Constructing Commongrounds:

Everyday Lifeworlds Beyond Politicised Ethnicities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Inspired by both the existential anthropology of Michael Jackson and by Bourdieu's discussion of habitus, in this thesis I research the lifeworlds of people in Sri Lankan in order to uncover inter-ethnic collaborations in human relationships/inter-connections that sit uneasily within the broader ethno-political mobilisations that continuously divide people. Partially motivated by reflecting upon on my own embodied subjectivity and intersubjective practices, the thesis discusses people's everyday lived reality, including the strategies they employ to live their social lives within an ethnically divided society. I address this phenomenon using the term "commongrounds", an existential capacity that people inherit and that they draw upon to shape their social lives. Appropriately the term also applies to my use of the work of Jackson and Bourdieu, in which I discern theoretical commongrounds that are usually overlooked.

This thesis identifies commongrounds in four different social spaces, in a middle-class suburb in Colombo, in one of that city's many shanty towns, in a Muslim-dominated town on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka and in a caste-organized rural area in Pānama. It analyses how members of ostensibly rival ethnic or religious groups create commongrounds that make ethnic boundaries porous and transgressable. It reveals that commongrounds are not static but shift with the dynamics of social interaction, as actors affirm resemblances between ethnic others that political parties and scholarly work alike deny.

Statement of candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled **"Constructing Commongrounds: Everyday Lifeworlds beyond Politicised Ethnicities in Sri Lanka"** has neither been previously submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirement for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research written by the undersigned. Any help and assistance that I have received during my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are acknowledged in the thesis. The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: **5201000621** on **16 June 2010**.

Deegalla Durage Anton Piyarathne

April 2014

Dedication

To those people, men and women of
different ethnicity and religion,
who create commongrounds in their
"home" country of Sri Lanka

Acknowledgements

During my school days I had a dream while walking from school amid beautiful mountains and valleys. I dreamt that I would go to university and enjoy higher education. It was not just a dream but also determination. Eventually my niece and I went to university as the first students from our school. This inspired following generations of students in my village. According to the teachers in that school, when we climb up in the social ladder we should lean down to the ground as a good rice flower (or grain). I have a lot of respect for this school and its teachers who are still concerned about my work. I am also grateful to a lot of other people who helped me in the long journey to a PhD.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the many people who have helped me and made great sacrifices while enabling me to acquire this PhD. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my supervisors Jaap Timmer and Chris Houston. I was in contact with Chris Houston for more than a year before joining Macquarie University in February 2010. Their unfailing guidance, encouragement, enthusiasm, and concern for my studies and my wellbeing have provided great leverage for me. Without their kind attention and academic guidance, completion of this work would not have been possible.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to Kalpana Ram, Greg Downey, Robert Norton, Lisa Wynn, Malcolm Haddon, Deborah Van Heekern and other scholars in the Department of Anthropology, who provided valuable advice and guidance in the course of my studies. I extend my deepest gratitude to Estelle Dryland for her academic mentoring and support and for improving the presentation of the thesis. They are lessons for both today and tomorrow. Payel Ray, the Anthropology department administrator, has been very kind and helpful throughout the process. In addition, the financial support from the departmental fund enabled me to conduct my fieldwork in four selected locations in Sri Lanka.

I wish to extend my thanks to the Higher Degree Research Office personnel both at the Faculty of Arts and the main offices. But for the International Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship (iMQRES), I would not have been able to enjoy the magnificent PhD experience at Macquarie University. I am also extremely grateful for the

Achievement is not an individual matter in societies like mine. It is team work and requires sacrifice from many stakeholders. The courage, determination, and perseverance that my mother silently imbued in me from childhood stood me in good stead and allowed me a lot of leverage to work hard. I am sure that I will repay her by successfully completing my PhD. My sister, father, and brother have really tried to fill the vacuum created by my absence. This is also an achievement of family. I owe much to my little daughter Nethuki, and to loving wife Iresha. Both sacrificed a lot without my support and were able to hold the fort until my return. I was not with them when Nethuki came into this world and could not give her much needed affection during her critical period of socialisation. So, I dedicate this PhD to them in appreciation of their love, support and sacrifice.

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Introduction

Like anyone, I am identified differently by different peoples in diverse spaces and social contexts. This identification by various and often conflicting ethno-religious gazes has both positive and negative impacts. During my research, I was variously identified as a professional, a university lecturer, a student, a respected person, as *Sir*, a person studying in Australia, a Sinhala man, a Buddhist-Sinhala, Christian-Sinhala, Hindu-Tamil, Christian-Tamil; or as a Sinhala who can live in a Tamil lifestyle, a Tamil who can associate with Muslims, a Sinhala who can associate with Muslims, a member of State Intelligent Service (S[1]: *intelligent* or S: *buddhi anshaya*) a man from the CID (Criminal Investigation Department), a prospective husband, a kind person, a person who wishes to donate to a good cause, a decent person one can invite to one's house (who would not abuse this trust by beginning a relationship with a female member of the family), a father, a married man, a high-caste, or a middle-class man. This list collates how people in the research locations with whom I associated differentiated me from or connected *me* to *them*. Some sought to maintain a harmonious relationship with me via personal borders shaped by different criteria in different situations. Others used the same classifications to dissociate themselves from me.

"The body is not only an object that is available for scrutiny. It is also a locus from which our experience of the world is arrayed" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 89). Living with people means learning the art of living, blended of life situations and social contexts. According to Michael Jackson (1998), this art is the essence of a human capacity to live together in everyday social life-worlds. Similar to many people living within the storm of the politically crafted ethno-national crisis in Sri Lanka, I found this capacity vital during my fieldwork among members of the island's different ethno-religious groups. The art of research was predicated on the existence of commongrounds, forged in living together.

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1 S: refers to Sinhala terms.

During my fieldwork I mobilized commongrounds as a practice and embodied knowledge to create relationships with diverse peoples, being a participant in the very society that I sought to study as a student of anthropology. In that sense commongrounds are not something newly created: they are a practice built upon something that already exists, even if they have not been intellectually noticed or analyzed. Viewed from that perspective, one intention of this thesis is to make invisible commongrounds visible. To do so I seek to understand the embedded practices of inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lankan society through ethnographic fieldwork. Thomas Eriksen suggests that the task of anthropology is to "create astonishment, to show that the world is both richer and more complex than it is usually assumed to be" (2004: 7). Eriksen's notion is applicable to my work, given my aim is to discuss taken-for-granted yet 'miraculous' commongrounds that appear as a 'trivial' aspect of community life for many people, including for those who hold political and administrative power.

I remember a Sinhala woman, Kusumalatha, who married a Tamil man in Jaffna. I had gone to present a paper at Jaffna University during the short-lived peace after the reopening of the A9 highway, subsequent to the United National Party (hereafter UNP) government's signing of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) 22 February 2002 (see Goodhand, et al. 2011). She was working as the housekeeper at a guesthouse where we stayed, a Tamil disguising her Sinhala ethnicity. She spoke to me on the second day of our stay, after she heard my speaking in Tamil. She told me that many Sinhala people continue to live in Jaffna, even after the LTTE expelled them (Sinhalas and Muslims) to leave the peninsula (see de Silva 2004: 98; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2011: 207; Thiranagama 2011: 106-144). They exemplify people in-between both living on their wits and exercising commongrounds, a group of people sandwiched between Sinhala and Tamil political forces. The opportunities offered by commongrounds in social life enabled them to continue living in a homely environment.

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During school I learnt that Sri Lanka is the "pearl of the Indian Ocean." It is located off the southern tip of India, where twenty million people live on an Island of 65, 610 square kilometres. It was known by Ptolemy and Mediterranean people as "Taprobane"; in ancient Buddhist Chronicles as "Sinhaladeepa" and "Dhammadeepa", "Tambapanni", or "Lanka";

for Tamils as "Eelam"; to Arabs as "Serendib"; to Portuguese as "Ceiloa"; for the British as "Ceylon", and today as Sri Lanka (see Gunawardana 1990: 52; Holt 2011: 1-8). According to the census Sri Lanka is home to Sinhalas (74.9%), Sri Lankan Tamils (11.2%), Indian Tamils (4.2%), Muslims (9.2%), Burghers (0.2%), Malays (0.2%), Sri Lanka Chetty and people categorised as "other" (0.1%). The "other" people include Kaffir, Vädda, Rodi[2], Borah's, Persians, Colombo Chettys, Chinese, Portuguese of Batticaloa and Waha Kotte, Dutch Malayalam, Mukkuwars, Nadar, Sindhi and also Gujarati (see Gankanda 2006). Sri Lankans are Buddhist (70.2%), Hindu (12.6%), Muslim (9.7%), Christian (7.4) and other. The island is essentially multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural yet the national data does not describe the mixed religious practices, hybridities I explain in the chapters to come (also see Bass 2013: 51-55; Gunawardana 1990).

Doing anthropology at home

In this thesis, I critically reflect on ethnic relations and forms of conflict from which I too am a silent sufferer, a person who ponders a problem I cannot solve myself. I could have been a victim of a suicide bomb or air strikes. My family could have been attacked during the 1983 anti-Tamil riot (see Hollup 1992; Kanapathipillai 2009: 152-153) had the mob misidentified our dark skin or punished us for giving refuge to Tamil neighbours. Even as an anthropology student, I may have been an object of suspicion: anthropology has been labelled an 'anti-national' intellectual exercise by ethnic chauvanists once it started studying nationalism, political violence, and ethnic relations after this riot (see Bastin 2009a; Goonatilake 2001; Spencer 2007). This thesis examines a problem that I wish could be resolved, even while I realise a powerlessness to effect a resolution. These emotions are linked to the human and thus anthropological reality of subjectivity and objectivity. I am not a machine. As both anthropologist and as member of a problematic society, I sense people's suffering, their efforts to create a homely environment, to live in a secure social lifeworld, to provide a future for their children.

However, I am also aware of the possible biases of 'familiarity.' I too was exposed to the state ideology through history lessons in school, the particular way of reporting ethnicity in newspapers, and the political construction of narratives about different

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2 Also known as Rodiya community.

ethnicities and the nation. My training in the Department of Anthropology at Macquarie University has given me the opportunity to "step back" and "reflect" on situations, to ponder the indeterminate and ambiguous character of people's everyday life. In this stepping back I have also been guided by the work of local and international anthropologists who wrote on ethnic relations and political history: their work is scaffolding for learning, akin to *standing on the shoulders of giants*.

Scholarly debate surrounding ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has often highlighted the divisions between conflicting parties. Some analyses accept the social situation as described in the discourse of the conflicting parties, as if their classifications can form the heuristic categories for critical scholarly reflection. Such scholarly discussion has contributed volumes on Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim divisions and the non-existence of co-operation or intra-ethnic similarities between people. By contrast, post-war writing has focused on a wider variety of topics including the suffering of war (Weiss 2012), rituals and recovery (Derges 2013), and post-war reconstruction in Sri Lanka, paying special attention to prospects and challenges (Herath 2010) and peace building (Goodhand 2012; Price 2010; Stokke and Uyangoda 2011). Yet the commongrounds that I describe in this thesis remain an often unremarked upon reality.

In other studies by Sri Lanka watchers, ethnic identity has often been projected, discussed and debated as inborn and static rather than as always in flux in the ethno-political practices of Sri Lankans. As I will demonstrate below, some scholars support this hegemonic mode of presenting ethnicity. They do not seek an alternative way of understanding people that goes beyond and scrutinises such dominant nationalist thought. Even in school this talk confused me given the complex social and cultural reality of my childhood. Haunted for years, this thesis is an answer to that confusion. From my childhood onwards I wanted to convert my experiences in a multi-ethnic community into a critical and conceptually liberating search for a different account of social life. I spent most of my school days playing cricket with friends who were officially labelled "plantation Tamils of Indian Origin". This group were also identified as "estate Tamils" (S: *watu demala* or T: *thotta thamil akkhal*), or "line room dwellers" (S: *laime minissu*). We swam together in a water tank created by building a small dam across a canal that channelled water into the rubber factory on the Colonial planters' estate, and our parents and elders beat us in the same way for neglecting our homework. I ponder now how and why those

associations existed among parents and children of different ethnic groups often projected as engaged in everlasting rivalry and conflict.

This personal history has encouraged me to utilize a concept I call 'commongrounds.' The term commongrounds does not allow "common" and "grounds" to be separated as different categories. Commongrounds are not settled states but continuing fields of interactive struggle. Michael Jackson (2011) posits similarly that the concept of well-being is also indefinable. As with commongrounds it changes from person to person and place to place, is short and long lived, and unequally distributed. Even as the well-being of the prosperous is different to the well-being of the poor a certain existential dissatisfaction prevails among people living in a civil war, given exposure to continuous internal and external pressures that render their lives difficult but amidst which they must continue to live.

The people of Sri Lanka live a social life coloured by the constant threat of internal and external pressures, wars and killings, including arbitrary arrest and detainment, punishment, forced disappearances through "white vans", deprivation of basic human rights, the mobilization of ethnic and/or religious hatred, and international economic marginalisation. Furthermore, the end of the war has not meant the end of ethnic tensions or discrimination. This unstable situation makes social life difficult indeed, as nationalism, ethnic divisions, religious extremism and ethno-political factions exert phenomenal power over communal life. Yet even in this situation, many people develop strategies around commongrounds to draw out the sting of such nationalist perceptions.

People forget or pardon each other; tolerate, empathise and sympathise with each other; they accommodate others, diverting the focus or averting from talk that might include offensive ethno-national flavour; they help each other in crisis situations, and gossip about the bad character or upbringing of perpetrators of ethnic rivalry; they collaborate in everyday enterprises while trusting cosmological powers and repairing, amending, redefining their relationships. They create "compatible" and "incompatible" partners through a variety of assessments that fall under non-ethnic judgements of "good" or "bad", "liking" and "disliking". Ethnographic fieldwork facilitates insight into these existential aspects of commongrounds. Hence my aim in this thesis is to make the hitherto invisible commongrounds visible. I submit that Sri Lanka has a politically-crafted ethnic

"problem" which, in the words of Gabriel Marcel, admits a solution and is not a "mystery" that will never be solved (cited in Jackson 2011: xi).

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My aim in this study is not to see things no one has seen, but to draw analytic attention to what everyone takes for granted. For anthropologists, "it is the *social* reality of the lifeworld and forms of *social* consciousness which are of critical interest" (original emphasis Jackson 1996: 19). To this end, I draw upon the anthropology of everyday life to help me discuss these unnoticed everyday phenomena. Pierre Bourdieu refers to embodied dispositions that inform everyday practices, while Michael Jackson talks about the existential and intersubjective lives of human beings. In his discussion of interaction between individuals in a society Michael Jackson values the "*interplay* of subject and object, ego and alter" as subject for ethnographic analysis (original emphasis Jackson 1998: 6). For Bourdieu, peoples' habitus is comprised of systems of perception and common values and assumptions, "which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them" (Bourdieu 1990: 53).

Using both of these ideas, I understand commongrounds as inhabitants' continuous and creative efforts to live and relate to each other in fields of common endeavor informed by embodied (conscious or unconscious) understandings of the social and material world. To put it slightly differently, commongrounds involve shared dispositions and abilities to use cultural resources in distinctive, pragmatic and creative ways that best match emerging situations and contingencies, while taking account of external forces/limits that threaten local social living in its meeting of existential needs. Commongrounds are not something necessarily passed on generationally. They are a field of growth, enhancement, addition, imagination, learning, adaptation, creativity and imitation. They subsist in a field of continuously invented and overlooked tradition while facilitating the socialisation process of a person.

Commongrounds appear in the following chapters where I discuss the creative and unique ways that individuals or groups of individuals negotiate ethnic boundaries that

endanger them and/or family members. Commongrounds are not always peaceful but tense, lived out in ups and downs, and shifting. Commongrounds take various shapes in the four locations where I do fieldwork, according to their unique situational, contextual, and social space. Hence following Jackson, the focus of the thesis is "the paradox of plurality and the ambiguity of intersubjective life" (Jackson 2013: 9). Commongrounds are both embodied and 'enminded', and may vary in persons of the same family, ethnic or cultural group.

Standing on the shoulders of giants

I stand on the shoulders of giants. In my case there are a number of scholars who I see as exemplary analysts of Sri Lankan society, yet whose works have had unfortunately little impact on ethnic politics in Sri Lanka. Discussion of ethnicity is a relatively recent phenomenon in anthropological research on Sri Lanka. Prior to 1983, most of the ethnographic work on the island focused on caste, kinship, marriage and land tenure as the leading instigators of conflict (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 58-59). After the 1983 anti-Tamil riots, and with the escalation of the war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil military groups, ethnographers started focusing more on "ethnic conflict", mostly on conflicting Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms (Bastin 2009a; Nissan 1987) and the degree and consequences of their aligning or anti-aligning of themselves with political forces. A regrettable outcome is that ethnic politics have forced scholars like S.J. Tambiah to leave the country, leaving us apprentice anthropologists in academic poverty. The plea voiced by local anthropologist Pradeep Jeganathan for 'radical', "democratic" or "liberal intellectuals" who live within or outside of the country to seriously think about their relationship to nationalism(s) is important given that they (and their contributions) are vital to building alliances that will liberate people from the traps devised by ethno-political entrepreneurs and make "Sri Lanka a better home for all of us" (Jeganathan 2010b: 432).

My research is that of a scholar from a misled generation, members of which have been exposed to extreme ethnocentrism and the perpetuation of hatred regarding ethnic "others" in general and Tamils in particular. "We", the Sri Lankans of my generation have been moulded through school systems, electronic and print media, books, and written and oral historiographies that have combined to develop unsympathetic attitudes and hatred

against "Tamils". Anti-nationalist scholars have had little influence: extremist politicians and biased writers dominate the discussion of ethnic conflict. Within such a milieu, local scholars receive little leverage.

In response scholars whom I considered my models have suggested that Sri Lanka's issues are essentially political. They have identified ideologies of the ruling political and economic class that systematically oppress the lower classes. The antagonistic nationalist projects designed by the dominant class are composed of many dimensions: interpretations of the past to justify present divisions; making history of the conflict a political history (Spencer 1990b); nationalism as a process politically constructed (Brow 1990a; Brow 1990b); ethnic riots and violence (Tambiah 1986; 2011); and language rights, citizenship, state building and sovereignty. Bruce Kapferer (1989; 2012) discusses the nationalism that gives rise to ethnic violence and war, racism and social exclusion, and how Buddhist healings and rites made an ambiguous intervention in Sri Lankan society. He compares the culture of nationalism in Sri Lanka with that of Australia and sees Australian nationalism as less problematic than that of Sri Lanka as it operates within a framework of egalitarianism (Kapferer 2012). James Brow's contribution includes areas such as agrarian changes, economic development, globalisation and local indigenous people (Vädda). In particularly, I admire his work on party politics, political factionalism and the politics of development (1990a; 1990b; 1996), colonialism, nationalism and ethnicity.

Jonathan Spencer who has conducted considerable research into Sri Lanka since the 1980s focussed on rural change and local politics (1990c). He later contributed extensively to our understanding of conflict, nationalism (2008) and political violence (1990a; 2007; and Spencer, et al. 1998) and is now focusing on aspects of religion, war and peace. He sees the Sri Lankan conflict as a politically constructed and manipulated crisis rather than as 'primordial' as habitually projected by activists (Spencer 1990b). Gananath Obeyesekere has not directly addressed ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, but his studies of Buddhism, nation, and nationalism present a critical analytical view of the historical roots of contemporary issues. In his writings he senses the ethnic intermingling in a society where ethnic groups live side-by-side. In particular, his discussion of Buddhism's historical transformation (1988) challenges the essential combination of religion and ethno-linguistic nationalism that constantly polarises the island's ethnic groups (see Obeyesekere 1981; 1984; 2004b). Most importantly Obeyesekere (2004a) delineates the inability to

draw a parallel between today's ethno-national discourse and that of the past. He recently alluded to the local indigenous people known as the Vädda in a discussion focussing on both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism (Obeyesekere 2003; 2004b).

Rohan Bastin has contributed much to our understanding of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: for example, the nexus of knowledge-power creation of conditions for war and conflict and its impact on the knowledge production of the state. His analyses royal science[3] and civil war (2009a): globalisation and conflict (2001a); nationalism and its multiple forms (2012); the role of religious institutions in the formation of nationalism (2005); rising militant Buddhist monks and their links with Sinhala nationalism and the state (2009b); religious pluralism; and how seemingly conflicted Buddhist-Sinhala and Hindu-Tamils join together to observe rituals (2002), pilgrimage, festivals, and state and ethnic conflict.

Tambiah has focussed in the main on religion (1992), politics and the ethnic clashes (1986; 1989; 1996; 2005) that have torn the country apart and provides certain recommendations towards positive change. It is interesting to compare and contrast the writings of Tambiah and Daniel as they adopt two different approaches in anthropology to address ethnic violence and conflict. Valentine E. Daniel accommodates more human complexities whereas Tambiah emphasises how ethno-politics emanate from above. In particular, his research into political violence (2000), ethnic identities (1989), refugees (2002; 2010) and work among the plantation communities of Sri Lanka (1993; 2008) has inspired my work. Perhaps most stimulating is his outline of an ethnographic path in *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (1996) wherein he explains the circumstances in which ethno-racial bodies are threatened, beaten and killed. This is a fine example of an ethnography of violence. He concludes his book by supporting the existential nature of people's intersubjective relations (realities) that must be taken into account by analysts, as also suggested by Michael Jackson in *Minima Ethnographica* (1998).

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3 This concept is used by Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1987) in "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, (trans. Brian Masumi)" (cited in Bastin 2009a) to describe the production of knowledge by the state wherein the knowledge-power connection creates conditions of conflict and war.

Daniel tells the story of a team of Sinhala political goons raiding a railway compartment in search of "Tamils." A Sinhala upcountry lady whose image is often projected as a paragon of typical Sinhalaness held a Tamil man's hand until the gang completed their "search for enemies" and left. The lady alighted at the next station: no talk passed between the two. This incident illustrates the complexity of the present day ethno-political crisis. I wept as I read Daniel's article titled *Unexpected Destinations* (2010). He has a powerful way of depicting human bodies subjected to torture by their own ethnic liberators, Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) and the Sri Lankan military, and how they are thrown on the generosity of the unknown 'international community' where they repeatedly face problems within their broader identity categories as south Asians.

Post-war Sri Lanka needs extensive research to understand the shape of inter-ethnic relations and the mind-sets that determine them after three decades of war. Dennis B. McGilvray (1982; 1983; 1989; 2011a) has contributed to an understanding of Tamil-Muslim relations in the Tamil-speaking eastern province where people have been traumatised by both war and the 2004 Tsunami. His book *Crucible of Conflict* (2011a) is the major detailed ethnography about people lives on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka. It details tensions, conflicts and collaborations. For me, it was a window to that region.

I also agree with Spencer, when he challenges present-day scholars to address the inadequacy of explaining ethnic conflict in societies like Sri Lanka, highlighting the vital research gap in works on Sri Lanka:

> Anthropologists have hardly started to understand how Sri Lanka works (and does not work) as a plural society…[there is] no published ethnography of what we might call the everyday work of ethnicity… (2007: 163-164).

I hope to contribute to this task in this thesis by employing a more existential-phenomenological approach (see Jackson 1996; 2005; 2011; 2013), seeking to comprehend my own and others' embodied subjectivity and intersubjectivities in a multi-ethnic community. I show here that the people of Sri Lanka live their social lives collaborating with so called ethnic "others" in their everyday lived reality, a fact that has been taken-for-granted in a society wherein ethnicity is given higher prominence than other aspect of human 'identity'. This lived multiculturalism relies on people's capacity to differentiate

their everyday "culture" from "political" manipulation, an area that should attract more research by anthropologists (Spencer 2007: 164-167).

From the beginning of my fieldwork my efforts have been motivated by my embodied reaction to the sufferings of the men and women of my own (ethnically mixed) community. In that sense, the differences between the fieldworker's and informant's worlds are not clear-cut and distinctive, as seen by Valentine Daniel (1984: 294-295). I began my research characterised by a desire to understand the changing livelihood patterns of the plantation Tamils (Piyarathne 2004; 2005). Later, my intention was to expand my research into discussion of the social identity of plantation Tamil communities in both up-country and low-country (Piyarathne 2008a; 2008b). My current research focused upon Tamils (including of sub identities such as Colombo, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Indian), Muslims, Malays, Burghers and Sinhalas (including various intra-ethnic categories). My focus is on everyday struggle to live with divisive "centrifugal" ethnic forces (cf. Eriksen 2004: 166) continuously produced and reproduced by a group of ethno-political entrepreneurs who pursue politics as a way of life.

Native subjectivity as a means of uncovering the "reality"

Fieldworkers who by nation and place were foreign to those regions dominated early anthropological research into 'peripheral' regions. Over the last few decades this trend has changed with the emergence of local anthropologists (see Chawla 2006; Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 16). These native ethnographers provoked discussion concerning the subjectivity and objectivity of ethnographic writing. I argue that while partial objectivity is a legitimate and potentially satisfactory approach for foreign researchers, it is more problematic for local researchers as it may impede their ability to recognize ethnographic reality. I cannot be ethnographically alien to my field site, detached from my embodied subjective understanding of the world and my relationships (Piyarathne 2013).

My experience of objectivity/subjectivity is closer to what Michael Jackson calls intersubjectivity, that is "the interplay of subject and object" (1998: 6). According to Jackson, "subjectivity" "arises from and is shaped by ever-altering modalities of embodied social interactions and dialogues" (1998: 6). As asserted by Merleau-Ponty (1973)

"subjectivity is in effect a matter of intersubjectivity, and experience is inter-experience" (cited in Jackson 1996: 26). Here I follow the contemporary understanding of subjectivity as "synonymous for inner life process and affective states" (Biehl, et al. 2007: 6). I see the world subjectively: if not, I cannot understand it. This subjectivity is intrinsic to both the fieldwork process and to ethnographic writing, for as Jackson suggests:

> One's ethnographic understanding of others is never arrived at in a neutral or disengaged manner, but is negotiated and tested in an ambiguous and stressful field of interpersonal relationships in an unfamiliar society (1998: 5).

Of course, my training in anthropology has taught me to "step back" to view the people under investigation as the sum of their embodied subjectivities. From the phenomenological point of view the living body is recognised as an "existential null point" "from which our various engagements with the world whether social, eventful, or physical are transacted" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 89). In the context of my own research in Sri Lanka includes hotly contested issues that have emerged from a three decades old ethno-racial crisis. Building on my own experience of fieldwork within communities in my own country, in the forthcoming chapters I illustrate the ways in which my changing subjectivity has affected my analysis and writing.

At this point it is important that I explain something about my own mixed-ethno-religious history. As I mentioned above, I grew up with Tamil friends of Indian descent, in a neighbourhood variously marked like everywhere by happiness and sadness. We spoke the same languages, Tamil and sometimes Sinhala. We attended our village temple (*kovil* or *koil*) where people gathered to share experiences with the Goddess Mariamma, often identified as Pattini of the Hindu pantheon. Our families conducted *pūja* (offering) to gain the blessings of the Goddess. If for some reason we failed to attend the rituals, the temple priest (*poosari aiya*) would send over a parcel of food. We neither quarrelled over the ethnicity of God nor over the Tamil language used in the *kovil*.

However, when my friends and I started attending two different schools, separated by language (Sinhala and Tamil), and recognized as "Sinhala schools" and "Tamil schools" we learned there that it is a divided world. In these schools our first awareness of ethno-nationalism or ethnic difference was cultivated. Sometimes students from the Sinhala School clashed with Tamil school children on their way to school. Later my

parents enrolled me at the Buddhist Theological School *Daham Pāsal* where I learned about Buddhism, which was different from the Hinduism I was familiar with.

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I was forced to face causes of divisions when I witnessed Sinhala people attacking my neighbours during the 1983 July riots (see Spencer 1990a; Tambiah 1986; 1996: 94-100). We feared that we too would be attacked because we are dark in complexion, similar to the myth about Tamils. My grandparents and my parents were deeply saddened when our neighbours departed for India as a result of the so-called Sirima-Shastri pact signed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Lal Bahadur Shastri (also see Kanapathipillai 2009: 153). I wept as I lost my good friends Morgan and Lasanthan, who were as close as brothers, reliable companions and totally trustworthy. Their father Perumal was a tough man: he quarrelled with my grandfather and he was equally intolerant of those who opposed him. However over time Perumal and my grandfather became good friends. He was the first to visit us in crisis situations and vice versa. My friend's mother Mangamma was a soft-spoken kind lady. She often took refuge at our house when Perumal beat her. I did not like Perumal very much: he often punished my friends and their mother after drinking *kassippu* or *siders* made by local breweries in the neighbouring Sinhala villages. When Perumal came to collect Mangamma from my grandparent's refuge, he invariably went home alone with his ears stinging from the rebukes of my grandma. Mangamma returned the following morning when things were back to normal.

As I grew up, I tried to comprehend ethno-racial differentiations and the related discrimination directed towards my Tamil neighbours. My first lesson came in the form of daily meetings with a schoolteacher. I enjoyed chatting with this man, a Buddhist-Sinhala person who lived in a neighbouring Sinhala village located between the rubber plantations where the Tamil people live in estate "line rooms" (see Hollup 1994; Piyarathne 2005; 2008a; 2008b). He was a master of the ideas and application of federalism, separation and power sharing, referring to examples of past Tamil politics and the mistakes of Sinhala politics. Although I did not understand his concepts, I liked to talk to him about political issues while we travelled the five kilometres hill road to the plateau, he sitting on the front bar of my push bike. In retrospect, although he was a Sinhala-chauvinist he was not hostile to the Tamil people in the neighbourhood but against both the Tamil political elites who

talked about "separation" and the callous Sinhala political elites who were insensitive towards Tamils in general.

<center>***</center>

This thesis is as much about ethnicity as it is about all that does not fit the common usage of that term. "Ethnicity is a product of contact and not of isolation" (Eriksen 2010a: 42) and ethnic boundaries do not reconcile with territorial limits but with social ones (Eriksen 2010a: 46). To write this thesis I pursued a multi-sited research project that included four locations, different social contexts or spaces where ethnicity takes place differently. I employ personal, event-focused (also see Jackson 2005) and discursive-centred ethnographic examples, similar to the approach adopted by Mattingly (2010) in his *Paradox of Hope*. I add one more category to this list of sources, family centred phenomenology, based upon relationships I developed with families in the field. The Sri Lankan situation needs much deeper understanding of the ways and means by which people develop relationships with "ethnic others" in their local multi-cultural societies.

From the beginning of my fieldwork (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997), I planned to develop close relationships with local families and an event-centred research helped me to understand the broader context within which these families function by attending events such as birthday parties, weddings, funerals, new year festivals, get together parties, picnics, processions, pilgrimages and other religious festivals. I did not want to be a guest but tried to become "part of the goings on in the village [or communities], immersed in its sights and smells and sounds" (Jackson 1989: 7). I spent seventeen months in Colombo and approximately one year in Pānama and Pottuvil. My longish stay in different communities afforded me the chance to do talk-centred research, to listen to the dialogues of individuals and social groups focused on new political and social trends and their rationales. In fact, this approach enhanced my understanding of more abstract concepts, feelings and emotions attached to these bodily interactions.

In a bid to understand commongrounds, I analysed relationships among members of society via their social networks of informants. The nature of social networks requires further discussion beyond a concern for groups' boundary creation and maintenance as discussed by Barth (1969). In order to overcome this barrier, I employed network sampling

(or snowball sampling) (Bernard 2006: 192-194) to contact respondents. This facilitated my following of networks among the members of these multi-ethnic communities, and of the networks of people that transcended ethnic and nationality borders in accordance with the various unique qualities of individuals. Following conventional ethnographic practice, I use pseudonyms to recognise the informants throughout the forthcoming discussions of this thesis.

Ethnographic studies require examination of both the nodes of a network and their links through following flows of gifts, things, ideas, love or hatred. For the purpose of constructing knowledge of the nature of flows and respondents, qualitative research techniques including participant observation, in-depth interviews and group discussions were undertaken. On the whole, I was drawn into the lifeworlds of men and women in the studied communities. My research in multiple sites in Sri Lanka focused on both urban and rural[4] (see Varshney 2001) commongrounds. In order to improve its representation of the everyday experience of commongrounds, I adopted a family-based approach in order to include diverse demographic categories as recommended by Maria Hudson, Joan Phillips, and Kathryn Ray (2009) in their paper titled *Rubbing along with the Neighbours'- Everyday Interactions in a Diverse Neighbourhood in the North of England*.

Each research site and its spaces, with different social goings-on composed of unique ways of living out and through ethnic, religious, caste, class and other boundaries pushed me to adopt a different approach to share in their social life-worlds. My whole research was in fact an exercise in "commongrounds building", involving members of different ethnic, religious, regional, class, caste, age and gender groups. Good fieldwork in anthropology is always an exercise in creating commongrounds. Establishing good relations with all groups in general and diverse ethno-racial groups in particular was prerequisite to obtaining consent and to achieving the objective of data collection. Thus this research is evidence in itself that embodied local subjectivity includes strategies to make either peace or war.

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4 Ashutosh Varshney (2001) established the difference between inter-ethnic relationship building in urban and rural settings in India.

Imagined ethno-nationalism as essentially rivals: The constructivist approach

Ethno-nationalism has instigated a great deal of conflict often culminating in violence and threatening the lives and property of peoples who may have little committed loyalty to any of the concerned parties. It results from the construction and essentialisation of ethnic differences, often cast in complex relation to forms of traditional distinction such as kinship, caste, and regional loyalties, in the process newly connecting and disconnecting groups. The focus on commongrounds recognizes individuals not as just passive inheritors of given identities but as active, creative, imaginative beings who incessantly struggle to create the social spaces of social lives. Taking this as my point of departure, I employ Obeysekere's notion of axiomatic ethnic identity (2004a; 2004b), in light of its importance to my discussion of the development and shaping of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that I consider key to the development of commongrounds. Obeyesekere's discussion of axiomatic identity allows me to connect my discussion of commongrounds to theoretical debates pertinent to ethnic identity and ethnic border crossing.

I am the "eldest son" of my family, a position that sociologists identify as "status" or "position" connected to a bundle of "roles" that accompanied my "birth" and to various forms of affective backing, such as the emotion of filial piety with all its ambivalences. Obeyesekere terms this situation "axiomatic identity", which refers to those "statuses and social positions that one takes for granted as true and valid and which carry an important though varying emotional investment, the root of which is 'birth'" (2004b: 37). Despite these axiomatic identities, there are some "sons" and "daughters" in society who do not treat their parents 'properly' or neglect them in their old age, denying them the culturally expected role placed upon children in Sri Lanka. In such situations, the identity of the "son" becomes ambiguous.

As Obeyesekere suggests, the doubting of this axiomatic identity "can be profoundly troubling and agonising" (2004b: 38) precisely because of its "taken-for-granted" quality. Axiomatic identities are entwined with one's perceptions of "worth", "wholeness" (Eriksen's notion of 'ego identity' (cited in Obeyesekere 2004b: 38)) and "well-being." In individual's questioning or rejecting of their or others' axiomatic identity, one can

scrutinize the social process by means of which identity is produced, reproduced, broken, altered and reconstructed. There may be many contributing factors to an identity crisis pertaining to the axiomatic qualities of son-ship (Obeyesekere 2004b: 37). This taken-for-granted identity "son" may have different connotations even within the same culture: the son may or may not represent his father's innate qualities or parental qualities.

Obeyesekere (2004b) draws a parallel between this sort of personal identity and the broader identities of imagined communities that are often the foundation of modern conflicts. Individuals do not exist in families or mass 'society' only: they are addressed by many identities with axiomatic qualities such as clans, kinship lineages, caste groups, nation states and emerging transnational identities as envisioned by political Islam. Identity as presented in all of these processes is an "end product or consciously or unconsciously sought as one" (Obeyesekere 2004b: 38). A lot of social work is put into creating these axiomatic identities, even as they are "reproduced", "recreated" or "refashioned" in compliance with shifting socio-historical conditions (Obeyesekere 2004b: 38). Although these axiomatic identities do not necessarily cause intolerance, during wars or sport competitions such axiomatic identities tend to get infused with "passion" and "commitment" and become sharpened against 'opposing' identities. Thus "strengthening-weakening" is a dialectical process inextricably associated with axiomatic identities. Obeyesekere sees this process as decided by "historical circumstances that must be contextualised for each case" (2004b: 39).

Obeyesekere (2004b) identifies two main qualities of axiomatic identity: "birth" and "the land" where one is born. Birth is an indisputable attribute associated with any kin relationship of a lineage or caste. The term *jāthi* denotes caste lineage and most South Asian societies, including the Tamil community[5] in Sri Lanka, are connected by birth. However this term is also used by the Sinhala people to refer to "nation", "race" and "people" (De Silva 1981: 512). The etymology of the European nation is also "birth" and the transformation of "birth" (which is a natural phenomenon) into "nation" (which is both a political construction and an imagined group) is a complicated and difficult cultural process.

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5 All of the intra-ethnic Tamil groups, i.e., Indian Plantation Tamils, Sri Lankan Tamils (also known as Jaffna Tamils), Colombo Tamils, Batticaloa Tamils, and Vanni Tamils use this term to denote caste in day-to-day conversation.

This cultural process occurs in particular ways in Sri Lanka. For example, Tamil (*demala* in Sinhala) persons whose *jāthi* (caste lineage) were not known settled in *gattara* (immigrant) villages, where people with mixed or uncertain identities were provided with homes (Obeyesekere 2004b: 39). Similar villages may be found in the western province for peoples of the *demala gattara*[6] caste, that is, people who have entered into 'mixed' marriages with Tamils. I found *demala gattara* people living in Matugama[7] during my research into the changing social identity of the plantation Tamil community in Sri Lanka (Piyarathne 2008a). Similar to "birth" connections, the specific "land" of birth is also very important in the context of developing modern nationalism. Traditional myth has it that *Sāsana* (the "Buddhist church", which is essentially linked to Sinhala nationalism today, i.e., Sinhala Buddhist nationalism) was created in Sri Lanka, a country wherein Buddhism would flourish with the help of the Sinhala people. In response Tamils promulgated their "traditional homeland myth" to contest Sinhalas' claim to be the sole custodians of Sri Lanka.

Obeyesekere argues that modern nations are a product of culturally constructed 'primordiality' (2004b: 41). This primordialist conviction is reified in the historical consciousness of a group and pops up in mythologies and literature, ranging from sober historical writings to patriotic national anthems. It is possible to de-mobilize this primordiality during periods of peace and prosperity but they are able to be resuscitated when axiomatic identity is felt to be jeopardized within family, tribal, national or transnational contexts (2004b: 40-41). We see this happening with the essentialisation of *Sāsana* (or Sinhalas Buddhist nationalism) today. The term *Sāsana* has two meanings: (1) the "universal Buddhist community or church that transcends ethnic and other boundaries"; and (2) "the Buddhist 'church' that is particularized in the physical bounds of the land consecrated by the Buddha – in the present instance, Sri Lanka" (Obeyesekere 2004b: 15). In that sense the term *Sāsana* lends itself to both universalistic and particularistic interpretations. Today in Sri Lanka mostly the particularistic notion prevails.

> As far as the Buddhists are concerned, the tension between the two meanings of *Sāsana* resurface in the historically constructed and then essentialised (and sometimes primordialised) axiomatic identity (Obeyesekere 2004b: 41).

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6 Tambiah refers to them as Tamil gotra in his book Buddhism Betrayed (1992: 145).

7 A village located in the district of Kalutara. Sinhala and Indian immigrant plantation Tamil workers live side by side in this village.

There has also been a continuous "Buddhicisation" (or *Sāsanisation*) of South Indian groups, their Gods and magical practices. While appropriating over a two thousand five hundred year history, the Sinhalas are a group of South Indian migrants who have been *Sāsanised*, that is, people who have absorbed most aspects of Sinhala culture, e.g., caste groups and Buddhism. In Sinhala-dominant areas, *Sāsanisation* has been aided by lack of protest by migrant groups. A similar process was adopted by the Kerala and Tamil peoples, who in ancient times lived in the northern peninsula of the country and attempted to assimilate the Sinhala speakers post 15th century.

The assigned nature of axiomatic identity was initially an official attribute. Yet "axiomatic identities have to be learned and contents poured into them and this can be [a] complicated process" (Obeyesekere 2004b: 42). For example, I was born into a Buddhist-Sinhala family, but this was not enough to create axiomatic identity. First, I would have to learn the relevant language, culture, religion, duties, rights and lifestyle to instil "Sinhalaness" in me as expected by the culture. Therefore an axiomatic identity is an "end-product", an "ideal condition" that would relate to discussion about kinship, tribal status, or the cultural identity of being a member of a nation. Viewed from this standpoint, when the cultural identity of "Sinhala-Buddhist" is attained, a perceived ideal position and an end-product of particular "socialising strategies" and "cultural practices" (what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "habitus"), "one can legitimately speak of this identity as existing in a variety of imperfect conditions where such strategies did not exist" (Obeyesekere 2004b: 42). In other words, the reproduction of ethno-religious (or ethno-national) identity is not the same everywhere, a notion further strengthened by other writers such as (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997), who identify communal identity formation as an ideological process specific to a society (Obeyesekere 2004b: 41).

Obeyesekere's highlighting of nationalism as an "on-going cultural process" helps to identify the diverse rigidities that demarcate ethnic boundaries and the ethno-nationalisms that allegedly divide the people of Sri Lanka, paving the way for ethnic clashes. I suggest that it would be very difficult and impractical to attempt to analyse the ethnic rigidities (or divisions) and relations in Sri Lanka through exclusively primordial, instrumentalist or modernist approaches. One cannot label ethnic identifications as 'historical' and 'inborn' (Daniel 1996; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Tambiah 1986), as purely political manipulations or as the results of the economic policy changes of 1977 that saw competition for scarce

resources (DeVotta 2004: 196; Nissan and Stirrat 1990). They are intertwined with each other in the broader ethno-political discourses of the country.

So how did ethnic groups in Sri Lanka become separate? Careful analysis of the literature and documented reports on ethnic identity construction shows that scholars have often reiterated the constructions that originate from the process identified above without bothering to disentangle them. This, I argue, has also blinded them to the multiple instances during which people coexist peacefully and share commongrounds or to the common complexities of living that exist in the midst of tension. Only a few (see McGilvray 2011a; 2001; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004; 2011; Yalman 1967) have noted that the people of Sri Lanka live as "components of local or regional sociopolitical complexes" (Tambiah 1986: 7) rather than just as Sinhala or Tamil rivalry ethnic groups as they are shaped today.

Understanding everyday relationship-building amidst ethno-racial inventions

Any discussion of commongrounds should showcase actors' efforts either to negotiate ethnic boundaries, or to deliberately ignore and downplay them. Fredrik Barth is known for having changed the understanding of ethnicity from a static notion of difference to an interactional phenomenon (see Eriksen 2010a: 44-45; Vermeulen and Govers 1994b: 2). Barth's approach includes three core principles: (1) he identifies ethnic groups as categories of attribution and recognition by the actors themselves. According to this proposition, ethnicity plays a role in organising interaction between people; (2) he discusses the diverse methods of producing and retaining ethnic groups; and (3) in an attempt to facilitate an understanding of the ethnic boundary-making process, he shifts the existing paradigm studying the internal characteristics and history of ethnic groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary creation (Barth 1969).

Barth's recognition of cultural traits serving as ethnic boundaries was debated at the conference on "The Anthropology of Ethnicity" convened in Amsterdam in December 1993. The resultant publication titled *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'* (Vermeulen and Govers 1994a) draws a threefold link between

culture and ethnicity: "Ethnicity refers to the consciousness of (ethnic) culture, to the use of culture, and at the same time is part of culture" (1994b: 3). First, apropos of the final point, Barth depicts ethnicity as an element of social organisation to be considered as part of culture. Anthony P. Cohen (1994) claims that while boundaries can be seen in "interactional terms", they can similarly be regarded as "boundaries of consciousness". Second, in effect, it may be that ethnic identities are the outcome of "classification, ascription and self-ascription and bound up with ideologies of descent" (Vermeulen and Govers 1994b: 4). In this sense, inquiry into ethnicity is connected to the study of "ideology and of cognitive systems", from which standpoint Vermeulen and Govers (1994b: 4) claim it becomes part of culture. Thirdly as George De Vos indicates, the term 'ethnicity' implies "the subjective, symbolic or emblematic *use* by a group of people of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups" (cited in Vermeulen and Govers 1994b: 4, original emphasis).

From a phenomenological perspective ethnicity may be considered "meta-cultural" because it is often a manifestation of "what our and their culture is about" (Ingold 2011). Michael Jackson, too, has highlighted the significance of situations, maintaining that the human existence is "an outcome of a situation, of a relationship with others…" (2011: xiii). Barth spotlights the nature of culture as varied, constantly in flux, contradictory, incoherent from place to place, and as different in variously positioned persons. These varied qualities of cultural development result from the ways in which culture is reproduced (Barth 1994: 14).

Katherine Verdery (1994), arguing in support of Fredrik Barth, endorsed the notion of situationalism that gained widespread acceptance by 1970s anthropology following publication of Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. According to Verdery, the most influential examples of situationalism came from the "Third World". However, the state-making processes and politics (see Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Spencer 2007) of a country also impact upon the ways ethnic identities are shaped. The adoption of majoritarian democracy in Sri Lanka resulted in more parliamentary representation of the Sinhalas, by extension generating political decisions that disadvantaged the ethnic minorities who in turn organised their ethnic politics in response accordingly. However, this does not mean that the consolidation of modern nation states eliminates situational manipulation of identities.

Verdery (1994) suggests that Barth did not mean to imply that culture necessarily works as an ethnic boundary established to block inter-ethnic relations when he posed the question: "How [can] culture … be integrated and/or shared *to varying degrees*" (Verdery 1994: 40, original emphasis). According to Verdery, Barth's position was "that transactions across ethnic lines were possible with only the most minimal sharing of evaluative principles, and he showed that this minimal agreement was nonetheless sufficient to sustain interaction despite massive disagreements between interacting groups" (1994: 40). This discussion validates my argument against the blanket, divisive ethnic identities often projected in the ethnic conflict discourse on Sri Lanka. It may be that the situational downplaying of ethnicity in various places in Sri Lanka can be reckoned as a form of commongrounds created as a way of subaltern (everyday) dealing with divisive ethno-nationalist forces.

Despite the fact that the concept of situational and contextual ethnicity may be valid for Sri Lanka, the inappropriateness of considering culture as an ethnic boundary is noted by Harrison (2003; 2006) who argues that cultural difference may be best understood as denied resemblance. In general, ethnicities and nations are defined by their dissimilarities, for example, the cultures, histories, languages, mentalities and bodily appearance imagined or perceived to exist between communal selves and others. While Harrison recognizes Fredrik Barth as one of the first researchers to use this approach, he does not agree with Barth's proposal to view ethnicity as the symbols of cultural dissimilarity that create social boundaries and shape connections across them. Harrison writes that such a method of constructing contrasting identity categories relates to a rather traditional notion of Derrida, "suggesting that categories are constructed negatively and have no intrinsic content" (2003: 343). The defining of ethnicity and nation from this perspective creates "marginalized others", provoking them to form oppositional identities and to mobilise themselves through resistance. According to Harrison, certain features of ethnic and national identities remain puzzling if one considered this kind of approach (2003:344): conceptualising ethnicity and nationalism as relational will help to explain denied or disguised resemblances rather than emphasising differences or sensed differences as Barth often did (Harrison 2003: 345). According to Harrison ethnic and national differences are "better conceptualised as muted or broken resemblances" (2006: 63).

While Harrison's approach urges me to perceive cultural similarities that nationalists seek to obscure or render insignificant, Neofotistos (2004) affords me the possibility of understanding inter-ethnic connections more pragmatically. He shows the possibility of the co-existence of tension and peace in a given society. Michael Jackson, who maintains that "compassion" and "conflict" are "complementary poles of intersubjectivity, the first affirming identity, the second confirming difference", stresses the need to incorporate both in anthropological analyse (1998: 4). Neofotistos (2004) also considers the possibility of local actors deeming ethnic boundaries porous and incorporating individuals of different ethnic origin within their communities by employing classificatory principles.

Using the term 'classification' in a practical (rather than cognitive) sense helps to explain commongrounds. Neofotistos (2004) suggests that scholars including Handler (1988) and Herzfeld (1992) among others, proposed "stereotypes" that could be considered a means by which local actors could "sort out" and "justify" their "classification" of the rest of "the world" at a "particular moment." Here stereotyping performs a significant function in the negotiation of ethnic identity. Simultaneously, Neofotistos also argues that the porousness of ethnic boundaries can similarly signal the ways in which actors understand social worlds and their respective positions in it (2004: 63).

Neofotistos (2004) sheds light on how inter-ethnic relations may be negotiated in everyday life in a society tagged with negative ethnic stereotypes and vulnerable to ethnic violence. Members of one ethnic group work with ethnic "others" in accordance with their own social classifications to create "inclusive social arenas" in practice. These alternative classifications are based on pragmatic everyday relations and indifference, for whatever reasons, to the claims and ethics of nationalists, which tends to divide people rather than facilitate their non-violent interaction.

Boundaries entail existential aspects of life with others. People erect boundaries in order to enjoy better lives, i.e., not to destroy the future or existence but to protect crops from animal attacks, from others invading their land (which must be protected for their children) and to make sure that thieves cannot steal their crops. People make their own selections. As explained by rational choice theory, "your choice is rational because it is based on some calculation of your needs and goals, but it need not lead to greater profit…" (Nanda and Warms 2009: 146), when people take decisions on the nature of the boundary.

Boundaries are similar to the exit and entry doors of a house. One invites friends, relatives and neighbours into one's house. Close friends sit in the kitchen and have friendly, relaxed, often intimate discussions there. Conversely, officials, respected persons and/or strangers keep to the formal house areas and are treated accordingly. Some are not invited into the house at all. I have seen people in Pānama and elsewhere keep small, very low-height wooden benches, and special utensils such as plates and cups for use when low-caste people visit their houses. While such people may visit them, and are distinguished by social ranking, at the same time it does not mean that they are unworthy or enemies. They have established intimate bonds, perhaps through generations of negotiation and establishing relationships over the borders.

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In summary, my argument pertaining to commongrounds is predicated on both Barth's and Verdery's situational nature of ethnic identity. But I also draw upon Harrison's discussion of cultural resemblance to discuss inter-ethnic relations constituted by way of ethnic boundary negotiations and by 'local ethnicists' denial of these resemblances. And I employ Neofotistos' notion of local actors who create alternative classifications to illustrate how members of all communities develop relationships despite the prevailing trend towards a divisive ethnic socio-political environment in Sri Lanka. Above all, the discussion of commongrounds in this thesis will adopt an existential anthropological approach, aligning most with the work of Michael Jackson (1998; 2005; 2011; 2013). His anthropology accommodates discussion of collaborations and separations, peace and violence in different intersubjective situations. The existential anthropological perspective of this approach allows me to discern the everyday pragmatic lives of people who struggle to create a social life within this divisive ethno-political culture.

The chapters

My discussion and analysis of commongrounds of inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lanka is organised in five chapters. Chapter Two examines both the colonial and postcolonial contribution to creating and maintaining ethnic groups. The colonists constructed ethno-

racial groups via censuses and scientific ethno-racial categorisations backed by the dominant racial theory of the particular historical era. They introduced separate cultural codifications into systems of law and education, and essential ethno-racial representations for political administrations that issued in contemporary communal politics. The electoral politics of postcolonial Sri Lanka, based on the Westminster model and gifted by the island's colonial masters, has also contributed significantly to creating a rift between ethnic groups in general. Ethno-political entrepreneurs have mobilised the extant social complexities, religions and languages to secure power in the majoritarian democratic system, a strategy that has led to ethnic tensions, clashes, and ultimately to war.

Chapter Three explores the strategies of a middle-class community to build cross-ethnic unity. Members of Crow Island in Colombo tend to work through voluntary organisations. The chapter examines how the heterogeneous members of Crow Island are both integrated and conflicted, based on information gathered through techniques such as active participation in jogging sessions on the beach, involvement in voluntary associations and religious institutions and in regular interactions with island-dwellers. It explains how the peoples of Crow Island construct reality and inter-subjectivity, looks at their activities, how they construct commongrounds and why the said commongrounds are always under threat. In particular, the discussion uses as a specific case study an annual picnic organised by a local voluntary organisation, the BPMS.

Chapter Four analyzes the research experience in a low income slum community in Colombo, given that the middle-class commngrounds of Crow Island are insufficient to provide an understanding of the full dimensions of ethnic relations in Colombo. This chapter describes the everyday experiences of the *watta*[8] community, their activities, how the members of this low-income settlement construct commongrounds despite being dominated by socio-political and economic realities.

Chapters Five and Six analyse everyday inter-ethnic relations in rural Sri Lanka based on two locations in the district of Ampara in the Eastern Province of the country. The peoples of Eastern Sri Lanka experienced the brutality of the internal war between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). These two research

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8 People who live in low-income communities in urban canters are often referred to as *watte minissu* in Sinhala and *thotta akhkal* in Tamil, a term that translates in English as slum or shanty community.

sites were considered to be "border villages" during the war. Chapter Five, which explores the experience of the rural village of Pānama, delineates the everyday experience of living according to the expectations of the God and Goddess. Examination of the everyday lives of the people of Pānama highlights the unique relationship that "Pānama people" enjoy with ethnic "others" as neighbours, friends and relatives. The Pānama social system displays a unique amalgam of Sinhala and Tamil cultural unity that shapes everyday inter-ethnic relationships and ethnic boundaries. In this village, ethnic borders are negotiated through caste, a conservative system of labour that is changing its nature in today's context.

Chapter Six focuses on the ethnically mixed rural town of Pottuvil and its Muslim majority. This chapter starts with a discussion of the "greased devil" or "greased man", who created social fear in Pottuvil people, and also delayed my data collection there in 2011 by at least two months. In general, Sinhalas and Tamils in the eastern province of Sri Lanka fabricate a unique mix, a hybrid culture generated by mixed marriages and common beliefs and practices. This community is testimony to commongrounds built among ethnic groups in the politically dominant Muslim community of Pottuvil.

Conclusion

Researching commongrounds has involved making 'invisible' yet everyday social reality visible. Politicians, policy makers, scholars, technocrats and bureaucrats who have cornered the visible realities are engaged in a grand project of searching for a solution to an ethnic conflict that jeopardises the country. In contrast, I have employed my own embodied subjectivity as a way of participating in a social reality that is "taken-for-granted" by the politically dominant class who take decisions on behalf of society as a whole. Politicians, a decisive factor in fostering emergent political arrangements in Sri Lankan, also foster "enmity"/"friendship" among a heterogeneous population, sparing them a thought only during elections. The ordinary masses have often been made scapegoats or guinea pigs for politicians' crafted blunders: their efforts to collaborate are increasingly denounced as insignificant, as an absurdity of the *hoi polloi*. Hence one final aim of the thesis is to transform these anonymous masses into exemplary practitioners of living.

2

Incompatible partners:
Colonial and postcolonial fabrications of
ethno-political subjects today

Introduction

In their analyses of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, scholars have adopted four basic approaches: primordialist, constructivist, instrumentalist and modernist. In this chapter I will first briefly examine these approaches to facilitate an understanding of the socio-economic and political backgrounds to ethnic conflict. The bulk of the chapter however analyzes the modern history of ethnic and nationalist chauvanism in Sri Lanka, focusing on the colonial era of Portuguese, Dutch and British domination of the island, and then on the years of postcolonial independence.

The primordialist approach discusses language, religion, and culture in relation to the conflicting ethnicities and nationalism (Arasaratnam 1998; De Silva 1986; Imtiyaz 2009; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008; Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Advocates of this approach tend to argue that pre-colonial historical factors, in particular an age-old Sinhala/Tamil rivalry, can explain the on-going conflict. However, I will suggest that the explanations put forward are weak even as they make some relevant points. History shows that Sinhalas and Tamils have also demonstrated a propensity for extensive, peaceful co-existence for more than a millennium. So why do they engage in conflict now? (DeVotta 2004:197).

My research findings, which aim to shed light on these broad theoretical perspectives, are based upon fieldwork observations and careful literature study. My review of the extant literature suggests that the politicization of ethnicity and ethnic relations has contributed significantly to the tension that destabilizes the country today (Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008:408; Spencer 2004; Tambiah 1986; 1996). The prevailing situation warrants a refinement of the constructivist approach from a broader perspective, perhaps borrowing from the instrumentalist, primordial and modernist approaches in the process.

Nevertheless, there are criticisms regarding various dimensions of the constructionist perspective. Among them the arguments of Michael Roberts in particular are important. Roberts is a scholar of ethnicity in South Asia and Sri Lanka. His review essay "Nationalism, the Past and the Present: The Case of Sri Lanka" (1993) highlights the efforts of the contemporary political regime to "assimilate" (but not to "reconcile") people within a plural society and a democratic system. Yet this assimilation project is hampered by the domination of Sinhala Buddhism over other religious and ethnic groups, which has a long historical legacy. Roberts' emphasis is on the cultural maintenance of Sinhala nationalism (Sinhala consciousness) while being critical of constructivist arguments about modern ethnicity and nationalism in Sri Lanka. He argues that most of the writers who discuss ethnic relations in Sri Lanka in general and ethnicity and nationalism in particular (e.g. Spencer 1990b; 1990c, Nissan and Stirrat 1990) follow the tradition of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities*) and Eric Hobsbawm (*The Invention of Tradition*). His claim that their work is based on western experience and is not applicable to the Sri Lankan case is problematic, given Anderson's examination of Indonesia and Gellner's familiarity with North Africa. Nevertheless all of these writers believe that with mass education in modern writing and in the expansion of literacy local diversity, fluid ethnic identities were altered by emerging firm ethnic nationalisms that divided members of the society. Roberts asserts that Sinhala (or Tamil) nationalism is not a construction of modern print capitalism and that it existed before this in local oral traditions, i.e., in folklore. Although I cannot address the complexity of (and problems with) his argument here, it is clear enough that historically Sinhala society was a hierarchical social formation ruled by kings and their families. Here the elites (cultural, religious, and political) played a key role in the ideological formation of Sri Lankan society. Roberts' argument denies the fundamental importance of the colonial and post-colonial years in the construction of ethnic identities, but not of the broader notion of the construction of identities per se.

Roberts continues his discussions in many of his writings (2004; 2001b; 2001c) demonstrating how Sinhala (and Tamil) 'consciousness' maintained itself over the long-duree of time. Roberts' conviction is that there must be a power that persuades people to be so chauvinist, and so passionately involved in producing discourses on their unique national selves, which he feels could be nothing but a primordialist 'fact.' This force makes Sinhala Buddhsits fight for their ownership of the entire island and Tamils fight for a separate traditional homeland in the north and the eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Alonside

the influence of colonial ethnic categories and the introduction of print capitalism etc. locals maintained their notions of ethnic consciousness through unique traditional communication system, via oral transmissions of stories, temple paintings, and sculptural images.

Roberts views on Sinhalas' and Tamil's long-term 'cultural' nationalism are interesting. Nevertheless my reading of Sri Lankan ethnicity and ethnic relations leans towards constructivist notions of ethnicity and nationalism for two reasons. First, my family experience in childhood includes our (and many others) living with ethnic Tamils. I saw no deep-seated cultural nationalism there. Second my reading of the literature of ethnic relations that notes the fluid, contextual and situational notions of ethnicity has been confirmed by my fieldwork findings.

Most anthropologists including Daniel (1996) and Tambiah (1986) have taken a constructivist approach to undertand civil conflict. Their work and that of others such as Arasaratnam (1998), Makenthiran (2003), Orjuela (2010), and De Silva (1986) reveal that authors who have tried to establish, confirm or reiterate ethnic divisions and tensions in society appear to have conveniently either overlooked or taken for granted peaceful coexistence or complexities that existed amidst such tension. Tambiah (1986) points out the existence of three types of status difference in the pre-colonial period, caste, geographical and communal aggregates. These differences are not ethnic divisions. During the Portuguese and Dutch colonisation of Sri Lanka (1505-1796), people were increasingly "enumerated and aggregated" according to the Sinhala caste structure: *Karāwa* (fishing), *Salāgama* (Cinnamon peelers) and Tamil castes; *Vellālar*, *Karaiyār* and *Mukkuvār* (matrilineal Tamil caste). Even today, there are intra-ethnic variations among the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim peoples of Sri Lanka. Tamils are not an homogenous community: they have different identities such as Colombo, Batticaloa, Jaffna and Plantation (Daniel 1992; Schrijvers 1999; Wilson 1994). The Sinhalas and Muslims are also no exception to this rule.

Instrumentalist theories attempt to explain the role of the elites - and of the rational choices exercised by people - in the creation of conflict. This, in my mind, is by far the best theory for explaining the causes of ethnic conflict (Arasaratnam 1998; DeVotta 2004). The argument proposed here is that making Sinhala both the official language and the

practice of that language in the country's offices and schools for over two decades contributed to the marginalisation of non-Sinhala groups, who in turn lost confidence in the government and isolated them from Sri Lanka's poly-ethnic society in general. DeVotta (2004) sees the Sri Lankan conflict as an ethno-national struggle sparked by ethnocentric practices initiated by the state and/or the majority Sinhala people. But while these may be good observations, the instrumentalist theory fails to explain all of the factors that underpin Sri Lanka's ethnic tension. More importantly it fails to explicate how after such policies on-going peace can be achieved.

Modernisation theorists assume that when the colony becomes independent, people would be less influenced by their traditional, ethnic and religious allegiances due to the individualizing and rationalizing influences of modern education, media, state formation, democratisation, capitalism and the intellectualisation of culture. As far as the people were concerned, these modern traditions, it was assumed, would support development of a broader national identity and diminish their tendency to identify with parochial identities (Delanty and O'Mahony 2002; DeVotta 2004; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008:06; Schrijvers 1997). But this did not occur as anticipated: Sri Lanka's minority ethnic groups felt that not only had they been excluded from 'modern' development; they claimed they had been deprived of any chances for a good life (Imtiyaz 2009; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Schrijvers 1997).

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During my fieldwork I often heard people say "those people are incompatible with us, and we cannot live with them." This claim was uttered most when people referred to ethnic 'others' who made them anxious about the prospect of sharing space. I see this notion of an ethnic 'other', today's mass ethno-political consciousness, as both colonial invention and as one of the ways that political elites maintain their power in postcolonial Sri Lanka. In both cases it involves attempts by power holders to deny existing resemblances between groups of people (Harrison 2003; 2006), similarities generated through their pragmatic and skilful engagement with sometimes similar, sometimes contrasting environments. The discussion in the following sections will unveil the gradual and systematic construction of rigid ethno-racial categories throughout recent history, beginning with the colonial construction of ethno-racial groups followed by the

continuation and reinforcement of this political strategy by postcolonial regimes. The evolving identities have been maintained as "incompatible partners" up until today by political entrepreneurs, via various discriminatory efforts including disfranchising their citizenship rights in 1948 and politically backed systematic ethnic riots since 1950s (see Kapferer 2012). Overall, the race conceptions of ethnic differences have become deeply ingrained in the realities of Sri Lankans.

Though "incompatible partners" appear as essentially primordial, in fact, they are recent constructions (also see Gunawardana 1990), a colonial invention rejuvenated in the postcolonial period through electoral politics. Harrison (2003) suggests that ethnicity is generated either through denying or muting resemblances. The country gained its independence in 1948, replete with unresolved issues created by the colonizers. The inherited Westminster system with its majoritarian ethno-political model offered most advantages to the majority ethnic group than to the minorities. The thrust of my argument is that the history of the conflict is essentially a political history, in which particular cultural resources have been deployed to suit the interests of key political actors.

Colonial constructions

In general, the notion of ethnic pluralism was the result of colonisation by western powers and the formation of unitary institutional systems for the purposes of politics and government (Jenkins 1986: 179). By contrast, Tambiah (1986) and Arasaratnam (1998: 302-303) describe how the people of Sri Lanka lived as "components of local or regional socio-political complexes" rather than as the Sinhala or Tamil rival ethnic groups they are depicted as today. When the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 three Kingdoms held sway on the island; Kōtte, Kandy, and Jaffna. They amalgamated with the low-country kingdoms (only Kōtte and Jaffna) to create a central administration that was continued by the Dutch from 1658-1796. The British conveniently forgot the prevailing political realities in the Kandyan kingdom wherein Sinhala and Tamil Nayakkara elites ruled the kingdom jointly (Trawick 2007: 40; Wickramasinghe 2004: 71).

When the colonists established a common administrative system for the whole of Ceylon (the name used by colonists to refer to Sri Lanka) in 1833 for the first time, it included government by governor, and legislative and executive councils. The three

unofficial local members, who were nominated to the legislative council by the governor, represented low-country Sinhalas, Burghers and Tamils. In 1889, two more members from Kandy were added, an up-country Sinhala and Moor. This was further strengthened through changes made by the legislative council in 1910, 1920, and 1923. However, this practice changed when the new constitution introduced recommendations based on the Donoughmore Constitution[9] in 1931.

According to Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam (1997: 70) Muslim-ethnonationalism "follow[d] a trajectory building on the existing social formations and systems of governance which accommodated the local power structures through communal representation." It was a top-down ideological projection approach constructed by the Muslim elites in response to the British political model. During the 1880s, Muslim elites created essential links with Arabs to combat the efforts of Tamil elites such as Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan to project the Moors of Sri Lanka as Tamils who had converted to Islam. At the same time western-educated Muslim political elites, who were well equipped to argue a case for unique ethno-racial difference, competed with each other to gain better political representation. This resulted in the invention of a superior racial myth among the "Sri Lankan Moors", depicting them as "indigenous Muslims" ahead of the Indian or coast Moors, Borahs, Memons, and Malays (Nuhman 2007).

Muslim political elites' efforts to create a separate unique identity with the backing of the British provoked the Sinhala nationalists. Such sentiments, and the apparent collaboration of the Muslims with the British, led to clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in 1915 (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997). But despite this there has generally been a good relationship between the Muslims and Sinhalas, so much so that in 1617 they pushed for the Kandyan community and their king Senarath to sign a treaty with the Portuguese colonial administers of Ceylon. Their concerns were for the 4000 Muslims from the Kotte and Seethawaka areas, who had sought asylum from the Kandy kingdom, to protect the Muslims from attacks and threats from the Portuguese, and to settle them in the eastern coast of Kandyan kingdom's jurisdiction area (Ali 2009).

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9 The Donoughmore Constitution was established by the Donoughmore Commission in 1931, which was in effect in Sri Lanka until the introduction of Soulbury Constitution in 1947.

The discussion in this chapter revolves around "national histories" but where possible I will make reference histories made by people in Sri Lanka. We will see that ethnic-politics has a need to maintain close association with accounts of past hegemonies, past sufferings, past discriminations, past enmities. The political entrepreneurs such efforts happen against the peoples tendency to adjust, forget, blur or reimagining (Jackson 2005: 11-14). The construction of the past appears to be an effective way to mobilize social groupings. In that sense "history is not a product of the past but a response to requirements of the present" (Eriksen 2010a: 85), in our case the purposes of ethno-political entrepreneurs. For example, President J.R. Jayewardene came to power through effective evocation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism through reiterating the controversial Sinhala chronicle *Mahavamsa*. This chronicle is often criticised as underpinning Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism against Tamils (see Kapferer 2012: vii and x-xi; Kemper 1990). People on the ground did not see the use of *Mahavamsa* as a form of manipulation but experienced the telling of the myth as natural.

The most common historical analyses of Sri Lanka show that before the 19th century the ideal combination of distinct races, languages, religions and political territory so prominent in contemporary nationalist discourse did not exist (see Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Obeyesekere 2004b; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004; Tambiah 1986). Nationalism in rural Sri Lanka did not exist; it was, according to Spencer (1990b; 2008), a construction of local politics and politicians. Tambiah (1986) identifies three types of ancient social differences: caste, geographical, and communal aggregates. He claims that migrant communities from India were absorbed smoothly into local communities during the pre-colonial period. There were no ethnic tensions. Also the evolving multicultural populations of local or regional socio-political complexes in the kingdoms of Kotte, Kandy, and Jaffna were not considered rivals of "Sinhalas" or "Tamils." These observations are confirmed by early 19th century colonial writers such as Robert Percival who notes a "mixture of nations, manners and religions", "caste" and "class" and that all of these groups have unique "manners, customs and languages" (1805: 136).

My research into the history of ethnic relations shows that modern ethnic rivalry is mainly the result of the construction of ethnic categories during the colonial period (also see Kapferer 2012: 91; Spencer 2008). Colonial administers used scientific categorisation for the purpose of census-taking and codifications in the laws for the colony. These

categories were critical to the establishment of political representation in 1833 and thereafter gave rise to ethnic consciousness (Nesiah 2001b: 9). In the terms of Homi Bhabha, colonial efforts were like stereotyping, arresting some elements and discarding the social fluidity that existed among people (cited in Huddart 2006: 35-56). On the whole the colonisers muted existing fluid identities, i.e., caste, religious or cosmological, regional, while mobilising and concretising ethno-racial identities. The postcolonial elites further strengthened ethno-racial identities into strong ethno-nationalisms via modern liberal democracy.

According to the liberal imperialist Thomas Babington Macauley (cited in Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004) scientific classifications and enumerations of subjects in the colony were fundamental aspects of the liberal colonial *mission civilisatrice* (also see Fischer-Tiné and Mann 2004; Watt and Mann 2011). The colonial officials saw it as their duty "to educate the masses in the ways of civilized men (also in the path of democracy)" (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 55). This kind of "exoticization and enumeration were complicated strands of a single colonial project" (Appadurai 1996: 115) and play a decisive role in today's conflicts in India as well. In general, as also said by Cohn (1987: 224-254), the census played a key role in objectification of south Asian society: colonial bureaucrats attempted to rule local people by altering local concepts like caste into frozen groups of people that later became real social and political categories. In this section, I will focus on the role of census taking - a key element in altering the "complexity and diversity of the island's people and cultures" over a period of time (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 55; Wickramasinghe 2004) - as a device of subject construction (Anderson 2006: 164-170).

The first censuses, which took place in 1824 and 1827, categorised people according to caste and religion. Initially, the term "caste" was applied loosely in Sri Lanka: it included Tamil high caste groups such as the *Vellālas*; regional groups including Europeans, Portuguese, and Malays; occupational groups such as washer people, potters; and larger "amophorous" groups such as the "Moors" and "Malabars". Tambiah (1986) indicated that even in the early days of the British period, the coastal people were increasingly "enumerated and aggregated" according to the Sinhala caste structure: *Karāva* (fishermen); *Salāgama* (Cinnamon peelers); and Tamil castes; *Mukkuvār* (matrilineal Tamil caste), *Vellālar* and *Karaiyār*. Colonial census taking created a mythical link

between the Sinhalas as an 'Aryan' race, and the Tamils as a 'Dravidian' race (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 60). This is in line with the Victorian racial theory that suggests that the people in the world are divided over a few unconnected groups of people (Kapferer 2012: 91; Spencer 1990b: 8; Trawick 2007: 38-42). During the early colonial period this thinking dominated Sri Lankan understanding of their history (Gunawardana 1990; Rogers 1990).

These colonial constructions were "politically determined" and therefore "historically fluid" (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 58). As a result, over time the colonial officers ceased to use the term "caste" in their census and firmly established their invented ethnicities in official categorisations and policy-making (also see Cohn 1987: 224-254). As for the category of 'race', the British used it, alongside "nationality" for the first time in their 1871 census, in which they categorised 78 "nationalities" and 24 "races". In this census, Sinhalas and Tamils are considered races as well as nationalities (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 55). By the time of the next census in 1881, they had introduced seven races: Europeans, Sinhalas, Tamils, Moors, Malays, Väddas (local indigenous groups), and others. The "Moor" identity, which was used to refer to the "Muslim" community, was also created by the colonial administrators, initially by the Portuguese. The Dutch and British continued using this category with the consent of sections of the Colombo-based Muslims to differentiate themselves from Indian Moors and Malay Moors (Nuhman 2007).

The British colonial government also introduced new ethnic categories including the Indian Tamil community (or Indian Plantation Tamils; an intra-Tamil group) (Hollup 1991; 1994: 21-23), Burghers, Malays, Javanese and Kaffirs. As a result, the Indian Plantation Tamil community, one of the island's largest ethnic minorities, got caught up in an ethnic clash between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalas (see Bass 2013; Daniel 1996; Kanapathipillai 2009). They were not allowed to assimilate with the local communities because the Europeans viewed the immigrant Tamil labourers as a separate foreign community (Bandarage 1983: 309; Hollup 1994). This idea contrasted with those prevalent among the people of Sri Lanka before colonial categories and classification became part of people's realities. For example, the *Mahawamsa* (a great Sinhala chronicle by Mahathera Mahanama monk) reveals that those who came to the country in the pre-colonial period were assimilated into Sinhala castes including the *Karāwa* and *Salāgama* (Horowitz 1975: 117).

The British administration in Sri Lanka not only created ethno-racial identities, but also intra-ethnic identities. Indian labourers were brought to the country from 1870 on, to work in the island's tea, rubber and coffee plantations (Bandarage 1983; Wesumperuma 1986). The British planters established pure Hindu-Tamil settlements in the Sinhala areas and gave the settlers special benefits (De Silva 1986: 18; Nissan and Stirrat 1990). The migrant Tamil population has little in common with the Tamil people who live in other parts of the country (see Hollup 1993). Nevertheless, they were discriminated against by the Sinhalas and the mainly non-estate based Tamils including Jaffna Tamils labelled them *thottakkattan* (plantation-jungle-men), *malaiyakkathan*, *vadakkathiyan* (northerners), and *kallathony* (illicit boat-persons). Not surprisingly, the estate Tamils resented the use of such terminology (Daniel 1992: 3). In contrast, the Indian Tamil community had established itself quite well, and this led to a situation in which Jaffna Tamils discriminating against the Batticaloa Tamils versus the Indian Plantation Tamils (Arasaratnam 1998: 306; Piyarathne 2008a; Tambiah 1986: 66-67).

The British incorporated their racial divisions in the colonial legal system, in particular in the areas of family law and property law, which facilitated fixing, continuation of ethnic boundaries to the future in most of the colonies from South Asia to Africa (see Metcalf 2007). The so-called Kandyan law was applied to the up-country Sinhalas which was based on territorial principles. A special legal system known as *Thesavalamai* covered the marriage and property rights of Sri Lankan Tamils in Jaffna and Trincomalee (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 28; Wickramasinghe 2006: 25). The Muslims were afforded colonial state support for two distinctive areas, marriage and inheritance, and also in education (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 22). The people inhabiting the low-country areas had to deal with Roman-Dutch law. They were exposed to a colonial socio-economic culture and lifestyle that differentiated them markedly from the up-country people (Wickramasinghe 2006). Even today, the above-mentioned types of legal systems are active in Sri Lanka. Most of the legal provisions reflect European racial theory based on assumed biological differences between races (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 28). They were part of the British policy of 'divide and rule', differentiating Tamils from Muslims in Tamil-speaking areas (De Silva 1986: 117) and people feel the effects of this until today. The incorporation of ethnicity in the normative system of the state allowed effective continuation of ethnic boundaries in the future (see Metcalf 2007).

The anti-colonial movements in Sri Lanka, like in India and Nigeria were divided along ethnic lines (Horowitz 1985: 292). Local Tamil and Sinhala elites tended to unite and they manage to gain significant local representation in the colonial administration services and in the legislative assembly. Although the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) gathered in common cause its democratic principle was short-lived because the Donoughmore constitution (1931) introduced representation for the Legislative Council on the basis of territorial and demographic conditions as electoral principles (Tambiah 1986: 67). The commission that developed the new constitution did not heed the plea for communal representation. The Kandy National Assembly, which represented the up-country people argued in one of its communications to the Donoughmore Commission for a Federal State, similar to the United States of America (Roberts 1998b: 454). The up-country (or Kandyan) Sinhalas, who saw themselves as different from the low-country Sinhalas, argued for a separate state or a federal state before the Tamils claimed a separate state of Eelam (Guneratne 2011b; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 56).

It appears that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, prior to independence, there were situations in which all of the elites of the different ethnic groups united in some contexts and divided in others (see Tambiah 1992: 10). For example, Sinhala and Tamil local leaders fought together to protect their rights in areas such as land and economic policy (Roberts 1998a: 30). However, the elites who fought for a common cause still engaged in caste, class and community rivalries (Rogers 1990: 95; Wickramasinghe 2006: 140). With the introduction of a universal franchise in 1931 via the Donoughmore Commission, the elites began to talk about the "entitlements" of various groups and argued for the real "Sri Lankans" to receive a share of the wealth of country's resources (Spencer 2004). This all changed with the advent of the Great Depression, which gave rise to unemployment among locals and led to acts of hostility against migrants, with epidemics such as malaria all aggravating the divisions (Wickramasinghe 2006: 122). From the time of the Donoughmore Commission onwards, the British attempted to establish a "Ceylonese entity" after a century of divisive politics that led to divisions between migrants and locals (Wickramasinghe 2006: 123-124). Citizenship claims and demands for local economy levelled against the British exploiters and Indian traders, moneylenders and labourers, had created a more vulnerable socio-economic-political situation for the Indian Plantation

Tamil workers (Kanapathipillai 2009; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Roberts 1998a: 32; Spencer 2004).

In this climate, richer Muslims joined with Sinhalas to reap the benefits of the local economy (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 70). At the same time Sinhalas and Tamils were afraid that Christianity would swallow the entire Buddhist and Hindu community. They also feared that the Buddhists and Hindus would be denied special treatment on the basis of their religion. Converted persons in particular were given privileged treatment by the colonial government (Nuhman 2007: 101-103). These sentiments contributed to the development of Sinhala (-Buddhist) and Tamil (-Hindu) nationalisms as voiced against the British colonial rule of Sri Lanka. As Nissan and Stirrat (1990: 31) show a good share of the "cultural baggage" of the British colonial rule comprised the missionaries who deployed intimidating attacks against Buddhists. Eventually, these attacks were converted into public debate. A tense situation arose when Buddhist monks with the support of followers started responding to provocations of missionaries that took the shape of tension between rulers and ruled, between local and foreign religions (also see Smith 2006: 168).

Between 1883 and 1915, violent clashes took place over the precedence and demarcation of sacred spaces, the conflicts between the rulers and ruled, between the indigenous religions (i.e., Buddhism and Hinduism) and the imported religions (i.e., Islam and Christianity) (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 31). Violence was clearly directed towards groups that were emerging as political threats to Sinhala-Buddhists as well as against political competitors of the main ethno-religious groups under the British administration (see Wickramasinghe 2006: 117). Roberts observes that the economic, religious, and cultural threats of the Muslims were reflected in the 1915 riots against them (cited in Wickramasinghe 2006: 119). In addition, the colonial state's law enforcement policy favoured non-Buddhists and it contributed to the rise of anti- Christian/Muslim feelings (Wickramasinghe 2006: 120-121).

In the meantime, the "Moors", changed from "Mohammedan" to "Muslim" during the nineteenth century. A section of Colombo-based Moor elites contributed to this identity-making process (Nuhman 2007; Thiranagama 2011). The revival of Muslim nationalism was not the result of a religious conversion threat as was the case with the

Buddhists and Hindus, but of the elite's interest in creating a wider community awareness in response to Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms (Nuhman 2007). By the nineteenth century, colonial intervention and the local bourgeoisie were able to manipulate caste, religion, language, and ethnicity (Rogers 1990).

The emerging new elites became increasingly ethno-racially sensitive and developed motivations that led their respective communities through various revival movements in the postcolonial era post 1948 (Kapferer 2012: 91; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 31; Nuhman 2007: 95; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 69; Bastin 2002: 7). The Sinhalas adopted Buddhism, the Sinhala language and the idea of the "Aryan" race to promote multiple facets of nationalism (see Tambiah 1986; Tambiah 1992). They employed borrowed organisational frameworks from missionaries to develop a Protestant form of Buddhism that western intellectuals considered 'proper' and 'original', "shorn of synchronic trappings" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 32). But the Tamils could not unite under one umbrella to fight for their rights due to the non-assimilative nature of the two groups and their elites (Wickramasinghe 2006: 145). This mobilisation was more aligned to their aim to create ethno-racial identities that would be dominant in the political and economic spheres of the Sri Lankan society.

Colonial scholarly work made a significant contribution in shaping the discourse on ethnic identities in Sri Lanka. Most colonial scholarly research took its point of departure from the "models and knowledge systems of colonisers" (Eriksen 2010b: 265). They also adopted colonial ethnic imaginations, ideas about collective ethnic consciousness, and ethnic homogenisation as well as divisions evoked by colonial capitalism or "print capitalism" (Anderson 1998: 130; 2006). Victorian orientalist tradition, history and archaeology also contributed to the scholarly underpinning of the establishment of Sinhalas as "Aryans" and Tamils as "Dravidian" (Guneratne 2011b: 91; Jeganathan 2010b: 430; Kapferer 2012). Rogers (1990; 1994), Gunawardana (1990), and Jeganathan (2010b: 430) claim that this tradition contributes significantly to people's understanding of the rival ethnic identities and their 'natural' pasts.

For example, a major historical study entitled *Yalppana Vaipawa Malai* (*YVM*: English translation; The Garland of Jaffna Events) that was initiated by the Dutch governor, Klaas Isaacsz and penned by Mayilvakana Pulavar, a Jaffna native, contributed

greatly to Sinhala-Tamil divisions. This nineteenth century standard work on Tamil history projected the Sinhalas as the enemies (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990). The production of such history through racist readings of Sri Lankan history, aligned with majoritarian domination, and augmented by ancient Buddhist chronicles such as the *Mahavamsa* was not only used by the elites of the time, but was also carried into modern nationalist scholarship which in turn has fostered divisive ethno-nationalist politics (Gunawardana 1990; Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990). In response, slightly different mythical histories of both Sinhalas and Tamils were created to fit their political projects (Kapferer 2012).

By 1948, when Sri Lanka gained independence from the British, there were noteworthy contradictions at the heart of Sri Lankan polity (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 29). On the one hand, all of the "citizens" of "the country" should be equally treated by adhering to a common set of rules and governors. On the other hand, the British had instituted heterogeneity in the country by formalising cultural dissimilarity through legal codifications and making it a basis of political representation. This "British policy was deeply influenced by the racial theory that had developed from the relationship between contemporary studies of language, etymological and historical, and of evolutionary theory" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 29). This contradiction was further strengthened by usage of the Sinhala term *Jāthiya* (pl. *Jāthi*) to identify the race or a nationality and used to describe and encompass the "newly-imported" concept of a "nation" (Roberts 2001a: 2). The term *Jāthi* collapses non-resembling types of differences; in other words, religious, linguistic, cultural, phenotype indicators amalgamate in the notion of ethnicity through racial categories (Obeyesekere 2004b: 39; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004: 57).

The discussion thus far has revealed how colonial intervention narrowed down the extant complex group structure via castes and kinships, collaborations and fluid identities which over time were mobilised and essentialised into ethno-racial categories by the time of the end of 443 years of the colonial regime in Ceylon. This was common among many of the developing countries with colonial heritage (Ghosh 2000: 1-2). The newly created ethno-racial groups had been mobilised politically. With the establishment of Westminster rule, the introduction of universal franchise and a majoritarian governing system, a base was set for modern competition. A dangerous foundation for the modern religious and language based ethnic nationalisms had been laid by the end of nineteenth century (see Kapferer 2012; Tambiah 1986:7; 1992). In the next section I explain how these ethno-

racial categories were politically mobilised and called into military battle in the post-independence period after 1948.

From ethno-racial groups to ethnic nationalism

In this section I will show how the invented ethno-racial groups became further strengthened into increasingly radicalised ethno-nationalist categories in the postcolonial Sri Lanka. I will also discuss the internationalisation and transnationalisation of Sri Lanka's ethno-nationalisms wherein people are treated as unequal citizens. Post-independence Sri Lanka embarked on a difficult journey on the basis of a colonial legacy that had manufactured ethno-racial groups. Moreover, the postcolonial independent state was formed amidst anti-colonial sentiments in relation to liberal economics. The colonial subjugation had not allowed the growth of "full-blooded bourgeois modernity but only a 'weak and distorted caricature'" (Chatterjee 1986: 24) and this has affected the postcolonial character of Sri Lanka.

My aim here is to present the political culture and discursive practices of the people as a collective driving force of ethnic consciousness and ethno-national divisions in independent Sri Lanka (see Kapferer 1997: 289), promoted by the ruling elites (see Spencer 2002) whose main wish was to gain power using the Westminster system of governance (also see Kapferer 2012: 93). What occurred during the colonial period can only be partly captured by the observation that a "capitalist democracy [was] superimposed on a feudal infrastructure – a democratic top-dressing on a feudal base" (Sivanandan 2010: 60). This would explain why the traditional elites attempted to confine the franchise to certain castes, genders, ages, education, and wealth groups (Bandarage 2009: 35-37). The politics of the time gave the elites the go-ahead to fulfil their own wishes by controlling the population via modern apparatuses, courts, the constitution, the military, police and a majority vote - in effect assuring the centralisation of political power of the country among a few families. The introduction of universal franchise, majority politics, and the refusal of special constitutional protection for minorities not only worked against the minorities (Tambiah 1986: 68), but created divisions among the Sinhala society that has repercussions for Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim relations.

Tambiah (1996: 17) observes that as a result the newly independent South Asian countries increasingly produced politics of ethno-nationalism. He identifies four underlying issues: (1) the dilemma regarding selecting the language for education and state administration and other public affairs; (2) the inability to fulfil the aspirations of educated youth through the modernisation project; (3) an increase in population accompanied by a reduced capacity to cater to their needs as a result of third-world weak economies, which amounted to discrimination in the eyes of the minorities; and (4) the problems with religiosity compared to secular nation and state building in the West. I will explore these categories in turn in the following discussion.

Post-independence Sri Lanka was unable to create an umbrella "identity"/"identities" or "nation"/"nations" such as "Indians" or "Singaporeans" (the success of these models are highly debatable) as the country could neither settle the grievances of the minorities, nor allow all to enjoy their citizenship and political rights in the same way as the majority Sinhalas. "The foundations of a Ceylonese nation are yet to be laid" (Arasaratnam 1998: 311). One problem is the universal limits of nation-building. The nation is an "ideological construction seeking to forge a link between cultural groups and the state" (Sabhlok 2002). According to Sabhlok (2002) its extant weakness lies in its lack of a feasible theoretical model capable of unifying the different ethnic groups into one integrated whole, a weakness that is due to issues connected with "legitimacy of the state," "self-determination", and "national and ethnic identities". As Sabhlok notes, the problem of nationalism is that nationalists struggle to "build nationalism as a concept limited to territory and as a process through the ideals of national integration" (2002: 25).

On top of these universal dilemmas of nation-building, Sri Lnaka's history contains few elements that invite the emergence of nationalism. The opinion of Sivanandan (2010) sheds some light on this. Sivanandan migrated to London following the 1958 communal clashes. He writes that the country did not go through a process of nation building due to lack of the kind of mass struggles that India saw. Sri Lanka was regarded as a "model colony – with an English-educated elite, universal suffrage, and an elected assembly – deserving of self-government" (Sivanandan 2010: 60). The failure to establish a national identity, together with continued competition and claims to a better share, engendered the politics of ethno-nationalism.

In the postcolonial period Sinhalas embarked on a hegemonic project that aimed to incorporate a compelling sense of national identity and unity, a project that could be deemed an effort to create what Anderson (2006) terms an "imagined community", discarding all the forces that divide society. The quest for "horizontal solidarity" came to an end with ever-increasing demands for linguistic and religious boundaries. Brow (1990a; 1990b; 1996), Whitaker (1990) and Woost (1990) discuss the Sinhala efforts to reproduce glorified nationalist historical consciousness among the island's rural population, who constituted the majority of voters. The majority of the people however attempted to develop their lives in terms of their own cultural values, which fuelled minority aspirations for autonomy (Imtiyaz 2009: 409). In particular the Tamil political elites have been "pulled between an all-island territorial nationalism and necessity of safeguarding the interest of the community" (Arasaratnam 1998: 297; also see De Silva 1986: 152; Nesiah 2001b:13). It must be emphasized, however, that this kind of political-nationalism based on ethnicity, religion, and culture was in fact already a rejection of existing cultural hybridity (see Wickramasinghe 2004).

The narrow nationalism developed in response to projects of national identity evokes "a distinctive ideology of the modern nation state" in Sri Lanka (Spencer 1990b: 5). The state was considered by the minorities in general, and by the Tamils in particular, to be the exclusive domain of Sinhala-Buddhists, an apparatus facilitating the exercise of a Sinhala majoritarian hegemony (Kapferer 2012; Nayak 2001; Tambiah 1986: 6). The elites of all ethnic groups attempted to seize a better share of the state that provided welfare, development and other benefits. In this process the state became "the agent of history and civil society … the repository of myth" (Daniel 1990: 244).

Nissan and Stirrat (1990) compare and contrast the local pre-modern and western administered modern nation states in a way that is useful for understanding the structural contributions to post-independence ethnic competition, tension and conflict. The modern state, with its Westminster democratic system, invented a new identification for the differences of religion, cosmology, language, and customs (Kapferer 2012; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 24). Nissan and Stirrat (1990) suggest that the pre-modern states of south and south-east Asia were comparatively loosely composed organisations built on the foundations of relationships and graduality, and on the principle of the decentralised authority. Tambiah (1977) identified this as "galactic polities" while Obeyesekere

investigated ideological unification that surpassed the disjointed and manifold designs of "state" (2004b: 14-15). By contrast, the modern state is centralised and related to a territory that has 'ritualised boundaries' acknowledged by international law and that can be altered only through legally-defined standards. The pre-modern state did not consider religion, language and ethnic differences as criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In contrast, the present form of the state has gradually come to be considered as an agent depriving Sri Lanka's ethnic minorities of their citizenship rights, a circumstance that has led to the emergence of ethno-political nationalism.

Verdery's (1994) comments regarding the usage of ethnicity as a way of achieving political power (also see Spencer 2013: 94) and holding it summarises the long story of tense ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Differences develop into politically important issues because ethnicity and culture are seen as the locus of homogenization, rendering groups visible as ethnically different. Nationalism is linked to liberal democracy, electoral politics, state-making process, and the ruling of the country (see Kapferer 2012; Spencer 2007; 2008). The ethnic minority elites read the activities of the Sinhala majoritarian state as domination over them (Alison 2009: 42-43), the kind of thinking that mobilised people to engage in violent conflict from 1980s onwards. Tambiah (1986) viewed post-independence era Sinhala-Tamil tensions and conflicts as more of a recent phenomenon, the result of increased "ethnic" mobilisation and polarisation.

Ethnicity became a dominant signifier in self-ruling Ceylon (Hettige 2008: 205-206; Kanapathipillai 2009: 36). The Sinhala political elites opted for a 'one person one vote' policy in line with the British thinking that gave more power to the Sinhalas according to their numerical majority. This was repeatedly discussed by the Tamil political elites, who requested the inclusion of communal representation in politics and the state-forming process. The Sinhala leaders favoured the western notion of the 'modern state' in which homogeneity, equality of voting rights, universal franchise, and the rights of individuals irrespective of race and language were highlighted (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 33). The absence of a colonial mediator to draw a balance among these forces contributed to ethno-racial competition and antagonisms. "It was only later, after Independence, that the British were to be replaced by the Tamil as the 'dangerous others' implied in much of the self-conscious proclamations of Sinhala identity and community" (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 32).

The hardening of the ethnicities fabricated by the colonisers, the creation of nationalisms, the discovery of the essential connection between religion, language and ethnicities, the disenfranchising of ethnic "others" and aggravated violence were all connected with the communal form of competitive politics and state formation that dated from and after independence in 1948 (see Arasaratnam 1998; DeVotta 2007; Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004; Spencer 1990b; Tambiah 1996). In this competitive political environment, politicians used history (Kemper 1990) in their attempted hegemonic interpretation of the past (Tennekoon 1990). The political elites on their parts used the idea of primordial loyalties to garner the support of the majority voters (Arasaratnam 1998: 297).

The Sinhalas attempted to invent their identity through Buddhism (Kapferer 1997: 92; 2012), language and disposition towards the past through 'history' (Daniel 1989; 1996: 13-31). The Tamils pursued their identity through the disposition towards the past via "heritage" (Daniel 1989; 1996: 13-31) and Hinduism, especially Saivaism that later extended to a magnificent linguistic and cultural legacy (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990). This process was masterminded by ideologues, who promoted the politics of separation by employing cultural symbols and myths in a powerful manner so as to conscientise individuals of a diverse society as affiliates of a community distinct from others. Sinhala and Tamil nationalism and Tamil separatism continued as postcolonial political projects constituted by nationalist materials and discursive practices (Stokke 1998). Reconstruction of the nationalist past of the country took place in various spheres among which school class rooms and the print and electronic media were significant. But a great deal of intervention took place through propaganda spread by politicians (Spencer 1990b: 10).

This political situation became conspicuously termed "communalisation", "a process of formation of an exclusivist collective identity across class-caste-gender divisions on the basis of language, and, or religion in a multi-ethnic society, with the intent of mobilising the people for political purposes under given historical conditions" (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 68). Attempts by Tamil political elites such as Ponnambalam Ramanathan to include Muslims living in the eastern and northern parts of the island as Tamil-speaking peoples who believed in Islam occurred despite the fact of an existing harmonious relationship between the two groups (Thiranagama 2011: 117-118; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 87).

A more recent example of communal politics occurred when Muslim politicians attempted to construct a distinctive Muslim identity based on Islamic faith, in order to maintain a distinctive group from the Tamils of Sri Lanka (Ali 2009; De Silva 1986: 117; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008: 408; Nuhman 2007: 95; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997). The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which has committed itself to promoting Islamic values among the community, further contributed to mobilising Muslims as an ethno-racial group in Sri Lanka claiming sovereignty on the basis of the Holy Quran (Goonatilake 2001: 405-406; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997). Like other competing parties, this party fed the exclusive myth of group ideologies to people during election periods.

The creation of the SLMC in September 1981 in the east (Ali 2009) where the majority of Sri Lankan 'Moors' live united the country's Muslims despite their different cultures and region-based ethnicities. The SLMC sway was so powerful that the party assumed a "king-maker" role in electoral politics (Nuhman 2007). Although the Muslim leaders maintained a good relationship with the Sinhalas and Tamils, they were inclined to take the side of the strongest party, the Sinhalas (Imtiyaz 2008). The Muslims who lived in the western, southern and central regions where Sinhala national politics was powerful supported such policies, whereas the Muslims in the northern and eastern areas, where the Tamils were in the majority and the LTTE was active, divided their loyalty between the LTTE and the government (Schrijvers 1997). They have supported Sinhalas during their "Sinhala only act", and had to fight against the Tamil militants (Imtiyaz 2008). In that context, Imtiyaz (2008) rightfully argues that the "politicisation of ethnic relations" weakens the unity among the ethnic groups, with special reference to the low income-generating groups.

During the ethno-political electoral process, both Sinhala and Sri Lankan Tamil (one direction of Tamil nationalism as viewed by Trawick (2007: 52)) ethnic group backed parties united to disenfranchise the citizenship and voting rights of the Indian Plantation Tamil community, another alien concept introduced by the British, by the Senanayake government in 1948 (Arasaratnam 1998: 306-307; Hollup 1991: 196-197). This was considered an attempt to curtail the plantation Tamil voter's overwhelming support for left wing political parties (Kanapathipillai 2009; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 34). But there was no

considerable resistance against these disenfranchising efforts (Daniel 1996: 37-98; De Silva 1986; DeVotta 2004; Kanapathipillai 2009: 36; Manogaran 1987; Sivanandan 2010). After 55 years of Independence, all of the Indian Tamils became Sri Lankan citizens via the "Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act" of 2003.

Postcolonial politics greatly affected general opinion about the state and the nation, and about differences between ethnic groups. The new political elites invited citizens to discussions of politics backed by ethno-national historical myths, using language that could be understood by the masses (Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008). This was similar to the situation in India where Indian National Congress leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru effectively appealed to all sectors of society. At the same time, there was a growing number of clashes between the western-oriented, English speaking political elites and rural elites (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 35). Gradually, the rural elites started replacing western-oriented and English-speaking elites, who had been offered powerful position in the administration and in education by the British (Gombrich 2006: 26). On 23 May 1951, For example, Oxford-educated Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike quit the United National Party (hereafter UNP) and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (hereafter SLFP) that encouraged ethnicity-based nationalism. He adopted 'native' costume and learned the Sinhala language, gave up Christian upbringings and became 'Donoughmore Buddhist' after he returned from England in the early 1930s (Bastin 1994: 161; Spencer 2002: 94; 2008: 614). "The use of cultural factors of cohesion or other aspects of traditions that strike an emotive response assumed a political potent from among the Sinhalese in the early 1950s" (Arasaratnam 1998: 301).

Neither the Sinhalas nor the Tamils responded eagerly to the first manipulations of communal factors at the hustings in 1952. But the politicians were able to turn the situation around during the 1956 election (Arasaratnam 1998: 301-302; Spencer 2008: 614). The rise of Bandaranaike's "Sinhala-Buddhist Populism" (see Tambiah 1992) in 1950 marked the turning point in the country's politics which saw power pass from the hands of "Anglophone elite" to what many view as a newly rising Sinhala middle-class (Bastin 1994: 161; Spencer 1990b: 9). I see it more as an opportunistic move by an older elite making use of the newly franchised masses. In 1956, the politically-mobilised Sinhala groups included the *pancha maha balawegaya* (five forces) of *sanga*, *weda*, *guru*, *govi*, *kamkaru* (Buddhist monks, local physicians, teachers, farmers, and labourers) (see

Kapferer 2001: 33; Seneviratne 2001). Bandaranaike's introduction of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 impacted upon the education, occupation and language rights of the minority groups (DeVotta 2004; Manogaran 1987; McGilvray 2011a; Schrijvers 1997; Sivanandan 2010; Tambiah 1996). This increased Tamil (Tambiah 1986: 76) and Muslim (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997) fears about their futures. This policy further Politicised ethnicity and religion with severe impacts for generations to come (see Chandra 2005; Kemper 1990). Later, in the following time period up to today most of the Sinhala politicians from both UNP and SLFP applied the same trick to get the majority, the Sinhala votes (Feith 2010: 348; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008; Trawick 2007: 44).

Since the Sinhala elite's ascent to power, postcolonial electoral politics and the political culture in general has become violent (Kapferer 2001: 33; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 37) and corrupt (Kemper 1990: 191) and eventually led the country into a civil war. Competition among the local elites became a "way of life". Tambiah claims that the twentieth-century politics of Sri Lanka became ethnic as it mainly considered "bread-and-butter" connected discrimination (1992: 11-12). At same time severe competition reduced the space for dialogue, tolerance and peaceful negotiation. Together, the UNP and the SLFP main parties contributed to this situation (Tambiah 1986: 70-74). The socio-economic politico-cultural development models introduced by governments (led by both UNP and SLFP) also contributed to the war. The changes to the country's constitution in 1972 and 1978, and the subsequent repercussions from these changes, prompted the Tamil community [with the manipulation of their party politics pushed] to seek complete autonomy from the Sinhala majoritarian states (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 37; also see Veluppillai 2006). All viewed the changes as firming the Sinhala-Buddhist grip on the minority ethnic groups.

The nationalisation of the state economy by Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP-led government resulted in more benefit for the Sinhala-Buddhist community than for the Tamils (Bastin 1994: 160-161; Trawick 2007: 46). A strong patron-client relationship developed between voters and politicians from which the Sinhala community benefitted greatly while the Tamil community became marginalised as their politicians lacked such opportunities (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 37). The changes in the education policies of the country further reified the ethno-racial divisions. Initially, ethnically mixed schools had nurtured long-lasting relationships among members of this heterogeneous society. The

replacement of English with the Sinhala and Tamil languages and the creation of separate linguistic streams benefitted Tamil and Sinhala students from marginalised backgrounds, who could not afford an English medium education. But it negatively affected ethnic mixing after 1956 (Nesiah 2001a: 59-60; 2012). Subsequent governments created Muslim schools as a third category. The schools in estate plantation areas (mostly attended by the sons and daughters of Tamils of Indian origin) operated in further isolation. In 1974, the introduction of ethnic quotas for the country's universities and government jobs created a lot of frustration among the educated Tamils (McGilvray 2011a: 4; Tambiah 1986: 77-79). After 1977, the government withdrew the controversial university-entrance policy that was introduced only three years earlier.

Post 1977, the newly appointed UNP government introduced more liberal economic policies making a radical change with the closed economic policies adhered to by previous SLFP-led governments. The Tamil community did not benefit from these policies and they also negatively impacted on remaining inter-ethnic trust, ethnic relations, and ultimately contributed to sentiments that made people embark on war (Gunasinghe 2004). In total, post-independence state policies widened the gap between the Sinhalas and Tamils (Hettige 2008; Shastri 1997). Schrijvers (1997) writes that these new economic policies ruined the Jaffna middle-class peasant economy and violated the fundamental social and economic rights of the majority citizens of Sri Lanka. Overall, economic liberalization impoverished ethnic minorities and politicians exploited this pressure to gain political power by manipulating their sentiments (Imtiyaz 2009). At the same time, the UNP government initiated what appeared to become a long tradition of suppressing the judiciary and opposition parties, and controlling the media as an authoritarianism practice operating behind so-called "democracy" in the "democratic-socialist republic" of Sri Lanka. Members of Parliament were given powers to issue jobs, and this rapidly increased the politicisation of all sectors.

The Tamils failed to benefit from these changes that at the same time also marginalised rural educated Sinhala youth. The government's massive development project called Accelerated Mahaveli Development Schemes, which was started when the UNP government came into power in 1977, called upon the nationalist dream of "Sinhala Buddhist hydraulic civilisation." It further aggravated Tamil anxieties at the national level (McGilvray 2011a: 5; Trawick 2007: 45). This kind of development-oriented

"demographic engineering" not only contributed to national rice production and development but also changed the "political map "of the northern and eastern side of Sri Lanka via colonisation projects (Bastin 1994: 162; McGilvray 2011a: 6). Also the introduction of Free Trade Zones (FTZ) (see Hewamanne 2008b; Lynch 1999; 2002; 2004), various factories, and the development of tourism, while providing the Sinhala ethnic group with more mobility, also resulted in sharp economic polarisation (Bastin 1994: 162).

Other UNP government development schemes, such as it's 'village awakening' (*gam udāwa*) programme, led to the building of one million modern houses, replacing the more primitive *cadjan* houses. Brow (1990a; 1990b; 1996), Woost (1990) and Bastin (1994: 169) note that this project aimed to strengthen Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The Mahaveli Development Schemes (Tennekoon 1988), the "village awakening' programme, and other development activities in postcolonial Sri Lanka all attempted to build Sinhala nationalism and obliterate Sri Lankan Tamil heritage and the third group, the plantation Tamil community, totally (Bastin 1994: 170-171; Daniel 1992). On the whole this could be interpreted as an effort of "infusion of Buddhist culture into mainstream political symbolism" (Spencer 2008: 621). As indicated above, it is important to note that this policy was not just ethnic but also a class struggle. Ethnic issues came to the fore clouding class issues, as the JVP was mainly comprised of educated and rural-based Sinhala youth (Bandarage 2009: 142). One illustration is that during the 1971 and 1988-1989 JVP (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*- People's Liberation Front)-led uprisings both the SLFP and the UNP governments killed more than 100,000 youths. They fought to create socialism through class struggle (Lynch 2007: 65), against the state controlling dominant elites who allegedly did not create fair ground for new elite to rise (Moore 1993; Orjuela 2008: 91-92; Richardson 2005: 248-250; Spencer 2002: 104-105; 2008: 618-619).

Electoral politics, separation, war and the Eelam dream

The ethnicisation of the Sri Lankan political system by Sinhala politicians gradually radicalised Sri Lankan Tamils and created conditions for the emergence of the LTTE (Alison 2009; DeVotta 2004; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008). There was some delay before affirmative action was taken to redress the disadvantaged minority ethnic groups. They

were not only in a hurry to obtain their rights but harboured a high degree of distrust in the majority Sinhala (or "lions") population. Eventually this resulted in the Tamil "Tigers" fighting against the government for the establishment of a separate state "Eelam" (Spencer 1990a; 1990b; 1990c). Meanwhile, successive Sinhala governments continued to ignore the Tamils' grievances (Spencer 2008). The accumulated frustration among Tamils transformed into a full-blown conflict, curtailing both development and progress in modern Sri Lanka (DeVotta 2004; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008).

Politician-backed ethnic riots erupted in 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, and 1983, futher aggravating already very strained ethnic relationships in most parts of Sri Lanka (Feith 2010: 350-351; Imtiyaz and Stavis 2008; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 24; Sampanthan 2012; Tambiah 1986). Nissan and Stirrat (1990) note some interesting differences between the riots of the 1950s and those of 1970-1980. During the 1950s, the attacks were levelled against Sri Lankan or Ceylon Tamil peoples, not the Indian Tamil community. And the state politicians and the military became involved in clashes in various areas of the country (also see Spencer 2008). Furthermore, growing numbers of Sinhala people began to consider the Tamils—irrespective of their ethnicity—as a threat to the state. This created a niche to treat all Tamils as enemies.

The notion of a separate state became the prime objective of Tamil politics after September 1973. In early 1972, Tamil parties combined to form the Tamil United Front (TULF) in support of the Tamils' fight for language and citizenship rights and to stem the devolution of power (Tambiah 1986: 77). A civil disobedient movement commenced on 2 October 1973 and the Federal Party (FP), one of the main components of the TULF, at its yearly meeting later that year claimed that,

> Tamils are in every way fully equipped to be regarded as a separate nation and to live as a separate nation and that the only path for them to follow is the establishment of their rights to self-rule in their traditional homelands based on the internationally recognized principles of right to self-determination of every nation (Arasaratnam 1998: 309).

By 1976, the TULF had replaced the Federal Party (FP) and passed a resolution to establish the Eelam nation at Vaddukkodai (Trawick 2007: 47). This resolution was

endorsed by the voters in the northern and eastern parts of the country through the massive election victory of the party in 1977 (Feith 2010: 349).

Reflecting on these developments, Korf (2006) contends that the political and ideological elites' construction of a fictitious ethnic homogeneity connected to specific geographical territories was sufficiently powerful to construct the ethnic "others" as "rogues". This terminology resonated with territorial control, political justice, and virtual or real "rogue" states. It resulted in violent action aimed at toppling a rogue state in order to create genuine states, e.g., Eelam, for the Sri Lankan Tamils. Throughout this period the official state, with the support of the majoritarian Sinhala voters, justified violence by its armed forces (mainly recruited from Sinhalas) against the rebels or terrorists (who were drawn from Tamils), denouncing them as a threat to the country's "sovereignty" and that it would act against them at whatever cost to meet the "people's mandate". The actions of the state, initially against the 'terrorists' (ethnic "others") and later against 'traitors' amidst its own ethnic group appeared in this context as a mechanism to protect the "people's mandate" and the "country's sovereignty" (by a group of "patriots"). Ruling the country by emergency laws and regulations (Coomaraswamy and De Los Reyes 2004), the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and other emergency regulations resulted in abductions through "white vans", or "disappearances" perpetrated by military and paramilitary forces, putting the lives of the innocent andno-so innocent people at peril. The same methods used by the state were used by the Tamil "liberation" groups against "rogue" ethnic others and members of their own communities considered "traitors".

After the failure of the liberal peace experiment project of 2002-2005 (Goodhand and Korf 2011: 1-14; Price 2010), the newly-elected president Mahinda Rajapaksa government went to war with the LTTE with the firm determination to eliminate it. The international community and world organizations such as the UNO, UNHRC and other agencies failed to put a halt to the resulting blood bath. By remaining silent, the international community in fact extended support for the war (also see Boyle 2009). The conflict ended in May 2009 with the killing of the LTTE leadership. This three decade old internal war claimed a lot of resources and lives between 80,000-100,000 (Hashim 2013: 4; Weiss 2012: 6). While the idea that things are resolved seems to prevail, there are many unresolved issues including human rights violations, war crimes, massive killings of innocent civilians, issues of "Internally" and "Internationally" Displaced People (IDP), orphans, war widows, disabled

persons, livelihood development, and the yet unaddressed rights of the Tamil community regarding reinstating normalcy in their everyday social lives (see Boyle 2009; De Soyza 2011; Derges 2013; Harrison 2012; Ondaatje 2000; Price 2010; Rev. Sangasumana 2009; Thiranagama 2010; 2011; Weiss 2012; Whitaker 2007)

The Indianisation of the Sri Lanka's Tamils

The intervention of India, especially during the postcolonial epoch, under the pressure from the South Indian federal state and allegedly aimed at safeguarding the rights of the Tamils in Sri Lanka ranged from peaceful negotiation to violations of the Sri Lankan air space (Alam 1991; Chandradeva 2007; Ghosh 2000; Rajappa 1987). In the post-war epoch, there was considerable agitation in Tamil Nadu. Many of the protestors set themselves ablaze. A few Buddhists monks were severely punished, and Sri Lankan pilgrimages to Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu religious places were disrupted. These incidents resulted from a transnational political movement of global Tamils, who sought to have their own Tamil state. Their actions were backed by Tamil Nadu politicians who wished to establish Eelam or a separate state in Sri Lanka, not in India. If Eelam were to be created in Sri Lanka, it would prove a Mecca for the Tamils.

The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka can be identified in three ways: it aimed (1) to balance and maintain Indian hegemony in South Asia and limit the influence of the US, China, Pakistan or any other country (Ghosh 2000: 53); (2) to cool down Tamil Nadu politics or Tamil Nadu Tamil Nationalism and obtain their support to establish a central government; and (3) to influence the Sri Lankan government to secure the rights of the Tamils. In my opinion, the Indian government intervened to resolve issues connected with the Sri Lankan Tamils rather than those of the Indian Tamil community. By not resolving Tamil grievances linked to power-sharing, granting full citizenship to Indian Tamils, and choice by language, the Sri Lankan government set the backdrop for Indian intervention in Sri Lankan matters (Kanapathipillai 2009: 37). Tamils started to believe that the Tamil Nadu government, rather than that of Sri Lanka, would grant them their rights. Now they belive more on so called "International Community".

Indian intervention in Sri Lanka has a longer history. More accurately it is Tamil Nadu Nationalism which has impacted with Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism and vice versa. The "Sirimavo-Shastri Pact" (known as the "Indo-Ceylon Agreement) was jointly signed by Ceylon's Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Indian Prime Minister Lal Shastri on 30 October 1964. Through this, India agreed to repatriate 525,000 Indian Tamils, while Sri Lankan government would offer Sri Lankan Citizenship to 300,000 Indian Tamils. They agreed to decide the fate of 150,000 Indian Tamils later (Rajasingham 2002; Sivapragasam 2009). In 1974, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi signed the "Sirimavo-Gandhi Pact", granting citizenship to the remaining people.

On 29 July 1987, then Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayawardene and Indian Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the "Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord" in an attempt to settle the ethnic conflict. By signing this agreement, the Sri Lankan government agreed to devolve power to the provinces, and put an end to government military operations in the northern and eastern parts of the country. The LTTE agreed to surrender their arms and India dispatched an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to monitor the cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and Government of Sri Lanka. It was mainly the Sinhala majority who considered these efforts a threat to national integrity and to the pride of the nation (Kapferer 2001: 34). The above agreement paved the way for the establishment of Provincial Councils, bringing the 13th amendment to the 1978 constitution of Sri Lanka.

The 13th Amendment to the constitution proved controversial in party politics from that point onwards. Furthermore, the 16th Amendment to the constitution, introduced on 17 December 1988, enabled Provincial Council members to use either language when discharging their duties. Article 20 proclaimed the Tamil and Sinhala languages the languages of administration and legislation, replacing Articles 22 and 23. The Sinhala and Tamil languages were made court languages, amending Article 24 of the constitution. English was made Sri Lanka's link language. However, in the post-war epoch, government politicians or the winners of the war initiated discussion to amend or totally remove the 13th amendment to the constitution, which was already operating in the country that satisfied ethnic minorities in general and their ethno-political representatives in particular. Opposition to the amendment sought to create Sinhala chauvinistic feelings through fractions of *Sanga* (political Buddhist monks) (see Tambiah 1992).

The Tamil politicians of post-war Sri Lanka often counselled both the Indian central government and Tamil Nadu politicians to the effect that the Sri Lankan government did not address the issues of war-affected Tamils. In my opinion, this approach has contributed to the Tamil community's floating loyalty between India and Sri Lanka. As well, it has widened the cleavages between Sinhala and Tamil communities. During the war against the LTTE, the government of India both extended and withdrew its support from time to time. Post-war India joined hands with the International community to put pressure on Sri Lanka at the UNO and UNHCR level, theoretically helping the country to improve the lives of the war refugees.

Is there a way forward?

The great 'opportunity' that Sri Lankan warmongers expected from the annihilation of Tamil leaders, the killing of a great many people and the resulting peace is slowly fading away (see Goodhand and Korf 2011: 1; Price 2010; Spencer 2012: 730). Politicians continued to voice common rhetoric around such things as the "sovereignty of the state", "territorial integrity", "constitution", "democracy", "good governance", "patriotism", "national and international conspiracies", "new fears of terrorism", "home grown solution", and "power sharing". In another way, it is the same "election winning" political behaviour that gave rise to all the above issues (also see Bopage 2010). This indicates that post-war Sri Lanka is struggling with two major issues: one internal and the other external.

The internal threat stems from the wealth accumulation of one elite group and leadership that has no enlightened vision or commitment to the betterment of the country other than short term strategies that will keep them in power (see Spencer 2012). The post-war state still focuses on the accumulation of political, and economic power while marginalising a lot of people (Spencer 2011: 211-212). The ruling politicians who won the war continue to reap their harvest through election victories and by altering the country's constitution, endorsing a "new illiberal political culture of a partial authoritarian constitutionalism" (Jayasuriya 2011). They do all they can to ensure that their siblings and children hold power for generations (see Feith 2010). Their efforts to create new enemies to replace the previous ones via religion, language, and ethnicity (Seneviratne 2011;

Spencer 2012: 731; Tambiah 1986: 122) allows them to easily oversee real everyday issues connected with social, economic, cultural and political development.

The country's external pressures are inevitably connected to its internal issues. The foreign states' and UNHRCs' main focus is on war crimes, human rights violations and the failure to address ethnic issues to find a successful solution to the country's problems. The rulers of the country are aligning with China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, moving away from the US and other Western nations that emphasise peace, human rights and good governance in Sri Lanka (Bopage 2010: 360; Spencer 2011: 211-212). At the same time, the economy is collapsing and this is fuelling protests that in turn invite further suppression. Even after a 30-year war and more than 65 years of independence, Sri Lankans, Sinhalas, and Tamils in general continue to depend on the international community. The current scenario within the country could be well understood through the instrumental approach offered by DeVotta:

> [Sri Lanka comprises] official establishments that come together to create 'the state'—the legislature, bureaucracy, judicial system, public education system, and the police and defence forces—as well as those private establishments that gain legitimacy from and/or providing legitimacy to political elites representing the state (2004: 15-16).

Not only do the Tamils take their grievances to the UNO and the UNHRC or international community but the aggrieved Sinhala majority and the Muslims do the same, a clear indication of the blatant intention of the power elites to remain in power at whatever the cost.

The Tamil political elites continue to take the unaddressed Tamil issues to the international arena in search of justice for people who still live in the "homeland", a myth initiated by the country's politicians, continued by the rebels, and further internationalised by transnational diasporas (Fuglerud 1999). Nowadays the ethno-political battle is operating mostly beyond the geographical territories of the country and in cyber space (Ranganathan 2002; 2010; Whitaker 2004). The Tamil diaspora and LTTE members living in other countries have created the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) with its head office in New York and a heavy presence in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, Germany, France, Australia and other western countries. The

TGTE, the government of the exiles, hopes to keep the notion of Eelam alive despite the defeat of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. This "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson and Kligman 1992), now seems to be incorporating "global Tamil sentiments" that will continue to influence "local nation" and multi-ethnic "unity".

Conclusion

Returning to the starting remarks of the chapter, the speaker's banal reference to "incompatible partners" reveals the tip of the iceberg of everyday ethno-politics. The situation is fuelled by the political elites of ethnic groups. Spencer (2012) has offered the solution of abandoning the political traps that creates "enemy" and "friends" or "compatibles" and "incompatibles". But there is no indication of anything that points to such a resolve. One small solution to Sri Lanka's multiple dilemmas is for the government to address the war victims' claims and those of their family members when addressing the issues faced by all. In the meantime, there should be a mechanism in place to re-establish a free and professional institutional State structure that caters to the needs of all of the people. The current socio-political climate distances the minority ethnic groups from any feeling of being responsible citizens of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the continuing construction, reconstruction and ongoing reification of ethno-racial identities does not deny the possibility of the Sri Lankan people redefining their ethnic boundaries, a topic I will address in the forthcoming chapters.

3

Middle-class commongrounds in
Crow Island, Colombo

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the negotiation of ethnic boundaries in a middle-class setting on Crow Island, using Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of class consciousness and its interaction with socio-cultural and economic capital as my point of departure. The chapter explores how a group of middle-class people on Crow Island develop strategies to create a community wherein a sense of sharing mitigated ethno-political boundaries. One key social event on which I base my account is an annual trip arranged by the community organisation named Beach Park Management Society (hereafter referred as BPMS) in August 2011: on it we see residents' generating of commongrounds through an embodied habitus involving shared appreciation and knowledge of songs, dance, food and leisure practices. An anthropology of events of this nature are important to comprehend critical moments that existentially "define our lives, notably love, mutual recognition, respect, dignity, wellbeing" (Jackson 2005: xxix).

Constructing commongrounds for a middle-class multi-ethnic community

According to the Census data 2011, the ethnic composition of the entire Colombo district is 76.7% Sinhala, 10% Sri Lankan Tamil, 1.2% Indian Tamil, 10.5% Sri Lankan Moor (or Muslims), 0.6 % Burger, 0.5% Malay, 0.1% Sri Lankan Chetty and 0.4% others. However these figures change when referred to Colombo metropolitan areas (DS or Divisional Secretariates) such as Colombo, Kolonnawa, Thimbirigasyaya, Dehiwala, and Ratmalana. Here the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil, Muslim, Malay and Burgher population is high compared with more Sinhala Buddhist dominant and newly developing DS areas such as Hanwella, Padukka, Maharagama, Kaduwela, Sri Jayawardanapura Kotte, and Moratuwa

Kesbewa. Colombo has a more ethnic mix compared to the population data for the entire district. Both the Crow Island and De Mel Watta districts that I cover in Colombo come under the Colombo DS jurisdiction area. The 2011 census data suggest that the Colombo DS has more ethnic minorities than ethnic majority Sinhalas (Buddhists): 79,468 Sinhalas, 97, 690 Sri Lankan Tamils, 8,635 Indian Tamils, 126, 345 Sri Lanka Moors (or Muslims), 1,517 Burghers, 2,985 Malays, 546 Sri Lanka Chetty, 185 Bharatha, and 677 others. The religious mix too could be seen following the above ethnic trend: 60, 744 Buddhists, 70, 863 Hindus, 133, 510 Muslims, 42,492 Roman Catholics, 10, 040 other Christrians, and 399 people of other religions. Apart from these official figures on ethnicity and religious background mixed marriages and mixed religious practices also generate inhabitants' ethno-religious behaviour. This suggest the inescapable nature of inter- and intra-ethnic, inter-religious, and inter-cultural interaction in everyday life in Colombo.

Crow Island is identified in Sinhala (S:) as *Kaka Dūwa* or *Kakadūpatha,* and in Tamil (T:) as *kakatheewu*, meaning "island with crows" (the black crows that one often sees in Colombo). A small island village surrounded by a two-kilometre long canal called Vistwyke, it is believed to have been named after a Dutch governor.[10] The canal separates Crow Island from the mainland and links the Keleani Ganga (Kelani River) to the Indian Ocean. Approximately seven hundred housing units on the island (Rajarathnam 2011; Wijeyeweere 2011) accommodate around 3,500 people of a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Reflecting this variety is a *Pansala* (Buddhist temple), the *kovil* or *koil* (Hindu temple), a mosque, a catholic church dedicated to mother Mary, and diverse bible study groups. Although the GN office did not have details on the specific socio-economic details of the population that live on the Crow Island, my estimate is that of the above population nearly 60% are Tamil, 10% Muslim (not including Muslim refugees) and 30% Sinhala.

The Tamil respondents of Crow Island have witnessed the bitterness of the generations-old ethnic war. During 1983 Colombo ethnic riots, the Tamil houses of Crow Island were attacked by thugs from off the island (Sinhala and Muslims as identified by the respondents). Though the riot was considered Sinhalas against Tamils some Muslims too took part with their Sinhala counterparts in looting properties of the rich Tamil families

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10 I could not find any literature to confirm this.

who lived on Crow Island. Some Jaffna Tamils left the place after that. No killings were reported. Atleast three Tamil families shared with me stories how people who knew them for some time saved them from the attacks. One interesting story shared by a Sinhala-Buddhist woman of the Island recounted how her Tamil servant had tackled the thugs in 1983. They kept a Indian Tamil girl from an upcountry plantation area as a domestic servant. When the thugs came to her home and asked whether any Tamils were there the servant showed them the Lord Buddha's statue and afiirmed that she was Sinhala. There is a considerable number of Tamil families in my sample who came from Jaffna to settle in Crow Island during the war and who enjoyed a peaceful social life there. There was also a refugee camp for Muslims who were driven out off the northern area by the LTTE set up in the Island. However the islanders do not maintain contact with them due to class differences.

Prior to the 1980s, low-income families resided in a shanty town on Crow Island. This was demolished by R. Premadasa, then Minister of Housing and Construction, to make way for middle-class housing schemes those initiated by his predecessor Minister Peter Kennaman, which were set up as joint ventures and financed by foreign construction firms. These changes reflect the growth of liberal economic policies. These policies saw the end of state monopoly of the economy practiced by Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). As a result, from then on only rich people could afford to buy houses in the Crow Island complex.

The fact that I was a university teacher living in a middle-class area in Colombo facilitated my acceptance as a researcher amongst middle-class Crow Islanders. Rajalingam aided me when searching for a field site in the Colombo city region. Raja is a Batticaloa Tamil married to a lady of Colombo Tamil descent, principle of a Tamil School in Colombo. He accompanied me to Crow Island, and introduced me to his fellow community members. He arranged a meeting with the then treasurer of the BPMS, Mr Sankaran, a Jaffna Tamil, who moved to Colombo when he commenced work in a government ministry in 1976. Raja and his wife became friends with Mr Sankaran, whom they met during early morning jogging on the beach. Mr Sankaran introduced me to Mr Gilbert, a 58-year-old Burgher married to a Muslim lady, who ran a customs clearance firm and also served as Chairman of the BPMS. They often conversed in English with me, signalling that we were members of the educated middle-class. They offered me

membership of the BPMS, which provided me with easy access to their programmes, meetings, and casual conversations.

I did fieldwork on Crow Island from September 2010 to January 2012, interviewing 30 males and 20 females from different families. Among them, I maintained very close relationship with 16 families: 5 Muslim, 6 Tamil, and 5 Sinhalas. Many informal group/individual discussions were done. I collected 80 essays written on inter-ethnic collaboration in the neighbourhood, from students representing two schools in the area. In addition, I associated closely with two pre-schools operating on the island to gain a sense of inter-ethnic mingling amongst children. I took part in important events, political meetings, carnivals, and various similar events in addition to formal data collection. Moreover I became a daily jogger, mingling with the residents and engaging in participatory data collection from an "insiders" standpoint.

At the same time, I was finding other entries into the lifeworlds of Crow Islanders. I attended a number of events organized by the BPMS, including the monthly *Shramadana* (gift of labour) programmes conducted to clean the beach on a Buddhist holiday known as *poya* day. On top of that I also developed a relationship with the religious leaders of the Buddhist and Hindu temples. I became a teacher at the Sri Peshala Dahama Pāsala[11](S:), a frequent participant in activities at the Aranari School[12](T:), and attended religious functions at the Sri Raja Rajeshwari Amman *kovil*. I also participated in religious functions of the Catholic Church after establishing contact there with the caretaker.

My experience with Crow Islanders revealed how intra- and inter-ethnic groups of people can de-Politicise ethnic identities. Indeed many of this middle-class group of people frequently questioned their politically-stigmatised (ethnic) identities. For example, Ms Paramasiwam, a 70 year-old Hindu-Tamil lady, expressed her bewilderment regarding her ethnic identity to me. A member of an Indian Tamil community, i.e., an intra-ethnic Tamil group, Ms Paramasiwam was born into a middle-class family in Polgahawela, Kurunegala district, which is predominantly a Sinhala area with a small percentage of Indian and Sri Lankan descent Tamils, Moors and Malays. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Indian Tamil community was a creation of the British colonial planters, who did not allow

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11 Buddhist religious school.

12 Hindu religious school.

members of this group to integrate with the Sinhalas or with other Tamil ethnic groups who were already living in the country and identified as Sri Lankan or Ceylonese Tamils.

This particular British policy contributed to the disintegration of the region's intra- and inter-ethnic groups as suggested by Bandarage (2009: 30-31), Bass (2013) and Hollup (1994) and Daniel (1992; 1996). Initially, Ms Paramasiwam found it difficult to ascertain whether she belonged to the Indian Tamil category or not. She said; "I am a Ceylonese." Then she added: "I am neither Colombo Tamil nor Jaffna Tamil: let's say [I am of] Indian origin." Still dissatisfied with her answers; she said:

> Well I cannot say I am Indian too because we have been living here for last five or six generations. My mother's father was born here and my father's father was also of Sri Lankan origin. Then we cannot be called Indian (1.30 p.m. 11 February 2011, interviewed at her home).

She was stuck in the official categorization (labelling) used by the national census and other official documents, even after sixty five years of independence. She preferred to be identified as "Colombo Tamil" (see Thiranagama 2011: 228-256; Wilson 1988: 61-63; 1994), an appellation that would bring social prestige. This was an indication of how painful and unsettling the uncertainty surrounding personal ethnic categories can be for some Sri Lankans. We will see that this experience is transcended in islanders' attempts to establish a middle-class lifestyle, fabricating particular commongrounds.

The discussion in this chapter will be cast in the broader constructivist theoretical frame outlined in the Introduction. However, I would like to pay special attention to a situational manifestation of ethnicity, Bourdieu's middle-class or *petite bourgeoisie* (1984: 354-365) when discussing commongrounds. Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of "taste" suggests that people become acculturated in accordance with their social position. In other words, they develop special likings or dispositions that distinguish middle-class people, a premise that I will employ throughout the chapter. Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" summarises the ways in which taste and dispositions are communicated and embodied (Lupton 1996: 95). Bourdieu helps us study class identities based not only on economic assets as such, but on other forms of capital, i.e., cultural and social capital that are essential in daily practices and sub-cultures.

The "habitus is both the generative principle of objective classifiable judgements and the system of classification…of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-style is constituted" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). The habitus is "necessarily internalised and converted into dispositions", which produce "meaningful practices and meaning giving perceptions…" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). These dispositions shape our social lifeworlds, i.e., with whom we associate, talk, eat, drink, live. Stewart notes the high possibility that people from homogenous backgrounds with similar dispositions mostly interact, unlike those who have unfamiliar "regions of social spaces" (2010: 8).

Bourdieu's discussion of the middle-class focuses on three important aspects: "The role of culture as a set of differentiated 'tastes' and socialisation as a set of consciously differentiating practices; the importance of everyday practices; and the different kinds of capital available to the middle-class" (Donner and de neve 2011: 6). His analysis highlights the everyday practices, and the value and behaviour internalisation that combine to make special classes of people. He recognises that economic, cultural and social capital create middle-class Sri Lankan subjectivities and lifestyles, through which inter-ethnic unity building is possible. The prime case-study in this chapter involves exploration of an annual picnic. Bourdieu's (1991) insights into sports, leisure, social class and social capital will be drawn upon to examine the activities of the BPMS and how they involve the multi-ethnic Crow Islanders. Rather than assuming a kind of universal importance of ethnicity, Sandra Wallman (1988) emphasises that we should consider the context in which ethnic identifications take shape. For the middle-class residents of Crow Island, I suggest that class consciousness often invalidates or decreases the power of ethnicity because it deemphasises the need to identify to which group one belongs or not.

Middle-classness on Crow Island

Lawrence James suggests that the middle-class is not a homogenous group, but "a sprawling, untidy organism in a perpetual state of evolution" (James 2006: 1). However on Crow Island I see broad similarities in inhabitants' social dispositions as Bourdieu (1984)

argues. Bourdieu notes that "such groupings are made up of individuals in a position to be able to accrue sufficient economic capital (money in the bank, property, shares, etc.), cultural capital (educational credentials, legitimate knowledge), and social capital (connections and access to various networks and resources)"(cited in Stewart 2010: 1). The following discussion details the influence of these forms of capital in forming Crow Islanders' distinctive ethnic-blurring habitus.

The infrastructure and physical nature of the buildings on Crow Island reflect the bourgeois nature of the community (see Kemper 2001: 194-222). In many ways, the built environment signals the island's difference from the working class communities across the canal (also see Bremner 2004: 138-139). It does not, however, express ethnic difference. Indeed both Horowitz (1985) and Stokke (1998) note striking class stratifications within Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalas. In such cases, social inequality between dominant and subordinate classes within each language group is larger than the social inequality between the two ethnic groups. Joke Schrijvers (2011: 540) also stresses the importance of class, caste, age groups, regional differences, gender, as well as past experience and personality in a radically different context, the processes of identity-making in refugee camps. My research on Crow Island reveals a special bourgeoisie that fostered a remarkable commongrounds between Sinhalas, Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and others. To sketch the habitus and tastes of this group I will discuss aspects of middle-class lifestyle: familiarity with formal meeting procedures, voting, discussion and constitutions; housing, occupations, status consciousness, and the communication strategies employed.

The houses on Crow Island are joint units built on each side of the island's by-lanes. They are distinctively different from the houses with bigger home gardens in rural settings such as Pānama and Pottuvil. On Crow Island, although people live physically closer than in the villages housing arrangements have supported the creation of a heterogeneous community. In general, houses are fenced with high walls, have gates, and one needs to ring a bell to gain entry when visiting (also see Bremner 2004). The entrances to the houses are marked by notice boards bearing the words; "no parking", "private road", and "beware of dogs", and there are security guards on duty. This kind of gated community constitutes middle-class living areas in Sri Lanka.

The community comprises well-educated people, who communicate in English both at home and outside (Smith 2012: 3). I noted many of them code-switching using English together with "swabasha" (Tamil or Sinhala) during casual conversations at home and with community members, a practice not commonly seen in rural areas. I found that parents who could not speak English opted to give their children education in English. In order to convey their appreciation of English as a language of development and status, some islanders during their daily conversations with neighbours use formal terminologies, e.g., "Mister", "Missis", "Mistress" and "Miss" and professional titles such as "Teacher", "Accountant", "Doctor", "Police Officer", "Army Officer", "Manager", and "Director". This form of title usage may also be read as a way of giving and earning respect among fellow residents, while neutralising ethnic connotations in daily communications. I will use these titles with names during the discussion to give a sense of the tone of their distinctive community life.

Members of the Crow Island community pursue a unique way of life. Most, if not all, appear very busy and organise their time tightly. Among them are businessmen, accountants, doctors, engineers, government servants, local shop owners/ managers, writers, teachers, bankers, and retired top-level officers from the government and private sectors. People share one common feature unites them. They all have acquired cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu 1984: 80-84). Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam, a Hindu-Tamil person of Indian Tamil descent, married to a Buddhist-Sinhala lady stated:

> All the people live here have humble beginnings though they are in a certain socio-economic status now. Therefore, they understand each other well. They all have come from faraway places and now live as Colombo citizens (4.00 p.m. 28 August 2011, interviewed at his home).

Good education, being incomers to the island, running one's own businesses, working in white collar jobs or in the business sector, sharing similar lifestyles and aspirations for a peaceful and organized environment constitute some of the similarities that overrule notions of ethnic difference. Most of the residents of Crow Island have foreign connections, either with family members or with friends in the globalised 'postnational world' (Appadurai 1993: 421-424). Most of the families have their own vehicles: cars, vans and motorbikes. The few who have no vehicle aspire – and save money – to buy one. Perhaps most important of all, they all wish to live peaceful, quiet and prosperous lives.

The Beach Park Management Society (BPMS)

The people of Crow Island often gather to participate in events organised by formal bodies, a feature of social life uncommon in my other research sites. The community consists of three main housing schemes: the government's housing of members of each scheme is organised by the LKN Housing Scheme Society and the Sea Breeze Garden Housing Scheme Society (SBGHSS). In addition, the Islanders are members of other formal associations, e.g., the Crow Island Housing Scheme Welfare Society (CHSWS), the Hindu Society, the Catholic Society, the *Dayaka Sabha*[13] and Mothers' Unions, all societies typically managed by a committee that is elected annually following the constitution adopted by the members. The members take decisions at the Annual General Meetings (AGM) and committee meetings. One person may hold membership of several associations. Given that the beach is a common piece of land that the majority of Crow Islanders uses for jogging, relaxing and playing, the BPMS has become an umbrella organisation for members of all the housing schemes and the other organisations indicated above.

The BPMS generates commongrounds through physical exercise. There is a public demand for body-maintenance exercises, i.e. jogging, walking and relaxing. The BPMS caters for this need through its (bureaucratic) organisational mechanism. Crow Islanders utilise the beach for jogging and relaxing purposes in the mornings, evenings and during weekends. Ordinary peoples in Sri Lanka often consider this a middle- or upper- class activity. Crow Islanders referred to it as the "best way of maintaining health". Those who missed their exercise activities lamented: "I feel something uncomfortable if I miss jogging even for a day".

The way islanders dress also demonstrates their middle-classness (see Bourdieu 1984: 200-201). When people go jogging, or for a casual run or walk in the park, they wear sports jogging shoes, sports shorts or pants, light-coloured cotton T-shirts and hats. Whenever the islanders want to relax, they go to the beach, sit on the bench, and find

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13 *Dayaka Sabha*: English translation; Buddhists' lay patron society, a voluntary organization comprising of a group of contributors, who operate under the leadership of the chief monk of the Buddhist temples to take decisions on temple management, development, and to gain support for various religious activities.

aesthetic enjoyment in the light breeze and the light, in the views of religious places and the harbour, in perspectives on the horizon or the setting sun. I did not observe this practice in my other three research locations.

The establishment of the BPMS towards the end of 2005 was in response to broader social requirements, based on an already extant common understanding of the needs of the Crow Island beach users. The tsunami that hit Crow Island on 26 December 2004 caused a lot of damage, but fortunately there were no casualties. After the tsunami, the beach was cleaned and the government began to develop it as a park in line with the "Mahinda Chinthanaya", the election manifesto of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This development was undertaken by the Coastal Conservation Department (CCD), which was then a subsidiary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development (MFARD). Today, the CCD comes under the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development (MDUD), headed by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the brother of the President Rajapaksa. The MDUD began to search for ways and means to incorporate community participation in maintaining and protecting the beach once it was developed.

Two Buddhists-Sinhala men were instrumental in facilitating this participation: (a) Mr Saman Sapukotanage, the Assistant Director of the CCD; and (b) Mr Seneviratne, the Assistant Secretary of MFARD. They both came to Crow Island to work and lived in the Minister quarters. Subsequently, they became permanent residents after they were given home ownership as official residents. They both were advisory committee member of the BPMS. Mr Seneviratne had earned high respect among the Islanders. He hails from a Buddhist-Sinhala family, came to Colombo from the South (S: *Dakune minissu*), a Sinhala majority area often identified by its patriotic feeling. He spoke little Tamil, but maintained a good relationship with both Tamils and Muslims on the Island. They mobilised the already extant informal gatherings of dwellers. The initial meeting of the BPMS was attended by people of Crow Island and by representatives of fourteen relevant government institutions. Office bearers were selected and a constitution was adopted during the meeting.

There are approximately 140 members of the society, the majority being Tamil. Both members and non-members[14] participate in events organised by the society. Similar to the other organizations, the BPMS work according to a constitution, decisions are taken at AGMs and Committee Meetings. This symbolises a rational base agreeable to many dwellers for their interactions, reducing risks of collaborations stemming from ethnic, religious, family mobilisation. The AGMs were conducted in English. Members from any of the ethnic groups were able to hold any position provided that they could do the job. For example, when I first visited Crow Island in 2010, the president was Mr Gilbert, a Christian-Burgher while Mr Kirubaharan became president in 2011. Mr Kirubaharan is a Hindu-Tamil man of Indian descent married to a Hindu-Tamil lady of Jaffna Tamil descent, now living as Colombo Tamils, that itself a fine indication of social prestige focused ethnic identity change or modifications.

The objectives of the association were stated clearly in the first Annual Report of 2006/ 2007: improvement of the beauty of the beach, obtaining maximum support from the users for the development and management of the beach, improvement of the physical and mental health of the beach users, enhancement of the inter-personal relationships and cooperation among the daily beach users, making the beach an harmonious and safe place for everyone (including the hundreds of outside visitors from other areas of Colombo) by establishing a police post, the active involvement of members of the BPMS, generating and coordinating capital resources, and guiding and facilitating the young to participating in the activities of beach park management. In other words, in beach management they had a common agenda in which all could participate.

The beach as commonground

In this section I will discuss the beach as it is managed by the BPMS to demonstrate how the "taste" of the middle-class islanders is reflected and invested in a space created to facilitate better health, aesthetic or leisure activities, and relaxation. I understand the strip of beach not just as physical space but as a constructed social space by middle-class Crow Islanders.

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14 The participation of non-members varies according to the event. However, most of them belong to the joggers who use the beach daily (approximately 100-150)

The beach is essentially a space for exercise; most people walk or jog together on the beach from 4.00 or 4.30 a.m. to 8.30 - 9.00 a.m. each morning. In addition there is another team of area residents who jog in the evenening as well. Both are "highly rational and rationalised activities" (Bourdieu 1991: 371). Different social classes have different expectations when they do bodily exercise (Bourdieu 1991: 368). Crow Islanders desired better body shape, beauty, better health, mental equilibrium and stress release. Most of the members I met at the beach claimed a history of having exercised there for more than ten years: some had been using the beach for more than twenty years. This multi-ethnic Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim people (both male and female) greet each other, usually in English: "Good Morning, Good evening, how are you?" Mostly they jog in groups, often of a multi-ethnic and religious mix, wherein a lot of interaction takes place. So these periods of time are not limited to physical exercise: they are also used to meet friends, share family details, receive suggestions from colleagues vis-a-vis personal crisis situations, discuss politics, their businesses, the country's economy and one thousand and one other issues.

Before the BPMS took control of the beach in 2005, it was considered a "danger zone" for middle-class Crow Islanders. The beach was notorious for various criminal activities, robbery and rape for example. Thus it was not a suitable place for families to visit (Tissera 2005). A gang rape and the killing of Indian beauty queen Rita John Manoharan on this beach on 11 October 1998 caught the attention of the authorities, who argued that the criminals should receive capital punishment (which is no longer enforced in Sri Lanka) (De Silva 1998; Sameer 2009). After supporting this judgement almost unanimously, the people of Crow Island cleaned the beach and attempts were made to remake it as a (middle-class) people friendly place. However, with the escalation of the war between the LTTE and the government armed forces, Colombo became vulnerable to LTTE bomb explosions and air attack by light aircraft. Subsequently, a naval base was established close to where the mouth of the Kelani Ganga meets the sea in a bid to protect Colombo including its harbour and other important places. Residents' entry to the beach was restricted during the implementation of these new security measurements.

However, key figures of the BPMS were able to quell the fear of Tamil residents on the island (see Jeganathan 2002; Thiranagama 2011: 246), in particular regarding members of the security forces. They were able to establish a good understanding between the two

groups. After the war ended, the Navy presence was withdrawn from the beach. Some of the residents expressed concern at this: they feared gangsters and robbers and the possibility that the beach might become a haven for criminals, illustrating the nexus between 'security' and 'development' discussed by (Orjuela 2010). The BPMS intervened, establishing a police post in their office, ensuring adequate security for people visiting and utilising the beach. The officers of the BPMS continue to work closely with the police officers.

The beach is a commonground for people: men-women, young, old, lovers, married, divorced, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and finally Sinhalas and Tamils. The beach stretches from the Modara *kovil* to the Kelani Ganga (River) where the naval unit is stationed. Next to the beach the Modara *kovil* is a complex of Hindu temples dedicated to various Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Both Sinhala and Tamil devotees visit this *kovil*. Buddhist-Sinhalas go there to seek the assistance of Goddess Kāḷī Amma to punish offenders in a society wherein law and order is seen to deteriorate (see Kapferer 1997: 245). When Sinhala youth were killed, or disappeared during the state sponsored counter anti-riot movements in the period of 1988-1989, their mothers visited this temple in search of solace (see De Mel 2001: 259). Now Tamil parents whose children encountered the same fate during the war do the same. Those who come to the beach to jog or relax worship at the *kovil* which they access from the beach.

The BPMS put considerable effort into organizing the beach facilities for the flocks of people from both the middle and lower classes. Two children's parks fenced with barbed wire attract families to the beach. There are also several other facilities including benches for people to relax upon, an open stage used for various functions, lampposts for lighting, garbage bins (though rarely used), a toilet block, mobile ice-cream shops and other short-eat sellers of heterogeneous backgrounds, all of whom come to do business. Some young people bring horses and carts for taking people on tours of the beach. Along with thousands of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people I too went to the beach to relax during weekends. Families enjoyed sitting on the grass, talking and playing with their children in the evenings. Some went swimming: young people played cricket. Peoples of all ethnic backgrounds gravitate towards this distant place both not to be disturbed by others yet to feel secure and comfortable on a commonground.

Picnicking together and the making of taste

One morning, around the beginning of July 2011, the people who came for jogging at the beach saw a notice, "inviting all to a picnic", written in English, on the notice board of the BPMS. The use of English during the activities of BPMS is a symbolic indication of the boundaries of the middle-class (see Guneratne 2011a; Karunaratne 2009), and their invitation to people of the same "taste" (who can understand the message). The notice was printed on BPMS letterhead, featured the logo of the BPMS in Sinhala, Tamil, then English, the way that languages are presented on public document. Below the main message was a picture of the sun setting and a few bushes indicating the beach, making it official. The notice was fixed to the wall of the office, facing the walking track and the main entrance of the beach. At the time, I was exercising with Alfred, a Christian-Tamil man from an Indian Tamil community (but now represent Colombo Tamil group), a resident of Crow Island.

This was the first official trip organized by the BPMS that invited the public to accompany members. The 'public' were Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim men and women from middle-class backgrounds, who worked in government departments and ministries, engaged in various businesses including jewellery shops in sea street Pettah (Colombo 11), pawn shops, wholesale dealers in stationery, steel shop owners, retirees from top government jobs.

From the early days onwards the BPMS has conducted programmes such as the Tsunami commemoration, the monthly *shramadana* (S: gift of labour) programme which involved cleaning the beach, the Sinhala and Hindu New Year Festival (see Müller 1995: 258-259), conducting *dansala* (S: and T: alms house) (see Müller 1995: 89) during *poson*, a Buddhist festival, developing infrastructure for beach users including children, social services such as medical clinics and dengue prevention programmes, annual get-togethers, and supporting members in need. Moreover, the BPMS has also contributed to the Hindus' and Christians' religious programmes and organised extra leisure activities at the beach.

On this occasion, the holiday makers decided to go to Madu Ganga, an estuary located south of the city, a popular destination for both local and foreign tourists. Though

the Madu Ganga estuary is located in Galle district, an area often referred to as a breeding ground of Sinhala chauvinism and racism (Hollup 1992; Imtiyaz 2010), this did not seem to concern Muslim or Tamil participants.

I interpret the location and the picnic in line with Bourdieu's (1984; 1987) discussion of habitus: in the organization of holidays groups select specific methods to differentiate themselves from others. This middle-class group of people spend time in hotels and private parties. Thus they wanted listen to music, taste good food, enjoy the environment, swim, have a light drink, and relax with family members leaving the 'hustle and bustle' of everyday life behind. The picnic was a "pleasure trip" combined with "aesthetic activities" appreciated by a "cultivated bourgeoisie" (Bourdieu 1984: 490). As we will see in chapters to come, we can compare all this with Pānama villagers' very different pilgrimage to religious places.

Approximately 40 persons including members and affiliates of members' families took part. Each participant was required to pay 700 rupees (less than six Australian dollars by then) for the trip. In order to reduce the fee, Mr Seneviratne acquired a passenger transport coach from his office free-of-charge; but the organizers had to pay for the fuel, the driver and the helper. Madu Ganga Visitors Centre (VC) was also donated free of charge with the help of another member, Mr Saman Sapukotanage. Thus the organisers only had to spend money for food and drink. These arrangements demonstrated their capabilities and contacts.

Our bus stopped in the town of Aluthgama, where Sinhala and Muslim peoples live side by side, to buy liquor, soft drinks and some other items. The Sinhala and Tamil women of our team sought the permission from a Sinhala house owner to use his toilet. His wife helped our team, engaging in friendly chat with them. Access was free of charge: it is considered courteous to help when others are in crisis situation (particularly as there was no public toilet in that town). Of course, the house owners first check whether the visitors are in fact thieves; but no other ethno-racial features would come under scrutiny.

On arrival at the destination the team decided to take a boat tour around the estuary with friends from all inter- and intra-ethnic groups. The boats were rowed and organised by ethnic Sinhalas. I noticed that no one feared the boatmen: perhaps we all were

concentrating on a common purpose of not risking our lives through quarrelling. Arguing over seating positions to get a better view of the estuary people may have caused people to lose balance and fall overboard.

We travelled in four boats, people cracking jokes with friends in other boats. Our boat had four rows of seats: members with intra- and inter- ethnic backgrounds sat together to balance their weight, to facilitate the safe control of the boat. I sat between Mr Godwin, a catholic-Tamil man of Indian Tamil descent married to Colombo Tamil wife and Mr Rukman, a Buddhist-Sinhala person. Mr Godwin was fluent in both Sinhala and English: his mother tongue was Tamil. I often met him during morning jogging sessions at the beach. He is also a member of the SBGHSS and manages a furniture shop. Mr Rukman, who manages two garment shops, jogs every morning before going to the shop: he also goes to the beach on weekends with his children. Mr Nadan and one of his Tamil friends, who are Hindu-Tamils of Jaffna Tamil descent (or Sri Lankan Tamils), sat on the front seat. They own and operate a pawn shop in Mattakkuliya. They are Hindu-Tamils of the age of around 35.

In the next seat sat Mr Mohommed, a retired Muslim man, who had occupied executive positions in several government offices and in the private sector. He was sitting in between Mr Wasantha's wife, a Christian-Sinhala lady and Mr Saman Sapukotanage; Mr Wasantha, a Buddhist-Sinhala man who is a car dealer and runs a customs clearing firm, shared the seat with his daughter, son and Mr Muttu, a Hindu-Tamil man of Jaffna Tamil descent who had retired from an executive position with government bank and had several properties in Colombo and Jaffna. Mr Nadan and his friend discussed with Mr Rukman the possibility of using this site for filmmaking. Members of our team on the boat were excited to see the local techniques of prawn and fish catching. Group members communicated in Tamil and Sinhala, and Mr Wasantha took photographs of all of the members in the boat. Mr Muttu, Mr Mohommed and Mr Saman Sapukotanage chattered about the beauty of the area. Mr Godwin and Mr Nadan talked to the boat owner in Sinhala.

Mr Rukman said: "there... see an Āta is going on the bridge", indicating a three-wheeler taxi travelling to Madu Ganga village. The term *āta*, used to refer to three-wheelers (auto rickshaws) in Colombo, was Tamil. Nowadays Sinhalas use it as part of the

Colombo vocabulary. The discussion I had with the teachers of schools in Colombo, along with essays I read on the theme of inter-ethnic relationships among school children I had collected from Catholic and Buddhist schools close to Crow Island, confirmed this common language usage, which challenged "unmixed", "clean", "pure" Sinhala or Tamil languages, often claimed to be a marker of ethno-political boundaries. Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students who studied in these classes used a unique form of "Sinhala" language, different from the "Sinhala" spoken in other parts of the country. They spoke quickly, used their hands during discussions, and had a special pronunciation, indicating the emergence of "Colombo Sinhala", "Colombo Tamil" sublanguages. Members of this heterogeneous community understand each other's languages well, the result of contact between members of different ethnic groups.

The group visited Kothduwa Purana Rajamaha Viharaya, a Buddhist temple located on Kothduwa isle in the Madu Ganga estuary. Members of our team were multi-religious: Christian, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims. We visited the statue of Lord Buddha, the *Bo* tree, and also received the tying of the *pirith nool* (S: sacred thread) from the head priest of the temple. Buddhists in Sri Lanka consider the *pirith nool* a sacred object. A cotton thread is passed among the devotees, who listen while the Buddhist priests chant *pirith* (S: sacred stanzas) in homes or temples, at times for one whole day or for several days. It is said to have multiple powers including curative powers and the power to banish evil spirits. No one refused to visit: nor did any of our team members behave in a *manner* warranting a warning or rebuke from the temple authorities, unlike a team of foreign tourists who attempted to take a photo, tarnishing the image of the temple. In brief, members of our group behaved according to a *shared sensibility* informing gestures and behaviour: many were eager to have a casual chat with the chief incumbent (S: *hamuduruvo,* a member of Buddhist monk) about the temple, visitors, the area and other topics of interest.

How could these Tamil and Muslim people relax in the temple so confidently without feeling "strangers", talking to the Buddhist monks (members of the *Sanga*) who are often projected as the symbol of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism keenly contributing to Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict? As Tambiah (1992) observed in his book titled *Buddhism Betrayed?: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*, their activities have inflamed ethnic hatred in Sri Lanka. Not surprisingly there were massive protests against Tambiah's work. Protestors demanded the removal of the cover page that displayed a popular

Buddhist monk, the venerable Madoluvave Sobhita. The University of Chicago Press opted to replace it with a more neutral image (Deegalla 2004: 83; Perera 1998).

Despite this nationalization of religion, the picnic outing reveals how the embodied practices or habitus of individuals' connections with ethno-religious "others" shape a commongrounds. To further explore this commongrounds let me discuss the life story of Ms Paramasiwam, a Hindu-Tamil who is familiar with/followed or became a participant in Buddhist traditions. There were many reasons for this: an inheritance from parents, her siblings influence, her life experience, the socialised socio-cultural environment. In another way, living in close association with other religions fosters a leakage of religious habitus: their "system of *dispositions*, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or system of *long-lasting* (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (originally emphasis Bourdieu 2005: 43).

According to Ms Paramasiwam, a Buddhist-Sinhala Senanayake family adopted her father, Archinan. Mr Senanayake served as *Arachchi* (village headman) of their village in Polgahawela. After the sudden death of his parents when he was a child, Archinan opted to live with this Sinhala family rather than live with his own uncle due to the close relationship that endured between the two families. He received a good education in a *Pirivena*, a traditional Buddhist teaching school. After his upbringing among Sinhalas, he married Ms Paramasiwam's mother after the demise of his first wife, an Indian Tamil lady from Polgahawela. He already had two sons and one daughter from the first marriage. When Archinan died his funeral was conducted according to the Buddhist-Sinhala traditions that he loved and had learned when growing up among Buddhist-Sinhala people.

Ms Paramasiwam's father had made arrangements to provide her elder brother Pirabuthewan with a Buddhist-Sinhala education in a *Pirivena*, in addition to his English medium formal education at St Benedict's, the Catholic college in Polgahawela. Later, he became an executive officer of the Bank of Ceylon (BOC), which sent him to London for five years higher education. Ms Paramasiwam studied up to JSC (Junior School Certificate) at St Benedict's College, a Catholic School. She gained her SSC (Secondary School Certificate) education from a Christian College in Kopai, Jaffna, where she also made many friends, between two intra-ethnic groups, Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil.

Her story explains why she performed Buddhist rituals in her personal life. Although Ms Paramasiwam is a Hindu-Tamil lady she engaged in *dāne* (S: alms giving), emulating the Buddhist-Sinhala practice, with 12 Buddhist monks at their previous house in Polgahawela, which now own by a Buddhist-Sinhala lady who was her one time student. Ms Paramasiwam had got a lot of enjoyment during the alms giving as she met her old friends in the village. In Polgahawela Ms Paramasiwam had Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim friends. Many of whom were drawn among neighbouring families she gave English tuition before she settled in Colombo permanently. Even today the Sinhala people address her using kinship terminologies: *akke* (S: elder sister) and *nangiye* (S: younger sister); and they refer to her brothers *malliye* (S: younger brother) and *aiye* (S: elder brother). This witnesses the closeness among ethnic groups in Polgahawela. She recalled her pleasant memories of the Buddhist-Sinhala-Buddhist majority:

> I never experienced any racial feeling during my childhood. Even now the villagers have a very good relationship with us (4.00 p.m. 11 February 2011, Interviewed at her home).

This glimpse of the religious practices of this group on Crow Island helped to explain commongrounds established in the sphere of bourgeois or middle-class religion. Their religious participation reflected shared "tastes" or "dispositions" in religious affairs. Extending support to the activities of another religion was not due to a passion for a particular religious ideology but was felt to be a way of exhibiting goodwill or friendship to one's fellow islanders who practiced different religions.

Crow Island houses a Buddhist temple, two Hindu temples customarily identified as *kovil* or *koil*, a church, a mosque (mainly used by the Muslims in the refugee camp) and many other religious sites. Every month some form of festival is held in this area. The majority Sinhalas are Buddhist and the Tamils are Hindus. Although most of the Sinhalas (Buddhists) are predominantly followers of the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, there is no tradition of identifying them as Sinhala-Hindus or Tamil-Buddhists. In addition, both Sinhalas and Tamils participate in Christian rituals, demonstrating a fascinating bond between the members of the ethnic groups.

When Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians on Crow Island stage religious functions, they often receive financial and material contributions from well-wishers of other religious

and ethnic groups. One morning I witnessed Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim members of the BPMS joining hands to raise money among the joggers for the *Katina pinkama* of the Buddhist temple in 2011. The main arch constructed at the entrance of the Buddhist temple was built by a Hindu-Tamil devotee who live in the area, a fact publicly exhibited on a carved stone fixed to the arch.

I detail below three types of processions, parts of religious festivals I witnessed: *Katina Pinkama* of the temple; annual *ther* festival of Sri Raja Rajeshwari Ambal *kovil* (T: *Warushabisheka*-annual festival); and the arrival of Mother Mary's statue at St. Mary's Church on Crow Islands. This statue came to Sri Lanka as a part of a world tour. The *Katina Pinkama* is conducted at the end of *Was Kālaya*, the three months rainy season during which the monks stay in the temples to engage in religious work. As part of *Katina pinkama* a procession called *Katina Perehera* was arranged to bring *Katina Cheewaraya* (a robe made out of thick cloth to be worn by a Buddhist monk) to the temple (also see Wickremeratne 2006: 84-85). During the annual festival of Sri Raja Rajeshwari Ambal *kovil*, Hindus transport the Goddess Pattini's statue around Crow Island on a chariot (T: *ther*) (see Ramachandran 2000). The Christians brought International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Mother Mary, carried on a special chariot and transported it from St Mary's church in Mattakkuliya to Mother Mary's Church on Crow Island (also see Stirrat 1992: 69-70). In general, these processions took place along the main roads of the island; the *perehera* (S:) at night, *ther* (T:) in the morning while mother Mary's statue paraded in the evening. These festivals take place during different times of the year.

Each procession has unique features that make the event more attractive. The *Perehera* included approximately 20 items; e.g., the *Kāvadi* dance and *nagasalam* band were from Hindu-Tamil cultural traditions, the *nagasalam* (Tamil) band (Guruge 2003: 285), and the *Kāvadi* dance, a traditional Saiva Hindu practice honouring the God Skanda or Murugan (*Kataragama deviyo* in Sinhala) (see Kapferer 2003: 162). It is mainly performed using hired *kāvadi*, "a peacock arch of the God" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 165). When the *kāvadi* dance is combined with a *nagasalam* band it is the only time when men and women both engage in a communal dancing, "which became very popular after 1960" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 193). These items were also seen during the *ther*. The uniqueness or ownership of the various religio-cultural items is not questioned by anyone: the viewers simply enjoy them as part of a general spiritual environment. Some of

the items in the *Katina* procession, such as the *patturu gaseema* (S:), the *nagasalam* band, the fire-jugglers (S: *gini bola sellam*), and the *kāvadi* dance are of interest to all, so much so that at some points I saw Muslim and Tamil boys dancing with Sinhala dancers who were also participating in the procession.

Some items were presented by ethno-religious "others". The youngest priest told me that both Sinhala and Tamil boys participated in the *pathuru kandayama* (S: a team of Sinhala folk-dancers). Two Tamil boys studying at a Sinhala school, who went to pay homage to the head priest one morning, asked if their team could participate in the procession. The priest duly accommodated them. Here I particularly want to mention Mr Kirubaharan, a victim of 1983 July riots, who sought temporary refuge in India (see Daniel 2000: 338-363; Tambiah 1996: 94-100 and 161-167) but later returned to Sri Lanka and now lives on Crow Island. He continuously serves the community. He has decorated the chariot, a canter lorry that takes the Lord Buddha's statue and a casket (S: *karanduwa*) containing the remains of past priests (S: *dāthu*). He uses his own bulbs and power generator to decorate the chariot. Apart from this contribution in 2010 Mr Kirubaharan masked himself as a *kolam*[15](S:) dance presenter (donning the attire of a devil with a mask covering his face) along with another Sinhala man. His friends and relatives were delighted by his performance.

These three processions involve many people of the area: events are not limited to particular ethno-religious groups but are open to others. People gather on either side of the road to watch the processions go by, to see the items presented, to seek the blessings of the Gods and to share sentiments with fellow neighbours. During these processions, people decorate their houses with coloured bulbs and flags. Irrespective of ethno-religious backgrounds they contribute *panduru* (S: money), which is collected and put in a till by the organisers during *perehera*. There is a belief among many Sri Lankan people that putting money into a till is an act of collecting merits. One receives the blessing of God, helpful in getting rebirth in a good place after death. It would also ensure that the giver would not go to hell, a fate all hope to avoid. The Catholic priests who rode on the chariot, on either side of Mother Mary's statue, held red sashes, which were connected to the stage upon which Mother Mary's statue was placed. They blessed the people who queued on either side of

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15 Traditional Sinhala dance, a form of comedy enacted by men.

the road, placing those sashes on their heads or foreheads. During the *ther*, the Hindu priest rode on a chariot pulled by Hindu men and women using two ropes. They accepted the *pūja* (offerings) and offered it back to the devotees with the blessings of God, with *vibuthi* (T:) (white ash which worn stripes across the forehead), flowers, and blessed fruits.

In order to further illustrate the shared and syncretic religious practices that need the support of all of the Gods and Goddesses and cosmic powers to maintain people's current (middle-class) position, let me briefly recount a few experiences of multi-ethno-religious participation in these events. Mr Bradman Perera, a Buddhist-Sinhala person who lived close to Mother Mary's church, and next to a Christian-Tamil family, offered *pūja* to the Goddess Amman during *ther*. His wife and all of his family members participated in the event. I saw some of his Hindu-Tamil friends, who had been instrumental in organizing *ther*, talking to him in fluent Sinhala. Mr Prasanna, a Buddhist-Sinhala, and his Catholic-Sinhala wife did *pūja* (offering) in front of his house. I noticed that he was the first person to fly a Buddhist flag during Buddhist festivals. He offered a garland made of white flowers to Mother Marry while his wife offered *suwanda dum* (incense *pūja*).

Ms Manel, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, who works as a teacher in a Christian School in the area, offered soft drinks to those who participated in Mother Mary's procession. Approximately 200 people accepted drinks from her. She kept a mini statue of Mother Mary decorated with serial bulb lights outside her house. I observed Mr Savarimuttu, whose very devout Hindu-Tamil family lives next to the Buddhist temple, offer *pūja* to Mother Mary's statue in front of his house, just as he offered *pūja* for *ther*. I noted his wife and his daughter, who was around 20 years of age, worshipping the statue, placing both hands together. They participate in almost all of the religious functions conducted at the *kovil* on Crow Island. His daughter was working as a teacher at *Aranari School* (T: a Hindu religious school held at a Hindu temple).

Sharing taste on Cinnamon Island

Having discussed the apparent unity of the island's middle-class in the religious field, in this section I highlight common concerns of the inhabitants regarding various important aspects of everyday life, e.g., health, food recipes, food preferences, ideas about value of

money, customer satisfaction, sympathetic feeling towards the worthy lower-class, mutual understanding among middle-class peoples, bilingual capacity for meaningful communication, common attire, joking, and concern over each other's needs. All of these are key aspects of commongrounds and also shape the shared distinctiveness of multi-ethnic middle-class people.

The team visited another islet of around 10-15 acres, on which was a cinnamon garden, home to a cinnamon peeler. The mud house conveyed a rustic image of the life of an ordinary villager to the middle-class Crow Islanders. Traditionally cinnamon peelers, who belong to the *Salāgama* caste, mostly live in the Balapitiya, Ratgama, Galle and Boossa area. The *Salāgama*s represent a caste of pre-colonial Indian migrants who were incorporated into the Sri Lankan community (Horowitz 1975: 117; Tambiah 1986: 8-9). They believe that they are descendants of the *Saligrama* Brahmins of Kerala, who were forced to become cinnamon peelers by the King of Kotte in 1406. Most of the Members of Parliament (MPs) elected from this area are of low *Salāgama* caste (Jiggins 1979).

The team members spent a lot of time at the cinnamon peeler's house, watching demonstrations of cinnamon peeling, cracking jokes, relaxing in the shade of the cinnamon bushes, and sitting seating on wooden benches in the courtyard. Their enjoyment was indicative of a commonality of taste shared by all. The Hindu-Tamils, Christian-Tamils, Buddhist-Sinhalas, Burghers and Muslims enjoyed many common practices. For example, they all use cinnamon, a very expensive spice, in their everyday cooking, in cakes, puddings, and other foods. They all loved its smell and taste. The team engaged in long discussions about how the old man peeled cinnamon.

For an hour they questioned the cinnamon peeler, seated on wooden benches in the courtyard. People sat next to their friends. As regards class they exhibited a great deal of respect for each other. Ms Dewanayaki, a Hindu-Tamil lady of Jaffna Tamil origin, asked (in Sinhala) about the uses of cinnamon other than for cooking. She holds a high position in a newspaper where I conducted our interview, and was one of the persons I met every day when jogging on the beach. Ms Dewanayaki undertook the trip alone, perhaps showing the independence of new middle-class women in South Asia (Radhakrishnan 2010). I often saw her driving her new Indian made Maruti Suzuki Alto car to the office like many other middle-class working women of Colombo. Ms Gilbert, an executive officer at a private

hospital in Colombo, observed that cinnamon is good for diabetics as it controls their sugar levels. The Gilbert family spoke mainly in English: their fellow travellers used English to communicate with them. However, they could communicate in Sinhala and Tamil as well. The above revelation of Ms Gilbert was of considerable interest as many of the travellers suffered from diabetes.

Most of the Tamil members spoke Sinhala and English fluently, reflecting the trilingual space of Colombo i.e., Sinhala, Tamil, English. They spoke in Tamil among themselves and asked questions to the cinnamon peeler when discussing the cinnamon making process and its various usages. The spoken languages, and *pottu*, the red dot on some of the ladies' foreheads which indicated ethnic and religious identity, seemed of little concern to locals as well, the boat service providers, the cinnamon peeler, the bus driver and his assistant, the helpers or staff members of the Madu Ganga Visitors Centre. The Hindu-Tamil women made no attempt to remove the *pottu* as (Schrijvers 2011: 526-528) indicated in her study. There was no difference between the Sinhala and Tamil males as far as dress was concerned. But their middle-class attire made them conspicuous. The boat service provider, a 25-30 years old Buddhist-Sinhala bought owner told us; "we can earn a living if we get tourists like your team. Therefore we really help them and also try to safeguard the environment". In this context it was not ethnicity that mattered but money.

My middle-class picnicker teammates felt sympathetic towards the poor cinnamon peeler (lower-class), surreptitiously observing his lifestyle, mud house, basic furniture, dress, kitchen, and children's drawings pasted on the wattle wall. This feeling pushed them to buy some of his products despite remarking amongst themselves about the price. Mr Gilbert bought two bundles of cinnamon sticks: he paid two hundred rupees for each bundle as a mark of respect for the cinnamon peeler. Ms Deepika Sundaralingam also bought two bundles: her husband paid the peeler. Mr Govindan, a 60 year old Hindu-Tamil businessman, also bought two small bottles of cinnamon oil saying: "this is very good stuff". Mr Dushyanthan also bought oil. It was not his ethnicity but his poverty that pushed multi-ethnic team members to contribute to the cinnamon peeler's business. I noted many instances when islanders helped destitute people from 'rival' ethno-political backgrounds.

Picnickers compared the price of cinnamon sold there with that at the supermarkets where they do everyday shopping, highlighting the similarities in their consumer pattern.

Ms Gilbert, speaking in English so that cinnamon peeler could not understand, reminded Mr Saman Sapukotanage that he could buy 100g of cinnamon from a retail shop "sixty rupees cheaper than here". A middle-class notion of gender relations, including the autonomy of women, prevailed when they took photographs. Mr Wasantha asked Mr Kirubaharan to take a photograph of him with Ms Paramasiwam and Ms Dewanayaki on one side and Ms Deepika Sundaralingama and Ms Menaka, Mr Kirubaharan's wife, a Hindu-Tamil lady of Jaffna descent on the other. Ms Menaka also holds an executive position in a government department. Mr Wasantha's wife and two children stood observing, showing no, jealousy or anger against her husband or the other women.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Politics and politicians as a *curse* are subjects about which middle-class Crow Islanders agree. Almost all of them emphasised that the country's crises were 'political', a strategy devised by crafty politicians to divide people. Thus the Islanders behaved very circumspectly so as not to jeopardise the extant collaborations among the multi-ethnic community. At the cinnamon peeler's house Mr Wasantha said that "the Dutch came to Sri Lanka to get these treasures." Although there was silent approval, no comments were made. His comment reminded me of his remarks regarding the strategies adopted by the BPMS to work together with members from multi-ethnic backgrounds. They never provoked controversy by discussing ethno-political issues during casual conversation, eschewing any possibility of upsetting their friends. According to Mr Wasantha, during the war some of his Tamil associates were supportive of the activities of the LTTE. Attacks against the Sri Lankan air force, army or other bases gave rise to delight. But residents did not make it an issue. They agreed to avoid talking about war and politics during BPMS activities, reinforcing Spencer (1990b; 1990c; 2007), Brow (1990b) Nissan and Stirrat's (1990) claim that 'politics' were a determinant factor of Sinhala-Tamil divisions, and that politics lay at the roots of divisive nationalism.

The uniqueness of the Crow Islanders was that they did not need to fall in behind politicians (like the people of De Mel Watta, below). With their extensive array of networks, they were capable of getting things done in other ways. Politicians, in return, appeared to respect the people of Crow Island. I attended a meeting where a candidate of the ruling party, who was contesting the Mayor's position in Colombo, came to meet

members of BPMS. However the contestant's local organiser cancelled the meeting as he did not attract the required number of participants. By contrast in De Mel Watta locals were given bags of essential foodstuffs or money to attend such events, a practice not observed on Crow Island. If people were to be bribed, then the politicians would have to too much to buy middle-class votes. Mr Wasantha further elaborated the ground rules of the BPMS:

> Have you seen that we are arguing or quarrelling? That never happens. You know when I introduce someone we really give them the due respect. We never undermine anyone. We introduce a person with reference to his positions but not according to ethnicity or religion. I call even the Tamil person, Sankaran[16] as Sankaran uncle, I call Sahayanesan [17] as *bāndāgarika mahattaya* (S: Mr Treasurer), we called Mohommed[18] as *upalekam thuma* (S: Mr Assistant Secretary), or else Mohommed *mahattaya* (Mister or sir). We really made sure to give due respect to the persons in the association (11.00 a.m. 10 December 2011, Interviewed at the beach after *Shramadana*).

Here a conscious shared ethos existed among the members BPMS: mutual respect for each other, listening, discussion, common interests, regular interaction, lack of a ethnic chauvinist sensibility and a commitment to forgetting certain events.

Other shared practices of enjoyment

Similarly there existed shared practices of eating and drinking that were distinct to a multi-ethnic middle-class consciousness: "...the taste for rare...food points to a traditional cousin, rich in expensive and rare products..." (Bourdieu 1984: 185). Their food habits transgressed ethnic boundaries (see Thiranagama 2011: 229).

By the time we reached the Visitor's Centre in the morning, we were all hungry. We sat down to a "Sinhala breakfast" (S: *Sinhala kēma wēla*) set out in the lobby area located on the ground floor. All of us admired the rareness and freshness of the dishes: manioc, string hopers, *pol sambol*, fish *kari* (S: and T: curry), *kiri hodi* (S: coconut milk curry), boiled yams, *kiri bath* (S: milk rice), *lunumiris* and *parippu hodi* (S: dhal curry). The same

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16 A Hindu-Tamil of Jaffna descent, he had retired from a high position on a government board

17 A Hindu-Tamil with Indian descent, he has been serving as an auditor in a private firm in Colombo.

18 A Muslim man, who had retired from an executive positions in several government offices and in the private sector.

culinary delights were enjoyed by islanders of different intra- and inter-ethnic and other identities. We tasted food that was not only made using rare varieties, but was expensive in the markets in Colombo. In addition, our eating etiquette was shared: the use of right hands to eat food, washing hands before and after eating, tasting dessert, respect for food (take only what you can eat to the plate) were common practices among all. Moreover, the plates we used were not reserved for different ethnic groups as is often the case in cross-caste relations.

In general, water for bathing, drinking, and washing demarcates caste boundaries in South Asia and Sri Lanka (see McGilvray 2011a; Silva, et al. 2009; Srinivas 1976: 167). In cities caste/class is marked by the use of common taps and public bathrooms for poor people, especially in slum and shanty areas (see Bremner 2004: 138; Markus 1993: 153). I still remember how my grandfather (Sinhala) punished me for bathing in the lower section of the stream once he found out a low-caste Tamil caste (S:) *Sakkili*, (T:) *Sakkilian*[19] caste bathed in the upper section of the same canal. They used to kill goats to sell people in the estate and neighbouring Sinhala villages.

However, bathing together in a corner of the Madu Ganga posed no problem for the members of Crow Island. While the party was still in progress, a group of men from all ethnic groups decided to swim in the shallow water close to the lobby of the Visitors Centre. The others watched while the music and eating continued. They all bathed in the same water and were not bothered by the 'dirt' that emanated from other ethnic bodies. Mr Kirubaharan dragged Mr Manju, who brought cigarettes to them, into the water. Mr Dayarathne's mobile phone and his camera, worth seven hundred dollars, were damaged. He had left them with Mr Manju for safety. I thought that trouble might develop between Mr Kirubaharan, Mr Dayarathne and Mr Manju as they were intoxicated. But nothing happened: they seemed not to bother.

Post-boat trip 'drinks' too generated commongrounds, seen in Islanders' mannerisms, self-confidence and respect of other's dignity that transcended any ethnic boundaries in their social lifeworlds. This was noted by Bourdieu: "bourgeois distinction is still defined, both in speech and bearing, by relaxation in tension, ease with restraints, a

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19 They also referred to as Sakkiliyar, Chakkiliyar.

rare and highly improbable combination of antagonistic properties" (1984: 311). Those who wished to enjoy liquor proceeded to do so. No one was forced to drink. Some shared plates of food: others either sat around the table or moved closer to enjoy their drinks. There was no ethno-religious basis to the selection of tables or to their imbibing. All behaved in a respectful manner, not only out of consideration for others but to protect their own dignity (S: *sāyama*). They avoided actions conducive to *lajja* (S: shame) and acts of *mūna narak wenawa* (S: loss of face). Not one member commented on the 'typical' Sinhala food (for some an ethnic other's food) or expressed a preference for his/her own "ethnic" dishes. They enjoyed the various aromas, the ingredients, and the quantity of spices as well. The wide variety of foods met the needs of all members of the team.

Bourdieu identifies taste as "the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference" (1984: 56), as "a system of classificatory schemes" (1984: 174), and as "the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class' conditions of existing" (1984: 175). The similarity of Islanders' multi-ethnic lifestyles became clearer to me during the eating, drinking, singing, and dancing that were part of the trip. The specific "tastes" based on their conditions of existing made inter-ethnic unity possible, and were evident at other parties as well, such as New Year (see page 87).

After finishing drinks members of the group started singing and dancing. Brothers from the same Hindu-Tamil family, i.e., Mr Gunaseelan and Mr Sahayanesan, and also Mr Mohommed, a Muslim friend, asked me to dance with them several times. Mr Dayarathne, Mr Manju, who was a police officer, Kelvin Aiya, Mr Kumar, and Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam, who was wearing a pair of shorts and shoes, also joined in. Mr Kirubaharan, who was able to attract an audience, danced along with the others. Meanwhile, the staff members of the Visitors Centre provided a well-prepared lunch including a variety of curries.

Raja, a Hindu-Tamil, sang "*adi ennadi raakkammaa pallaakku nelippu… en nenjji kulungguthadi…*", a song from the Indian Tamil movie *Pattikada Pattanama* (T:), starring Sivaji Ganesan and Jayalalitha Jayaram from 1972. As Raja did not know all the words of the song, the leader of the band (a Sinhala man) sang the Sinhala version; "*mama gannemi karakara bandala, walawwe hamine dan…*" made famous by H.R. Jothipapala in the

Sinhala film, *Hita Honda Minihek* (S:). The same tune (similar to their social lives) accommodates both Sinhala and Tamil lyrics, while having general appeal for Sinhalas, Tamils, Muslims, Burgers and Malays alike. These songs are often heard during parties and musical shows in Sri Lanka.

Mr Dushyanthan, took Ms Dewanayaki's hand, inviting her to dance. Mr Gilbert, noting his action, asked him to desist. Mr Kirubaharan intervened, calming the situation and thinking that Ms Dewanayaki, who lived alone at home as her husband worked in a foreign country (he returns home every six months), would concur. Ms Dewanayaki did not concur. Instead she opted to dance although she did not take Mr Dushyanthan's hand. This scene gave rise to a spate of jokes among close friends, which persisted even months after the trip. Mr Dayarathne threatened to put the photos of the rejection on the notice board.

Unabashed Mr Dushyanthan attempted to take Ms Gilbert's hand, which encouraged Mr. Godwin to approach Ms Paramasiwam. No-one attempted to stop him as Mr. Godwin was considered a well-mannered man with a degree of self-restraint. In addition, he was a teetotaller. Ms Paramasiwam accepted the dance with a laugh. Ms Deepika Sundaralingam joined in voluntarily as did Mr. Wasantha's wife. Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam, who was observing the dancing, tapped his hand on the desk in the time with the rhythm of the songs. After the end of the Tamil-Sinhala song, we enjoyed non-stop music, dancing-type songs, similar to karaoke, a genre commonly enjoyed by Sri Lankans. Finally, almost everyone was dancing. Mr Kirubaharan danced posing as a lady.

Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam, a Hindu-Tamil of Indian Tamil descent and husband of Deepika Sundaraligam, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady sang a Sinhala song: "*gamen liyumak evilla, akkagen wage, mokak kiyalada dannehe, ehi giyeth nehene…*" (A younger brother who works in the city, receives a letter from his older sister. He opens it, filled with feelings of loss, and recalls the beauty of village life and the love of his family members). According to Mr Krishnan, he sings Sinhala songs even at home. Mr Krishnan and Ms Deepika are a well-matched couple: both love music and dancing. These men and women of diverse ethnic group are aware of what Bourdieu observes: "that techniques of the body constitute genuine systems, bound up with a whole cultural context" (Bourdieu 2004: 582). Dancing in a particular way is a bourgeois use of body (Bourdieu 1991: 372). I assign the

willingness to dance, drink and sing to an "acute awareness of oneself and of one's body, to a consciousness fascinated by its corporeality" (Bourdieu 2004: 585).

The BPMS organise other events including New Year Parties. As (Bourdieu 1991: 372) suggests: "In fact, the health-giving functions are always more or less strongly associated with what might be called aesthetic functions", a sentiment visible in events organised by the BPMS. It is normal practice for the BPMS and other organisations to celebrate the dawn of each year. While in 2010, the celebration was organised by the BPMS alone, the 2011 event was jointly organised by the BPMS and the LKN Housing Society. Most of the members of the BPMS are members of the LKN: Mr Gilbert who is very active in BPMS is the president.

The parties were generally held on the rooftop of the Mr Gilberts' house, from where we could see many areas of Crow Island and had a clear view of the beach and sea. There were adequate drinks; e.g., wine, whisky, arrack, beer and soft drinks; coca-cola, pepsi-cola, and ginger beer, and food was served buffet style (also see Smith 2012: 1-4). Although some might think it important to note that this reflects a colonial influence on local middle-class bodies (see Wickramasinghe 2006: 3), taste in food is an important aspect of Bourdieu's class analysis, since it is inculcated in the early stages of peoples lives. Food is linked with the body since it creates specific bodily shapes relevant to diverse social classes (Gunasekera 1994: 111). The guests contributed a nominal fee each year. Tables were arranged so that members could sit, talk and enjoy the night. In 2010, Ms Lakshmi (a Chrstian-Tamil) sang a few songs: her husband and others danced in time to the music. Some ladies seated at a corner table also danced. The others simply sat and enjoyed the songs. In 2011 a Buddhist-Sinhala person posing as Santa Claus distributed gifts to the children. There were games, e.g., musical chairs in which children and ladies participated. Sinhala, Tamil, and Hindi songs were very popular. The music was provided by Mr Wasantha's brothers' band that was in Madu Ganga during the picnic.

This was an occasion where they built and displayed social capital, inviting highly-placed officers attached to the Sri Lanka navy, police and from the Coastal Conservation Authority to the party. It is clear that these events perpetuate a cultural capital that assures their distinctiveness as a superior group of people in the stratified multi-ethnic social structure of Colombo. Their intention to meet these officials was twofold: (1) to develop

personal relationships with them; and (2) to seek their support for the BPMS. The speakers referred to the beach beautification project and to the actions of the BPMS, undertaken in line with the government's main development project, to develop Colombo to become the "wonder of Asia". Politicians and organisers, the *curse*, were excluded from these functions.

Mixed marriages and Crow Island

Marriage between members of the Sinhala and Tamil middle-class was common on Crow Island. Among my respondents, I met five families with ethno-religious mixed marriages and Buddhist and Christian marriages among Sinhalas and Tamils. Historically there was generally a wide acceptance of mixed marriages in Sri Lankan society but it has become limited due to the ethno-political conflict that has ravaged the country. I told Mr Gunaseelan, a retired auditor who had worked for a private firm, that he could have brought his wife, Ms Kanthi, who is a housewife. In my inquiring, I made reference to Ms Deepika and Mr Krishnan (who had inter-ethnic marriage) and their daughter, who were enjoying during the trip. But, he replied: "My wife is teaching at the *daham pāsala* (Buddhist religious school) today and she never misses that. So I did not bother her". Mr Gunaseelan is a Hindu-Tamil man married to Ms Kanthi, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, following their love affair that started while he was helping his wife's father audit accounts for his furniture shop in Colombo.

Let me briefly portray one Buddhist-Sinhala and Hindu-Tamil (Ms Deepika & Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam) marriage, as such unions are often portrayed as mismatched in the literature. These couples play an active role in the activities of the BPMS and illustrate how two lower-class members belonging to two hostile ethnic groups with upwardly mobile aspirations jointly achieved middle-class status, enjoying equal social footing in that society. The social prestige of mixed-married families including Ms Deepika has become a reference point for others.

Ms Deepika, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, became Ms Deepika Sundaralingam after marrying Mr Krishnan Sundaralingam, a Hindu-Tamil of Indian origin background from the Ratnapura Tea and Rubber estate, located approximately 60 kilometres from Colombo

towards Ratnapura along the high level road. Mr Krishnan, a chartered accountant by profession, works as a partner in a Private Accounts firm in Colombo. He came to Colombo after sitting his G.C.E. (O/L)[20] examination to work a trainee accountant under the guidance of his elder sister's husband. He became a boarder in Ms Deepika's aunty's house in Wattala. Although Ms Deepika's house was located in Boralesgamuwa, Colombo South she was going to school from her aunty's house and it was there that she and Mr Krishnan started a romantic relationship.

They were married in the 1980s after a four years engagement. They gained the consent of both families despite the growing ethnic tensions that threatened to destabilise the country at that time. Ms Deepika's parents did not oppose her marriage as Mr Krishnan was a "good" young person, "non-alcoholic", "non-smoking", "well mannered", "educated", and "working hard to self-improve." No family in Sri Lanka would think twice before giving their daughter in marriage to a young man of this calibre. And it was a fulfilment of Mr Krishnan's dream to marry an educated lady from whatever ethnic group in order to free himself from the poor circumstances of his family on the estate. The worsening ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka after 1958 were not strong enough to put a halt to this marriage.

The wedding took place according to Hindu-Tamil custom, first at the Wellawatte *kovil* and then at the Omega Inn. Members of both parties attended and no objections were raised. Now the couple has one daughter and two sons, who currently live in Australia as permanent residents. The daughter who lives with them on Crow Island accompanied them on the picnic. Mr Wasantha once referred to Ms Deepika as "the Sinhala lady married to a Tamil person, who lives in a Tamil way". She wears *pottu* (red dot) on her forehead, and speaks Tamil at home. They celebrate both Buddhist-Sinhala and Hindu-Tamil festivals to accommodate both traditions with the family.

Ms Deepika and Mr Krishnan do not see any difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. According to them, both religions are equal: "Hindus worship Gods and Buddhists too worship Gods. Religion is not an issue at all in our family". Mr Krishnan said that each month they visit Sivan *kovil*, a Hindu temple exclusively dedicated to Lord

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Siva in Kotahena every month. "She comes with me to go to *kovil*[21] and she accompanies me to the panasala[22]". He recalled the inter-religious ethnic harmony he experienced in his childhood: everyone he knew participated in an annual pilgrimage to the Kataragama shrine with Buddhist-Sinhala people while neighbouring Buddhist-Sinhalas came to the *kovil* on his estate to offer *pūja*. His father had close connections with many Sinhala villagers who lived in his neighbourhood in Ratnapura.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Given taste serves as a key signifier and component of social identity, and also as a chief determinant of relationships of "class endogamy", individuals tend to meet and marry, as Bourdieu argues, *within* rather than *between* lifestyles (and hence within rather than between social classes) (Jenkins 1992: 139). Bourdieu's notion of the class desire to associate became apparent in the concluding speeches made around 5.00 p.m. by Mr Dayarathne, who is a Buddhist-Sinhala person around 60-years of age, a retired police officer and the vice-president of BPMS. Mr Dayarathne made a speech thanking the members:

> Crow Island means a society with different ethnic groups. We all live in peace. We have a great unity despite of the variations. The BPMS has contributed to create unity and friendship. That is our strength (5.00 p.m. 18 September 2011, vote of thanks made at Madu Ganga Visitors Centre).

He asked a question of the audience: "Was there unity like this in the area prior to the BPMS?" Ms Paramasiwam shouted "never!" He then made a request to expand the membership to, bring more people into the BPMS. He was not implying anyone but "people of their kind". Emphasizing a common desire for all that elaborated "their" (middle-class) taste:

> Remember specially when we live in this world we need happiness, to enjoy life, associate with others; especially during our age (middle age). That is being fulfilled by our BPMS. We have been talking this kind of outing for last five years and we were able to materialise today due to the commitment of the members of the BPMS (5.00 p.m. 18 September 2011, vote of thanks made at Madu Ganga Visitors Centre).

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21 The terms *Kovil* or *koil* customarily used to identify Hindu temples in Sri Lanka.

22 The term *Pansala* (temple) is generally used to refer to Buddhist Religious places.

The participants applauded, appreciative and approving. The whole explanation thus far has been testimony to enhancement of social capital or bond among the multi-ethnic Crow Islanders with the initiatives of BPMS. In the words of Bourdieu: "Among the professions and the well-established business bourgeoisie … health giving and aesthetic functions are combined with social functions; sports take their place along with parlour games and social exchanges (receptions and dinners etc.) [as explained picnic, dinner parties, New Year Festivals] among the 'gratuitous' and disinterested activities which enable the accumulation of social capital" (Bourdieu 1991: 372).

Finally the band played the national anthem. Both the national anthem (in Sinhala only) and national flag have been very controversial among the competing nationalist forces because minorities in general and Tamils in particular tend to view them as an affirmation of Sinhala hegemoney over them (Kapferer 2012: 209-211; Mukarji 2005: 156; Nayak 2001: 151; Orjuela 2008: 191; Thangarajah 2004: 263). All stood upright. It was sung in Sinhala. In Tamil areas, the Tamil language version of the national anthem is sung, despite politicians of the ruling coalition objecting to this practice in the post-war scenario. I used to hear my colleagues who went to Tamil schools sing the national anthem in Tamil in my childhood. I remember my friends showing me the Tamil version of the anthem printed on the front page of their school textbook. I did not observe any members of the group rejecting or disregarding it, even if they harboured ill-feeling about the war during which many thousands of Tamils were brutally killed by the Sri Lankan Military. Criticism was levelled by UNHCR and the international media after the production of the video titled "Killing Fields" by Channel 4.

Conclusion

This chapter explored commongrounds in middle-class social space in Colombo with special reference to an annual picnic organised by community organisation called BPMS. Bourdieu's discussion of class consciousness (1984; 1991) and cultural and social capital is useful in exploring their everyday social lifewolds. Class capital facilitates 'transgression' of ethnic border while constructing commongrounds among a specific segment of ethnically-diverse people, uniting them as a middle-class.

Crow Islanders have created a unique lifestyle, a pattern of social exchange distinct from those of the poorer classes: education and modernity connect with 'cultural' features of life such as "means of income", "common houses", "usage of English", "modern equipment", and "non-dependence" in a bid to make ethnic borders unimportant amidst the macro-polarization that prevails in Sri Lanka today. This contexts in which ethnicity takes place, as Wallman (1988) indicates, assure comfortable relationships for people from all sides of the ethnic boundaries (see Jenkins 1988). Members of an ethnically varied group, united through common tastes, formed the BPMS. It was initially organized to improve the health and relaxing facilities for members of the community. Now it develops social and cultural capital further. In brief, Crow Islanders showcase a tale of commongrounds generated within middle-class habitus that explicitly disregards the exploitation of the ethnic field by political entrepreneurs.

4

Rubbing along with the neighbours:
Everyday survival in the watta community

Introduction

The shape of commongrounds differs from place to place and situation to situation, as does the political charge of ethnicities and nationalisms. In this chapter, I delineate commongrounds in a slum community in Colombo. I will refer to them as 'watta dwellers' or a 'watta community' (also see Ranjith 2004; Silva and Athukorala 1991) in the discussion that follows. Slum community owns a subculture that embeds a distinctive habitus, creating a living space of distinct opportunities, limitations, sharing, shared identity, ethnic and religious practices.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977) and Jackson's notion of the existential imperative will be employed in the discussion of structural influence on individuals' and groups' decisions and application of their creativity and innovative skills in their carving out of commongrounds in the watta. Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as "the form and structure of embodied practices that shape, and are shaped by, social practice" (Morton and Smith 2012: 72). The habitus of slum dwellers is an "*open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (original emphasis Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133). As on Crow Island, there is a 'socialized subjectivity' informing the urban slum subculture.

Tambiah (1986) considers Colombo to be one of Sri Lanka's three most sensitive zones, a place where Sinhala-Tamil tensions occur and where slum communities might play a key role in ethnic polarization. Slum dwellers actively participated in the July 1983 ethnic riots and in other such events in Delhi, Calcutta, Colombo and Jakarta (Kapferer 2012: 102-102; Nissan and Stirrat 1987: 23; Tambiah 1996: 216). These should be

understood within broader socio-economic and politically manipulative contexts (Bandarage 2009: 79). By contrast however *collaboration* across ethnic, cultural and other borders tend to be marginalised in scholarly discussions surrounding the watta dwellers. In this chapter, I discuss the accommodation of cultural heterogeneity and ethnic diversity in slum dwellers' subculture in Colombo (see Silva 1994), an elaboration of another shape of ethnic relations in Colombo. Unlike Crow Islanders, the watta dwellers of Colombo face daily uncertainties concerning earning a living: officers expel them from "un-authorised" houses, police harass them, health problems abound (flooding sewerage, a mosquito menace, epidemics of dengue fever), and quarrels break out regarding neighbourhood issues. Despite these vicissitudes, they have a distinct social life in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious and surprisingly even cross-class neighbourhood.

The chapter shows how commongrounds, differently to Crow Islanders, are forged in 'unorganized' ways in dwellers everyday social lifeworlds. The commongrounds here witness the struggle of a group of multi-ethnic inhabitants who live in one "slum subculture" to forge a decent social life, one which is not static but adjusts to broader socio-cultural and political forces. Jackson sees human existence as a struggle between "contending forces and imperatives" (2005: ix). People's creation and re-creation of commongrounds happen in that struggle to continually test "how the given world can be lived decisively, on one's own terms" (Jackson 2005: xii).

Linking social lifeworlds

I received a phone call from a friend in response to my inquiry about a research location:

> I would like to introduce you [to] Gopalan, from De Mel Watta, who [has] agreed to help your research. He has been serving as a driver in my organisation for more than five years but he does not deserve to be a driver… He can do many things that even our clerical staff members cannot do. He is very reliable… He can both read and write in Sinhala as he had studied in Sinhala medium though he is a Tamil… He manages to talk in English as well…. He has the capacity to grasp what you are doing... I do not treat him as a driver… in a way he is a friend of mine...

Dushani, a 45 year old Buddhist-Sinhala lady from a middle-class background, similarly to those people I associated with on Crow Island, works as a director for an NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) engaged with good governance-related issues in Sri Lanka.

Her introduction of Gopalan anna (T[23]: elder brother Gopalan), a Hindu-Tamil, (ethno-religious "other") is a fine example of existing relationships between various ethnic, religious, class, and cultural groups in Colombo. Furthermore, her description is testimony to the qualities that people use to value others in their everyday social lifeworlds. That is, it was not essentially ethnic.

Gopalan anna came to the main road to meet me one Sunday. He assumed that I would not be able to find his house due to the many narrow roads leading to various sections of the slum community. Speaking in a low voice, he introduced me to his setting, the "other world", imagining that "my world" was very different:

> Sir...people in this area live in acute poverty. They live in rows of houses (S[24]: *pēli gewal*) that are very small. Even my house is small like one of these houses. You have to go through a muddy road. During rainy days the sewerage overflows covering roads. I am afraid you don't like this area…(9.30 a.m. 26 September 2010, at his house).

He took me along a muddy road approximately 500 meters from the main road, passing multi-floored commercial buildings to reach his house. I had never pondered the existence of this community behind the well-maintained commercial buildings in the city. I had however noted the sewage smell. The people lived in small houses and tenements, most of which had plank walls, roofing made from corrugated iron sheets or asbestos. Some of the smaller ones looked like dolls houses. Boys were playing cricket, football and volleyball in the main playground. It was noisy. I saw Muslim ladies, heads covered, peeping from behind half-closed doors. On both sides of Gopalan anna's house were heaps of garbage. The locals sorted through the rubbish until the municipal tractor collected it. Garbage is useful: people grab anything, an old tyre, a sheet of iron, wood, wire, even a nail that can be used when repairing a house. Crows and dogs gather there in search of food. There were houses of various sizes and of legal and illegal construction. Most of the houses were linked to each other by a shared wall. Gopalan anna's family members warmly welcomed me. From that point on I associated closely with them, and their kindness, love (T: *anpu* or *pāsam*) was unforgettable.

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23 T: refers to Tamil terms.

24 S: refers Sinhala terms.

De Mel Watta is in many respect an "imagined community" (see Anderson 2006). Residents are identified, and identify themselves as dwellers of De Mel Watta. They possess a sense of belonging to "a community operating over and above their respective households" (Silva 1994: 6). The built environment, and the micro and macro social relations that condition it can be described as a working class habitus. As Morton and Smith say, "the dwelling place in which such systems of embodied dispositions take place also structures its community's habitus since particular struggle over economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital help shape the principles around which a community organizes itself" (Morton and Smith 2012: 73). Coupled with existential needs and intersubjective relations, this habitus shapes commongrounds in watta community. The territorial limits of the commune are in the main demarcated by the high walls of the factories and shops and the stinking canal with its black-coloured water.

The locals often use the terms *watta* (S:) (pl. wattas) and *thottam* (T:) to denote their place of residence. They differentiate one *watta* from another using terms such as *ape watta* (S:), *engaladu thottam* (T:) ("our watta"), *intha thottam* (T:) ("this watta"), *eha watta* (S:), *antha thottam* (T:) ("the other watta"), *egollange watta* (S:), *awangaladu thottam* (T:) ("their watta"). Outsiders are wary of quarrelling with the *Melwatta Minissu*, *Melwatta Akkhal* (T:) ("De Mel Watta people") as the area is notorious for its mafia; *pāthāle* (S:). In general, most wattas are infamous for occupation of government-owned land, prostitution, drug peddling, robberies and other criminal activities. A significant number of the community members have a common interest in protecting themselves from law-enforcing agencies (Silva 1994). However, the linking of such characteristics with the inhabitants of wattas also serves to veil the various forms of local suffering that are attributable to the area's poor economy, lack of facilities, and inferior housing conditions. The authorities give little priority to their welfare and development.

This watta community is comprised of a Muslim majority and a Sinhala/Tamil minority. According to the data obtained from the Colombo DS (Divisional Secretariate) office under the instructions of GN (Grama Niladhari- village level government administrative officer) the New Bazar GN division under which De Mel Watta consists includes 2,743 Sinhalas, 3, 828 Sri Lankan Tamils, 181 Indian Tamils, 9,175 Sri Lanka Moor, 104 Burghers, 150 Malays, 10 Sri Lankan Chetty, and 32 Others. These are only approximate figures: the GN officer of the area confirmed the inability of the office to

maintain statistics of the residents as the numbers are changing due to rapid in-migrating. The watta was originally formed by a number of 'temporarily' resettled families uprooted by various neo-liberal development schemes (e.g., establishment of Crow Island middle-class housing estate) implemented in Colombo by different regimes (Orjuela 2010). Their life histories testify to the lower soco-economic and less politically influential background that they hail from. This made them more vulnerable and open to exploitation by the political parties and elites in their search for political office.

Most of the current houses were constructed during President Premadasa's UNP (United National Party) regime in 1980s. Being temporary houses, they had only minimal facilities and access to common lavatories and water taps. Conditions were expected to improve when the multi-storeyed low-income dwellers' housing complex was finished. However, when the De Mel Watta housing complex was built they were given to the party faithful. The assassination of President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993, a man who the slum dwellers saw as a person who had feeling for "the poor people", crushed their hopes concerning permanent houses. They converted temporarily built plank-houses into permanent dwellings introducing modifications such as private lavatories, bathrooms, an upstairs level, and remaking the walls and floors with bricks or cement blocks. All these modifications are illegal and unauthorised. Subsequently, an influx of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim people took place in search of affordable accommodation in the city.

De Mel Watta is divided into four sections and the dwellers are categorised as "people who live after the water tank up to the canal", "people who live before the water tank", "people who live closer to the water tank", and "people who live on the flat." The section differentiation "after" or "before" changes according to the access road from which one enters the community. Within each of these first two sections there are subsections. I fraternised with all of the dwellers except "people who live after water tank". Kumudika akka, 34 year old a Buddhist-Sinhala woman, said that the people who lived beyond the water tank were predominantly Muslim. They opted to live near the mosque. Similar to others (Tamils, Sinhalas, Muslims) in her neighbourhood, she did not like to associate with this group:

I do not undertake any help to Grama Niladhari[25] beyond water tank. I cover only 48 legal government houses and 78 illegal houses existing before tank. People who live beyond the water tank are *Pāthāle* people (underworld). They have unacceptable qualities. They have no decency at all. When there was a musical show here organised by Shakthi TV (a popular Tamil medium TV channel), boys came from that area [and] hit boys of our section. We happened to go to the police station and get it sorted out. Muslim boys in our section are united with the other boys and come forward for anything (5.00 p.m. 12 December 2010, at her house).

The re-categorisation of ethnic groups in terms of 'decorum' and social behaviour deconstructed the shared ethnicities that shape social relationships in multi-cultural watta life. The first section, which was predominantly Muslim, was considered a group of people with connections to underworld activities. All sections were ethnically mixed while in the last sections, *loku minissu* (S:) or *periya akkhal* or else *pana karawanga* (T:) was a group of lower-middle-class people. Originally politicians promised the temporary resettled people currently living in sections other than in the flat that they would provide houses for them in this housing complex. As 'flat' people, they preferred to maintain a distance from the slum dwellers living in the other two sections. The flat community has an organisation called the *Sahadipathya* Committee, a welfare and flat maintaining organisation officially linked with the Ministry of Construction, Engineering Services, Housing and Common Amenities. The focus of this committee related to the dwellers and to building maintenance. The heterogeneous families living in the flat pay a monthly subscription to the committee that meets monthly. They change office bearers (naturally with diverse ethnic backgrounds) at the annual general meeting.

For anthropologists, fieldwork is significant because it provides "opportunities to explore knowledge...as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground" (Jackson 1996: 8). I collected ethnographic data in De Mel Watta from September 2010 to January 2012, from 70 respondents in total, out of whom 32 were females. Formal and informal discussions were conducted with family members apart from the main respondents. I maintained close contacts with 15 families (five from Muslim, Sinhala and Tamil Muslim ethnic backgrounds). I conducted interviews with Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim religious leaders of De Mel Watta and neighbouring wattas. I took part in government programmes, local

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25 Village level government officer

political meetings, community works such as *dansala* (alms house) organisation and New Year Celebration, religious event at Buddhist temple, *kovil* (Hindu temple), weddings, funerals, birthday parties, and Deepawali, Christmas and Muslim celebrations at various houses. I watched live cricket matches telecast over the television at the respondent's houses. I visited them and shared their grievances in crisis situations such as the repeated floodings that occurred during my stay.

Fieldwork is not an exercise limited to specific office hours or weekdays. I also participated in important events conducted in connection with participants from slum communities, e.g., workshops, seminars, training programmes, programmes for children and women, prevention of drug addiction, conflict resolution and peace-building. I conducted interviews with government officials attached to Colombo DS office and closely associated with Grama Niladhari[26] of De Mel Watta. The fact that the distance between De Mel Watta and Crow Island is around 8 kilometres made it easy for me to research both locations in Colombo. Two female research assistants helped collect information from female respondents in both De Mel Watta and Crow Island.

In the beginning, Gopalan anna's family were very careful with me. They monitored my movements in the watta to prevent any "expected risks" such as my falling prey to "cunning ladies", "assault" and "threats" from the underworld. Gopalan anna's wife Maheshwari akka often asked her husband to go with me when I visited various houses, "places of traps" where dubious ladies might seek to sell sexual relations, harass me, or grab my money. She situated them in "their" world against "my world" saying:

> Though you are a married person with a child, you are a person who has just seen your world. People here know how to get you into various traps. You have a different purpose for coming here; to collect information for your studies. You talk with them friendly with a smile. But they would understand it differently. You do not know who are "good" and "bad" people and you go and talk with 'bad people' (S: *naraka minissu*) for long time. If something happens who would be there to help you? Do not go alone to meet these people and if you get into trouble don't come back here... (10.00 a.m. 13 November 2010, at her house).

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26 Village level government officer

Similar advice and warnings were given to me by many persons in the settlement as well as by those living in neighbouring wattas. Here commongrounds emerge in a shared ethics informed by individuals' experience of shanty-town social life.

Socio-economic condition of the watta dwellers

Exploration of people's work provides us with an understanding of the basis of community life and their priorities. Slum settlements, which are often disregarded, undermined and threatened by the rulers as well as by the wealthy, provide the city with low paid workers. Gopalan anna works as a driver for an NGO: his son works as a clerical officer in a hardware shop in Armour Street; and his daughter works as a clerk for a construction company. Gopalan anna currently draws approximately 15,000 rupees per month. His son contributes 5000 rupees and his sister-in-law also spends around 5000 rupees on the family. Gopalan anna's wife Maheshwari akka is a housewife. The couple do not take any money from their daughter's salary into the family budget and very little money from their son. This allows the young people to save money for future events such as education and marriage. Theirs is a relatively good situation; the majority of the watta people work in poorly paid and sometimes intermittent jobs.

They live in a small house with two small rooms, each 8x8, a kitchen (15x8), a living area (10x15) and a verandah (5x20). As well there is an illegally constructed area. One room is used as a *sāmi room* (T: shrine room) while the other room is set aside for visitors or for the ladies of the house. The front side of the house is open to the main access road while the back of the house ends at the sewerage drain that goes through the watta. The water in this drain is dark and often blocked by garbage bags. During the rainy period, the plugged drain forces water into the house. The front lane of the house becomes a waterway during the wet season bringing more water into the house. In an attempt to block it, Gopalan anna built a small wall, as his house is located on ground lower than that of the main entry road.

Most of the time, Gopalan anna's family members sleep in the living area and use the verandah when they have visitors. The verandah has four walls and a fully covered gate so that no one walking on the road can see the inside the house. All of the legally constructed

houses provided by the state have a similar design. This house was originally given to a Buddhist-Sinhala lady named Dayawathi akka from whom Gopalan anna bought it. Houses that were initially given to close associates of politicians through "patron-client" provisions are sold on to third parties in this way. As noted by Sunil Bastian, the Sri Lankan electoral and political system is largely patrimonial (cited in Frerks and Klem 2011: 174). Gopalan anna initially came to live here as a tenant; later he bought the house after the landlady agreed to receive the money in instalments. He considers that this has been a great help. Generally, people feel jealous of others' progress. But the original deed is still is in Dayawathi akka's name: Gopalan anna has power of attorney. This is testimony to a situation among many such dwellings wherein trust exists across ethnic borders.

Although Gopalan anna's house is relatively spacious, there were many smaller houses constructed from planked and iron sheet. Illegally built two-storey houses were common as well. In general, whenever people see a free space, they try to build a house for themselves or to give to their children as inheritance. These illegal constructions have increased as politicians give permission for their own party supporters to occupy unutilised 'state' land. Not all watta dwellers, however, can be considered the "poorest of the poor" in society. They have access to some means of income in the city of Colombo. Living among the "poor" are teachers, some clerical staff, members of government and private organisations, some businessmen and migrants from Middle Eastern countries.

I came in contact with a cross-section of people engaged in different income earning activities; e.g., shop/store keepers, low ranking clerical staff, garment factory workers, three-wheeler taxi drivers, three-wheel taxi repairers, drivers, small boutique owners, money lenders, pavement hawkers, salesmen/women, and coolies working for the Colombo Municipal Council (hereafter CMC). There were those who did physically demanding labouring jobs on a day-to-day basis, the self-employed who outsourced work at homes for local manufacturers, and a significant number of unemployed persons and students. In general, most of these families were dependent upon the father's income as the traditional breadwinner. Children are apt to terminate their education and undertake some income earning activity to support the family budget.

Older watta dwellers are often not born in Colombo. Migration to the city of Colombo is a process of acquiring social prestige for members of all the ethnic groups and

of constructing less-stigmatised ethnicities. They do not inherit generation old roots in the city which blur the ethnic claims to the "motherland", or "homeland". These new "Colombo Wo/Men" do not have a particularly ethnicized consciousness. Watta dwellers often think of cost effectiveness, profit making, and are ready to engage in multiethnic economies. Becoming "Colombo Wo/Man" (T: *Columbu Ākkhal* and S: *Colomba Minissu*) is a process of becoming a differently shaped identity. Irrespective of whether they are Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim, they enter an ideological relationship with "city people", "rich people", and "able men". Viewed from that standpoint, migration makes ethnic boundary crossing possible. I do not mean that their "ethnic identity" disappears but that it is given a different shape in conditions conducive for multi-ethnic collaboration.

The city consists of migrants who have settled in different time periods, creating different identities as "Colombo people". In general, "the city" symbolises people's hopes for a better life. In it there are job opportunities, infrastructure such as education, health systems, transportation, access to both private and government institutions; shopping facilities and the chance of a better lifestyle. Also it may be more secure (Schut, et al. 2008: 81). In the process of searching for suitable places to live, rural and estate migrants are confronted by certain criteria such as level of education and jobs and income. Their social contacts determine whether they can survive in a slum community where they need little money but live a congested lifestyle. Or they might be able to settle in middle-class places such as Crow Island. However, they are all entitled to a new identity: "Colombo people" against the "rural people" or "estate people" who have a kind of class and region based status. As Schut, et al. (2008: 81) maintains:

> Once migrants are able to appreciate the use of facilities and enjoy the increased opportunities, they develop a yearning to become a real Colombo inhabitant too, assuming Colombo identity. People do not want to show that they are from a rural area. Some respondents say there is a conceited mentality in Colombo; others say they are modern, European or Americanised. People speak English, have Western patterns and behave in an urban manner. Though a clear Colombo identity does not exist, the informants are able to tell who is originally from Colombo or in other words, who is born a city person and who is a 'wanna-be' from the rural areas. All this has to do with urban identity and image.

Tamils like Gopalan anna who come from a tea estate find that after spending time in a 'probationary' period in which they learn the lifestyle and performative skills of the city they become "Colombo Tamil". This group, with their permanent addresses in Colombo on

their National Identity Cards (NIC) can walk through security check points as they are not considered 'potential terrorists' (Orjuela 2010: 109-110) or "human bombs" (suicide bomber). However, if the address on the NIC says slum area, he or she will be required to undergo a security check since police often have suspicious eye on slum dwellers. The "Colombo Muslim" (McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997) is emerging as a separate category within everyday discussions and scholarly works (also referred to as "eastern Muslim people" in Chapter Six).

Initiatives towards claiming middle-classness may be seen in some of their houses. For example, some people speak English, read English newspapers, watch English TV channels and listen to English radio stations. Others mix English words with the local language (code-switching), wear modern fashions, frequent the new shopping malls and attend recognised education institutions. However, the limitations of their cultural capital make such performative ambit claims risky. As Bourdieu notes "the differences in [visible] cultural capital [in the watta] mark the difference between classes" (Bourdieu 1984: 69) and low cultural capital is most likely to produce poorer or limited economic and 'social capital' (see Bourdieu 1984: 177; Westman 2009: 209). This trend could be seen cross-ethnically. I noted that often Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhala families watched the same Tamil or Hindi movies telecast during the weekends. Becoming "Colombo Wo/Men" gained a higher priority than worrying about ethnicity.

Watta is home to Malays, Burghers, Sinhalas, Muslims, and Tamils (Colombo, Jaffna, Batticaloa, upcountry, and estate). As of 2013, most of the families have been living in this setting for two generations, since the 1980s. During this period, many life events such as coming of age, marriage, divorce, fights, deaths, illness and healing have occurred, events that have emotionally bonded them to the "watta". Further watta families have established deep neighbourhood ties (T: *sutti irukkinra makkhal, pakattu veettu akkhal, ingana ulla akkhal* and S: *ahala pahala aya, allapu gedara aya*). Interaction builds social capital in the Bourdieu sense: the networks they establish in the deprived urban communities provide materials and emotional support for needy members (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Ezeh 2005).

Analysis of Gopalan anna's life shows the struggle his family faces in their multiethnic dwelling. Gopalan anna was born the elder son of an Indian Origin Plantation

Tamil family that had four other children. They lived in a line room of a tea estate in the central highlands of Sri Lanka. He initially came to Colombo after he completed his G.C.E. O/L Sinhala medium education. His parents could not afford to send him for higher education due to the low income they earned as estate labourers. He worked in all sorts of physically demanding jobs, from a *nattāmi* (T: and S: coolie) to driver. He decided to bring his family members to Colombo after his father went "missing" following the 1983 July ethnic riots against the Tamil minority. Since then he has been interacting with different sub-ethnic categories. When Gopalan anna first came to De Mel Watta as a rentee, the family had problems accessing water from the common tap in his lane. A Sinhala lady who lived close to the tap accused his family members of taking water; "These people have come from plantation area to give us trouble", she was reported as saying.

Such accusations result from competition for limited resource among many families at any given time. However, the accusation seemed also to target "ethnic" (Indian) Tamils and the regional (plantation) origins of his family. Making reference to ethnicity and to particular socio-economic and cultural characteristics is common during brawls. But it does not appear to create on-going enmities. Gopalan anna's family members were not ready to fight back: they were new to the "culture," and to the "rented" nature of their dwelling. Later they were able to create a social space for themselves, disarming the threatening situation "by making that foreign thing [their] own, by assimilating it to [themselves], by incorporating it within [*their*] being, by *bringing it under* [*their*] *control*" (original emphasis Jackson 1998: 48).

During that time, Rinoza akka's family (their Muslim neighbours) helped them to adapt to the watta community. They fetched water for Gopalan anna's family from the common tap. The Sinhala lady did not accuse Rinoza akka's family for two reasons: they were permanent members in the watta unlike Gopalan anna who came as a renter with many family members; and the watta had a Muslim majority. However, there was no one to look after this Sinhala lady, who lived in the watta alone during my field work. Gopalan anna's family now feels sympathetic towards her: they offer her food whenever she comes to their house. Gopalan anna and his wife said: "God has punished her for those wrongs committed against us". This story testifies to the shifting nature of commongrounds.

From the outset, Gopalan anna's family developed a good relationship with Rinoza akka's family. One brother, who is managing a three-wheeler (auto rickshow) tinkering shop, lives a few yards away from Rinoza akka's house while a third sister is married to Avissawella. The other brother stayed with Rinoza akka until he married. Gopalan anna calls his neighbours better than his own siblings, those who have the "same blood" and shared "one womb"; *onna piranda sakodararkhalakkuvida nallam* (T:).

Members of one ethnic group develop relationships not only with ethnic "others", but also with intra-ethnic members using the same strategies. Unity among distinctive intra-ethnic groups, who usually live in separate aggregates, is evident in the watta. A foreigner could conclude that the Tamil population in Sri Lanka is one homogenous group; but, when one delves into the matter further, one realises that this is not the case. As Bush (1993) suggests, they observe divisions according to geographic location, and on social, political and economic lines. The prominent relationship patterns and strategies observed across inter- and intra- ethnic borders will be discussed in the next sections.

Social relations in the watta

Sri Lankans, irrespective of ethnic background, "expect" that their neighbours will help (T: *udavi* and S: *udavu*) in times of crisis (T: *avasarattakku* and S: *hadissiyakadi*). Moreover, the sympathy extended to poor people and to the ill is remarkable. These crises vary from borrowing spices, to funerals, sudden illness, and accidents. Mobilisation of resources such as labour, money and material irrespective of ethnicity, religion, caste and kinship, is common in De Mel Watta. Ranjith noted this form of mobilisation in a Mahaiyawa slum in Kandy (2004: 157). Unlike on Crow Island, everyday inter-dependability is high in watta community.

Gopalan anna and his wife stressed that neighbours' assistance was vital during bereavements in their community. During his father-in-law's funeral, many Muslim, Tamils and Sinhalas supported the family in two ways: (1) Muslim boys intervened to thwart efforts of some of his wife's relatives who wanted to forcibly remove the corpse; (2) Active participation in the funeral;

They fixed up a hut here since our house is not big enough for all the visitors to accommodate... arranged chairs… They got electricity illegally from some faraway place, none of the house in our watta had permanent electricity supply…Once the electricity got disconnected the Muslim family [who] live in the front house brought their emergency lamps… These boys went home and attended their work during daytime and came back to our house in the nights...Other families provided tea and food for those who came to the funeral…(10.00 a.m. 22 January 2011, at his house).

His Muslim neighbours, Rinoza akkas' family offered one of their houses exclusively to accommodate Gopalan anna's relatives who attended the funeral. Others provided tea and biscuits for the visitors. In another instance, these same Muslim neighbours had Maheshwari akka admitted to hospital when she delivered her daughter and son. When there is a pregnant woman in an adjoining house, the neighbours pay careful attention to her. They will invite her for a meal and prepare special food for her.

The sustainability of the above relationship depends on "mutual help" (T: *udavi senjikanom* and S: *udavu karagannawa*). In return for these help, Gopalan anna safeguarded Rinoza akka's brother's life. Someone threw acid at him, testimony to the slum's violence, causing burns to his face and to the front of his entire body. Gopalan anna used the relationship he had developed with the administrative doctors of Colombo General Hospital, when he was serving as a driver at an embassy of a western country in Colombo. Gopalan anna took the man for treatment by an Australian plastic surgeon, who had been working in Peradeniya hospital (on the instructions of the doctors at Colombo General Hospital). These mutually strong bonds between families, according to Harrison (2003; 2006), help negate the political elites' manipulations of people's (collective) ethnicities.

I noted that Rinoza akka's daughters Nazeera (23) and Nuzhat (22) and her two sons addressed Gopalan anna as *appa* (T: dada) and his wife Maheshwari akka as *aththe* (T: mother), when he took me to visit that family. Why do the children of Muslim families use kinship terminologies when addressing this Hindu-Tamil couple? These children spent considerable time in Gopalan anna's family during their childhoods so it seemed natural to address Gopalan anna and his wife as *appa* and *aththe* respectively. It was an expression of due respect, honour for Gopalan anna and his wife. Kumudika akka's daughter too was often cared for by neighbouring Tamil and Muslim families. This connection happened even though Kumudika akka (a Buddhist-Sinhala- lady) and her Tamil neighbours were

not on good terms due to a personal dispute. This too is not unusual in the watta. Kumudika akka's mother, Samudra Jayawardhana (or Samudra akka), a Buddhist-Sinhala lady revealed how a Muslim boy (S: *kolla*) had cracked vulgar jokes with her married daughters:

> You know I have looked after this Muslim boy when he was small... I have even breast-fed him... He still loves us... Though he is not staying in this watta anymore, he still visits us whenever he comes three-wheeler[27] hire to this watta... (4.00 p.m. 20 March 2011, at her house)

In this instance, their mutual love of those children, and their concern for their welfare and wellbeing supersedes new enmities, allowing the development of collaboration among people of varied ethnic origin.

People in the watta maintain "give and take", "go and come", "eating and drinking" relationship with families of their choice. These relationships are not ethnicity-based. The first relationship type is "give and take", locally referred as *kuduttal-wāngal* (T:), *ganu-denu* (S:) starting from food stuffs and extending to everyday household items: ornaments, clothes, household utensils, electrical items such as electric irons, along with curry dishes and sweets. This practice is an essential part of their social lives given that they are burdened by economic crises and a modern consumer culture. People in the neighbourhood help each other when there are financial crises. Gopalan anna often obtains loans from Saleema akka's husband, who draws approximately 25,000 rupee per month as a gatekeeper for the Railway Department.

The second type of relationship is *poradu-wāradu* (T:), *yanwa-enawa* (S:) or "go and come". They visit each other's houses to have a chat, share gossip (local information important to their daily social lives), and make requests while having a cup of tea, sweets, or other food. This only happens among very close people. The third relationship type is "eating and drinking", i.e., *kanawa-bonawa* (S:) and *sappidaradu-kudikkiradu* (T:). People eat food and enjoy drinks with residents of other houses that are closed by, reliable, clean and compatible. Sharing curries, rice, and other special dishes is one of the ways in which neighbourhood ties are developed. Rinoza akka's children visit Gopalan anna's house to request curry and food when they do not have enough at their house. During festivals,

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27 Auto rickshaw

friends and neighbours of the watta share food; but this applies to "compatible partners" only. Kumudika akka, a Buddhist-Sinhala- lady, told me that she does not eat at each and every house:

> People should be clean irrespective of the fact [of] being Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim. We cannot eat things from the houses we know that are not clean. Muslim neighbours gave us food plates during this *nombu* (Ramadan). There are around 15 Tamil and Muslim houses send sweets and foods [to] us during festival... (4.00 p.m. 10 September 2011, at her house)

Lack of space in a house to accommodate visitors pushes dwellers into maintaining good relationship with their neighbours. When Gopalan anna's family has visitors, the ladies sleep in Rinoza akka's and Saleema akka's houses. During Saleema akka's and Rinoza akka's weddings, Gopalan anna accommodated their visitors in his house. In this way neighbours habitually interact for various needs. Watta dwellers arrange the physical structure of their houses so that they can have regular interaction with "good" (T: *nalla*, S: *honda*) neighbours. Not to engage in "going and coming", "giving and taking" or "eating and drinking" between two houses signals that the parties are not on good terms.

People who live in the same neighbourhood mostly interact (S: *katha baha* and T: *kathaikkaradu*) during the evenings. They arrange chairs by the side of the road, which is the only free space available in the wattas, and sit and talk to others in the neighbourhood as well as to the passers-by. Women serve as agents maintaining social connections with the neighbourhood in generally. I often noticed not only neighbours, but Gopalan anna's wife, her sister, Mekala and relatives Kumuda along with Rinoza akka, Saleema akka and their daughters Nazeera and Nuzhat, combing their hairs in search of lice. This is a form of evening relaxation, a relatively normal scene in the watta. They get together in a place that is well lit and remove the lice from each other while talking about various issues related to family, neighbours, and the community. Even their pets visit each other's houses.

Neighbours take part in special events such as almsgiving, weddings, and coming-of-age ceremonies. In general anyone can attend families' "sad occasions", but for "happy occasions" such as weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies, attendance is by invitation only. I noted a few instances where heterogeneous members of the neighbourhood attended such weddings together. On one occasion Maheshwari akka's brother-in-law brought a son

of a Buddhist-Sinhala lady whose daughter married a Muslim and continues to live in a Muslim way even after her husband's death. This child came to participate in the almsgiving organised by Gopalan anna to commemorate his father. Maheshwari akka's sister lived in a rented house owned by the child's grandmother, who, along with his uncles, continues to live as a Buddhist-Sinhalas. They were closely associated with this Sinhala-Muslim mixed family. Although the daughter married a Muslim, her mother and brothers continues to live a Buddhist-Sinhala way. Gopalan anna associates with them regularly.

As on Crow Island then reciprocity, life as intense social exchange and the social ethic connected to acting appropriately in such reciprocal relations is integral to the generating of commongrounds. We might hypothesize that enmity occurs, on both the micro and macro ethnicized level, when exchange ceases. But the ways in which people relate to each other in watta community are different from those employed by the Crow Islanders. On Crow Island, residents generally use the titles "Mr", "Mrs", "Miss" or professional titles. In contrast, in the watta community, people use kinship terminologies. Most people do not know the real names of their fellow residents.

Members of the neighbourhood develop "sisterhood" and "brotherhood" after interacting over a long period of time. *Akka* (T: and S:) denotes elder sister while *anna* (T:) and *aiya* (S:) refer to elder brother. *Thangachchi* (T:) and *nangi* (S:) signify younger sister. Similarly, *malli* (S:) and *thambi* (T:) mean younger brother. Muslims use the term *nānā* for elder brother; as well Sinhalas and Tamils refer to Muslims as *nānā*. Children use "aunty" and "uncle", very English terms, when referring to elders. I also used these forms of address adding *aiya* or *akka* after a name. These linguistic usages penetrate ethnic borders. Ethnic majorities call older persons *akka* or *anna* while persons from ethnic minority backgrounds use the correct terms in response.

Haseena akka (42), a Muslim lady with two children, whose husband is a three-wheeler (auto rickshaw) driver, demonstrated her relationships with others in the *thottam*:

> I have been living in De Mel Watta for last fifteen years... eight years in this house. I associate with everyone in the neighbourhood as *akka-thangachchi*. There are not many Muslims in my neighbourhood... all of the [people] are Christians. There is a lady called Lata akka, she is Christian [-Sinhala] [emphasis on the religion not on the

ethnicity of this Tamil lady and other persons] and I associate with her. There is another Christian [-Sinhala] lady called 'Kalu akka', with whom I am very friendly. In the next house, they are also Christian [-Sinhala]; the wife was Buddhist [-Sinhala] but the husband is Christian [-Sinhala] [so] she also went to Christianity. Kamalani akka too; she is Hindu [-Tamil]. She converted to Christianity since the husband is Christian [-Tamil]. In the front house, Sinhala people they are Christians. We all associate well without any issue here (10.00 a.m. 14 December 2011, at her house).

Youth have their own 'friendship groups' of a multi-ethnic nature as observed in other areas of the world such as North England (Hudson, et al. 2009: 203), where similarly rigid ethnicities blur. The group of teenagers with whom I frequently associated at Kumudika akka's house was an ethnic mix. Krishanth an officially Tamil boy (since father is Hindu-Tamil) lives a Sinhala life, because the mother is Buddhist-Sinhala. He revealed that he included among his friends Nissan (Sinhala) Prasad, Roshan, and Praveen (Tamil), and Yāsim (Muslim). They used the term *machan* (S: and T: buddy) to refer each other, as do other youths in the country. They all have pushbikes, cycle around the city, have same hair styles, mostly watch Tamil films, wear ear rings, colour their hair, wear T-shirts, speak both Sinhala and Tamil, are fond of cricket, and work in similar unskilled and low paid jobs.

The relationships of the parents contributed to youths; ability to maintain their relationships via the ethnic borders of the watta community. The same friendships obtained among young girls. Gopalan anna's daughter, Mekala, is friendly with Nazeera and Nuzhat. These teenagers often visit each other's homes, and exchange gifts on special occasions. For example, Nazeera made a dress for Mekala for her birthday. This relationship has developed beyond friendship into "sisterhood". Children of different ethnic groups too play together in the watta. Whenever I visited Haseena akka (Muslim), Kamalani akka (Tamil) or Rathu aiya's (Sinhala) houses located in the same neighbourhood their children were playing together.

In the watta community, people from various ethnic backgrounds participate in the everyday economy as businessmen-customers, employees-employers, and vendors-vendees. The financial hardships experienced by the families pressurise them to maintain good relationships with their neighbours. Otherwise, no one will come forward to help in times of crisis. People would be unable to get loans, a kilo of rice, or any other similar

commodities. Watta dwellers with entrepreneurial skills open small businesses, manage retail shops, sell clothes and "short eats" (e.g., pastries, Chinese rolls and patties, other spicy food such as "wade", "murukku"), all of which are heavily dependent upon earning the trust of customers. Thus these persons try to maintain good relationships with the heterogeneous neighbourhood. People in general work at maintaining good relationships with the small entrepreneurs so that they can get clothes and essential food stuffs on credit (T: *kadanakku*, S: *nayata*). Kumudika akka, told me about her business;

> I bargain in Sinhala and Tamil with the [multi-ethnic] traders in Pettah and get clothes for a reduced price and sell them in the watta for keeping 100-200 rupee profits for one piece of cloth. I sell clothes taken from pettah [main streets in Colombo] and sell them here in the watta during Muslim, Hindu, Christian festivals. For this Nombi [Ramadan] period I have sold around 8000 rupees worth of clothes. These people who buy clothes on credit pay it back in instalment. They have very good contacts with me... (4.00 p.m. 10 September 2011, at her house).

Businesses based on personal relationships create avenues for the building and maintenance of unity across ethnic borders. Some of the residents of the watta have an extra house or additional rooms in their houses: they rent these spaces in order to earn additional income. Many young people with rural and estate backgrounds live in rented houses and rooms. Outsider vendors of diverse ethnic backgrounds also frequent the watta. Among them some sell sweep tickets, toys, "short eats", clothes and herbal medicines. Others are service providers, e.g., such as knife sharpeners or three-wheeler taxi drivers. One day, I met a Sinhala lady selling ladies garments on Hajji (Ramadan) festival day.

Watta dwellers work in multiethnic working environments in Colombo. Gopalan anna is employed by an organisation that has majority of Sinhala workers. Thus he was able to get a job for his sister-in-law. He never complains about discrimination but often talks about how he outsmarts others. His daughter works as a clerk in an office with two other Sinhala girls, for a building construction company owned by a Tamil businessman. Gopalan anna's son Danush works in a Tamil majority hardware shop with a Sinhala and Muslim minority as co-workers. Sinhalas who work for Muslim employers claim that they are treated well. During Hajji (Ramadan) festival in 2011, Kumudika akka's husband was paid extra 10,000 rupees with his monthly salary; as well, he received clothes, a sarong, dates, five kilos of rice, and vegetables. Out of this money, Kumudika akka deposited 5,000 rupees in her daughter's fixed savings account. She was given 2000 rupees and her

husband used the rest. Even her father, who works as a mechanic, receives gifts, e.g., sarong and a shirt from his Muslim employer.

The paradox of hope

Members of this heterogeneous community have similar aspirations for the future: in brief, they desire to move out of watta life. Realizing this hope is dependent upon planned and unplanned opportunities, unlike in the case of Crow Islanders. Their aspirations are shaped not only by the "social relations" of the watta, but by reference to the middle-class. The watta dwellers compare their situations with those of richer city dwellers. Their social imaginary is partially shaped by their lack of economic and social capital. They seek support from cosmic powers via deities to gain security. De Mel Watta is located behind companies that sell hardware items. The watta dwellers see these modern buildings full of people doing white-collar jobs. They wish for—and work to achieve—better futures for their children. In the process, they have little opportunity to obsess over ethnic stereotypes or differences. In any case, their lives are similar. For the poor, the future means fear of contingencies. Haseena akka (42), who studied up to grade ten at a Muslim school and is married to an uneducated Muslim husband, explained why she sends her two children to an English medium international school[28] in Colombo:

> Their father [who] did not study at all became a three-wheeler[29] taxi driver and works hard and the children should not have the same plight... I could go only up to grade ten in a Tamil medium Muslim school... Time is moving very fast and the country is developing rapidly. The children should be prepared for the future. They get English education. English and Sinhala are very important [in] today's context in the changing world. Tamil as a language would help us only to read the Quran. Tamil has nowhere in the country.... But these children should have a better future.... We hardly manage to send them to this international college... I have to pay 2500 rupees for my elder son and 1500 rupees for the younger son as monthly fee for the school, out of the income my husband brings as a three-wheeler driver. I don't mind skipping a few meals to save money to give a better education for my children as dowry (T: *seethanam*) though we don't have any wealth (T: *sottu*) to give them... (10.00 a.m. 14 December 2011, at her house).

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28 In general, sending children to international schools or fee-levying schools is considered as a prestige's act and also an indication of wealth of the parents in Sri Lanka. In general, students in Sri Lanka are entitled to have free education in government schools.

29 An auto rickshaw

Haseena akka cannot anticipate what will happen to her children in the future; she tries to minimise the risks by careful monitoring of her children's academic progress as well as by minimising their association with "bad characters" in the neighbourhood. In Haseena akka's neighbourhood, other Sinhala and Tamil parents send their children to study Sinhala at the home of a Christian-Sinhala teacher, who gives tuition in the evenings. If one mother finds it difficult to take her son or daughter to the tuition class, another person helps. All have invested great hope in their children's education. They share the same aspirations and choose the same social strategies. Their focus is on collaboration not conflict.

Although the watta dwellers have high aspirations, they face a variety of problems in a highly Politicised society that works through patron-client networks. Gopalan anna's son Danush wanted to apply for a job in Korea; but he had a problem getting his name included on the job list in a context where everything relies on social capital. A known local government[30] (*Pradeshiya Sabha*) chairman from upcountry, for whom Gopalan anna had earlier worked, agreed to include his son's name under his job quota which was limited to five names. This was very rare given that MPs and politicians usually include the names of their family members and very close supporters only. The distribution of foreign job quotas in this case was not a smooth process. Many young people stood in the queues for days on end, waiting to apply for the Korean language test. Police officers were deployed to control the situation (Somarathne 2011). The Pradeshiya Sabha chairman, a Buddhist-Sinhala man, personally went with Gopalan anna and Danush to collect the application forms averting the long queue. When the other young people saw Danush going into the office and bypassing the queue they shouted, "political stooges...lackeys (S: *pandama*)..."

After registering for the job, candidates had to undergo a Korean language proficiency test, which was conducted under the direct supervision of Korean delegates. However no Korean language test preparation classes were held in the Tamil medium in Colombo. In one of the classes, Danush found a Muslim teacher conducting the course in Sinhala. Although he could neither read nor write Sinhala Danush could speak and understand it. Nevertheless, he attended the class and got the notes from a Sinhala girl. Gopalan anna translated notes into Tamil so that his son could prepare for the test. He finally sat the test: his marks were inadequate and he lost his dream. Danushe's experience

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30 The lowest level government administrative mechanism

shows how difficult it is to get a job for a person from ethnic minority in intensely (ethnic) politicised system (Hettige and Salih 2010; Kanapathipillai 2009: 6). Gopalan anna's strategy reveals other commongrounds among members of this multiethnic society: the necessity of corruption/networking. Yet ironically, here commongrounds shared by people across ethnic groups – that of networking or patron-client relations – may also increase ethnic tensions, if it is understood by ethnic 'others' as favouring ethnic compatriots.

Religious multiculturalism as watta subculture

Silva (1994) refers to the watta community as a multicultural social space in the city. But this notion of multiculturalism is different from the state-enforced multiculturalism that was often rejected as a form of ethnic Sinhala domination by ethnic minorities (Orjuela 2008: 227-229). Watta residents are exposed to inter-ethnic learning and to cross-cultural experience as a part of everyday life. Each family has a working knowledge and tolerance of each other's cultural traditions. Taken together, these multicultural practices can be treated as a way of building social capital among the people, most of whom are bilingual in Sinhala and Tamil (see Silva 1994: 86).

Watta dwellers are experts in religious syncretism, just as religious architecture is also rich within three acres of De Mel Watta. There is a one mosque in the watta, and three mosques within the walking distance of Panchikawatta area. There is a Madarasa (religious school), which was possibly developed on a model of a Buddhist monastery (Harris 2004: 363). There are three *kovil*s (Hindu temples) in the watta and the neighbouring areas are dedicated to Goddess Amman (the Goddess Pattini), Goddess Kāḷī Amma and God Muniyandisāmy or the Goddess Kāḷī's brother. The main road to the watta starts at Pulleyār *kovil* and ends at Amman *kovil* located adjacent to the Buddhist temple. The Buddhist temple and the Pattini *kovil* of De Mel Watta are divided by one wall, back to back, facing in two opposite directions. Catholics and evangelical group members have access to religious places outside of the watta.

Both Sinhala and Tamil peoples go to the *kovil* when they want to perform *pūja* (offering). Kumudika akka (a Buddhist-Sinhala lady) told me that she made a vow at the Kāḷī *kovil* (see Obeyesekere and Obeyesekere 1990) at neighbouring Paradise watta

seeking the Goddess's help to find her a better husband. Furthermore, she revealed that she conceived a baby following the *pūja* she made to the same Goddess. Locals seek the support of other religions (cosmic powers) for many reasons; to rid themselves of poverty, to get a good job, conceive a baby, heal or cure diseases, or to make a successful marriage.

During my research diseases such as *ammai noi* (T:) or *deyiyange leda* (S:) (chicken pox) and dengue fever were widespread. The diseases were not confined to certain ethnic or religious groups but the "way out" was sought mainly in Hinduism. Sinhalas, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians did *pūja* (offering) to Amman (Goddess Pattini of the Hindu pantheon) and performed rituals at home. I noted that they had laid lines of mango and magosa leaves across the front steps of their houses to stop others from entering. Buddhists, Hindus and some Muslims visit the famous Catholic churches in Colombo. At the theological school at the Buddhist temple, I saw five Muslim and Tamil students among the 20 attending on that day. They all were studying in the Sinhala medium.

Clifford Geertz (1966) suggests treating "religion as a cultural system." In his definition of culture, he refers to "meanings", "symbols" and "conceptions". In the watta religion is a system in which everyone participates. During Buddhist festivals such as *Wesak* (celebration of Lord Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death) and *Poson* (celebration of bringing Buddhism to Sri Lanka) Colombo becomes a zone of mesmerising events including *pandol, Wesak* lanterns, *bakthi gee* (devotional songs) and puppet shows. The temples are opened to host various religious activities while non-Buddhists visit to look at the decorations. They eat and drink from the *dansala* (Alms house), a stall where free food and drinks are served during Buddhist religious festivals to all persons as part of the religious observance of Buddhist traditions.

Yet religious events are not just ethnic and religious group collaborations but also carry political and inter-class significance. They are events in which ethnicity is blurred in everyday practice (Bremner 2004: 149). During Wesak 2011, a *dansala* was organised in the watta for the second time under the leadership of Samantha aiya, a Buddhist-Sinhala man. Financial contributions came from the people of De Mel Watta, mostly from Tamil and Muslim businessmen who owned hardware shops in Armour Street, and Panchikawatta area. Kumudika akka started this *dansala* tradition in the watta in 2010. At her *dansala*, she served lunch consisting of bread and curry for two days. Samantha aiya served as an

organiser for Duminda Silva. He invited his "boss" as the Chief Guest. He did not come. Duminda Silva, a Member of Parliament (MP) was elected from the UNP (United National Party) who later crossed over to the ruling UPFA (United People's Freedom Alliance). Samantha aiya had gathered together Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims for election canvassing, political rallies, and to mobilise the people to vote him. Duminda Silva gave Samantha 50kg bag of rice when the latter went to meet him to invite him for *dansala*, which prepared *Dunthel* bath (Ghee Rice with green peas) with onion sambol and a selection of curries both days.

I observed that members of all ethnic groups living in Samantha aiyas' neighbourhood participated in the arranging, cooking, transporting and serving of food. Members of the heterogeneous ethnic groups participated in *dansala* and no attempts were made to hide anyone's ethnic background. Those who partook of dinner did not forget to attend the *sau dansala* (sago *dansala*) organised by the Buddhist-Sinhalas with Tamil and Muslim friends who had also participated in organising the activities. Farook nānā, a Hindu-Tamil *Dhobi* (washerman caste) who had converted to Islam, provided sound and lights for the *dansala*. During the festival Mohideen Beg, a Sri Lankan Muslim performer, sang songs about Buddhism, were played over the public address system. The chief incumbent of the De Mel Watta Temple recalled one of the singer's statements in his sermon at the conclusion of the *dansala*. Mohidin Beg said:

> My songs would be there as long as Buddhist people are survived. We play his songs, Muslims, Tamils helped to organise this *dansala*. This is the fascinating unity we have...

I should note here that Tambiah (1996: 61) describes how Muslims objections to Sinhala organising of a *dansala* led to Sinhala-Muslim clashes in 1915. Today it has changed. I made brief notes on some other religious events in which I noticed multi-ethnic and multi-religious participation despite macro ethno-political rivalries. The Katina procession[31] was held in the Buddhist temple at the watta. Tamils and Muslims were eager to see it: some Tamil children took part in presenting items as well. I was told that when mini masses were held at one Catholic-Sinhala family's house, Buddhists, Hindus, and even Muslims attended. Some churches, e.g., St. Anthony's, attract members from heterogeneous ethnic

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31 A Buddhist religious event. More details are available in the previous chapter.

backgrounds. I observed this during the annual feast of 2011. *Kandiri*, which celebrates the birthday of Milad-un-Nabi, is a Muslim celebration that non-Muslims have the chance to attend. All of my experiences in the watta show the possibility of people celebrating others' ethno-religious practices, even as political entrepreneurs use such practices to create collective identities and/or clients for their political careers.

Becoming an ethnic or/and religious "other"

Members of the watta community negotiate ethnic and religious borders in different ways in order to create commongrounds. Two are significant: permanent change through sudden or slow conversion, and temporary day-to-day interfaith interactions (as illustrated in this chapter). Inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriage is one mode of permanent alteration. I met many families with mixed marriages. Wimalasena aiya (brother) married a Muslim lady and now lives in a Buddhist-Sinhala way. Similarly, a few Buddhist-Sinhala ladies who married Muslims adhere to Muslim cultural mores. A Sinhala man who lives in Kumudika akka's neighbourhood married a Muslim lady and now lives in the Muslim way.

The other way of becoming an ethnic "other" is through conversion. I met a Hindu-Tamil *Dhobi* (a low caste assigned to serve as washermen) family, who had all converted to Islam, signalling a religious, caste and ethnic change. The father is now identified as Farook nānā while his son and wife too altered their Hindu-Tamil names following conversion. The differences that shape different religions' 'ways of living' are locally understood as including diverse forms of religious worship, food habits, clothing, and male-female interaction. Those who live according to Islam are more easily discernible. They change their names, pray five times a day, and wear caps when they attend the mosque. Those who adopt a Muslim lifestyle change both their religion and ethnicity. I found a case where a woman married a Sinhala man, then a Muslim man. While living with the latter, she covered her head. But when she married for a third time, a Hindu-Tamil man, she ceased this Islamic practice. Each change was made quietly without resistance from the respective communities. People thus appear to possess the possibility to alter potentially Politicised ethno-religious identities to meet their various needs, constituting another shared commongrounds in watta community.

Perhaps the best example of this was a Buddhist-Sinhala family of seven siblings, each of whom entered into a mixed marriage. As a result, they became part of extended families with different ethno-religio-cultural traditions. Their lives illustrate the situational, contextual and personal factors that lead to ethnic/ religious boundary crossing.

Figure 4.1: Samudra Jayawardhana akka's family tree
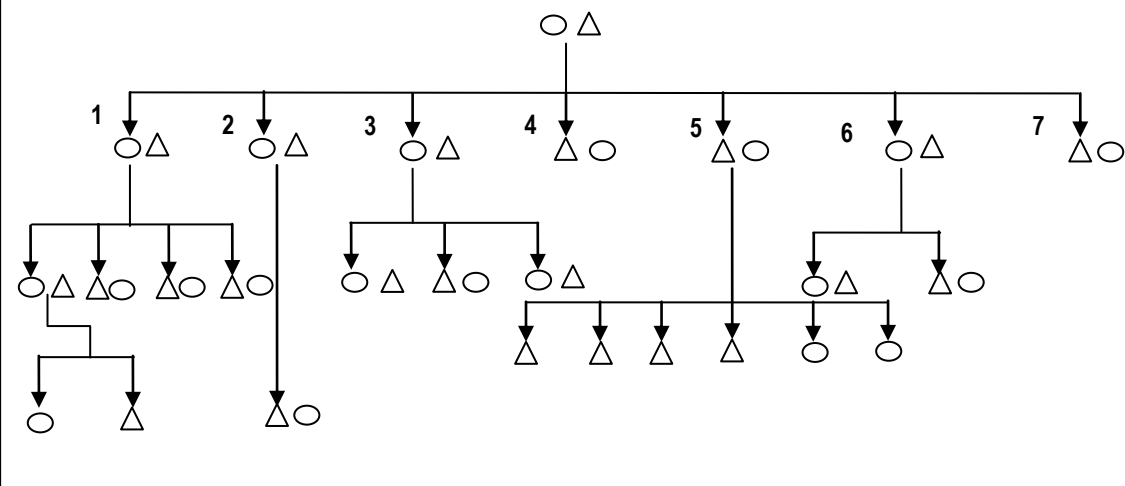
1. The oldest sibling was Sriyani Jayawardhana (a 53 year-old woman), a widow when I met her: her late husband was a Buddhist-Sinhala person. She was a heavy drinker (who died a year after my fieldwork). Her elder son, Saman, married a Hindu-Tamil lady who is a mental patient. They have two children. They live a Sinhala lifestyle, celebrate Buddhist-Sinhala festivals, and attend *kovil* as well.

2. Thusitha Jayawardhana (a 51 year-old woman) married a Muslim man and has a married son approximately 25 years of age. He and his father live in Galle and have no contact with Thusitha. During her marriage, she lived as a Muslim lady. Later, she separated from her Muslim husband and started to live with a Christian-Tamil man. By the time the research finished she was living with a Hindu-Tamil man.

3. Samudra Jayawardhana (a 49 year-old woman) married to a Buddhist-Sinhala person. She has one son and two daughters from this marriage. Her son married a Hindu-Tamil girl with Indian origin from Avissawella: he met her in the Middle East where both were working. Both her son and husband work for Muslim businessmen. Furthermore, her son-in-law works as a driver for a Muslim businessman in the area.

4. Wimalasena Jayawardhana, a 47 year-old man married to Muslim lady lives a Buddhist-Sinhala lifestyle. However his wife is not a devoted follower of Buddhist-Sinhala traditions.

5. Sisira Jayawardhana (a 45 year-old man) married a Hindu-Tamil lady but later converted to Christianity. Initially they lived a Sinhala lifestyle, but later pursued a Christian-Tamil lifestyle. Sisira was jailed after his conviction for using heroin. His wife has been working as a domestic servant in the Middle East. Their daughter married a Christian-Tamil man: their son is engaged to a Christian-Tamil lady.

6. Rohini Jawardhana (a 44 year-old woman) married a Hindu-Tamil man and has six children, all of whom speak Tamil at home. The Sinhala names given to these children at birth have been confined by their birth certificates; they always use nicknames, which, they believe, signal more "Tamilness". The elder son, Kishor, is to marry a Muslim girl from Anuradhapura. He wanted to follow his uncle who married a Muslim lady and now has a better life.

7. Younger brother Jinasena Jawardhana (a 40 year-old man) was stabbed 47 times by seven Muslim men from one family following a dispute in 1991. Violence also exists in the watta community. Before his death, he had separated from his Buddhist-Sinhala wife after her extra-marital affair with a local Muslim man. Later she married another Christian-Tamil man and lived with Jinasena's two sons.

Eriksen claims that "although ethnicity is not wholly created by individual agents, it can simultaneously provide agents with meaning and with organisational channels for pursuing their culturally defined interests. It is very important to be aware of this duality" (2010a: 19). He further indicates that elementary us/them divisions are not always practical in real life even though many nationalist ideologies are developed on that kind of binary opposition (2010a: 136-139). I observed the dynamics of antagonism and integration among members of different ethnic groups as well as between members of intra-ethnic groups. Their conflicts were hardly linked to ethnicity but to day-to-day matters. Such dynamics create the possibility of the existence of both ethnic tensions and peace at the same time in one society (Neofotistos 2004).

To illustrate, Gopalan anna's distant relation Kumuda, a Hindu-Tamil girl from upcountry, went to work in a garment factory (like so many other young women). According to some writers, female garment factory workers in Sri Lanka who work in the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) "collectively express their difference from dominant classes and males and articulate their identities as a gendered group of migrant industrial workers by cultivating different tastes and by engaging in oppositional cultural practices" Hewamanne

(2003; 2006b; 2008a; 2009; 2011). The stigmatised nature of their work, i.e., that "blood and flesh is being sucked dry" (Hewamanne 2006a), is perceived by some males as making them easy girls to sleep with. Kumuda, the elder daughter of the family, came to Colombo to earn money to support her younger sisters' education and to buy medicine for her mother suffering from cancer. Her father could not earn enough to cover these expenses as a labourer on a tea estate, like so many destitute once- bonded labourers. Members of Kumuda's generation reject the estate sector: they prefer to work as sales staff, domestic servants, garment factory workers, labourers, and as clerical staff in Colombo. During the war, their mobility to the city was drastically reduced due to security checks, pressure to register with the police, and unexpected arrests.

The Muslim boys of the watta harassed the factory van that transported Kumuda from work to Gopalan anna's house. After that, she went to work at another factory where she was paid a low salary but could come home before 'dark". In this way, not only was she assured of a safe job, but it was a way of dealing with young men who had harassed her. Their disturbances ceased when they were warned by the *dada*, the so-called leader (a Muslim) of the *pāthāle* (underworld) in the watta following a phone call from Gopalan anna's wife. The *dada* warned the boys not to disturb the "innocent family" of the watta.

Subsequently, Maheshwari akka noticed that the "Muslim Three-wheeler boys" were supporting a Tamil boy, who was alleged to have a connection with the Muslim underworld. He wanted to win over Kumuda. Gopalan anna considered this an act transgressing a good neighbour in the watta by Muslim boys. The Tamil boy continued to follow Kumuda, disregarding Gopalan anna's polite request to cease, and ignoring the fact that neither Kumuda nor her parents consented to their marriage. Gopalan anna hit the boy when he started to pursue Kumuda a second time. During this clash, Rinoza akka's brother, a Muslim man, also joined in. He hit the Tamil boy as he could not tolerate injustice happening to his neighbour. The whole affair showcased a range of commongrounds involving gender politics, inter-ethnic negotiations (for "good" and "bad"), the blocking of such attempts, unity among diverse ethnic groups against a common threat, the absence of formal law and order and substituting of it, the "un-official leader's" concern over the safety of ethnic others, and the support that prevailed amongst inter-ethnic youth vis-a-vis a romantic affair of a peer.

Tambiah (2005) notes that in South Asia cricket matches are events that give rise to nationalist feelings among members of ethnic groups. This is in contrast to the notion that international cricket matches evoke "Sri Lankan" feelings that transcend ethnic divisions (Roberts 1985: 411). During cricket matches almost all of the households in Sri Lanka in general and in the slum communities in particular are glued to television sets. Some Tamils support the Indian team, some Sinhalas to Sri Lankan team while Muslims may support the Pakistan team. However, do all Muslim and Tamil groups support the Pakistan and Indian teams? Once I watched a cricket match on TV at Gopalan anna's house, in which his daughter supported Sri Lanka while his son cheered on India. On the same night, Muslim boys who hire three-wheeler taxis in the watta drove around the streets flying national flag of Sri Lanka after the national team won the match with India.

Two neighbours Malar akka (38, a Hindu-Tamil lady) and Leela akka (50, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady married to a Hindu-Tamil man) started quarrelling over a remark passed by Menike akka, another Buddhist-Sinhala lady who was currently looking after the children of Muslim friends after both the husband and wife died of cancer (In fact here was another illustration of the prevalence of trust, loyalty, responsibility, and long-term bond across ethnic borders). Leela akka told me about the quarrel:

> When the Sri Lanka lost the final world cricket match to India there were worries in the minds of the Sinhala people. The following day Menike came to my house and accused Muttiah Muralitharan [the only Tamil player in Sri Lankan cricket team, loved by most of the Sri Lankan cricket fans] of betraying the match. She belived that Sri Lanka loss the match as he did not ball well [Menike meant here Muttiah favoured India as he is Tamil and he also married a lady from India]. She said there are good Tamils in the area where she lives and Muttiah belongs to some bad Tamils. Now Menike akka lives in Bambalapitiya area and she integrates much with Jaffna Tamils [who mostly include in LTTE]. I answered her from the bathroom and just said, "yes" and "no" only. As I came back from the bathroom Malar started accusing me. Then I clarified to her that I neither insulted Malar nor the Tamils but just listened [to] what Menike said. She really accused me a lot [so] I kept silent. After that they stopped talking with me (12.30 p.m. 23 August 2011, at her house).

Malar akka did not fight with Menike akka as she was a tough character: Leela akka was the weaker of the two. This case shows the probability of everyday misunderstanding among peoples who are also sensitive to ethno-politics. Malar's mother continues her relationship with Leela akka but her daughter has ceased communication. Leela akka invited Malar akka to the alms giving at her house in an effort to resume their relationship.

The alms giving (S: *dāne* and T: *dānam*) to the Buddhsit monks was organised in memory of her (Hindu-Tamil) husband deceased a year ago. I noted that Malar often got angry, even with a Muslim boy, her brother's friend, who often came to watch cricket matches at her house. The Muslim boy teased Malar akka by making comments in support of the Pakistani team. He took wicked delight in making her angry.

Cornered society: State, politics and citizenship

The watta community is not a law or society unto itself. It is part of broader society, influenced by national forces and state institutions. Although its residents are united in a "marginalised" or "cornered" community, they are also divided regarding the benefits they receive from the state or politicians. The slum community is politically mobilized too by both the ruling and opposition political parties during elections. In 2011 the Ministry of National Securities and Urban Development declared that slum settlements in Colombo would be removed to obtain land needed for the city's development, to establish factories, and to beautify the city. There were rumours that the slum dwellers would be relocated to Avissawella, an area 50 kilometres from the current location. This created great uncertainty among the people of De Mel Watta. Furthermore, during the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) election in 2011, many government officials both distributed and filled in various forms, creating more fear for those who live in the unauthorised lands of watta communities in Colombo. The main opposition party, United National Party (UNP), challenged the proposal during canvassing and electoral rallies. Many people saw it as a trick by the government to threaten the Colombo dwellers who supported the UNP in general.

The strategies adopted by the state regarding "national security" created hard times for the people of this community. Many Tamils had come to Colombo for security reasons from the northern and eastern areas. In Colombo, they live with friends and relatives. They wanted to be engaged in day-to-day matters related to their education, livelihoods, and rituals. These situations created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety for the government and locals, and an opportunity for nationalists (Schut, et al. 2008: 81). Security, according to Maria Stern (2005), "needs identity: a (seemingly) stable 'we' that is to be secured. The creation of this 'we' – whether in attempts by those in power (e.g. the state) or by resisting

marginalised groups – involves processes of boundary-making between 'us' and 'them'"(cited in Orjuela 2010: 7).

The shanties in Colombo are considered a threat to the safety and security of the city, and by extension to the wishes of its middle and upper-classes. They are often seen as a threat to "national security" (Sunil 2010; Sunil and Wijesiriwardena 2010). This notion of security was often exercised against De Mel Watta people. Sudden police raids and arrests of drug users or small level drug sellers are part of normal life in the watta. Rarely do police act against the kingpins of the drug business. I saw some police officers in "uniform" undertaking search operations in De Mel Watta on National Independence Day, the day which Sri Lankan's commemorate the country's freedom from the British Raj on 4 February 1948. It is a day that political elites monopolize: they observe the national celebration in a "high security zone" with limited and selected peoples' participation. For Gopalan anna and others of De Mel Watta, it is simply a holiday. Gopalan anna said;

> I watched a bit about National Independence Day programme live telecast on the television. Where is freedom for us? You see the prices of essential commodities are very high. People simply cannot afford to have three meals. Years ago I saw that the boys [mostly Muslim] who are in the three-wheeler taxi park fix flags on their three-wheelers but now they do not continue it anymore... (9.30 a.m. 4 February 2011, at his house).

In the watta there is a group of police officers, members of the State Intelligence Services (SIS) and Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The watta dwellers often refer to them as *buddhi anshaya*. Members of this group wear civilian clothes and blend in with the people who frequent the watta. According to Mubarak nana, a Muslim who runs a *petty kade* (S: small short-eats selling shop), they masquerade as pavement hawkers and sweep ticket sellers. The people of the watta believe that they come in search of LTTE activities, drug dealings, and other forms of malpractice. Although mostly Tamil people have been pressurised regarding registration in the non-slum areas, here everyone is considered a "special category of people". Thus they are expected to register with the police. It indicated the unwillingness of the post-war Sri Lankan state to establish normalcy and civil life, that might obstruct the ability of ethno-political entrepreneurs to remain in power.

The Police label watta dwellers "a group of criminals", an appellation reflected even in their routine affairs. Irrespective of "whoever" makes "whatever" complaint regarding

people in watta, the police immediately arrest the perceived offenders. During my research, a group of ethnically mixed young persons were arrested several times by the police. No proper explanation was provided to the parents. Kumudika akka, said:

> A Muslim man living in the flat made a false complain against boys of our watta for robbing a tyre of a three-wheeler [taxi]. It appears that this man had bribed the police to take serious action against the boys. When Samantha aiya tried to get clarification from the police officer the police offer had blamed him. Then he had called the Duminda Silva and got them released on the following day... (5.30 p.m. 15 December 2011, at her house).

According to watta dwellers, the police officers are biased. The way to deal with them is through politicians and bribery. This is the only strategy that people can adopt. Police arrests and the necessity of seeking the support of politicians engender a vicious cycle in which people become trapped. The politicians 'love' the watta community. They maintain constant contact through organisers as they consider the watta a bloc of votes. I did not see any political party-based quarrels in the community during the CMC election. The watta dwellers try to get something from the politicians. Members of the community work with the politicians they like. There is in brief an unequal reciprocity at work that sustains watta subordination but facilitates their agency. For example, the people who live "before water tank" are mostly attracted to Ramsy Toney while Mansil works with most of the people who live "beyond the water tank". Both of these Muslim politicians contested the Provincial Council elections: they represented the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA), the ruling party.

Kumudika akka, who is a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, work as a local agent for Ramsy Toney, a Muslim Municipal councillor of CMC. She organised a meeting for Ramsy Toney during the CMC election. Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalas attended. Toney spoke in both Sinhala and Tamil at the meeting. During his speech, he accused another candidate contesting the CMC election, who lives in the De Mel Watta flat, of undermining the watta dwellers, an event that should be read as the division between two localities represented by two classes. Politicians with entrepreneurial skills create a niche to do every day divide-and-rule politics in such a circumstance. During the election period, the people of the watta were given coupons for respective political parties. When members of the watta attended the political rallies in the evenings they received a parcel of dry rations: five kilograms of rice, a few coconuts, a packet of milk powder, dried fish and a milk packet, in total worth

500-1000 rupees. In sum, the people of the watta are used by the politicians to ensure the latter's power in "majoritarian politics".

The watta dwellers feel that they are marginalised citizens, a fact that is magnified during the flood season, when they struggle to find places to live. The decentralisation of power in Sri Lanka was intended to better address "citizens'" issues. However, in November 2010 most areas, including the Parliament located in the capital of Sri Lanka, went under water. MPs were escorted from the House by the military. Although rich and poor suffered during the floods, the rich had more options available to them. The peoples of the slum and squatter settlements were often accused of blocking the waterways. Waterways clearance projects, and the clearance of shanties, were seen as solutions addressing the "Colombo flood" problem. The canal that winds through the slum areas overflows during heavy rain. It swells with black-coloured greasy water, mixed with liquid industrial waste from various factories and vehicle service centres, and with liquid domestic waste from hotels and houses. De Mel Watta and the surrounding low-income housing area flood readily as they are built on low land. The CMC authorities put "red flags" in some wattas disallowing people from returning.

The CMC authorities made arrangements to clean the area; but action was very slow because they gave priority to celebrating the start of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's second term. Immediately after the war victory in 2009, the President sought a mandate from the public for his second term. Oath-taking took place one year after the election victory. From then on, his second term was guaranteed. Around this time, Gopalan anna's sister and three children lived in her brother's watta in a rented house. But the CMC put such unbearable financial pressure on their budget that she could not afford to send the children to school.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown another dimension of ethnicity through which watta dwellers, who live in a specific, low-class, marginalised community amid ethno-political tension, make commongrounds. They maintain "give and take", "going and coming", "sisterhood", and "brotherhood" types of relationships that facilitate the existential and economic needs

of this multiethnic community. They appropriate the religious and ethnic differences of neighbours as a way of forging alliances. They divide this heterogeneous community into "good" and "bad" categories, transforming conflicting ethnicities into a user-friendly concept, a categorisation based on unique, individual, and family-based criteria. They maintain informal relationships, vastly different to the formalities and manners evinced by the Crow Islanders. The socio-economic and political pressures propel them into sharing as a lifestyle and as a coping strategy. It is also ethical to give and to be generous. This heterogeneous community struggles to achieve everyday survival: it has no time, concern or motivation for embracing conflicting ethno-politics that has no particular meaning for them. In brief, although I have used the terms Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim in this discussion, watta dwellers do not view each other through ethnic lenses.

5

Cultural similarity as agreed resemblance: Everyday life-worlds in Pānama

After identifying the shape of commongrounds in the city of Colombo, with special reference to two locations representing two different class backgrounds, my attempt here and in the next chapter is to determine the social features that constitute commongrounds in rural Sri Lanka. Both Pānama and Pottuvil (Chapter Six) fall within the Ampara district secretariat jurisdiction. Frequently described as "border villages", wherein the everyday lives of "ordinary people" (often referred to as S:[32] *sāmanaya minissu*) were sandwiched between the LTTE and government armed forces, up until May 2009, they were, in effect, battlefields. Pānama is a rural village, while Pottuvil is a rural township with a Muslim majority: the rural nature of both places is characterised by an agriculture-based economy.

A number of anthropologists have studied the eastern area of Sri Lanka, e.g., Nur Yalman in his monograph *Under the Bo Tree* (1967) and Dennis B. McGilvray, who studied caste, marriage, and the matri-clan structure of the area's Tamils and Muslims. McGilvray's recent research titled *Crucible of Conflict* (2011) reveals that Tamils and Muslims have co-existed for centuries in this part of the Island. In these recent anthropological writings, 'the East' is discussed as a location wherein there is a considerable level of inter-ethnic relations, co-residence, inter-marriage between ethnic and religious groups, and religious cooperation (McGilvray 2011a; Obeyesekere 1984; Yalman 1967).

In this chapter I explore another experience of lived commongrounds in my third research site, Pānama, a rural village in Eastern Sri Lanka. Here Sinhalas and Tamils live together in one social system, an amalgam of Sinhala and Tamil systems. This amalgam has proven the cornerstone for a number of aspects of communal life such as marriage, kinship, division of labour, religious practices, and many other everyday life pursuits.

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32 S: refers to Sinhala terms.

Their routine interaction facilitates a form of situational ethnicity connected to a unique, traditional classificatory scheme predominantly based on caste order.

Introduction

In Pānama, members of two ethnic groups, Sinhala and Tamil, who have been engaged in conflict elsewhere for more than three decades, live together in one social system, inter-connected by kinship and marriage, religious beliefs and practices, in a caste-based economic and social system. The everyday commongrounds that characterises this rural village is the subject of discussion in this chapter. The villagers have created a unique social system in which people's status and roles have been defined in caste terms. They do not problematise ethnic difference but they are highly conscious of caste boundaries. My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate how the residents of Pānama have maintained intra- and inter-ethnic relationships through both a caste-based classificatory scheme of marriages and kinship, and religious rituals, despite recollections of wartime when people kept a suspicious eye on ethnic "others". I have no intention to project the village as equitable. It has its own system of inequality, and a social discrimination rooted in caste and clan lines. Nevertheless the social pact that allows Sinhalas and Tamils to live together as high and low-caste groups (happily or unhappily) bound together by cosmological powers, maintains the sexual and kinship ties that provide the foundation for both intra-ethnic commongrounds and extra-caste antagonisms in Pānama.

In his *The Articulation of Structures: Pānama* Nur Yalman (1967) identifies Pānama as a "bicultural community" located on the borderline between two cultures. These borderlines exist not only in geographical or territorial boundaries but everywhere in the country. Furthermore, Yalman described Pānama society as a "shatter zone" caught between two cultures, an amalgam characterized by synthetic Sinhala and Tamil cultural patterns due to the long period of isolation that produced its own unique system. But Pānama should not be considered in total isolation. Had there been no resemblances, Sinhalas and Tamils would not have been able to collaborate. I endorse Yalman's recognition of Pānama as a blend of Sinhala and Tamil social systems. He observed this amalgam in kinship, caste and religion, three spheres creating the traditional idiosyncratic social system of Pānama. He also concluded that in the future Pānama, becoming

integrated with other parts of Sri Lanka due to greater mobility, would be forced to become either Sinhala or Tamil. However, these events have not happened as he envisaged in 1955. Intra-caste Sinhala-Tamil collaboration has survived in Pānama. In this chapter, I focus upon the unity of Sinhala and Tamils, mainly exploring the three areas highlighted by Yalman.

Bourdieu (1998: 8) writes that "one of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for the unity of style, which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or a class of agents." I witnessed this unity of style among Pānama villagers. Here I treat the social relations of this village as organized by a collective habitus, as discussed by Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). For Bourdieu the inculcated dispositions characterizing habitus take shape in diverse socio-economic conditions (see Grenfell 2004: 33-35; Hardy 2008: 136-138; Hillier and Rooksby 2005). From that standpoint, the peasant agriculture-based goods and services economy, and the relative socio-economic isolation of the area has created a collective habitus, which is the existential reality (Jackson 2005; 2011; 2013) visible in this village. The inculcated dispositions informing the workings of the three "fields" of caste, marriage and kinship, and religion will be explained in the discussion.

Barth's (1969) view of ethnicity as a social practice that identifies codes of cultural distinction to delineate social borders and reify connections across borders is subject to question in this case, given that Pānama is a place where Sinhala and Tamils live side by side in a shared transethnic culture. Simon Harrison's discussion of ethnicity and nationalism as ideological systems that deny or disguise resemblances may prove a better fit in the case of Pānama (Harrison 2003: 345; Harrison 2006). It is this second theoretical framework that informs my discussion on commongrounds in Pānama below. Harrison proposes that the existence of group and cultural similarity favours stability and peaceful coexistence. Quoting Roosens and Smith he notes that nation or ethnic groups have been commonly described by differences (vis-a-vis culture, history, mentality, and physical appearance) fictional or sensed to prevail "between itself and others" (Harrison 2003: 343).

Against this trend, Harrison suggests that ethnicity and nationalism should be "conceptualised as relationships, not of difference or perceived difference, but of denied or disguised resemblance". He adds that "to understand ethnicities and nationalities, then,

involves understanding the ways in which they are constructed, in part at least, from devices for the elision and undoing of resemblances" (Harrison 2003: 345). According to Harrison, the impact of the proclamations of ethnic and national differences is "more or less elaborate and effortful attempts by groups to forget, deny, or obscure their resemblance" (Harrison 2003: 345). My aim is to treat Pānama as a case study of the failure of these continuous attempts by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethno-nationalists to deny the similarity between cross-ethnic and cross-religious local social lifeworlds and their operating features (including caste, marriage and kinship, religion, cosmology, livelihoods, collaborations and conflicts). In the case of Pānama, people are included in a system of social relations in which they hold various statuses and perform different roles, assigned according to local classifications.

Apropos of Pānama, there is considerably less rigidity of shared activities within ethnic borders compared to activity to Colombo, where nationalists' efforts often mute or negate resemblances due to sponsorship by the state and the investment of ethno-political capital (money, media, and ideologies). In ethnic wars, powerful parties become involved in territory-acquiring battles in order to safeguard their "noble" and "patriotic" causes. They pay little attention to perceptions, social relationships, practices and rules of local social lifeworlds. In a way, the eastern part of Sri Lanka in general, and Pānama in particular, could be considered a place in which both government forces (who generated Sinhala nationalism) and the LTTE rebels (a production of Tamil nationalism) came to know different types of people who could neither be measured according to their own divisive ethnic policies nor according to their "process of generating denied, muted, and fractured resemblances" (see Harrison 2003: 358). The government forces could not mobilize pure "Sinhalas"; and the LTTE cadres struggled to organize the "Tamils".

The Pānama village

I went to stay in Pānama in March 2010. Yalman spent less than two months in Pānama with a research assistant, collecting data until the end of October 1955. Gananath Obeyesekere visited Pānama in 1965 and again in 1967 to observe the *Ankeliya* (horn pulling) rituals conducted at Ampitiya devālaya (see *The Cult of the Goddess in Pattini* 1984). After Yalman and Obeyesekere, I may be the only (student) anthropologist to have

visited this village for long-term fieldwork. Yalman conducted his research when the village had a total population of 987. Currently Pānama is home to more than 10,000 persons and is divided into five Grama Niladhari (GN)[33] divisions. Both of the scholars' work in Pānama provided me with an anthropological profile to draw upon regarding today's village, although I have a special focus on intergroup relationships and unity building.

Aravinda, a young monolingual Buddhist-Sinhala graduate from the Department of Sociology, the University of Colombo, became my field assistant. His commitment and passionate involvement proved invaluable to me during my fieldwork in Pānama and Pottuvil, to be compared in a multi-sited research project. When we went to Pānama in March 2011, after the monsoon rain period, we stayed in a community hall built by Sarvodaya in Siriwardhana aiya's (elder brother Siriwardhana) home garden. It was a den of wild rats, snakes (come in search of rats), and mosquitoes where I learnt the necessary hard lessons of becoming a fieldworker. My friends in Pānama could not find accommodation for us because the villagers did not like to rent rooms to strangers. After staying for two months in a small room in the half-opened community hall, located in high-caste area, we realised that our chances of meeting local Tamil people were very low.

So we decided to move to Pānama north where the majority of Tamil people live, particularly low-caste washermen (*Dhobi*) settled in specific aggregates in the village. We were able to find a small unoccupied house that had been constructed under various Tsunami aid programmes. Some families had received a few houses from these agencies. This house, which had a living room, a kitchen, and a verandah, was to be our home until January 2012. The toilet was located approximately 150 meters from the house, typical given locals' health concerns and toilet practices. The house, which had a pretty sandy garden, was the last house on a byroad in Pānama north. It had been constructed approximately 500 metres from the sea, which often made us nervous during rumours and warnings about Tsunamis. A sand mountain eased the tension: it served as barrier to protect the village that is located below sea level.

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33 The GN (abbrev. Form for Grama Niladhari division) is the lowest public administration jurisdiction area, in Sri Lanka, a subunit of the Divisional Secretariat (DS).

Our neighbourhood comprised a mix of 20 Sinhala high-caste and low-caste Tamil *Dhobi* (washermen) families. We were welcomed into the neighbourhood network and immediately started *ganu denu* (S: a give-and-take relationship) with our neighbours. They sent us curry dishes, and portions of the fish caught by their fishermen husbands. We fetched water from the well of a high-caste Sinhala neighbour, and borrowed an air pump from a *Dhobi* family to pump air into our bike tyres. This was the practice among the Sinhala and Tamil neighbours. Two villagers, a youth and an old trader, were kind enough to lend us their bicycles on occasion. We often cycled around the village.

Our research in Pānama consisted of multiple strategies: participating in religious performances/ rituals at Buddhist temples and Hindu shrines; engaging in pilgrimages, taking part in various functions such as weddings, funerals, coming-of-age ceremonies; observing special events of the village such as new year festivals, musical shows, community works; having a close contacts with government officials and joining their programmes; visiting families with whom we have close contacts. We were in contact with 30 Sinhala and 16 Tamil families. In addition we associated with 5 families of Sinhala-Tamil mixed marriages. We were able to maintain day-to-day contacts with these families. We had discussions with Muslims to whom Pānam villagers introduced us. Moreover, we had close contacts with key figures and institutions of the village. Aravinda permanently stayed in this village recording data on everyday life of Pānama and Pottuvil people. I often travelled between research sites collecting ethnographic data in Colombo and the eastern coast. I traveled back and forth nearly 400 kilometres (one way) distance between field locations at night, so as to save daytime to gather ethnographic data.

Whenever we wanted fish curry, we would go to the seashore where the fishing-boats and canoes were moored. We could get fish free from the natural fishing harbour. Here we met Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala middle-level traders came from Pottuvil, Ampare and other places to purchase fish. Their lorries were fitted with cold storage facilities. Such business relationships bound the multi-ethnic fish traders together. The Pānama fishermen used to give away enough free fish to make *hodda* (S: a pot of curry) to people who went to the harbour around the time the boats reached the shore in the evenings. Caste, creed, colour and gender were irrelevant: any villager could get free fish. Even the fisher folk themselves were ethnically mixed.

Every evening we engaged in casual talk with our neighbours. Children and adults of all castes used to come to our house for a chat. However, we tried to make sure that no one of the *Dhobi* caste was at our house when high-caste visitors came to see us. The high-caste Sinhalas, including our landlady, did not like our violation of their norms concerning caste border maintenance. So we endeavoured to strike a balance with visitors to the village. Routinely, we participated in important events in the village, i.e., funerals, weddings, and rituals at the Buddhist temple and devālaya (S: shrine).

Sinhalas use the term *gama* and Tamils employed terms *kiramam* or *ūr* to refer to the "village". Both Sinhalas and Tamils add the adjectives "our" (S: *ape*) and (T[34]: *enga, engaludaya* and *engaluda*) to claim inheritance or ownership of the village. In general, referring to "our village", the villagers employ plural terminology, e.g., (S: *ape gama*) and (T: *engaladu ūr, enga ūr* or *engaludaya kiramama, enga kiramam*). The fact that everyone described Pānama as "our village" is a fine indication of their solidarity and emotional attachment to it. Villagers identified themselves as "Pānama people" (S: *Pānama minissu* and T: *Pānama Akkhal*) irrespective of caste or ethnic division. They all come forward to help when a fellow villager is in a crisis; that is, in case of funerals or accidents.

The people of Pānama use a distinctive vernacular language: there is a unique difference in language usage compared with that of people in other areas of the country. Sinhalas and Tamils use the same words. For example, when chasing dogs they yell *hadi*: the (S:) term *ada* (man) may have originated in the (T:) term *ade* (man). Some other terms commonly used by both Sinhalas and Tamils include: *pingi* (row), *rottuwa* (road), *olunguwa* (narrow road), *abagannawa* (take a seat), *marikkiwenawa* (go), *bukul denawa* (hit), *ona* (chin), *gongaya* (crow), *atikitta* (frog), *hinno* (ants), *mappudiya* (a hand of paddy), *hura* (brother-in-law), *kundikora ennawa* (S: *ukkutayen innawa* meaning "squatting"), *kundukattuwa* (to sleep in a curved shape), *ambanawa* (chase), *mattayo* (Muslims), *brumpetti* (turban), *wade* (rent), *kudilla* (a thatched house), *Vattavidane* (*Velvidane* in Sinhala tradition, and elsewhere in the country, the traditional irrigation headman), *Vannakar* (temple trustee), and *Vattāndi* (a position assigned during the *Ankeliya* ritual). Thus the people of Pānama are essentially bilingual: the Tamils are fluent

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34 T: refers to Tamil terms.

in Sinhala and vice versa. Our neighbours, who were low-caste Tamils, often engaged in day-to-day conversation in Sinhala.

Pānama is devided in to five GN divisions, Pānama South, Pānama North, Pānama West, Pānama Central and Pānama Shastrawela. The total population of Pānama North where my research was mainly based was 1343 inhabitants. They include 979 Sinhalas and 364 Tamils. There were 7 women-headed families as they lost their husbands during the war. Both Sinhala and Tamil people live there while Muslims are not welcomed as permanent residents. Pānama is surrounded by mainly Muslim and Tamil dominated areas. Perhaps out of necessity both the Tamil and Sinhala people have close contacts and business relationships with Muslims who mainly live in Pottuvil and elsewhere in the eastern region.

In general Pānama residents enage in agricultural work, i.e., paddy cultivation, *chēna* cultivation or shifting farmland cultivation, working as agricultural labourers, and in fishing, and animal husbandry. The village too has government servants such as clerical staff, school teachers, government officers such as Samurdhi Development officer and Grama Niladhari (or village level government administrative ooficer), and security personnel. A few people run their own businesses, i.e., small retail shops where they sell essential food stuffs. The village also has private sector employees who work in the neighbouring Muslim Town of Pottuvil or Colombo. Those who work in Colombo used to come home once a month or specially in festival times or in long holidays. The socio-political isolation of the village had been really reduced with the decentralisation of political power, media expansion, infrastructure development and also because of the war. The Pānama people too take radical political decisions by changing the ruling party of the Pradeshiya Sabha (local government body) to show their resistance to the current government and to protest against state encroachment of their lands and Navy officials fishing in the lagoon. I found that many soldiers who served in this area during the war had married women from the village and have now become part of the Pānama community. The Sinhala and Tamil villagers can send their children to both Sinhala and Tamil medium schools now. In general the literacy rate among the younger generation is relatively high.

The high-caste Pānama people are generally believed to have descended from Sinhala warrior families, who withdrew from Kandy (*Uva*) to the forest areas of eastern

part of Sri Lanka which was under the Kandyan kingdom in those days, followed by their defeat in 1818 in the *Uva-Wellassa* rebellion (the Great Rebellion) against the British occurred in the hill country of Sri Lanka (see Davy 2011; Gunawardena 2003: 307-308; Wickramasinghe 2006: 103-104). Then British Governor, Robert Brownrigg (1812-1820) issued a gazette notification condemning the individuals (including Kandyan aristocratic leaders) who revolted against British rule in Sri Lanka: the rioters were condemned as "traitors" and their possessions confiscated (Kostal 2000). This Gazette notification changed only in 2011 when those who participated in the uprising were honoured as "National Heroes". However, some educated people of Pānama claimed that they had been living in Pānama before the insurgents arrived in 1818. In Sri Lanka, there is a tendency to link the Pānama people to the local aboriginal community, i.e., Vädda or the *Helwa Paramparawa* (*helawa*[35] generation). This mix is "taken-for-granted" in the everyday life, similar to the high-caste Sinhala/Tamil mix.

The insurgent families retreated to the forest area of Pānama to escape British torture and punishment. They settled in the villages of Helawa, Kumana, Kudumbigala, Radella, and Meeyangoda, which were located on the Heda Oya, Kumbukkan Oya and Vila Oya rivers, for easy access to water for drinking and cultivation. However they subsequently relocated to Pānama due to natural hazards, e.g., drought. They lived as a farming community in this forest area, developing marital, social and economic links with the Tamil community of the east. The Pānama and Pottuvil peoples narrated stories about the origins of the Pānama people and their relationship with the Tamils. According to one story, two sisters from the same family, Kirihami and Kaluhamy, lived in Meeyangoda, which was divided into Pānama and Pottuvil. Kirihami went to Pānama where she adopted the Sinhala lifestyle while Kaluhamy went to Pottuvil to embrace the Tamil way of life. I met the grandchildren of the two ladies in Pānama and Pottuvil. They maintain good kinship ties even today.

Yalman identified Pānama as a village isolated in Sri Lanka and located between large Muslim and Tamil communities, like Pottuvil, Thirukkovil, Kalmunai and Battcaloa in the north, and small "Sinhala jungle communities" to the west (1967: 311). The closest community to Pānama was Pottuvil, a predominantly Muslim area in which approximately

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35 Name of a place in the Yāla forest

were 7000 lived in 1955 (Yalman 1967: 311). But this number has increased drastically today. Tamil groups, who live on the east coast are divided into many sub groups in terms of religion; for example, Hindu, Roman Catholics, and Protestants. Moreover, the Hindus are further divided into caste-based groups.

I will now delineate the practice of commongrounds that mitigates the ethnonationalists' or ethno-national political elites attempt to silence, negate or break the extant resemblances (see Harrison 2003; 2006). I will consider three main aspects, caste, marriage and kinship, along with religious practices during the discussion. Let me begin by analysing caste relations.

The caste-based social system of Pānama

One cannot fully comprehend Pānama's social system through superficial observations, given the ethnographer's initial perceptions are guided by various influences such as ethnicity, class, gender, and politics. Pānama should be understood from the "Pānama people's" perspectives, which necessitates long-term acquaintance with the locals. I understood the inappropriateness of my approach to ethnicities in Pānama within a few months of my stay. Initially I identified the various groups as "Sinahala people", or "Tamil people", using ethnically biased language. This may have happened due to my over-enthusiasm for "ethnic" relations. Subsequently, I understood the difference, juxtaposing my language with theirs. The vocabulary of the Pānama people is composed of caste references not ethnicity: *Dhobi minissu* (S:) or *Dhobi ākkhal* (T:) (*Dhobi* people-washermen), *honda kattiya* (S: high-caste people), *ape kattiya* (S:) and *engaluda* (T:) or *enga ākkhal* (T:) (our people), *egollange kattiya* (S:) and *awangaludaya ākkhal* (T:) (their people), *egollan* (S:) and *awanga* (T:) (they), and *megollange kattiya* (S:) (his clan). These are referenced routinely when conversing with outsiders. But outsiders like me often view people through ethnic lenses.

Caste (S: *jāthi* or *kulaya* and T: *jāthi*) plays a primary role in the organisation of Pānama society as is evident in other east coast villages as well (McGilvray 1982; 1983; 2011a; Obeyesekere 1984; Yalman 1967). Rohan Bastin's view of Sri Lankan caste as an economy of differentiation and fragmentation based on kinship, marriage and reproduction

(2001a:17) holds valid ground in Pānama. Caste was in the centre of social organisation of Kandyan society from where Pānama people believed they came (Gunasekera 1994; Leach 1960; Yalman 1960). The village is home to villagers of four castes: *Goyigama* and *Vellālar* (parallel castes), *Dhobis*, *Barbers*, and *Padu* in hierarchical order. This combination of Sinhala and Tamil castes forms one unique social system in the village. In general, Sinhala high-caste *Goyigama* and Tamil high-caste *Vellālar* are identified as equal caste groups (Sabaratnam 2001). According to the inter-caste relations of traditional Pānama, the *Goyigama* and *Vellālar* people enjoy high respect from the three other castes. The next two caste groups, the *Dhobi* (*Vannar* washermen) and the *barbers* (hair cutters) (*Navitar* barber) are also Tamil caste groups. McGilvray (1982) describes these castes in detail with reference to neighbouring areas such as Akkaraipattu and Kokkadicholai. The lowest group in the caste hierarchy, the *Padu*, is ethnically a Sinhala group.

Facts emerged that contest some Sinhala people's exclusive claim to the *Goyigama* caste. In contrast, in-depth discussions with some Sinhala villagers, who initially came to Pānama as seasonal fishermen, support a caste-mix. These particular Sinhala people, who joined to village community from a low-country area, have been elevated to high-caste positions. However, the villagers do not make such distinctions in everyday life. The up-country Sinhala rebels who settled in Pānama married into high-caste *Vellālar* Tamil families from neighbouring Tamil communities. I should note here that up-country had a hybrid social system; i.e., Sinhala and Tamils marriages, and Buddhist and Hindu religious cooperation (see Trawick 2007: 40, 286; Yalman 1967: 15-16). These two caste groups were very careful never to marry into *Dhobi* (washermen) families. Furthermore, there is no evidence of high-caste Tamils and low-caste Tamils uniting on the grounds of ethnicity, not even during the peak of the war. In general, the villagers were referred to only as "high" and "low" caste groups.

The term *Dhobi* signifies a Tamil caste group. Sinhalas' use the Sinhala washermen caste term *Rada* to refer to Tamil washermen. There are no Sinhala washermen (S: *Rada* or *Radawu*) in the village. But the Tamil washermen caste fit well with the Sinhala caste system too. I relentlessly heard that Sinhalas using the term *Rada* to call *Dhobi* people. When the high-caste Sinhalas settled in Pānama permanently, they had to obtain the services of a few *Dhobi* Tamil families to deal with mundane matters; e.g., washing clothes; helping during funerals, weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies and funerals, and

rituals at the devālaya (shrine) and temples. The same roles were performed by washermen in the village life of Kandyan society, from where Pānama people were believed to have come from after 1818 (also see Yalman 1967: 68). These status and role-based performances continue even up to today. The current *Dhobi* population in the village consists of more than five hundred families, signalling an expansion of the numbers of the initial migrants who settled in the village. Traditionally, high-caste Sinhala and Tamil families owned a (bonded) *Dhobi* family, members of which provided various services for both happy and sad occasions (other than routine clothes washing) (also see Leach 1960: 6).

According to older villagers, the high-caste people either placed their "dirty clothes" (S: *kilutu redi*) at the *kadulla* (S: the gate of the home garden) from where the washermen collected them, or waited until the high-caste people handed over their clothes, i.e., an indication of respect towards high-caste people. In return, the washermen families were given paddies and money by the corresponding high-caste families. In those days, the *Dhobi* and *Padu* peoples used to show respect to high-caste people in public by removing the towels they wore over the shoulders and bowing in a show of respect as they passed by. These forms of respect are no longer seen today. However, Punchimenike, a high-caste Sinhala lady, made clear that the *Dhobi* people's *baya-saka* (S: direct translate "fear and suspicion", which mean "respect") embodied attitude towards Sinhalas was not a form of ethnic borders maintenance in Barthian terms, but rather a mode of maintaining caste boundaries. Most outsiders, however, were inclined to misconstrue this thesis.

We came to know of instances where washermen and barber castes, who were predominantly ethnic Tamils, refused to offer their services to the Sinhala *Padu* people. This was an indication of the inclusion of high-caste *Vellālar* and low-caste *Dhobi* Tamils into one whole social system. High-caste Sinhalas bestow lower status on the *Padu* community, members of which are Sinhalas. The settling of the *Padu* people at the far end of Pānama in Kumana Gammanaya (kumana village) in 1980 was ostensibly an act of maintaining old caste relations with high-caste people. Fewer than ten Tamil families representing *Barber* caste lived in the community: they ran a few saloons in the Pānama bazaar. Once when I tried to get a hair-cut I found that they usually close on Friday prayer day. The Hindus in Sri Lanka consider Tuesdays and Fridays auspicious days and make

pūja at *kovil*s (Hindu temples) (see Derges 2013: 65, 68). Yet Pānama villagers engage in rituals on Fridays, which will be discussed in detail later.

Historically in Pānama caste boundaries were expressed and affirmed by clothing, food habits, food sharing, sexual relations and the traditional division of labour. For example, *Dhobi* and low-caste people did not cover the upper part of their bodies and did not eat or drink from the same plates and cups as high-caste people. Low-caste people were only allowed to sit on low height benches or on mats. High-caste people kept separate benches, mats, cups and plates for low-caste visitors. Up until today, this stratification is still observed in various spheres of the everyday lifeworld of Pānama people. However, some practices, such as low-caste people bestowing priority on high-caste people in their daily lives, or collecting high-caste people's dirty clothes from their *kadulla* no longer exist. Once I requested a 20-year-old Sinhala boy, who had recently passed his G.C.E. Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) in Arts, to show me the house of Kumuda, a low-caste Tamil girl. Although he accompanied me to her house, he stayed outside in the road. This evinces people's caste sensibility, which remains strong among educated young people. In the next section, I will discuss marriage, kinship, and dowry and further demonstrate how caste plays a key role in shaping harmonious community life.

Marriage and kinship

When discussing marriage and kinship relations in Sri Lanka and South Asia, emphasis must be upon marriages based on kinship ties and commitments, the creation of bonds that also express political, economic (land and other resources) and caste negotiations while ensuring social productivity and continuity (Leach 1961; McGilvray 1982; Obeyesekere 1967; Tambiah 1958; Tambiah 1973; Trawick 1992; Yalman 1967). The matrilineal marriage and dowry system obstruct members' outwards mobility and facilitate continuation of "Pānama way of life" or of an existing collective habitus that creates a certain equilibrium in the society. Marriage, sexual relations and kinship ties across ethnic groups resist the heavy load of ethnic provocation from ethno-political entrepreneurs who aim to negate current resemblances.

At the outset, I want to stress that the everyday lifeworlds of these villagers are replete with (emotional) attachments to each other. In generally, they connect to fellow villagers via kinship terminologies such as: *māmā,* (S: and T: uncle), *bappā* (S: big father-fathers brothers), *nendā* (S: aunt), *seeya, mutta* (S: grandfather) and *āchchi* (S: grandmother), *akka* (S: and T: elder-sister), *nangi* (S: younger-sister), *aiya* (S: elder-brother), and *malaya, malli* (S: younger-brother). High-caste Tamils are allocated the same social positions in everyday conversations. The usage of 'uncle' and 'aunty' terminologies when addressing washermen and women is also observed; *redi nendā* (S: *Dhobi* aunt) and *redi māmā* (S: *Dhobi* uncle). They are also called as *ēgāli*. According to genealogical analysis we did most of the villagers are bound together as relatives.

There are two marriage patterns practiced in Sri Lanka: *binna* (S: matrilocal residence or matri-uxorilocal) and *deega* (S: patrilocal residence) (Tambiah 1958: 28-33). In *binna* marriages the husband goes to live with the wife's family while in *deega* marriages, the situation is reversed. The *binna* marriage pattern prevails in Pānama and elsewhere in the eastern province among both Muslims and Tamils. It is a core commonality that exists among all ethnic groups. The people of Colombo, and in many other parts of the country, do not like *binna* marriages. They assume that they reduce the power of the bridegroom's relations with the bride's family. There is a Sinhala saying: "If you have a *binna* marriage, you must keep a *hulu atta* (a bunch of dry coconut leaves) and *thal atta* (Palmyra leaf) ready always". The saying references a supposed inability of the bridegroom to predict when a mother-in-law and wife will chase him out of the home. It could be during the night or in the rainy season. Hence, the *thal atta* is for covering the head during the rain and the *hulu atta* provide light to find his way in the dark.

As well, endogamous marriages take place between Sinhala and Tamil parallel castes. Yalman suggests that intermarriage between two ethnic groups was possible when "systems were similar in basic essentials" (Yalman 1967: 311). He further claimed that not only high-caste Sinhalas, but even low-caste *Padu* people who lived in the Kumana village contributed to a mixture of Tamil-Sinhala people through marriage (Yalman 1967: 316). Sinhalas of the village had not married with the low-caste people by 1955 (Yalman 1967: 316). Even today, in 2013, there is massive resistance to high-caste Sinhalas or Tamils marrying low-caste people. We were told of instances where high-caste Sinhala men married low-caste women: they were ridiculed and shunned by people in general.

We observed a 'mixed' marriage when we attended the wedding of a Sinhala *Goyigama* young man from Pānama to a Tamil *Vellālar* girl from Thirukkovil. The marriage took place at the latter's parents' house. The Sinhala relatives of the bridegroom travelled by a bus to the Tamil village of Thirukkovil to participate in the wedding. The bridegroom's mother was Sinhala *Goyigama* and his father a Tamil *Vellālar* man from Batticaloa. Although the father was reported missing during the war, his relatives had maintained a very close relationship with the bridegroom's mother. They were very active in fulfilling the expected customary duties and responsibilities of kinsfolk during the wedding function. The bridegroom's elder brother had married a *Vellālar* Hindu-Tamil girl from Jaffna. A Pānama Sinhala *Goyigama* lady, who was also related to the bridegroom told me: "I will find a bride for my son also from this village", signalling further Sinhala-Tamil mixed marriage in the future. During this trip, I noted how many Pānama Sinhala people had married and settled in the Tamil village of Thirukkovil.

Although arranged marriages are common practice, the mate selection process was not particularly rigid among same caste couples in earlier times according to some elderly villagers. A man from Pānama may have met his wife when he visited a Tamil family village or when a Tamil family visited their relatives in Pānama. According to a respondent who was approximately 60 years of age, the suitability of the groom was assessed by the father of the bride, who would take the young man to the *chēna* (*hēna-* farmland used in shifting cultivation) to observe his physical and mental capacities, i.e., how he would use *udella* (*mamoty*; a special garden hoe used in India and Sri Lanka), a *katta* (battle axe), prepare the ground for cultivation, and build a mud house, key skills for achieving a successful family life. The Pānama people welcomed outsiders into their community through marriages, establishing the myth among other villagers that: *Pānamata giyoth āyith yane nē* ("the man who goes to Pānama never comes back") Both the Tamils and Sinhalas of the village held the same view.

We found evidence of mixed marriages among members of the same caste having taken place even during the ethnic war. Young men from Pānama who joined the military found partners in Tamil areas in the eastern province. For example Sunil, a 40 year old Buddhist-Sinhala *Goyigama* man married his Tamil *Vellālar* wife during the war. She is now the principal of a Tamil school. They have two daughters who have been raised

according to both Tamil and Sinhala traditions. An ordinary farmer and also a mason like Karunadasa, a 45 year old Buddhist-Sinhala *Goyigama* man, met his young wife when she came to live with her sister who was married to a *Goyigama* Sinhala man in Pānama. Karunadasa received the marriage proposal through his wife's sister.

Some people in the village had married several times due to various circumstances. For example, Sumanadasa, who was approximately 68 years of age, had a daughter and son from his second marriage with a Tamil woman from Batticaloa. He already had two sons from his first wife, a Sinhala lady from the same village. One son died while serving in the Army during the war: another son married a Tamil lady in Tamil-majority Batticaloa. His current wife, Thilakawathi, came to live with her sister, who was married to a Sinhala man. She met Sumanadasa and decided to live with him. Thilakawathi already had a mature-aged daughter from her first marriage to a Tamil man. This woman, who married a Pānama Sinhala man, lived next door to Sumanadasa's house. They have a very good relationship. These marital arrangements indicate that mutual understanding and individual needs were given priority over narrow ethnic consciousness in the various parties' everyday lived reality.

Similar to the common marriage pattern that exists among the Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims in the eastern province, all observe a similar dowry system of *dāvädda* (S:) or *seedanam* (T:). Rich people buy land and build houses while poor parents give their thatched houses to their daughters and build a *kudilla* (S:), *kudil* (T:) (temporary house or hut) in a corner of the same land; or they go build on different land after *kele kotāgena* (S:) or *wal kapala* (S:) (clearing the bush lands). Sixty-five years old Sundaram, who was considered a leader of the *Dhobi* people, gave tracts of paddy land and houses to his daughters and sons, illegally encroaching upon *Yāla* forest. His act challenged the established notions regarding patriarchal values and androcentric societies wherein women's lives are controlled from birth to death. According to McGilvray (1989), women are subjected to various forms of torture and discrimination in Sri Lanka and throughout South Asia. McGilvray conducted his research among neighbouring Muslim and Tamil communities in 1980s and suggested that the marriage system in the east ensure a greater level of female autonomy and influence. In Pānama too through the marriage and dowry systems women gain more autonomy; they are not troubled by their mothers-in-law, have a

certain amount of control over property, can access their clans in emergencies and distress situations, and finally live in their own known environments.

The arranged marriage pattern in Pānama is combined with various duties and responsibilities to the bride's family. The groom is given a house and a plot of farming land as a dowry: the newly-wed couple is looked after by the family of the bride. If the bride has farmland, her family will cultivate the land and give her the crops, which become a form of support system for the newly-wed couple. In turn, they are expected to do the same for their children. This practice developed from the Hindu-Tamil tradition. Weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies in Pānama are conducted colourfully, unlike those of other areas. Wedding functions last for seven days, during which time the relatives of the family come to visit the couple, bringing all the things needed. Crackers are exploded as the relatives reach the *kadulla*. Today, many of these rituals are languishing but giving a house and a plot of land is considered an essential component of the dowry.

Bourdieu comments that "Marriage provides a good opportunity for observing what... separates official kinship, single and immutable, defined... by the norms of genealogical protocol, from practical kinship, whose boundaries and definitions are as many and as varied as its users and the occasions on which it is used" (1977: 34). Marriages extend kinship ties and vice versa: in Pānama it often binds together two ethnic groups as blood relatives; i.e., kinsmen and kinswomen. Such bonds have spread throughout the eastern province. Yalman (1967) identified the Pānama kinship pattern as an amalgam of Sinhala and Tamil systems resulting from Sinhala-Tamil mixed marriages (S: *binna*), through which they establish blood-relations (T: *retta uravu*) or (S: *le nekama*). And because people maintain long-lasting kinship ties with both Sinhala and Tamil relatives on a daily basis, nearby villagers call Pānama people *kawalam* (S: mixed).

"Practical kinship" in Bourdieu's (1977: 34) sense is apparent in the village. I once asked Punchimenike, a *Goyigama* Buddhist-Sinhala GN[36] (*Grāma Niladhari*- village level female government officer) of Pānama who is married to a *Vellālar* Tamil, whether people protest when Tamils marry Sinhalas these days. I noted that a few Sinhala-Tamil mixed marriages were celebrated during our stay. She replied: "Blood is thicker than water (S: *le*

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36 A well respected position in Sri Lanka

neyata le suwanda): therefore no one would be offended as we have no such divisions in the village." Although the war disconnected the Pānama people from their Tamil counterparts living in villages along the east coast, the post war scenario has re-established their connections. For example, Chandraleka, a 38 year old housewife, now goes either to Akkaraipattu or Kalmunai market to buy eggs from wholesalers. She resells them in the village keeping a profit margin. She told that me she meets her Tamil relatives and Muslim friends in markets located predominantly in Tamil and Muslim areas. Tamils and Sinhalas who move into the village after marriage adapt to the particular kinship pattern, and practice the kinship terminologies for addressing his/her spouse's clan members. Almost similar kinship patterns survive in both Sinhala and Tamil cultural systems. This not only absorbs the newcomer into the social system of the village but also ensures his/her commitment to its survival.

The notion that "kinship serves as a bond regulating day-to-day social relationships" (Tambiah 1958: 55) among Sinhala and Tamil kinsfolk applies to both happy and sad occasions (als see Kapferer 1983: 105). This bond, underpinning daily relations between Sinhala and Tamil relatives, and driven by an embodied consciousness and practices associated with duties and responsibilities, constitutes the driving force behind inter-ethnic unity. Punchimenike recalled instances when her Tamil relatives, domiciled elsewhere in the eastern province, mutually helped each other during funerals, illnesses, weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies, and financial crises. The presence of at least some relatives during weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies and funerals is essential for it is they who perform linked rituals. This tradition necessitates a healthy connection between matrilineal and patrilineal clans, and their bilingual capacity (Sinhala and Tamil) enables them to maintain good connections.

Mixed marriages have provided the Sinhalas living in the village with Tamil surnames. For example, in a mixed family, if the father is Sinnathamby (Tamil) and the mother Karunawathie (Sinhala), one son would be named Karunamoorthy (Tamil), another son Gunapala (Sinhala). This is common practice in Pānama. In addition, children take the fathers' name as their surname. For example, if father's name is Thangiah, the children will adopt that name as a first name, following by another name or several names. Thus unlike in other areas, it was very difficult to identify the ethnicity of a person by name in Pānama and Pottuvil, a fact that confused members of the military and other officials.

Pānama people are also referred to as "fifty-fifty" (S: *panahata-panaha* or *kalawam*) by the people of Pottuvil and elsewhere due to their ethnically mixed composition. Bastin (2001b) too observed a similar ethnic mix in Maradankulama and regions in the North-Western coast. This identification has been repeated by government officers and members of the armed forces who came to serve in the area from other parts of the country during the war. These government officers' identification of Pānama as a mixed community did not convey any derogatory meaning. Members of the armed forces often became confused during everyday identity checks held at the military roadblocks. The security officers used the above label to identify Pānama people who did not meet the security officers' criteria of identification, i.e., "pure Sinhala" or "pure Tamil" so as to distinguish the "patriots" from the "terrorists". But, according to the villagers, officers' usage of the term had connotations of ridicule. The usual National Identity Card (NIC) check did not help them to distinguish between the Sinhalas and the Tamils because in effect they were ethnically mixed. In the following section, I elucidate how religious ceremonies and rituals similarly unite Sinhala and Tamil villagers in Pānama.

Unity under religious cosmology: Rituals and practices in Pānama

Many scholars have referred to religion in Sri Lanka as a everyday social space for uniting members of different ethnic groups under a cosmological power (Bastin 2002; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Goonasekera 2007; Leach 1962; Obeyesekere 1984). Thomas J. Csordas (1999: 181) writes that "...the culture and self can be understood from the standpoint of embodiment as an existential condition in which the body is the subjective or intersubjective ground of experience", an argument we might apply to the shared religious practice among Sinhala and Tamil villagers in Pānama. In other words, the embodiment of culture is lived out in shared cultural practices in the field of Pānama religion, as Csordas (1990) suggests.

Although writers on the Sri Lankan conflict have created an essential link between religions and ethnic groups, e.g., Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus, it is difficult to divide people's religious practices into clear-cut divisions in Pānama. My reference to Buddhist temples and Hindu shrines should not be treated as a reflection of the villagers'

ethno-religious consciousness: rather, it is to facilitate a better understanding of the religious practices in general. Yalman alluded to the similarity between Buddhism and Hinduism in Pānama. The same pantheon could be seen in both religious practices (Yalman 1967: 316). Pānama has two Buddhist temples: one for Buddhist monks and the other one for Buddhist nuns. There are two Hindu temples identified as devālaya (S:) and *kovil* (T:) (shrine). The Ampitiya devālaya, a shrine complex, is dedicated to the Goddess Pattini and the God Kōvalan. The Pulleyār *kovil* (T:) or Gana devālaya (S:) is dedicated to God Pulleyār (T:) or Gana deiyō (S:), popularly known as Vināyagar, Lord Ganapathi of the Hindu pantheon. Leach (1961; 1962) established a relationship between Lord Buddha and Pulleyār when discussing Sinhala-Buddhist worship to this God in the north central province of Sri Lanka. In addition, the villagers worship at other devālayas located in the forest area close to the village: Kuda Kebilitta, Maha Kebilitta, and Okanda.

Yalman (1967: 319) speculated that the establishment of *vihare* (the Buddhist temple) by Buddhist-Sinhalas, and the construction of the Pulleyār *kovil* by high-caste Tamil-Hindu elites would divide the community in 1955. This did not occur. The Sinhala and Tamil villagers saw the above Gods as a part of their traditional heritage. The only division I saw during religious practices in Pānama was caste shaping religious behaviour, which is their generations-old tradition. The villagers perform annual religious festivals in the Buddhist temple as well as in the shrines. The Hindu rituals attract both Sinhala and Tamil people. Whereas the Buddhist tradition mainly focuses on achieving sacred (other worldly) objectives, the Hindu tradition supports deals with more mundane (this worldly) affairs: e.g., problems with paddy cultivation, hope for a better harvest, cures for the various diseases that threaten cultivators, protection of the crops from wild elephants, other animals and various insects, hopes for a better fish harvest, cures for the illnesses that affect family members, and myriad day-to-day issues (also see Kapferer 1983: 30-33). Sinhala and Tamil family members visit Ampitiya devālaya on Friday mornings and attend rituals at Pulleyār *kovil* on Friday evenings. Friday is considered an auspicious day. On Fridays, the Ampitiya devālaya is filled with persons from neighbouring villages. Every week we met Muslim families making offerings at this shrine. In order to be part of the embodied everyday lifeworld of the village, we too attended the shrines.

The religious lives of the Pānama people are replete with ritualistic performances that take place in the devālayas, mainly in the Ampitiya devālaya. Among the annual

religious festivals, the *Ankeliya* (horn-pulling) ritual of Pānama is a main event celebrated by Buddhists and Hindus on the eastern coast. The *Ankeliya* ritual is held in the village after participation for the religious festivals celebrated at Kataragama devālaya that last for fourteen days. I will discuss two rituals first, then extend my interpretation of their connection to show how they include both ethnic Tamils and Sinhalas in one cosmic world.

Kataragama pāda yātra (pilgrimage on foot)

Kataragama (S:) or Kathirkāmam (T:) is a sacred site created for the God Murugan in a forest area in the deep south of Sri Lanka. The God Murugan, variously known as Kataragama deiyo, Kanda Kumāra (S: God Kataragama) and Skandakumara, Karttikeya, Kandasamy (T:) and Kande Yaka, Italeyaka (demon of the arrow) by the Vädda people (local indigenous people), and Vanniya by the people of Vanni,[37] is a God in the Hindu pantheon. The Muslims in the country pay homage to al-Khidr (also known as Hayat Nabi), "the green man" (Gaffar 2011; Harrigan 1998; Hassan 1968; McGilvray 2004; 2010), also at Kataragama site, which is renowned among the Muslims as Khidr-gama, the home of Khidr (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002; Gaffar 2011). This multi-religious site then incorporates the God Murugan's shrine, the shrines of his two consorts, Theyvanai-amma (Indian consort) and Valli-amma (Sri Lankan consort), Kiri Vehera (a Buddhist Temple), a Mosque and a shrine. Apart from the main shrines, there are also additional Hindu and Buddhist places of worship. This religious site is located on the banks of the Manik Ganga (Manik River). People bathe in the river as part of a purification process prior to meeting the God Murugan. A very popular site, it stands witness to religious pluralism in Sri Lanka (Bastin 2002: 63; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Goonasekera 2007; Leach 1962: 85; Obeyesekere 1977; Obeyesekere 1978).

According to mythology, the God Murugan came to Sri Lanka from India: he became friendly with the Vädda's daughter Valli and settled in Kataragama. Valli became the God's Sri Lankan consort (Vallai-amma) while his Indian consort is Theyvanai-amma. The unity between the Indian God and his Sri Lankan wife symbolises the peace between Sinhala and Tamil in general and Sinhala-Tamil-Vädda's unity in particular. It suggests

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37 The site the LTTE considered their administrative capital during the three-decade old war.

unity between India and Sri Lanka rather than the hostile relationship portrayed in the great Indian epic *Ramayana*, the story of Rama's (the Indian prince) beautiful wife Sita's abduction by the then powerful king Ravana based in Lankapuri, which was the then capital of Lanka Dvipa (an ancient name used for Sri Lanka).

The main religious festival for the God Murugan is held annually during a period of fifteen days at the devālaya. This festival is known as *Esala Uthsawaya* (S: Esala festival) and *Ādi Thiruvila* (T:) (also see Gombrich 1995). During the Esala festival, Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim pilgrims from different religious and ethnic backgrounds come from all over the country (and from overseas) to gather at Kataragama to participate in the *pūja* (offerings). Moreover, Vädda also attend to celebrate the wedding of the God and their daughter Valli-amma. The devotees who pay homage to Kataragama either make a vow before the God Murugan or perform rituals in his name in the hope of accomplishing success. Some devotees self-inflict physical torment, e.g., pierce their bodies with pins, needles or pointed iron sticks (S: *katu gaseema*), hang hooks on their bodies (penetrating their skin), roll upon the holy ground, fire-walk, and perform the kāvadi dance (Kapferer 1983: 31; Kapferer 2003: 162). The kāvadi is "a peacock arch of the God" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 165). In general, most of the people who visit Kataragama offer a *pūja wattiya* (offering) to the God.

Although Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) provided details of the rituals performed at Kataragama, not much work has been undertaken on this pilgrimage, other than by Goonasekera (2007), Samuel Holt and Ethan Higbee in 2003-2004 (McGilvray 2010) and Patrick Harrigan (1998). My full participation in the pilgrimage for eight days was an attempt to uncover "insiders" perception of (natural or taken-for-granted) transgression of ethno-religious borders via traditions. I felt that my embodied subjectivity regarding multi-ethnic and multi-religious backgrounds helped to identify inter-ethnic connections during the pilgrimage.

This pilgrimage is taken on foot by specific groups of devotees who participate in the Esala festival in Kataragama. The route to the centuries old *pāda yātra* passes through Pānama. Pilgrims join the pilgrimage, some even from South India. Hindu-Tamil devotees commence the walk at the Jaffna Nallūr temple: it passes through Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Pottuvil en route to Pānama. Those who start their pilgrimage at the northern tip of the

country, walk approximately 450 kilometres to reach Kataragama. From Pānama, they walk another 105 kilometres for approximately 4-8 days. Buddhist-Sinhalas, who live in the eastern province, including those who live in Pānama, accompany their Hindu-Tamil counterparts.

According to some local writers, e.g., Gunasekara Gunasoma (1994), Piyum Seeya (also known as) Sudu Nilame Kuruvita Bandara (Kiribandara 2011), during the war pilgrims used to stay in Pānama for a few days rest before entering the Yāla forest. In those days, they stayed in a hall called Kittange, Buddhist temple, and in a School in Pānama. During their short stay in Pānama, the pilgrims used to mingle with villagers. They went from house-to-house collecting vegetables, rice and other foodstuffs needed for the remainder of their trip through the forest. The pious people of Pānama contributed willingly. It was considered a way of collecting merit (S: *pin* and T: *punniyam*), an act that will benefit a person contributing to both this and the other world after death. But nowadays they participate in religious festivals in a shrine known as Okanda devālaya (also see Goonasekera 2007: 242-253). They also rest for some time in the shrine. However, Pānama people (both Sinhalas and Tamils) give *dāne* (S:) and *dānam* (T:) (alms) to pilgrims who come on foot, even today. The Wild Life Conservation Department keeps the gates of the Yāla National Park open over a 15-day period for the pilgrims.

Aravinda and I participated in the *pāda yātra* with a group from Pānama, members of whom joined in the annual religious festival held at Okanda devālaya simultaneous to the *pāda yātra*. Thousands of pilgrims attend on the first day. The festival is held over a fourteen-day period in the devālaya, which is very important to both Sinhala and Tamil Pānama villagers. The Okanda devālaya was erected where the God Murugan landed in the country on his way to Kataragama approximately 2000 years ago. Devotees believe that Murugan spent some time at this beach with Valli-amma, watching her dance. The canoe in which Murugan came from India has been turned upside-down, converted into a rock, and positioned at the beach. The Okanda devālaya, which is located in the forest 18 kilometres from Pānama is traditionally worshipped by the people of Pānama. However, they lost their right to worship at the shrine when the LTTE seized control of the forest.

The people of Pānama perform rituals at the Okanda devālaya every Friday, and an annual festival is conducted parallel to the Kataragama festival. Today there are three

perehera (processions) out of 14 such events dedicated to the people of Pānama: one procession is organised by a *Goyigama* Buddhist-Sinhala family from Pānama, another by Pānama villagers under the supervision of the head priest of Pānama Buddhist Temple, and the last by a *Vellālar* Hindu-Tamil person. On the day reserved for the Pānama villagers, the Sinhalas and Tamils participate in the *perehera* (procession), which showcase a fine combination of Buddhist and Hindu traditions. The head priest of the Pānama Buddhist temple personally monitors all of the rituals conducted by the villagers in honour of the God Murugan. The Sinhala and Tamil peoples of Pānama observe the same rituals and wear the same attire, a white *vaetti*[38] clothing or white sarong. They are bare from the waist up, and put *vibuthi* (holy ash) on their foreheads. During the procession, four family members carry a statue of the God on a palanquin.

Throughout the festival period, Muslim traders from Pottuvil open shops on the Okanda devālaya premises. They sell various items including toys, plastic cups, bangles, rings and necklaces, plastic flowers, bags, slippers, clothes. Furthermore, they sell services such as haircuts and shaves, and recharge mobiles and camera batteries. Almost all of the goods sold at the shrine sell for at least double the normal price of any of the item sold in Pānama or Pottuvil. I saw one souvenir shop that opened close to the devālaya selling statues of the laughing Buddha, photos of Jesus Christ and St. Anthony, and of Saraswathie, Pattini, Murugan, and Vināyagar (Gods and Goddess of Hindu pantheon).

On the following day, our group rose early in the morning. After performing ablutions, we started to walk after first lighting camphor for Lord Murugan (as other pilgrims had done expecting blessings of the God for the trip). The pilgrims took water, dry rations to cook and offered *pūja* at the small shrines established by various groups of pilgrims along the way. Any devotee who participated in this pilgrimage was known as *sāmi* (T:) (pl: *sāmis),* irrespective of age, gender, caste, ethnicity, or religion. The *sāmis* who took part in this pilgrimage left everything behind other than a parcel of essentials, i.e., foodstuffs, cooking utensils, biscuits, noodles, water, medicines, instant foods, and clothes, which they carried on their heads. For a short period, each of us experienced the life of a homeless person, a beggar or hermit.

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38 Five yard long strips of cloth, usually white or cream in colour.

In principle, the aim is to experience the harsh reality of life through acts of self-denial. We slept and lived out-of-doors, often under the shade of a tree. We did not know when or where we would take our next meal, or where we would sleep. We feared wild animal attacks: some people (including me) experienced painful blisters on their feet. We crossed valleys in search of water, and muddy lagoons, streams and rivers, praying that we would be spared thunder storms. We often travelled under the hot sun and dusty winds that slowed our movements.

A Pānama group of Sinhala and Tamil pilgrims shared with me a story about the God Murugan's arrival and his view of ethnic groups. This team of pilgrims stopped for a tea break under the shade of a huge tree where I was waiting for my partners. They invited me to have a cup of tea with them, observing the established tradition of pilgrimages on foot that make hitherto unknown persons known to each other. Many known high- and low-caste Pānama people passed by us. One of the elderly ladies in the group, who had made this trip more than 10 times, began to talk about Murugan and his relationship with the *pāda yātra*. According to her, when Murugan came to Kataragama in the form of an old man, he asked a group of Tamils to make him a hut. He wanted to shelter in it as it was going to rain. But after questioning his request they decided against it. Later, the God made the same request of several young Sinhalas who were passing by. They fulfilled his request, making the God happy. In response, Murugan said:

> Sinhalas and Muslims came to my wedding (marriage with Valli-amma) but Tamils did not help me and they will face difficulties in meeting me. They have to come through a very tough route every year (10.00 a.m. 6 July 2011, interviewed during pilgrimage at Yāla National Park).

This story was confirmed by the leader of a group of Tamil pilgrims from Batticaloa. Even though Murugan did not expect the Sinhalas to walk through this path (according to the above myth), thousands of Buddhist-Sinhala pilgrims from eastern Sri Lanka take part in the pilgrimage (1) to show their devotion to Murugan; and (2) expecting his blessings.

To most devotees the festival is an intense spiritual opportunity: it offers a meeting with the God in response to the "call." Among the devotees I found people of different occupations; e.g., doctors, teachers, education directors, politicians, and businessmen. Parents took their very young babies and toddlers with them on this pilgrimage as a way of

fulfilling the vows they had taken in their supplication to the God Murugan. During night time, the Tamil women sang *Bagawath Geetha* (songs to the Gods) and *bakthi* songs (devotional songs). I joined in the singing one night. There is a widespread belief that the God Murugan will protect his followers. Pilgrims self-purify by not eating animal flesh or eggs, not engaging in harmful activities to others, not lying or insulting others, eating only vegetables, abstaining from alcohol drinks both before and during the trip. They invoke Murugan by blessing "*haro… harā...*" I will now detail another important ritual, the *Ankeliya*, observed by the Pānama people. This will be followed by an analysis of both rituals.

Ankeliya (S:), Kombu Vilayattu (T:); the horn pulling ritual

Worshipping of the Goddess Pattini is crucial for Pānama people. The locals believe that Pattini has saved the villagers from many calamities, including the Asian Tsunami in 2004 and attacks by LTTE on various occasions. She appeared in the form of an army of soldiers and routed a group of LTTE combatants when they came to attack the village. On another occasion, she appeared in a dream to Moorthi, a *Vellāla* Tamil man married to a Sinhala *Goyigama* lady. In the dream, she warned the villagers about the Tsunami a few months prior to the incident. In the dream, she warned the villagers to perform rituals after hearing of Moorthi's dream; and the Tsunami claimed only one life from in the village despite its three-pronged attack. There are many such narratives that reflect the locals' faith in the Goddess Pattini. Other Gods are also worshipped, including Gana Deiyo, Aluth Bandara Deiyo, and God Murugan (or Kataragama Deiyo). However, the Pānama people have afforded particular importance to Pattini, making her their guarding deity. They are bound together by rituals and beliefs connected to the cult of Pattini.

There are numerous games to honour Goddess Pattini in Sri Lanka. Among them *Ankeliya* (horn pulling), *Likeliya* (stick games), *Polkeliya* (coconut games) are very popular in various parts of the country. Rohan Bastin studied *Polkeliya* in Maradankulam on the North-West coast while Obeyesekere (1984) analysed *Ankeliya* in Pānama on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka. Obeyesekere differentiates between them: the "coconut game is more properly a game where the horn game is more ritual" (Bastin 2001b: 121). These two rituals performed for Goddess pattini in two locations in Sri Lanka involve Sinhala and Tamil people or else Buddhists and Hindus. Yalman's (1967: 316-319) explanation of

Ankeliya highlighted Sinhala-Tamil and Buddhsit-Hindu unity and more interestingly I witnessed something similar 47 years after.

Obeyesekere (1984) provided a fine description of the *Ankeliya* ritual in his book titled *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*. I explain my observations here with special reference to ethnic collaboration, which is not visible in Obeyesekere's interpretation given that his focus was exclusively upon interpretation of the rituals. His explanation of the ritual, however, is also testimony to Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim unity. *Ankeliya* (horn pulling, horn game or hook tugging), the most important annual ritual performed in Pānama, is well suited to the heterogeneity of the village. This ritual is conducted over a fourteen day period at the Ampitiya devālaya where two shrines were built; one for Goddess Pattini (T: Amman) and the other for her consort, Aluth Bandara Deiyo (S:) (S: Aluth Deiyo), means "New deity") or prince Pālanga (S:) or Kōvalan (T:). These shrines are shaded by two huge tamarind trees in an isolated corner of the village facing the paddy fields.

This ritual originated from a myth featuring two Gods. In this myth, the Goddess Pattini took birth from a mango. She married Aluth Bandara Deiyo and remained a virgin due to her divine power. One day, while the two were out walking they saw *sapu* (temple flower) blooms on a tree. Aluth Bandara Deiyo climbed the tree and, using a hook, attempted to pick some of the flowers for his wife. Pattini found a hook-shaped sandal stick and tried to help her husband pluck the flowers. Unexpectedly, the two hooks became entangled. The couple pulled the two hooks in opposite directions in an attempt to unhook them. Finally, Aluth Bandara Deiyo's hook broke, which delighted the Goddess Pattini, and the friends who had joined them. They danced to celebrate the event. Pānama people have performed this fertility ritual for generations, hoping to obtain the pair's blessings for the prosperity of the village.

The ritual goes far beyond symbolically linking the high and low-caste groups under religion or cosmic power. It enhances the solidarity between the two caste groups, stresses their indispensable cooperation, and strengthens existing peaceful social equilibrium. Pānama villagers highlight the event as tradition and an essential component of their cultural heritage. The young people learn to practice these traditions, thus ensuring its endurance. The *Ankeliya* is one among the village's vital festivals. All of the villagers engage in special preparation: those who work elsewhere in the country return home for

the event. They buy new clothes, consume appropriate food (changing normal food patterns), arrange their homes to welcome the God, and focus on an harmonious lifestyle, all practices admired by Aluth Deiyo and Pattini Deiyo. They make a concerted effort to observe traditions connected to this ritual. Those who violate the traditions are punished by an elite group of villagers. The latter adhere to the tradition to avoid *killa* (pollution) that will upset the Goddess and render their lives vulnerable to her curse, which may come in forms of contagious diseases, natural disasters such as heavy rain or drought, and ultimately the destruction of their harvests.

All of the Pānama villagers, irrespective of gender, caste, ethnic or religious backgrounds, are conventionally divided into two groups: *udupila* (upper side) represents God Kōvalan (T:) (or S: Aluth Bandara Deiyo), while *yatipila* (lower side) represents the Goddess Pattini. These categories do not symbolise any social status differences. Rituals are performed if a villager wants to change his or her ascribed status after marriage or for any other reason. Such classifications do not prevent people from worshipping any of the Gods. In general, this is an exclusively male-dominated ritual that takes place during the night. Women are only allowed to visit the temple during the two days marking the end of the ritual. The *Ankeliya*'s various components are performed during the 15 day celebration: *an edeema* (horn pulling); *game minissu devālayata yāma* (villagers visiting the temple); *Dhobi minissu devālayata yāma* (low-caste Tamils visiting the devālaya); *deiyan game yāma* (God's visit to the houses); and, finally, *diya kepeema* (water cutting). After *kap situawēma* (hoisting the God's flag) the locals allocate five days for *kolu Ankeliya* (horn pulling by young boys) followed by seven days of *maha Ankeliya* (horn pulling by adults).

The most important elements of the *Ankeliya* ritual are as follows: The *udupila* (upper side) tie their horn (*anga*) to a tamarind tree (*angaha*-horn tree) located slightly behind, equidistant from both devālayas. The *yatipila* (lower side) tie their horn to the trunk (around 15-20 feet high) of a *henakanda* (thunderbolt tree), which is placed in a channel hinged by a 6-8 feet long conduit, and held in position by *happini kandan* (female cobra trunks). This channel helps the *henakanda* (trunk) to move back and forth easily during the horn pulling. Two ropes are tied to the *henakanda* for tugging. Once the hooks are entangled to afford the best satisfaction to each side, the two teams start *an-edeema* (horn-pulling). Six persons from each side clutch their hooks: the men from both sides tug the two ropes tied to the *henakanda*, applying immense pressure until one of the

interlocked horns snaps. The breaking of a hook is considered a defeat. Immediately, when one hook is broken, the winning party, whose hook remains unbroken, takes their hook inside the devālaya. At the same time, the winning party commences dancing jubilantly, yelling salacious songs at the vanquished team in front of their (the defeated group's) devālaya.

The defeated team members remain calm and silent during this provocative behaviour. Both sides adopt a position known as *Vattāndi*, to help the *Kapuva* (the laymen performing the rituals at the devālayas) during these rituals. They sit at a specially arranged place during the victory celebration dance. The *Vattāndi* of the defeated side become the prime recipients of insults and provocative comments hurled by the winners, which according to Obeyesekere are generated by two perceived dangerous drives, "sex and aggression" (1984: 484). The songs that ridicule and undermine the defeated team include themes such as intercourse with their mothers-in-law, anal intercourse and similar humiliating practices (Obeyesekere 1984: 485-486). However, the provocations that occur, often among same siblings or blood relatives, is within *Ankeliya* norms and is limited to the shrine premises. The defeated side view their humiliation as an exercise in tolerance. Other members of the team stay with the *Vattāndi*. The *Vattāndi* positions are held by two elderly persons who have the emotional and intellectual maturity to tolerate these situations. Every night they pull horns a few times, each cycle of horn pulling taking more than two hours.

During *Ankeliya*, the villagers adhere to certain policies; for example, they abstain from eating fish (including dry fish), meat and eggs. They only eat vegetarian meals. People from houses with new-born babies, menstruating women and newly-attended girls are sent either to the remotest corner of the village (which the God opts not to visit) or to another village. Puberty ceremonies and weddings are not conducted at this time. If there is a sudden death, burial is arranged immediately. The fishermen stop *rassawe yāma* (fishing). The two *kapuva*s (clerics of the *udupila* and *yatipila*) stay at the devālaya and eat only vegetarian food. Those who participate in the horn pulling stay in rooms built for both sides in the devālaya premises. All of these actions are undertaken to avoid *killa* (evil or pollution) that would disturb the perfect conduct of the ritual.

The caste groups play unique roles in the devālaya activities. For example, *Vellāla* high-caste Tamil people play the same roles as their Sinhala *Goyigama* counterparts while

the low-caste *Dhobi* are given the exclusive responsibility for providing *pāvada* (carpets and a canopy) to both *udupila* and *yatipila* devālayas (shrines). They accompany the God around the village and perform certain roles during the home rituals. One or two selected high-caste Tamils and Sinhalas attend rituals in the inner shrine room with the *kapuvas*. The organising committee nominate some members to perform this service in both *udupila* and *yatipila* devālayas during the rituals. On the 14th day of the ceremony, high-caste Sinhala and Tamil women go to the devālayas (*game minissu devālayata yāma*), while the 15th day is reserved for low-caste Hindu Tamils to participate in rituals at the shrines.

During the last two days of *Ankeliya* ritual, the villagers unite Hindu and Buddhist traditions similar to processions conducted at Okanda shrine. The villagers link another Hindu shrine, Gana devālaya and Buddhist temple also with the *Ankeliya* ritual conduct at the Ampitiya devālaya. The devotees go to Gana devālaya get *pahadum pettiya*, *pūja wattiya* (a basket of offerings) or *katu gaseema* (S:) (T: *mullu kutturadu*), piercing the body with hooks (T: *adayālam*), with the assistance of the S: *kapuva* (clergyman, T: *aiyar*) of the devālaya. Then they all walk approximately two kilometres to make offerings at the Ampitiya devālaya located. A high-caste Tamil *kapuva* performed the rituals for both the Tamils and Sinhalas. All the devotees bathe in a few buckets of water from the well of the Gana devālaya as a way of becoming purified prior to the *katu gaseema* ritual. Those who performed *katu geseema* at the Gana devālaya went either to the Pattini devālaya (S:) or Pattini *kovil* (T:) (or, T: Amman *kovil*) or Aluth Bandara devālaya (S:) (T: Kōvalan *kovil*) according to their traditional loyalties to remove the hooks.

On the evening of the thirteenth day of *Ankeliya*, the Goddess visits the village, *deiyan game yāma* (S: the parade of the deity). This is done in a procession. The *lee keli kandāyama* (S: team of "stick dancers") go first, bearing the message of the God's arrival so that the villagers will be alert and prepared to welcome her. This is followed by the small casket of the Goddess Pattini, two *kapuvas* and the supporting team including members of the *Dhobi* caste. Usually, the statue or symbol of Pattini is taken to the village. People erect small huts (*pandalama*) to welcome the Goddess Pattini: they put considerable effort into creating and decorating these small huts. The casket is placed inside the *pandalama* for a while until the *kapuva* blesses the family. The villagers eagerly await the arrival of the Goddess at their houses, eager to receive her blessing. The entire village stays awake during this ritual.

As indicated already, this segment of *Ankeliya* combines the Buddhist temple with the rituals of hindu devālaya and other key institutions of the village as a way of ensuring religious cooperation and contextualising a social system that ultimately helps to unite the community. There is a particular order regulating the Goddess' visit to the village. After leaving Apitiya devālaya, the statue is taken to the village, at an auspicious time, initially to the Buddhist temple, then to the Gana devālaya, the village hospital, the army camp, the chairman of the Pradeshiya Sabha (local government) and finally to houses of ordinary people. During this ritual the low-caste Hindu-Tamil *Dhobi's* participate in the procession while attending tasks traditionally entrusted to them. During religious rituals their role was essential even in the Kandyan kingdom: their function was to "turn pollution into purity" (Yalman 1967: 68). Some *Dhobi* and high caste Sinhala boys held the four poles bound to the canopy. The God's casket was not taken to the *Deewara Gammānaya* (fisheries village) where the majority of the low-caste people live because they were not considered pure enough (*killa*) to welcome the God. Their exclusion met with no resistance from the low-caste Tamil and Sinhala fishing community.

On the final day of the *Ankeliya* festival, the *diya kepeema* (water cutting) ceremony took place at Pānama beach. Peoples of all castes joined in the water cutting procession. Villagers who wished to perform rituals such as the *kāvadi* dance, or *katu gaseema* were allowed to do so without restriction. Ladies had hooks fixed to their lips or cheeks: the men had them fixed to their backs. Immediately after bathing the God, all of the villagers bathed in the sea invoking the God's blessings. After the water cutting ceremony, the statue was taken to the devālaya. Two *kapuva*s (clerics) kept the doors of the shrines shut for seven days. All of the observances and restraints on the villager's lives end with the water cutting ceremony. The villagers who took part in the event were well dressed, with specially bought clothes to the event. After the successful ending of the ceremony all of the villagers became jubilant, having received the blessings of the Goddess Pattini. They celebrated their happiness by cooking all of the dishes that were taboo during the ritual. We too received tasty dishes from our neighbours.

Reading of rituals as a way of crossing ethnic borders

I will now explain how these two main rituals have developed bonds both within the village and also between Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim peoples from neighbouring areas. These events can also interpreted as what René Devisch calls "'bodily' ways in which people create and engage in a culture from within its own genuine sources" (Devisch 1993; 1996: 94). I draw upon Victor Turner's (1969) notions of liminality and communitas to interpret the process of relationship building among the villagers. Turner himself adapted the concept from Arnold van Gennep's usage of the "liminal phase" in *rites de passage.* Van Gennep defined *rites de passage* as "rites, which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" (Turner 1969: 14). Turner uses the term *state* to indicate the changing position of the actor. Gennep claimed that all rites of passage have three stages: separation, margin and aggression. According to Turner, in the first stage, the actor detaches from his previous fixed social points of the social structure or cultural conditions, or both. In the second, the liminal stage, the actor is in a state of ambiguity: "he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1969: 94). In the last stage, the actor is in a more stable relationship.

The devotees who participate in both rituals go through liminal stages wherein they encounter numerous uncertainties. They try to be pleasant and mutually helpful to each other during these periods. They adhere to the accepted traditions, beliefs and myths during the rites of passage. If a pilgrim failed to adhere to the required conduct he would be punished: attacked by wild animals, have an accident, and would ultimately be unable to receive the God's blessing. If the villagers do not conduct the rituals well or fail to follow the traditions, the God's anger will translate as a curse that will bring disaster to the village, disrupt normal village life by sending diseases, destroying crops, sending natural disasters such as rain, floods, and drought. The prosperity of the village is important to both high-caste and low-caste people, thus all try to minimise the risks and maximise the benefits (see Kapferer 1997: 262).

The same applies to the pilgrimage. Those individuals who participate in it are called *sāmi*, a term suggesting loss of the inflated "ego" or "the self". Their continuous shouting of "*haro..hara…*" and their making offerings (*pūja*) along the way generates a bond between peoples of mixed ethnic backgrounds. Pilgrims are free to talk with others: no-one

is reserved; everyone is ready to help, to share, and to tolerate. They all evince the same physical weaknesses when they walk this distance. I noted ladies and children walking alone: some who missed their groups joined new ones. There are benefits of communitas. Sinhalas and Tamils' mixed marriages are alluded to in village poems, in instances in Pānama history where girls and boy find their life partners during the annual pilgrimage making. Gunasekara Gunasoma (1994) and Kiribandara (2011) have written extensively on these types of bonds. I still recall hitherto unknown people who came from Batticaloa and elsewhere in the east with whom we developed a very sound friendship. We met them several times during the trip. In particular, relationships between villagers from different villages are established during pilgrimages.

Hermkens, et al. (2009: 9) observes that "the interaction with other pilgrims may result in a strong sense of communitas, which engenders shared spiritual emotions and possibly a shared sense of the presence of the divine among them". Tamil and Sinhala villagers of Pānama exchange addresses and telephone numbers with villagers from the east. They return to their villages with good memories of the Sinhala people of Pānama and share them with others. In these ways, a strong solidarity is developed among villagers. When we arrived in the village, we noted that the villagers accepted us because we had participated in the *pāda yātra*. Buddhist Sinhala friends, who came from Colombo to participate in the *pāda yātra* with us and with other groups, returned home contemplating how best to make next year's trip. The Ampitiya devālaya create very good inter-connectedness among all of the groups vis-a-vis respective duties and responsibilities. They work together as one team, developing the notion of "we Pānama people". This is why those who work elsewhere in the country come to the village to participate in the rituals.

From the Pānama villagers' viewpoint, this series of rituals is a very important part of their lives. It underpins their "Pānamaness". Pānama Sinhalas and Tamils join together to walk to Kataragama. The Pānama Sinhala people in our group met relatives and friends from neighbouring Tamil villages during both rituals. Our participation in these two rituals encouraged the villagers to accept us. Irrespective of a person's social status, the *pāda yātra* is an important part of her/his life. From a broader perspective, "the Kataragama pilgrimage cult" unites members of all ethnic groups. I met some respondents from Pottuvil during the pilgrimage. My observations, together with interviews conducted in

Kataragama, proved an existing religious harmony. Sinhalas, Tamils, and Muslims participated in each other's events. They enjoyed the processions. And, although seemingly taken-for-granted events, they have massive potential for creating goodwill and peace. Accordingly I have some doubts about the "Buddhicization" or "Sinhalization" argument (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 411-444) that noted how Sinhala Buddhists are taking control over Hindu religious space in Kataragama. Most ordinary people who were not that educated did not seem to worry about such domination.

Their commitment ensures the continuation of all of the above practices: emphasis on humanness and existential needs, concepts well explained through Bourdieu's concept of habitus; i.e., "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to functions as structuring structures" (Coleman and Eade 2012: 37; McCorriston 2011: 55). According to Joy McCorriston "practices are both generated by and reproduce the framework of tendencies that shape decisions about what people do" (2011: 55). Pilgrimage includes rationality of action habitual to those who participate in it: pilgrims reproduce a "defining framework of culture", trusting in "bodily habituation rather than [in] cognition" (McCorriston 2011: 55).

Connection with Muslims

Traditionally Pānama is considered a home for Sinhalas and Tamils. Both ethnic groups discourage Muslims from settling in the village as permanent residents. Nonetheless our network analysis of Pānama revealed that both the Pānama Sinhala and Tamil communities have business and personal relationships with Muslims. Pottuvil is the rural supply town for Pānama. Pānama shop owners buy foodstuffs from Pottuvil wholesale traders, from both Tamils and Muslims. The majority of Pottuvil business people attract customers from Pānama. Pottuvil traders also go to Pānama to buy rice, fish, and vegetables. Some Pānama businessmen accompanied us to Pottuvil to demonstrate their relationships. During this tour, we became aware that over a period of time they had been buying foodstuffs from Muslims and/or Tamils on credit, indicating the trust that endured between these people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Throughout these interactions Pānama people use "good" and "bad" classifications to identify the Muslim persons with whom they interact regularly. Our trip with Somapala *Mudalāli* (S: and T: a trader) revealed showed that he selects particular hotels in which to eat, and specific shops in which to buy vegetables, foodstuffs and other items. In these places, he is given a very warm welcome during his weekly visits. The traders are not concerned with cash: they were prepared to loan Somapala all the goods he wanted. At the time of my fieldwork, Somapala owed one Muslim businessman approximately one hundred thousand rupees (approximately AUD $ 865 as of August 2013). Somapala is offered food and other invitations during Muslim festivals. In return, he invites known Muslim traders to his house for meals. They also attend each other's sad and happy occasions.

The Muslims also participate in the Friday ritual at Ampitiya devālaya in Pānama. When attending such events, they are assisted by Sinhala and Tamil acquaintances. During *Ankeliya*, I spoke with a few Muslim families who came to perform *pūja* regardless of the tension connected with "greased devil" (will detailed in the next chapter) and to invoke the blessing of the Goddess Pattini. They sought a cure their daughter, who had been suffering from a chronic illness for some time. They made no attempt to conceal their ethno-religious identity: they naturally mingled with the Sinhala and Tamil devotees. In addition, Many Muslims took part during the festival in Okanda devālaya to open various stalls as indicated above.

Recent changes in Pānama

Pānama society is exposed to the on-going discourse of ethno-national politics and (undue) state intervention that may in time impact upon existing social relations. Among these interventions political decision remaking public administrative jurisdiction is vital. In eastern Sri Lanka, the merging and demerging of government administrative jurisdictions, which are ethnically homogenous, were made in parallel with the growth of ethno-nationalist politics in Sri Lanka. Before the 1960s, Pānama came under the Batticaloa *DRO Kanthoruwa* (District Revenue Office); that is, it was subjected to predominantly Tamil jurisdiction. Sinhala villagers went to Batticaloa along with their Tamil and Muslim counterparts to discuss administrative issues. When required to fill out applications, or read

notices and letters, the Pānama Sinhala people may have faced difficulties as the offices used Tamil as its working language under the Batticaloa DRO administration.

However, the older villagers did not cite language as a serious issue they faced in earlier days. Instead, they shared stories of how Tamil friends and relatives helped them during their visits to government offices, hospitals and other places; furthermore, Pānama was linked to the Lahugala DS (Divisional Secretariat) office which comes under Ampara District Secretariat, a Sinhala majoritarian area after S.W.R.De. Bandaranaike came to power in 1956. Lahugala is located far from the closest Muslim and Tamil mixed Pottuvil DS office. This kind of politically manipulated move to change public administrative jurisdiction into ethnic homogenous enclaves has not only reduced the space for inter-ethnic mixing, but also the chances of Pānama people meeting their Tamil relatives and friends who mostly live in the Batticaloa district.

The war, which saw Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms clash in the village, forced the villagers to rethink their ethnic identities (see Goonasekera 2007: 229-230). The peoples of Pānama were forced to go through security checkpoints on a daily basis, to have their ethnic identities checked. Anthropologists (Jeganathan 2002) suggest that such actions could be considered "spaces" in which the Pānama people were forced to confront an ethno-political nationalist discourse. Those with names that had Tamil connotations were questioned, arrested, and often looked upon with suspicion by the security forces. Under these circumstances Sinhala villagers of Pānama who had inherited Tamil surnames or names via mixed marriages opted to change them. Tamil villagers of Pānama started to give their children Sinhala names.

During my long stay in the village, I heard of many instances where Sinhala and Tamil villagers united against the common threat posed by the LTTE and the military. For example, when the army arrested a Sinhala or Tamil villager, their fellow-villagers gathered at the camp and negotiated, argued or protested until the person was released. Sinhalas and Tamils went together to fish or work their farmlands to confront the threat posed by LTTE cadres who were essentially Tamil. They joined hands to challenge the *Pradeshiya Sabha* (local government) formed by the UPFA (United People's Freedom Alliance) party, which allegedly backed the forceful grabbing of land from villagers to build hotels under the post-war development strategies of the UPFA government.

The rebuilding of the Colombo-Pānama main road after the Tsunami, transportation development between the main cities, electricity supplies to the village, exposure to electronic and print media, education, Middle Eastern migration, and occupation changes have facilitated a new phase of modernity in Pānama. Though it appears apparent that these processes have impacted on the villagers' belief systems, when we delve into the matter further I understood it is not so.

At the same time, the traditional division of labour based on caste is changing, altering the simple division of labour in the village. The income earned by the *Dhobi* people from washing the clothes of high-caste Sinhala and Tamil families is not be enough for today's generation to survive. Of 109 *Dhobi* families in the Pānama North Village Officers (GN) Jurisdiction, only 12 families are currently washing clothes. The traditional way of carrying the clothes, i.e., *pottani* (S: and T: wrapping the clothes in a big piece of cloth), has changed. Nowadays plastic bags are available in the market to use for that purpose. As well, it conceals the washerman identity. But low-caste *Dhobi* people and high-caste Sinhalas still go fishing together in the sea and lagoons. I noticed that they fish from the same boat, eat together, and share the challenges of the rough sea equally. Some take alcohol together after they finish work. Low-caste Tamils seem to maintain their respect for high-caste Sinhalas, and the latter seem inclined to take side with their low-caste Tamil friends against some very high-caste Sinhala villagers.

One occasion I attended a meeting held by the fisheries officer for fishermen gaining their livelihoods in the Pānama reservoir. During that discussion, a high-caste Sinhala lady accused certain low-caste Tamil fishermen of violating the law regarding fishing in the village tank imposed by government officials. During this exchange, the rights of low-caste Tamil persons were rigorously defended by other high-caste Sinhalas, who forced the government officer to withdraw the proposed fishing ban. Thus the existing social system of the village seemingly continues despite these social changes.

Conclusion

Pānama is a village in which an older classificatory system continues to shape the commongrounds for all. Its entrenched caste, marriage, kinship and religious systems and cosmologies have rendered the community largely immune to the Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms that have eroded inter-ethnic relationships elsewhere in Sri Lanka. The discussion developed in this chapter shows how two ethnic groups live together in peace in a complex social system, which may be considered (at a more abstract level) as an amalgam of Sinhala and Tamil cultures. This peaceful co-existence is facilitated by a caste based-classificatory scheme, marriage and kinship patterns, and the religious practices adopted and shared by Pānama people that have existed for many generations and mark back to the mythical story of the Kandyan warriors who rioted against the colonial rulers of Sri Lanka in 1818. Although I have employed ethnic terminologies such as Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim to make this chapter 'reader friendly', these ethnic identities do not embody antagonistic meanings within everyday Pānama community life.

Pānama poses a challenge to Barth's (1969) ethnic-boundary making process. As well it shows the applicability of Harrison's (2003; 2006) argument that cultural differences are often better understood as denied resemblances. The external elites and ethno-political forces continue to delineate ethnicity as a process that generates "denied, muted, and fractured resemblances". The story of Pānama illustrates the ways in which the locals deal with ethnic and nationalist projects and, in the process, preserve their resemblances. The discussion in this chapter is presented from the standpoint of the sufferers or victims who have little option but to attempt to manage processes, ethno-politically produced elsewhere, that ignore their local realities (or resemblances).

6

"Greased devils": Living between conflicting ethno-political nationalisms

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how Pānama caste, marriage and kinship, and cosmological practices were shared by Sinhalas and Tamils. Somewhat similarly, this chapter will explore how members of different ethnic groups (Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalas) create commongrounds in Pottuvil, in an environment that is increasingly addressed by Muslim ethno-religious ideology. This ideology is partially a reaction to dominant Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms in which Muslims have become the meat in the sandwich as it were (Ali 2009: 183; Thiranagama 2011: 120). These nationalisms have contributed to social undercurrents of suspicion, contention, and anxiety between members of ethnic groups, sentiments that weigh down the atmosphere in Pottuvil. Despite this, local people there seek to live together in peace, made possible because of a strong local tradition of mutual respect and collaboration. Even though this tradition is increasingly threatened by the divisive political culture in the country its commongrounds are still there.

As in my three other field sites, the attempted mobilisation of inhabitants through the production of ethnic chauvinism exists in Pottuvil too. However Pottuvil is different as well, given the existence of a regional majoritarian Muslim nationalism and a related collective ethnic consciousness of all ethnic groups in general and Muslims in particular. Despite the prevalance of individual's ethnic awareness, the generation of commongrounds at both collective and individual levels is also a feature of the region. This chapter is divided by two concerns: the first illustrates the creation of commongrounds amidst provocative ethnic mobilisation while the second details the prevalance of commongrounds at the individual and smaller group level. Moreover, the experience of Pottuvil pinpoints the tension between a persons loyalty towards a collective ethnic homogeneity and their individual perception of ethnic heterogeneity. Unlike the other three chapters, this chapter

reveals the prevalance of commongrounds even within the intensity of collective ethnic tensions, agitation, and protest.

The chapter also observes ethnic "individuals" unique efforts to connect with ethnic "others" disregarding or disassociating themselves from an ethno-nationalism that poses a threat to their social lives. Even at the peak of collective Muslim consciousness raising local Muslims interacted with counterparts from other ethnic groups. The chapter shows how social practices best described as co-opting, adaptation, mutual learning, tolerance, sympathising and empathasing countered the volatility of ethnic agitation.

The Pottuvil DS division is a Muslim dominated social space. Especially in the eastern coastal belt the majority of the population are Muslims and Tamils. My research mainly centred in Vettiveli GN jurisdiction area where 8 Muslim, 146 Tamil and 46 Sinhala families live. I also observed, and did interviews with the Muslim families that lived next to the vettiveli area. According to the GN officer there were 20 mixed Sinhala and Tamil families and I was also able to include some families in my sample too. According to the GN and the people of the area discussions have been under way for many years to establish separate GN jurisdiction areas for both minority Tamils and Sinhalas of the area in order to deliver better service to these two minority groups in the area. Both the Sinhalas and Tamils seemed comfortable with that decision as they belived it to be a good way of meeting their demands and obtaining better service from the government.

I did not observe much difference among the ethnic groups in their socio-economic activities. Most were engaged in paddy cultivation, *chēna* (or shifting cultivation) cultivation, fishing, running retail shops, carpentry and masonery. A small number of government and private sector employees also lived there. There was socio-economic cooperation and dependancy among the members of different ethnic groups on an everyday basis.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The "greased devil", a kind of bogeyman, enters houses at night to draw blood from the breasts of women to fuel some mysterious activity. This killing of women first occurred in Sinhala-dominant areas such as Kahawatte in Ratnapura in 2008 (Jayasinghe 2012). In

2011 it extended to all areas of the country including the north and eastern provinces where many war-affected Tamil and Muslim people live (Ratnapriya 2011; Watchdog 2011). The "greased devil" created mass fear among women. Indeed it began to cripple the lives of ordinary people everywhere in the country, even as the efforts of the police and the law enforcement authorities proved futile in curbing the killings. Sensationalist media reports aggravated people's anxiety. In Pottuvil the greased devil was thought to be connected to the Sinhala State. Vigilante groups found that "greased devils" ran towards or disappeared into military camps or police stations when they tried to catch them, creating suspicion among people in general and the ethnic minorities in particular that they were a tool of the armed forces (Jeyaraj 2011). Denying peoples' concerns over the matter, senior police officers and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence warned that they would take stringent legal action against anyone who takes the law into their own hands regarding greased devils, further exacerbating Muslims suspicions (Berenger 2011; Perera 2011; Rajasekera 2011).

In response, inhabitants of Pottuvil organized a civil disobedience movement (*hartāl*). The *hartāl* is a demonstration against anything that causes a perceived public disturbance. It involves a total shut down of offices, shops, and other public places in the area. I have often heard the term *hartāl* used in relation to protests in the northern and eastern parts of the country, often by minorities. Local politicians in the northern and eastern provinces have often joined hands with the people to stage *hartāl* against the police and military forces (Kamalendran 2011; Kamalendran and Kumar 2011). Similar kinds of protests have been reported in other parts of the eastern province in Batticaloa, Kalmunai, Akkraipattu and in the northern area around Jaffna in July 2011. The *hartal* was related to anxieties generated by state terror and state violence against its own citizens, of which the greased devil was an apt metaphor (see Goodhand, et al. 2009: 689).

By mid-August, *hartāl* was experienced in Pottuvil for the first time. Starting after Friday prayers, protestors,closed the road disturbing traffic, burning tyres, and setting on fire stalls belonging to Sinhala vendors at *pola* (S: market). These Sinhala vendors were not Pottuvil residents but regular comers from neighbouring Sinhala villages. Protesters accused the police of inaction in curbing the "greased devils" and also of alleged links with them. Muhammad Maujoom, a 32 year old father of three and a former candidate for the SLMC (Sri Lanka Muslim Congress) of Pottuvil, died when the military (who came to

control the situation when police officers failed to do so) opened fire. In response the government imposed a police-curfew on the area (Dias 2011; Haviland 2011).

The government dispatched senior ministers and representatives[39] of the Muslim community to the region to address the situation. The deployment of Muslim Government ministers to redress the issue was indicative of the kind of ethno-politics that divided communities. In the eyes of local residents, Muslim politicians' lackadaisical approach to the issue highlighted the political and institutional incapacity of the government and the lack of determination of the state when it came to healing the woes of people in post-war Sri Lanka.

Spencer suggests that "collective violence should not be treated as a departure from the flow of the political, but rather should be analysed as a heightened and intensified continuation of normal politics" (2007: 120). The tense situation that this chapter details is a development of the discriminatory or divisive 'normal politics' of the state in the eastern region and the related evolution of nationalisms (see Alagappa 2001: 520; McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Spencer 2011: 204). The violence of the "greased devil" phenomena shows how ethno-nationalism is perceived by its countless victims and protagonists, and as I will show, it reveals its character.

Emotions and passions released through nationalism are both personal and worldly. Indeed as Kapferer says, "the emotionality of nationalism flows from the way persons are directed to their experience, to the political and social and economic circumstances of their experience in ontology" (Kapferer 2012: 212). The violent protests during Muslim-led *hartāl* formented fear in the minds of Sinhalas living in Pottuvil and Pānama revealed certain latent anti-Sinhala (state) nationalist sentiments. However, it did not pose a serious threat to local Sinhalas as a group because (a) they accepted Muslims' sufferings; and (b) because this mysterious threat comes from "outside" familiar society not from "within". Further protesters who came to the streets to do *hartāl* did not constitute the majority of Muslims, while many other Muslims were there to help Sinhalas (fellow neighbours and friends) if things went wrong.

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39 The leader of SLMC, the Minister of Justice Rauff Hakeem, Senior Minister A.H.M. Fowzie, and Minister A.L.M. Athaullah, along with Ministers of the Eastern Provincial Council and members of local government went to talk to the residents in the Grand Jumma Mosque of Pottuvil (Mohomed 2011).

Similar to what Jonathan Spencer observed that the "greased devil" myth aimed to create fear and rumours and was used to reduce any possibility of inter-ethnic co-existence (2007: 167). This is a further illustration of his notion of "ethnic politics as a counter-pluralism" (2007: 164-167). Despite this politics, people continue to live in a world of "everyday pluralism", i.e., in "situations and settings in which people, averagely imperfect as they are, manage to get by with one another" (Spencer 2007: 165). People share commongrounds despite on-going ethno-religious political crisis situations. In this context the minority Tamils in general and the Sinhala residents in particular endured the potentially anti-Sinhala anger of Muslims as they too were worried about the "greased devils".

Arriving on the scene

The morning of 11 August 2011, my assistant Aravinda and I went to the Gana devālaya[40] (or T: Pulleyār *kovil*) to watch the devotees' performing rituals. Among the devotees were some who came from Pottuvil and from elsewhere in the eastern province. One well-known elderly villager advised us not to go to Pottuvil as the Muslim people of Pottuvil had started a *hartāl*. Indeed, this *hartāl* was a hot topic – news about it spread widely throughout the village in the course of the day.

According to villagers from Pottuvil the reason for the "greased devil" outbreak was that a Pottuvil Muslim woman, who went outside to relieve herself in the evening, was grabbed by a "greased devil" that took blood from her breast. Subsequently she was admitted to the local hospital. This incident happened during the Ramadan fasting period (*nombi*) during which Muslim men are usually in the mosque in the evenings. But the fear of another attack by the "greased devil" prevented them from leaving their wives and children alone at home. In a parallel incident, locals detained three strangers who, they believed, were behaving suspiciously. They handed the men over to the police station. Sometime later, however, people found that the police had released them, claiming that they were Government officers conducting a census on wild elephants in the region. This provoked a *hartāl* against the police because people felt that they did not take due action

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40 A temple dedicated to the God Pilleyār or Pulleyār (T:) and Gana deviyo (S:), a God of the Hindu pantheon.

against the suspects. Rumours began to spread about connections between the police, the security forces and the "greased devil".

During the *hartāl* Muslim protestors showed their anger towards Sinhala nationalism, and there were reports that Sinhala villagers from Pānama had been harassed. Anti-'Sinhala' sentiments in the region were further fuelled by politicians. Sinhala people in Pānama in general and in Pottuvil in particular, who were minorities in Muslim majority areas, acted with extra caution so as not to provoke Muslim people. In this tense situation they feared a Muslim attack.

The conspiracy rumours evoking "greased devils" suggest that relations between the Sinhalas and Muslims are forged and impacted on not by "insiders" but by outside agents who either have connections with the "state" or with "powerful politicians". It is certainly my impression that locals believe that agents of the state who frequent the area are in some way involved in the "greased devils" phenomenon. This affected my research. We were afraid that we as "outsiders" and people with a non-Muslim identity might be connected to the "greased devil", a scary prospect in a region where people are often keen to take the law into their own hands. We understood that the casual and sarcastic remarks directed towards us as "greased devils" were indicative of the imagined threat we posed to locals. This is one of the dangers that a local ethnographer faces when they do research in their own societies.

However, this dreadful experience prompted me to cease research for one month and to give Aravinda a break. The "greased devil" episode took a lot of time out of my research to develop rapport with locals and pushed us to be extra cautious. Once we resumed our research, I was able to conduct interviews with 21 Muslims, 15 Tamils and 22 Sinhalas living in the area. We maintained close contacts with 20 families, equally distributed among all the ethnic groups. They pursued various occupations, and had varied educational and socio-economic backgrounds. We took part in religious activities of the Buddhists and Hindus, funerals, private functions and also observed the *quazi* court session where Muslim marriages and divorce matters were heard by respected male Muslim officials.

"Greased devil" rumours circulating in the region evoked fear, anxiety, agitation, retaliation, provocation, and created and recreated ethno-nationalist feelings. Sinhala

people in Pottuvil told me that they felt that Muslims preferred not to talk to them. The peace had been disturbed. And Pānama traders and others, who customarily bought essential items on wholesale and retail basis, noticed a difference in the behaviour of the Muslims towards them. Some Muslims suggested that they were reluctant to interact with Sinhalas as other Muslims would disapprove of their actions. This shows the magnitude of the political aligning and dis-aligning connected to this emerging yet defensive Muslim religious-nationalism. The Muslim community were aware of the fact that their fellow neighbouring Sinhala Pānama villagers were also victims of post-war government efforts such as seizing lands, disturbing fishing in the sea. On the other hand, ordinary Muslim people had to balance their everyday lived reality with a militant ready-to-hand Muslim ethno-nationalism as Klem (2011) suggests.

At one occasion Muslims told me that "greased devils" only attacked their villages while Tamils and Sinhalas were safe from attacks in Pānama. This observation was criticised by the Sinhalas who pointed out that similar incidents had occurred in the Sinhala areas of the country, including in Kahawatte. At the same time, rumours flared among Sinhalas that the devil was connected to Muslims, who had secret contacts with Muslim extremist organisations such as "Jihad". This should be seen as reflecting an emerging Sinhala anxiety vis-a-vis Muslim-militant nationalism (also noted by Klem 2011). These types of rumours are indicative of the fears people harbour regarding divisive ethno-national politics and the growing militancy and violence of Muslims. However, all parties also sensed a conspiracy connected with the government. Nevertheless, once the "greased devils" issue and the political mobilisation of the people came to an end in the wake of provincial council elections in the western and other provinces, people returned to their normal everyday lives. At the end of the day, the whole thing was yet another incident that added to the already rich repertoire of personal and collective memories of terror.

Sri Lanka's ethnic crucible and post-war power-sharing

In this section I will discuss Muslim ethnic politics in eastern Sri Lanka in general and Pottuvil in particular to introduce the ethno-politically volatile context in which commongrounds survive. Muslim ethnic politics should be understood within a framework of the political construction of rigid ethnic boundaries based upon favouritism and

discrimination promoted by the majority Sinhala-dominant central state and militant Tamil politics. Two main historical events have evoked ethno-nationalist feelings and hatred in the area: (1) the emergence of the LTTE and its attacks against Sinhalas and Muslims and (2) the beginning of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (CMC) political party. The arrival of massive numbers of security officers was a third factor.

In his study *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* Dennis B. McGilvray identifies the east as "Sri Lanka's ethnic crucible" (McGilvray 2011a: 7). With the start of the Eelam war, it became a region of "ethnic tensions and geopolitical uncertainties" (2011a: 7-10). Tambiah also sees this region as heavily affected by ethno-nationalist politics that emerged after 1956 (1986: 100). While he initially refers to Sinhala-Tamil nationalist sentiments, Muslim seperatism can now be added to the drama. For most outsiders, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka appears as a struggle for power between a Sinhala ethnic majority and a Tamil minority. Obscured in this analysis are Muslims. The conflict between Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms spawned during the colonial period also gave birth to Muslim nationalism that later aligned with two main Sinhala political parties to form governments.

The introduction of the provincial council system as a way of solving ethnic conflict was an intervention by then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi via an Indo-Lanka peace agreement. The Muslims were used by the state to discredit LTTE's claims to unite north and eastern provinces of the country and, in the process, to devolve more power to the Tamils. Muslims did not relish the prospect of living under the domination of Tamils in their areas. In this context, *hartāl* movements erupted as a result of continuously fed ethno-national politics from both the state and ethnic minorities. "Today the Muslims are the only Sri Lankan ethnic group bearing a religious rather than a linguistic, ethnic or racial name, as reflected also in the name of the largest Muslim political party – the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress" (McGilvray 2011b: 52).

Yet other parties make use of religious sentiments: the Jāthika Hela Urumaya, generally identified as the JHU (National Heritage Party), which is currently in an alliance with the ruling regime of Sri Lanka, made reference to anti-Muslim feelings among the Buddhist-Sinhala community (McGilvray 2011b: 52-53). In addition, Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS, "Buddhist Power Force"), a group led by a Buddhist priest, has promoted Buddhist-

Sinhala sentiments against alleged Muslim domination in Sri Lanka since mid-2012. However, it makes more sense to view these efforts as a instrumental politics by certain elites, as shown in Chapter Two.

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In 1977, A.H.M. Ashraff, a resident of Sammanthurai, obtained his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Law from the University of Ceylon. As well, he was a graduate of the Colombo Law College. Ashraff formed the Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF), perhaps based on the extant Tamil Party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), with which he later entered into an alliance when he contested under the TULF ticket. In the wake of the Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms of pre-and post-independent Sri Lanka, Muslim politicians also switched to the strategy of Muslim mobilization, effecting a paradigm shift from a non-militant form of nationalism (politics) to a more militant discourse of ethno-nationalism and minority rights (Klem 2011: 17).

The SLMC claimed for itself the role of promoting Islamic values among the community, i.e., promoting the "sovereignty of Holy Quran" (Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997: 90). In September 1981, Ashraff formed the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) along with several other Muslim politicians in Kattankudy, where the party thrived (Ali 2009). In a practical sense, it appeared that the party was more aligned to mosques and imams. Gradually the SLMC gained popularity due to the communal political stance it adopted (Spencer 2012: 728-729; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997). Nevertheless the Muslim community and their politics cannot be treated as a united whole against Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms. Muslims too are internally divided and wracked by hostility (Klem 2011: 1; Spencer 2012).

Ethnic power-sharing that emerged as a solution to "communal conflict" became a competition to grab power for the benefit of "our people" against "their people" or "friends" and "enemies", failing to assure principles of democracy such as equality, equity, fairness, and right to dissent. The Pottuvil case is a fine example of the shortcomings of power-sharing in a society that does not have a democratic political history. Unlike in national politics, Pottuvil and other eastern parts of the country favour Muslim people (at least in the eyes of Sinhala and Tamil respondents). The Muslim majoritarian nature of the

region was evident in the local administrative bodies, e.g., in the Divisional Secretariat (DS), hospital, the post office, public and private banks, indeed everywhere. Like minorities elsewhere, the Sinhala and Tamil communities perceived domination backed by ethno-politics as discriminative and as depriving them of their rights. It is in this political climate that we have to understand the dynamics of fear, tension and commongrounds in Pottuvil.

The endangered Pottuvil community

The Pottuvil Divisional Secretariat comes under the Ampara District Secretariat in Eastern Sri Lanka. Earlier it was under the Batticaloa District. People who live in Pottuvil share a common identity as *Pottuvila kattiya, Pottuvila minissu* (S:) and *Pottuvil ākkhal* (T:), all meaning "Pottuvil folk". The local lingua franca is Tamil (also see McGilvray 2011a: 23) and the fact that people share this language despite being labelled with different ethnic names also contributes to building a sense of community. In 1617, when the Portuguese expelled Muslims from the Seetawaka and Kotte Kingdoms of Sri Lanka, the refugees sought asylum in the Kandy kingdom. King Senarath re-settled them on the east coast after reaching an agreement with the Portuguese (Ali 2009: 184). Most Muslims settled in the Tamil village of Kattankudy near Batticaloa to avoid further Portuguese persecution. Some may have married local Tamil women of the Mukkuvar caste of fisher folk (Imtiyaz and Hoole 2011: 218). The Pottuvil Muslims are an expansion of this earlier Muslim group who mixed with local Tamils.

Many respondents believed that externally imposed nationalisms destroyed the peace in Pottuvil since the latter years of the 1980s. Thangamaari, a 65 year old Hindu-Tamil lady, suggests that Pottuvil became a fertile ground for ethnic provocation because people were burdened with ideologies from 'outside' (also see Goodhand, et al. 2009: 688). Take the LTTE. The LTTE was not established with the involvement of any of the residents of Pottuvil, although some low-caste Tamils joined the movement at a later stage. There is little evidence to suggest that the Tamils in the area demanded that the LTTE attack non-Tamil local residents: nor did they abandon their relationships with their Sinhala and Muslim counterparts. Some of the people in the area shared horrific stories with me. In October 1987, the LTTE commenced its main attack on Pottuvil by killing 25 Sinhala and

Muslim persons travelling in a public bus from Pottuvil to Monaragala. Some of the respondents who talked to me lost close relatives in this attack.

In June 1990, the LTTE took into custody unarmed Muslim and Sinhala police officers attached to the Pottuvil police station. They killed them along with more than 600 other officers attached to different police stations in the eastern province. Following this, the Army and extra police forces were sent to Pottuvil. McGilvray (2011a) notes how the lives of local people were ruined amidst clashes between State forces and the LTTE. The LTTE killed Sinhalas and Muslims (including 10 Muslim farmers in September 2006) (see Jeganathan 2010a), and the military forces started to arrest and punish Tamils, many of whom went to refugee camps. Every person had a story to share about the war, the fighting and terror of LTTE, Sri Lankan Police and military and Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) (also see Lawrence 2000). People were deprived of food supplies, schools and government offices closed, and most nights they had to manage without lighting. Many lost their properties and had to flee the area. The LTTE killed one Sinhala family in the town and then burnt their bodies alleging that they had passed information about LTTE movements onto security forces.

According to the statistics provided by community leaders there are approximately 60 Sinhala families in Pottuvil town. As indicated by the Sri Lanka Census of Population and Housing in 2011, the ethnic composition of the population in the Pottuvil Divisional Secretariat (DS) area is 27213 Muslims, 6581 Sri Lankan Tamils and 881 Sinhalas. The Sinhalas cannot be considered a community created under the government's colonisation scheme, which sought not only to change the region's demography, but to create fear in the minds of the minorities living in the dry zones (see Korf 2005; Peebles 1990). Local Tamils and Sinhalas stress the fact that the number of Muslims in Pottuvil as recent migrants rendered the relationship of the migrants and the original inhabitants' complex. The actions of the LTTE against the government resulted in Tamils and Sinhalas fleeing the area. Subsequently their premises were sold to Muslims. Understandably, both Sinhalas and Tamils feel that the Muslims have not only benefitted from the war: they have taken control of business in the area. In effect, the Sinhalas and Tamils deem the "ethnic war" and "the Tsunami" a blessing for the Muslims, who gained prominence within their majoritarian ethno-national politics within provincial/local government frameworks. These

accusations and perceptions were testimony to the emergence/hardening of ethno-political boundaries during the Tsunami aid distribution.

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In total, the rubbing-up of externally organized Tamil and Muslim nationalisms with overarching Sinhala-state nationalism is a live undercurrent in Pottuvil community. One 55-year old Buddhist-Sinhala person, married to a Christian-Burgher-Sinhala lady was elected to the Pottuvil Pradeshiya Sabha (PPS) supported by the votes of Muslim, Tamils and Sinhalas. He claims that he is the only Sinhala person elected to the PPS to date and doubts if another Sinhala person will be elected. His election to the PPS reflected his ability to win over the "hearts and minds" of voters due to his broader policies in a context in which the "ethnic [or ethno-religious] card is the only card in Sri Lankan politics" (Spencer 2013: 94). According to him,

> Then leader of TULF Amirthalingam had accused Sinhalas a lot during political rallies (S: *Sinhala minissunta pana yanakan banna*) mobilising Tamils against Sinhalas. M.H.M Ashraff was an ordinary lawyer of the Kalmunai court, he had selected the same path of arousing ethnic feelings of the Muslims so that to take political advantages (9.00a.m 8 July 2011, Interviewed at his home).

A few weeks after the "greased devils" the area became normal and people started living their social lives as usual. These sorts of tensions and anxieties have been part of their lives for some time since the independence in 1948. These sorts of "events quickly and imperceptibly blur into and become stories" (Jackson 2005: 11).

The uniqueness of Pottuvil's social space

Unlike in Colombo, in Pottuvil it was difficult for Aravinda and myself to recognize the ethnicity of a person simply by observing ways of dress or behaviour or through the use of the Sinhala or Tamil languages. Most people maintained Sinhala-Tamil bilingual traditions in the Pottuvil town, just like elsewhere in the country (see Tambiah 1986: 99). With respect to dress, in Colombo Muslims often wear a distinct jubba[41] or a long-sleeve white shirt, while men wear skullcaps and women wear the hijab that covers the face and head.

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41 Jubba is a garment: a coat like tunic that extends down to knees, which is commonly worn by religious inclined persons.

But in Pottuvil this was not the case. I also observed Muslim women on Crow Island and De Mel Watta wearing the *niqab*, *burqua* and *chador*. According to some Muslim respondents, their dress choices were a result of recent Islamic trends in Sri Lanka. Unlike in Colombo, in Pottuvil the only occasion Muslim men wear skullcaps was when they attended services in the mosque. According to elderly persons, Tamils too had changed their attire over time. Years ago, Tamils would wear a *vaetti*[42] or white sarong and a *vibuthi*[43]or *pottu*[44] when going to the *kovil*.

Members of all groups engage in similar kinds of work, predominantly in agriculture, paddy, and vegetable cultivation. People of all three ethnic backgrounds live side by side in the same neighbourhood. In addition, there are religious places for all, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu. A considerable degree of unity has survived among the three ethnic groups, despite the provocations of ethnic nationalism and communal politics. The entire eastern province represents a unique cultural zone in which most of the practices across groups show similarities (1989; McGilvray 2011a; Yalman 1967: 325-331). We see marriage ceremonies, dowry allocations and kinship systems that resemble each other, overlapping religious beliefs, similar aesthetic tastes, and shared norms and values related to everyday life.

My first exposure to Pottuvil was during the Sinhala-Tamil New Year celebration (S: *bakmaha uthsawaya*) that falls in April every year.[45] During this occasion Sinhala and Tamil people celebrate New Year annually in the month of April. People collect their harvest in the *Maha* season and perform rituals to thank Nature. After the ritual performances they organise various traditional games and musical events. The two-day long event, which in 2011 was organised by the *Dilenatharu Kreedā Samājaya* (S: Shining Stars Sports Club). The Pottuvil police station also played a vital role in its organising. People from the neighbouring Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim villages, e.g., Pānama, Lahugala, Kōmari, Thirukkovil attended the festivities. I travelled with a team from Pānama. I

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42 Five yards long strip of cloth. It is usually come in white or cream colours.

43 A stripe or dot of holy ash placed on the forehead of both Hindu-Tamil men and women.

44 The red coloured dot is generally worn on their foreheads, by Hindu-Tamil women in generally. Christian-Tamil women also follow this tradition.

45 The dawn of New Year is celebrated between the 13th or 14th of April every year according to the dates set by astrologers, taking into consideration the movement of the sun. This marks the sun's movement from Meena Rashiya (the house of Pisces) to Mesha Rashiya (the house of Aries) after completing its twelve-month cycle every year.

attended similar events in the other three research locations during the same period, but my focus here is on Pottuvil as its New Year celebration was special.

The Sinhala-Tamil New Year celebration was colourful and enjoyable due to both traditional and new sports events. Games commonly include events such as marathon, women and men's cycle races, beauty queen contests, fancy dress competitions, pillow fighting, and various kinds of races (such as bicycle) and archery. People also engaged in cross country running (S: *gama haraha diveema*), a lime and spoon race (S: *dehi gediya ha handa*), hurdle race (S: *badaka diveema*), a sack race (S: *goniye basa diveema*), and a three-legged race (S: *pada thunen diveema*). On top of that there was coconut scraping (S: *pol gēma*), weaving of coconut fronds (S: *pol athu wiweema*), and reciting of verses (S: *kavi gāyana*). One popular sport, known as greasy pole (S: *grease gaha nageema*) was the highlight for most people. In two other games, the competitors are blindfolded. In one such game, the competitors are asked to mark the eye of an elephant (S: *aliyata asa thabeema*) and to break the correct pot among a few pots hanging from a rope by hitting it with a particular stick (S: *kanā mutti bindeema*).

At the end of two days people collect their prizes at the musical show held overnight. There were two musical groups: Sinhala and Tamil. Peoples of all ethnic groups took part in the musical show, including Muslim families. The chairman, a Muslim working for the Pottuvil Pradeshiya Sabha (Local Government), came to the prize-giving ceremony. Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala businessmen of the area sponsored the whole event. The organizers thanked them during the speeches made that night. Youth from all of the ethnic groups actively participated in various events and collected money to fund them. During these two days I observed people interacting without being hampered by the boundaries of ethnicity and religion that often shape people's perception of each other in other contexts (also see Schulenkorf 2010). In the following section I shed light on the kind of ethics that bring people together and shape commongrounds amid ethnic and religious tensions.

Kinship, caste, and personal qualities

In this section, I illustrate the role of kinship, caste, and personal qualities that act as a base to forge commongrounds, that is, to establish user-friendly social relationships. People in

Pottuvil construct and reconstruct various forms of social identities through which the ethnic "other" can be drawn closer. The everyday strategies of rendering ethnic identity insignificant occur among neighbours, during regular business transactions, with co-workers, and in many other similar spheres of life. Usage of kinship terminologies in day-to-day interactions is one significant way of creating intimate connections.

This "kinship formation" is a "pragmatic kinship" that does not recognise genealogical lineage but instead creatively reconciles elements of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim kinship systems. In essence, it is the social formation of a kinship system that provides an alternative to the dominant primordial notion of kinship formation. For example, Sekaran *mudalāli*, a 60 year old Hindu-Tamil man is married to a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, who now lives in the Hindu-Tamil way. He runs a retail shop in the Pottuvil Sinhala-Tamil area and told me that "In this area, when a Sinhala child goes to a Tamil house he or she may call members of that family as *nandā*, *māmā* (aunty or uncle). They may not necessarily be blood relatives." Anusha, a 40 year old Buddhist-Sinhala lady married to a man whose father is Buddhist-Sinhala and whose mother is Hindu-Tamil from Jaffna always uses these terms when she refers to known Muslim and Tamil persons. She shared with me examples of addressing people of different ethnic groups and ages: *akkā* (S: elder sister), *nangi* (S: younger sister), *aiyā* (S: elder brother), *malli* (S: younger brother), *nendā* (S: aunty), and *māmā* (S: uncle).

I also witnessed many occasions during which Anusha was addressed by elderly people of both Muslim and Tamil ethnic backgrounds as *duwa* (S:) and *maha* (T:) ("daughter"). Anusha was confident that this habit will not disappear in the foreseeable future since young people are used to their culture. She shared with me stories about how her daughter had sought help from a neighbouring Muslim lady when her mother punished her; "Fathima aunty, my mother is hitting me. Help me...come and save me..." On such occasions, Fathima used to come and rescue Anusha's daughter and take her to her house. Sarojini, a 26 yearold Christian-Tamil lady from Colombo married to 29 year old Hindu-Tamil man working for the Pottuvil Pradeshiya Sabha affirmed the use of kinship terms, saying that the Muslim traders address her as *Marumaka* (T:) and her husband as *Maramakan* (T:). In return, she and her husband call Muslims *māmā* (T: uncle), *māmi* (T: aunty) and Sinhalas *aiya* (S: brother) and *akka* (S: and T: sister). Sasanka Perera claims that people use "fictive kin terms" when seeking help or when supporting each other in

times of crisis (2004: 26). Tambiah (1986: 5) and Brow (1996: 195) have also noted the similarity between Sinhala and Tamil kinship patterns. McGilvray (2011a: 122) sees kinship similarities between the Tamils and Muslims in the eastern areas of the country.

Besides the use of shared kinship terminology people in Pottuvil also forge commongrounds by making reference to kindred (kinsfolk) when discussing connections and disconnections among their fellow villagers. This referencing involves diverse characteristics such as wealth, social prestige, profession, generational inter-ethnic friendship and mutual help. It helps to neutralise the ethno-political boundaries from their everyday collective social life. This makes inter-ethnic connection and interconnection possible. Anusha said that she is often identified by people as the "cooperative manager's daughter", "baker's granddaughter" (S: *bakkarege petti*) or else "Thilakaratne's daughter-in-law". This form of identification highlights the harmonious, friendly relationships that other members of the contacting person's family have established with "good people" (S: *honda minissu*; T: *nalla akkhal*). Anusha's mother has not only helped Muslims and Tamils of Pottuvil: she has also saved the lives of Tamils who may have died at the hands of the security forces.

The other uniting force in Pottuvil is personal qualities and achieved status that also soften the conflicting inter- and intra-ethnic boundaries. When people categorise two members of the same ethnic group, they also refer to various other criteria such as job, wealth, prestige, education, place of origin and living, mannerisms, and similar social criteria. The term for two Muslim betel nut sellers, Nuwara *māmā* (uncle) and Mannar *mudalāli* (trader) highlights the fluidity of ethnic identity as these are not their official names but substitutions. These two Muslims came to Pottuvil from other regions: Mannar *mudalāli* came from Mannar, while Nuwara *māmā* or Nuwara *aiyā* (elder brother) came from Kandy (S: *Nuwara*), a city in the central highlands of the island where all three ethnic groups live side-by-side. Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims all denote a businessman using the term *mudalāli* and Mannar is known as Mannar *mudalāli*.

Throughout Pottuvil people are generally identified according to their region of habitation, which helps to conceal or obscure the prominence of ethnicity in the social identity of the person. When Nuwara *māmā* came to Pottuvil initially, he worked in the spice trade and was identified as *enasal nānā* ("cardamom brother"). He was also

identified as Nuwara *nānā*, a Sinhala term denoting Kandy (Nuwara) combined with a Muslim term (*nānā*) denoting 'elder brother'. Some people add another adjective, e.g., *bulath kade* (betel shop), calling him, *bulathkade* Nuwara *nānā,* or *bulath kade* nuwara *aiyā*. The second name relates to his Muslim identity and denotes more closeness with Sinhalas and Tamils. This sort of labelling makes ethnic border crossing possible.

The examples above show that social perceptions other than ethnic or religious facilitate commongrounds. Speaking with me, these two Muslim men criticized characteristics of their fellow Muslim intra-ethnic group members. Mannar *mudalāli* often used to accuse the Muslims of Pottuvil as a group of being stingy and selfish compared with those of his hometown of Mannar. Nuwara *māmā*, who came from Kandy, claimed a different identity. Broadly speaking "Kandy Muslims" regarded the people of Pottuvil as "stingy, untrustworthy and unreliable people". During my discussions in Pottuvil Muslims and non-Muslims alike always referred to other sub-identities of Muslims as "Kattankudy Muslims", "Akkaraipattu Muslims", "Batticaloa Muslims" and "Colombo Muslims" for examples. The first term of each sub-identity indicates the locality.

Caste also played a significant role in shaping intra- and inter-ethnic relations. Tamils tend to identify intra-ethnic variations in terms of religion, caste, class, and region-specific loyalties. Thangamaari, a 65 year-old Hindu-Tamil lady often said that members of her clan in Pottuvil do not accept a glass of water from a low-caste Tamil person's house. Apropos of caste there are clerics, goldsmiths, steel workers, washermen (*Dhobi*), and barber caste Tamils in Pottuvil. Some Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims saw LTTE brutality as perpetrated by *Dhobi* (washermen caste) youth, who took part in LTTE activities. This was an attempt to disassociate oneself from stigmatised ethno-political labels (also see Obeyesekere 1974). Pottuvil Tamils showed little interest in interacting with the *thotta ākkhal* (T:) (Indian plantation Tamil community who mainly live in the plantation areas). During our discussions they referred to various Tamil groups as "Jaffna Tamils", "Batticaloa Tamils", "Akkaraipattu Tamils", "Colombo Tamils", while acknowledging religious variations; "Hindu-Tamils", "Christian-Tamils", and "Saiva-Tamils". Such identifications are linked to the distinctive qualities that people use to distinguish communities. Although Sri Lankan Muslims are not concerned with caste in general, I heard many personal accounts where caste became a concern during their contact

with Tamils in the area. This shows how people deconstruct stigmatising ethnic boundaries so as to life lives not obstructed by such boundaries.

Sharing foods, sweets, greetings and blessings during festivals

During the *Nombu* or *Nombi*[46] (S: and T:) festival, which was held after the "greased devil" event in August 2011, Aravinda and I visited Ravi's house. Ravi works as an officer attached to the Pottuvil Divisional Secretariat (DS) office. His father, Sundaram G.N. (Grama Niladhari[47]) and two of his uncles also took part in the discussion. A young man around 25 years of age arrived on a pushbike and handed Ravi a bag. He was a local Muslim youth and a friend of Ravi's. They became friends since the Muslim boy came to meet Ravi's father in his capacity as Grama Nladari to get some official documents. He had brought a plate of sweets for Ravi as part of their *Nombu* celebration. They now exchange sweets annually. Ravi is a Hindu-Tamil, who has 'blood relations' with a Buddhsit-Sinhala lineage. The young man is a Muslim. Ravi lived in Vettiveli along with Sinhalas and Tamils. His young friend lives in a Muslim quarter of Pottuvil town.

In Pottuvil I often noticed the importance of food sharing among Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil families. Sekaran *mudalāli*, a Hindu-Tamil trader (of Indian Tamil descent[48]), who is married to a Buddhist-Sinhala lady (whose father is Sinhala and whose mother is Indian Tamil), now is seen to observe Hindu-Tamil customs. He told me that they share plates of food with Muslim and Sinhala families and vice versa. Sekaran *mudalāli* originally came from Monaragala, a Sinhala majority area seriously affected by ethnic riots. He then moved to Vettiveli. He prepared biryani[49] to share with neighbours during deepavali[50] in 2011. Thilakaratne, a Buddhist-Sinhala man married to a Hindu-Tamil lady

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46 These terms are used by members of all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka to refer to Ramazan festivals. The Ramzan fast culminates in Eid-ul-fitr or Ramzan (or Ramadan) festival, that is known among the local Muslims as nombu/nombi perunal symbolising festival of the fast.

47 Village level government officer

48 This is an intra-ethnic identity of Tamil. They have been experiencing discriminatory treatment by other Tamil groups in general and by the Sri Lankan Tamil community popularly known as the Jaffna Tamil community in particular.

49. A rice-based food made with spices, rice and food mixed with chicken, beef, mutton or vegetable. This was originally a special food among Muslims in Sri Lanka. But, now it is popular among other ethnic groups

50. Deepavali (or Deewali) is, a Hindu-Tamil festival that celebrates the triumph of God over evil. A festival of light, it is celebrated in Sri Lanka on a day between October 15 and November 15 every year.

of Jaffna decent, who was a neighbour of Sekaran *mudalāli*,[51] said that he used to distribute approximately 30 parcels of sweets among neighbours during the Sinhala-Tamil New Year that was mainly celebrated by the Buddhist-Sinhala community on the Island. However, in the east in general, and in other parts of the country, Hindu-Tamils too consider this a special day for them.

The food-exchange practice seems to be a long tradition that has survived in the region. It is through these practices that locals build and renew close relationships commonly conceptualised as *palaharawanga*[52] (T:)*, therinjawanga*[53] (T:)*, pakattuweetu akkhal*[54] (T:) and *hitwath kattiya*[55] (S:)*, danna aya*[56] (S:). Back in my home, in Kalutara, my mother used to send 20-30 plates of sweets to Hindu-Tamils or Christian-Sinhalas during Sinhala-Tamil New Year. They, in return, shared sweets during *deevāli* and *thai pongal* and Christmas. This could be considered a way of maintaining social capital and highlights people's ability to select their "fictive kinsfolk" or "friends" from other groups in ways that negates Politicised ethnic preferences.

Being a neighbour and business collaborations

In Pottuvil neighbours are identified as *akkam pakkam akkhal* or *pakattu weettu akkhal* (T:) and *ahala pahala aya* (S:). Arjun Appadurai sees locality as "primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial" while neighbourhood is defined as "actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized" (1995: 204). Locality and neighbourhood are generally taken-for-granted and are the locus from which the "imagined community" is constructed. In Vettiveli, Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims live side-by-side in the same neighbourhood helping each other on happy and sad occasions. In general, people believe that in times of need, "neighbours" always come and help. For example, not only Fathima but also two other Muslim neighbours gave Anusha 'unforgettable help'. They trimmed their hedges so that Anusha could directly access the

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51 The terms mudalāli or muthalāli is used by both Tamils and Sinhalas to denote 'business people'. They always refer to monied people. This person was buying and selling for a small retail shop, which was locally identified as business karanawa (S:) and business seiyaradu (T:) (Weeratunge 2010: 340).

52 Regular associates.

53 Known people.

54 Neighbours.

55 Friendly people and also reliable.

56 Known people

well of another Muslim neighbour. Such alterations are undertaken very rarely, even among the kinsfolk, as they are considered an invitation to unnecessary land right claims. In return Anusha offered her special skills in wedding planning, dressing, and beauty culture. She used to help many Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families she knew to plan their weddings. And she saved her neighbours a lot of money.

Neighbours then make an effort to be nice to each other and to maintain good relationships through sharing foodstuffs, sweets, ingredients that women run short of during the cooking process, jewellery, shoes, and sandals. They also visit each other in crisis situations such as illness, funerals, accidents or any other special events such as weddings or parties. Neighbours visit to just chat whenever they have time. In general, a good neighbour is an asset, a resource, and provides some protection from the possible disasters of life.

According to Aneez, a 25 years old Muslim young man who owns a telecommunications shop in the market and lives in a mixed neighbourhood, members of families who live in his lane engage in casual talk. And they share food on daily basis.

> I will share an example with you…if my neighbouring Sinhala family cook jackfruit they tend to send us a plate of that dish to my house while we also fill that plate with some of our curry dishes when we return it back…(3.00 p.m. 8th May 2011, Interviewed at his shop).

This material and service exchange is another aspect of sharing and maintaining of neighbourhood relations in Sri Lanka. Through it people learn to appreciate various tastes and differing conditions of food. For example, a Muslim neighbour may not share a dish of beef curry (S: *harak mas hodi*) with Sinhala and Tamil neighbours while they do not share dishes of pork curry (S: *ūru mas hodi*) with Muslim neighbours. During my stay, I often witnessed the cooperation, friendship, trust, confidence, expectations, and levels of bonds created across ethnic boundaries.

It would, however, be untrue to imply that there were no 'problems' in the neighbourhood. Some of the common problems that people experience include noisy drunken neighbours, and disputes over access roads, garbage disposal and drainage. But as

Anusha suggested to me, such problems are in the main resolved amicably. They do not necessarily develop into inter-ethnic (S: *jāthi beda walata yanne ne*) clashes.

Further there are everyday economic and business relationships among the multi-ethnic Pottuvil community. This is an area where the local people negotiate everyday needs for which ethno-political entrepreneurs refuse to take responsibility. Indeed their everyday economic interests constituted a driving force behind the ending (or muting/regulating) of ethnic tension in this part of the country (see Klem 2011: 11-12). Everyday economic cooperation includes everyday buying and selling, service obtaining and offering, credit facilities, engaging in rotating services and micro-finance activities known as "seettu" (S: *seettu danawa*, T: *seettu pidittal*) across ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, Sinhalas, Muslims and Tamils travelled in teams to fish in the sea, where everyone worked together as there were no politicians there to disturb their peace, a fact emphasised by Goonasekera (2007:285). People buy everyday essentials on credit (S: *nayata*) and (T: *kadanakku*) and settle once they receive money or their salaries. This is a normal pattern in everyday business transactions, heavily dependent upon trust. People who bought items from selected traders engaged in personal relationships from which bonds developed. Their business interactions and dependency have gradually translated to long-term friendships or relationships. Muslim traders provided details of occasions upon which they attended Sinhala and Tamil functions; e.g., weddings, funerals, coming of age ceremonies and various national festivals.

Interestingly, business rivalries may lead to ethnic tensions and clashes (e.g., arson attack on stalls belong to Sinhala traders during protests against "greased devil") that disturb the networks of credit and debt among businessmen (*mudalāli* community) in the town. The majority of businessmen are Muslims, but Sinhalas and Tamils also engage in business. There were some concerns expressed among the non-Muslim business community when the Pottuvil Pradeshiya Sabha (Local Government Body[57]) changed its *sāppu sattam* (T: business regulations), requiring shops to close on Fridays. Muslim businessmen did not welcome the idea either but the resulting tensions were resolved through well-established cooperation between business people. Among the many businessmen I associated with two were Muslim, who owned betel stalls among many such

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57. The third level of government in Sri Lanka. The central government and Provincial council operate above it.

stalls. They described their relationships with others in the town in terms of close friendships. Kiribanda *mudalāli*, a Buddhist-Sinhala trader, who sells betel approximately ten meters away held similar opinion.

Mannar *mudalāli* and Kiribanda *mudalāli*, Muslim and Sinhala pavement betel sellers, occupied two ends of the same building owned by a Buddhist-Sinhala person who hailed from one of the families that initially came to Pottuvil many years earlier. Currently, the Sinhala owner had leased it to a Hindu-Tamil person, who wanted to open a retail shop. Before renting the building, Mannar *mudalāli* was allowed to have his small shop in front of the building free of charge; but now both Mannar *mudalāli* and Kiribanda *mudalāli* pay rent to the Sinhala trader. Mannar *mudalāli* also enjoys a friendly relationship with a middle-aged Buddhist-Sinhala lady, who ran a fruit stall next to his in front of a shop that had been abandoned by its Tamil owner during the war. Mannar *mudalāli* told her that he would look after the stall and sell her fruit if she went away. In return, she would help him to sell betel, areca nut, lime, and tobacco. If any Tamil and Muslim customers made accusations against her, Mananr *mudalāli* would fight, stand up for them as she could not understand Tamil.

Mannar *mudalāli* came to Pottuvil 27 years ago, as a dried fish salesman. At that time he was a bachelor, but later he married a lady from Pottuvil. When an open economy was introduced into the country in 1977, the demand for locally produced dried fish declined as imported dried fish was available for a lower price. As a result he had to undertake coolie work in the Sinhala areas of Monaragala, Siyambalanduwa, and Buthgama. It was demeaning for him to have to work as a coolie among people he knew in Pottuvil. Sometime later, he started his betel business.

These observations highlight that business competition and engaging in the same businesses mostly does not lead to ethnic tensions. Instead they create different types of commongrounds amongst different individuals. However, the arson attack against the temporary stalls of Sinhala traders of the Pottuvil Fair was interpreted as an outcome of business rivalry, as the local Muslim traders could not attract customers for their shops as the prices of these stalls were relatively cheap. This however occurred in an environment already rife with tension and hatred.

Chewing betel nut together

Anyone who visits Pottuvil will see many stalls selling betel nuts, unlike in Colombo. This prompted me to think of the significance of betel nut to people in the east. In many ways, the chewing of betel is a significant aspect of life in this part of the country with the betel leaf associated with many cultural events. The palm-sized tender betel leaf is identified as *bulath* (S:) and *vettilai* (T:). They are the main components of a chew (a *vita*-a quid of betel). Other components of a chew are areca nut (dried in rows or else sliced, shredded or cut into pieces), *chunam* from burnt chalk (coral or sea shells-slaked lime), and a piece of sun dried tobacco leaf. The people of the area believe that chewing betel will reduce tiredness and diminish hunger. Hardworking farmers, fishermen or ordinary labourers have a special need for chewing betel and other ingredients in their bags when they leave home for work. Chewing betel is also a great social equaliser: all chew betel: Sinhalas, Tamils, Muslims, the rich, the poor, and high and low caste people. Even priests are allowed to chew betel.

The betel nut also signifies the regional connections of Pottuvil. According to Mannar *mudalāli*, he receives dried tobacco leaf from a Tamil trader in Batticaloa, betel and areca nut (dried and raw) from Sinhala traders in Eheliyagoda, Avissavella and Monaragala, chunam (slaked lime) from a Sinhala trader in Badualla (upcountry), and other products from a Muslim trader living in Akkaraipattu. Without the support of external suppliers, a mundane activity such as chewing betel cannot be fulfilled. Similarly, the Muslim traders in Pottuvil buy vegetables, fish, curd, rice—and also sell their products in—the Sinhala and Tamil-dominated neighbouring towns of Monaragala and Siyambalanduwa and from other areas as well. Mannar *mudalāli* and the other traders share the goods they buy from Sinhala and Tamil suppliers on credit, with an agreement to pay the money back once the goods are sold. Invariably, 4-6 lorries arrive in Pottuvil from Sinhala and Indian Tamil people up-country, bringing vegetables: they take back dried fish, prawns from Pottuvil. In the process, a great deal of trust has developed among the business community.

The same interdependence prevails in almost every aspect of human life in Pottuvil. People cannot live in isolation. Their situation pressurises Pottuvilians to maintain "good"

relationships with neighbouring communities. As a result, the "greased devil" was not allowed to divide multi-cultural society for long.

Giving a hand in crisis and being a part of happy and sad occasions

Members of Sri Lanka's diverse societies develop special friendships with neighbours and co-workers through attending each other's festive occasions such as homecomings, weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies, opening ceremonies of business premises, and sad occasions such as funerals, accidents, when someone becomes ill, and in other crisis situations. Also during the war people supported each other. The minority Sinhalas in Pottuvil were invited to take refuge in the houses of Muslim friends, fearful that the LTTE would shoot them during the night. Tamils sought help from the Sinhalas and Muslims, asking them to bear witness to their innocence. The military kept a suspicious eye on them. Aneez said that during the war the retired principal of the Pottuvil Sinhala School, a Buddhist-Sinhala man, married to a Hindu-Tamil lady, used to sleep at his house so that he could look after his four daughters and wife if the LTTE visited during the night. I heard many instances of Sinhalas and Muslims protecting Tamils while agitated Muslims rioted and were violent towards their Tamil fellow villagers. These kinds of riots and agitation were part of the everyday lives of the people who lived in this part of the country (see Goodhand, et al. 2009; Klem 2011; McGilvray 2011a).

During fieldwork we saw Muslims and Tamils attending and actively participating in the funerals of Sinhala people. In fact, I noticed two Muslim men crying after burying a Buddhist-Sinhala lady in the cemetery. They said that they were well treated by the lady whenever they visited her house in the town. Since Muslim funerals take place sooner than those of the Sinhalas and Tamils, only those who live either next door or in the same neighbourhood can attend. A 65-year old Hindu-Tamil lady met with an accident when she trying to alight from a bus. She injured her spinal code and underwent treatment for two years. During this time, her Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil friends visited her.

When the Boxing Day tsunami hit Pottuvil in December, 2004, the Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala peoples fled towards the Sinhala villages located in mountain areas. Muslim and Tamil respondents can recount emotional stories about the warm welcome and support

they received from those Sinhala villagers. They were given food, shelter, and all the care needed. For them this was an unforgettable aspect of the tsunami disaster (see Frerks and Klem 2011: 175). The people of the area really appreciated the services of the police and members of military.

The following two stories give more evidence to my observation that helping hands extend across ethnic borders even when there is no prior acquaintance. This happens because of people's empathic comprehension of the situation, their broader thinking within the given socio-economic context, the non-political nature of most social relationships, the need for reliability, the efforts put in trust building, and so on.

Nuwara *māmā* related two stories, which explain the broadness of the help and how it contributes to the strengthening of mutual bonds. The first story is about an unknown Sinhala lady, who accommodated him and his wife over night during 2000. After returning from Kandy and upon arrival in Monaragala the last bus to Pottuvil had left. There was no possibility of hiring a three-wheeler[58] or a private vehicle due to the war. They could not stay in the bus stand, so he decided that they would go to Siyambalanduwa by the last bus and find a place to stay. But they had not made any prior arrangements to stay in this Sinhala area. In the bus, he talked to a Sinhala lady, who was returning home after selling fruit at the weekly fair in Monaragala. When Nuwara *māmā* explained the situation to the woman, she allowed Nuwara *māmā* and his wife stay with her although they had no prior acquaintance. Nuwara *māmā* and the husband of the lady slept on the veranda of the house: the lady, her children, and Nuwara *māmā*'s wife slept inside the house, honouring gender and age related norms prevail in the area. He said that he was well treated by the Sinhala lady and her husband.

The second story follows: one day Nuwara *māmā* was returning home after failing to find a labouring job in the Siyambalanduwa area. He did not even have the bus fare to return home. On this occasion, a Buddhist monk who he met at the temple gave him more than enough money to pay for the trip. This contrasts with the attempts to provoke ethnic hatred by such organisation as the BBS and JHU lead by Buddhist monks in 2013. In brief,

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58 Auto rickshaw taxi

the right to ask for help, receive attention etc. is based on common agreements that underpin Pottuvil community life.

Bonding through marriage

Roosens (1994: 83-84, 100-101) discusses marriage, kinship and lineage in terms of genealogical dimensions that pass ethnic identities on from one generation to another. I will argue that some kind of genealogical dimensions also work as a means to dilute rigid ethnic boundaries. Sinhalas and Tamils who live in Pottuvil, unlike Muslims, enjoy close ties through marriage and kinship. One genealogical case analysis revealed that Pānama Sinhalas and Pottuvil Tamils believe that they come from the same origin. When upcountry warriors' families withdrew to this area following the 1818 riots against the British, fearful of arrest and punishment, many settled in various locations in the area including Meeyangoda. They relate their descent to two sisters of same family; i.e., Kalumenika and Sudumenika. Kalumenika married a Tamil man from a Tamil area; and Sudumenika went to Pānama where she married a Sinhala man. McGilvray (2011a) along with other researchers notes that in general the Sinhalas and Tamils in the east have strong kinship ties (also see Obeyesekere 1984; Yalman 1967). To illustrate my point, I will include the case of one Tamil family wherein the siblings and grandchildren married Sinhalas and Muslims. It shows that on occasions, if a family member marries a Muslim man, she may sacrifice her relationship with the rest of the family.

There were eight siblings in Thangamaari's family including one who married a Sinhala man and now lives in Wennappuwa. The Sinhala man, who owned a garage in the area befriended her sister and the two eventually married. Her family members were related to the Sinhala people through her father and mother. Kusumaratne aiyā, a Buddhist-Sinhala man who lived in Pānama and was a member of the local government, married Thangamaari's great great niece (mother's elder sister's-daughter's-daughter). Kusumaratne aiyā calls her aunty (S: *nanda*). Kusumaratne aiyā's wife's father, a Buddhist-Sinhala man from Pānama, married Thangamaari's cousin (mother's sister's daughter) and Kusumaratne aiyā's wife was one of the daughters born to this family. Thangamaari's fraternal uncle (father's elder brother) married a Buddhist-Sinhala lady. His son, who contested the Pottuvil PS from UNP in 2011, married a Buddhist-Sinhala lady.

She also provided details of other kinspersons, Sendooran, who owned a rice mill, and who was related from her father's side of the family. Thilakaratne, a Buddhist-Sinhala man married one of Sendooran's daughters. Some of his children are now married. Another daughter married a Tamil man. Their daughter is now engaged to a Sinhala-Buddhist boy, who lives next door to Thangamaari. One of Sendooran's younger daughters, who worked as a teacher in a Tamil school, married a Muslim teacher following a love affair. Imtiyaz and Hoole (2011: 218) note that since early times, Muslim men came to Sri Lanka and married Sinhala and Tamil women. She has converted to Islam. Thangamaari did not like this. Furthermore, Thangamaari did not approve of Thilakaratne's wife's good relationship with her sister. The family totally disapprove of their daughter's conversion to Islam, her change of dress and customs. They saw it as a betrayal. Thangamaari's fraternal uncle also married a Sinhala lady. The descendants of that family, who live in the neighbourhood, maintain good relationships with the Sinhalas. In Sri Lanka, relationships in extended families really matter, and even more so in Pottuvil. The bonds built through marriage are vital to sustaining strength in their everyday lived reality.

The nature of relationship between clans of inter-ethnic marriage is determined by other social criteria such as education, profession, gender, wealth, other social status, and personal characters of involved parties. We had a long discussion with a Buddhist-Sinhala teacher married to a Muslim police officer following a romantic relationship about the difficulty of balancing various extremist forces within family circles.

Unity and collaboration among marginalised peoples

Barth treated ethnicity in the same category as class (see Verdery 1994: 44), which means the possibility of independent operation of each other in the stratified society. I see a nice correlation between ethnicity and class in the 'everyday ethnicity' of Pottuvil in creating commongrounds possible among the members of different ethnic groups. Muslim majoritarianism and its politics in the area are based on minority-majority juxtapositions, and insider-outsider notions that transform into ethnic territories at specific levels. But this

ethnic politics or nationalism is not strong enough to obliterate economic realities and ties or social contradictions along class and caste lines (see Korf 2006).

Local Muslims who live next to the Vettiveli area identify themselves as "poor" (S: *duppath* and T: *varumai* or *ēla ākkhal*) and as "marginalised" against the "powerful", "business", and "political" elites, (T: *periya ākkhal*, to denote "big people"), who are also a group of Muslims. These so-called "big people" live in the town opposite the Muslims, distancing themselves from that lower economic neighbourhood. Muslim "big people" maintain good contacts with the same class of Sinhala and Tamil families. This demonstrates what Horowitz (1985) and Stokke (1998) suggest: inter-ethnic class unity or divisions matter as much as ethnic divisions. In this part of Vettiveli, "the poor" members of all ethnic groups (Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims), developed a bond as marginalised people, a lower-class. I will now explain the shape of commongrounds among this poor multi-ethnic neighbourhood.

Premalatha, a 55 year old Buddhist-Sinhala lady told me the following story. Her husband, who was the breadwinner of the family died after suffering from cancer. She herself had some physical incapacity due to the domestic violence she had experienced. Her husband had broken both of her hands, thus limiting her earning capacity. Her daughter married a Sinhala boy, a *Grāma Ārakshaka* (home guard[59]) but he too gave her daughter a very tough time. She separated from him but not legally. They had two daughters. At the time of the interview the elder was around 12 and the younger approximately 2 years old. The husband being a home guard had considerable influence with the local police. So they did not take action against him. Then Premalatha's daughter started living with another man in Colombo and had a third child. They lost their house during the tsunami and alleged that they were not given a house by the Muslim administrators, who were responsible for distributing tsunami aid. The sole responsibility of the family fell on Premalatha.

Premalatha lived in a house with her husband's mother, divorced daughter, and two granddaughters. Her neighbourhood was a Muslim majority area: there were few Sinhala and Tamil families. In the meantime, Premalatha's husband passed away at this house after

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[59] Security persons recruited from among the locals to safeguard their areas from LTTE attacks. They serve under the local police stations in the areas. The Home Guard Service was instigated under the Mobilization of Supplementary Force Act No. 40 of 1985.

suffering from incurable cancer. She said that people in the neighbourhood had been very sympathetic towards her. They helped a lot during the distressful situations, i.e., her husband's death, when her son-in-law fought with her and her daughter, and during economic crisis. They had good relations with their immediate neighbour, a Muslim with five mature-aged daughters, who lived in a small house. He sells *saruwath* (sherbet) in the city and also worked as a fishmonger. He found it very difficult to support a family of five daughters on the small income he earned by selling fish and *saruwath*. He often gave Premalatha's family free fish.

The house Premalatha lived in belonged to a Tamil man who rarely asks for money. He accepts it whenever Premalatha settles and never pressurises her to pay her rent on time. Everyone in the neighbourhood was sympathetic towards this family. They worry about the plight of Premalatha's two little granddaughters and admired the way she looks after the children. Shared notions of merit, worthiness, as well as shame, vice, hatred, and anger create commongrounds. I noted that Sinhalas and Tamils sympathised with the anger released by Muslim protestors during *hartāl*. And many Muslims in Pottuvil apologised for the tone of anti-Sinhala feeling expressed during *hartāl*, when they met each other after the event.

Religious cooperation: Religious syncretism

There are two small shrines in town; one for a Hindu God Pulleyār under a *Nuga* tree and other for Lord Buddha under a *Bō* tree. Also there is a mosque in town. Gunawansa, a Buddhist-Sinhala man married to a Hindu-Tamil lady from the Plantation Tamil community in Matale maintains the small Pulleyār shrine in the town. Rangasami, a Batticaloa Hindu-Tamil person, helped him to perform rituals. Every Friday they performed *pūja*. Once I participated when the offerings were made by a Buddhist-Sinhala trader of the town. Approximately 200 metres away from this shrine, local Buddhists constructed a small shrine for Lord Buddha, near the mosque. Even after the new Pottuvil-Colombo road was constructed, these two trees were not removed, in response to requests from residents. This led me to explore the religious harmony in the area given the tense situation surrounding Muslims' objection to the Buddhist temple, the Muhudu Maha Viharaya. On one level, it had to do with the personal qualities of the current monk. The

previous priest had maintained very good relations with the Muslims in the neighbourhood. On another level, it was a political issue connected with the histories and heritages of the Sinhalas and Muslims.

I heard accounts of religious harmony that existed among Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. Muslims might be considered part of a broader Hindu- and popular Buddhist-religious culture that exists in the eastern province of the country (see Obeyesekere 1984). Sinhalas, Tamil and Muslims can be seen in Ampitiya devālaya[60] in Pānama, at the Okanda devālaya on most Fridays as well as its annual rituals. While we were visiting Siriwardhana aiyā's house, a Buddhist-Sinhala man in Pānama, one of his best Muslim friends arrived at his house with rice, sugar, coconut, and other foods to be used as an offering at the Ampitiya devālaya on Fridays. Siriwardhana aiyā always made arrangements to prepare offerings: his Muslim friends came with their families to participate. A Muslim youth group, including Aneez and his Muslim friends, said that they visited Okanda devālaya (dedicated to the God Murugan) and Ampitiya devālaya (dedicated to Goddess Pattini and God Aluth deviyo) during the annual festivals.

In general, Tamils and Sinhalas are united (or enjoy a common religious habitus) under the God Murugan (Skanda, or Kataragama). When I participated in *pāda yātra* (the pilgrimage on foot) with a group from Pānama, I met a Sinhala/ Tamil mixed group from Pottuvil participating in the pilgrimage, who presented themselves as blood relatives. Buddhists often visit Hindu temples; and Hindus are allowed to attend Buddhist temples if they so wish. By contrast, Muslim respondents often stressed that Buddhism and Hinduism are different from Islam. However in private some Muslims told me those religious practices in Islam resembled (in some ways) those in Hinduism. Anusha suggested that Muslims did not readily visit *kovil* as they feared being considered "bad Muslims" in the eyes of other Muslims. However this did not prevent many Muslims from participating in Hindu forms of worship. Anusha told the following story to illustrate this phenomena:

> Daughter (S: *duwa*)...can you make an offer (*pūja*) for me to fulfil a vow I made some time back?... I will arrange everything at home and you just go to the *kovil* and conduct *pūja*... (10.00 a.m. 22 March 2011, Interviewed at her home).

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60 Mainly dedicated to the Goddess Pattini (S: and T:) and God Kovalan (S: Aluth Deviyo or Aluth Bandāra) but famous to for the Goddess Pattini's miraculous power. See Chapter Five.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Muslims often pay homage to the Goddess Pattini when family members suffer from diseases such as chicken pox and small pox, which are considered "God's disease" (T: *ammai noi*).

Similarly some Sinhalas told me that they make vows at the mosque, expecting Allah's blessing for a good harvest. If fulfilled, immediately after the harvest they offer a portion of paddy to the mosque. A Muslim trader confirmed this practice. Some interviewees reported that when the Sufi Islamic Bawas held religious functions at the mosque close to Pottuvil beach many Sinhalas and Tamils took part in the events. They went there to see the miracles performed by the Bawas in the name of Allah. The Bawas cut their bodies, drove nails into their heads, and scratched their bodies with sharp weapons. But at the end of the performance, no harm had happened to the performers. One of the Hindu-Tamil boys showed me a video of the event that he had recorded. Anusha said that her mother, a Buddhist-Sinhala lady, used to offer bowls of porridge[61] (S: *kenda*) to the mosque for those who fasted during the *nombi* (Ramadan) period. She also offered (T: *dānam*) to the *kovil* or the Hindu temple. Hindus' and Christians' attraction to Muslim shrines, rituals and symbols have also been observed by McGilvray (2011a: 273-275).

Sri Bōdhi Rukka Ramaya, the Buddhist temple located in the Vettiveli, functions in cooperation with the local Hindu-Tamil and Muslim communities. In fact, even the Tamils who live near the temple, with whom the elderly Buddhist monk (S: *Hāmuduruvo*; T: *Sādu*) cannot communicate in Tamil, enjoy a good relationship with each other. They help the monk by giving food or alms, and in various activities around the temple. Some Tamil families are among the lay-patrons of the temple. They also offer alms (S: *dāne*), once a month and offer food to the *hāmuduruvo*[62]. During my research, I noted a Hindu-Tamil man working in the temple's paddy field. A Hindu-Tamil man of Jaffna descent helped to build both the wall and the well of the temple. The Buddhist monk emphasised the fact that Muslims supply their tractors during processions organised by the temple. This monk crossed ethnic boundaries whereas the monk in other temple, Muhudu Maha Viharaya did

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61 They end fast observed during the daytime, partaking porridge distributed at the Mosque after the evening prayer.

62 The Buddhist monks in the temples are maintained by the lay patrons (S: *dāyakayo*). In each and every villager, mostly Buddhists, are allocated a date (dan seettu) to offer alms to the monks which falls once a month or once every few months according to the size of the Buddhist population in the locality. They are assigned to offer either *heel dāne* (S: breakfast) or *dawal dāne* (S: lunch) or both. Normally Buddhist monks are not supposed to have dinner.

not, raising tensions with local Muslim politicians who also gave various pledges to remove it in their local government election campaigns.

Friendship among the youth

I often encountered a youth gang composed of Buddhist-Sinhalas, Hindu-Tamils, Christian-Tamils and Muslim in Pottuvil town. They engaged in various activities as part of their 'subculture'; e.g., smoking, drinking, meeting girlfriends, attending weddings and parties, participating in funerals and playing cricket. My discussion with another Muslim youth Aneez who owned a communications shop in the market confirmed the above. He described commongrounds;

> Suppose I fell down on the road on my way to somewhere…would others leave me, looking aside telling that he is a Muslim man…? No… all would gather and try to assist me…all have same red colour blood…unlike in other areas we have lived with the Sinhalas and Tamils from our childhood… (3.00 p.m. 8th May 2011, Interviewed at his shop).

Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youth take part in sports events and represent their individual sports clubs.

Members of the youth group referred to the many Sinhala-Muslim, Tamil-Muslim and Tamil-Sinhala marriages that take place among youth, reinforcing the ethnic hybridity of the area. For example, Aneez told that he has a romantic relationship with Nadeesha, a Buddhist-Sinhala girl, known since they had attended an English class together conducted by a Buddhist-Sinhala teacher. The girl's parents inquired of Aneez's parents if they consented to the marriage and they agreed. Now Aneez is planning to seek a foreign job so that he can earn money to finance the marriage. He showed me photos of his girlfriend, always carried in his wallet, during our discussion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified the ways in which people in Pottuvil live multicultural social lives amidst the ethno-nationalist provocations of political entrepreneurs. The "greased devil" revealed the intensity of 'ethnic' feeling amongst Muslims, and the corresponding plight of Sinhala and Tamil minorities. Ordinary Muslim's harboured an anxiety regarding the Sinhala majoritarian state and its security, police and other agents. The chapter also exposes how ethnic power sharing as a solution to so-called "ethnic conflict" may entrench both ethnic separatism and the privileges of ethnic culture-brokers (power elites). Disregarding this organized ethnic mobilisation, local people have formed existential, socio-economic and cultural collaborations across ethnic boundaries in a multitude of everyday activities. Despite the ethno-political boundary-markings and the construction of social spaces that have given power to Muslim politicans and groups, inhabitants of the heterogeneous social space of Pottuvil have continued to live amicably with people of different ethnic backgrounds. They continue to "live as relatives" (S: *sahodarayo wage;* T: *sakothararkal mari*), to "live as one family" (T: *oru kudumbam*; S: *pawulak wage*), to "live as friends" (S: *yāluwo wage*; T: *nanbarhal*), to "live as neighbours", to be "members of one village", interacting with their ethnic others on both happy and sad occasions.

It is clear that the Pottuvil locals view ethnic others on two different levels, 'suffering' from a dual consciousness: through both an ethno-political ideological lens (macro), and through the lens of practical activity (micro). People may have both formed certain negative opinions about groups of ethnic others while engaged with those others on more individual grounds. Their cognitive negativity towards ethnic "others" reveals the discursive political trap in which they are caught while their collaboration showcases the everyday reality. Although at the political and administrative levels there is frustration, grievance, and tense situations, in the day-to-day lifeworlds of Pottuvilians inter-ethnic cooperation is observed. Even within the divisive political sphere, inter-ethnic collaborations were evident at the personal level.

7

Conclusion: Everyday existential realities in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, the proverbial pearl of the Indian Ocean became its teardrop when, from 1983 onwards, it became a theatre of devastating ethnic politics and protracted violence. In this thesis I have challenged the way notions about ethnic difference are taken-for-granted by journalists and even many scholars as the main cause of this violence. On the basis of fieldwork in a number of different locations and an anthropological analysis rooted in Jackson's notion of the existential imperative and the idea of habitus, I have highlighted the ways in which similarities between people's lifeworlds show not only the contingency (rather than the inevitability) of ethnic classification and of political mobilization on those grounds but also allow for commongrounds. I have analysed these commongrounds through Bourdieu's (1977; 1984; 1990; 2005) concept of habitus and on the basis of Jackson's (1998; 2005; 2011; 2013) discussion of existential realities/struggles of human beings to create well-being/existence in unstable and uncertain conditions. In this final chapter of the thesis I will compare and synthesize the significance of the commongrounds discussed in the four different locations.

Sri Lanka has often been projected as a country torn apart by ethnic tensions, suggesting that ethnic identities on the islands are incommensurable. There is limited acknowledgement of the fact that ethnic tensions are the result of the politicisation of ethnicity (see Tambiah 1989: 339; 1996: 334-342), despite the fact that this is a common phenomenon throughout postcolonial South Asia (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001; Visweswaran 2011). As I have highlighted in Chapter Two, the politicisation of ethnicity has its roots in the colonial period. In the postcolonial period ruling elites continued it as an instrument to secure election victory through the Westminster system that the country also inherited from the British. There is no reason to repeat the casualty figures of the more recent conflict except to state that suffering and trauma continues to affect the lives of many in Sri Lanka. In the meantime government politics show no signs of change towards inclusive nation-building, de-militarisation and de-politicisation of society, real democratization and the development of the rule of a just law even as most Sri Lankans

continue to forge relationships across ethnic boundaries that subtly undermine elite politics.

Politically mobilised or hardened ethnicities and ethnic labels cannot be taken-for-granted; the reality is that they are constructed via discursive practices of mass politics (Tambiah 2011: 184). It is impractical to list the attributes of Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims in order to differentiate them from each other because in the end we will find so many similarities that we end up getting confused about our categories. The politicians' or interests group's mobilisation of these cultural elements, which are flexible, inclusive, fluid, hybrid and mobile, is the vital aspect here (also see Visweswaran 2011: 1-2). It is equally difficult to isolate aspects of people's everyday lives and see them as characteristic of a certain ethnicity. It is very hard to find one identity, whether it is ethnic, caste, class or gender, existing alone. They are social identities interlocked with one another. Instead it makes much more sense to see 'ethnicity' as part of the way people conduct their daily relations, and as ideas and practices used in interaction. To study this we must investigate how the 'term' is lived by people in different situations and locations, in relation to the concerns and interests of certain persons and groups, as well as by the government. This thesis shows different usages of ethnicity in four locations on the Island of Sri Lanka.

The evidence from the current study suggests that peoples' day-to-day practice not only transgresses the borders of inter-ethnic but also incompatible intra-ethnic (aslo see Orjuela 2008: 91; Wilson 1994) unities and divisions; that is *us-them*. The violent actions that devastated Sri Lanka were not only inter-ethnic but also intra-ethnic: "Tamils killing Tamils and Sinhalas killing Sinhalas than Sinhalas killing Tamils or Tamils killing Sinhalas; with the Sri Lankan state killing the most, Tamils and Sinhalas" (Daniel 1996: 207). The ethnographic investigations of commongrounds in the four locations indicate that people transact across politicised ethnic and religious boundaries in their everyday lives. The commongrounds illustrate the "mimetic character of cultural identity or the inescapable embeddedness of culture in human relations of interdependence and reciprocity" (Harrison 2006: 154). My research highlights the capacity of both individuals and groups to create commongrounds. However, this space making should not always be understood as "peaceful" for commongrounds also generates political power and subordination.

Commongrounds is made at both individual and at broader community or group levels. Religious affiliation and common norms and value systems, marriage and kinship, friendships, neighbourhood, lifestyles, livelihoods struggles, life crisis, class and caste relationships as well as associations on the basis of education and occupation are the main sinews of commongrounds. Moreover these interlocking practices shape intersubjective strategies in different circumstances. These relationships are regular or long-term even as they shift or are amended in relation to the macro-level socio-economic and political realities.

The four case studies in this thesis also show a broader set of factors that allow the formation of commongrounds. These factors include most prominently the different environments in which people dwell: middleclass, slum, caste, religion, similar marriage and kinship patterns, rural locales. These environments entail different sets of norms, values, rules, worldviews, and distinct historical, socio-economic and political configurations. Below I illustrate the role of these environments in the way different commongrounds are shaped.

The case of Crow Island brings to the fore the influence of middle-class consciousness of taste, aspiration, dispositions, and lifestyle in forging commongrounds. Islanders are highly concerned with private space, peace, social status and prestige. Their developed notion of "compatible" and "incompatible" people is shaped by these. By contrast, De Mel Watta people forge commongrounds as a socially, culturally and economically marginalised group of *watta* ('slum') dwellers. Crow Island is inhabited by an urban entrepreneurial class articulated with economic and cultural globalisation (Hettige 1999). Most are business owners or professionals such as accountants, doctors, managers, directors while others are senior level officers in public and private institutions. In De Mel Watta people have blue or pink collar jobs such as drivers, factory workers, daily wage labourers, watchers, security guards, clerical staff members, or are self-employed as tailors, carpenters, mechanics, and so on. Crow Islanders are concerned with social dignity, prestige and status. They emphasise the appropriateness of certain ways of talking and particular subjects of conversation, and they are aware of the messages conveyed by clothing styles in particular when attending social gatherings such as dinner parties and picnics. In contrast in De Mel Watta people's discourse includes the regular expression of everyday conflict and they tend to hide their wealth.

While Crow Island and De Mel Watta are urban suburbs, the societies of Pottuvil and Pānama are rural and located in the east of Sri Lanka. The people of Pottuvil have a long history of living together while Pānama's cultural formation is based on its caste socio-economic system (unity through hierarchy). Both these areas are dominated by Muslims. The national level nationalist agitations have an impact on ethnic groups here. Pānama people, concerned for caste etiquette in marriage and kinship, also unify through the common religious and cosmological practices of Sinhalas and Tamils. It is in many ways an homogenous society, a community in the same way as Pottuvil is on the basis of Islam. While Pānama is an example of an ordered and unequal society organized in terms of an 'ancient' cultural form Pottuvil has become homogenised on the basis of shared lifestyle and cultural practices, Islamist nationalism rather more recently mobilizing its population in response to Sinhala and Tamil nationalism.

The research also shows the effect on people of on-going attempts – either local or distant – to mobilize them on the basis of their ethnicity. As explained in the Chapter Two, the role of ethno-political entrepreneurs, electoral politics, and chauvinistic discourse in maintaining political party loyalties among members are crucial. Crow Islanders reveal more resistance to the lure of ethno-nationalist feeling, their social, cultural and economic capital providing them with an ability to 'manipulate' ethno-political manipulation in turn. In De Mel Watta however dwellers must live with periodic ethno-political provocation threatening their on-going social relations. But these ethnicised understandings do not prevail given socio-economic and cultural realities. Residents sympathise with each other's everyday struggle with high inflation, economic pressures, social stigmatisation, flooding, diseases and multitude of other problems. The watta dwellers create a pragmatic 'peace' within the watta that contributes both to their survival and flourishing.

Ethno-political entrepreneurs' efforts to maintain ethnic divisions and antagonistic identities are common everywhere, but it was conspicuous in the East during the fieldwork period in reaction to the "greased devil" that created mass paranoia throughout the country. The Colombo-based ethno-political entrepreneurs' divisive ideological production created a volatile situation in this peripheral area. Tamil nationalism and Muslim Islamism found receptive hearers in response. Yet in Pottuvil at the peak of such agitation inhabitants also defensively affirmed their commongrounds and sought out a return to normalcy.

It should be stressed that the commongrounds identified in these four locations do not limit the possibility of the construction of commongrounds between people moving between them. The research process itself proved a good example. My research assistants and I connected with people in all four locations. Although this occurred through our disciplinary commitment to adapt, adjust, empathise and be sensitive to the rules of everyday social lifeworlds, it also testifies to the possibility of Sri Lankan wide commongrounds. The creation of commongrounds does not mean construction of social relations free of asymmetrical categories or divisions, i.e. ethnic, nationalist or any other, but it does entail a struggle to produce a space that enables connections in a reciprocal manner, disregarding existing rigid ethno-political boundaries.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Among the more significant findings that emerge from this study is that the 'collective' or 'group' representations of identity and groups' feelings of identification conceal everyday life realities of which commongrounds are part. Due to ethno-political divisions, people tend to talk about collectives in *WE, US, THEY* and *THEM* terms in particular when referring to others' ethno-political identity. They talk less in *I, HE, HIM, SHE or HER* terms. For example, one often hears plurals such as "Sinhalas" (S: *Sinhala Minissu,* T: *Sinhala Akkhal*), "Tamils" (S: *Demala Minissu,* T: *Thamil Akkhal*), and "Muslims" (S: *Muslim Minissu,* T: *Muslim Akkhal*) in daily discussions. This 'singularisation' of everyday life reduces the individual to the image of the collective and its one-sided representations. Most painfully, the singularisation of everyday life makes people liable to political mobilisation along ethnic lines, facilitating the viewing of individuals as components of a larger totality, such as members of the 'Sinhala Buddhist state' (Kapferer 2012).

In such environments people's lived realities are at once responses to political constructions, war traumas, fears and anxieties, and related to their relationships to different cultures, religions, values, and so on. It should be no surprise that the cultural shape of nationalism in Sri Lanka has varied according to the caste and class of its leaders (Bastin 2012). The politicisation of ethnicity or ethno-religion occurs when people are made aware of ethnic identity within a new polity, an awareness that animates them to engage in ethno-political action. The growth of the welfare state, state-based development,

state economic benefits and occupations in which the state holds a monopoly led to various quota systems including on the basis of ethnicity (see Brow 1990a; 1990b; 1996).

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of how subjects live with the crisis engendered by stigmatised ethnic identities. All four locations bear testimony to the generation of embodied and enminded capacities that are an essential part of creating liveable social space in Sri Lanka. Such capacities include sympathy and empathy, adaptability and adjustability, creativity to live with diverse divisive forces, ability to align with and separate oneself from collective forces or identities, inter- and intra- group (ethno-religious) understanding, preservation of long-term relationships amidst broader tensions, acceptance of others' worries and hatred, accommodation and toleration, awareness of broader threats, and flexibility. These life-skills are essential for the existence of social relations, given the inability of the ethno-political entrepreneurs to provide solutions to people's everyday issues (i.e., poverty, hunger), and the reality of practical inter-dependence.

The findings from this study contribute to the current literature and discourses on inter- and intra- ethnic group collaboration and hybridisation. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake (2001; 2004; 2011) has discussed extensively the possibility of inter-ethnic collaborations in the "border zones" in Vanni border region in the north, while Yalman (1967) sees similar phenomena in "shatter zones" on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka where Sinhala and Tamil cultural borders rub up against each other. My research shows that inter-ethnic collaboration exists in the everyday social lifeworlds of people in other areas of the island as well. Cultural boundaries do not exist in parallel with Muslim, Sinhala, and Tamil geographic concentrations. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that of the fluid, ambiguous, and multiple social identities of people in Sri Lanka. This situation is common in other South Asian countries too. Social identities or social dynamics such as religion that produce tensions in one situation may unite inter- and intra-ethnic people in another, as in Pānama. Even in the same location the social institution of religion can generate peace and tension, in the very way the two Buddhist temples did in Pottuvil. Even as cultural brokers agitate to redress wrongs on the basis of aggrieved collective identities, individual imaginations can produce space for inter- or intra- ethnic collaborations as in Pottuvil. Politicised and emotionally efficacious ethnic imaginaries are subject to transgressive movements creating alternative cultural symbols.

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Yet even after this exercise, I find it difficult to produce a magic formula that "peace makers" can adopt to bring "goodwill" to the country given that the construction of commongrounds vary according to persons, places, times, situations, and broader socio-political and economic contexts. As suggested in the introductory chapter of this thesis, one objective has been to make a hitherto unremarked upon social phenomenon – commongrounds – noticeable. In doing so there is no intention to negate the sufferings of any community. Nevertheless it is a valuable insight that people, including myself, live a multicultural social life in which we construct and share commongrounds.

Appendix of this thesis has been removed as it may contain sensitive/confidential content

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