Theravadan monastic order could be 'the act of turning over the bowl,' a practice that serves the same function as fasting. It is known in Pali as *patta nikujjana*, or 'the act of turning over the bowl' and it refers the choice available to a monk to censure a laymen, usually the king or another powerful person, by refusing to accept his offering. The *patra* or 'begging bowl' is the receptacle for offerings to a monk, usually food donations (*dana*); and a monk can powerfully censure a lay donor by turning the bowl upside down. Although this act is literally the act of turning over the bowl, it is more importantly a symbol of the ability available to a monk to refuse anything.

Staging a fast, as Rathana did, is similar to the act of turning over the bowl. Although refusing food is not a common practice in Sri Lanka, it is a prominent practice in modern

Myanmar, another country that adheres to the Theravada form of Buddhism. In September 2007, for example, nearly 20,000 monks led anti-government protests in a protest by holding their bowls upside down and refusing alms from members of the military and their families (Jordt 2008; Mydans 2007).[38] It was a symbolic and material gesture that ex-communicated the rulers and their families from the religion they share with the rest of the country. This very public refusal of food disturbed the tradition's embodied arrangement in which merit-making (*punna kamma*) through dana was set to close the formidable gap between distant salvation ideal and the desire to achieve it. Since almsgiving for monks is part of cultivating meritorious deeds for donors so that they could improve their chances for better rebirths, it was laity's salvation at stake before the monks' refusal to accept their dana. Thus, turning over the bowl is a time-honored Buddhist practice. Ratana's inspiration to appear to be turning over the bowl by refusing to eat , however, seems to have come from not the religious norms but the modern secular practices of civil disobedience and mass dissent.[39]

Let us compare for a moment the hunger strike with another form of protest, the work strike. A strike is deemed legitimate as a way to counter sovereign violence. It can interrupt the monopoly that the state has on violence by interrupting activity, non-violently. It must be remembered that the modern state accepts workers' right to strike. If it did not, it might kill them. Modern rule-of-law states, in general, accept the existence of trade unions and their legitimate right to strike. In Sri Lanka, civil resistance is also safeguarded under the constitutional clause of freedom of expression. Article 14 (a) of the constitution states that "every citizen is entitled to

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[38] See Ingrid Jordt, 2008. Turning Over the Bowl in Burma. Religion in the News. Vol 10 (3). See also https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/weekinreview/30mydans.html

[39] See Karuna Mantena. Mass Satyagraha and the Problem of Collective Power for a detailed analysis of Gandhi's satyagraha as a mass civil resistance against the British. (Forthcoming in *Political Imaginaries: Rethinking India's Twentieth Century*, edited by Manu Goswami and Mrinalini Sinha).

the freedom of speech and expression including publication." This is a mechanism that was established by the modern state to ensure that individuals as legal subjects will not resort to using violence outside the legal system. According to Benjamin, "violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law" (Benjamin 1996, 239). In other words, the state finds individuals exercising violence outside the boundaries of the legal system as a threat to its existence.

For this reason, it is argued, the modern state permits and shares its monopoly on violence with its citizens in these controlled measures. This state's rationale is that strikes are not violent, they are a cessation of activity, and a non-act cannot be considered as violence. A nonviolent withdrawal of work is considered to be freedom of expression, not violence. However, in "Critique of Violence" Benjamin argues that since the objective of a political strike or a general strike is to form a new state or to annihilate the state once and for all (a revolutionary situation in Sorelian terms), strikes really are a form of violent act. If the intention is to overthrow the state as opposed to earning a higher wage and better medical benefits then the strike bears the condition of possibility for 'founding violence.' This the state fears, according to Benjamin: the state fears fundamental, founding violence (*begrunden*, to found, 1921: 283) because that violence is able to legitimize or transform the relations of the social and economic order (*Rechtsverhältnisse*, legal conditions).[40] So the remedy for this fear is the state's acceptance of the right to strike. In this sense, for a critique of violence and a proper evaluation of it, one must first recognize violence that can rupture the order—that is, the force is not exterior to the law or to the legitimized frame, instead it is internal to the law. Thus, in legal

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[40] C.f. Derrida (1992: 40).

terms Rathana Thero's protest was a condition of possibility of violence as it was within the state's legitimizing frame and not-violence.

Let me summarize this. The efficacy of a strike is that it reminds the state of the founding violence [law -making violence] that it bears. And when the state confronts a force that could call it into question, the state subordinates that force within the state's sovereign power by absorbing the threat. The threat is a condition of possibility for making a new law that suspends the force in power. In other words, it is a possibility for a sovereign moment. Thus, the state responds. The state fears the possibility of violence that is outside of the law. So it shares its monopoly of violence with its citizens. It is this legitimizing frame that permits Rathana Thero to perform his hunger strike as a not-violent act. More importantly, by suspending the legal order of the state, Rathana Thero expands the boundaries of sovereign violence and reveals the limits of the state monopoly on violence.

Further, fasts or hunger strikes, the most ancient form of protests, are different from other types of strikes.[41] They are special because they threaten to suspend a life, the life of a citizen, a body that belongs to the state and for which the state has assumed responsibility. Of course, this does not mean that other strikes do not bear this danger as there is the possibility of losing one's life in a protest: the state apparatus (police or the military or their hired local strongmen) can kill protestors.[42] But in a hunger strike, two forces have conflicting political interests: there is the

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[41] See Simanowitz, Stefan for a detailed analysis of the history and the endurance of this form of strikes, The body Politic: The Enduring Power of the Hunger Strike 2010. Contemporary Review. Vol. 292: 1698. Pp. 324-331.

[42] After July 1980, the cruelty of the state against workers, it maintains, releasing state violence, killings and abductions have become the norm. Many times, the state military and police forcers killed the protestors, for instance, Free Trade Zone strikes in 2011 and 2012. See "2012 Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights - Sri Lanka," https://www.refworld.org/docid/4fd8892521.html.

hunger striker's right to their own life (including the freedom to end that life) and the state's rejection of this right. The modern state's rejection of the right to end oneself comes from the grounds of the modern foundational pact between "the inherent source of power that alone can authorize the creation of a political order (variously, the citizenry, the sovereign, the people, the nation), and the sovereign constituted political body (especially the state) that represents that power" (Jennings 2011: 29).[43] This is the legitimizing frame that the state uses to stop a hunger strike against the subject's will. Also, more importantly, if one's life is not a matter of the state's concerns, engaging in a hunger strike would not have been a possibility to interrupt the state or gain its attention. Indeed, in some cases, such as that of Rathana Thero, the striker's demands are met; in other circumstances, the state rejects the demands, and this results in the striker's death. However, there is more to the legitimizing frame that enabled the successful story of Rathana's fasts than his ability to conduct a protest and the modern state's duty to protect his life. There is a second legitimizing framework: social norms, customary practices and obligations—a moral economy of Sinhala Buddhist society.

The Sri Lankan government often violently responds to protesters by using tear gas, water cannons, shooting, and at times even murder. Its justification for using law-preserving violence (police, army) is the possibility of violence borne by these strikers. When monks are involved in strikes and put their lives at risk, the government often but not always concedes as in general monks share a great deal of authority (*anuhasa*) in Sri Lanka. This has been justified within Sinhala Buddhist customary practices, in many quotidian rituals, and in the Sri Lankan

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[43] For Hobbes man is violent in nature thus they must agree to a pact that assigns to a leader the absolute right to act, or really the absolute power to do all except take away the means of human survival and reproduction, an act in fact for many scholars (Agamben 2000; Fiskesjö 2003; Butler 2004) modern nation state takes away.

state giving a foremost place to Buddhism in the Constitution.[44] Given Sinhala Buddhist customary practices, for instance, a monk and a lay person are not equal—not because they are legally unequal but because of a crucial sense of the tradition. This particular relation is historically produced and maintained through "a self-consciously Buddhist discourse" that has authorized the Buddha's dhamma and given it a "privileged relation to the structures of state power" as a form of authority through distinct symbols, e.g. Buddha's Tooth Relic (Scott 1994: 175). Significantly, Rathana lay down for his hunger strike in front of the Temple of the Tooth Relic [*Dalanda Maligava*]).[45] It is these 'historical non-essential' practices, rituals, events and symbols that Buddhists draw on to make authoritative claims about their religious and ethnic identities. These practices are also a legitimizing frame that Sangha relies on for their authoritative positioning against difference/other.

Consider how the authority of Sangha is made manifest in day-to-day social relations. The concept of *veneration* is expressed in the priority seating dedicated to clergy in public transportation and at public events. Women, on no occasion, will seat alongside them. Lay people rise from their seats when clergy appear and always assume lower seating irrespective of social and political status. Every newly elected political party leader, regardless of ethnicity or religion, pays a visit to *Mahanayakas* (the chief prelates of the three main religious chapters of Sangha), demonstrated respect by abstaining from crossing legs while sitting in front of them, removes both hat and shoes in the temple and in conversation with them. These and other ritual practices display long custom of respect. And while there is no legal punishment for not

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[44] See Benjamin Schonthal, Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law: The Pyrrhic Constitutionalism of Sri Lanka (2016), New York: Cambridge University Press for a detailed analysis of this legal attempt and its unexpected consequences.
[45] Cf. Scott (1994: 175).

performing these rituals there is intense social pressure on those who fail to do so: a continuous

social gaze, public critique in various media, an advice, a demand or ask to leave—these are the

forms of enforcement that inevitably carry a sense of established authority. This authority is not

an exception, protectively sealed off from politics: it is the hidden source of the monks' temporal

power.

In short, the Sri Lankan state cannot let Rathana Thero die when he interrupts the public

political-social order by performing the end of his life, his death. This impossibility is a virtue of

any respectable subject of a tradition, arising from what Marcel Mauss called *habitus*-- "an

embodied capacity that is more than physical ability in that it also includes cultivated

sensibilities and passions, an orchestration of the senses" (Asad 2003: 95). Thus one respects

monks not because necessarily he/she fears punishment or a responsibility, or sense of duty to be

accountable to an authority, rather because moral actions are "passionate performance of an

embodied ethical sensibility" (2003: 95). In other words, *habitus* is "not something one accepts

or rejects, it is part of what one essentially is and must do" (2003: 96). It is my contention that

the Sri Lankan state takes monks' political demands seriously not because it is the state

responsibility or the state is always partial to Sinhala Buddhist. Rather it is a form of life that

constitutes this ethical sensibility that belongs to the modern Sinhala Buddhist state. Thus it

cannot simply ignore his demands and watch him perish. Indeed, these limits of state sovereignty

are contingent and revealed at times when its power is not threatened.[46] Ironically, those who are

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[46] For instance, there are many Sangha's unsuccessful attempts achieving their demands: they received no attention
from the State or suppressed them. Killing, imprisoning and torturing the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) monks
during the State's island wide counteroffensive on the JVP and expulsion of Inter University Student Federation's
monks by tear gazing and heavy watering are some examples for the State suppression on monks. Also in 2014,
Bowaththe Indrarathana a member monk of Sinhala Ravaya, recently emerged organization whose political targets
have been Sri Lankan Muslims burnt himself demanding the State "stopped killing cows."

in power are always the Sinhala Buddhist majority. Most often it is the Sangha's authority that matters.

In contrast to this legitimizing frame of customary practices that bears the conditions for interrupting the State further, consider the State's responses to lives outside its legitimizing frame. The State has let many people die while engaged in hunger strikes. For example, it abstained from preventing the death of Thileepan, a political leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He began a fast-unto-death on 15 September 1987 while demanding the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) leave the country during the decades-long war in Sri Lanka. Thileepan launched his 'martyrdom operation' in a space alongside Nallur temple in the town of Jaffna, an iconic temple (just as strategic a site selection as Rathana's sacrosanct site temple.[47] The Sri Lankan state, in the midst of growing hostilities with the LTTE after the July 1983 riots against Tamils in the country, had signed an agreement with India, famously called the Indo-Lanka Peace Pact, allowing the IPKF to enter the Northern and Eastern provinces to ensure peace within the country. Although this force was at first welcomed by the Tamils in the northern peninsula, it later met with the growing resentments among the people. When the LTTE decided to use one of their bodies as an open weapon of pressure against the IPKF presence, Thileepan performed his death as a resistance to state actions. But neither the Indian State nor the Sri Lankan state took any action to protect Thileepan's life. He was allowed to die, He weakened slowly and eleven days later, on 26 September 1987, he expired. Another example is Annai

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[47] See Roberts, Michael. 2007. "Suicide Missions as Witnessing: Expansions, Contrasts." *Studies in Conflict &Terrorism* 30: 857-887 for a performative evidence of suicide missions, self-immolations practices in the history but with no-escape.

Pupathi. She died under similar conditions. On 19 April 1988 she passed away while protesting

the presence of the IPKF. Both were subsequently immortalized by the LTTE.

As I see it, the hunger strikes of Thileepan and Pupathi did not present the condition for

the possibility of violence that could interrupt the State. The actions were not regarded as a

legitimate force preserved in the Sinhala Buddhist interpretive framework. Therefore, they either

were neglected or suppressed militarily. The negligence of the State toward Tamil or Muslim

lives is a representation of the Sri Lankan state's impossible promise of social equality. The

dominant Sinhala discourse regarded the political, economic or cultural demands of Tamils and

Muslims in terms of 'terrorism' or 'violent fundamentalism;' monks' demands often made a

successful, not-violent story even as their actions violated the normative order of the society.

Consider the death by burning of the monk Bowaththe Indrarathana who killed himself,

demanding the State "stopped killing cows." He is a member monk of *Sinhala Ravaya (the*

Sinhala' Roar), one of the organizations whose political targets have been Sri Lankan Muslims.

He was protesting against the State for a few months by organizing people in marches,

demanding a ban on the slaughter of cattle (mainly because the cattle trade is done by Muslims).

He threatened to take his own life if the government did not comply with his demand (*Sinhala*

Ravaya 2014). Rathana Thero also campaigned to form various organizations to ban the

slaughter of cattle and made alliances with Tamil representative leaders because in Hinduism the

cow is considered a sacred animal. However, Indrarathana died on 24 May 2013 in front of the

Temple of the Tooth by setting himself on fire as a symbolic protest against the state's failure to

ban cattle slaughter. In 2014, a year after his death, at the dedication of a statue of Indrarathana

at a Temple in Embilipitiya, Rathnapura district, Omalpe Sobitha, the current leader of the

Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), said, "venerable Thero [Indrarathana] sacrificed his life to bring

peace and morality to the country and to save the economy of this country from foreign encroachments. Sacrifice of his life opened people's eyes. It was to prevent religious conversion and to have good governance" (Shantha Udaya, 2014). In this rendition, Indrarathana's death was for a righteous cause and therefore not-violent.

Rathana's fast was able to suspend the normal order, a power that is normally wielded only by a sovereign.[48] The Muslim ministers who resigned were representatives of the people: They were duly elected by the people of the country in a fair election. But they were made to resign without a democratic procedure in the parliament. During Rathana's fast there was a No Confidence Motion put forward in the parliament against the aforementioned Muslim leadership, but the politicians resigned before this process was complete because of the pressure created by Rathana's fast. In this respect, the strike represented the fundamental and structural possibility of interrupting normality, law, and due political process. But the important point is that it was not called violence. No one filed a fundamental rights case against Rathana Thero or the government for Muslims having to resign from office. And the simple reason was that Rathana Thero's act and its consequences were not considered violent by those who identified within the Sinhala Buddhist tradition. Hence they were legitimized. It can be argued that Muslim politicians resigning from their posts was also a moment of truth that revealed the ever-present impossibility of a complete political community.

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[48] See Fiskesjö (2003) for a brilliant analysis on the fundamental and structural antagonism towards normality that the sovereign bears deciding on state of exception.

Now at the risk of stating the obvious, I should note that my interest here has not been to tell a generalized story: that Buddhists are violent, or that violence is the norm of the Sri Lankan state. Indeed, the country has a rich history of multi-ethnic, inter-religious coalition building around questions of dissent and state resistance. Whitaker et al., in their discussion on innovative and multiple religiosity in Sri Lanka, suggest that though the Easter Sunday attack may have again suggested to someone that "the only story worth telling about interreligious life there is one unrelenting local conflict," the reality – of mingled cooperation and conflict in Sri Lankan society – is more complex (2021, 32). They argue that though interreligious sites, for instance, are exposed to pressure from state Buddhism, the religious innovations of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims continue to challenge religious boundaries and suggest forms of tolerance. Hence my labor was not to undermine this coexistence among different communities in Sri Lanka despite their antagonisms towards each other, rather to highlight the force within monks that can often, not always, disrupt this coexisting social order.

Conclusion

My efforts here have been to narrate the story of Rathana Thero's fast and the discourses that circulated about it to delineate the conditions of the possibility for determination of force as 'violence,' and construction of force as 'not-violence.' While that monk's fast threatened the state and the political order and caused the capitulation of the state to his demands it was not characterized as violence—even though it helped to create conditions for the possibility for violence against Muslims, including violations of the rights of Muslim politicians as well as more diffuse threats to the lives and property of Muslim citizens. I have argued that whether an act is violent or not depends on the ways in which it creates condition for the possibility of the emergence of violence and the ways in which the 'force' that enable the violence has been

legitimized within a given society. More importantly, the question is whether the use of force has been legitimized within a certain frame. It is important to understand these legitimizing frames; customs, norms, and values that are historically accumulated within a given society. My concern in this chapter, to interrogate the justification of violence such as historically accumulated cultural values and customs thus necessitates a paradigm shift in the study of violence; it is a strategy to avoid a partial reading of violence. Such an approach runs the risk of treating certain violent acts as violent and other violent acts as not-violent. Many liberal-democratic American citizens, to compare between Sri Lanka with the United States for a moment, consider the State's historically differentiated structures and projects against its Black communities as acts of violence. But when the United States sends drones to Middle Eastern countries this usually is not construed as violence. Why so? My simple answer is that America's intervention as a force in other countries has been legitimized in the framework that sees the United States as the protector of the world order and the action as the duty of the world's leading power. Similarly, Sangha in Sri Lanka has the ability to suspend the socio-political order and behave like a sovereign because this power is latent within the Sinhala Buddhist interpretive framework: Sangha is a legitimized force within it. It is notable, indeed that the status of monks makes their hunger strikes appear more virtuous than violent, although this paradoxically is also what contributes to their capacity of violence.

CHAPTER THREE

Sangha's New Demand to be Sovereign: Third Wave Monks in Politics

Abstract

The contemporary ethnographic present of Sri Lanka which Rathana Thero belongs to represents

the third wave of the Sangha's claim to be sovereign in which they established "new politics"

that defines our troubled present. In what follows I locate—both historically and

genealogically— two previous waves of monastic sangha involvement in Sri Lankan politics and

the formations of a contemporary Sangha's "new" demand to become the sovereign, the third

wave monks in politics. Indeed, as these monks argue, Sangha participation in politics is not a

new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. However, several key twentieth and twenty-first century

transitions in monastic involvement with politics are evident and constitutional changes that took

place very recently paved the way for this third wave. While monks involved in current Buddhist

militant nationalist projects argue that they enact a deeply historical past precedent stretching to

the early centuries A.D., I underscore the relative novelty of their current projects and ambitions,

rooted only in the last two centuries. I argue that in Sri Lanka, what is distinctive about the era

that makes possible the monks' claim to sovereignty is the new electoral representation

arrangements, a democratic attempt to include the voice of the numerical minorities.

Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to delineate the trajectory of the "new" claim of the Sangha in politics

and the condition of possibility for the emergence of recent "national movement" (*jathika*

vyaparaya)[49] or the militant Buddhist movements in Sri Lanka in particular led by monks—the political and ideological conditions, more specifically.[50] What is new in monks' demand to be sovereign is not necessarily the claim itself, but its role in constituting a new legitimate order in the Sinhala Buddhist *sampradaya* which I loosely translated as local traditions. Indeed, the claim is temporal, but it emerged within and continues to be based on a consolidated past and present of the *sampradaya.* In other words, it inherited institutions and ideas from the past, but went on to develop diverse but distinctive processes of power and discourse. Through the techniques of the field of the political (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Malathi 2009), this claim authorizes and produces certain knowledge, imaginaries, acts and practices. The claim involves assertions an absolute superiority of the Sinhalese Buddhists that constrains a political and cultural life for the ethnic and religious minorities within the island.

Indeed, within the disciplinary (see De Silva 1989; Dharmadasa 1992) and native Sinhala Buddhist discourses (e.g. Jātika Chintanaya), monks' ability to interrupt the state is not "new," but I argue that the Sangha's demands to be sovereign is new. In other words, Rathana Thero's explicit challenge to state power, the force of monks and effective claim to sovereignty as I discussed in the first chapter, is a novel expression of the Sangha's critical potential to undermine polity and sovereignty. As an attempt to explain this point briefly for the purpose for our discussion on the force of monks, let us underline the ideological underpinnings of their claim.

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[49] National Movement is the word that the recent groups use to explain their efforts to protect the country, nation and religion.

[50] What I follow here is the discussion on the emergence of "violence" as a conceptual category for anthropology in Sri Lanka by Pradeep Jeganathan. He claims that '1983 July' riots that represent the massive atrocities against Tamil community in Sri Lankan history is both "historical and conceptual conditions of possibility of the contemporary Sri Lankan anthropologies of violence" (Violence as an analytical problem 1998: 13).

There is documentary evidence that concerns the monastic involvement in the governance of Lanka understood as the ongoing effort by various individuals, groups and organizations to achieve power and influence in social and political arenas as early as the sixth century since the dawn of first recorded history of Buddhism and its relation to politics (state) and it is well discussed in the literature.[51] For instance, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana (1979) spells out several key relations between the temporal authority and the Sangha in Lankan context from 'monastic landlordism' in the Anuradhapura kingdom to the restored kingdom of Parakramabahu I and his reorganization of the Sangha in the twelfth century. Although Buddha advised the monks to obey the king (Vinaya Pitaka, vol.I, 1879:138), Sangha wielded considerable political power over the sovereign and its subjects, Gunawardena argues. Sangha's role in certain rites and practices, and the kings engagement with the monks to celebrate the coronation festivals, are some signs of a significant relationship between the relationship between monks and the sovereign of the country.[52] These political contacts with Sangha and their importance in monarchical form of governance ceremonies paved the way for legitimacy of Sangha's authority and acceptance of the both parties in the eyes of the people, Gunawardena claims.

Of course, the history of the relationships between sangha members and political leadership is a complex one, revealing considerable variety across historical periods and

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[51] See Ronald B. Inden, Daud Ali, and Jonathan S. Walters' Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia 2000 for discussion on the constructions of a history of an 'original Buddhism' for fashioning the history of the island kingdom and nation in Sri Lanka. Also, see S. Paranavitana, 'Two Royal Titles of the Early Sinhalese and the Origin of Kingship in Ancient Ceylon', *JRAS* (1936) 443-62. K.M. de Silva, Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka, 1880-1985 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986.

[52] See for instance, inscription of Abhayagiri monastery mentioned "the rulers of the island wont to don the white turban to serve and attend the great community of monks on the very day they celebrate the coronation festival after attaining to the dignity of kinship bestowed by the great community of monks for the purpose of defending their bowls and robes" (Gunawardena 1979: 176). Sangha's role in certain rites practices are also evident for this centuries-long relationship. For example, the vessels that were used in consecration ceremony, where by a prince was acknowledged as sovereign, made out of clay that was obtained from seven places, five of which were certainly from religious significance.

geographical locations on the island (Blackburn 2010; (forthcoming); McKinley 2018; Gornall 2020). Here, Gunawardhana's work on Anuradhapura is mentioned simply to illustrate an early phase in polity-sangha relations that can be contrasted with the more contemporary histories discussed here and in Chapters Three and Four. In other words, at Anuradhapura, monks played a role in governance, and accepted sovereigns' patronage, but they were not guarantors or protectors of the polity, nor were they sovereign.

In Sri Lankan Buddhist *sampradaya*, accurately understood, the Buddhist monks (as members of Sangha) are considered as one of the Three Jewels–the two other being the Buddha and Dhamma–hence understood as having a special relationship to the state and its people the former being the institutional guarantee of Buddhism from the arrival of Buddhism in the island more than 2,500 years ago. According to the familiar narrative of any form protests by the Sangha, due to this relationship, whenever the state is threatened, Sangha have a historical duty (*ayithihasika karyabharayak*) to safeguard the land of Sinhalese that are "chosen protectors of Buddhism" (de Silva 1986: 9).

Similarly and unsurprisingly, throughout his insurrectionary act Rathana Thero repeatedly mentioned the Sangha's "historical duty" (*ayithihasima karyabharayak*) to safeguard the island of Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese, understood to function as the "chosen protector of Buddhism." For instance, in his interview, Rathana Thero reminded the audience, "If the politicians cannot run the country, grant us the power (*apita balaya denna*). We know how to run the country. If we remain silent when the country is in danger [*rata anathure thiyeddi*], we will forget our *historical duty* that has been laid over on our shoulders." While Rathana Thero claims an historical duty to protect the country, this history in fact quite recent. Arguments for Sangha

protection of the polity date back only to the middle of the nineteenth century while the pursuit

of Sangha sovereignty is a late 20 century and early 21 century phenomenon.

I argue that prior to the very recent constitutional reforms, Bhikkhus' politics, which I

refer to as the 'third wave' of monks' involvement with governance, was not explicitly about

them becoming the sovereign of the country. Monks contesting for sovereign power in Sri

Lankan modern democracy is a new phenomenon. It is new for several reasons: First, the

condition of possibility for people to contest for sovereign power is premised upon modern

democracy—a new form of secular power that is not legitimated by monarch sovereigns, as in

the premodern age—is a recent phenomenon. With British colonialism, the politics of

representation--the majoritarian principle-- and the universal franchise were introduced by the

Donoughmore commission in 1928 into colonial Ceylon politics (De Silva 1981).[53] Until this

political transformation, what prevailed was the institution of monarchs and the majoritarian

principle in the modern liberal sense was not functioning. More importantly, it is new as the

conditions of possibility for recent monks' demand to be sovereign is enabled by the Fifteenth

Constitutional Amendment in 1988. It is a result of a change that brought to Sri Lanka's

Proportional Electoral System. In other words, it was the constitutional reform that decreased the

cutoff point from 12.5 to 5 percent of the voter percentage that a party needed to enter the

Parliament (Shastri 2006). This decrease of the voter percentage allows ethnically or religiously

or ideologically small parties (e.g. Muslim Congress) and anti- Muslim Sinhala Buddhist groups

(e.g. Jatika Hela Urumaya on which more in Chapter 3) to enter the Parliament.

Succinctly, not only monks led groups and organizations but certain lay individuals,

groups and organizations mushroomed in the context, and as a largely unintended by-product, of

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[53] See K.M. de Silva, A history of Sri Lanka. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1981.

this larger political strategy directed primarily at incorporating numeric minority voices into the legislature. In 1978, the system of the electing representatives to the national legislature changed from first-past-the-post (FPP) to a proportional representation (PR) system, with the expectation that there would be 'cross- ethnic coalition building' (Shastri 2006: 35).[54] The United National Party, with its new constitution, introduced a proportional system of representation for the members of the legislature; with a cut-off point of as low as five percent of the votes of the population, a candidate can gain representation in the Parliament. This arrangement altered the previous political terrain in which a single person who succeeded to obtain the majority of votes entered the legislature.[55] While the system allowed the ethnically minority parties a group autonomy over their own affairs, it also enabled them to veto the decisions of the two main majoritarian larger parties, Sri Lanka Freedom Party and United National Party.[56] Thus it was a constitutional response to the haunting return of the excluded forces that constitutes the formation of any democratic polity, in a Laclau and Mouffe sense. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Laclau and Mouffe argue that democratic polities are necessarily incomplete as they are predicated upon exclusions. However, when the excluded forces return or their haunting

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[54] See for detailed analysis on both these political systems and its political outcomes in Sri Lanka; Minna Thaheer (2010) "Why the Proportional Representation System Fails to Promote Minority Interests? A discussion on contemporary politics and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. In Power and Conflict Democracy Vol 2 (1). Pp.95-118. After 1978, Sri Lanka adopted a Proportional Representation (PR) System with larger electoral districts which proportionally elected members from a multitude of parties. Currently, the 22 electoral districts largely correspond to Sri Lanka's administrative units, also termed 'districts'.3 Accordingly, Sri Lanka currently utilizes a single ballot to elect its 225 Parliamentarians: 196 seats to 22 multi-member constituencies and 29 national seats. Each voter is allowed to select up to three candidates (without a rank ordering) from within their chosen party as their preferred representatives within their electoral district. This system referred to internationally as 'open list' voting is referred to in Sri Lanka as 'preferential voting'.

[55] Presenting the 15th amendment to the constitution, Lalith Athulathmudali, defense minister said "unlike at a national stage where you need to have strong government, in provincial elections what is important is that as far as possible all possible shades of local opinion must gain some recognition. I do not know we are right, but that is the principle that has been accepted and that is what we are proposing today" (Hanzard 1988, December 08, Ahutlathmudali 2409). The expected two consequences of the amendments; first, reduction of the cut off point to five percent brings the proportional representational system close in line with the more common systems of the world. Second, small parties can survive on their own without going for alliances.

[56] One of the main criticisms to this system is that perpetuating small ethnically based parties limits the possibility of non-ethicized governance (Shastri 2006: 35). See also David Horowitz and Benjamin Reilly.

become successful, they can rearticulate basic premises of democracy itself.[57] In what follows, I show how these democratic initiatives broaden and expand the democratic spaces for even extremist groups to emerge though indeed, it was not for the best society.

In light of this background, what I propose to do in this chapter is the following: First, I shall delineate the novelty of Sangha's claim to sovereignty and situate it in the decades-long historical narrative of politics, governance, and Buddhism that shapes the parameters of my study. My ethnological concerns are with the contemporary, but I construct a relatedness to the past from the contemporary moment to show the shift that has occurred in monks' claims in politics. To do so, I briefly examine accounts of two waves of monks' politics to point out that the Sangha's claim to become sovereign—evident in Rathana Thero's argument—is new. Though their involvement in politics is not new, in the past they were limited to advising or promoting lay people to fulfill their political needs while they now aspire to sovereignty of the state. Second, I discuss the institutional dimensions that I argue to be the "historical condition of possibility" for the emergence of the monks' demand to be sovereign, and the monks as law-makers.

The Sangha in Politics: The First Wave

As mentioned above, there is evidence of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka and Myanmar rejecting elite (including royal) patronage on occasion as a form of critical practice (Mendelson 1975; Abeysekara 2002; Blackburn 2010; Turner 2014). Arguments for monastic involvement in governance arise late in Sri Lanka and are linked to colonial-era developments (Seneviratne 1999; Blackburn 2010). In his compelling book *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society,* Kitsiri

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[57] C.f. Butler, Judith (2000: 11-13), Restaging the Universal.

Malalgoda meticulously traces the claim of a historical duty of the Sangha, and their involvement in governance, to the collapse of Kandyan Kingship in the early nineteenth century. He argues that the 1860 onwards marked a transition from the "traditional attitude of tolerance towards other religions to active and militant resistance leading eventually even to manifestations of intolerance (1973: 173).[58] On Malalgoda's reading, the residues of the "militant resistance" of Buddhists and the continued struggle to establish a political order is an eventual consequence of the persistent colonial enmity towards Buddhism. Bolstering a common view that Buddhists were tolerant towards even to aliens before colonialism, Malalgoda claims that it is "not very surprising" that monks had to confront Christianity, and more broadly "Western political dominance," due to the Buddhist loss of state patronage in the wake of the state's withdrawal of political and financial support that led to the Sangha's "disestablishment" (Malalgoda 1982: 259) of the Buddhist order, the Sangha. However, Malalgoda does not suggest that Sangha had authority over temporal power in this order in the sense that they had sovereign power. Rather 'disestablishment' refers to the removal of centralized royal patronage of the Sangha, heightened Christian provocations, eventually causing discontents, conflicts, controversies and segmentation within the order of Sangha.

Further, contrary to prophecies of doom of Buddhism in the narrative of colonial modernity, he argues that what happened in Buddhism was not a "decay" as many would lament, but rather a "shift" in Buddhism's center, from Kandy in the highlands, home to a high-caste monopoly of Sangha fraternity who were supported by the Kingship at the political center, to the Low Country, or maritime districts (Malalgoda 1973: 189). This shift was a consequence of the colonial withdrawal of royal patronage for Buddhism, and was accelerated by the segmentation

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[58] Kitsiri Malalgoda, "The Buddhist-Christian Confrontation in Ceylon, 1800-1880," Social Compass 20, No 2(1973).

of the order of monks in which lower caste monks played a prominent role (Kemper 1980).[59] The story of the emergence of the "new and rebellious" *Amarapura Nikaya,* in which Rathana Thero was later ordained, is an example of the result of the fracturing dominance of the *Siyam Nikaya* that had maintained the authority structure of the Kandyan ecclesiastical establishment with state patronage.[60] Crucial to Malalgoda's story is that it was this profound change in the Sangha from the 1860 onwards that enabled the Buddhists to contest the colonial order. Moreover, their earlier attitude of tolerance towards other religions shifted into "active and militant resistance leading eventually even to manifestations of intolerance" (Malalgoda 1973:173).

More importantly, the emergence and expansion of fraternities, and the internal politics of the Sangha, went hand in hand with the emergence of disadvantaged or non *Govigama* caste (Govigama were considered to be the highest ranked caste within the caste hierarchy) patrons, Malalgoda claims. They gained upward social mobility under colonial rule politically and economically which turned the wheels of post-colonial history towards that of lasting impact. The monks and patrons of the *Amarapura* fraternity originated in the financial hotspots of the Southern Province of Ceylon, namely Mathara (where Rathana Thero--discussed above--is from), Galle, and later, Colombo (Malalgoda 1975: 188). By describing the groups in this way, however, I do not intend to territorialize—limit the militant resistance to particular territory— or *fraternize* —limit the resistance to one particular segment of monks—the contemporary

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[59] See also K.M. de Silva 1965, S.J. Tambiah 1973. Buddhism and This-Worldly Activity. *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.7 (1). Pp.1-20.

[60] See Malalgoda (1976: 104). Amarapura Nikaya was established in the low country around 1800s by the non govigama caste monks due to the weakening of the authority structure of the Kandyan monks' establishment (Malalgoda 139). It was established by five different groups who traveled to Burma and returned with higher ordination at different times during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. So It had "more the character of a loose federation of fraternities than that of a unified and centralized fraternity" (144). However, Amarapura nikaya was famous among the monks of Siyam Nikaya in the Kandyan provinces, as they considered the Amarapura fraternity and their "radical ideology" as an easy avenue to organize against the existing establishment (Malalgoda 1976: 139). Siyam Nikaya established in the middle of the eighteenth century with the help of Siamese monks who were brought to Ceylon from Siam (Malalgoda 1976: 144).

resistance by locating Rathana in this narrative. In the contemporary context, in fact, this "militant resistance" cuts across caste and class, a subject which will be examined in detail in subsequent chapters. Rather, here I wish to identify key moments of historical change that have helped shape the contemporary conceptual frameworks related to Buddhism in Sri Lanka and locate the position of contemporary resistance movement of Sangha.

The point I want to emphasize is that in the colonial era, as the Sangha sought involvement in politics and governance, they did not seek sovereignty. Rather, their struggle was to reestablish the earlier social order structured through royal state patronage and under which they were taken care of. In other words, no evidence exists to show that the Sangha's involvement in governance was an attempt to capture state power. This was evident in the series of *vadayas (*controversies, debates*)* that occurred from the mid-1860s to the 1880s. The monks' involvement in politics to "protect" and "defend" the *Sasana* was shaped by wider debates about the power and the patronage associated exclusively with the Catholic and Anglican clergy. [61] For instance, the School Commision established in 1834 to supervise the existing government schools gave Anglican clergy much decision making power with regard to education. Monks' politics and resistance were influenced by these colonial decisions. Further, their debates were about the following themes: Overthrowing Christianity: Baddegama Controversy (1976: 225); creating Printing establishments to spread Buddhist messages: Sav Sat Dam Controversy (literary controversy) (1976: 184); the proper role of *dayakas* (patrons of the temple); maintenance of religious institution; how to appropriately interpret rules of monastic discipline (*vinaya*): Dussila Vadaya, or the 'controversy on the impious monks (1976: 170-172) and more importantly, obtaining upasampada, which required much state patronage (1976: 148-172);

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[61] The School Commission that made to supervise the existing government schools (Malalgoda 1976: 194).

controversy on the propitiation of deities: Devapuja Vadaya. As we can see many of the themes were intra-Buddhist. None of these controversies or debates were about whether they should become sovereign—instead, they were struggling to regain the patronage the monks once enjoyed from the central authority of the state. Put differently, they were longing for a king, not to become a king.

In her work *Locations of Buddhism*, Anne Blackburn locates the role of Hikkaduve Sumangala, a prominent monk, in the Buddhist Order during the colonial period and investigates both challenges and opportunities for Sri Lankan Buddhists brought by the modernizing and colonizing forces in nineteenth-century. She shows how the Sangha's longing for a king is an apparent struggle in colonial history, as they were losing political patronage with the arrival of colonialists. This longing, which was expressed by a vision of Burmese, Siamese or Cambodian kingship patronage for Lankan Buddhism, shows the pressing needs of the Buddhist monks not only to reestablish the relationship between the monastic order and the central royal authority, but also to resolve the "island's monastic struggles and divisions" (Blackburn 2010: 168). The debates and arguments were above Sangha's expectations about their obedience to a king, rather than the view that they had the authority over king. One indication of the nature of the relationship that the monks were expecting is apparent in a letter written in 1897 to Rama V in Siam, when the local monks expected that he would accept their request to become the patron of Lanka *Buddha-Sasana*:

> "We, the undersigned, for ourselves and on behalf of the rest of the Buddhist priesthood of Ceylon, beg to tender our deep regards and tender love to Your Majesty, as the only Buddhist sovereign of the world yet preserved to us, to look to for the protection of the

religion of our Lord Buddha and the Advancement of out spiritual Welfare…We anxiously look forward to the day when the Buddhist priests and Laymen here will *recognize, acknowledge and yield implicit obedience to the laws and decisions of your enlightened ecclesiastical Government and Sovereignty* as not only binding on us and them, but on the whole of the Buddhist world and as the natural and respected head of our common religion we look to you, and beg of you to advise us, to organize the means *whereby we can approach you, and be guided by your decision in all matters of religious law and reform,* and to generally help us for the furtherance and better establishment of the religion of Lord Buddha (16 March 1897, reproduced in the Ceylon Observer, 24 March 1897; cited in Blackburn 2010: 168 emphasis true to the text).

The Buddhist monks' response to the colonial encounter is modern because, as David Scott has suggested, they did not themselves "choose the terrain for their encounter with the Christian missionaries," but "the monks arrived at a point at which they were obliged to respond on the terrain chosen for them, which made them realize the 'traditional' terrain was being systematically displaced by—or reconstituted into—a new one that in definitive ways rendered the old options inefficacious" (1999: 61). Indeed, this colonial confrontation of monks' claims, agendas, and stakes shows how they were preoccupied with a political vision for a type of leadership that opposed and was separate from colonial governance. However, their entrance into the modern political sphere was not colored by the discourse of seeking or needing sovereignty.

Further, Scott tracing the processes through which the categories of the modern, such as "religion" and "Buddhism" were constituted, suggests the importance of attending to how they came in to being and the changing assumptions embedded in them within their own traditions. As a response to Malalgoda's argument—that people of Lanka were tolerant with even with the

aliens hence no struggle between Sinhalese and Christians until 1860s and there were no institutionalized mobilizations against Christian missionaries— Scott argues that the shift of attitude from "lack of resistance" to "militant resistance" needs to be understood on the part of "the Buddhists was that for them there was not really a "religion"— one called Buddhism"— to defend, in the way that there would certainly have been for the missionaries a very distinct "religion"— one called "Chirstianity"— doing the attacking" (1996: 60). Scott goes on to argue that deployment of "Buddhism" or an associated identity with it—the Buddhists— had not been constructed earlier, but was a product of the "adversarial relation" with Christianity that came into existence during the 19th century. What particularly concerns Scott in this narrative are the very social and political field that was fashioned by modern secular rationale in which these categories are constructed, negotiated, and resolved. Following Scott's argument on this modern character of the emergence of 'Buddhism' as something to be protected, I wanted to emphasize the fact that not only the Sangha's militant form of resistance is new but also their demand to be sovereign in their resistance movement to protect Buddhism is new.

Further, resistance against the colonialists was the first wave of the monks' involvement in the political sphere. These monks' struggle against the colonists had a lasting impact not only on the *Sasana*, but also on the political modernity of Sri Lanka. In other words, this colonial encounter precipitated the second wave of monks in politics in which they developed "militant resistance," to use Malalgoda's term, towards the non-Sinhala Buddhist ethnic and religious communities in the country. However, in what follows, I will show their demands were still not of becoming sovereigns. In the second wave, monks were asking power for the parties that they represented but not for power for their direct sovereignty.

The Sangha in Politics: The Second Wave

The second wave refers to monks' political involvement in the first quarter of the post-independence period,[62] following Sri Lanka's independence from the British in 1948. Scholars describe it with various terms: *"Buddhism betrayed," "Buddhism transformed," "political Buddhism," "Buddhist fundamentalism,"* and *"Buddhist nationalism."* As Abeysekara claims it is the time that categories like "Buddhism", "religion" came into being as deployable ideological entities which had their own historical narrative inserted into the problematic of the emergence of violence. The 1940s is "the most important, if not the first" political context that gave rise to public debate about the relation between Buddhism and politics (Abeysekara 2002: 81). The main participants in the debate were the United National Party (UNP), or the dominant political party in power at the time, and the monks of Vidyalankara Pirivena and Vidyodaya Pirivena, the most prestigious monastic colleges in Sri Lanka that were established by the first wave of Bhikkhus in politics.[63] The origin of these monastic colleges is in the end of the nineteenth century. Vidyalankara Pirivena was founded 1875 by Ratmalane Sri Dhammaloka, and Vidyodaya Pirivena was founded in 1873 by Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala. They were built to revive monastic education in the context of British colonialism. The Vidyalankara monks became the supporters of the emerging leftwing, Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP), which was formed in 1936. Seemingly having a calculation of the emergence of the force within this monks' support, J.R.Jayawardena, the future leader of UNP, published an article as early as 1934 titled

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[62] For a useful discussion of this period in Ceylon, see Donald E.Smith, The Sinhalese Buddhist Revolution, and The Political Monks and Monastic Reform and in Siriwardene's 'Buddhist Reorganization in Ceylon. In D.E. Smith (ed.), 1966.

[63] See Seneviratne, Work of Kings for more on the origins and the political involvement of the monks in these colleges.

"Buddhism and Politics," which maintained the necessity of a strong separation of politics from Buddhism and demanded that monks should not participate in "politics." His reasoning was: "Buddhism and politics are terms which refer to two different systems of human thought and activity. It is said that the Buddha advises members of the Buddhist Sangha not to take part in politics. No one can say, however, that he exhorted politicians not to study or follow his teaching, and politicians who rule nations and attempt to mold the lives of their fellow men" (Cited in Abeysekera 2002: 82). The polemic brevity of this political demand provoked ample public debates and texts, posters, pamphlets, broadsides, and booklets envisaging a new order for monastic life.[64]

One among many such texts was *Bhikshuvage Urumaya*, written by the prominent Vidyalankara monk, Walpola Rahula. This work was translated and published in the United States as *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu,* which later became a "manifesto" for contemporary monastic life (Seneviratne 1999: 168). Responding to the political and ideological position of those like Jayawardena who were against monks' involvement in politics, Rahula argued that engagement with "politics" is every monks' duty to the country. According to Rahula's interpretation this duty, which is a cry that reverberates among contemporary Bhikkhus today (as shown further in subsequent chapters), was apparent even during the time of Buddha himself. However, Rahula's view is not empirically/historically correct though it was a powerful reinterpretation of the history of the country. His arguments for "a connection between state and religion as an integral part of an exemplification of the monk's work as social service" is not consistent with the historical evidence, Seneviratne argues. Though there is, however, evidence

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[64] Seneviratne writes that the seed of the family of texts grew from The Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena, written by a Vidyalankara monk, Yakkaduve Pragnasra, and it set the tone for the monastic life: the vocation of the monk is social service (1999: 136).

for how monks worked with the kings closely (See Blackburn 2001; 2010) to meet their ends, the connection between "religion" and "state" in the modern sense is a novel phenomenon, as discussed above, premodern involvement of monks in governance is very different from than those imagined in the colonial era and the mid 20th century.

Further, Rahula argues for a long history of Sinhala Buddhist monks engaged in social and political spheres; he referred to this as the "heritage of the monk" in Sri Lanka.[65] As a response to the question of whether the monks' involvement in secular, mundane practices such as doing "politics" would deprive the *Sasana*, the Vidyalankara monks turned to the "needs of the modern world and international requirements" that were the consequence of the "natural process of history that cannot be stopped" (Rahula 1974: 97). In other words, according to their interpretation, the socio-economic and political changes that swept society and the state and the transformation to monastic life were inevitable.[66] Following Rahula's advocacy, monks were keen to take part in these changes, thus proving their legitimacy to engage in activities for the social welfare of others, a behavior that was imagined to be an indispensable component for the monks in a secular social order. Their "social service" includes a broad sense of political activities that expanded on monks' social involvement in earlier historical eras. Beyond participating in ritual practices, the Vidyalankara Bhikkhus embraced monastic activities such as providing medicine, conflict resolution, teaching, literature, art and culture, protecting the country and religion, and becoming the "guardians of the nation" (Rahula 1974: 97).

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[65] For a lengthy discussion of the formation of this ideological claim and its outcomes, see Seneviratne's *Work of Kings*, 168-188. There he discusses the reaction to this position of the heritage of Bhikkhus from some monks of Vidyodaya. For instance, Henpitigedara Nanavasa pointed out that the real Buddhist goals and values are not to serve the people as such, but to attain Nirvana.

[66] When the Sasana Sodhana Council (cleansing of the Buddhist order) established by J.R. Jayawardena, D.S. Senanayake and D.S. Wijewardena in association with the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress and demanded that *The Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena* that defined the vocation of the monks as social service, should withdraw it, the responded that they are ambivalent as to whether the "cleansing of the order" should be conducted in accordance with the Buddha's times or the contemporary times. See Abeysekera 2002: 86 and Seneviratne 1999: 137.

Indeed, as Rahula rightly perceived, "political monks" engaged in social service adapting to the changing social environment. I wish to re-emphasize, however, that this concept of "social service" did not include the monks' demand to contest governance in the sense of forming political parties, entering government, and obtaining sovereign status. Rather the new interpretive moves by Rahula and his colleagues attempted to establish the legitimacy for monks to participate in the work of the state: to work for people, represent people, to solve people's economic, political, and social problems. Hence similar to the first wave, there is still no discussion on Sangha demanding sovereign power of the country. In other words, the monks in second wave concretizes their political involvement in their relationship to governance, their relationship to the state, their seeking or needing the state patronage, but they did not demand power for them to become sovereign in the country.

These historical instances discussed as the first and second "wave" show that claims about the necessity of the Sangha's involvement with ideas about governance and social order in Sri Lanka had been a prominent component of the modern history of the country, since the middle of the nineteenth century. In the first wave as I mentioned, claims were about how to reestablish a central authority and regain a king that had been made absent by colonial governance. It was about bringing a leadership that favors their interests and provides them patronage. The second wave, preceding the first generation of monks in politics, was mostly about whether they can legitimize their party political involvement and their other secular involvement in society beyond the temple sphere (*pansalen epita*). However, what they certainly were not thinking about was having monks become the sovereign. In other words, they were longing for a king, political patronage or loyal politicians but not to become them. This is what is "new." And it marks and makes a new beginning.

The Sangha in Politics: The Third Wave

This "new" claim, "grant us power" (apita balaya denna) which I described as a demand to be sovereign that emerged over the last four decades, in particular in the mid 1990s, is grounded with a familiar story that justifies their movement against non-Sinhala and Buddhist communities. Many of the leading figures in the movement such as Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thero (Secretary General of Bodu Bala Sena), Omalpe Sobitha Thero (Leader of the Jathika Hela Urumaya), Madille Pangnaloka Thero (Secretary of Sinhala Ravaya), Akmeemana Dayarathana Thero (Secretary General of Sinhala Ravaya) put forward a similar story, though they have said it in complicated ways. This familiar story as Galagodaaththe Ganasara Thero said (I summarized his explanation here for clarity) :

> The Sinhala-Buddhists have 2,500 years of historical heritage. Since the dawn of the country, relations were strong between Buddhism and the state, and the Sangha is considered to be the guardians of the Sinhala nation and the country. Colonialism, which formed the roots of political modernity in Sri Lanka, destroyed Sinhalese culture. It introduced a new legal system in which Sinhalese Buddhists, the "real owners of the country" (*saba urumakkaruvo*), are equal to other ethnic communities. It introduced a parliamentary system where other ethnic communities can compete for state power and generally become "king makers" (*rajun thananan*), a particular form of power that only the Sangha enjoyed before. It established an education system that created the "white Sinhalese" (*Sinhala Suddo*), who have become the followers of Western attitudes, culture, and market-oriented economic models. In sum, colonialism destroyed the very foundation of Sinhalese culture and civilization that was built on deep Buddhist religious traditions. Thus, the Sangha has the authority to act against any form of threat to the

country, and indeed now the one coming from "Muslim expansionism." Unlike in the past, they cannot trust anybody in power (i.e., parliament), thus their presence in sovereign governance is of historical importance (Interview with Galagodaaththe Gnanasara, July 25, 2019).

The narrative is a critique to the formation of the modern state or political modernity in Sri Lanka. The claim that from the origins of the country, there has been a well-established relation between the State, Buddhism and the Sangha as the guardians of the Sinhala nation and the country is not only shared as a common knowledge in Sri Lanka, among many Buddhists but it also governs scholarly work. As a well-known Sri Lankan historian, K.M. de Silva put it,

> "the introduction of Buddhism to the island around the third century BC had an impact on the people as decisive as the development of irrigation technology was in economic activity. Buddhism became in time the state religion and the bedrock of the culture and civilization of the island, so much so that the Sinhalese grew accustomed to regarding themselves as the chosen protectors of Buddhism. Sri Lanka itself was viewed as, "a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion," a concept that linked the land, the people, and the Buddhist faith, in brief an intermingling of religion and national identity which has always had the most profound influence on the Sinhalese" (1986: 9).[67]

In the configurations of this story, an "arrogant history of errors" as David Scott nicely put is produced. Though this narrative profess their favor to the Sinhalese nation and aim to

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[67] K.M. de Silva.1986. Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka, 1880-1985 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.

restore its premodern sovereignty, the loss of which they attribute to colonial governance, this view of premodern Sinhala Buddhist sovereignty is historically inaccurate as noted above (Malalgoda 1982; Seneviratne 1999; Blackburn 2010; Scott 1999; Gunawardena 1973). Their critical intellectual tradition thematizes the development of "Buddhism" (religion), "Sinhala" (ethnic identity) and "Lanka" (state) around cultural-political interventions to locate their historically "shifting problem spaces"; that is to say, they are "conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations, or language games that are generative of objects, and therefore of questions" (Scott 1999: 8). Part of their argument is to show the emergence of these categories as self-evident though the problem-space in which they emerged have always been changing or demanded answers and questions in which replaced previously assumed regular, stable shape of these categories. In other words, one of the central problems of the narrative of militant forces that these scholars tried to show is that it involves a certain suspension of the question of the political, the changing competing parties and divergent interests for power and their emergent context. They normalized the questions and answers that constitute the problem-space and taken the categories they engaged with as self-evident. Hence the essentialist assumptions and rigidity attributes to these concepts and ideologies needs to be under scrutiny. In other words, it is important to interrogate the grounds in which this narrative, their extremist ideology is normalized if we are to dismantle the location that it occupies and authorizes.

As one of the most timely and formidable interventions to demystify this Sinhala Buddhist ideology, R.A.L.H. Gunawardena, in his famous essay 'The People of the Lion,' meticulously shows the recent construction of the relation between community and history in Sri Lanka in which Sinhala, a circumscribed royal kin group reconstituted as the name of a "race" of

people. Here he discusses how Sinhala ideology with its associations with language, race, and religion refashioned the past and the problem-space of this narrative.

> Since many writers assume that the Sinhala ideology in its current form has a very old history, it may be relevant to point out that even in the European languages the word race . . . dates only from about the sixteenth century and that the biological definition of the term as denoting a group distinct from other members of the species by specific physiological characteristics is of even more recent origin. In both Sinhala and Tamil, it is difficult to find a satisfactory equivalent to this word. Hence it does not seem likely that racial consciousness can be traced back very far into the past of these two linguistic groups. Thus when an author of popular historical writings speaks of the mythical Vijaya as having been anxious to find a queen "of his own Aryan race" and further states that "his pride of race revolted at the thought of any but a pure Aryan succeeding to the Government which he had striven so laboriously to found" or when academic historians writing about ancient Sri Lanka refer to "the Sinhala race," they are all presenting a view of the past molded by contemporary ideology (Gunawardana 1990: 45).

Here, he points out the impossibility of imagining a present guaranteed in the past retrospectively as the concept one used to make certain relations between Sinhala and history not only are very recent invention(s) but they are recent articulations. His main focus is to point out the falsehood of this dissemination of the knowledge of this popular Sinhala ideology. For instance, the beginning of the Sinhala consciousness, he argues, arose as part of the period of state formation. Hence the formation of collective identity, "Sinhala" is a formation of a discursive terrain in which it always signifies a particular meaning within the parameters of a

given socio-political historical context. It is to say that Sinhala identity cannot be taken for granted as a stable concept.

The historical continuity that is claimed to legitimize popular Sinhala Buddhist ideology[68], as Gunawardena elaborated, constructed through diverse and competing narratives. Thus, to thematize Sinhala identity seemingly attributed immobility in the present of the popular apparatus of Sinhala ideology, one needs to reexamine the histories, new modes of social organization and knowledge, and political mobilizations in which it has been produced. In other words, we need to attend to the "*positioned* character" of categories of our problematics in historical narratives as Scott aptly put it. We need to embrace the discursive formation therefore positioned character of historical narrative that these categories emerged, developed, and altered.

However, it is not only that we need to demonstrate the positioned character or their contingent nature of these categories the ideologues of the movement engaged with, but also the scholars'; those who tried to reconstruct the divergent history of these categories to get history right and destroy nationalist claims "on the validity of its representation of the past" (Scott 1994: 101). In other words, these categories are contingently produced, we will never be able to get them right as they belong to a certain past, a particular problem-space thus our limitation to fully grasp them correctly. Showing a different historicity of the nationalist ideologies precisely invites the kind of criticisms that cast doubts of this historicity producing and presenting new questions, data, sources of the same categories that are already been historicized. Ultimately question about nationalist ideologies and their extremism comes to a question about who is

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[68] The continuity of this narrative is constructed through foundational narratives, the familiar stories, of Buddha's bestowal upon that community of a permanent benediction as the true island of his dhamma; Vijaya's arrival and his relation to an authentic community; of the rise of Anuradhapura as the site of civilization; of Dutugamunu's heroism against the Tamil King, Elara, and so on (Amarasekere 1988; de Silva 1986; de Silva 1991). But there are different versions of these narratives.

correct about the past. Hence, I invite to interrogate, following Scott's suggestion, the positioned character of the religio- nationalist ideology of the militant movement and its concepts that many scholars have failed to understand.

Understanding the religious-nationalist ideology in its positioned character is of critical significance as it demonstrates the way the religio-nationalist narratives set up and the importance of paying our attention to the political field that our problem categories are contested, constructed and negotiated and set aside producing a linear story of the history of our present. So what concerns me here is the conditions that configure the terrain on which certain ideologies, organizations, groups were engaged and produced "new" forms of power, new forms of knowledge, and new forms of subjectivity. However, attending to the ruptures and discontinuity of certain concepts do not necessarily demanding to produce another history treated past or the history as "a self-evident, causally self-successive flow, the proper elucidation of which can offer assurance and secure guidance to the present" (Scott 1999: 93-94). In other words, marking the ruptures of a certain history is not to produce another history of a people or society. It is to examine the newly emergent discourses and relate it to its historical and social background, and the immediate socio-political and economic factors that led to the developments of those discourses to mark its newness or the ruptures. Further, it is an attempt to focus on the antagonism, contingency, and politics of "disserve traditions" (in Talal Asad's terms) that we take as our object of inquiry.

In my view, there have been many sovereign competing articulations of Buddhist identity formation and claims to Sinhala Buddhist nationhood. However, until the third wave monks' involvement in politics (discussed above), their demand was not about to become sovereigns of the country. This demand is new.

The groups and organizations that are in question of our inquiry organize and mobilize Sinhala community based on a presupposed eternal past and they use a narrative of historical continuity to guarantee the legitimacy of political in the present. In short, although the theoretical and political responses to the Sinhala chauvinist argument of continuous Sinhala identity exhaustively have demonstrated the history is partial to the communities that are negated by the meta narratives of Sinhala Buddhists, they have not been able to change the ground reality of Lanka where such narratives and thinking remains vital. The political organizing against minority communities or Muslims has not weakened rather strengthened. In other words, the ideology of a continuous past of Sinhala identity and the country informs the labor of political organizing of the recently emerged groups and organizations whose politics has been against Muslims in the country. This leads us to ask the question: why and how are the majoritarian groups are able to transcend the academic attacks on these groups' politics and ideologies? Although these groups are small in numbers, they have been able to represent the parliament and play a part of decisive politics in the country. In what follows, I attend to the condition of possibility that enabled these groups and organizations' emergence as political entities. In doing so, I turn on the need to understand some of the organizing mechanisms and their ideological claims through which monks' demand to be sovereign are expressed and articulated. This study looks at the mechanisms that bear the totalitarian imaginary inscribed into the political terrain in the island in the context of the recent, profound modern, democratic institutional arrangement.

Indeed, the political past and the present of this claim is an enormously complex one. Therefore, to any observer of this recent formation of monks' involvement in politics, it is clear that there can be no simple conditions of possibility for the emergence for the monks' demand to be sovereign. It is facile to think that there ought to be, and of requires a careful critically

account of the contemporary movement and the debates around it. Central to my task is the examination of the practices, discourses and the authors of this new claim, and how they authorize their claim, and thus the political space that they are battling out. It is a genealogical inquiry that allows me to explore how people talk about and engage with power and authority in shifting moments of time (Asad 2015). As Asad insists genealogical critique is "not a rejection of *all* grounding; its ground is "today," the place from which one thinks of the difference between time present and time past, and aspires to future time" (Asad 2015). To do so, I attend to the contemporary ethnological present of Sri Lanka.

Institutional Possibility for "Kingmaking"

First I wish to turn to the profound significance of the era–third wave of monks in politics– during which the monks' claim to be sovereign gained traction. This was the 1990s, a decade that followed the beginning of an era of exceptions that became the norm in the island. It was an era of the 'temporality of the aftermaths of political catastrophe' to use Scott's words that buried, burnt, and disappeared nearly 60,000 revolutionary youth from the South, marking the rise and fall of two insurgencies of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the third main political party in contemporary Sri Lanka (Perera 1995; Kapferer 1997; Watkins 2005). It was also the time when the youth of the North of the island were burying their people and sending the bodies of thousands more lower class and caste Sinhalese to the South due to the civil war between the Sri Lanka government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Manikkalingam 1992; Jayadewa 1995; Perera 1994). It was also the decade of the expectation of the masses of the South for an end to the broken promise of an *dharmishta samajaya,* a righteous society that J.R.Jayawardena's government was unable to bring about in seventeen

years. It was also following this period that the J.R. Jayawardena government's "open door" market policies introduced new vigor and dynamism into the values, principles and practices of an increasingly commercializing society (Kannangara and Hemantha 2014; Venugopal 2018; Brow 1990; De Silva 1997). The masses expected a "new," a new that would at least end the eleven years of war that consumed most of the UNP governance.

Meanwhile, the politics and the violence of the island were paving the way for the unprecedented turn of bringing minority parties to the Parliament, made possible by the changes to the electoral representation system in December 1988. Many communities or parties that have a minority voice in the electoral system were able to get into the parliament as this proportional system enabled any party which gets a minimum of five per cent of the vote in any district to enter the Parliament (Shastri 2006: 38) and thus increased the ethnic and religious distribution in the places of decision making. These electoral arrangements made it possible for small parties to be elected to the parliament and broaden the political discourse, though this most often polarized and deepened the ethnic and religious divisions. Michel Foucault would remind us that any political rational arrangement does not necessarily bring the expected but unexpected, thus the new subjects, conduct, relations, and world views into being.[69] The militant Sinhala Buddhists groups are the unexpected that set my intellectual labor to work.

It was believed that all parties would take into consideration the importance of the ethnic composition of the electorate in order to attract their votes, since the number of representatives that is allocated to the electoral district is in proportion to the votes that they received in that electorate (Shastri 2006: 39). It was also expected that minority party representatives will have a decisive role in establishing the government, as under the PR system it is difficult for any single

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[69] Brown, Wendy *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* 2015. Pp36.

party to obtain even a single majority (Uyangoda 2010: 38), though this expectation faded with the unprecedented victory of the Sri Lanka *Podujana Peramuna* (People's Alliance) in the general election in 2020, contested almost exclusively on ideological claims of Sinhala Buddhist superiority over the other ethnic and religious communities. However, prior to 2012, it has always been the Tamil or Muslim parties' alliance that has made the difference in decisive bill passing in the Parliament. For constitutional reforms, as there needs to be a two-thirds majority in parliament as the minimum constitutional requirement for amending the Constitution, the role of minority representatives has become decisive. It is this political status that Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups use to label Muslim representatives as "kingmakers" that became central to the critique of Sinhala Buddhists' electoral discourse.

Minority party representation in the Parliament and their alleged "kingmaker" role mainly became an issue for groups who contested for "Sinhala only" representation around the mid-90s, when the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) gained nine seats in the 1994 general election. They became the third major political force in Sri Lankan political landscape and decisive force in forming the central government[70] after this election, though their presence in the parliament was not new.[71] Their prominent representation with ministerial posts such as transport, finance, foreign service, and harbor in President Bandaranayake's third government made their presence in the public space visible.

The irony of this register is that the monks in power put into doubt the very same democratic rationale that enabled their (numerically minority monks') presence in the parliament

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[70] See Mohammad Agus Yusoff, Athambawa Sarjoon, Nordin Hussin and Azhar Ahmed 2017. Analyzing the Contributions of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and Its Founder- Leader to Muslim Politics and Community in Sri Lanka for a detail analysis of the impact of SLMC on Sri Lanka political landscape.

[71] In 1989, the SLMC contested the parliamentary polls and won four seats. Ashraff himself was elected with a massive majority. This was the first time a Muslim representative was elected to parliament from a Muslim political party in the history of Sri Lanka.

and become 'sovereign'. The democratic rationale was to make changes in the electoral representation system as a modality to encourage diverse participation as equals, and creating a meaningful political and social space that enable the possibility for multiple demands for sovereignty. In other words, it is this political rationale that enabled the condition of possibility for these groups to become the political representatives of popular sovereignty. Quite apart from this expectation behind the rationale, the militant nationalist groups like *Sihala Urumaya, Jathika Hela Urumaya, Bodu Bala Sena, Sihala Ravaya, Ravana Balakaya* and *Mahason Balakaya* that are numerically small in numbers – whose emergence I will discuss in third chapter - reject the notion that everyone has a right to be part of the political system. They repeatedly question the other numerically small parties' presence in the parliament. The emergence of these extremist groups owing to the electoral reform, therefore, can be partly attributed to the modern rationale with numbers that organize the society and its failure to address the ethnic and religious diversity in a society through numbers (Appadurai 2006).

In *Refashioning Futures* (1999), David Scott locates the problematic implications of the reliance on "number" in the state of affairs within the terms of the liberal democratic project. Through the process of inscribing liberal project of democracy into the colonial and postcolonial state, *a whole new game of politics* was introduced. One aspect of this new game, and in particular its "democratic" political rationality, is its reliance on "number"'- on the principle, that is to say, of majoritarianism" (163). One of the assumptions behind this paradigm of modern political thinking - especially with the Donoughmore Constitution, the first institutional attempt to inscribe the majoritarian principle into the country - is that it can abolish communal representation and it will create a national unity. It was also their belief that democracy is the best governing principle of politics. But this attempt actually creates the minority/majority

distinction to begin with, revealing its own paradoxical nature when political rationales rely on numbers. Let me explain.

Ian Hacking in his well-known work, *The Emergence of Probability*, discusses the history of the number game that was inscribed into our modern politics and its constitutive privilege in modern governance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it was a period of an "avalanche of numbers."[72] With the emergence of the practice of providing empirical evidence for categories by governments - suicides, crimes, incarceration, prostitution, births, and deaths of a population - a conceptual arena of probability began to be tamed as a neutral mode of governance. Populations were subjected to a numerical-statistical ratio and probabilistic rationality became a natural marker of justice as numbers considered to be impersonal and disinterested in caste, class, or ethnicity and so on. It is considered to be a secular principle.

Though this numeric-probabilistic political rationality gained much traction in societies, shaping what Hacking calls our "styles of reasoning," the impersonal, neutral, and secular principle had unintended consequences.[73] It found new groups and new social and political categories that never existed before, and new objects for State governance, as everyone has become a part of a majority or minority group. Since many societies reorganized their politics based on the majoritarian-territorial representation principle, it continuously produced numeric minorities.

In a society like Sri Lanka where there are several culturally diverse communities but the Sinhalese Buddhists were marked as the numeric majority and negated other traditions by that

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[72] See Ian Hacking, 1982. Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers. Humanities in Society 5 (1982): 279–95.

[73] Ian Hacking, 1982. Language,TruthandReason. *In* Rationality and Relativism. Martin Hollisand and Steven Lukes, eds. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

order, the minority voices were located already behind the game. In this order, not only were Tamils, Muslims, Protestants and Catholics numerically minority groups that were not represented, but so were the political groups based on ideological differences; for instance, the groups that mobilize people around Marxist political views. Though these groups were numerically small, their pressure on the state is of vital importance. Thus, the need to assimilate into the main system was also of importance. This was a key intention behind reducing the proportional system from 12.5 percent to 5 percent.

When it was reduced, both of these groups – ethnic, religious, and ideological minorities - were able to enter the Parliament. Yet, interestingly, there was an unintended effect of this change. As I began by saying, the political strategy behind the democratic rationale to deepen the democracy by giving the space for diverse groups to come into power was thrown into doubt as more subtle and subversive groups in militant movement emerged and started demanding to be sovereign the country. These militant Buddhist parties are ethnically and religiously the majority that represent the third wave monks in politics though these parties or the groups were led by most often two to three members. These small parties, the groups and organizations of the third wave of monks in politics got fewer votes compared to other main political parties in the country. These groups and organizations led by monks use the most absolute form of demands, in particular not accepting the equal existence of Muslims and Tamils and were able to contest on extreme grounds separately and win several seats in the parliament. They are a numerical minority, but their voices were able to redefine the power of the state sovereignty, as monks play the leading role of the leadership in these groups. They criticize Muslim parliamentarians' on the grounds that they represent minority and not national interests. Their presence in the parliament, though small in numbers, beautifully illustrates the manifold possibilities in our democracy. In

other words, the monks led parties that are competing for the state sovereign power display the overt and the subversive ramifications of some democratic attempts designed at deepening democracy.

Thus it is my contention that the recent emergence of the militant Buddhist groups owes much to democratic constitutional arrangements that were expected to create more spaces for minority voices across the political field. Ironically, militant Buddhists use these political pathways, denying the very possibility of their use by Muslims and other ethnic or religious minority groups. With the expectation of coming to power, these groups propagate sedimented fears of "Muslim expansionism." It remains the most persistent ideological bedrock for their claim to be sovereign in their electoral campaigns and organizing mechanisms, and I will turn to their success stories in the rest of the dissertation. What we need to understand is how—through what discourses and through what mechanisms—the contemporary Sri Lanka has been produced. In addition to the changes that have taken place in the democratic structure as a condition for possibility for the emergence of the monks' demand to be sovereign, changes that took place in politics at certain conjunctures can also be seen to have played a key role in that regard. I attend to these particular junctures that shaped and rearticulated the traditions bearing identities in the realm of democratic politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned with the formation of the authoritative discourse of the Sangha's new claim to be sovereign and how it was produced. It has been my aim to present the specific inaugural moments of this specific discourse and its primary Buddhist actors, practices, and acts. I have periodized and thematized them in terms of the patterns and processes I saw as

emerging from my chosen perspective. I argued that the monks' demand to be sovereign is new. Indeed, their engagement in temporal power and governance is not new, rather their demand. Second, I argue that the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the contemporary Sangha's claim to be sovereign are the reforms taken in the proportional representation system. The newly emerged groups led by monks were able to mobilize around the slogan that a 'Sinhala-only party is possible' to come to power. In subsequent chapters, I discuss some the monk actors and how they view Muslim political parties with particular antipathy, and seek to displace them, and in doing so they articulate a certain postcolonial vision for the country.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Sovereignization" of the Sangha: The formation of the recent "national movement" in Sri

Lanka

Abstract

I want to demonstrate in this chapter how the third wave Sangha in politics, with their

established monastic authority within the *sampradaya*, led their new political struggle to be

sovereign, establishing a totalitarian imaginary—a collective perception based on a pure,

homogeneous, unified state with the absence of divisions and difference among the people as in

the Nazi notion of *Volk*[74] - as a possibility for the contestation for political power. They justify

their struggle based on a contingent collective perception that treats an increasing Muslim

population, their businesses, and cultural practices as a form of Muslim fundamentalist terror and

they demand the eradication of their 'difference.' The unquenchable urge to create a uniform

society is the drive that governs their politics; those who do not adhere to this drive are enemies

and are to be eliminated. I argue that this enemisation constitutes a totalitarian imaginary

propagated by recent Sinhala Buddhist political organizations and groups in Sri Lanka, that I

term the 'sovereignization of the Sangha'.

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[74] For a sophisticated analysis of the nature of totalitarian Nazi Germany and how it organized their masses through totalitarian propaganda, see Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism. 1968. The monks' claim to become sovereign and the organizations that represent their claim resembled the totalitarian imaginary of Hitler's Germany that left scars on human history. There are many local organizations and nation states in general that have made and are making extremist claims with varying degrees of sophistication all over the world but "Totalitarianism" in Nazi Germany stands out as the defining marker of modern history for its exceptional nature--the absolute destructive power of the sovereign and the terror that it yielded. Says Hannah Arendt writing the politics of propaganda mechanisms of the Weimar Republic; totalitarianism is the concomitant elimination of all group solidarity-- the *sine qua non* of total domination-- the liquidation of other people and making them "objective enemies" (Arendt 1968: xiv-xv). In other words, a totalitarian regime does not accept "diversity" or the "difference." See also Enzo Traverso, Totalitarianism Between History and Theory, 2017. History and Theory, Theme Issue 55 (December 2017), 97-118 for a detailed analysis on the trajectory of the idea of totalitarianism as a concept and as a form of governance throughout the history from the Great War. Read also Origin of Nazi Violence (2003) by Traverso for a discussion on how this destructive power went hand in hand with the modernity and its technical mechanisms developed between the Industrial revolution and the first world war put into use during the Weimer republic in power.

Introduction

I sketch out the rise and fall of some organizations, groups and their organizing mechanisms of recent nationalist movement that concretized the monks' demand to be sovereign in the recent political present of the island, that in themselves negate the presence of non-Sinhala Buddhist religious and ethnic communities as equal political beings. Indeed, this demand is constituted precisely by an ongoing historical argument that "monks are the king makers", that they have always had power over the King from the dawn of Sinhala Lanka, though it is not true as I demonstrated in the last chapter. In this chapter, I discuss the discursive organizing and institutionalized mechanisms that set this claim in the making in the ethnographic present of Sinhala Lanka. I hope to show the social and political conditions behind the emergence of Buddhist militant movement, particularly against Muslims.

Scholars have explained the emergence of the movement and its violence as a failure of democratic politics (Tambiah 1996; Uyangoda 2010; Haniffa 2016). Their argument seemingly grounds in an assumption that the solution for the emergence of violence is the separation of violence (politics) from religion, in this case Buddhism.[75] The problem of this narrative of religion and its changes is that it separates the discursive-embodied tradition—changes of rules, laws, forces, power, local agency, movements that constitute and frame Buddhism from its origin. Contrary to this notion of Buddhism and its changes, I show how violent interventions of recent militant Buddhist movement have emerged out of a conjunction of certain strategic conditions of possibility that have played out within the existence of certain authoritative discourses of their living relationship to Buddhism that are produced and maintained historically.

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[75] For a fascinating discussion of the problematic of this secular theory that separates politics from religion, see Asad (1996).

The recent movement's unquenchable urge to create a uniform society is the drive that governs their politics; those who do not adhere to this drive are enemies and are to be eliminated. I argue that it is this enemisation that carries the totalitarian imaginary propagated by recent Sinhala Buddhist political organizations and groups in Sri Lanka, that I term the 'sovereignization of the Sangha'. Lest I be misunderstood, my argument is not about a totalitarian regime and its exceptional sovereign power that suspends the state of law in everyday life of the people in Sri Lanka and, as in Agambenian terms, that reduces its inhabitants' political life—a form of life (bios) into a bare life, nor do I suggest that there is a regime as such. In other words, it is not about a movement that already has the sovereign power to exercise its power to kill the minority groups in Sri Lanka. Rather, it is about the past and the present, a history of an anthropological present of certain groups and organizations in which monks take an unprecedented turn in politics by competing to become sovereign. The aim of this chapter is to discuss how these monks' claim concretizes a totalitarian imaginary, revealing the possibility to interrupt and redefine state sovereignty. The indifference of state agents to the violence is explicit, as Police or the Army who witness the violence rarely interfere to prevent it. Thus, monks' and the militant lay people' presence reminds us of the existence of 'de facto sovereigns' beyond the parameters of canonical state apparatus grounded in formal ideologies of rule and legality that marked the monopoly of state violence (Hansan and Stepputat 2006).

As in Hansen and Stepputat's influential work *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World (2005),* many anthropologists problematize state sovereignty by showing the range of local forms of authority distributed in post-colonial societies and question the solidity often attributed to the state (Aretxaga 2003; Mbembe 2003; Das and Poole 2004). For instance, Hansen and Stepputat claim that the 9/ll attack by Al-Qaeda on the America's

global empire, the emergence of transnational networks, the proliferation of ethnic conflicts and local war mongers have reconfigured the power of the modern nation state. In the light of this theorization, I locate the Buddhist monks with their recent claim to become sovereign as a form of sovereignty lying outside of the canonical modern State: "fragmented sovereignties" (Stepputat 2012). In other words, it helps me to think about the concept of sovereignty in Sri Lankan society where Buddhists often inflict violence while marginalizing the state apparatuses such as the police and army.

Work like a state

With the promise of establishing a new society and ending a protracted war, the third Bandaranayake came into power in 1994, ending 17 years of J.R.Jayawardena's United National party governance. The new government's initiation of constitutional adjustments: 'devolve central power with the north and the east' marked a significant advance of the emergence of the monks' claim to be sovereign in the political landscape. By April 1995, the LTTE ended the Cessation of Hostilities from their side as there was growing disinterest to maintain an agreement that they had signed with the Sri Lanka state around January of the same year and started sending more bodies to the South.[76] This left the government with one possibility to stop the war; to find a political solution that involved a significant devolution of autonomy and power to the North and the East.[77] This political attempt, reputed as a Devolution Package, was to redress Tamil grievances and devolve power to the Tamil regions by accepting their autonomy to govern.[78] The

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[76] LTTE must have been burying thousands Tamil bodies but numbers unknown and also that number never was an issue for the Buddhist movement.

[77] Indeed, the discussion on devolving power is not anew. Since the Indo- Lanka Peace Accord of July 1987, it was accepted that at least among the two main political parties that any kind of solution for the North and the East should involve a power sharing. In fact, it extended to all the provinces of the country.

[78] For a discussion of this package, see Jayadeva Uyangoda, "The Package and Its Politics," *Pravada* 4 (July/August 1995): 5–7.

constitutional draft proposed to define Sri Lanka as a "union of regions," and abandon the concept of the "unitary state" (The Sri Lanka Constitution [1978] mentions Sri Lanka is a "unitary state").

These constitutional reforms caused an outcry among the Sinhala Buddhist ideologues, vociferous monks, and some lay Buddhist organizations. As a response to this State's attempt to reform the Constitution to change its unitary structure by the suggestion of devolving power to the north, a body of Sinhala Buddhist intellectuals formed a *Sinhala Commission* in 1996 to report how it would affect the Sinhalese socially, politically and economically if the Devolution Package were to be passed.[79] The entire Commission campaigned to Sinhala-Buddhists to come before the Commission and reveal their grievances as Sinhalese of how their culture had been oppressed by colonial and post-colonial politics, the great Sinhalese Buddhist civilization dismantled and made "voiceless" by their own "pro-white man" (*suddanta gathi*) representatives. Their rhetoric was able to refine the long existed notions of "natural," "eternal," and "essentialized" "Sinhala Buddhist culture" and it is in danger in the hands of the two main political parties.

More importantly, they were able to advance signature slogans: the Devolution package as a Western conspiracy to divide the country, an extension of colonialism that gives prominence to minority elite, minorities becoming 'king makers', and the Sinhalese heritage is under threat. In the report it said that the devolution package will "destroy the unitary character of Sri Lanka...preserved for over 2,500 years." Further, it mentioned it would "impoverish the Sinhala people who are already a disadvantaged section of the population despite them comprising three

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[79] C.f. Ananda Abeysekara's detailed analysis about the Sinhala commission and the state response to it in "Im-passable Limits of Fugitive Politics Identity for and Against Itself" Pp. 179-188.

fourths of it" (1997: 2).[80] The report also claimed that the constitutional proposal would have a devastating impact on Buddhism since "splitting the Sinhala majority areas" would divide the Buddhists, creating "the real possibility of disputes arising between them" (1997: 28-29). They viewed the proposal for power over land and police to be devolved to the provincial councils as a mechanism that moved these away from the central government's authority, and would negatively impact "the country as a whole and for the Sinhala people" (1997: 31). Further, with all these criticisms, they envisaged a social vision that negotiated political settlements as a waste of time; the problem should be treated as a terrorism, thus needing a military solution.

On September 17, 1997, the Commission report was submitted to the government with the support of thousands of monks. However, the Sinhala nationalists soon realized that the government was not in their interests as Mangala Samaraweera, the minister of media in the People's Alliance (PA) government and an ardent supporter of the Devolution Package, said "the right place of the Commission report is the dustbin of history" (Divaina, September 27, 1997). This raised an outcry in the country and almost all politically-active Sinhala-Buddhist organizations engaged in a continuous stream of press releases and media statements asking the minister to apologize to the people as his statement was a 'disgrace' to Sinhala Buddhists in the country.[81] Monks threatened the government that they would rally ten thousands monks to Colombo unless the minister withdrew his statement (Divaina September 28, 1997).[82] Maduluwawe Sobitha, well-known among the second wave of monks in politics, denounced the minister's statement at a press conference held on September 29, 1997, saying his comments are

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[80] Sinhala Commission Interim Report 1997.

[81] Among them were Deshapremi Bhikkhu Peramuna led by Bengamuve Nalaka, Sabaragamuwa Maha Sangha Sabhava, Jathika Ekabadda Kamituva (Rathnapura Branch), Sri Lankave Dhaham Danuma Padanama, Sinhala Veera Vidahana, (Rathnapura Branch), Rathnapura Samagri Sangha Sabhava (Divaina September 29, 1997).

[82] Since the minister did not withdraw his comments or made a public apology, on October 1, 1997, about two thousand (not ten thousand) monks and some fifteen hundred lay people gathered at the public park to state a satyagraha ("peaceful demonstration") (Abeysekara 2008: 182-183).

a disgrace for the Sinhala race and all Buddhists; he claimed he would give only seventy-two-hours to the minister to withdraw his statement and make a public apology. Sobitha had long been defending and campaigning for the "unitary state" ever since the "political solution for the northeast" became a public discourse.

Since the minister did not withdraw his comments or make a public apology, on October 1, 1997, about two thousand (not ten thousand) monks and some fifteen hundred lay people gathered at the public park to stage a *satyagraha* ("peaceful demonstration").[83] Sobitha and many other monks representing the National Sangha Council that was founded in the 1990s with the Sinhala Commission condemned the minister and the government as betrayers of the *rata, jathiya,* and *agama* (country, nation, and religion). The speakers not only echoed the *impotence* (*napunsaka* [sexual impotence]) of the government, but also condemned the opposition (the UNP and other parties) for not rejecting the government's attempt to share the power with the northeast.[84] Monks and lay Buddhists further continued their rallies and protests taking part in cultural ritual practices*, polgaheema* (coconut breaking) and recite slokas ("imprecatory verses") at the historic Bo tree (a sacred tree considered to be under Buddha attained enlightenment) in Matara, minister's home town, that reversed the discourse against the government. These ritual practices of the Sinhala Commission were criticized by the government's supporters as "un-Buddhists" thereby "very Buddhistness of the Sangha council's *satyagraha*" (Abeysekara 2008: 183). However, it is in these events, rallies and protests that the monks and the lay Buddhists behind the Sinhala Commission were able to concretized the slogan that the 'two main parties

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[83] c.f. Abeysekara 2008: 183.

[84] The monks' criticism of the government as impotent (*napunsaka*) connote that government is not manly enough. It is one of the term that people use to insult the queer community in Sri Lanka. In 2000, UNP burnt the constitutional draft when it was put forward for the debate in the parliament.

divide the country' (*Pradhana Paksha deka rata kadanava*) cultivating the seeds of a need of a third force that represents Sinhala Buddhist desires only.

This narrative of "Sinhala Buddhist desires only" was charged with the economic interests of a certain Sinhala Buddhist elite section of the island. The financial backing for the Sinhala Commission and its political slogans were coming from well-organized political organizations that committed to the "promotion of Sinhalese commercial interests as a way of redressing the supposed threat of competing Tamil and Muslim business in the country" (Abeysekara 2008: 180). For instance, the Sinhala Veera Vidhana (SVV) [Order of the Sinhala Heros] was formed the same year with the leadership of seven successful Sinhala-Buddhist middle and upper-class businessmen. They were entrepreneurs in industrial production such as textiles, rubber products, consumer durables such as gas and fuel, and banking sector that competed for the domestic market dominance with their Muslim and Tamil counterparts (more in the fifth chapter).[85]

These Sinhala Buddhist businessmen from the deep south arrived in the capital Colombo in the 1980s. It is important to note this territorial character as it has seemingly been made into a territorial patronage, with their financial support going into the groups and organizations led by monks who came from the south as well. While financially supporting the groups who represent their desire to be the economic dominants, SVV published a concrete critique to the devolution package; *Economic Consequences of the Devolution Package and an Evaluation of Decentralisation (1997)* written by Buddhadhasa Hewawithrana, a professor of the Economics

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[85] See for a brilliant discussion on the relationship between the 1977 economic liberalization process of the island and its impacts on ethnic entrepreneurs, Newton Gunasinghe, 2004. The Open Economy and Its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka. *In* Economy, culture, and civil war in Sri lanka. Winslow, D., & Woost, M. D. (Eds.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

department of the University of Peradeniya. It argued that the suggested provincial council system does not benefit the provinces as it exercises overlapping of functions, thus wasting money and national resources. The lack of uniformity and centrality of economic policies over the national resources will unequally affect the Sinhala people, it predicted. In a nutshell, the critique was primarily focused on the loss of power from the Sinhala majoritarian central government if the devolution of power was to take place. Retaining the central authority that serves Sinhala Buddhist interests was the driving force behind their critique.

The SVV's emergence was not merely economic, as they were competing for state power. According to one of the founding members of the SVV, they were fulfilling a "historical need of the National Movement of the country to fight against the leaders who were trying to cheat the Sinhala Buddhists again" (Sirisena, May 27, 2919). He further said "our goal was to reestablish the historical unity of '*gamayi, pansalayi, vaveyi, dagabayi*' (village, temple, tank, and stupa), [a social vision they used as a justification, that they claimed existed before the arrival of colonialists.] For the first time, we mediated as a movement to develop the infrastructure of the village that has long been negated by the State" (Sirisena, May 27, 2919).

Thus the rural forces that the SVV mobilized through their rural development projects saw themselves as the guardians of the villages in which fear and terror was the norm due to their close proximity to the ongoing war and its explosions. It was also during this time that the government was sending bulldozers to expand the rural paths of these villages, in keeping with their election promises of rural development, a part of its political campaign. Indeed, the government needed these rural road developments for military personnel to be able to move fast to the north and the east as around 1996 as the war was accelerating. However, these government projects created unexpected moments of antagonistic politics that these forces, Sihala Urumaya

and SVV were aiming to organize against. For instance, according to the government and its stories in the aftermath, one of the government bulldozers entered the Deegavapi temple land in the Ampara district of the Eastern province "accidently" (Divaina October, 27, 1996). It was a strategic moment for the organizations like the SVV to organize the masses against Muslims. This incident became the center of the apparent Muslim danger, considered "Muslim encroachment" by these local forces and of course later for the Sinhala Buddhists in the country as Mohammed Ashraff, the leader of the SLMC, a Muslim minister was accused of being responsible for destroying and grabbing the temple's land. The Muslim minister was mobilizing people around SLMC and this politics made him an easy target of the criticisms of the groups that were mobilizing people against Muslims.

The organizations like Sihala Urumaya and SVV were able to mobilize Sinhala Buddhists as they were already building up and fueling on the commonly shared understanding of the Muslims as a threat to the country. These increased communal tensions helped them campaign against Muslims and present accidental outcomes of government policies as mere examples of 'truth.' So even the coincidences are interpreted as an all-embracing omnipotence of a danger of Muslims. These forms of beliefs and organizations based on those are close to totalitarian propaganda which thrives on this escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency (Arendt 1968: 50).

As such, the debate on the Deegavapi temple land issue was able to mobilize a narrative that Muslims were 'conquering' Sinhalese land while destroying the Sinhala Buddhist ancient heritage in the East. The incident filled up the letter columns of the newspapers and tv channels, marking a new discourse on Muslim land grabbing. A Sinhala Buddhist writes,

"during the kingdom of Deegavapi, it was apparent that 12,752 acres belonged to Vihara. But nearly 2000 acres have been conquered by non-believers. There are still historical remains in these lands. Some of these artifacts such as stone bricks have been used to build houses and some important historical artifacts have been used as a piece of rock to wash cloths [It is a common practice among the villagers of Sri Lanka to wash their clothes on a piece of rock to remove the dirt on the clothes]. If you travel through Deegavapi village, you will be able to see this with your own eyes" (Sisira Paranathanthri Divaina 1999 Septemeber 12 pp 08 *Ashraff amathivaraya eda keeve aththamada*?).

Further, the idea that "Muslims forcibly occupied the Sinhalese land" gained much traction in the South alongside the SLMC's demand to sit as equal partners for the discussions on devolution of power to the north and the east that the Devolution Package were setting forth.

This alleged imminent threat from Muslims to the Sinhalese and their 'traditional homeland' with 'rapid Muslimization' of the North and the East became one of the main concerns of the public discourse around mid-1990's, and a pioneer of the third wave of monks in politics took the leadership mobilizing the narrative. Gangodawila Soma Thero, an advisor to the SVV who was vociferous about these concerns in the Sinhala media, escalated this incident by challenging the Muslim minister to a public debate on television with him. Of course, this imagination that 'Sinhalese Buddhists are under threat' is connected to a broader transformation that was taking place in the people's lives with the prominent role that was played by newly established 'private media' from the mid-1990s, pioneered by Chandrika Bandaranayake's government. It is important to note that the private media here, as they are the first to open the space for these ethnically, racially and religiously charged heated arguments in an unprecedented manner. For instance, the debate was planned to be broadcast on the State owned media channel.

However, the Muslim ministers' support in the government probably prevented it from happening. With the growing demand that came from the public, one private media channel decided to broadcast the debate. Although Soma Thero lost his credibility to the minister as he was not able to back any of the claims with facts that he was making against Minister Mohammod Ashraff, he was able to localize the so-called imminent threat of Muslim danger through this debate broadcasting even to the margins of the country.

Soma Thero's role was enormous in forming the new claim that sovereign monks were the only viable solution for the imagined threat of growing "Muslim expansionism." Soma Thero received his monastic education at Maharagama Bhikkhu Training Institute, located 15 miles away from Colombo, an institution whose patrons include several SVV businessmen. He was a pupil of the nationally known monk Madihe Pannasiha who is prominent in the second wave of monks of politics. In 1989, Soma traveled to Australia and built a monastery with his impressive leadership skills and manner of sermons, grounded with day today life, wit, and continuous engagement with *shravakas*. This charismatic personality was evident with his return to Sri Lanka after seven years, as he was able to revive the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse towards a more exclusive end, but one that drew mass attraction. The discourse seemingly shared the narratives and characteristics of what H.L. Seneviratne called "Dharmapalite Buddhism", that proposed a modern form of Buddhist life modeled after the colonial subject that rejects certain ritual practices and beliefs of Sinhala Buddhism, such as procession and god worshiping. It seemed that he was following the Buddhist revival history of the beginning of the nineteenth century in the colonial context in which many monks and lay leaders took the leadership. I will return later to mark its historical precedence.

This new Buddhist way of living was the central component of Soma's preaching that mainly attracted rising middle-class urban Sinhala Buddhists. For instance, the members of the SVV and those who send their children to Vajiragnana Bhikkhu training center's Sunday School, amounting to nearly 6000-6500 students, are the target audience of his preaching. He vociferously despised Sinhala Buddhists not following Theravada Buddhism, and not being 'proper' Buddhist by adhering to practices like worshiping gods in temples, Bhikkhus engaging in magical practices, and lay Buddhists singing *seth kavi* [auspicious versus] in front of *Bo* trees. Singing *kavi* in front of Bo tree in temple is a lay Buddhist practice that seek the assistance of the power of Bo tree. By this criticism, Soma seemed to represent a certain set of expectations of Theravada Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka in which rituals and beliefs that are contradictory to it are considered to be the religion of the uneducated and underprivileged peasant. By doing so, he associated himself with what he termed the right form of tradition of Buddhism [*nivaradi Bududahama*]. For his right form of Buddhism, he was using a modern nationalist interpretive framework to reform Buddhist so as to adopt a rationalist and utilitarian worldview that would function as a basis for the modern way of life. According to this interpretive framework, Sinhala religious practices consist of two separable parts; one "Buddhist", a more recent, ethically higher and civilized and the other "animist", the opposite of the former. Further, he also hinted at the class interests in his preaching. One could also see a reminiscence of Soma's demands to devalue rituals as an attempt toward the "purification of Buddhism", a "work of kings" as Seneviratne showed in his brilliant study on the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. Soma derides the Sinhalese Buddhists for not learning English, not respecting their parents, not having many children, not having political leaders that represent the interests of Sinhala Buddhists, and not having a Sinhala Buddhist state to safeguard the Sinhala Buddhists' imagined past glory. He first targeted

the cultural and religious sphere in his sermons while comparing the deterioration of Sinhala

Buddhists to other ethnic minorities, namely Tamils and Muslims. Though he repeatedly said in

his sermons that he was not opposing nonbelievers, his comparison appeared no less to be anti-

Christian, anti-Tamil, and anti- Muslim narratives.

With the continuous and unfavorable comparison of Sinhalese Buddhists with every other

ethnic community in the country, he complained that by 2025, Sri Lanka will be a Tamil and

Muslim state due to the Christian and evangelical unethical conversions and Sinhalese parents

not having children. More importantly, he preached that it was a result of the "impotent" Sinhala

Buddhist political leadership that governed the country. This critique for the then-contemporary

leadership surfaced constantly in his sermons. In 2002, he established the *Janavijaya* Foundation

and made the announcement that he would contest for the presidency of the country. Reviving

Buddhist society by propagating true Buddhism this time was not just something others can do,

but something that Soma himself can and planned to do. Indeed, his plan to become the president

of the country did not emerge in a vacuum; the financial and organizing support came from the

businessmen behind SVV.

While the SVV was successful in mobilizing people in the rural settings in doing the

work of the state, they also became the direct target of the government. In 1997, Mangala

Samaraweera criticized them in the Parliament for spreading racism (1997 October Hansard).

One of the founding members of the SVV told me that the main reason behind the government's

criticism was not about how they spread racism, but that they "disturbed the years-long

traditional rural-urban economic structure where mediators buy farmer's rice paddy at a price

whatever they think is good. We did not do that, we paid the farmers a reasonable price"

(Sirisena August 15, 2018). The government's introduction or their openness to intermediaries to

intervene in agriculture, for instance, collecting rice from farmers directly changed the previous relationship with the government. If the farmers could negotiate with the state in the past, they lost their bargaining power with new intermediaries. So these new relations opened the space for organizations such as SVV as people expressed their interest in having the old order. The SVV exercised a new model of governance that suggested new ways of handling the work of the state alike. Needless to say, these mechanisms were powerful when the state neoliberal market policies lessened the relationship between the state and the rural settings and the state mechanisms did not appear to be viable solutions for the problems of the majority of the peasants. It was a damage to the ideal state that constitute a notion of social justice based on welfare state which resonates with James Brow's description: "The ideal image of the social order in nationalist rhetoric is one that recognises the responsibility of government to ensure the welfare of the common people, particularly the peasantry" (Brow 1990: 13).

Responding to the growing public demand to safeguard 'Buddhism,' the government appointed the Buddhist Commission in 2000 to report on the grievances of the Sinhala Buddhists. In 2002, the Commission released their report, giving evidence for all the political slogans that groups like the SVV were putting forward. It reported Christian and evangelical conversion, the destruction of Buddhist archeological artifacts and ancient temples due to Muslim and Tamil resettlement, lack of Sinhala Buddhist population growth, and the suggestions to overcome the difficulties that Sinhalese Buddhist are facing. In 2001, the government released the population statistics in the country. The Commission report used these statistics to back their claims that "Buddhism is in danger." They pointed out the increase of the Muslim population in comparison with that of the Sinhalese.

Creating the temple as the main social center of the village and assuring the leadership of the monks at these temples were the main suggestions to overcome this great danger, as put forth by the SVV and concerned groups. To assure such leadership, establishing a nursery, Sunday School, youth center, counseling center, information center, and library and a social service center were important and needed to be maintained. The temple should take the leadership to bring youth together and become the pioneers in social development projects. These social service projects, one of the founding members explained, were important to help the vulnerable, organize sport meets, conduct drug prevention awareness programs, national events, and *shramadana* (a practice where everyone comes together and provides their free labor for publicly important activities) events (Nandasena August 17, 2018). Such organizing mechanisms were actualized through many temples later on. These temples, one of the founding member said use for mass mobilizations and later it seemed they became the fertile grounds to establish narrative such as that Buddhism is in danger and need to be protected from growing "Muslim expansionism."

However, reminding us of the contingent nature of these groups' politics, around the end of 1998, the SVV disappeared from the public view. "We failed not because of the government criticisms but because of our own problems," a founding member told me, explaining the reasons for their discontinuity (Interview May 08, 2019). The resistance came from their own forces despite their planning to reestablish an imagined Sinhala Buddhist State. The story goes that the chief monk of a temple, where they stored their paddy and conducted business with farmers, had taken control of the operation. The monk has started selling paddy directly to Colombo without the assistance of the SVV members. This has led to some heated arguments with the monk and breached the trust they had established in the rural setting. The founding member told me that it

was a rupture to the business model that the SVV expected to establish. Consequently, SVV

members had to withdraw from the village, while also it had put an end to their organization.

However, despite their discontinuity, their success in establishing imagined threat of

Muslims had a lasting impact. The SVV was able to pioneer a model that similar organizations

can adhere to. Their strategic attempts of organising people set precedent for the groups such as

Sihala Urumaya, Jathika Hela Urumaya, and *Bodu Bala Sena* whose politics were shaped

around attacking Muslims, labelling their culture, business, and religion as a form of terror.

Further, the significance of the rise and fall of the SVV and their politics is that they were able to

set a tone for their fellow organizations towards a more extreme and a totalitarian direction that

negates the presence of Muslims and Tamils as a political entity, a theme to which I will return.

It is my contention that if the SVV's project was to construct Sri Lanka in a particular direction,

it was in totalitarian one. It is through this project that monks claimed to be sovereign,

concretized and achieved their desired future to some extent in the political terrain of the island.

Sinhala Only Party, the Third Force "Kingmakers" to be

Amidst the political turmoil created by the discourse around a political solution for the

North (*uthurata deshapalana visadumak*), in April 2000, the Sihala Urumaya (SU) (Sinhala

Heritage Party) was formed, arguing the need for a Sinhala only party as both the Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) did not represent Sinhalese

interests. It was financially backed by the SVV businessmen, with two other main Sinhala

organizations ideologically supporting it: the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT)

and the Jathika Sangha Sabha (National Buddhist Monks Council). It was the first time in Sri

Lankan political history that monks had openly participated in the establishment of a political

party, a condition of possibility brought by the proportional representation system that made their claim to be sovereign possible (see chapter two). Their campaign was carried out on the communal argument that Tamils and Muslims have political parties for their own ethnic identity, but the Sinhalese have none. This is though it is a well-known fact, that they are no doubt aware of, that both the UNP and the SLFP's base is Sinhalese Buddhists, and they don't have a history of compromising the Sinhala majority's demands over minorities in the country. This fact aside, they argued that a third force needed to fill this gap. Their mass propaganda was organized around "winning the unitary structure of the motherland and Sinhala heritage" questioning the "devolution of power" as it was the only seemingly just option on the government's plate to end the war. In this context, the SU's 2000 parliamentary election manifesto included promises to protect the *Sasana* by suppressing all the forces that were against it (Lankadeepa, 2000 September 7).

A series of socially progressive, farmer-centric proposals included in the Sinhala Urumaya manifesto assumed a stance of anti-privatization and anti-commodification of natural resources. Also, their manifesto contained pro-Sinhala Buddhist and anti-Tamil proposals (Lankadeepa, 2000 September 7). For example, they proposed to restrict the singing of the national anthem to the Sinhala language, provide citizenship to Indian Tamils only under the regulations related to Sirima-Shasthri and Sirima-Indira agreements (the majority of the estate workers brought to Sri Lanka during the British colonialism), provide state patronage to Buddhism and uphold Sinhala culture over other cultural practices.[86] They were pushing the

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[86] Indian Tamils or the Hill Country Tamils moved to Sri Lanka from South India two centuries ago under British colonial rule as indentured labor to work in the coffee and later tea plantations. Soon after the Independence they were disenfranchised and continued to be socially excluded. Furthermore, continues political attacks on this community and particularly the denial of their citizenship rights remained their central struggle for decades until it was slowly addressed in 1990s.

discourse towards an extreme direction in which Sinhalese Buddhists have absolute superiority over other ethnic communities. It embodied a vicious totalitarian social vision.

However, the totalitarian vision is not a one-time achievement, but a gradual outcome of the power plays among the leadership of the party. At its origins, the party was syncretic in nature as not everyone was a Sinhala Buddhist in their leadership. The president of the party was a Christian and there were three other Christians out of 17 members in the party leadership. However, the party was not able to maintain this syncretic nature as some of the Sinhala Buddhists in the leadership were competing for the chairman position of the party based on the Sinhala Buddhist identity, and not simply Sinhalese identity. A person who has a long history extending from the Sihala Urumaya to the Bodu Bala Sena, working at the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, once mentioned to me the collapse of the SU was due to the Sinhala Buddhists leadership becoming too greedy and giving up the larger cause they were fighting for (Shantha, Interview 2019 March 13).[87]

The split in the party occurred over who was going to take the single seat it won in the 2000 election with the significant support of sections of the middle class in Colombo and nearby districts.[88] Though SVV groups were organizing in the rural areas, it seemed that they did not receive much support during the election. The central committee of the party nominated the party president S.L. Gunasekere, a Chiristian Sinhalese. But the faction that represented the party's national organizer's political interests demanded Champika Ranawaka, a Sinhala Buddhist, was the best candidate for the position. Ranawaka is a founder of the National Movement Against

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[87] See a great description of the story of the split, "Split in Sri Lanka's Sinhala extremists signals emergence of a fascist organization" 2000. G. Senaratne and Deepal Jayasekera. https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2000/12/sri-d04.html [Accessed 2019 April.]

[88] Although the SU failed to win a seat on a district basis, under the Sri Lankan polling system, it obtained one seat from the national list because of its island-wide vote—127,863 or 1.47 percent. They also were able to secure four local government seats in 2002, local government election.

Terrorism (NMAT) —one of the SU's founding organizations that demanded the military solution for the ethnic war. He was also supported by a layer of Buddhist clergy (G. Senaratne and Deepal Jayasekera 2000).

Ranawaka's faction blamed Gunasekere's leadership for the party's poor performance in the elections. Further, they accused Gunasekere of being agnostic, of consuming liquor, and of speaking and dictating meetings and delivering statements in English. Gunasekere's "Christian way of life" was rejected, though not explicitly, using the criticisms that were already available in the society. Indeed, by critiquing this "Christian way of life," the organizations such as the SVV, the Jathika Sangha Sabha (JSS) (National Buddhist Monks Council), the NMAT rallied behind the SU proposed "Sinhala Buddhist way of life" model as the social vision for the society. The polemics against the 'Christian way of life' has taken from the 1860s "Dharmapalite image" of society and Buddhism—Buddhist morality or righteousness as the basis of the social order that was pioneered by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864- 1933), a reformer who launched an organized ideological battle against the evolving British politico-administrative machinery that was setting the tone for a modernizing colony. Dharmapala exhorted the westernized, unpurified, unwholesome and corrupted form of life where Sinhala Buddhists have grown accustomed to foreign customs and mores, foreign foods, especially meat and alcohol. He expressed the need to revive "an ideal Sinhala Buddhist society that existed until the end of the Sinhala monarchy in 1815" (Seneviratne 1996: 29). Ranawaka and the clan seemed to follow this social paradigm and its criticisms made against the British colonial government and Christian missionaries.

The nature of the NMAT is important in understanding the political force mobilized by Ranawaka, who led the JHU and made the monks' claim to become sovereign a reality for the first time. The NMAT was founded in early 1998 to organize people around the rhetoric that the

LTTE needs to be defeated militarily. The NMAT was backed by a faction of Buddhist clergy that represents a more "overtly fascist layer" of the Sangha (Senaratne and Jayasekere 2000). Here the term fascist is used to denote their dictatorial nature and forcible suppression of opposition. Some elements of violent groups drawn from among public university students and a handful of army men constituted the movement. These elements were used in physical attacks against their enemies (Senaratne and Jayasekere 2000). Often their presence is marked by their militant disruption of political activities that are against their ideology. For instance, in 1998, the NMAT along with the SVV in an attempt to disrupt the May Day rally of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), a plantation workers union. The majority of the members of the union are Tamils speaking plantation workers that historically claimed to have Indian origins.[89]

Interestingly, one of the promises of the SU election manifesto was that Indian Tamils should not to be given citizenship except under the regulation of the Sirima-Shasthri and Sirima-Indira agreements (pacts that signed respectively in 1963 to give citizenship to the "stateless" cheap labor force that was brought to the island by British colonialists during its plantation era 1830-1880) specifically target the plantation worker's right to citizenship.[90] Their provocative attacks on the plantation workforce was unprecedented and this workforce becoming targets of a direct attack of a political party in the political arena of the island was a new element. It signifies the direction the party was heading towards, targeting and establishing an antagonistic relationship with every possible ethnic and religious community of the country by the Sinhala Buddhists. Another incident of their antagonistic approach towards minority communities and

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[89] See Mythri Jeganthesan's Tea and Solidarity (2021) for a sophisticated analysis on the life and work of the Tamil-speaking tea plantation laborers in Sri Lanka. Washington: University of Washington Press.
[90] See Urmila Phadnis and Lalit Kumar 1975. The Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964: Problems and Prospects of Implementation for a discussion on how the Indian Tamil labour force, an immigrant community in Sri Lanka became a threat to the interests of the "sons of the soil" in popular politics that were emerging after the First World War. SU's seemed to be trying to revive the controversy on this community whether to regard them as bonafide Ceylonese and were therefore entitled to the full privileges of citizenship or whether they were birds of passage regarding India as their true homeland" (1975: 12). 31 (3), Pp. 249-269.

militant activism was in attacking the public meeting at the Colombo Public Library Auditorium in December, 1998 organized by the "Peace Alliance," an organization of ardent supporters of the devolution package. This direct disruption, thuggery and intimidation became the modus operandi among the organizations that are active today.

This was different from the strategies, practices and the mood of the second and third wave of the nationalist movement. It is also different from Dharmapalite tradition of Sinhala Buddhist movement in the 19th century in terms of the strategies he used to mobilize Sinhala Buddhist against other minority groups and the colonialists. Lay people like Champika Ranawaka, a parliamentarian in the present political arena of the country is different from Anagarika Dharmapala, the spokesperson for reviving Sinhala ethnic identity and the island's main religion, Buddhism. The strategies and practices of the third wave of the militant movement whose attacks have targeted Muslims in contemporary Sri Lanka, and particularly about monks' claim to be sovereign hold a more of a militant mood than Dharmapalite monks tradition. Ranawaka's writings and speeches revealed the totalitarian direction the movement was heading towards. During the 2004 general election, Ranawaka commented that the NMAT will treat the Tamils in the way that Hitler treated the Jewish masses. He continuously brought forward the idea of Sinhalese superiority, claiming they are "Aryan" Sinhalese and superior to southern Indian Dravidians or Tamils.[91] One of his books, *Koti Vinivideema* (Penetrating the Tigers (LTTE)) stated that Colombo and suburbs have been invaded by Tamils and rescuing the land from them is a duty that has fallen on their shoulders (Ranawaka 1999). His writings also cry out for a list to be published of all the Tamils who migrated and live in Colombo since 1987 and for

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[91] These rhetorics indeed are not new in the nationalist movement in the country. Dharmapala also did the same. See Dharmapala, Anagarika, History of an Ancient Civilization [1902] in Guruge, ed., Return to righteousness. A collection of speeches, essays and letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala.

them to be issued with separate identity cards. Further, one of the NMAT's pamphlets titled the "National plan against terrorism,"[92] called for the mobilization of the country's entire resources for the war against the LTTE and demanded the use of maximum force to suppress it. This racist and totalitarian paradigm is conveyed throughout his speeches. At a press conference, he mentioned "all the nationalist movements so far have moved only their heads. We are building a movement (with people) who are ready to flex their muscles" (Cited in G. Senarathne, Deepal Jayasekera 2000). This publicly set their tone to fascism, proposing a politics that moves away from discussions to find militant solutions. This is what is different from the Dharmapalite tradition.

Dharmapala had not only a vision for the Sinhala nation, but also a more broader attempt to bring Buddhist community together and work with other religious and ethnic communities. Despite Dharmapala was the leading figure in the emergence of Sinhala nationalism, as Steven Kemper discusses in his work, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (2014), he was part of a 'universalizing social movement' that "transcends local identities and incorporates different kinds of people in the same project, settling for inclusion" (2014: 4). To the extent that he spent most of his life away from the island and his association with "clerics, Theosophists, scholars, and a steady stream of well-to-do Westerners" (Kemper 2014: 4), he was engaging in a universalizing and inclusive mission. This lack of inclusive dimension of the third wave of the militant movement evident for not only its danger for the society but the limitation of the movement.

Since these are male-oriented political movements, muscle power is a symbol of masculinity, one that is associated most closely with violence. Sinhala masculinity that is

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[92] *Thrastha Virodhi Jathika Salasma* [National Plana against Terrorism] (1999) Accessed August 16, 2021. https://www.champikaranawaka.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/thrastha_virodi_jaathika_selesma.pdf

associated with "fearlessness" is a repertoire of practices that can be learnt, taught and experienced, for example by masculine specialists, such as "*chandi*" (thugs/tough) (Jeganadan 1998: 105-106). Treating violence not as a self-evident category but pointing towards the possibility of its emergence that can be wrapped in our everyday practices, Jeganadan argues that practices of "fearlessness" is a possibility for the emergence of violence. He present whole array of violent practices that Sinhala men did during the 1983 riots against Tamils; burning and smashing the properties of Tamils', joining powerful group of toughs, facing the police with no fear of being arrested. Among some of these acts of "fearlessness" of the SU, JSS and NMAT were their trips to the northern part of the country, the "battlefield." These were prominent as they gained attraction among the masses of the south. Despite the war, these monks of the JSS and members of SU staged provocative demonstrations in 2003. They went for an "inspection" of the ruins of Buddhist temples in the east, in areas under LTTE control. They also marched to an LTTE camp in the eastern Batticaloa district. Since these acts had the potential to provoke violence and in return attacks from the LTTE, their visits to the battleground made them heroes in the eyes of the agitated masses of the South. More importantly, they were able to establish themselves as fearless masculine bodies that are able to run the government as opposed to, according to them, the "impotent" "weak" political parties that were already in power.

Further, when Gunasekere accused Ranawaka's attacks and acts of thuggery, Ranawaka held a press conference on October 17th, 2000 and said "intimidation was simply a "genuine agitation by party members," and I had the support of Maha Sangha" implying that the Sangha is aware what he is doing and their acceptance is in itself a legitimacy for his acts (Lankadeepa, October 18, 2000). This form of legitimizing violence is made as a moral and normative practice. It was these repeated practices of "fearlessness," I contend, as *habitus* that they pioneered, that

later groups learnt, performed, and reproduced continuously. In other words, parties like Sihala Urumaya and Jathika Hela Urumaya established a form of heroism that other groups that emerged later times started imitating.

However, aside from the poignant character of this violent behavior and muscle power, the political register of Ranawaka and his clan is that they were able to portray monks as a moral agent of their social vision. It was the monks' presence and backing that attracted the masses. Ranawaka legitimizing their politics of "muscle power," and "fearlessness" against their opponents in the above mentioned press conference, said "we have the support of Maha Sangha (the Buddhist hierarchy) and will not go against their wish" reminding people that Ranawaka speaks for the Sangha and they are not alone. At the same press conference on October 17th, 2000, Athuraliye Rathana said "a leader of a Sinhala party must be a Sinhala Buddhist." Further, justifying the decision to give foremost place to Sinhala Buddhists in the party, Thilak Karunaratne, the party secretary said "they had to heed the Maha Sangha and also some businessmen that the party depended upon financially" (Lankadeepa, October 18, 2000). The leadership of the SU's speeches marked the end of the SU's syncretic nature—at least its lip service to that end—and moved the party towards a Sinhala-Only party, in a totalitarian direction that some Colombo-based prominent monks were taking the leadership. It is in this leadership I argue that the monks' new claim to become sovereign gained traction.

The JSS leader Maduluwawe Sobitha, a prominent monk of the second wave of monks in politics, believed monks should do social service and politics is ideologically strengthening this tradition on the part of the monks. Though he was not a member of the SU, his advice and open support towards the party leadership was prominent. There were nine member monks of the JSS representing the central committee of the SU. This is the first time in Sri Lanka political history

that monks openly supported the establishment of a political party, enabling the Sangha to claim their sovereignty in this tradition. The SU in their political campaign repeatedly pledged to build a Sinhala Buddhist state that would not govern on any matter without consulting the Maha Sangha (Lankadeepa, September 29, 2000). In the Buddhist land that they promised to establish, the Buddhist clergy would effectively be the final judgment on government policies, thus the state.

A few years after the public battle between the Ranawaka faction and Gunasekere, the SU disappeared from public view. However, when such divisions led to the demise of the Sihala Urumaya and the collapse of organizing mechanisms of such organizations like SVV due to political and social issues, their ideology and ideologues of the political project they enacted were served as a platform for the re-formation of parties and the formation of organizations that gained the loyalty of the same people. These personalities, their rationalities and the forms of their organizing mechanisms imagined establishing a social order and authority that developed into a very violent, that is, a viciously totalitarian direction. In the next section, I aim to point out the totalitarian imaginary of these organizations and the monks' demand to become sovereigns as the moral agents of this imaginary carried the condition of possibility for violence.

Indeed, monks being in politics is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. But as I pointed out in the last chapter, their presence was limited to supporting and advising the political parties to gain benefits, namely to protect Buddhism and Sinhalese nation. That politics was not explicitly about the monks becoming the sovereign. In other words, monks contesting for sovereign power in Sri Lankan modern democracy is a new phenomenon. What follows is the formation of this new phenomenon. My primary concern is to show that the monks' leadership of

all the organizations can be traced to one common root, the Jathika Hela Urumaya, the first political party in Sri Lankan political history that enabled nine monks to enter the Parliament.

The New Turn: Sovereign *Bhikkhus*

In 2003, while the Sihala Urumaya party was breaking up, Gangodavila Soma Thero died during a trip to Russia during which he was to be awarded a doctorate degree. His death caused a mass outcry in the country as Soma Thero had gained a striking popularity through his sermons, *dharmadesana*— "short, devoid of ritual, well-integrated and focused on a theme, and above all relating religion to daily life"—a form of preaching invented in early 20th century by Paravahara Vajiragnana, the founding father of Vajirarama, Soma's own tradition (Seneviratne 1999: 53). Soma's emergence highlighted the aspirations of urban clients and third wave monks in politics, including himself, to "change" (*venas karanna*) the Sinhala Buddhists. He proposed state-level solutions, and presented his vision as the political answer for all the problems and issues that the country is facing. He was attentive to the same rhetoric that the Sihala Urumaya was addressing - a wealthy, commercialized, educated, disciplined and upmarket needs of urban professionals, civil servants, public sector workers, and the business strata but with a taste for 'Sinhala Buddhism.'

The context for his social vision was that he witnessed the disastrous war. It was a time when the living conditions of the people needed urgent and radical change. Soma provided a new social vision and found new enemies who have made, as he claimed, 'Sinhala Buddhist life' impossible: it was the leadership in power and the dishonest, drunk, lazy, and frivolous Sinhala Buddhists themselves. He reminded people, most often at the end of his sermons, that unless Sinhala Buddhists are ready to change themselves,

"Within the next ten years, a Muslim will be a prime minister. Maybe after the next six years or the election after. Within the next 50 years, there will be a Tamil state unless we do not change this trend. The politicians don't have feelings for *jathiya* (Sinhala nation) religion and the country. Muslim do not drink. Some don't like me talking about Muslims. Blessed ones, I am not talking about racism. If there is something to be learned from a minority, we should take it together. Tamil people are also trying to stand up. Many say not to talk about the Sinhala nation (*jathiya*). If there is no me and no mine and if there is no nation,[93] (*Sinhala jathiya*) and no religion, is there any importance of having the eightfold path? It is needed because they exist. Even if you cannot adhere to ultimate truth, there is a relative truth. You better adhere to the relative truth, alright? If we continue to believe there is no relative truth, then you would even say there is no mom and dad. So if we follow this way of thinking, a great disaster will unfold; there is no me and no mine. There is no nation and religion. Everything can be minimized to the earth, wind, water and fire so it is fine to do anything to anyone. This form of thinking needs to be understood following the threefold training (virtue, concentration, and wisdom) and when you live a social life you need to respect the relative truth"[94]

At first glance, there seems no possibility for emergence of "violence" in Soma's reasoning. His reasoning for why one needs to adhere to the relative truth, in this case the importance of protecting one's identity, is legitimately put. In a Buddhist view, to achieve nirvana—the end of suffering—there is a path to follow. For instance, among many others, collecting merits, not killing, not stealing, and not harming others are commonly accepted among

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[93] Unless otherwise I indicated, I use the word Jathiya to mean Sinhala jathiya.
[94] Recorded audio-cassettes, audio snippets of Soma's speeches were widely circulated all over Sri Lanka. These do not give the dates on which a particular speech was made. This abstract comes from https://www.dhammikaweb.com/?p=1089.

the people as steps on this path. According to Soma Thero, if *nirvana* is the ultimate truth,

relative truth or what many commonly called conventional truth is the path that would help

Buddhists reach it. According to the Buddhist doctrine "no-self," holds that what we perceive as

an unchanging and natural entity as "self" is constantly changing and not permanent. In this

logic, the ownership of one's own body or to protect it is impossible as there is no "self" to hang

onto anyway.[95] However, while in Buddhism the attachment to "I" is something to be disgusted

and ceased by following the eightfold path and training like meditations, because Buddhism also

valued as the best vehicle to achieve the path to enlightenment (Collins 1997; Williams 1997).[96]

The gist of the Buddhist notion of "self" is this. But Soma's reasoning goes beyond this doctrinal

notion.

When Soma speaks here about the "self" and asks the blessed ones to cling onto or

identify with a self, he specified an identity. It is the "Sinhalese Buddhist" self, an ethnic and

religious identity that is located in the political and civil domain. This request for the

identification with the Sinhalese Buddhist self as something that needs to be "protected," more

specifically protected "from" [of something] is imagining an "other," in this context Tamil or

Muslim citizens of the island. This, I suggest, is a sovereign act that demarcates the friend and

enemy distinction. Here I am thinking along with German philosopher Carl Schmitt's radical

reading of the we/they distinction of the political—a space of power, conflict and antagonism. In

his discussion in *The Concepts of the Political* (1932) in relation to the social imaginary, he

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[95] See The Foundations of Buddhism Gethen, Rupert 1998 for a deeper discussion on the Buddhist notion of No Self. Pp.133-162. Buddhist thought suggests that "as an individual I am a complex flow of physical and mental phenomena, but peel away these phenomena and look behind them and one just does not find a constant self that one can call one's own. My sense of self is both logically and emotionally just a label that I impose on these physical and mental phenomena in consequence of their connectedness. In other words, the idea of self as a constant unchanging thing behind the variety of experience is just a product of linguistic usage and the particular was in which certain physical and mental phenomena are experienced as connected" (Gethen 1998: 139).

[96] See a discussion on body and politics in Religious Bodies politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism. Bernstein, Anya. 2013. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pp.12-13.

reminds us the impossibility of imagining one's identity without an [enemy] other. This distinction always deals with the formation of a 'we' as opposed to a 'they' that is concerned with collective forms of identification that involves the sphere of decision. That the We/They distinction in our collective identity formation is ineradicable is the key point for Schmitt, and that every consensus is based on an act of negation or exclusion. Thus, it is impossible to achieve inclusion fully.

Indeed, that any knowledge on what constitutes self/identity is produced in relation to or against "other" is not an unorthodox point of view. As Judith Butler points out "no particular identity can emerge without presuming and enacting the exclusion of others, and this constitutive exclusion or antagonism is the equal and shared condition of all identity-constitution" (Butler 2000: 31).[97] This constitutive exclusion or the ineradicable nature of the friend/enemy distinction of collective identity formation bears the possibility for violence as it reveals the impossibility of a fully inclusive consensus. To put it differently, any form of identity formation or the demand to protect it from an enemy others brings to the fore this inescapable moment of decision.

I do not claim that the imaginary perception of the existence of the Other in Soma's preaching directly urges Sinhala Buddhists to eliminate the Other. Rather my point is his sermons, many monks' sermons for that matter, bear the condition of possibility for the emergence of violence because they carry the moment of inescapability of decision-making every time they urge the "blessed ones" to protect the country, Sinhalese and Buddhism. Unless these seemingly rational and morally sound arguments take into consideration and reveal their complete process of ideological abstraction and their appropriation to the political purposes, they obscure the violence that carried them and takes it for granted. So it is not that militant terror that

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[97] Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," 2000 in Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, Butler et al.

emerges from time to time is the problem per se—the real menace is the violence hidden in the everyday practices that Arendt explained by the concept of "banality of evil." It is also this condition of possibility for violence that I contend, carried by the monks' claim to be sovereign, which I turn now to describe further in ethnographic detail.

Soma's sermons, the continuous harsh criticisms in which he proposed a new way of life attracted loyalty from Sinhala Buddhists masses, including myself when I was 14 years old, as I remembered watching his sermons on television and eagerly awaited the next program. I also remembered his unexpected departure was not easy to comprehend so a "conspiracy" theory that he was murdered by Christians served well to understand the impossibility of his absence. The conspiracy theory was built by groups and organizations that mobilize people around slogans that are central to our discussion. For instance, the groups like the JSS and the Sihala Urumaya were already fertilizing the political ground for this "conspiracy theory" to be true. While the Western mediators, particularly Norway, saw the "ceasefire" as the only option to end the war, the masses of the south, however, saw a military solution is the solution and the idea that this solution was possible was spread by these groups. They were already establishing the notion that Western mediators were LTTE stooges who intervened in the sovereignty of the country. Thus, national heroes like Soma who were trying to rescue the country from all the dangers in the form of intervention by non-patriots was a better story. It was also around the time that these organizations were demanding a ban on Christian missionaries, as they claimed they converted the poor Sinhala Buddhists offering welfare, dry rations and financial support. During this time these groups pressured the government to bring the Anti-Conversion Bill and more than hundreds churches of various Christian denominations were attacked by thugs in Colombo and other parts of the country from November 2003 to April 2004 (Wijesiriwardena Rathnayake

2004).[98] An end to "unethical conversions" is the hot slogan that these groups were mobilizing around. Therefore it was not difficult to convince the Sinhala Buddhists that Soma's death was a well-planned murder by the Christians and Western conspirators.[99]

Emerging through this outcry of the Sinhalese Buddhists, promising to find the culprit responsible for Soma Thero's death, and using the Sinhalese-centric platform that they had already made with the SU, a breakaway group of the SU formed the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). It was the "apogee of political Buddhism", as they compromised the image of the Bhikkhu and Sangha for political purposes at a level that took an unprecedented turn as Neil Devotta correctly pointed out (2008: 33). The popular understanding of the relationship of Bhikkhu and state governance among Sangha was such that 'Bhikkhu should be above the state,' and 'Sangha must eschew worldly possessions and involve in mundane affairs' were in question. It seemed that the Sinhala Buddhists were compromising these traditional beliefs.

Within two months, before the election in April, 2004, the JHU launched their campaign and successfully built a rhetoric "*rata jathiya anathure*" (Country and Sinhalese are in danger) that touched the nerve of the Sinhala Buddhist masses. A significant number of two hundred and fifty-two monks stood as candidates in twenty one of the country's twenty two of electoral districts. During this period, the JHU mass-produced the slogans alluding to the weakness of the two main parties to safeguard the country from 'Tamil terrorism'. Following on from the SU they claimed those parties 'divide the country', 'pamper minorities', and 'conspire against the country for Western interests.' These slogans became widely used in the years to follow.

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[98] See New Sinhala extremist party fields Buddhist monks in Sri Lankan election. *Panini Wijesiriwardana and K. Ratnayake 1 April 2004 https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2004/04/jhu-a01.html*
[99] See Nina Mahadev's Economics of Conversion and Ontologies of Religious Difference: Buddhism, Christianity, and Adversarial Political Perception in Sri Lanka (2018) for a brilliant essay of the debate on Soma's death revealed the ontological difference between Buddhists and Christians' revealed a way of life.

The JHU promised to create a *dharma rajya (*a realm of Dharma*),* an idealized image of a state that is devoid from corruption and abuses of power. Their political manifesto mentioned "the rulers of Sri Lanka should adopt the dharma rajya concept of Emperor Asoka, which was influenced by Buddhist Philosophy, and should work for the welfare of all ethnic groups. Their exemplary attitude should reflect Dharmasoka's idea of 'all citizens are my children' *(save munia mama paja*) (Deegalle 2004: 96). On the contrary, they demanded a mandate to become the decisive force that could play the "king making role" that they claimed was currently played by Muslim and Tamil political parties.

The JHU's rallies and organizing were resonant and seemed to be inspired by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). In a rally organized by JHU, Omalpe Sobhitha said, "The Hindu Parishad made an statement that the church is the LTTE's military section. But so far no one has done an investigation about this statement" (Divaina, January 14, 2004).[100] The VHP is the ideological front of the Hindu Nationalist movement's agendas, discourses, and the propaganda that emerged successfully in the Indian political field in the 1980s that Thomas Hansen (1999) called the "Saffron Wave." Their proliferating populist techniques of political mobilization and governance such as converting historically religious parades to political rallies to consolidate masses became the central characteristics of the JHU. Similar to have the VHP movement devoted itself to establish a Hindu social order, the JHU campaigned for a Dharma Rajya depicting the non- Sinhala community as "encroaching" upon Sinhala Buddhist culture. One of the significant innovations of the JHU campaign was the *Ratha yatra*; a procession in a vehicle, similar to Indian ritual, as their main campaign rallies. The first Ratha Yatra was from the Kelaniya temple in the Western Province to the *Dalada Maligawa* (the Tooth Relic Temple) in

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[100] "Ape Sama Deshapalakayekuma Merata Sinhalakama Bawuddakama Vinasha Kireemata Katayuthu Kala" [All of our politicians attempted to destroy the Sinhalaness of this country]. Divaina, January 14, 2004.

Kandy in the central hills, to offer their manifesto, in an act they called the *pratipatti pujava* (an offering of principles).

Through this act they represented their connection to the most sacred spaces for Sinhala Buddhists and evoked terminology related to Buddhist monastic discipline. They continued this ritual model all over their electorate bases, especially the ones in semi- urban areas such as Maharagama, Kottawa, Kesbawa and Homagama that were located approximately within twenty-five miles of the capital Colombo. These places comprised a newly-emerged middle class and a majority who worked as state servants. The *ratha yatra* in these areas was organized by the JHU's branch organizations. For example, Homagama *Bawuddhyin Surakeeme Sanvidhanaya* (Buddhist Protection Organization) organized a *ratha yatra* in which monks participated from sixty-nine temples in Homagama, clearly illustrating their popularity among the temples (Divaina, January 14).[101] It started from Homagama Purana Vihara (the Old Temple) with its abbot giving a sermon. All of the lay people were clad in white as if they were engaging in a religious ritual. It was ordered as such: in the front row were two people holding the banner with the name of their organization, then a Toyota car covered with Buddhists flags, *paritta* (a Buddhist practice, monks and lay people recite rhythmically certain verses and scriptures expecting to get rid of dangers, misfortunes) playing from loudspeakers mounted to it. After the car, yellow-clad monks followed the procession. Some of the lay people held Buddhists flags, the rest of their banners said; 'Let's establish a Sinhala Buddhist State', 'Why do we need churches in the places that Buddhists live', 'Buddhists, let's unite to rescue the Sasana'. Even the people who gathered in the streets to see the processions were dressed in white, calling *sadu sadu* (a Buddhist term meaning 'be well', typically used as ritual aftermath). On the whole, these

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[101] Mishanari Akramanayata Erehiva Homagama Bauddhayo Davantha Pa Gamanaka [Buddhists in Homagama are rallying against Missionaries]. *Divaina* January 14, 2004.

Ratha yatra seemed successful in extending the JHU's local networks as they were able to win nine seats, solely for Buddhist monks, in the parliament in the 2004 election that marked another significant social and political change in Sri Lankan history.

Indeed this is not the first time that monks have been elected to political institutions though it marked many unsuccessful attempts. In 1943, the first Buddhist monk contested for the Colombo Municipal Council but did not succeed. For instance, in 1957 a Bhikkhu won the election to a village council in Matara and there have been monks elected to the village councils after 1957. In 1977, a monk tried for the first time for the parliamentary seat but he was not able to win. In 2001, Baddegama Samitha, a *bhikkhu* from the leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Equal Society Party) was able to enter the parliament contesting the general elections (DeVotta 2007: 26). However, what is new about the JHU was they were able to mobilize a huge number of monks to contest for elections at once and hold the office as a monk led party for the first time in Sri Lankan electoral history.

One of the significant characteristics of the success story of the JHU's political campaign named as '*Paramitha Perahara*' [Demonstration of Ethical Perfection] was them using Buddhist rituals and terms that have religious connotations. People holding Buddhist flags in political rallies which they called *Bodu Samulu* (Buddhist conferences) was not a common character of Sri Lankan ear;ier political history. Religious content in JHU political platforms was prominent when they addressed people at rallies. For instance, at a political rally in Ellawala Medhananda said "this is not a conflict between parties, this is between Dharma and adharma. For those who wish for their wellbeing, they can go with Dharma and they may heal. Those who do not follow Dharma can go with adharma and may suffer like it says in *Parabhava sutta*" (Lankadeepa, February 24, 2004). The beginning and the start of their political rallies were marked by their

political supporters' observing *pansil* (five precepts). They were able to use these practices to assert their right to rule and carve out allegiance to them.

Not only did they depart from the normative party politics (rallying and organizing) by their appropriation of religious content to their campaign, but also in their constituency. This large constituency was generally a semi-urban, fast-growing middle class. The political rallies were well-attended by well-dressed youth. This difference is important because it marked a rupture from the previous waves of monks in politics; they became a decisive force behind and contested on a Sinhalese nationalist ideological and cultural conviction that bears a totalitarian vision for the society. For instance, similar to the election success story of the JHU—a process which Hansen describes as a "vernacularization" of the political field (1999:9), S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake's Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) coming to power in 1956 also marked a contingent juncture of the post-modern political history of Sri Lanka.[102] Similar to the JHU Bhikkhus, 1956's Bhikkhus also rallied around the same slogans, in particular "Sinhala Only." However, it was about making the Sinhala language the only official language, not necessarily forming a party for Sinhalese Only. Unlike the JHU's, the 1956's coalition constituency was predominantly rural and partly urban intermediate social groups—a secondary and subordinate elite (Gunasinghe 1990; Shastri 1983; Palmer 1975; Wriggins 1960). The political transformation was perceived by many as a victory of masses against the elite. Palmer argues that 1956 was a representation of rural lower middle class and lower-class Sinhalese discovering their strength and shattering the monopoly of power previously held by a small affluent, Westernized elite (Parlmer 1975: 195). The JHU election success story can be argued as an extension of this claim as the semi-urban middle class are the legitimate children of the

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[102] C.f Thomas Blom Hansen Saffron Wave (1999: 9).

constituency of 1956. In other words, this trajectory can be seen as a turn from cotton national dress to silk national dress but advanced a vision of utopian past to invoke a utopian future which constitutes characteristics of totalitarian vision for the society.

The majority of the business community who were behind the JHU were migrants from the south to Colombo, Kalutara and Gampaha districts. These districts are relatively more developed compared to the others and quite favorable for business and public sector jobs. Many of them are educated and hold a university degree at the least. Unlike the traditional elite, this class does not speak in English in everyday life, thought their children do. They drive Toyota, Maruti and Suzuki brands but draw on ritual perfection with a cosmopolitan dimension; they hang an auspicious bunch of three limes and a chili in front of their cars to protect it from all forms of harm, physical and non- physical, seen or unseen, such as accidents and jealousy of others. This symbolizes their cultural difference from the traditional elite—the urban, westernized, landowning and professional social core (Uyangoda 2010) that followed the United National Party, among whom such practices were rare.[103]

The SVV, SU, and JHU established a framework, tenor and vocabulary that many similar groups and parties use to acquire power. The JHU constituency is attracted by the Rajapaksha regime that came into power for the second time in 2010. On the one hand, they mobilized the masses around the same propaganda slogans of JHU. The factions of the JHU leadership were themselves absorbed into the political landscape of the Rajapaksha regime. It was able to absorb the monks JHU mobilized, the local political units that they organized and the ideological grounds and moral structures that formed their base. In terms of practice, the Rajapaksha regime

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[103]They considered them to be not part of the Theravada Buddhism. I will discuss this cultural difference in detail in the next chapter.

often shared many elements of rhetorical and pragmatic politics of JHU for political legitimacy so their *totalitarian vision* continued in the political field. The JHU set the precedent for the mushrooming of groups like them. For instance, the leader of the Bodu Bala Sena, whose has been criticized for his rhetoric that is anti- Muslim and anti-Christian Conversion, extending to a physical attacks against Muslims, is a member of the JHU. Likewise, the member Bhikkhus of the JHU were creating their own organizations from around 2010, in particular after the end of war, based on the same slogans that the JHU used to mobilize Sinhala Buddhists during the elections (See Sinhala Ravaya 2014, Bodu Bala Sena 2013). These newly formed organizations started playing on the grounds that the SVV, SU and JHU established, and concretized the idea further that Sinhala Buddhist-only parties are possible. More importantly, this vision constituted the most extreme exclusive narratives that one can think of, and the JHU concretized these narratives by associating them with the saffron robe. In other words, the balance sheet of the JHU's politics is that it concretize a new politics in which monks are ready to be sovereign. It is those who mobilized around this notion who started coloring the ideological and physical attacks against Muslims and Christians groups in the country with the yellow robes. In other words, JHU politics enable the condition of possibility for other small groups to mobilize people around a totalitarian vision and use monks to achieve that end.

Let us turn to the organized forces that demand to become sovereign, who extend virulent narratives with the possibility of the emergence of violence every time they are organized.

New norm: Brute Force

In the years after the 2004 election, the JHU did not mobilize monks to contest for the elections and their reputation faded away though its leadership were active in politics. When I was doing my fieldwork, almost all of the people I spoke to criticized the JHU and said they would never vote for them. One of the presidents of a 'dayaka samithi' (temple patron associations) "they just became one of the other parties. They claimed the JHU not only cheated on Sinhala Buddhists (*apiva ravattuva*), but they used monks for their political game (*hamuduruvanva pavichchi kala*)" (2018 August 13). This narrative of "monks being used" was also prominent among the Bhikkhus who contested and won elections. For instance, Uduwe Dhammaloka, the JHU's most popular candidate received 42, 850 votes from Colombo district. A few months after being elected, he left the party but functioned as an independent MP, claiming that then "JHU is opportunistic and Ven. Rathana Thero and Champika Ranawaka have a hidden political agenda" (Daily News July 1, 2005).[104] The discourse around his departure also revealed the exclusivity that the country's politics had shaped. This was apparent when the Party was nominating Ellawala Medhananda as the presidential candidate, and Uduwe Dhammaloka made some remarks indicating that he is not suitable for the task due to his caste. When the monk was questioned on this matter at a press conference, he responded that it was not his intention to belittle Medhananda. He stated it was to indicate that "it was not in the interest of Ven. Rathana Thero and Champika Ranawaka to make Medhananda a Presidential candidate, as they brought race and caste factors to the forefront and were not likely to promote the Mahanayake Thero under the circumstances" (Daily News July 1 2005). These remarks revealed the factions that enable divisions within politics. As stated previously, the reasons for the collapse of the SU or

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[104] See http://archives.dailynews.lk/2005/07/01/pol06.htm

JHU parties came not necessarily from outside forces, but from within as their ideology is inherently prejudiced.

However, what I am pursuing here is not why they collapsed, as it belongs to the contingent nature of the political field, but their authoritative claims and the aspirations that they were able to establish which had a cumulative effect on the political grounds. What is important to note here is not that the JHU was not able to win again in the same manner that they won in 2014, but their capability of establishing and concretizing the idea that a party for and of "Sinhala Buddhists only" is possible on the most exclusive grounds of politics. Further, the most conspicuous character of this movement is the association of the Sangha in the fascist claims against their 'adversaries' —Muslims, Catholics, Anglican and evangelical Christians groups and Tamils.

Galagodaatthe Gnanasara, the leader of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), who has won not only local but international name for being militantly vocal against Muslims and evangelical groups (their rhetorical attacks were mainly against evangelical groups not Anglicans or Catholics), is a former member of JHU. He is currently a pioneer of the monks' new claim to be sovereign. When I asked him his reason for leaving the JHU, he said "the JHU was not nationalist enough, it was not serving the interests of the Sinhala Buddhists, so we had to take the leadership to continue the national movement" (Interview, July 25, 2019). During my fieldwork, I came to know that the BBS is supported by select businessmen who were active in the SVV. These businessmen were extremely unhappy with the later stages of the JHU, as it integrated into the two main political parties, the SLFP and UNP. As a result, the BBS' politics were financially secured and they were able to take the baton from the JHU and continue their politics with the same slogans; unethical conversion, against the Halal certification, the increase of the Muslim

population, and imperialism'. The BBS was also organizing around the same local networks and the social forces that the SVV, SU and JHU had previously mobilized. Among them, organizing based on temples was prominent. The temple abbots use their traditionally established *Dayaka Sabha* (patron committee) structure to organize villages towards achieving their objectives. How successful these organizing mechanisms are can be seen in the BBS' political rallies; they were able to gather more than four thousands monks for their inauguration meeting in 2003. The last political meeting they held in July 2019 in Kandy attracted more than five thousands monks and of course, thousands of lay people.

The BBS politics draws fluidly on an inner edifice of totalitarian vision, its principles, symbols, and historical memory. At some occasions, rallies against Muslims, especially after the Easter Attack,[105] they waved a national flag without four color stripes that symbolized the ethnic minority groups. The flag only had the lion which represents the myth of the origin of Sinhala. Singing the national anthem in Tamil for the National Independence day on the 4th of February became a big controversy and they demanded only to sing in Sinhala language. Such national symbols were part of actualizing their ideology that was becoming ever more disastrous to the nation and bewildering. The visual self- representation of their imagined nation was just as important as their militant interventions. As their foremost objective, restoring what they saw as proper Buddhism and the glorious past of the society, monks were imagining to establish a state in which Sinhala Buddhist do not have to bend over the minority demands. While different groups expressed the nature of their imagined state without much of a clear vision for implementation, BBS with its demand to be sovereign, unveiled the characteristics of their supposed state.

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[105] On 21 April 2019, Easter Sunday, a series of coordinated suicide attacks were carried out in three churches and three luxury hotels in the commercial capital Colombo.

The BBS proposes a new governing structure for their imagined social order. Among them are a section for legal aid, a Buddhist ombudsman, a Buddhist business congress, a Buddhist bank, a Buddhist development trust fund, a Buddhist leadership academy, a section for volunteers and health care facilities are prominently pronounced. They aim to protect the rights of the Buddhists, raising awareness of international laws and human rights among them. A booklet published in July 28, 2019 titled *Kathikavaka Arambuma* (Beginning of a discourse) explained its objective; "it is for the protection of our people from the English 'hyper-saturated' law created by the whites and developed by 'black-whites'." The BBS' continuous attack on constitutional law (the legal framework adapted from Roman-Dutch Law) is prominent in their campaign. Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims also follow their customary laws, laws that are specifically belong the members of their community, respectively Kandyan, Thesavalamai and Muslim law. They claim that it is not only that the Roman-Dutch law does not protect the rights of the Buddhists, but it also allows Muslims to simultaneously follow their own law. They demand, therefore, 'one law' for all (Kathikavaka Arambuma 2019).

One significance of groups like the BBS is that they directly confronted their targets, a precedent set by the JHU. They refrain from making complaints to the police and taking the established institutional procedures as they do not accept that such a justice system exists in the country. Then they act like sovereigns. This close confrontation is shared in news media without any edits and they themselves attribute this '*bayanathikama*', fearlessness, as a heroic characteristic central to their campaign. The monks are present in these incidents. It is not necessarily that they were organizing in places where the violent incidents occurred, but they use these incidents to attract people. For instance, one of the massive events of violence took place in Aluthgama, Beruwala and Dharga Town in 2014, on the border of the Western and Southern

Provinces. Four Muslims were killed and widespread property damage occurred. The BBS were able to gain traction not only locally but also worldwide due to their engagement in these violent events.

After the violence, the BBS became the center of the anti-Muslim campaign. Their emergence as an anti-Muslim group also illuminates a contingent nature of the militant nationalist movement and how these militant groups can enable violence even without their presence in the local settings. For instance, before I went to the field, I suspected that the BBS had a considerable member base in Beruwala. Many of those I talked to who were involved in the 2014 attack said, however, that they did not have any connection with the BBS prior to the incident. They had however worked with the JHU, organizing during the 2004 election campaign. The abbot of one of the main temples in Beruwala contested in the 2004 election from the JHU. These temples are the centers of mobilizing around the idea that the country is in danger. So it shows that the certain value framework against other communities of Sinhala Buddhist *sampradaya* can be triggered by small incidents such as an accident or an argument between a Muslim and Sinhalese and mobilized it to achieve certain violent ends.

The BBS proposes a Sangha-oriented commitment to overcome this danger. In a BBS's booklet published in July, 2019, Gnanasara states "the country is in danger in every minute that we waste. Those who wear the fake patriotic clothes (*vyaja deshapremi salupili poravagath*) will make our duty a difficult one. Those who use the current crisis acting in the name of patriotism will also make our duty a difficult one. But it is our duty to uproot the crazy religious terrorism. We should not allow anyone to use this extremism to achieve their naive political objectives" (Booklet of Bodu Bala Sena, July 2019). He further reasoned why monks should take the leadership in controlling the crisis that they have imagined to be: "this crisis has so much to do

with religious extremism. Thus, we need to solve religious issues with religious means by religious leaders coming together. Politicians should create laws and regulations and a governing model based on the proposal that everyone agrees upon. To uproot this crazy extremism that has spread like a cancer, all the Sangha organizations should unite with the advice of the abbots and vice abbots of the three chapters" (Booklet of Bodu Bala Sena, July 2019). That it was a religious issue and thus the monks needed to take leadership in handling it, was how he rationalized the Sangha's intervention in politics.

While the BBS was organizing around the imaginary of Muslim expansionism, there were many other monk-led organizations that came forward to do the same. Their presence became public whenever they attacked Muslims or evangelical Christians, as the media gave them widespread coverage. For instance, they prevented a mosque or church being made, sparking a series of communal tensions and violence. These incidents always ended with Muslim or the Christian person (s) being assaulted, physically or vocally (Sinhala Ravaya 2013, 1(8)). These direct confrontations made the monks and the lay people who were involved 'heroes' among the Sinhala Buddhist residents of those areas. This enabled them to pursue their interests and to position themselves as protectors of the country from "Muslim extremism or Muslim expansionism."

These monk-led organizations published leaflets and newspapers to publicize their ideology and attract members. For example, the Sinhala Ravaya organization started by Akmeemana Dayarathana thero, elected to Parliament from the JHU in April 2004, had an official newspaper in the same name. Almost all the newspaper articles were on "Muslim extremism or Muslim expansionism." The articles were raising the issues of land grabbing by Muslims, the issues with the Burqa, Muslim colonialism, pronatalism, Islamic Banks and Islamic

law. They wrote about their heroic contribution explaining how they work in some local villages to bring different ethnic groups together, particularly reconcile Muslims and Sinhalese (Sinhala Ravaya 2013). For instance, in Grandpass, a multi-ethnic urban area in Colombo district, when Sinhalese were attacking Muslims for building a mosque, one of the Sinhala Ravaya articles pointed out how happy the Sinhala Buddhists residents were about their interventions. It cited people's voices; "Our Venerable Thero, there is no one to represent us. There is no one to talk on behalf of us. Please don't leave us behind" (Sinhala Ravaya 2013, 1(8)). It is also important to note that through these confrontations, they do not necessarily win over the case in which they are involved, rather they gain a reputation and are able to establish a local branch in that area, at least to connect with some individuals that can help them to reach people.

The Sinhala Ravaya organization is of great interest to us because of its leadership that gave rise to many other splinter organizations that rally on the same ideological grounds. The icon of 'Sinha Le' (literally, 'Lion's Blood'), an ultra-nationalist group that goes by that name, has appeared with increasing prominence in public spaces (T-shirts, bumper stickers, pilgrimage sites, TV, videos, Facebook posts), and members of the organization have been vociferous in denouncing the visibility of Islamic cultural practices like the halal certification, the hijab, and animal slaughter. Its president was Madille Pangnaloka Thero, who was once secretary of Sinhala Ravaya. SinhaLe organized around the idea that a 'Sri Lankan' identity does not exist, that it is a curse that happened to the country with colonialism. They claim the country belongs to the Sinhala Buddhists and no one else. 'SinhaLe' is different from the BBS or any other previous organizations, who argue that only a few Muslims are bad. They publicly claim that the majority of Muslims are extremists. In response to their emergence, in 2016, August 15th Azath Salley, a Muslim minister, organized a protest under the slogan "*Api Okkoma ekama le*" [we all

have the same blood]. 'SinhaLe' along with some monks went to the protest and confronted

Salley, preventing the continuation of the protest (Madaperadiga Website). They also painted

'SinhaLe' on the gates of Muslim houses in Colombo, spreading the terror among Muslims and

making the organization's name public. While denouncing Islamic cultural practices like halal,

hijab, and animal slaughter, they launch programs like pronatalism (See figure 3).

Figure 3: Poster of a social media campaign organized by 'Sinhale Api' (We the Lions' blood)
that asked for financial support to increase Sinhala births.

The Ravana Balaya organization is another splinter group of Sinhala Ravaya.

Magalkande Sudathta thero, who was a chair of Public Affairs of Sinhala Ravaya is its president.

There did not seem to be much public support for this group, but this monk and a few lay people

confront Muslims publicly on many occasions, thus appearing in the media quite often. They also carry out protests on issues that are not often a part of the public discourse. For example, they protested that Muslims have a higher entrance rate in the Law College entrance exam (Newsfirst.lk, 2014 February 28). [106]

The effectiveness of this kind of propaganda is a chief characteristics of these organizations. Unlike the JHU, all the other organizations that followed it seem to have a large popularity among the rural lower-class constituency. They possess an unerring instinct for anything that the propaganda of the two main parties did not care or dare to touch, and proceeded to organize around them. Among them, issues such as drug addiction among Sinhala Buddhists, migration of Sinhala Buddhist women to Middle Eastern countries as laborers and Bhikkhunis (women monks) not having identity cards were prominent. Drug addiction was a main problem facing some villages. When I was interviewing people in Beruwala, areas where both Muslims and Sinhalese fishing communities reside, some Sinhala women said "the Muslim issue is also a problem here but our people have become drug addicts which needs to be controlled" (Interview, March 28, 2019). In other words, other social and economic issues have overdetermined by the anti-Muslim discourse. It forcibly reminds us that the campaigns around these issues seem to have made them much closer to the rural community, even in times when urban Sinhala Buddhists or Sinhala Christians were not supporting the militant groups' explicit extreme politics.

The social coalition against 'Muslim expansionism' that these organizations imagined has a noticeable difference from the previous Sinhala Buddhist national forces in post- independent Sri Lanka. While previous coalitions, especially the 1956 national force (see above), was

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[106] See https://www.newsfirst.lk/sinhala/2014/02/28/මෙලෝ-රහක්-නැහැ-දෙල්-හොදි-ව/. [Accessed June 20, 2020].

expecting a social contract among *Sangha, Veda, Guru, Govi, Kamkaru* [Sangha, doctors, teachers, farmers and laborers], or a contract between labor relations to propagate the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology, the new forces expect an alliance between "chauvinists and Sangha lovers (*Sanghamamaka)*" (Sinhala Ravaya newspaper, 2014) a new social contract that binds people by the desire to protect the country and religion. The Sinhala Ravaya leadership claims it is this coalition's responsibility to care for the welfare of Buddhism and the Sinhala nation. It further shows the more extremist form of developments in the Sinhala Buddhist national movement, moving it towards a totalitarian form of imagination. In other words, the recent movements against Muslims are much more extreme than the previous movements that organize and prioritize the material interests of the Sinhalese on the same slogans.

Throughout the Sinhala Ravaya paper, the idea of striving for one's salvation is criticized. It also questioned and rejected the public critique that monks' involvement in politics or monks' social activism should be limited. Both the monks and the laity of these groups criticized the lack of social and political involvement of Sangha in the matters that concern the country, issues such as Muslim expansionism, that they have taken forward which was evident in their publications and rehtorics. Madille Pangnaloka Thero visited the Birmingham Buddhist temple and Thames Buddhist temple in London to carry out Sinhala Ravaya's missionary work. While praising the Sinhala Buddhists families and the abbots of the temples for taking care of him, he criticized the temples that didn't support him. "In London, there are nearly 20 temples where Sri Lankan monks are the abbots. Not only did they not give any support for the development of the Sasana, but they also didn't give their spaces to us to conduct *Dharmadesana* and make people aware about the tragic situation that the country, nation, and Sasana is facing. They have become defeated" (Sinhala Ravaya newspaper, 2014).

The recent mass propaganda wave of the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalist movement did not invent their themes, but their techniques of organizing perfected them. One of the common features of these organizations is that they use Soma Thero's pictures in the places at which they organize, be it at the YMBA, temples and community centers (praja shala) and in political rallies. They repeat his preaching on the importance of protecting the Sinhala Buddhist country. Further, certain exhortations that were claimed to be given by Anagarika Dharmapala can be seen on the doorsteps of the YMBA or some temples in Beruwala—surrounded by Muslim majority villages—and Maharagama. For instance, the YMBA doorstep in Beruwala reads "One day white men leave this country. But they will leave only after producing twenty -thirty thousands of 'Brown- Sahibs' (*kalu suddo*). They will hate the Sinhala language and manners. They will teach your children to condemn racial and religious divisions. They will say that Tamils, Moors, Cochchies and Hambayas are all equal. Then they will crown the English. Kovils will be constructed near Buddhist temples. You will be waiting for your savior, Prince Diyasena [according to a folk story, the prince who rescued the country]. Remember that these Brown Sahibs are capable of killing Diyasenas before they are born. They will entice our monks as well. Then your children will have nothing else to do other than watching it with regret and resentment." These exhortations, unlike in the past, are commonly seen in many places, publicly revealing their anger against all the other ethnic and religious communities.

Among the majority of the supporters of these anti-Muslim organizations, whether their activities and the ideology that they carry is racist or not is no longer a debatable phenomenon. To them, the Muslims' mere existence as a different cultural being itself proves that the question on their activism is irrelevant. In other words, Muslims presence, their population increase, and their cultural differences have been framed as the reasons behind the militant movement'

politics. Therefore, their doing against Muslims is justified. They no longer need to win an argument about their superiority; the 'danger' they live in is a consistent ideology more convincing than any argument or mere discussion that can be had about it. Just as "the assumption of a Jewish world conspiracy was transformed by totalitarian propaganda from an objective, arguable matter into the chief element of the Nazi reality" (Arendt 1968: 60), the Sinhala Buddhist movement actors act as though the country is dominated by the 'Muslim expansionism', and thus needing a counter-movement to defend itself. The main point about these groups is that they grew prominent and conspicuous in inverse proportion to their actual membership and position of power.

According to Arendt, one of the main characteristics of a totalitarian pattern is that it can be repeated indefinitely and maintain a liquidated nature of organization so that anyone can insert their presence as a part of it (Arendt 1968: 66). Similarly, the history of emerging totalitarian imaginaries can be told in terms of the different factions that later came into being, organized against Muslims. The prominent character in these factions is the presence of the monks and their leadership in representing an almost exclusive social vision. These groups, on the contrary, do not claim that they are different from the Sinhala Buddhist movement. They cite Anagarika Dharmapala, Migettuwaththe Guananada, Walpola Rahula, and Hikkaduwe Sumangala as their father figures of the Sinhala Buddhist national movement. It is their belief that it is a historical duty that they are adhering to. Though they mentioned leaders and their ideological stances, the reason for the success of these groups is that they don't have a coherent political center (Dewasiri 2017) and this character is symbolic of the militant Buddhist movement not as a narrow and specific programmatic entity with discrete ending points, but as a broader endeavor that they are trying to pursue.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned with the formation of the authoritative discourse of the Sangha's new claim to be sovereign and how it produced and enabled a totalitarian imaginary as a political possibility of Sinhala Lanka. It has been my aim to present the specific inaugural moments of this specific discourse and its primary Buddhist actors, practices, and acts. I have periodized and thematized them in terms of the patterns and processes I saw as emerging from my chosen perspective.

My argument was twofold; first I argued that the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the contemporary Sangha's claim to be sovereign are the reforms taken in the proportional representation system. The newly emerged groups were able to mobilize around the slogan that a 'Sinhala-only party is possible' to come to power. Secondly, the monks' claim to become sovereign carries the possibility of emergence of violence as their demand to be sovereign involves a decision on friend/enemy distinction in collective identity formation.

It is also my contention that the contemporary groups led by monks bear the possibility of a totalitarian characteristics in Sri Lankan society as their organizing with its violent negation of the difference cut *across* social classes. Since there is no elite political formation that has taken this ideology fully into a political possibility, the full form of terror is very limited. However, the common rhetoric - despite different leaderships - like the exclusion of both major political parties, the justification of the deportation of Muslims, and labeling them as outsiders are characteristics of the totalitarian imaginary whose seeds have been planted from the mid-1990s by different organizations and groups, yet their roots are the same. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara and Athuraliye Rathana Theros contested the 2020 general election from a party called Ape Jana Bala Pakshaya [Our People's Power Party]. The party received 67,758 votes from the island

wide (0.58% of the total votes) and gained a parliamentary seat. This election result shows they

have a considerable voter base that not only signified the extent to which their ideology against

difference has been concretized in the country, but they are a considerable force that can

mobilize people.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Buddhists' New Economic Solution: a Buddhist Brotherhood

Abstract

The previous chapter described the organizing mechanisms of recently formed political groups

and organizations through which monks articulate their demands to be sovereign and express

their visions for their desired subject and model of the state. In the years preceding the recent

violence against Muslims in Sri Lanka, a proposal for a new economy was pushed forward which

was not only a resistance to economic reforms, but also an act of self-assertion against the

perceived economic power of Muslims in the country. Sinhala Buddhist groups propose urgent

improvements to the deteriorating political-economic conditions of society, asserting that

Buddhist values must be the basis of these improvements. Central to their framing of this

deterioration is how they see Muslims, their businesses, and Muslim population increase as

causes of this discontent, a process that they called "Muslim encroachment." In this chapter, we

are concerned with their economic agenda for an ideal society in which they proposed "a

Buddhist Brotherhood" as a solution for their economic grievances. I explore the characteristics

of this new economic paradigm; its authors, practices and ideology; and their relations to

contemporary Sri Lankan economic conditions, such as the shrinking of the welfare state for an

open economy bent on export-led growth. I contend that the increasing influence of Sinhala

extremist forms of politics that cut across social classes and their proposal for developing an

economic ethic is a consequence of their appeal to the masses in the midst of these economic

conditions, and these politics also contain the demand to identify them with the state.

Introduction

It is a truism that expansion of market oriented economic forces has greatly aggravated social discontent, political failures and cultural and economic uncertainties in Sri Lanka. The forces in play also witnessed the resurgence of Sinhala Buddhist groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS hereafter; lit. Buddhist Force Army), known for both their violence against minority communities (particularly Sri Lankan Muslims) and their proposal to establish a new economy in the island. These groups propose to restore the perceived glories of the past through their economic agenda while condemning Muslims as a real threat to Sinhalese economic development. Central to my task is the examination of the characteristics of this new economic paradigm, its authors, practices and its ideology. I seek not to argue that market reforms created these groups; rather it is in the social order determined by the market that they found the legitimacy to promote their new economic paradigm.

Indeed, campaigns to establish a new economy to "develop the country" led predominantly by Buddhist monk-ideologues and Sinhala nationalists in general is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka.[107] The new economic proposal, however, departs from the earlier nationalist economic policies in several striking ways: first, the Buddhist monastic leadership in the campaign demands to be sovereign; second, the contemporary movement envisages an idyllic community concerned with improvements to the conditions of Sinhala Buddhist life centered on the concept of a Buddhist brotherhood (*Bawddha sahodarathvayak*) network predominantly modeled on the imagined success of the Muslim community. This contrasts with earlier economic agendas, which centered on a concept of social service based on the specific cultural

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[107] See *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, by H.L. Seneviratne, "A New Economy of Religious Identity" in *Colors of the Robe* by Ananda Abeysekara.

framework of Buddhist morality. The goal of the network is to stimulate young male and female Buddhists to undertake new business ventures, strengthen already-existing Buddhist business owners, and increases ties among them. By doing so, they hope to establish a local economy in Sri Lanka. The existent Muslim model seem to be serving their interests.

An important ingredient of the economic agenda is the restoration of the glories of the traditional Sinhala order to its imagined former status in which monks are the sovereigns. The monastic leadership of the campaign claim that their role in realization of the economic development is integral to the island's history, and that they have always played a larger role in developing the country as part of their religious tradition. However, as an extraordinarily rich corpus of scholarship has shown, the dominant articulation of the Sangha as a missionary of this economic development belongs to a particular conjuncture which I called the first wave Bhikkhu in politics (pre-independence Lankan monks). For instance, as H.L. Seneviratne has brilliantly argued in his *Work of Kings,* both the proposal of an economic program centered on the concept of "rural regeneration" and the articulation of monks at its center is a rather recent, indeed distinctively modern, affair (Seneviratne 1999: 57). The proposal involved building a self-sufficient and predominantly agricultural economy modeled on the imagined economy of precolonial Sri Lanka. In this model, primacy was to be given to rice cultivation, with the cultivation of vegetables and fruit trees and the building of rural crafts and industries constituting the rest of the economy (Seneviratne 1999: 57). According to the pioneer of this articulation, Anagarika Dharmapala, the main organizing mechanism of this regeneration was a rural association that would be founded in every village, called a Gramaraksaka (Village Protection) or a Maha Bodhi (Great Bodhi) Society. These ideas (e.g. of Dharmapala) have since become so

well-established and there is practically little space of reversal of monks involvement in economic development which I attributed to the *sampradaya* or tradition.

This vision of rural regeneration in which monks were at the center of missionary work encouraged great ferment during the 1940s among the second generation Bhikkhu (post independent Sri Lankan monks who did not demand to be sovereign of the country) in politics and continued to be dominant through the late 1970s. Among the monastic disseminators of this vision were *Vidyalankara* monks, such as Yakkaduve Pragnnasara and Walpola Rahula, who were nationalist in their political and ideological orientation (Seneviratne 1999: 57). Rahula not only asserted the monks' role in social work, but also brilliantly articulated and justified monks' missionary work and their entrance into lay territory. Rahula's sophisticated scholarly work entitled *Bhikshuvage Urumaya*, (The Heritage of the Bhikkhu) published in 1946 was influential in concretizing the paradigm of idyllic society, monkhood, and kingship that bears the imprint of Dharmapala's ideology. This work sought to restore the alleged precolonial status by telling the monk to "rearm himself for a society that has progressed while he has languished" (Seneviratne 1999: 137). In other words, the project of rural regeneration went hand-in-hand with defining the vocation of the monks as social service and *vice versa*. This vision led to a series of developments in the relationship between monks and politics, and the contemporary nationalist movement still bears the imprints of this paradigm. Seneviratne argues that how they pursued their agenda and the reverberating consequences of that pursuit, "constitute much of the history of the Sangha, indeed of the nation, in the twentieth century" (1999: 56). From the 1990s on, the actors of the recent nationalist movement continued in the paradigm of past discourses and they act within the limitations of the political system to Sinhala Buddhisize the state and culture. It is in this influential context of the tradition I set my analysis in this chapter.

A New Economic Paradigm

In this exploration of the proposal to establish a new economy by recent nationalist groups against Muslims and these groups emergence in the midst of economic uncertainties generated by neoliberal economic policies, I want to begin by focusing on the representatives of the resistance's ideological dimension, and on their explanations of the acute economic and cultural problems faced by Sinhala Buddhists. They express this by referring to the Muslims' cultural and economic existence as a threat to Sinhala Buddhist businesses. The popular mindset that underpins this violence against Muslims, and in general, against ethnic Others constitutes the demonization of them as thieves, money lenders, land grabbers, fundamentalists, extremists and outsiders. The campaigns against them are accompanied by slogans like: "Taking back the control of the state," "Returning to the nation's greatness," "Making sure the 'other' holds a correct place in the Sinhalese nation," and "Safeguarding the nation and Buddhism from an ominous future." These slogans are vicious. They work to create a national population with their own solution, and they are part of Buddhist politics in which monks often play a leadership role and it is widespread.

Criticisms pertaining to Tamil Others stealing Sinhalese businesses have a long history in attempts of establishing a new Buddhist economic paradigm,[108] but a new discourse has emerged about the responsibility of Sinhalese Buddhists towards restoring the lost sovereignty of the country due to the local and international economic threats. The possibility of a threat to the sovereignty of Sri Lanka has been a major theme in nationalist discourse, but many now say that one cannot quash the threat unless one has the material means to ensure the safety and endurance

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[108] See Newton Gunasinghe, "The Open Economy and its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka," in Sri Lanka: The Ethnic Conflict — Myths, Realities and Perspectives, Committee for Rational Development (ed.) (Delhi, Navarang) and Sunil Bastian "Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: The July 1983 Riots," in Das (ed.), 1990.

of Sinhalese-led businesses. This is therefore framed as a religious requirement, one that entails duty to the Sinhala community as a whole to contribute to restore it. Hence, this duty is not the same as an individual task, nor the same as the work performed by the quasi-secular welfare state. The difference consists in how this responsibility requires Sinhala Buddhists to restore the sovereignty of the state. Crucially, the responsibility is religious and ethnic—it has come to characterize the figure of a moral Sinhala Buddhist that is commensurable with Muslims. The point I want to stress is that this attempt to establish a Buddhist economic paradigm is not concerned with reducing economic distress in the abstract, nor simply making it an occasion for moral giving. It is inflected with material deprivation and in producing a certain "dignified Sinhala Buddhist" subject. This narrative is usually structured by the assumption that a single conception of Sinhala Buddhist life can and should be imposed on all citizens, and that a major purpose of the state is to ensure the conditions for its attainment, including the elimination of the import industry and Muslim businessmen. This is the basis for their proposed Buddhist economic paradigm which constitutes creating a Sinhala Buddhist brotherhood as a solution for their grievances.

Fundamental to the discourse of brotherhood is not mere business astuteness, but the way that brotherhood implies an ethos; it is the notion of restoring and protecting the sovereignty of the state by being fundamentally aligned with the state. In this ethos, economic acquisition is no longer considered a means of subsistence, but it is the ultimate purpose of a Buddhist's life. This is evident in the rhetoric of Buddhist leaders. For instance, in his presentation at a Business Conference held in October 2018, the general secretary of Colombo Young Men's Buddhist Association and the managing director of Lanka Tiles Plc., a Sinhala owned enterprise, stated that in order to achieve a "radical transformation of attitudes, perspectives and practices for

business development based on Buddhist values, we should follow what Lord Buddha has asked us to do. He said to think first of profit, second of profit, and third of profit." These professional syndicates are trying to establish a new moral and political language of Buddhist identity that links Buddhism to their commercial expectations. They are rebranding Buddhism as a profitable mechanism that can serve as a foundation to build up a Buddhist brotherhood.

In a series of scholarly works such as *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities* (2016) written on the intermittent violence between Sinhala Buddhists and Sri Lankan Muslims from 2012 through 2015, attribute the recent development of violence against Muslims to the main militant groups and organizations such as National Heritage Party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), BBS, Ravana Balaya, and Sinhala Ravaya.[109] However, my research reveals that their extremist slogans are not only common among these groups but have spread through the whole social spectrum. In other words, lack of economic improvement among Sinhala Buddhists and work of monks to improve local economy, however, is not only expressed by the prominent *militant* groups but also by the country's *official* institutional representatives of Buddhism. While some of them are vociferous proclaimers of anti-Muslim slogans in public, others are not. For instance, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) and BBS propose the same solution to their economic and sociological problems: a *Buddhist brotherhood* that will bring together local and international Buddhist networks with the objective of bringing financial benefits to develop Sinhala Buddhists' social and economic conditions. They both share a common political-economic feature: a welfare-centered strong local economy. These commonly held notions of

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[109] It is an excellent volume with social, religious and economic analysis of rise of Buddhist militancy against Muslims communities. But their attempt at understanding how and why the tensions between Buddhists and Muslims have become so aggravated recently in Sri Lanka has only focused on publicly vociferous groups and organizations.

economic grievances that cut across social classes seem to suggest the acuteness of economic distress in the country.

This is different from the common view about contemporary nationalist movements: that extreme narratives against Muslims are only prevalent among less privileged sectors of society.[110] This view is prevalent in historical understandings of the socio-cultural background of the agents of violence, though evidence suggests otherwise. For instance, Kumari Jayawardena (1970) in her account of the 1915 Sinhala-Muslim riots noted that though the rioters have often been portrayed as criminals and hoodlums out for plunder, evidence exists that in Colombo, it was not the criminal and rootless elements who led the riots, but the skilled, better paid, more militant segments of the working class. Thus different analysis is needed. How should one explain this demand to create a Buddhist brotherhood while simultaneously framing Muslims as a successful community of learned worthy and demonizing them as the other. What connects these rhetorics to market reforms in Sri Lanka? I contend that the Buddhist revival against Muslims in Sri Lanka found their legitimacy within economic uncertainties generated or results informs market reforms. Their resistance to economic discontent constitutes a new economic paradigm. In other words, economy did not cause the militant movement but it enabled the conditions for its emergence.

Explanations of Sinhalese economic grievances with reference to the ACBC will shed some light on how the religious revival against Muslims has become a widespread phenomenon. In 2018, the National Council for International Affairs of ACBC, in Colombo, organized a

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[110]In the media, it is a commonly held view that the violence is the work of the lower social strata of society. Even in the global context, some acute analysts of the recent "religious revival" or "rightwing populism" endorse this view. For instance, Gidron and Peter A. Hall (2017) argue that the rise of right populism is a result of status anxiety and economic and cultural developments as factors that combine to precipitate such anxiety. They suggest that lower levels of subjective social status are associated with support for right populist parties, identify a set of economic and cultural developments likely to have depressed the social status of men without a college education, and show that the relative social status of those men has declined since 1987 in many developed democracies.

"Buddhist Business Forum" titled *Buddhist Leadership Practices in Business* at Bandaranaike

Memorial International Conference Hall*, attracting nearly 300 businesspeople from around the

country. Eminent Buddhist monks, learned academics, professionals and business leaders

addressed the Business forum. Three sessions were held: "A new paradigm for sustainable

business founded on Buddhist values and ethics;" "A radical transformation of attitudes,

perspectives and practices for business successes based on Buddhists values;" and "Business

success based on Buddhist values." Kulathunga Rajapaksha, the managing director of DSI

Samson Group and a founding member of Sinhala Veera Vidahana (SVV; Order of the Sinhala

Heroes), spoke during the latter panel. SVV, as I discussed in detail in my third chapter, is the

organization that provided financial support for the third wave of *bhikkhu* politics. The objective

of the forum was to establish unity and brotherhood among Sinhala Buddhist businesspeople.

The discussion on establishing a brotherhood and using Buddhism as its basis is an

unprecedented recent development. Proponents wish to establish local and foreign business

networks to enhance business among Sinhala Buddhists. Here is how the ACBC president

proposed the idea:

> The main subject of the Buddhist Forum is to practice and propagate the sublime doctrine
>
> of Lord Buddha in the conduct of business, social educational, cultural and other
>
> humanitarian services and to secure unity, solidarity, brotherhood and networking
>
> amongst Buddhists (Prof. Lakshman R. Watawala, president of national Council for
>
> International Affairs, ACBC 2018, pamphlet).

The idea of brotherhood is the finest expression of this economic program. Though it is

common in leftist circles to hear people using *sahodaraya* in the sense of comradeship, it is not

common among the general public to use brotherhood. Hence, the structure and psychic

economy of the idea of establishing brotherhood should be regarded as an ideological

construction. This draws on a widely shared narrative that Muslims' business models and their

way of life are successes owed to the sense of brotherhood common among Muslims. This

narrative was, however, not necessarily referring to the Muslim Brotherhood.[111] Rather the

groups that are central to our discussion refer to a certain set of values that they believed to be

the reasons for Muslim business success. Many of the Buddhist leaders I talked to said that

Muslims' unity is provided and guarded by their religious values and Sinhala Buddhists must do

the same; represent Buddhism as conducive to economic growth and cultivate religious values to

forge stronger relations between Sinhala Buddhists.

Further, at the Buddhist Business Forum, in his lecture titled "Buddhist Ethics and

Spirituality in leading Business Organizations,"[112] Deepal Sooriyaratchchi, "a corporate leader

with a proven track" and an "author over 15 books on Business to Buddhism" as the organizers

of the conference introduced him, said, "Look at the Muslim community. Despite our

differences, we have something to gain and learn from them. That is their unity or in other words

brotherhood. The global financial landscape is changing and a prosperous future can be achieved

with Buddhist values and all international and local Buddhists coming together." This talk was

attended by most of the country's key Buddhist Sinhala businessmen and regulators.

Sooriyaratchchi further suggested that "creating a spiritual being is the task of Buddhism and our

spirituality can be used to promote efficiency, take proper decisions and maintain a leading edge

in a fast moving economic world." Though no one else at the conference mentioned Muslims or

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[111]Muslim Brotherhood, the "most influential Islamist movement" (Asad 2007: 86) that began in Egypt as a "religious alternative" for political leadership (Voll 1993: ix). It is an important dimension in the history of Muslim politics which reflected a "growing religious revivalism in both personal and public life that would sweep across much of the Muslim world" (Esposito 1992: 11-12) that also represented a major visible tendency of Islamic "fundamentalism" in Egypt. For a detailed study of the emergence of the movement, see Richard Michell, *The Society of the Muslims Brothers*, Oxford University Press, 1993.
[112] See Selling Spirituality, Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, Routledge, 2004 for a discussion on how spirituality has become a new cultural addiction and a "claimed panacea for the angst of modern living (2004: 1).

their success in their speeches, articulating Buddhism's use for business success was everyone's central concern. For example, the president of Young Men Buddhist Association of Colombo, Mahendra Jayasekara, who is a prominent businessman in the country, made bold statements on this articulation. His framing might also help us think about the nature of the different syndicates' central roles in the formation of this relationship. He asserted,

"There is no religion that encourages the creation of wealth as much as Buddhism does. Many people believe that Buddhism discourages the creation of wealth and it is all about suffering. For me, there is no religion that encourages the creation of wealth as much Buddhism does. In my view, Buddhism is for the rich and the intelligent. Poverty itself is the suffering for the poor. You can't understand *Duhkha* [suffering] and *Duhkha Samudya Satya* [the truth of the nature of its cessation] unless you are rich. To understand that, you have to be rich. Buddha's teaching has clearly mentioned that poverty leads to poverty. Buddha taught us how to create money, wealth, how to do business, and conditions for successful business… The fundamentals of Buddhist teachings can be incorporated into the corporate sector to deal with problematic employees at any workplace" (Mahendra Jayasekara, Business Forum 2018).

The urgency and theme here is that material means to ensure security in life are a requisite of Buddhism. The strong connection between being a good Buddhist and being wealthy was repeated in the presentations of others at the forum as well. Jayasekara is trying to transfer a doctrinal Buddhist teaching that one needs to secede from this worldly attachment or desire, in order to stop the cycle of rebirth, onto matters of immediate interest here and now. They are creating a new discourse of Buddhism and its relation to profit-making. They require Buddhists to fall into line with the market that organizes a commercial society to uplift their lives. Thus, we

should consider these suggestions as the object of a diverse and evolving religious discourse that engages with these conditions and gives them political force. Since the state seems to be preventing people from living a wealthy life by letting the market handle the economy, Buddhist intellectuals and businessmen have taken the responsibility to articulate a kind of Buddhism that fulfills the interests of a moral subject and the purpose of the state – the elimination of poverty – but they have do so by pointing towards Muslims and their imagined success more than towards Buddhist ethics.

The majority of the speakers in the conference raised the importance of having a 'work ethic' to improve the status of Buddhist businesses. However, they also refer to the Muslim business ethic more than anything else. As Sooriyarachchi mentioned at the Business Forum, "Dedication to work is a must and treating customers without complaining is important if you want to succeed in your business. We have a lot to learn from other people's businesses. Think how a Muslim businessmen treat you when you enter their shop." Here he is referring to a common belief among many Sinhalese that Muslims never turn away a customer.

The significance of the idea of brotherhood and learning from Muslims is constantly pronounced and promoted by all the groups and the public who proposed to establish a new economic paradigm. For example, the secretary of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in Beruwala told me that

> "Their [Muslims'] success is inevitable. Every single person despite the age, even the kids know how to sell, because it is in their blood. They are all connected together as a spider web. They consider every single person of their kind as one of them. Unlike us [Sinhalese Buddhists], Islam brings them under one brotherhood. So they could use their

existing support and infrastructure to expand their business on a global scale and offer strong financial options" (Interview March 02, 2019).

In this sense, with the hope of redesigning the Buddhist economic action in order to make Sinhala Buddhist families commensurable with the imagined success of Muslim businesses, the secretary has shared a report or rather a letter with the members of YMBA in Beruwala (Letter is shared with me when I was interviewing him). It was a set of proposals to realize the emphasis on partnership, sense of community, mutual benefit, and risk sharing. It was a proposal on how to prevent an anticipated Sinhala Buddhist demise. The letter put forth a mechanism that needs to be in place to achieve this goal. Here is how his letter laid out his proposal:

1. Recognize the issues that Buddhist society is facing and take long term and short term remedies.

2. Take steps to prevent the deterioration of Buddhist development:

   a. Choose *secretly* the families that are taking birth control with the help of prelates and midwives.

   b. Find the reasons for birth control and take steps to prevent it.

   c. Provide them milk, food, clothes and medicine.

   d. Provide nursery school for free.

   e. Provide free tuition.

   f. Provide daycare free; if the mother is working, support her to get vacation and fulfill her other needs easily.

   g. Find what governments and politicians provide and try to provide them soon.

What is envisaged here is a self-governing community that takes actions for their own issues in which they also expect to align with the state. These guidelines indicate what issues that

village in fact has: poverty, a lack of social welfare system and a lack of state support. Hence the need to endeavor to endow their imagined vision of society with their own values and proposals as mentioned above. While in their view these proposals are to improve the conditions of village life and a way of forming a network among Sinhala Buddhists, they also have real consequences for other ethnic communities. These mechanisms cultivate the fear among the people about, for instance, Muslims as a threat to their success.

Along similar lines, in 2019 the BBS also proposed in concrete terms a Buddhist Business Network and a Buddhist Bank as solutions to social distress. What was central to their proposal, it should be noted, is forming a Buddhist brotherhood. Incidentally the model for emulation is once again the Islamic banking system. The Buddhist Business Network is to take various measures such as motivating Buddhist youth for business, strengthening the Buddhists who are currently doing business, and networking among them. They propose a Buddhist Business Congress to build a wealthy, virtuous, and powerful community, encourage young Buddhists to do businesses, strengthen the established Buddhist businessmen and create a network that connects every one of them. By doing so, the Business Congress expects to build a virtuous community of Buddhist businessmen that is nationally and internationally spread. In that Buddhist Bank is crucial for bringing economic success to Sinhala Buddhists. Its objectives are outlined as follows:

1. Promote the businesses of Sinhala Buddhist businessmen.
2. Enhance access to business opportunities nationally and internationally.
3. Assist Buddhist entrepreneurs who are facing various financial difficulties.
4. Facilitate access to start-up capital for young Buddhist entrepreneurs.

5. Establish a Buddhist Development Bank based on Buddhist principles (Kathikavaka Arambuma, BBS 2019).

The BBS says that these mechanisms serve to reassure a virtuous business community and are an appeal to those who are accustomed to following the wrong economic practices that do not aim to uplift the lives of Sinhala Buddhists, behavior which has consequently led to a massive debt trap. It is my contention that the structure and psychic economy of this proposal should be regarded as an ideological construction similar to that of the Islamic financial system. Though there is a lack of consensus as to exactly what qualifies as Islamic finance, scholars refer to a set of economic actions, practices and values prescribed by Islam to govern the management of money and capital (Rosly 2005, Rudnyckyj 2018; Warde 2010). The BBS and all the other groups in our concern often refer to a particular Muslim financial practice – the religious prohibition against the payment of interest, prevention in investing in prohibited activities such as alcohol and gambling, – and attribute it to a result of their collective existence and support network (Kathikavaka Arambuma, BBS 2019; Panel discussions, Buddhist Business Forum 2018). It is something that the Sinhalese lacked hence the suggestion is to imitate it.

Muslims in Sri Lanka had always been viewed by some Sinhalese as traders, business community or business class and accusations were commonly made that they were unscrupulous in their dealings (Jayawardena 1970; Haniffa 2016). However, Muslims are a heterogeneous group and not everyone pursued industrial or entrepreneurial activities. For instance, Muslims in the East are overwhelmingly rural and engaged in either small-scale agriculture or fishing (Dewaraja 1994). Despite their internal differences, their cultural and religious identity is regarded by some non-Muslims as unitary, and some of them were perceived to have benefitted more from the state's open market economic policies and enjoy better economic standing

(Nuhman 2016). These prejudices served to legitimize the attacks against Muslims even during the 1915 Buddhist-Muslim riots.[113]

In the midst of the market economic changes, however, the nationalist groups reach the public with their extremist agendas articulating that they need to counter Muslims or Tamils and propose mechanisms through which to become alike them, a community with a business success. One good example is the emergence of SVV and their economic programs. The SVV is a group of seven successful Sinhala-Buddhist middle and upper-class businessmen. They were entrepreneurs in industrial production such as textiles, rubber products, consumer durables (e.g. gas and fuel), and banking sector that competed for the domestic market dominance with their Muslim and Tamil counterparts. It is important to point out that the SVV's emergence accompanied the State's neoliberal economic policies that rapidly privatized state-owned industries. For instance, in the mid-1990s there were certain attempts taken to privatize the Paddy Corporation that was established to buy paddy directly from farmers at a fixed price. The objective of its establishment was to save the farmer from losing his livelihood even if he/she doesn't make profit. There was resistance from farmers to the privatization. Amidst this political economic scenario, the SVV went to a village in Polonnaruwa in the north central province, the main city of the ancient royal kingdom of Anuradhapura, with a plan to buy paddy directly from farmers. According to one of the founding members of the SVV;

"Our goal was to reestablish the great historical cultural structure that existed in the past. When we went to the village we first renovated the temple and some tanks in the area. It

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[113] As Kumari Jayawardena stated in her analysis of the underlying economic and political factors in the eruptions and suppression of the 1915, the Indian Moors, known as Coast Moors, who came from and frequently returned to South India, were very unpopular among the Sinhala poor due to their engagement in petty trade throughout Ceylon. In the exchange of their trade with everyday consumers, they became moneylenders and pawnbrokers to whom the poor allegedly lost their land and money, increasing the hostility between Buddhists and Muslims (Jayawardena 1970: 224).

was very important to renew the relationship between the village and the temple. We asked farmers to come to the temple and distribute paddy seeds with necessary fertilizers. We also promised them that we would buy their seeds with a price that no other company or government would offer. We were able to continue it for two years and it went well. We were able to reestablish and renew the relationship between the village and the temple. But you know… some mediators, those who were buying the paddy before, conspired against us and even the government discussed our involvement in this business in the parliament. So we had to stop" (Interview, May 27, 2019).

These steps, renovating an imagined historical cultural structure of the past that these groups claimed to be destroyed in the contemporary times were significant in the actual concretization of the recent wave of the Sinhala Buddhist movement not only among the rural peasants who constitute a large majority of the population but also the urban-centered middle class. At the levels of city, region, and state, they worked to bring influential entrepreneurs, politicians and *bhikkhu*s together on platforms of rebuilding the nation economically. While mobilizing the underrepresented Sinhala Buddhists in rural areas for this cause, they organized several 'Business Fairs' (Salpila) in Colombo, expecting to bring rural entrepreneurs and Colombo wholesale Businessmen together. Their objective was to create a space for local farmers to sell their products "at a legitimate price" (*Divayina* October 15, 1997). One of the founding members of the SVV explained to me that "establishing this relationship between Colombo Sinhala Businessmen and the local farmers was important because we don't have a Business model that Muslims have. They help each other but we don't. If we need to re-establish the relationship between the village and temple, it is important to make the local farmers wealthy

so that they can take care of the temple. It will safeguard the traditional link between the two that is thousands of years old" (Interview, May 27, 2019).

Around 1999s, the SVV established their branches in many villages in the Districts of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Mathale, Ratnapura and Mahiyangana, the most underprivileged regions of the country (Interview with a founding member of SVV, May 27, 2019). These local units organized around the village temple. They distributed rice paddy seeds and fertilizers from the beginning of the cultivating season. When the farmers were harvesting, the temple became the store room for the paddy, where it was packed and sent to Colombo for distribution. The mediators of the supply chain were discarded from these villages and the paddy market as a whole. The aim was to establish a direct relationship with the farmers and the SVV members.

Most importantly, though these organizing mechanisms were designed to produce material benefits for both sides, they were also carrying an ideological project for the farmers: farming was not only an income, but something more than that; it is a service to their village, their society, and the country. The building and repairing of tanks is one of the main welfare activities undertaken by these organizations. While taking care of temples signifies spiritual prosperity, tanks symbolize material prosperity. These interventions signify a particular type of social order of a state they imagined creating, and the desired shape of the present and future of that state.

All of this also is certainly an important part of the context in which the Muslim community as a commercial community is located. The president of the Sasana Service Committee, Maharagama Vajiragnana, who is also a founding member of SVV raised his concerns over Muslim businessmen: "The mosque or their people help if they want to buy land or a building. One of the buildings, on the high level road, now owned by a Muslim—we all

wanted to buy it. But we could not, as the price was really high. I know the Muslim businessman who bought that building cannot afford it on his own, but he was helped by their community. This is what we are lacking" (Interview July 18, 2018). The lack of both community support and opportunities for loans without interest is a concurrent grievance that the Sinhala Buddhist businessmen complained about.

Some businessmen also connect their grievances to labor laws and taxation of the State. For instance, the president of a local shoe conglomerate and a founding member of SVV explained his economic issues. I will described them here in detail as his account helps to unearth the economic and political conditions that have enabled the emergence of the recent discourses against Muslims, and it helps us to understand the underlying contradiction between the demands to "build a local economy that is favorable for Sinhala Buddhists" and the economic policies of the state. The businessman expressed his objection to the growing labor laws, expanded human rights, and against Muslims economic success:

> "I have to compete with the Muslim businessmen. They export shoes from places like China and India so the production cost is unbelievably low hence they can sell their products at lower cost. I cannot do that as I have to pay for the laborers, factory maintenance and many other expenses. In the past, we worked until the job was done. There was no sense of how many hours we worked. If it takes 24 hours, we spent that many hours to get the job done. Now we have to pay overtime after eight hours. It costs a fortune. These new laws and regulations (*ana panath*) prevent us from having real development. It destroyed our old customs and values. How could we do things according to the Buddhist values? Buddha taught us how to do business. For instance, we organized our business practices and our life according to Sigalovada Suthra that explains

that the first fourth of our profit is for investment, the second is for saving, the third is for charity, and one fourth is for living. We spend one fourth of our savings to take care of the temples. It is our duty. Now we have to pay taxes. But we cannot fulfill our duty anymore, can we? The government doesn't count our charity for tax purposes" (Interview, June 20, 2019).

What the businessman reveals here are not only his grievances, but a certain historical trajectory of political and economic development in the country which I will discuss in detail later. The development of labor laws (e.g. eight hour work limit), cultural transformations of the ways of doing business, tax increases, and more importantly, open economic policies, seem to be behind the reasons for their economic and social frustrations. In particular, it is apparent that changes in the economic structure overwhelm this local businessman so they are working to attain a different economic paradigm while demonizing Muslims.

Also, the discourse on the proposal to establish a new economy brought a segment of a national-level business community into sharp focus for the first time with their proposal to unite the country Businessmen to 'develop the country.' In 2008, a group of businessmen who critiqued the way they had to compete with liberal import policy and who identified themselves as members of *Mawbima Lanka Padanama* (Motherland Lanka Foundation) launched a campaign of "*ape de ganna*" [Go local]. They were invested in the logic of Sinhala nationalism, asked Sinhalese to be united against the Tamil militancy (The Strategic Approach to Bring Economic Prosperity to the Motherland Protected by the Soldiers Sacrificing their Lives, 2009), trade liberalization and its unequal economic impact on the local economy. For these reasons, a discussion on their emergence is of importance. In July 08, 2009, soon after the end of nearly thirty years of civil war between certain Tamil militant outfits and the Government of Sri Lanka,

the organization launched their economic proposal at the BMICH titled; The Strategic Approach to Bring Economic Prosperity to the Motherland Protected by the Soldiers Sacrificing their Lives. With most of the country's key local businessmen and women in attendance, including President Mahinda Rajapaksha as the victorious leader who has been acclaimed as the new king that reunited the country by winning the war, the President of the foundation, Ariyaseela Wickramanayake presented their key proposals to redesign the country's economy to achieve the "impossible" (their wording). Their proposal consists of concerns on;

1. Reduction on flour consumption

2. Cease importing corn and canned fish,

3. Increase in self sufficient local dairy production for the local consumption

4. Envision Hambantota harbor as a project to improve the national economy

5. Establish local industries that produce sugar and invest in dairy farming and ethanol

6. Extend rice farming, cultivate grains, fruits and vegetables to be self sufficient

7. Prevent importing tea

8. Make laws for people buy their international tickets only through Sri Lankan Airlines

9. Reduce using expensive phones

10. Build trust on local industries

11. Introduce provisions on fertilizer subsidies

12. Remove the myth of economic centers such as Colombo as they take away the farmer's bargaining power

13. Reduce foreign investment

14. Restructure the banking system to improve the finance infrastructure

15. Improve the infrastructure of country

16. Invest in and research on natural resources in the country.[114]

A glance of these proposals make it clear the foundation had two fundamental objectives. They are strictly about developing a local economy and moving away from economic liberalization. Let me elaborate. The second edition published in 2011 of their booklet stated

"Improving the economic foundation of a country is not an easy task. It is met with many obstacles and conspiracies. Hence we need a central and strong institutional structure to move forward. Mawbima Lanka was formed to provide the organizational structure that our country's businessmen needed. It is to facilitate the reconciliation of our business community and develop the country, nation and its people" (Pamphlet published by Mawbima Lanka Padanama, 2011). Explaining their objectives further, the president of Mawbima Lanka Padanama said, "Our collective objective is to strengthen the local economy. For that, we need to reduce imports, produce more and more local products and strengthen the local producers. We must remove the obstacles that the local producers face. It is not only that we need to make a local consumerist, but someone that prefers locally produced commodities. Thus it is necessary to have a proper mechanism so that they can know about it. We believe that the *Surya Sinha symbol* will fulfill that task. The main objective of our organization is to make local consumers look for the Suriya Sinha symbol [as shown below] on behalf of the country on their every buying effort" (Interview August 29, 2018).

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[114] Dinagath Mawbimata Sauwbagyen Piri Apema Arthikayak: Mawbimata Arthika Samurdhiya Gena Ema Sandaha Vana Upaya Margika Praveshaya, "The Strategic Approach to Bring Economic Prosperity to the Motherland Protected by the Soldiers Sacrificing their Lives," first published in 2009, second printing is 2011.

Figure 1: Suriya Sinha Symbol

What is striking here are the assumptions that undergird this symbol of the lion, a predatory, carnivorous animal that signifies their investment in Sinhala nationalism. The desire to improve the local economy also reinforces a particular historical claim of the Sinhalese, that the Sinhalese are the people of the lion, a historical myth adopted for Sinhala ideology. For instance, while the sun is associated with the sublime, glory, solemnity, nobility, purity, holiness, and the *aryan* race, a stronghold in Sinhalese thought of their past, the lion symbolizes the historical origins of the Sinhalese race according to a popular mythical story. The myth is present in the sixth and seventh chapters of the *Mahavamsa*, a Pali chronicle believed to have been written in the late 5th or early 6th century. According to the "colonization myth," Sinhalese people evolved from Vijaya, a son of Sinhabahu who was born from the union of a princess with a lion.[115] One extended story about this mythical Vijaya describes how he had to find a queen "of

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[115] For a meticulously exhaustive exercise in historical reconstruction of the myth and how Sinhala ideology has refashioned this story to connect it to an obscure beginning of "Sinhala" ("the people of the lion"), the name of a royal kin group, and to the more recent past of 'Sinhala' as the name of "race" of people, see R.A.L.H. Gunawardena, "The People of the Lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography" (1990) in Sri Lanka: History and roots of Conflict edited by Joanathan Spencer.

his own Aryan race" so that he could succeed to the throne (Seneviratne 1930: 16).[116] This

history of the Vijaya myth provides the foundation of the Mawbima Lanka Foundation.

Juxtaposed with the highly materialistic objectives is their particularistic nationalist ideology. In

other words, their economic interests are embodied in a particularistic national framework.

This was evident in the booklet created to celebrate the establishment of the foundation.

The content was about the reconstruction of the relation between economic improvement and the

history of Sri Lanka. The booklet's author undertakes the meticulously exhaustive task of

historical reconstruction on the basis of mythical stories regarding the obscure origins of Sinhala

Buddhists. The text addresses a lion-like Sinhalese:

"Rouse your lion inside your hearts

Be the lion that agrees with your conscience

Be the Surya lion that loves your motherland

The Surya Sinha symbol takes the country towards modernity

Our Surya Sinha symbol that give life to national economy

Create a strong local Business chain

Building a proud Surya Sinha family

The mark that will take the Motherland to Modernity"

Central to this request are the strategic characteristics that define the heroes of the local

economy who will take the country towards a desired "modern" end. The text not only addresses

the deep consciousness of the Sinhala Buddhists but also proposes that they will lead the country

to modernity. The booklet discusses the importance of building a national economy, but the

invocation of "national" presupposes a history that has already negated other communities. This

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[116] See John M. Senaveratne, "The Story of the Sinhalese," Colombo, 1930.

is in fact the central paradox of the discourse of the nationalist economic paradigm of the recent movement: it imagines a national economy, but it does not include Tamil or the Muslim people, the Others of the Sinhalese. The internal cognitive apparatus of their thinking is echoed in one of their publications titled, "Strategy to bring economic prosperity to the motherland which was protected by war heroes who sacrificed their lives" (Booklet published by Mawbima Lanka Padanama, 2009 July).[117] They are attending to a particular discourse of national ideology that does not accept the grievances of the Tamil people. This discourse also support the Mahinda Rajapaksha regime's propaganda that solution for the national question is post-war development and it will forge reconciliation. Although a few Muslim- and Tamil-owned businesses became members of the foundation, and the director said that their objective is to incorporate all the businessmen in the country regardless of religious and ethnic background, the use of the Surya Sinha symbol seems to stem from the desire to make visible the Sinhalese historical consciousness of their continuous past. It is a call to unite Arya Sinhala rather than Sri Lankans. These attempts to improve the local economy emphasize a sense of unity among the Sinhalese rather than the country as a whole.

Further, the following excerpt is narrated by the Mawbima Lanka Padanama, regarding their national pride in their business model:

"Is there anything to beat the buffalo curd of the Ruhunu Rata? No. Sigiriya, as a pleasure garden or monastery or rock fortress, is unmatched across time and space. The Jaya Ganga is an engineering excellence that has no precedent and has never been replicated since. There is something exceptionally unique in our land and in our people and this is what the Surya Sinha symbolizes. Only those products that compete with the best in the

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[117] Mawbima Lanka Padanama. 2019. Strategy to bring economic prosperity to the motherland which was protected by war heroes who sacrificed their lives. Colombo: Mawbima Lanka Padanama.

world can carry the Surya Sinha Logo. In other words, being 'local' is not enough; the 'local' must be of the highest quality. This is our way of encouraging our local enterprises to strive for excellence. Those products that carry the Surya Sinha logo are not just popular among our people but have earned international certification with regard to quality. We don't believe that there are shortcuts to modernity. A strong nation—a proud nation–-requires people to step up, become better and strive to be the best. And when you purchase any product that carries the Surya Sinha logo, you not only purchase something of superior quality, you support the local economy and the local producer. The time has come. Our time has come. The time to produce is ours. The time to purchase our things" (Booklet published by Mawbima Lanka Padanama, 2009).

Here, succinctly articulated, are the concerns of the foundation and the economic paradigm they proposed. They feature particular history of the country, and describe architectural skills through Sigiriya, engineering skills through Jayaganga (a river), and production quality skills through curd. But what are the assumptions that this history upholds, and does it differ from other so-called lower class extremist groups' attempts such as BBS to establish a local economy? No. Despite their class backgrounds, they demand an economic "modernity" (*arthika nuthanathvayak*) that is located in relation to a popular discourse within Sinhala ideology. The fundamental view here is of a glorious past of the country, a self-sufficient, self-governing community but their preoccupation with glories of past that is of Sinhalese is noticeable. It is important to note here that as we discussed earlier this narrative is familiar with the society of Buddhists that is imagined by the SVV as well.

The epistemic horizon of most of the above proposals of the new economic paradigm suggested by the organizations in the nationalist movement that are in our concern is preoccupied

with notions of stability, development and certainty which are part of the moral economy of *sampradaya* that these groups claim to protect by resisting the market reforms. Their idea of development is articulated through the vocabulary of a privileged claim to a certain history of the country. In other words, the discourse on economic improvement of the country is not simply a response to economic distress. Such concerns do exist, but they are imbued with the desire to restore an imagined past and shaped by an imagined notion of one's responsibility to protect the country from collapse. Even when these groups use the language of the economically successful individual, it is accompanied by the sense of obligation to protect the country. Here it is important to note as Asad claims in relation to religious revival in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood, what one seeks is an agency that is at once one's own and not one's own (Asad 2007). In other words, what is common to the recent nationalist revivalist groups is that they are trying to attach their projects to a certain history, *sampradaya* and say that they have a duty to reclaim that past.

Politics of the Market: Inviting Sinhala Nationalism

Further, contemporary discourse on establishing a new economic paradigm—whether it is centered on the concept of social service or Buddhist brotherhood network—and the problematic politics of monks within it, particularly the violence against minority communities that accompanied this paradigm, can for most purposes, be located in the consequences of democratically elected governments' implementation of unpopular market reforms in Sri Lanka. Before we start discussing this relationship between market economic reforms and the recent economic proposals, it is important note that though many scholars have tried to understand what specific forms and manifestations of this correlation can be identified in social practices of the modern political order, it is difficult to suggest that economic restructuring is the only reason for

the violence against minority communities in Sri Lanka. Rather, it is an attempt to understand how economic liberalization processes provide some anchorage points to enable the conditions for violence to take place.

It had long been argued that there is a strong connection between inviting Sinhala nationalism and its violence to legitimize the unpopular market reforms in Sri Lanka in which the monks and their demands found grounds to thrive. As Rajesh Venugopal explains, Sri Lanka's market reform agenda suffers from an "inherent lack of popular legitimacy" and it is certain to damage any party's electoral prospects (Venugopal 2018: 81). Venugopal argues that there is a long term and close relationship between the expansive social welfare state grown since the 1930s under the electoral pressures of universal franchise as part of Donoughmore proposals and the popular democracy. As a mechanism that needed politicians to establish a rapport with the masses of voters, they promised to extend and expand the role of the state. The establishment of public services such as free education, health, public employment, the protection of peasant agriculture, and rural poor against pressures of market expansion together with promotion of the Sinhala language and patronage of the Buddhist religion comprise the moral parameters of hitherto governments of Sri Lanka which gave them the legitimacy and stability (Venugopal 2018: 81-82). It is this relationship between the electoral democracy and politicians' promise to expand the welfare state that defines the universe of political morality of the island. So he argues that preceding governments compromised this moral universe and system of thought to implement domestic and foreign forced economic reform agenda despite its unpopularity by inviting Sinhala nationalism as a legitimate force to neutralize the contradictions emerged from their economic reforms. In other words, welfare centered economy or at least the expectation of it is a part of the moral economy of Sri Lanka which Sinhala nationalism plays a

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larger role. Development and nationalism are closely connected. Therefore, this expectation which is a part of Sinhala nationalism have been used by the politicians to neutralize the deep rooted hostile approach against privatization policies.

So despite who is in power, whether it is United National Party (UNP) or Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) or an alliance of both, Sinhala nationalism as an alternative source of legitimacy to the illegitimate reforms to win public consent has become an innovative political strategy. Indeed, monks with their established authority in the village settings within the lay-monk relationship and with their non-elite background were ideally suited to bridge the gap between the rural voters and the majority elite politicians. Thus politicians were able to appropriate them to implement their ideological agenda and neutralize the opposition. For the monks, it was an opportunity to regain his relevance in the village where his prestigious role has been diminishing due to the modern economy and governance. Though before 1940s the "symbiosis between monk and politician was salutary," or "at worst harmless," and it broadly "represented a consensus of economic interest despite the politics of suffrage," the monk-politician relation later particularly after 1956, became "grossly political" and ideological (Seneviratne 1999: 60). The two main Christian born elite politicians in this context famously called 'Donoughmore Buddhists' because of their conversion to Buddhism to further their political careers are S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake and J.R.Jayawardene. They sought to display the Sinhala Buddhist religiosity by appropriating *Sangha* and recalling a glorious past through religio-cultural projects (Manor 1989; Kemper 1990; Brow 1990; De Silva and Wrigging 1994).

Let us discuss briefly the two time periods that are foundational to understanding the cultural and economic narratives of the Sinhala nationalist groups as it would help us understand how the new economic proposal is animated and influenced by efforts to shore up commitment

to Buddhism and Sinhalese in the face of the expansionary ambitions of people in power within a heterogeneous religious-ethnic milieu.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century followed by Ceylonese independence in 1948, there was a political and ideological alliance between lower middle class and rich peasantry such as smaller landowners, shopkeepers and those employed in subsidiary positions by the state brought together under the leadership of Bandaranayake (Samaraweera 1981; Manor 1989; Jeyaratnam 2000; Bastian 2013; Kadirgamar 2017, 2020). If we can name one common thread that binds them together it is their expectation to "develop the country." They saw economic development as a dynamo of change in which the promise of modernity and progress in various constitutional and social reforms will be fulfilled. In line with nationalist populist rhetoric bolstered by Bandaranayake's populist agenda that Sinhalese community had been marginalized by the state opportunities due to the colonial configurations of the social and political system, the two dominated Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) regimes in power between 1956-65, led the country in several directions by encouraging state welfare provisions to facilitate the desired economic development.

A political scientist, Amita Shastri, pointed out, the regimes in power sought to provide infrastructural facilities and heavy investment through the public sector, reduce foreign ownership dominated by colonial professional classes to encourage the development of indigenous industrial capital and enterprise, restructure private economic relations, chiefly in land, for instance, the Paddy Lands Act in 1958 for land reforms (1983: 5). These attempts moved the country in the direction of a mixed, import substitution economy with the state taking the lead in the mercantile and production sectors. Taxing the plantation sector dominated by the British and local wealthiest, providing generous subsidies to the farmers and the planting sector,

nationalizing port of Colombo and several industries including bus transport in 1958 and the petroleum corporation, the regimes in power not only weakened the old forms economic hegemony of colonial landed classes with their rapid growth, but also succeeded in concretizing the national and cultural interests of the alliance. It is here, among the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists and the public in general, that the post-colonial narrative of the nation's expectations for an economic modernity is to be found.

However, after almost four decades of the continuous expansion of the welfare economy, in 1977, the newly elected UNP government of J.R. Jayawardena initiated a "risky and radical program of market liberalization" (Venugopal 2018: 75). In their economic program, the government "deregulated foreign trade, removed import controls, devalued the exchange rate by 43 percent, eliminated subsidies on food and patrol, liberalized internal agricultural markets, reduced export duties, encouraged foreign investment, established export processing zones, modified labor legislation, and deregulated credit markets" (Venugopal 2018: 75). The Jayawardena government's economic policies brought a slow death to four decades of state welfare provision and heavy regulation of the export-oriented private sector economy. It is in this context that many political economists find the conditions of possibility for the frequent occurrences of Sinhala Buddhist violence against may it be the state, or Muslims or Tamils (Gunasinghe 1997; Kadirgamar 2018; Woost 1997; Jayawardena et al 1987; Athukorala and Jayasuriya 1994). And they argue that the shift towards open economic policies and the resulting social deterioration causes discontent that is then exploited by extremist groups backed by the governing regimes.

The introduction of open economic policies was characterized by rapid economic liberalization, and the government resorted to taking out foreign loans from the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank deepened the economic inequality of the country (Venugopal 2018; Moore 1985, Kadirgamar 2007). The policies in the long run trapped the country in a vicious circle of structural adjustments that disrupted the social order, a phase that coincided with some loosening of state control over the public sector. The system of quotas, permits, and licenses that are given through political patronage was dismantled and abolished. The public sector monopoly over the distribution of commodities and production was denationalized by handing those entities to the private sector. One of the main characteristics of this transformation was the allocation of a major role for foreign private capital in bringing export-led growth. The free play of market forces through dismantling of state concessions did not serve the interests of the local Sinhala businessmen (Gunasinghe 1996). Thus, they characterized Tamils or Muslims as the enemy to be responsible for all their grievances. Indeed, there are no concrete facts for this argument, rather they point towards or name some shopping malls or some shops that are owned by Muslims or Tamils.

Along similar lines, Obeyesekere (1984) and Tambiah (1986) contend that the sudden economic reforms caused long term repercussions and institutionalized political violence. For instance, they both have discussed Sinhala Buddhist violence against Tamils as a manifestation of the political and social decay engendered by the 1977 market reforms. In other words, the violence is a form of resistance to economic liberalization. As such, can a correlation be established between the changing economic conditions of the country and the intensification of ethnic tensions, and in particular, violence against Muslims? As I discussed above there are two main answers for this question: a) violence is engineered by the Sri Lanka's market reforming elites in order to implement their open economic agenda; b) hollowing out the state, in terms of

greater poverty and inequality resulted from the open economic reforms and it spurs Tamil grievances and Sinhalese mob violence.[118]

In post-war Sri Lanka, the intensification of ethno-religious violence went hand in hand as the country witnessed great flows of global capital in particular as characterized as "second wave of neoliberalism" (Kadirgamar 2013), arranged by global financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and the Asian Development Bank. With capital moving in the form of luxury buildings, highways, and massive urbanization projects taking place in Colombo, a large population went through a process of massive dispossession from their labor and property. Indebtedness has been rising among lower-class people due to their bank loans, leasing, and pawning, and they are unable to pay their debts regularly (Kadirgamar 2013). Meanwhile, the state is withdrawing investment in education, pension funds, and healthcare by introducing privatization as a form of governance. Irrespective of the regime in power, incentives are being discontinued, such as subsidized oil for fishermen and fertilizer for rice farmers. In other words, the system of state-regulated welfare is in a state of continuous decay so as the common expectations of the people. Kadirgamar argues that in Sri Lanka, "nationalist mobilizations are attempts to distract the Sinhala population from their economic vows and maintain the regime's electoral base" (Kadirgamar 2003). However, he does not explain why people actually find other ethnic groups as their enemy to conduct violence against. It seems to assume that people make wrong calculations about who their real enemies are.

Venugopal (2018), in contrast, argues convincingly that, linking reforms to violence against minority communities is incomplete in the sense that it does not adequately correspond to the fact that Tamil separatism, Sinhala nationalism, militancy, anti-Tamil riots, and the state

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[118] C.f. Venugopal (2018: 78).

authoritarianism already existed even before the first set of market reforms were proposed in 1977. In his analysis on Sinhala nationalism and the reasons behind the ethnic conflict, he argues that the conflicts led by Sinhala nationalists are not functional or causal of market reforms, rather the outbreak of conflict was the unintended consequence of the government's strategy of inviting Sinhala nationalism to find legitimacy and win public consent for their policies "that the circumstances of the exacerbation of the civil war occurred" (2018: 76). For instance, Jayawardene government appropriate the vernacular and religious idiom of Sinhala nationalism in the opening ceremonies of development projects such as Gam Udawa or Village- Awakening, housing scheme project and Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program (AMDP), a massive $2 billion irrigation and hydro-electric power scheme. By doing so he elevated the public displays of Buddhist religiosity to unprecedented levels. So inviting Sinhala nationalism as a legitimate platform to sail down the reform agenda and promoting monks within it is a work of the state.

So it is within this universe of political and economic context and monks' role within it that one needs to situate the contemporary movement against Muslims and their economic agenda. Most relevant for our purposes, monks who had comprehended the momentous nature of the social changes that were occurring before their eyes saw in the midst of economic reforms an opportunity to become meaningful and relevant to contemporary society.

Nationalist Resistance to the Market Reforms

Indeed, a review of the history of this relationship between monks-politician features numerous cases where this relation became falter. In Ananda Abeysekera's account of the new economy of religious identity in Sri Lanka (2002), he describes the shifting relationship between

J.R. Jayawardena and Buddhist monks, and how monks went from being part of an apolitical

monkhood to becoming political monks, a transformation that was made possible by the

inauguration of the free-market economy of modern Sri Lanka. According to Abeysekara, the

Jayawardena administration's initiation of new economic relations caused a "rupture" in the

state's prototype of apolitical monkhood that also soured their relationship as the government

restricted their influence and activism (Abeysekera 2002: 108). Similarly, Tambiah describes

how a number of influential Buddhist monks that represented the second wave of monks in

politics, as discussed in the second chapter, such as Maduluwave Sobitha, Palipane

Chandananda, and Muruttetuwe Ananda, who were prominent supporters of the Jayawardena

government, began to strike back around 1980s as they critiqued the government's economic

projects (Tambiah 1992: 83-108). The popular monk Maduluwave Sobhitha criticized the open-

market reforms, as he believed that they threatened the monks' role and place in society.

Sobhitha argued that people questioned monks' role as "custodians of the nation"

(Hamuduruwaru Satapima ("Monks' sleeping"), Budusarana, Nov. 30, 1984) and that their

questioning is a "product of the open market economy" because "there is no point in preaching

bana when people are unhappy" (*Janathava Asahanayen Inna Yugayaka Bana Deshana Kiremen*

Vadak Na, Divaina, Jan. 4, 1984). This monk's anxiety was focused around two aspects that he

viewed as dangerous in the context of economic reforms: on the one hand, the rigorous emphasis

on an "open economy" as evidence of growing inequality, and therefore a threat to the traditional

role and place of monks, and on the other hand, the government's insistence on prioritizing the

state over pristine Buddhism. For instance, monks lament that the politicians do not take their

advice seriously in solving state matters. As such, monks' involvement in politics and the critique

to the economic reforms of UNP, and winning party's having their support sought to place them

in a position that the political parties need their credentials to win power. Hence resistance to market reforms has become a long practice of diverse and evolving monks' political discourse that gives them political force. Indeed, there are monks that support the market reforms, but in general, it could be argued that monks resist them as welfare centered economy is an expectation of moral economy of Sri Lanka. People expect monks to play a role to protecting it because of the unique position of Buddhism and Sangha's role in it. The political and class interests of Sri Lanka's rulers went hand in hand with the interests of the political monks. Thus, such a relationship must in part be attributed to the rulers' own reluctance to depart from imperatives of national destiny.

The state's attempts to enlist Buddhism in the service of the political agenda became more prevalent from the beginning of 2005 with the Mahinda Rajapaksha government came into power and it merged ethno-nationalism with Buddhist religiosity and raised its appeal to unprecedented heights in the aftermath of war in which Sangha's demand to be sovereign was also concretized. In other words, the Rajapaksha family transformed the country by cultivating entirely new sources of support in rural settings from lower classes and lower castes by inducing a set of political practices in village temples in which monks play a pivotal role. In the Rajapaksha campaigns, temples occupy the center of their political organizations. Their gathering at the temples tried to reestablish a form of dharmadesana (sermons) that accompanied activities like music and dancing, collections, fireworks and performances that monks like Palane Vajragnana (1878- 1955), those who Seneviratne identified as Dharmpalite missionaries, ridiculed and extolled the "virtues of the new, time framed one" (Seneviratne 1999: 54). Dharmadesana was centered on the country's politics and they elevated Mahinda Rajapaksha as the "grassroot leader of masses" who united the country (*rata eksesath kala janamula nayakaya).*

During their election campaigns from 2005- 2019, Rajapakshas promised to reverse the Jayawardena government's political agenda from market to welfare state and to enhance the popular religiosity of the state. The failure to deliver this promise has deepened recent nationalization of the state against Muslims as Sinhala Buddhist in the militant movement find Muslims as the cause for their economic grievances.

The Rajapaksha government, though praised for suspending most market reforms from 2009 to 2014 (Venugopal 2018: 99), and won ardent support of the nationalist groups later implemented massive and expensive infrastructure projects like the "special industrial zones" funded by Chinese money. The deal allows the use of Sri Lankan land and hides both existing and increasing billions of deep debt to China. The sale of this land caused mass unrest, and ideologically-oriented Buddhist monks took the lead as violent protests erupted. For instance, the Rajapaksha government inaugurated a 15,000 acre special economic zone, allowing China to carry out a plan to create the Hambantota deep sea port and to boost Sri Lanka's economy. Later, in 2017, the Good Governance government signed an agreement with China ceding the land for 99 years in exchange for debt (Ondatjie and Sirimanne 2019). At the opening ceremony, a group of demonstrators led by Buddhist monks took to the streets and violence ensued. The media portrayed these monks as unbiased heroes of the country. The government's attempts to use Buddhism in the service of their development project began to fade away when the government's plan to sell land to China or India appeared as the one and only solution to the debt issue. The monks publicly denounced the government's attempts and opposed them, demonstrating their distress by taking their complaints to the streets. They changed their positions and readily exposed their "Buddhist" displeasure with these market-oriented projects. These protests

elevated their presence as "political monks" enabling them to occupy the "Buddhist" space in politics in Sri Lanka.

The Rajapaksha government was criticized for selling state assets such as the land of the country, harbors, and natural resources to China and viewed as puppets of the IMF and the World Bank. In particular, they have been criticized for turning Sri Lanka into a "Chinese Colony." Many monks have argued against the government's proposal to establish an economic zone with China, as it directly affects Sri Lanka's sovereignty. A typical critique of these government attempts is displayed in the statement against the Colombo Port City Economic Commission by Omalpe Sobhitha, a monk and an ardent supporter of the government:

> The bill is incompatible with the Sri Lankan constitution. In particular, it creates a social system that deviates from the *Panchasheela* principles and breaks the religious and sustainable development and civilized life protected by Buddhism and Buddha *Sasana*. The bill deprives the government of its responsibility to protect and nurture the Buddha sasana which is protected and given foremost place by article 9 of the 1978 constitution. "One country—two laws" is the theme of the Port City bill. One part of the country in which the Port City operates has not been confined by laws against betting and playing casinos. But in another part of the country, people are bound by many laws against such activities. Situating industries like casinos outside of the country's law will damage and threaten the Sinhala Buddhist culture" (Omalpe Sobhitha's Facebook profile, accessed on July 8th, 2021).[119]

Cultural integrity, national security, religious protection, and the economic well-being of the nation, as well as the importance of safeguarding sovereignty, became central to political

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[119]See https://www.facebook.com/aluthratake/

discourse against the government's infrastructure projects, and the monk critics elevated their presence as leaders who continue to fight for the country despite their political partialities. By doing so, they sought to counter criticisms of the people who criticize monks' involvement in politics that they participate in politics to gain wealth and lead lives of luxury. Their positioning in this discourse helped them to maintain and continue recognition of the role and place of the monks as those who safeguarded the religious and national values of the country.

Not only monks, but many lay Buddhist intellectuals also view the moral downfall of society as rooted in market reforms. In 1982, the prominent literary critic Ediriweera Sarachchandra published a book titled *Dharmishta Samajaya (Righteous Society)* and argued that the open market and capitalist policies damaged the social values and morals of the country in the guise of "development" (samvardhanaya), far from creating a righteous society as Jayawardena promised. Sarachchrandra's book is a story of growing inequality, the disparity between rich and poor, craving, selfishness, and indignity.[120] The initiation and promotion of the tourism industry and the emigration of Buddhist women as domestic servants to the Middle East were considered as phenomena that brought the complete moral downfall of society. Both Sobhitha and Sarchchandra were ideologically and physically beaten up for their critique of the government.[121]

Similarly, prominent patronage of the Rajapaskha government did not support liberal economic policies. The leading Sinhala Buddhist political ideologues and cultural personalities challenged the government's interest in privatization and selling the countries' resources to foreign countries. Gunadasa Amarasekara, a leading Sinhalese literary and cultural personality and an articulate advocate of the "national ideology" (*Jathika Chinthanaya*) school, resented the

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[120] C.f. Abeysekera, Colors of the Robe (2002), Pp. 209.
[121] See Ediriweera Sarachchrandra, Dharmista Samajaya (Colombo: Elko Industries, 1982).

government's signing of trade agreements with India and China to sell the land, viewing it as a threat to the sovereignty and independence of the country, and more importantly a threat to the Sinhala Buddhist ideals.[122] In other words, the desperate phenomena created by the state's attempts to liberalize the economy and the responses to it deal with questions about Sinhala Buddhist ideals, morality, and politics.

Perhaps the most important of the emergence of new social spaces for the exercise of Buddhist commitment to the deprived, and to uplift Sinhala Buddhist lives, is that though the recent militant groups or the nationalists are not able to change the state policies, they have been able to influence the local businessmen with their ideology. Let me relate an example to illustrate how influential they are in this new conjuncture and how subtle and dynamic ways their actions are brought together. In the aftermath of the Easter Attack in 2019,[123] there was a massive social media campaign demanding that Sinhala Buddhists not shop in Muslim businesses and naming the Sinhala businesses that they should consume from (See figure 2). One of them was *Wijaya Products,* a local business in Sri Lanka known for its range of spices and condiments along with other food products but which used Arabic lettering on their product packaging. The company was attacked for the use of Arabic letters and it is said that they are a Muslim owned business. The Wijaya Product in their Facebook page and newspapers published several posts and articles explaining that they are "100% Sinhala" and they have removed the Arabic lettering. They further said that they also removed the halal symbol from their products in 2015.[124]

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[122] https://www.lankanewsweb.net/67-general-news/83519-no-faith-leaders-govt-gunadasa-amarasekara
[123] The Easter Sunday Attack in April 24, 2019 sparked a furious orgy of anti-Muslim discourse and violent attacking in Muslim majority areas. A large population of the country started blaming the Muslims for not taking actions against the extremist development among the community.
[124]Seehttps://www.facebook.com/WijayaProducts/photos/a.375547262524128/2535102883235211/?type=3&theate

අපේ රත්තරං සිංහල අම්මේ තාත්තේ,
සහෝදර සහෝදරියනි...

සිංහල ජාතිය කවදාවත් අනෙක් ජාතිවලට ඊර්ෂ්‍යා කලේ නෑ...
ඉදිරියටත් එසේමයි...

නමුත් එහෙව් අපිට වල කපද්දි සිංහලු වශයෙන් බලාගෙන ඉන්නත් බෑ...

අප සියලුම මුස්ලිම් ව්‍යාපාර වර්ජනය කලයුතුයි.

හලාල් (halal) සළකුණ සහිත භාණ්ඩ — HALAL
Crysbro Chicken — CRYSBRO
Bairaha Chicken — BAIRAHA
Nolimit/ Glits/ Deedat/ NLM/ Pallu — NOLIMIT glits
Cool Planet — COOL PLANET
Expo Lanka — exp EXPOLANKA HOLDINGS LTD
Etisalat — etisalat
Emirates — Emirates
Fashion Bug — FASHION BUG Changing Life Styles
PC House — PC HOUSE Innovative Solutions!
Hemas Products — HEMAS
Amana Takaful — Amãna Takaful Insurance Redefined
Laptop.lk — WWW.laptop.lk OWNED AND MANAGED BY "THE TECHNOCITY (PVT) LTD."
Hameedias — Hameedia Real men wear real clothes
lumala bicycle — Lumala BICYCLES SUPREME JAPAN Tech
FMJ Plastics
Tajima
The phone company
කඳුරට කුඩ
මුසිලිම් ආපනශාලා
මුසිලිම් ව්‍යාපාර

Baby Cheramy Kumarika Clogard POP

Figure 2: A post shared widely in Social media that named and demanded Sinhalese to avoid Muslim-owned businesses.

One caveat: The political movements that are included in the general resurgence do not represent a single group, a single movement, or a single sensibility. Thus, explanations framed in terms of economic distress generally miss something very important: they miss the fact that the primary form of public discourse on economic deprivation is attached to the promises of the modern nation state. In a political order in which the state no longer operates as a representative

of the general national interest, ethno-religious populism can be a way of reaffirming a state that people once felt they belonged to. In other words, if the state no longer interpellates its citizens on ideological grounds as national citizens, certain groups or people in general can intervene to instill the normative culture that they wish to manifest. There is ample literature that features numerous cases in the west and South and Southeast Asia where the neoliberal reforms led to great distress and see the widespread phenomenon of populist revival as a part of this picture (McNall 1988; Roberts, 2008; Read 2009; Spickard 2013).

As Lemke describes, economic liberty produces the legitimacy for a form of sovereignty limited to guaranteeing economic activity in which the state was no longer defined in terms of an historical mission but legitimized itself with reference to economic growth" (2001: 196). In this neoliberal formulation of the state, the state's legal arrangements and decisions are made to maintain the needs of the market by readjusting labor laws, opening public education and health to the market, and implementing immigration policies and compensating the distress with serving a nationalist agenda. By doing so, neoliberal rationality enters formally non-economic domains and figures a citizen-subject of a neoliberal order. It "interpellates individuals as ['free'] entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life" (Brown 2005: 42; Ong 2006; Cherniavsky 2017; Schnitzler 2016). In changing political, social, and economic contexts, the modern political order dismantles its sovereign power, leaving the ground clear for the market. Thus, ethno-religious populism can be located not merely as a response to the hollowing out of the welfare state, but also as an ongoing concern that people negotiate regarding citizenship, nationality, belonging, and political community, some of which we have discussed earlier.

Conclusion

This chapter advances a more generalized proposition about the new economic proposal of the recent movement against Muslims. By revisiting the period of 1977 through 2015, particularly the state's attempt to pursue rapid development, I argued that the monk-led groups and their supporters are trying to pursue an economic ethic to create a 'Buddhist brotherhood' as a solution to their imagined fear of Muslim encroachment. They rearticulated their economic and national grievances by using Buddhism as a moral space and emulating Muslim values to develop an economic ethic. The latter involves a paradox owing to the unique nature of Buddhism. There are many approaches to materialistic improvement in institutionalized Buddhism, so they selectively use the perceived financial values and approaches of Muslims to assist their economic goals. Their proposal has two layers. One is that the groups consider Muslims to be a commercial people and that their success is learned-worthy. The other is that they consider Muslims to be fearsome.

CONCLUSION

"Come tomorrow. You can meet the *dayakas* (the patrons of the temple) and the teachers of the

Dhamma school and get the information you want. When you come, wear something proper,"

the chief prelate of Maharagama Vajiragnana temple said to me. When I went there on the

following day, the temple was crowded with white clad students from Sunday school. It is the

biggest Sunday school in the country. According to the prelate they have 6000 to 6500 students.

Before I entered the main office, the receptionist, a man of about 65 years of age, questioned my

attire. I was wearing a white kurta three inches above my knee paired with blue denim. He said it

is not allowed for women to wear jeans in the temple. When I was explaining my lack of

awareness of the specific dress code, the prelate mediated let me in. "I said proper!" Chief

prelate declared. I explained that I was unaware of jeans being improper. I told myself, "I am a

Sinhala Buddhist, I know what proper is!" However, the meaning of what counts and what does

not as 'Buddhist proper' yesterday is becoming vulnerable to being thwarted and deauthorized

today.

These everyday attempts in forming a particular authoritative discourse on virtuous

(*gunagaruka*) and disciplined (*vinayagaruka*) Sinhala Buddhist are central to the social programs

of the recent self-identified "nationalist movement" particularly led by 'militant' Buddhist

monks in Sri Lanka. I used the term militant to suggest a style and, above all, 'a mood' of the

recent groups against Muslims in the sense they are not always physically militant towards

others, rather the discourses that they took part in and popularized. I began with a discussion of

these programs that are connected with a formation of a particular kind of social order, a

particular kind of knowledge production and a particular kind of identity and their possibility for

conditions that enable, not often, violence. What is central to these discourses is a precarious collective perception—a constructed imaginary that treats an increasing Muslim population, their businesses, and cultural practices as a form of Muslim fundamentalist terror. This imaginary constructs the notion that they are a constant threat to the Sinhala Buddhists' existence. In response to this threat and to overcomes this impediment., they propose certain social engineering programs, which I argue is a form of political technology and an authoritative discourse that envision a totalitarian vision for the society that enables the conditions for the emergence of violence.

At the core of these programs, there are a number of proposals: increase the birth rate among Sinhala Buddhist families, mandate what women can or cannot wear, oppose the creation of literature except the great narratives of Buddha or Buddhism,[125] propose compulsory visits to temples on *poya days* or at least once a week,[126] suggest compulsory donations for building temples, prohibit shopping at Muslim businesses, propose one law for all and many more. The general concern of these proposals is that they seek to provide ideals for a disciplined (i.e.,

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[125] To cite one out of many; in April 1st, 2019, group of monks (25) from Sasana Arakshaka Bala Mandalaya in Polgahawela and Pothuhara, Kurunagala district, complained about a novelist, Shakthika Sathkumara, for one of his short stories shared on his Facebook profile, Ardha [half].Ardha is a fictionalized story of a person, Kasan who left the monkhood. It fictionalizes and brings into view a whole panoply of criticisms and radical views on Buddha's biography that prevail in the society against the monastic Sangha and their political interventions; the sexual relations among the clergy in temples and beyond the confines of the monastic life; some hints of younger monks are having sex with the head monks; doubts on Siddhartha's ability to have kids thus Rahula is not his son; Yasodara [Siddhartha's wife] having an affair with Siddhratha's best friend Channa; monks' complain about other novels; and their criticisms against activities of Non Government Organizations. Monks accused Shakthika for insulting and "downplaying" Buddhism [*haalluvata lak kara thibeema*]. Monks also said Shakthika is trying to disorient Buddhism [vikruthi karanava]. Shakthika spent 130 days in police custody with the repeated bail applications but rejected appeals by the attorney-general.

[126] Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha proposed that there should be mandatory visits to temples. At least once a week Buddhist should go to temples, he said.
http://www.ada.lk/breaking_news/%E0%B7%83%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%BA%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%A7-
%E0%B6%AF%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%B1%E0%B6%BA%E0%B6%9A%E0%B7%8A-%E0%B7%84%E0%B7%9D-
%E0%B6%B4%E0%B7%9C%E0%B7%84%E0%B7%9C%E0%B6%BA%E0%B6%9A%E0%B6%A7-
%E0%B6%B4%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%8A%E0%B7%83%E0%B6%BD%E0%B7%8A-
%E0%B6%BA%E0%B7%8F%E0%B6%B8-
%E0%B6%85%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%92%E0%B7%80%E0%B7%8F%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%8A%E0%B6%BA-
%E0%B6%9A%E0%B7%85-%E0%B6%BA%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%AD%E0%B7%94%E0%B6%BA%E0%B7%92/11-
375997

proper) Sinhala Buddhist self by authorizing and employing a particular way of life imagined on a model of a threatened community, an imaginary that enables the conditions for the emergence of violence. I argued that the mobilization of this imaginary by the recent monks, groups and organizations, marked out a crucial space— both conceptually and materially—within the landscape of Sri Lanka that seeks to produce a new way of life and authoritatively position a Sinhala Buddhist self against other/difference.

The authoritative discourses, one like what women should wear to the temple, have been characterized as regimes of subordination and domination.[127] Malathi de Alwis's 'Respectability', 'Modernity' and the Politics of 'Culture' in Colonial Ceylon is particularly notable here as it points out the colonial legacy that constitutes and continues to exercise as a hegemony in construction of a desired 'womanhood' in colonial Ceylon. Similarly, this dissertation demonstrated the ways in which the Buddhist monks and the recent groups against Muslims in vision a certain social order use particular representations of the past and the present of the country, religion, identity and nation that they attributed to their tradition or the *sampradaya*. It is to the sampradaya, I argue that we need to turn to, if we need to find how certain violent acts are legitimized, certain authorities discourses are formed and how they have, most often, existed without critique. Indeed, my suggestion is not the same argument that the Sinhala Buddhist groups, movements, and parties against Muslims make; in the sense that they have a strong entity called sampradaya and that it needs to be protected. Rather, my argument is that sampradaya is where we find their claims for legitimacy for why they do what they do.

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[127] In Sri Lankan context, Gananath Obeyesekere delineating the category of lajja-baya, glossed as shame-fear, a Sinhala practice shows how the practices relate to shame-fear socializing Sinhala females and males into a desired individual in the society. Obeyesekere's work has become particularly instructive for many Sri Lankanist anthropologists including Malathi de Alwis.

An epistemological assumption latent in much of the current literature on the "militant form of Buddhism" is that violence is something that lies outside of "proper Buddhism." I argue that the preoccupation with this assumption to determine what does or does not count as Buddhism inscribes an a priori ontology that already separates who is Buddhist and who is not. Such a priori conception prevents us from attending closely to Buddhists deciding what "Buddhism" is, and even at times, what count as violence. My effort is not to define "Buddhism" as an analytical category, but rather to understand the conditions that create authoritative discourses of militant Buddhists.

The argument of my dissertation has not been the straight and narrow. This dissertation asks, how, and *through what* kinds of practices, discourses, and persons, are distinctive authoritative claims established? And second, how and through what does one find political legitimacy for their authorized claims? I answered these questions in relation to a particular ethnographic enquiry, the emergence of Sinhala Buddhist movements against Muslims, particularly led by Buddhist monks with their demand to be sovereign in Sri Lanka. In other words, I examined how post-colonial religious ultra-nationalist discourses—authoritative discourses— emerged and how they are imagined and contested in spaces in which Buddhists are the majority.

The study of authoritative discourses and the violence they enable for instance, Sinhala nationalism, is polarized between radically different perspectives on its intentions and possibilities. Firstly, some scholars painstakingly endeavor to show that Sinhala claims of superiority are empirically unfounded and demonstrate that authoritative claims of continuous Sinhala identity consist of ruptures and discontinuities, and that they are not essential or natural but were constructed at varying times and in varying contexts. This creates a conceptual ground

from which to argue that nationalists' historical claims are untenable. Secondly, many scholars have attributed violence of these communities as a problem of state formation as the state has not been able to prevent them. That is, their analyses have understood violence, the conflict, the terror not in terms of its presence among the masses, but in terms of the desire to prevent or control, thus given its historical weight to the state apparatus.

These ideas and understandings of authoritative discourses and the violence and militancy that are enabled by them all relevant, and many of the chapters in the dissertation speak to and draw on them. But what often emerges is that in themselves, these analysis often have limitations and are inadequate. On one hand, they suggest turning to history for the legitimacy of their claims and limit the question to a matter of who is right and who is wrong about the past. Through this conceptualization of history, on one hand they have yielded a theoretical space for national ideologues to reassure their claims with "irrefutable" facts and on the other they have outrooted the authoritative claims from the politics of the present. Many also suggest turning to the state inscribing 'violence' or 'militancy' into the very nature of the state. However, this framing makes violence into an 'ill potential' inherent in the state. It presupposes an historical order according to which violent acts did not exist prior to the state and in a logical order, so we cannot examine violent acts without direct and joint reference to the state, instead, my proposal is to turn to the present and look at how persons in the present produce these authoritative discourses and on what grounds, and how they maintain them as authoritative. This is to make our analysis invulnerable to history and refuse to be governed by their claims on the past. Also, my ethnographic work shows if we are come to analytical grips with the spread of mass support against what is decried as "Muslim expansionism" in Sri Lanka, we must recognize

that the emergence of contemporary movements against cultural or political identities[128] is not a failure of the state or its strength. Instead, it is an effect of the temporal dialectics between these movements, the state institutions, the state practices and changing political landscape of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 1 was an attempt to engage with a number of critics, thinkers of varying disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. anthropology, history, and philosophy) that frame my work. They have drawn attention to the categories, "religion" and "violence" and their relationship to "state sovereignty." First, answering to one of the research questions in my dissertation; how certain communal acts, practices and discourses that holds the possibility for the emergence of violence have been legitimized in Sri Lanka, I suggest that we need to turn to the sampradaya or tradition in Sri Lanka. On the contrary to the postmodernist or anti-essentialist positions such as 'cultures are mobile' or 'cultures are unbounded', I demonstrate how certain "historically specific local discourses come to be produced and maintained as authoritative" (Scott 1999: xxi) and how they work as a force, not only to assess their claims of past, present, and future, but also to establish the authority of those claims. Thus their local discourses are very clear to the people who live within a society and it is not always changing.

There are many authoritative discourses that the nationalist militant movements are trying to establish. The one I focused on, particularly in the militant movement that I discussed is Buddhist monks' new demand to be sovereign. Chapter 2 starts with a story of a fast of a monk of third wave monks in politics exploring how certain acts like monks' fasting could be considered as an act of violence though it has been legitimized through their claims on

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[128] See for the formation of political identity defining through legal self. Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

sampradaya. By examining how "religious" ultra-nationalist discourses emerged in Sri Lanka and the conditions of possibility that enable militant groups to interrupt the state, I theorize an idea of a possibility for a condition for violence in terms of a conceptualization of sovereignty that lies outside of the canonical modern state, furthering the conceptual boundaries of this category of sovereignty. The expanding body of literature on religious politics and popular religious movements has drawn attention to issues of state sovereignty and the violence that it enabled (Fiskesjö 2003; Butler 2004; Bernstein 2013). Also, many scholars problematize sovereign violence by showing the range of local forms of authority distributed in post-colonial societies (Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). In this context of militant Buddhism, the concept of sovereign violence that I formulate is not only about practicing one's sovereign power on life and death over enemy others, it also about performing death *on one's own being* in the "realm of absolute expenditure" of life—which constitutes the possibility of exceeding the state (Feldman 1991; Bataille 1997; Mbembe 2003). Some monks' hunger strike actions, a common practice to win their political demands, not only expand the boundaries of sovereign violence, revealing the limits of the state monopoly on violence, but they also deny the prohibition against killing, a fundamental Buddhist *vinaya* rule. At the same time, these public performances suggest that we need to turn into the *sampradaya* or the tradition to explain how monks' actions—that have long term consequences for society and for Tamils and Muslims work without a critique from the majoritarian community.

Chapter 3 follows one important condition for the possibility for the emergence of monks' demand to be sovereign: the electoral reforms. Under this reform in 1988, the parties had a small voter base have been able to contest for the elections and represent the parliament. There were no monks in the parliament before or the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism did not represent the

parliament before. I critically engage with the existing scholarship on the relationship between Buddhist militancy, Buddhism, and the state. That scholarship argues that violence enacted by these groups has state support and attests violence to the failure of the modern Sri Lankan state (Tambiah 1996; Jeganathan 1998; Holt 2016). By revealing the deeper mechanisms and techniques at play at local levels, where no traditional state apparatus involvement exists as such, I argue that it is not state patronage that makes violence possible. Perhaps ironically, democratic initiatives such as the Proportional Representation System of the Sri Lankan constitution rooted in conceptions of secular governance combined with state patronage—that sought to ensure the presence of non-Buddhist minority voices in parliament—end up enabling the radical militant groups through the electoral success of parties allied to Buddhist militant organizations.

By the mid-1994s and after, the expansion of privatization, combined with the effects of protracted war, vastly and suddenly expanded the material grounds to establish Buddhist militant ideology. In an increasingly economic and social troublesome era where many Sinhala Buddhist businessmen, farmers and shop-keepers, minor officials, and middle and lower class groups generally found difficulty, militant Buddhist discourses were embraced by many. Their economic and social grievances were framed as a problem of the existence of Muslims and Tamils and their cultural difference from a point of view described by Rajesh Venugopal: "the state could be claimed by virtue of membership in a community of Sinhala Buddhists" (2018: 186). However, they did not stop there. This chapter showed that some characteristics of these groups bear a totalitarian view of Sri Lankan society.

Chapter 4 describes how conditions of privatization policies and their circumstances of the 1990s provided fertile ground for the groups to introduce some programs and establish mechanisms that provide economic benefits creating the idea that a new social contract is

possible. In other words, the chapter discusses their economic agenda for an ideal society in which they proposed "a Buddhist Brotherhood" as a solution for their economic grievances. Examining the multitude of aspiration, contestation, and charismatic affinity between Buddhism and rival religiosities in a multi-religious milieu, it illuminates how people often weave incoherent cultural practices together to achieve certainty, or at least livability, in complex times. The expansion of market oriented economic forces have greatly aggravated social discontent, political failures and cultural and economic uncertainties in Sri Lanka. The ongoing political struggle referred to as *Aragalaya* today represents this social discontent. I explored the characteristics of this new economic paradigm; its authors, practices and ideology; and their relations to contemporary Sri Lankan economic conditions, such as the shrinking of the welfare state for an open economy bent on export-led growth. While newly rich businessmen—who rail against the import industry while attempting to overtake Muslim commercial positions—are the primary patrons of recent militancy, numerous factions that grew within the main movement depend on remittances from Sri Lankan migrant workers in Middle Eastern countries, Korea, and Japan, alongside those from Sinhala Buddhists who live in England and Australia. These two levels of financial support for the militant groups reveal that the prominence of anti-Muslim sentiments and the rise of "cultural passions" cuts across social classes rather than between them (Mamdani 2001), and it is evident that potential seeds exist for a mass movement against Muslims. I also argue that the increasing influence of Sinhala extremist forms of politics that cut across social classes and their proposal for developing an economic ethic is a consequence of their appeal to the masses in the midst of these economic conditions, and these politics also contain the demand to identify them with the state.

Given that inequality had increased and the opportunities for growth had shrunk in the midst of the protracted war, it would appear that the circumstances of the 1990s provided fertile ground for a resurgence of antagonism against Muslims. In chapters 4 and 5, I have discussed how certain social and economic policies provide some groups, organizations, and parties a unique advantageous position to capture the mounting insecurity among farmers and local businessmen. During the two year-long peace process, the government's privatization program extended, and the public sector dropped by 20% (Venugopal 2018: 188). The electoral expansions in 1988 also provided the means whereby these groups' demands for better livelihoods of Sinhala Buddhists framed them in electoral terms and ethnicized and religious terms. The state mechanisms of governance such as releasing population statistics in 2000 enable them to frame their grievances in a numerical manner and spread such authoritative discourses like Muslim population is increasing, Buddhist population growth has declined, thus Buddhists and Buddhism are in danger of decay. More specific in these complaints and propaganda, however, than direct threats and crime against individuals is the use of indirect, veiled and menacing hints against all who will not cooperate with the growing patriotic, religious, nationalist sentiments. These growing sense of antagonisms against Tamils and Muslims were captured by the April 2004 elections in which Jathika Hela Urumaya, the party, led with the monks' demands to be sovereign, securing nine seats in parliament for monks.

In Chapter 5, I explored the impacts of the state moving away from social welfare programs, further distancing the state from the people and aggravating class contradictions. In this way, I respond to the calls of many anthropologists to focus on developing a more encompassing hypothesis of "religious violence" that includes economy and religious life (Asad 2003; Wallenstein 2007; Bastian 2013; Bernstein 2013; Kadirgamar 2017). Meeting with leaders

of *dayaka samithi* (donors' committees) in the main Buddhist temples helped me to understand the involvement of the business community in the recent militant Buddhist wave. The presidents of these committees are founding members of the Sinhala Buddhist business-led organizations that financially supported the militant groups' campaign to reclaim market opportunities from Muslim businesses. Unlike the traditional class of elites who became wealthier during the colonial period, these Sinhalese businessmen specialize mostly in manufacturing for the domestic market as discussed in chapter 5. Their main enterprises are jewelry, footwear, textiles, and condiments. In the open economy that has expanded in recent decades, these small enterprises have been sharply affected by the import industry, where Muslim businessmen play a leading role.

Though my fieldwork mainly occurred in Sri Lanka, I also visited Myanmar for several months in 2018 for comparative purposes. Similar anti-Muslim activities and expressions exist in Myanmar, another Theravada Buddhist country (Walton and Hayward 2014; Schissler et al. 2017) for which my research on Sri Lanka has theoretical implications. In 2013, Sri Lankan Buddhists responded to the recent militant Buddhist movements in Myanmar by supporting a regional alliance against Muslims. Group leaders from both countries held a conference in Sri Lanka to build partnerships in their pledge to combat what they see as an imminent threat to the Buddhist way of life. During my stay in Myanmar, I collected newspaper materials and interviewed Buddhist intellectuals in Yangon, which led me to recognize narratives against Muslims that were also shared by Sri Lankan Buddhists. However, I did not present an analysis of militant Buddhist movements in Myanmar as my Burmese language skills were not competent enough to engage with an ethnographic study of discourse they shared. Instead, I speak to and draw on studies that present ideas and understanding of recent Buddhist movements'

development against Muslims in Myanmar. Thus I argue that my observations would help to clarify areas of comparative investigation such as regional and historical similarities and differences of violence against Muslims committed in the name of protecting Buddhism.

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