

Masteroppgave

Tittel

Religion & Identity in Sri Lanka

*A study on religion's contribution
to identity formation in post-conflict Sri Lanka*

Av

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Masteroppgaven er gjennomført som et ledd i utdanningen ved Universitetet i Agder og er godkjent som sådan. Denne godkjenningen innebærer ikke at universitetet inntår for de metoder som er anvendt og de konklusjoner som er trukket.

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20.november 2009

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PREFACE

This master thesis has been a work which has followed me through several valleys and on top of mountains. I have been extremely fortunate to meet so many wonderful and exiting people along the road. Some have given me a helping hand to move onwards, others have tried to stop me. People in high places have argued in my presence on what to tell me and what to keep away from public documents. In any case the result here is a product of all those factors multiplied and discerned.

First of all I want to thank my family for bearing over with a husband and a father who has spent long hours in his office after work every day. Thank you also for letting me spend our family holidays in Sri Lanka, sometimes alone other times together with you all. I thank you for your great patience with me and for your enduring love and support.

I also want to thank my teaching supervisors, Professor Pål Steinar Repstad and Mr. Levi Geir Eidhamar for their always supporting and encouraging contributions. Your help and support have been more than priceless to me.

I want to thank Professor Gananath Obeyesekere for his great contribution to the initial phase of this work. Thank you, Ananda, for opening up to me the relevant library available and for advising me in my selection of literature. Professor Jim Beckford has also given me great help to enlighten areas of this study by advising literature. Thank you so much!

Last but not least I want to thank my fellow students on the Master Seminars at Agder University for encouragement and proof reading several times.

Yours faithfully

Trond K. A. Frestad

2009

INTRODUCTION

In this master thesis I have studied how religion is forming young people's understanding of their own ethnic identity as opposed to other ethnic groups, based on the background of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Implicitly I have by such an approach to the problem initially proposed that religion does matter. This conclusion is made on the account of various amount of literature on this issue of which some will be mentioned below. Secondly I want to find out to what extent religion is forming the understanding of the case held by the young people in my segment.

My **APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM** could be summarized by:

To what extent is religion influencing young Sri Lankan people's understanding of their own identity?

How is this identity then influencing their relationship to other ethnic groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka?

In the following I have suggested that religion is quite intertwined with history and politics and that we should not ignore the fact that religion does play a role, and also did so, in the former times of war and conflict in Sri Lanka. We need to understand this in different layers and understand the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the implications of religion's influence in society as a whole. If religion has been an artifact of the Sri Lankan conflict, by defining or perhaps shaping of identities, it will most likely not vanish when the weapons are laid down. Thus it is interesting to find how religion may have an influencing role on young people's understanding of their own identity, and how this identity then is influencing their relationship to other ethnic groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka.

I have discussed with myself what kind of data I should use and came to the conclusion that I would make use of qualitative interviews with young Sri Lankans. First I planned to travel to several areas of Sri Lanka to make these interviews. Even so, in December 2005 the armed inconsistency, as far as the cease-fire agreement was concerned, forced me to be cautious

when travelling around the island. I also found it prudent not to reside too much on the East- and West coast due to this escalating conflict. I had an idea, though, that this would only last a short period of time and that it would calm down within a few months but it did not. I was back in Sri Lanka in May 2006, in April 2007, in December 2008 and then my last trip before submitting this master thesis was in August 2009. Still there were great tensions and during my last trip, even though the armed battles were drawn to a close, I was disallowed from the government of Sri Lanka to travel to the Northern Areas. My selection of the informants is therefore being limited geographically from the North through a line drawn, from Chilaw on the West coast to Anuradhapura in the North and further to Amparai on the East coast. South of this line I found all of my informants and they are all of Sinhalese and Tamil origin. They are a selection from several areas of Sri Lanka and from different environments but there are some common factors that gathers them though, like age, education level, religion and language skills. We will get to know more about these young people below, in the chapter on methods and in the chapter on analysis.

First in this work I will present my personal background as far as Sri Lankan society is concerned. Then a brief historical perspective which spans from 2500 B.C. and up to the present will be enlightened in a brief manner, mainly focusing on the influence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka through the ages. In order to understand the history one must also include the colonial period from the 16th Century until the independence of Ceylon in 1948. The history of the last part of the 20th Century is crucial to understand important reasons for the war initiated in 1983. I will close the historical part by describing the present situation in order to show how religion is displayed as an identity marker in Sri Lanka today, especially among the Sinhalese. Furthermore I will present a theoretical part which will partly be intertwined with a historical and contextual background. Then a chapter on methods will be explained before details are given in a section on analysis. Finally a main conclusion is suggested together with a critical view on its limitations. There are also some final words of opinion and a few thoughts on the outlook of the future.

When reading this master thesis one may experience that the peak of interest is perhaps the empirical survey with its dynamic inputs. Some would also claim that this part of the work is

presented too late, or that one has to go through too much history to get there. I am humbly aware of this argument and have been forced to make a choice of whether to shorten the historical section or perhaps extending the master thesis by drawing more from my respondents' data. I have tried to do both and the result has therefore become what is presented in this work. In order to get a larger picture I find it difficult to reduce the frame, metaphorically speaking. I believe the Sri Lankan historical part has to be enlightened in order to get the larger picture and to understand the reactions from the respondents and from my conclusion as well.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka has for almost two decades been the land of my heart. I have learned to know the people and the country through living here as well as visiting this beautiful pearl of the Indian Ocean numerous times. Some of my very best friends live here, some of them are Sinhalese, some Tamil, some Malay and some Burghers. I even have established a great friendship with one tribe of the indigenous Vadda-community, in Ratugala. Though most Sinhalese profess Buddhism to be their religion as Tamils do Hinduism, I know several Sinhalese and Tamils who belong to other religious groups; some confess the Christians faith, some are Muslim, others belong to different kinds of Astrological or mystical faiths, some claim to be Atheists while other life views exist as well. Among this diversity of religions most people I know seem to live harmoniously together, respecting one another. As far as I have observed there is little enmity between general Sri Lankans. And that is also why it is so interesting to study the understanding of who is the real Sri Lankan and approaching a view of why there up till recently has been such a difficult conflict in this island nation.

What I have also noticed is that most ethnic groups do mingle more with "one's own group" than with those from other ethnic factions. This is probably not so much a rule as it is customary. Even so I am not blind to the fact that there are diverse traditions in different parts of the country which are less fluid and that ethnic consciousness for some seem to be rather imperative.

In 2001 I joined three cross-ethnic weddings. In the first wedding a Tamil girl married a Sinhalese boy. In the second wedding a Tamil boy converted to his bride's Muslim religion and married the love of his life. The third wedding was a consecration of the future life of a Burgher girl and a Sinhalese boy. All of these weddings were so-called love-marriages, where the boy and girl themselves had decided their spouse to be. In 2006 one of my Buddhist friends converted to Islam in order to marry his Muslim girlfriend. In 2009, one of my Muslim friend's Tamil girlfriend converted to Islam from Hinduism for the purpose of getting married. Although there is still a strong tradition in Sri Lanka for arranged marriages there is also a tendency for more liberal practice, especially in and around the bigger cities.

It should also be noticed that my relationship to Sri Lanka through almost two decades may of course also influence my understanding as well as the way I present and focus on different layers of information presented in this study. My assortment of information is also colored by the fact that I have a Norwegian background, nevertheless I also believe that my tight relationship to Sri Lanka has given me an ability to understand issues from a more inward perspective than I would have had without this experience. I do not, though, propose any favoritism or preference for any of the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. My aim has been to understand and listen to what my respondents have to say and thereby understand. What really amazed me was that my preconception of certain thoughts expressed by my respondents was in great contrast to what I had thought to find. Even though this was exiting I needed to confirm these ideas further to make sure of their reliability. As a final point, the findings presented in the further of this master theses could, to my perception, have important value for the future of Sri Lanka.

DEFINITIONS

SRI LANKA

First of all it should be clarified how I will use the name of the country today called Sri Lanka. The history of the name itself is almost worth a study alone. From ancient tales and

writings the name of the island was Lanka.¹ Through the ages lots of other names have been used in many different languages but when the British took over in the 19th Century they changed the name from *Taprobane* to *Ceylon*. In 1972 Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike renamed it *Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic of Sri Lanka*, simplified: *Sri Lanka*. In 1978 Sri Lanka got its first President, J. R. Jayawardena, who renamed the country again and gave it its present name *The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*, also simplified *Sri Lanka*. In order to make this topic less advanced I will only make use of the county's present name in its simplified edition: *Sri Lanka*. The reason for this is to not focus too much on the name itself but rather on the approach to the problem in this work. It should, though, be mentioned that the etymological meaning of the name Lanka in Sanskrit is island and the suffix Sri means honorable or venerable; thus, the venerable island – with a loaded veneration of the island as Buddhist adherent.

RELIGION

It is also important to lay a foundation for common understanding and definitions. Defining religion has been attempted several times by many scholars and some are more refined than others. Former Professor of Sociology Emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, Robert Bellah, in an interview with Professor Mark Jürgensmeyer, even says the this term is used in such chaotically diverse ways that it is almost useless, without further definition.² Some also initiate discussions on whether the term religion is understood equivalently in oriental countries and in the Western world. This is taken into consideration in the following.

¹ *The Ramayana, a great Indian epos from around 500 B.C. in oral origin. The written version is considered being from about 100 B.C.*

²

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exImf29Tsw8&feature=Playlist&p=E61BB8800E207F93&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=3

Functional definition

As we are looking for the consequences religion may have on the forming of opinions it could be tempting to define religion from a functional approach. Then one may be able to understand what needs religion can bring about and also what consequences religion may have. We may be more focused on what religion carries out and its implications. Religion by this definition provides identity and fellowship with a society as well as legitimating one's social, psychological and political attachments.

The weakness of such an approach is of course that many things may be incorporated in the term religion. If something is very important for someone and gives meaning to life it may be defined as religion. Is football or shopping or perhaps golf a religion?

It is also a more general trap that we end up talking about religion as something far from its member's own understanding of the term itself. Religion may then be reduced to being only an object of science rather than a subjective or individual experience of something that forms and foster one's opinions. In some Sri Lankan concepts this may be the case but in Sri Lanka it is my experience that religion is something that permeates society to a far larger extent.

Substantial definition

In some cases it is constructive to use a substantial definition where the focus is the substance or content of the phenomena religion. It is then sensible to define religion in regard to an experience or relation to a supernatural power or powers, like a god or gods. One may say that in a substantial definition religion is a person's or persons' experience of the holy³. Then holy is defined as something precious and different from anything else. In Buddhism we may speak of Nirvana. One could also, in Buddhism, narrow this definition down to an action, rather than an experience, and thereby suggest a definition: Religion is a person's or persons' experience of actions in relation to the holy.

³Sagedahl, Bettina, *Menneskets erfaring med det hellige. Kjærlighetsbegrepet i sufismen*, 2008
<http://www.krlnett.no/art/index.php?vis=68&nid=1>

Even though such a definition could be employed there is still a need to understand that there may be weaknesses of such an approach as well in this master thesis. When discussing religion's political, psychological or social role among young people in Sri Lanka by such a definition we need to understand individual as well as collective perceptions of the experiences and the nuances of "the holy". This is too big a task to accomplish in this master thesis. After understanding the implications of substantial religion in the lives of the informants one could also hope to shed light on religion's social and political role among the young people in Sri Lanka and thereby understand religion from a functional approach. Nevertheless such a definition of religion would be too vague and inconsistent. In the following I will make use of a substantial definition of religion and suggest:

Religion is in this master thesis defined as beliefs and practices connected to a (postulated) reality, transcending immanent rationality.

CIVIL RELIGION

To some degree this master thesis also deals with the moral and spiritual basis essential for a society and its members' understanding of themselves. If there is a function of religion that legitimate political authority in Sri Lanka, it is subject to be dealt with in terms of *civil religion*. Nevertheless this term should be considered more from the basis introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau than in the adaptive form of civil religion as understood by Robert Bellah⁴. For Bellah a civil religion is not merely consisting of religion as defined by me in this master thesis but is rather a mix of religious and secular beliefs and symbols by which a sovereign or a state establishes or maintains political legitimacy.⁵ This is not to be understood that Bellah's understanding is very different from that of Rousseau's but rather a development of it. We should in my opinion rather rewind history all the way back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The social contract* from 1762 where the term civil religion is introduced. I have not myself read

⁴ In Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion and modernity, Religion in modern times, an interpretive anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, 3rd ed. 2005:239

⁵ Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion and modernity, Religion in modern times, an interpretive anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, 3rd ed. 2005:239

this text in full. Nevertheless I have read articles and short essays written by Rousseau and his commentators and have learned from scholars who ought to know his works quite well. As far as I understand this work, through lectures and writings by scholars like Professor Robert Bellah and Professor Philip Gorski,⁶ Rousseau, and other great thinkers of his time, were concerned about how religion operated like an adhesive to keep a society functioning as some kind of contract with a greater purpose. The American settlers' analogue to the people of Israel has served as an example that to a certain extent have shed light upon this thinking. Through a common understanding and acknowledgement of a sacred or greater authority by the members of a given society, that also the political elite is submitted and committed to, one is able to speak of civil religion. In a more contemporary context religious content is coincided with a political and thus also a national agenda. Through an application of religious texts in public address by politicians, reference to religious leaders' lives and moral ideas, through citations of religious texts and national and primordial myths as well as the use of religious symbols on official property⁷ civil religion will have a base from which to develop. One is subject to being excluded from such a society if one does not accept this commonly acknowledged supreme authority together with society's norms and faith.⁸

To summarize; the concept of religion has both a substantial and a functional definition. When speaking of the concept of religion I will basically use a substantial definition. When speaking of religion in politics and in official practice I will discuss how religion infuses the Sri Lankan society and how it has a status of a civil religion.

Civil religion in Sri Lanka

In the Sri Lankan context we have a first of all find the name of the venerated island, we find Buddhist shrines in every small town or village of the island, we witness the traditional

⁶ Professor Philip Gorski is Professor of Sociology, and Co-Director of the Center for Comparative Research at Yale, USA..

⁷ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, AltaMira Press; 1 edition (February 28, 1998)

⁸ In Woodhead and Heelas, *Religion and modernity, Religion in modern times, an interpretive anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, 3rd ed. 2005:238-239

ceremony when any newly elected President of Sri Lanka visits the Holy Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, in schools it is customary to bow down to show respect to the teacher as part of the Buddhist moral, the Mahavamsa and the Thipitaka and other sacred scriptures are cited in public speeches by the President as well as other people in high positions, the life and teachings of the Lord Buddha is the highest respected illustration for all people to follow as far as moral ideas and way of life is concerned, the sacred scriptures are also taught in schools as well as in the Buddhist Dhamma Schools, where it is reverent for all Sri Lankan children to participate once a week. On this basis I advocate that it is likely to speak of civil religion in the context of the frames of this master thesis.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people is a vague term in general. From the perspective of an eighty year old lady one may be young even when passing sixty. Through the eyes of a teenager one may only be considered young before turning twenty. Some cling to the slogan: “old in body, young in mind” and others feel old when they can’t keep up the pace with those who are a few years less than themselves. In this study young people are referred to as the upcoming generation of politicians, business people and other educated human resources potential to further develop Sri Lanka in the future. The reason for making such a selection is to get an idea of how this generation’s opinions are enlightening the future path for Sri Lanka as far as the recently ended conflict is concerned. I have therefore also limited the age segment from 19-26 years of age. The upper limit gave me the possibility to find people who have only experienced living in Sri Lanka during war times⁹. The lower limit was necessary in order to find those who had finished their A-levels in school and thereby are qualified potential students for universities and colleges, and thus candidates for positional jobs.

OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

⁹ *The war broke out in 1983*

The term other ethnic groups is a term referring basically to Tamils and Sinhalese in this study. Scholars of different traditions have been discussing diverse approaches to the term. I will in the further use the expression ethnic group based on a social group's shared, either factual or perceived, cultural phenomena like racial-, linguistic- or national identity.¹⁰

Ethnic group in Sri Lanka

On the basis of the definition above, most scholars would agree to the fact that an ethnic group is a social group who share a common and unique self-identity. The group itself has a perception of being in possession of a common culture and a common origin separating them as such from other social groups. In Sri Lanka we find the dichotomy between the Tamil and the Sinhalese history of origin. Who is entitled to claim ownership over the legacy of the island? Who can document their lineage back to the first inhabitants of the island? The crucial word here is possession. Both groups claim to have primordial rights. The Sinhalese claim to be the descendants of Prince Vijaya who is believed to have arrived in Sri Lanka 2500 ago. This also gives the right to bear the name Sinhala, meaning lion blood. The symbol of the lion means the right to rule and govern. The Tamil ancestry may be traced back to the Indo Civilization, perhaps 5-6000 years prior to Vijaya. Nevertheless it is disputed whether these ethnic group's inhabitation of the island of Sri Lanka was done before Vijaya or later. We may never be able to find out the historical fact but it is clear that there has been a written Buddhist history favoring the Sinhalese, which is sturdily kept alive by a large ethnic Sinhalese community. On the other hand there is also a claim from voices within the Tamil group that their legacy and cultural artifacts have been eradicated by the Sinhalese majority through the mistreatment of the Tamil minority who refer to a quite documented history Indo Civilization. One should also be aware of the suggestion that the Tamil ancestry is found in Southern India while the Sinhalese lineage is found in North Eastern India. Thus it is further suggested that ethnic groups are separated biologically by race. Some also claim that there are proofs that both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have a DNA which stems from this island and that both the Tamils and the Sinhalese have emigrated to other places in early times and then

10 Furseth og Repstad, Innføring i Religions sosiologi, Universitetsforlaget, 2003;202

returned later on. This would in such case make both the indigenes people of Sri Lanka. As a small reply to this we should also keep in mind that there are the Adivasi, or Vaddas, still living in Sri Lanka, who claim to trace their ancestry on the island more than 15.000 years back. This is not a proposition I will consider factual in this master thesis, as I will separate the two definitions: racial group and ethnic group. I will in the further use the expression ethnic group as an academic term describing a social group who is sharing a common learned cultural heritage, where artifacts such as history, values, language, tastes, habits, beliefs and religion, among others, are concerned.¹¹

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical background could be split into two parts; a legendary one and a political one. The legendary background is important in order to understand the cultural background and the religious ties and obligations one may have to consider while discussing the ethnic conflict. The political one could of course be winded back to the same period of time but in that case with less historical accuracy, and consequently it would be more difficult to relate accurately to it. I will start out with the legendary history from ancient times about 500 B.C to about 1500 A.D. Then I will continue with a short summary from 1500-1948. I will use some space from 1948 to 1983 and then give a short description of the present situation.

Like all historical presentations this one may also be colored by the sources available to me as well as my own understandings of the material. Nevertheless I will in the following one try to signalize some sources of opinion.

ANCIENT HISTORY

The history of the conflict may be winded back to ancient history and often that has been done to explain the roots of the present conflict and the reason for attitudes of the fighting parties. Even though conflicts existed between groups mainly from Southern parts of India and groups

¹¹ Newman, David M., *Sociology, Exploring the architecture of everyday life, second edition, Pine Forge Press 1997; pg. 609*

dwelling on the isle of Lanka, we also find literature on intermarriages and close cooperation.¹²

In the Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka there is an old tale in the chronicles of the Mahavamsa of how the son of a lion and a princess, the Vanga (Bengal) king Sinha-bahu became the ancestor of the Sinhala people. Interpretations of the word “sinhala” , meaning “lion blood”, give the mandate of control to the “lion-people”- the “Sinhala minisu”.

Nevertheless, on the day of the Lord Buddha’s death (about 500 B.C.) the son of Sinha-bahu, Vijaya, arrived on the island together with 700 people and populated it. He married a princess from Tamilnadu in India, Kuveni. They had two sons. Kuveni was later killed by the earlier inhabitants of the island and the two sons had to flee to the mountains. The story tells us that Vijaya ruled as king in the Northern area of the island for 38 years.

The Mahavamsa also tells how the Lord Buddha three times visited the island and each time consecrated this island to be the protector of the Buddhist teachings.

The Mahavamsa further tells the story of a hero conqueror, king Duttugamunu, who in about 100 B.C. fought slaughtering battles on behalf of the Sinhala people and eventually after 15 years of warfare triumphed over the evil Tamil king Elara. Duttugamunu was probably the first king who controlled the whole island. He is considered a hero also in Buddhism, as the Mahavamsa excuses his violent actions because he only killed what the chronicle considers evil animals, and totally one and a half men’s worth of humans. Duttugamunu fought for the Dhamma dipa (island of the Buddhist doctrine), the Sinhala dipa (island of the Sinhala) and for the Sinhala minisu (the Sinhala people). It should in this passage also be mentioned that the hero king himself is considered having real difficulties justifying his own actions later.

Many wars were fought through the next 1400 years and Duttugamunu’s kingdom was scattered into several smaller kingdoms; some reigned by Tamil kings and some reigned by Sinhala kings. The Tamil kings were basically situated in the Northern and Eastern areas of

¹² Source: U.S. Library of Congress: <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/39.htm>, read 10.12.2007

the island while the Sinhala kings ruled the other parts. Then in 1505 a European ship wrecked by the Southern shore of the island and almost half a Millennium of colonization by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British followed. In my opinion their impact on the island has in many ways made the island what is has become today.

FROM 1500 – 1948

Through the time of colonial rule the Sinhala people in general were not known, in the Western literature, for being cooperative with the new settlers. This is contrary though, to what we find in the Sri Lankan Sinhala literature. Several venerable bikhus (monks) have told me stories and read to me about how the Buddhist community showed their hospitability toward the European settlers, especially toward the Christian missionaries.

From the views of Sinhala historians the Portuguese first introduced Catholic Christianity to the population of Sri Lanka who seemingly at that time were Sinhala Buddhists, and Tamil Hindus. There were also quite large settlements of Muslim merchants around the Colombo area. Christendom was introduced by force and the Buddhists were objects to persuasion. The Catholics destroyed Buddhist shrines and sacred places in favor of new Christian churches. They even killed and threatened Buddhist bikhus as well as discriminating those who did not convert to the new way of life. The Portuguese kept on with their crusades during most of their 150 years of control. When the Dutch conquered the Portuguese in 1653 they introduced Protestantism and started to refurbish and remodel holy Catholic shrines and churches in favor of their own. Some places Catholic churches were also destroyed. After the Dutch era the British ruled for about a century and a half. They introduced their 19th Century Anglican doctrines at first but through their reign till 1948 many different denominations and sects introduced themselves to the Sri Lankan people.¹³

Through the time of the British the missionaries tried to persuade the heathen monks that they needed The Faith of Truth, namely to becoming Christians. The British started Sunday Schools and also gave the children education in order to socialize them into the new dawning

¹³ For a more thorough description of Christianity introduced to Sri Lanka:
<http://home.no.net/trondfr1/ARTIKLER/Pinsesrilanka.pdf>

society. They tried to teach the heathens how to read, write and understand English in order to appreciate the Bible. Some Bibles were translated into Sinhala but due to the lack of knowledge of both culture and respectable language the translation in several situations served more to push the local inhabitants away from the new doctrine.

In the lowlands and in the towns of Sri Lanka the force of the new religion and doctrines preventing the Sinhala Buddhists to practice their Buddhist devotion gradually created a resistance towards the colonizers. This opposition firstly developed within the sangha, the Buddhist monasteries, and eventually became a hostile movement toward the British. It is also likely that the opposition was not so much against the religion as it was to the total regime of the colonizers. The colonizers on the contrary fought not so much against the political regime but against the traditions and culture of religion. In K. M. de Silva's words:

(The British fought...) "...the civilization of the island, so much so that the Sinhala grew accustomed to regarding themselves as the chosen protectors of Buddhism. Sri Lanka itself was viewed as a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion, a concept that linked the land, the people, and the Buddhist faith, in brief an intermingling of religion and national identity which has always had the most profound influence on the Sinhala."¹⁴

On the whole one could possibly say that religion, and specifically Buddhism, is understood to be profoundly intertwined in the fabric of Sinhala lives.

ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA

In the dusk of the 19th and the dawn of the 20th Century a primary contributor to the Buddhist revival arose; Anagarika Dharmapala. His focus was to promote the doctrine and life of Buddhism as the true sunshine leaving all other oppositions in the fade. He made this clear in one of his recorded speeches, where he reproaches the cultural impacts derived from Christianity and Hinduism:

¹⁴ de Silva, K.M. *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986:9

“This bright, beautiful island was made into a Paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals. Its people did not know religion... Christianity and polytheism [i.e. Hinduism] are responsible for the vulgar practices of killing animals, stealing, prostitution, licentiousness, lying and drunkenness... The ancient, historic, refined people, under the diabolism of vicious paganism, introduced by the British administrators, are now declining slowly away.”¹⁵

Anagarika Dharmapala, together with Western Theosophists like Madame Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, contributed to the creation of Buddhist institutions similar to those of the missionaries. They started Buddhist schools, youth clubs and other religious activities mobilizing the Sinhala people for their religion and their nation. Several of these initiatives were reproductions of Western religious socialization practice. Dharmapala was also a great contributor to the independence movement leading to the home rule for Ceylon in 1948. He was encouraging Sinhalese nationalism and had influential support from the Buddhist clergy. Although a scientific oriented man, Dharmapala was a religious celebrant who seemed convinced that the relatively new enlightenment ideology from the West was cohesive to the doctrine of The Lord Buddha. Through my personal conversations with bikkhus in Buddhist Sanghas¹⁶ I have learned to know that all phenomena in the universe are understandable to the human mind through enlightenment. The problem is that we do not understand because we are not seeking this enlightenment. Those who devote themselves to the Sangha and to meditation will eventually understand more and more. Thus the unexplainable phenomena we may experience all have a rational or logical explanation which can be achieved through enlightenment. Ideas like these also have root in the Theosophical doctrine of Blavatsky and Olcott. Nevertheless these ideas mixed with older forms of Theravada Buddhism seem to have had a great appeal also to those who were not religious devotees as well as those committed to the Buddhist faith. Dharmapala stands as one of his times’ great revolutionists

¹⁵ Quoted in A. Guruge, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*. Colombo: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1965: 482

¹⁶ *Monks in monasteries*

and is still a highly respected personality in Sri Lanka. Dharmapala himself never experienced political independence, though, as he passed away in 1933. Nevertheless his supporters saw his dream realized in 1948.

POST-COLONIAL TIME AND UP TO THE PRESENT SITUATION

The substantial reason for this previously ended war is several decades of conflict between a militant group of Tamils, called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), represented by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA). Sri Lanka has been stressed by war for several decades. One can ask the question whether there has ever really been peace in Sri Lanka at all in modern time. That is, of course, not only speaking of armies fighting heavy battles but rather about the conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority also on other social and political arenas.

The LTTE was fighting for home rule in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka for several years. On 27th November 2007 the now deceased LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, claimed in his annual Martyr's speech that LTTE would only accept home rule either by devolution of power and thus through the institution of a federate state or by a completely independent Tamil Eelam (separate Tamil state). There was now no way of returning to any more peace talks, in his point of view. He would fight for LTTE and for what he claimed to be the Tamil people's right to home rule.¹⁷

In relation to his inauguration, the present Sri Lankan President H.E. Mahinda Rajapakse released the Mahinda Chintana (Mahinda's vision) where he states: "the freedom of our country is supreme. I will not permit any separatism...¹⁸, "...the fundamental platform that I would base my initiative would be an undivided country, a national consensus and an honorable peace."¹⁹

¹⁷ <http://www.ltteps.org/?view=2063&folder=9read> 2007-30-11

¹⁸ *Mahinda Chintana* (2005:26)

¹⁹ *Mahinda Chintana* (2005:30)

There have been several proposals for cease fire agreements and peace talks but with little sustaining success. In 1987 India was involved in facilitating peace but the negotiations broke down. In 2002 Norway succeeded in bringing about a cease-fire agreement. This attempt did not succeed either, and from December 2005 new armed attacks was issued from both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army. In January 2008 the cease fire agreement was officially abandoned by the government of Sri Lanka and one year later the government troops were claiming victory in many areas held by the LTTE.²⁰ On 20th May 2009 the President of Sri Lanka claimed the supreme victory over terrorism in Sri Lanka and called the war off²¹.

At the present time of writing²² the military battles have recently ceased and the LTTE has been defeated as a military group. We still need to observe if the situation will sustain but officially the war is over in Sri Lanka today. President Rajapakse's policy of "peace through war" is nevertheless presently being challenged as hundreds of thousands of displaced people are in acute need for treatment physically, mentally and in the nearest future - a reconciliation process.

One needs to ask if war of decades has in fact ceased just because the armed power has proven to be stronger on one side than the other. Blood has been shed for generations and a country with its peoples of diverse forms of socialization, groups, identity, language, religion and other cultural artifacts is more in a state of recovering than having been healed after such intense battles which the world has witnessed during the last couple of months. One of my approaches is therefore to understand if there is a way of approaching each other or if the problem is still likely to abide.

From a Sinhalese perspective

Reading through multitudes of books, articles and Internet sites on Sri Lanka and the ethnic conflict gives me the impression that most ideas about rights and claims among the Sinhala people root back to history, both the one considered legendary and the one considered factual.

²⁰ *This information is gathered from daily basis newspaper reviews on the internet through the last three years.*

²¹ http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090518_10

²² *May 2009*

Some of this history is found in old Buddhist scriptures, other is found in diverse historical documents. Nevertheless there is a strong tie between legendary information and information considered factual.

Their myths tell that the Sinhalese are descendants from Aryan migrants from Bengal about four hundred years B.C. The main mythical and historical understanding seem to go from Lord Buddha's first visit to the isle of Lanka²³, through the legendary lion-king Vijaya, followed by hero-king Dutugamunu, about 300 years later, who fought the good battle and became the first island-wide king. We learn about the oppositional bikhus and the strong up-country Sinhala who stood up to the Western intruders, during the transition to the modern era, as well as the great nationalist Anagarika Dharmapala²⁴, and finally the modern conquest by the Sinhala Only act in 1956. In the further the new constitution of 1972 gave the superiority of the Sinhalese people's main religion, Buddhism, as well as allocation of Tamil people in schools. The same year the country was also given the name "Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic of Sri Lanka", with its loaded meanings. The word "Lanka" derives from Sanskrit, meaning island, while the word "Sri" has the Sanskrit meaning sacred²⁵. The country was renamed in 1977 but still carries the name "Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka".

In 1983 the whole Parliament was demanded by the President H.E. J.R.Jayawardene to give a vow to work for a unitary Sri Lanka. Tamil groups then left the Parliament in opposition and then even more, from a Sinhalese perspective, the Sinhala people are protecting what they perceive as religiously and judicially theirs while the Tamil separatists are only terrorists whom from the late 1970s onwards have tried to destroy the island nation by armed force.

There are also very important Sinhalese voices worth listening to which are critical to the past governing of the island by the British colonizers and to what they claim is a favoring of Tamil

²³ *The island is described in the Hindu tale Ramayana as "Lanka"*

²⁴ *Anagarika – a full time Buddhist worker, Dharmapala –guardian of the Dharma*

²⁵ *de Silva, Colin, "Sri Lanka, The Resplendent Isle", The New York Times, 1982. Read 4th June 2007*

people during the colonial period. Tamils were given benefits by the Brits and were highly educated. They held many important administrative, political and judicial posts. This gave much power to the Tamils in a new nation where more than 70 percent were Sinhala and less than one out of five was Tamil. Due to this understanding there was formed a parole by which the Sri Lankan Freedom Party won the election in 1956; “Sinhala only” – indicating the extinction of other languages in official business. Anyone who would now have a seat in any official office had to know the Sinhala language. In turn this led to a rise in national pride and further to nationalism.

From a Tamil perspective

First of all I want to differentiate between Tamil and LTTE. Tamil refers to the social group of the Tamil tradition and culture. Within this social group another group arose in the seventies, the LTTE. The latter is a militant group within the Tamil group, who has decided to fight for physical-, psychological- and social rights for the Tamil people through armed power. One may view their situation from another perspective understanding that the Tamil people have been unrightfully driven out of their homeland by a massive Sinhala population. Sri Lanka is also the homeland of the Tamil population. They are indeed described as present in Lanka in the Sinhalese history. I will not go into the alternative history of Tamil people and possible ancestry here but I am stating the fact that there is a subsidiary side of history, unconventional to the Sri Lankan socialization practice, which is not taught in government schools so far. The Tamil people may have been objectified by Sinhalese-Buddhist religious nationalism and thus discriminated, in the school system, through language discrimination and deprivation of other civil rights²⁶. There has, though, been a want for a federal solution and a prospected Tamil state even before the day of independence in 1948. The country had been under British rule for almost 150 years and the new independent government administration were overly represented by people of Tamil origin. Sinhala voices of the time claim this was a result of Tamil people being favored by the British as they converted to Christianity and cooperated with the British. The Tamil version tells that they themselves gave preference to education of the English language as well as to other academic subjects and thereby achieved

²⁶ http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KE27Df04.html

their positions. Anyhow a Sinhala movement laid pressure on the Indian Tamil group to go back to India after 1948. They also opposed the fact that the new constitution acknowledged the Sinhalese and the Tamil language equally, alongside English. That is why they should stand up for their rightfully claimed civil privileges and protect their own ethnic group's rights to equal liberties as the Sinhalese possessed as well as accepting the help they may get from the LTTE. Through the years there have been massive propaganda within the LTTE-controlled areas where children in schools are only taught Tamil, some children have not been aware of the fact that Sri Lanka does not only inhabit Tamil people²⁷ and thus have been living with the understanding and the life view of a Tamil nation in harmony. The Sinhalese intrusion is therefore a threat to one's ethnic identity and way of life – and ultimately an enemy to fight against in order to protect one's true nation. There are also several other areas to mention like language, Sinhalese banishment of India Tamils, quota of Tamil positions in education and public employment by which the Tamil people claim to having been discriminated. The LTTE did from 1977 claim themselves to be the protectors of the Tamil people and their rights in Sri Lanka. Through minor actions they advocated their viewpoints till 1983. After this the LTTE has also to some extent made an effort in trying to make the war sacred by declaring their leader to being The Sun God. This does not imply, however, that he is considered a god with divine character. It rather entails an understanding of a great hero and perhaps also a protector of something sacred or important. The LTTE leader has also promoted a philosophy that independence is crucial to the meaning of life and that such independence could only be achieved through the hardships of a war against those who suppress it. The war then gives a meaning of staying strong through the hardships to attain the meaning of life.

THE LAUNCH OF WAR

In 1977 the Sri Lankan government was headed by the United National Party (UNP) leader Mr. J.R. Jayawardena who also became the prime minister of Sri Lanka. The Tamil party, TULF, got 18 seats in parliament on the mandate of establishing “an independent, sovereign, secular,

²⁷ From an interview with “Rama” who grew up in Jaffna and fled to Colombo 19 years old. He is now 28 years old living in a larger city in Sri Lanka. Rama still doesn't speak Sinhala.

socialist state of Tamil Eelam”.²⁸ This party gained acknowledgement as a democratic party, most members were Tamil people. Jayawardena established the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in May 1978, and became the first President of Sri Lanka. The LTTE was then proscribed as an illegal organization in Sri Lanka.

TULF had several representatives in parliament but in 1983 all members of parliament were obliged to make a vow that they would work for a unitary Sri Lanka. All TULF members then withdrew from their seats in protest. This led to the absence of Tamil representatives in parliament for almost two decades. During the election in 2002, though, only 22 mandates of all together 225 represented the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which is an alliance of TULF together with three other Tamil parties.²⁹

July 23rd 1983, the day of “Black July”, was an important mile-stone. On this day Tamil people various places in Sri Lanka were brutally killed and their lands and properties were destroyed by Sinhalese civilians. The background was the killings of 13 Sri Lankan Army soldiers in Jaffna, done by the LTTE. The Sinhalese rage span over two weeks without interference from the government.

Mr. “Selvaraj”³⁰ witnessed how one family father who owned a shop in his own home, was pulled out on the street by his hair together with his wife and beaten to death while their children watched the incident. Their house and shop was then set on fire. “This incident was not unique”, Mr. Selvaraj told me. Other people have told me how heads of killed Tamil men and women were hung up on poles alongside the roads, around Nuwara Eliya, soaked with fuel and set on fire.

“ On each of these occasions it followed a similar pattern. The incidents were started off by people coming in from outside the districts, lists were used to identify

²⁸ <http://www.eelamweb.com/history/te/> read 28.11.2007

²⁹ <http://archive.srilankanelections.com/allcumu2004.htm> read 2006-05-07)

³⁰ One of my sources from Nuwara Eliya who did not want his name printed.

Tamil property and systematic attacks were made on it: the local people were then encouraged to follow with further depredations..."³¹

THEORY

Many social scientists would agree to the fact that ethnic conflict is an undeniable feature of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape, and that religion is, to a certain level, performing its role in it. The challenge is not one of finding theories to explain such causes. The problem is rather selecting from the excess of theories. Through a great deal of literature on the subject of this master thesis I have found a tendency to hastily conclude that religion has terrible consequences for ethnic conflicts in many societies. In my point of view we should be more humble to its position and undertake more thorough scientific work on this field in particular in order to make conclusions on religion's factual role. Through the eyes of a sociologist of religion the situation may seem different than from one of political science or anthropology. It is therefore in my opinion a necessity to have a more humble interdisciplinary approach with the intention of getting a wider perspective. Such an approach do have an impending base from Shults and Sandage,³² among others, who advocate more interdisciplinary studies in regard to understanding the complexity of phenomena like religion, philosophy, psychology and human nature as well as the interaction between such disciplines of research.

In this master thesis I will make use of the theories described below and tie some of them together. First a short section on traditional sociological approach to socialization presented and applied to the primary socialization in Sri Lanka. Second I present approaches to identity and identity formation from an etymological discipline in order to further understand the basic meaning of the term. This section is then followed by a differentiation between a sociological understanding of identity theory and the social identity theory from the social psychological discipline. Thirdly ethic philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' theory on the other, the face of the

³¹ *Patricia Hyndman, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of New South Wales and Secretary, Lawasia Human Rights Standing Committee - Report on the Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July*

³² *F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. The faces of forgiveness: searching for wholeness and salvation, Baker Academic, 2003.*

other and otherness is described before an illustration of how these theories may have a function of identity formation in a Western society. Fourthly I go into more detail about identity with different approaches like ethnic identity, the idea of many identities, scriptures of identity formation and then I am closing the identity section with some ideas on adversarial identities. Understanding the conflict in Sri Lanka is not possible only through the study of one discipline only. The following section of this chapter on theory, is dealing with the fact that there are several layers that need to be examined. Some scholars are discussing the traditional term of primordial hatred in Sri Lanka as well as other parts of the world where ethnic conflicts are present. I do argue that there may also be other ways to look at this. Drawing to a close on this chapter I use illustrations to enlighten and discuss a theory on socioeconomic tensions before the last theoretical section is a reminder of how historic consciousness may be colored by our myths and history.

SOCIALIZATION

Primary socialization

Through any fundamental teaching of sociology one will find a section on the topic of socialization. The process of socialization starts from any individual's genesis in this world and probably goes on till the exodus. Still a majority of social scientist states that the most important part of the process is the *primary* socialization. Through the initial years a child's parents, teachers and peer clusters help shaping the social integration process in order for the child to become socialized thus abiding by the actual attributes of that contextual group. Like I was shaped into being a Christian protestant, others are shaped into abiding by other attributes and consequently perceiving different identities.

Primary socialization in Sri Lanka

We may well look at this from a micro perspective and analyze how diverse individuals are socialized into different societies; nevertheless, in the following I will make use of a wider perspective and see the implications of socialization in a macro perspective, like the nation of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is a country in which the majority of the population is Sinhalese. Growing up in Sri Lanka comprise among many other attributes the privilege of going to a government financed school. Sri Lankan government schools are attended by most children living on this island, although in larger cities there are a great number of private schools being attended by the more wealthy part of the population. According to the secretary of Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, these private schools are not officially legal³³. The aim of the Sri Lankan government is to provide good education for all Sri Lankans in order to ensure the *equality* of any Sri Lankan citizen³⁴. Even so the constitution also quotes that the state of Sri Lanka “shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana,”³⁵ while assuring that all citizens shall have the right to enshrine their own beliefs. To protect and foster the Buddha Sasana in this context means to protect and foster *the doctrine of the Buddha*. The constitution actually says that it is the duty of the Sri Lankan state to ensure that the citizens of Sri Lanka are taught the Buddha’s teachings. The phrase “protect and foster” carries the semantic means of protecting and promoting. This is to a large extent being performed in Sri Lanka through legislation, education and public protection of the rights as well as providing soil for the development of the Buddhist religion. We may again focus on to what extent religion is influencing young people’s understanding of their own identity, as well as how this identity is influencing their relationship to other ethnic groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka?

IDENTITY

An Etymological approach

According to Dr. Joseph E. Trimble at Western Washington University, USA, there is no widely agreed upon definition of the term *ethnic identity*³⁶. Trimble suggests an etymological

³³ Interview with Secretary of Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, Mr. Ariyaratna Hewage, 4th April 2007

³⁴ *The Constitution of Sri Lanka*, chapter VI, article 27, number (5)g-(5)h + (5).

³⁵ *The Constitution of Sri Lanka*, chapter III, article 10

³⁶ in C. B. Fisher & Lerner, R. M. (Eds.; in press), *Applied developmental science: An encyclopedia of research, policies, and programs*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

approach to the term. As summarized by Trimble, the word ethnic has both Latin and Greek origins; respectively *ethnicus* and *ethnikos*, both words meaning *nation* and have historically been referring to heathen people; those not acknowledging the monotheistic Jewish, Christian or Muslim god. Trimble also brings in the Greek word *ethos*, applying it to the construct as custom, disposition or trait, further deriving from this the temporary definition: “a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs”³⁷.

The second part of the construct *identity* is derived from the Latin word *idem*, which is the stem of the word *identitas*, meaning *same* or *sameness*, *likeness* or *oneness*. Trimble makes a temporary definition of this term as well and uses a description also found in The Oxford English Dictionary: “the sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else”³⁸.

Combining the two definitions Trimble widely defines ethnic identity as a “sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residence.”³⁹

The Internet provides quite useful information on the construct of ethnic identity as well. I found fairly similar definitions, like The North American version of the Encarta Dictionary in English, defining ethnic as “sharing distinctive cultural traits as a group in society”⁴⁰ and identity as “the fact or condition of being the same or exactly alike”⁴¹.

Based on the above I will in the further define ethnic identity as a social group who share distinctive cultural, historical and linguistic conceptions and attributes, mainly residing in a shared geographical territory.

³⁷ http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/trimble/research_themes/ethnicity_identity.htm

³⁸ Found in footnote 37, and also in <http://www.oed.com>

³⁹ http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/trimble/research_themes/ethnicity_identity.htm

⁴⁰ http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/identity.html

⁴¹ http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861619974/identity.html

Identifying oneself with the Sinhalese ethnic group would thus mean one's recognition of sameness with the social group, the Sinhalese, sharing common cultural, historical and linguistic conceptions and attributes as well as mainly residing in Sri Lanka.

In the Sinhalese language there is another complexity as this language uses the word "Jati" when talking about several English words like *birth*, *identity* and also *nation*. There is not an explicit Western understanding of a separated cultural identity among the Sinhalese. That is all "jati". This does not mean that Sinhala people does not understand the difference but rather that this is not a common concept of identity. You are born Sinhala, you live in Sri Lanka, you speak Sinhalese and your culture is Sinhala, implying Buddhism, eating kiri-bat, wearing saris for weddings, going to work early and sending your children to Dhamma-school⁴² every Saturday. It's all a part of being Sinhalese, and even Sri Lankan.

Identifying oneself with the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic group would mean that one recognizes the sameness with the Tamil people, sharing a common cultural, historical and linguistic heritage and understanding of its attributes as well as mainly residing in Sri Lanka.

It should be added that there are many Tamils living outside of Sri Lanka due to the war. They have fled the country earlier, and if considering all of them being part of the Tamil ethnic group in Sri Lanka we would need to differentiate between those who have actually lived here, those who have only lived in exile, those who are still living in Tamil subcultures in their present abiding countries as well as those who are assimilated in another culture but are still sharing the Tamil cultural, historical and linguistic conceptions and attributes. And again this would be far too big a task to accomplish in this presentation.

For most casual cases this would be a sufficient platform to discuss from. Nevertheless I will, for scholastic reasons, also enlighten the distinction between two theories that might also serve as great instruments in the further; the identity theory and the social identity theory.

⁴² A Buddhist version of Christian Sunday school, implemented by col. H. Olcott in the early 1900s.

Identity Theory

There are basically two models of identity theory that I have found which are relating more to this master thesis than others; *the identity theory* and *the social identity theory*. The latter is one of a more psychosocial discipline while the former is more sociologically oriented. Based on my desire of interdisciplinary research I will focus on the social identity theory in the further.

The identity theory was in essence introduced by Mead in 1934⁴³ but has evolved into several directions through different approaches. The question of belonging to a group helps define one's sense of who you are, according to the British social psychologist Henri Tajfel.⁴⁴ He is one of the promoters of the social identity theory. This theory suggests that identity is developed throughout the different social roles one inhabits. People become who they are in the interaction with others. The participation in many groups causes many roles and thus many identities, like my description in the chapter on identity formation below will show.

The social identity theory

The social identity theory is composed of four elements: Categorization, identification, comparison and psychological distinctiveness.⁴⁵

When we place people into categories we give them a label, like Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Christian, Aryan, Dravidian etc. By using such categorizations we position people into categories and associate these categories with the group members of that category, or vice versa. Through such identification we augment our own confidence, according to Tajfel.

43 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/16210252/Stryker-Identity-Theory>

44 <http://www.google.com/books?hl=no&lr=&id=gSUj6S8Tun4C&oi=fnd&pg=RA1-PA223&dq=The+question+of+belonging+to+a+group+helps+define+one%E2%80%99s+sense+of+who+you+are&ots=tnhYk82J-N&sig=t8yFvp1uoH4Ew1bqoT18IYCtms0#v=onepage&q=&f=false>

45 *Psychological Science* Volume 11 Issue 5, Pages 379 – 385, Published Online: 8 Feb 2002 on: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/120705521/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

When people compare the group in which we belong to other groups they also become aware of which group to favor. Examples could be political parties, religious denominations or ethnic groups, like UPFA(United People's Freedom Alliance) or TNA(Tamil National Alliance), Buddhist or Hindu/ Christian/ Muslim, Sinhalese or Tamil.

The last of the four elements is a psychological distinctiveness which creates an expectation or a desire from others that our belonging to a category also imply expectations of certain behavior compared to such in other groups.⁴⁶ Research have also shown that people in one category, in-group members, are likely to be more loyal to their in-group members than to people not in their category, out-group members.⁴⁷ One of Tajfel's hypothesizes is that even minimal conditions could set discrimination in motion; the members of any in-group would favor their group's preferences in contrast to another out-group yet without even knowing the members of one's own group. Just the membership itself would to some extent favor a particular discrimination of others belonging to an out-group. Several studies on this topic have been performed through the last Century, like The robber's cave experiment, by Muzafer & Sherif (1954), The accentuation effect, by Tajfel & Wilkes (1963), The minimal group effect, by Tajfel (1970).⁴⁸ Even though this theory to some may seem to being a collective identity formation of an *us*, Hogg and Vaughan⁴⁹ also describe social identity as "the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups."⁵⁰ Thus social identity is an individual-based perception of what defines the *us*, associated with any internalized group membership. According to Hogg, Terry & White social identity is a social construct that perceives "a direct reciprocal link between individuals and society mediated by

⁴⁶ Taylor, Donald; Moghaddam, Fathali. *Theories of Intergroup Relations: International Social Psychological Perspectives (2nd ed.)*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. 1994: 80-81.

⁴⁷ <http://www.psychexchange.co.uk/glossary/social-identity-theory-421/>

⁴⁸ These studies were presented in a lecture by Sociologist Robb Willer at Berkeley University of California, March 17th 2009.

⁴⁹ *Social psychology / Michael A. Hogg, Graham M. Vaughan, 2008*

⁵⁰ As ref. 48

the social construct of the role of identity".⁵¹ An identity is developed through attributes like gender, ethnicity, nationality and age. A role in this perspective gives meaning in comparison to others'. Through interaction role identity gives meaning because they are reflexive.⁵²

In straightforward terms one could suggest that this theory is paying attention to a more collective identity in a macro perspective, where the individual within is able to identify oneself with the attributes of the in-group. Then the social self is constituted by society and not the other way around.

What I have found important in order to discuss the situation among the young Sri Lankans is trying to be aware of their understanding of their own social identity.

The face of the other

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas talks about *the other*⁵³ and suggests that only when we are able to look into the face of e.g. other people we learn to know who we are in comparison to that person. Professor at Agder University in Kristiansand, Norway, Paul Leer-Salvesen has done an ethical study among convicts of murder and rape in a Norwegian prison. He draws on Levinas' theory and discusses how the face of the other has an imperative consequence for the act of the assault. He also tells how the respondents of his interviews much easier were able to perform an assault on others if they covered their victim's face or attacked them from behind. This way they were not forced to looking into the victim's face while performing the offence.⁵⁴ By not looking into the object's face the victim is de-humanized and then easier to offend. People tend to de-humanize or degrade others in order to

⁵¹ *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1995, Vol 58, No 4:225-269

⁵² *Burke & Reitzes*, 1981

⁵³ *Levinas, Emmanuel, Otherwise than being: or, Beyond essence*, 1981:20

⁵⁴ *Personal notes from a lecture on ethics, held by Professor Paul Leer-Salvesen, Unawattuna, Sri Lanka, February 2006*

hurt them, Leer-Salvesen claims. When someone is less valued than oneself the consequences of harming this being is easier to justify. If one does not know the other person there is no basis for discerning what this person's characters are. It is only in the meeting with the face of the other that one is able to understand the otherness of that person. Levinas says it this way:

"Another comes to the fore as other, if and only if his or her appearance brakes, pierces, destroys the horizon of my egocentric monism, that is, when the other's invasion of my world destroys the empire in which all phenomena are, from the outset, a priori, condemned to function as moments of my universe. The other's face (i.e., any others facing me) or the other's speech (i.e. any other's speaking to me) interrupts and disturbs the order of my, ego's, world; it makes a hole in it by disarranging my arrangements without ever permitting me to restore the previous order to be safe from the intrusion. Nothing will ever be the same as before."⁵⁵

It is very interesting to see how these thoughts may be applied to a Sri Lankan context of ethnic division. I will draw from this theory when suggesting that it is also applicable when speaking of the enmity between Sri Lankan ethnic groups. This will be further discussed in the analysis chapter.

An illustration of identity formation

This is a short illustration of identity formation in a social identity theory:

I was born in a small Southern town in Norway. I was the only one in my primary school class who was not baptized as a child. The local community was mainly of a Lutheran protestant orientation and only three or four kids in my school were not taking part in the compulsory classes of religion. We all knew they belonged to the Jehovah's witnesses, which was really weird.

⁵⁵ Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than being: or, Beyond essence*, 1981:20

I grew up singing in a Lutheran boy's choir, though; learning Latin songs from the age of six and all the rituals of the Lutheran church were shaping my comprehension of the divine. I was always wondering why all the other children were baptized and I wasn't. My father told me that Jesus didn't baptize children and neither did his disciples, so I was free to be baptized when I was old enough to decide for myself what kind of Christian branch I wanted to join. My parents did not belong to any denomination but believed in the Christian message and confessed the Christian Apostles creed.

In my early teens I decided to get baptized in a church where they only accepted the "baptism of faith", discovering two weeks later that I had been "captivated" in a Pentecostal church. At that time I knew little about denominations, even so I had heard from my primary school teacher that Pentecostals were shouting strange words and climbing the walls during their services. At that moment I thought: "I will sit here for a while and hopefully the baptism will happen before they start screaming and climbing the walls." The only thing that mattered to me was to be baptized and that I now would make a vow, or a covenant, with God to stay close to him for the rest of my life.

Almost 25 years later I am still colored by the denominational choice I made, though my shades are quite more liberal than those of my previous church peers. After living a few years in multicultural Sri Lanka as well as studying several years at a secular university in Norway I still have my background strongly dwelling inside although my perception of "the other" is quite different today than it was years ago.

Nevertheless I have wondered what it would have been like if I grew up in Varanasi in India or perhaps in Saudi Arabia. Would I perhaps have been a worshipping Hindu, washing myself in the Ganga river, identifying myself as part of a holistic universe, an atman living a circular life through karma-destined substantive bodies. Perhaps I would rather have had the Muslim creed whispered into my ear a few minutes after entering into this world, I would have been memorizing the Quran by heart as a child, growing up in a large household, attending the Friday prayers regularly from my early teens and growing up to become the head of my own household, always keeping in mind that there is no authority anywhere at liberty to challenge the word or the will of God..?

It seems we are to a large extent a product of our social environment. The above is an illustration of how it may have been for me growing up in different religious contexts. Why such different outcomes may occur can be explained through the term *socialization*.

Socialization could also be illustrated as a language we need to understand in order to function well in society. It is a process of interaction between an individual and the group in which the individual takes part. Attributes like values, norms, attitudes, beliefs and language typical for the group, need to be learned by the individual members of the group and made one's own. Once these traits are perceived they are *internalized* by the individual and thus have fulfilled the main aim of the socialization process.

Ethnic identity

Sri Lanka has a variety of ethnic groups which have emerged through centuries of trade and immigration. Through the last 500 years the island has mostly been under colonial rule, by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. There have also been intermarriages between the various groups. With this in mind it is obvious that various cultural traditions, beliefs and religions have been shared between the different groups as well. Alongside the Sinhala majority, a Sri Lankan Tamil population and a so-called India Tamil group, we find Muslim Moors and Malays as well as descendants of intermarriages between Sri Lankans and Europeans, the Burghers, and the Veddahs.

The conflict is called an "ethnic conflict" and is to outsiders too easily considered a conflict between the two largest ethnic groups: the Tamil population and the Sinhalese one. In Sri Lankan everyday life, though, both ethnic groups intermingle and there are several intermarriages among all the different groups today. In certain areas they even share temples and shrines for devotions.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *On the Kandy Road there is one temple/davali where the Buddhists have one entrance for their shrine and Hindus have theirs. In Kataragama even Sufi-muslims are present inside the consecrated area, together with Hindus and Buddhists. In small towns where budgets are low one may also find similar arrangements, like on the Kandy Road.*

In Sri Lanka today many people claim that there is an ethnic conflict going on. Others do not accept the term “ethnic” conflict as they argue that the war was really ethnic only in its earlier years. People who have only lived their lives during this period do not consider the war ethnic but rather it being a war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) exclusively. As the Sri Lankan, and Sinhalese, President H. E. Mahinda Rajapakse claimed victory over the LTTE, on May 20th 2009, one may say that the armed conflict is over and done with so far. There are still thousands of Tamils with refugee status, in the former LTTE held areas, while this master thesis is being written, anticipating the government’s next step in providing equality for all Sri Lankans. One question arising is whether the government of Sri Lanka now will work from President Rajapake’s statement or not; that there are no minorities in Sri Lanka. He claims that there have not been minorities in Sri Lanka during his time in power. This country comprises only two groups, according to the President: those who love this country and those who have no love for the land of their birth... Those of the latter group are not a minority but rather considered a *lesser group*.⁵⁷

An ethnic identity, as described above, is in a broader extent also part of a cultural identity whereas attributes like religion is contained. Understanding how religion influences ethnic identity one have to be aware of how adherence to e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism or other defined religions are understood. As I am drawing on the concept of civil religion in this master thesis religion’s role is more of a communal character that one of personal experience for those involved. The role of religion is then partly to form the identity of the members of the general public throughout civic activities and thus an artifact for the socialization into the Sri Lankan society.

The many identities

Louis Kriesberg is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Syracuse, USA. He suggests that developing a sense of self is essential to becoming a mature person. There are

⁵⁷ <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2009/05/address-by-President-mahinda-rajapaksa.html>

many different identities one has to deal with.⁵⁸ Like my illustration above my identities were among others that I was a small-town boy, a Norwegian, a Lutheran protestant, a choir boy, a non-baptized student etc. All of these identities are social roles I had to identify with, and that has been part of the development of who I am, and what roles I have today. Now this individual identity shaped by roles and participation in them extends further to social groups, as discussed above. When identifying oneself with a social group, like a brass band or a golf club, one takes part in this group's activities and thereby internalize the values and attributes of the group. This kind of socialization is quite similar to what happens in countries and ethnic communities, Kriesberg argues. When identifying collectively, people feel injured when those who share their identity are injured. Kriesberg draws a parallel to Palestinian suicide bombers who are willing to sacrifice their individual lives for the preservation of their group. In Sri Lanka we have similar actions where LTTE soldiers sacrifice themselves for the promotion of the cause of their Tamil ethnic group. One may of course ask whether the LTTE and the Tamil population belongs to the same ethnic group as far as values and evolved principles are concerned but this example should be understood from an LTTE point of view. The now departed general of the LTTE, Velulai Prebakharan, stated in 1990:

"Having spilled sweat, having spilled blood, obtaining death with unbearable sorrow, (after this there is) independence. Without independence (cutantiram)⁵⁹ there is no meaning in the life of man."⁶⁰

Scriptures of identity

⁵⁸ Kriesberg, Louis. "Identity Issues." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: July 2003
<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity_issues/>.

⁵⁹ A Tamil word which in this context mean independence but do also have other semantic meanings with similar importance and relevance.

⁶⁰ <http://www.tamilnation.org/ideology/schalk01.htm#Introduction> read 01.10.2009)

In Sri Lankan government schools today children are taught the Buddhist chronicles such as the Deepavamsa and the Mahavamsa as a constitutional endeavor to foster Buddhism as well as providing a cultural basis for identity.

Deepavamsa contains the story of the three visits to Lanka made by Gautama Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama, as well as giving the seeds to legends and histories which have been more colorfully portrayed in the Mahavamsa. Throughout the stories of Gautama Buddha in Deepavamsa one learns that the visits are carrying great weight of implications to the understanding of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country. The introduction to the chronicle, (as translated into English by B. C. Law) reads:

“Listen to me! I shall relate the chronicle of the Buddha’s visits to the island, the arrival of the Tooth Relic and the Bodhi tree, the advent of the Buddha’s doctrine, the rise of the teachers, the spread of Buddhism in the island and the coming of (Vijaya) the Chief of Men”.⁶¹

The children of Sri Lanka are educated to understand their historical ancestry as well as their religious and cultural heritage, becoming aware of their cultural identity.

Through the Deepavamsa one can also read how Gautama Buddha proclaimed that on this island the *śāsana* (Buddhist teachings) would shine. Some interpretations even take this understanding further and give it the meaning of *the holy island of the śāsana*.

We also find the story of how Prince Mahinda was sent by his father, the great King Ashoka of India, to promote the śāsana and establish the first śangha (monastic fellowship of ordained Buddhist monks). Later his sister Sanghamitta brought a branch of the holy Bo-tree to the island and planted it in the town of Anuradhapura.

My brief conclusion is that religion is very important for the forming of young people’s identity itself and as such it is important for the young people’s perception of other ethnic

⁶¹ <http://members.tripod.com/~hettiarachchi/dipa.html>

groups. On the other hand one can sense an enlightenment of “the other” as a close and equal peer rather than an unknown enemy.

SEVERAL LAYERS

Professor at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, Steve Bruce has written extensively on the nature of religion in the modern world and on the links between religion and politics. He is now professor of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen. Bruce (2003) states that there are several layers of history which need to be considered in order to understand the links between them.⁶² This is also the case with the conflict in Sri Lanka. One cannot speak of religion in Sri Lanka without also linking it to other layers like history or politics or the common understanding of the island’s legacy. One must not forget the understandings existing on the grass root level. We should dare to challenge any “political correctness” that might exist on the topic and thereby reveal the grassroots’ actual opinions to understand the pulse of the people involved, according to Bruce, even if this might be controversial or even provoking to the typological foundations. Due to Posing the reach of this master thesis I do admit the weakness of the more thorough scientific research this subject deserves, nevertheless, based on interviews and also more casual conversations with young Sri Lankans, I believe it is presenting a general tendency among the Sri Lankan youth of today, living in the South, West and Central parts of Sri Lanka.

Bruce continues by explaining throughout his book, “Religion and Politics”, how religion may have influenced wars and conflicts all over the world in one way or another but that we must be careful calling all of these influences religious. Religion is not independently the reason for conflict. It is through other circumstances in culture, society, ideas and social realities in which they are lived out.⁶³

Religion and religion

⁶² Bruce, Steve, *Politics and religion*, Blackwell Publishing 2003:

⁶³ Bruce, Steve, *Religion & Politics*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003:254

Bruce also seem to argue that there are religion and then there are religion. Like in Sri Lanka there are Tamils and there are Tamils. Now, I do not try to say that Tamil and religion are equivalent but nevertheless to illustrate my understanding of Bruce this simile may enlighten two important areas of my study: There are Tamils in Sri Lanka, they live all over the island but the main population is situated in the Northern and Western areas. Most of them are not supporting the military actions made by the LTTE but still they are Tamils. The LTTE on the other hand claims to be Tamil liberation fighters. The LTTE has been a relatively small army in relation to the several million Tamils living in Sri Lanka. Even so, people outside of Sri Lanka are very often speaking of the war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Only one week ago my fifteen year old son came home from his social science class telling that he argued with his teacher concerning the Sri Lankan war. The teacher in a Norwegian government school had told the students that Sri Lanka consisted of Sinhalese and Tamils and that the Tamils were terrorists. We must understand that one does not belong to the LTTE just because one being Tamil. We have what people outside understand as Tamil (the LTTE-Tamils) and then we have those who are only Tamil. Even a Tamil being in opposition to the government does not have to support the LTTE. This nuance is very important when discussing Sri Lankan matters because one may so easily mix the cards.

My illustration will perhaps become clearer when discussing religion. I said that there is religion and then there is religion. Bruce argues that there are groups within most of the world religions who use religion in different manners not representative to the religion itself but rather to identify one's own agenda. About one fifth of the world's population is Muslim. Examples like 9-11 gave rise to a hostile attitude from the Western world toward all Muslims. The responsibility for the attack was taken by the Al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden, who in the name of Allah claimed its success. Although the assault on the World Trade Centre was a severe attack on Western values, and had enormous symbolic effects, it was nevertheless an attack condemned by most Muslims. It is nevertheless no secret that in the Islamic faith many accepted Western values are haram. It is neither a secret that Muslims condemn many Western norms and ideas. But even so it is to my understanding a just as severe attack to make all Muslims responsible for a terror attack carried out by a separatist group with a Muslim affiliation. Even so movies, the media and political parties use this event to promote their views that Islam is a less intellectual and more dangerous religion that is imposing its

power over Western countries and their more or less shared cultural values. When asking thirty random people on the street in a town in Southern Norway, for instance: Who crashed into the WTC? Most of them answered me that it was done by Muslims. I do not think this result is exclusively Southern Norwegian, though. Some people from most religions tend to, from time to time, do severe damage to others in the name of religion. This does not mean, though, that the professed religion substantially gives support to the subjects causing the harm. Perhaps we should, like Claire Mitchell (2005), turn the point of view around and asks whether conflicts created are able to keep political dimensions of religion alive through mass media and lack of genuine objective information? Now this is tight up to the aim of this study as well; finding out whether the understanding of identity helps to keep ethnic groups in Sri Lanka socially separate and to some extent in conflict with each other by interacting with religion as a central feature of their social- and political identity. But before one can answer this question it is crucial to discern what religion from a substantial dogmatic point of understanding is and what religion from a more political point of understanding implies. Religion is not merely a marker of identity. It continues to provide many of the meanings of identity, community and politics. As such we must understand the relationship between religion, identity and politics in modern societies before we make hasty conclusions of religion's factual role in this interdisciplinary area.

PRIMORDIAL HATRED

Professor of Political Science at Swarthmore College, James Kurth teaches defense policy, foreign policy and international politics. Kurth (2000) argues that there are three important theories to consider when discussing religion's role in an ethnic conflict: One is considering that the cultural traditions and historical legacies are giving rise to *primordial hatreds*⁶⁴. This may have been the situation in the Sri Lankan conflict initially but it does not seem to be present to the same extent today. Therefore we must also consider the historical evolution in Sri Lanka through the last part of the 20th Century and the dawn of the 21st in order to understand the Sinhalese and Tamil actions that took place in 1983 when the Sri Lankan war

⁶⁴ <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-73836003/religion-and-ethnic-conflict.html>

officially started. During the last decade of the British rule, which ended in 1948, there were several political initiatives made by the Ceylonese. They formed communal groups like the Burgher Political Association in 1938, the Ceylon Indian Congress in 1939, and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in 1944. These were followed by the The Great Council of the Sinhalese (Sinhala Maha Sabha), founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1937. Bandaranaike was in 1956 heading the nationalist parole “Sinhalese only” and was elected prime minister of Ceylon. There have been communal controversies in Ceylon and later in Sri Lanka for more than half a century as far as the Tamil-Sinhalese dichotomy is concerned. Even from the 1956 proposal opposition members clearly warned about the dangers of potential communal riots, federal demands and separatism.⁶⁵ Throughout the sixties and seventies the new Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, wife of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, held an even more rigid Sinhalese nationalistic policy and was by many commentators considered a nationalist hardliner. Then in the mid seventies the LTTE was officially formed as an oppositional Tamil military group, fighting for independence and devolution of power in order to give Tamils their Tamil Eelam, a separate Tamil federal province or an independent Tamil state. They opposed the Sinhalese Only act, of course, which professed Sinhalese to be the only official language, as well as Buddhism to having the highest priority as far as religion was concerned. When speaking of the war as an *ethnic* conflict based on cultural heritage and legacies, one must be aware of the fact that there has been an evolving understanding between the young and middle aged Sinhalese and Tamils living in Sri Lanka through the timeline that the focus of most people is not so much the ethnic legacy or the right to develop one’s language and culture in a separate Sri Lanka anymore. To some extent some of the grenades of the conflict are already disarmed; In 1987 the Tamil language was brought back into the official arenas of Sri Lanka⁶⁶. Today the Sri Lankan constitution states: “The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala”, “Tamil shall also be an official language”, “The National Languages of Sri

⁶⁵ <http://www.tamilnation.org/indictment/indict004.htm>

⁶⁶ *The Constitution of Sri Lanka, Chapter IV*

Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil”, “A person shall be entitled to be educated through the medium of either of the National Languages”.⁶⁷

Turning back to historical events one can also look at how federation movements in the seventies agreed on a compromise containing the right to a federate state in the North and East. This was not realized and tensions arose. All this in mind brings us to the second point where Kurth speaks of how political disorder and failed states create a security dilemma between ethnic groups that are often exploited by ambitious and unscrupulous political entrepreneurs.⁶⁸ Since the independence in 1948 Sri Lanka has introduced two new constitutions, one in 1972 and one in 1977. The country has been an unstable state due to the conflict between LTTE and the government, and we have seen several attempts of political innovations that have not really been successful in developing Sri Lanka as a state. Oppositional political groups have tried to govern by democracy but have been thrown as governments due to the parliamentary structure of the state. One needs to understand the political culture in Sri Lanka as democratic to the point of election. Whether the elected are true to their program or not varies very much from delegate to delegate. This lessens the trust in politicians for the general Sri Lankan; “these guys keep the country going as a club for big people,” one of my informants told me.

SOCIOECONOMIC TENSIONS

Thirdly Kurth mentions that the socioeconomic tensions produced by modernization and uneven development are stoking violence among ethnic groups. Considering this point, one can look at the Western attempt to facilitate to peace making. In Sri Lanka the understanding of these intentions are being misinterpreted by many of the young people, and eventually creating tensions rather than the intended peace. Several of the young people I met had the understanding that Western countries were just playing a role in a political game. They did not think of the contributions from the West to be of genuine interest for peace in Sri Lanka.

⁶⁷ *The Constitution of Sri Lanka, Chapter IV, 18, 19, 21*

⁶⁸ http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-10883595_ITM

“Why should they?”, one of my informants asked. “Europe and USA need us to be in trouble. That way less people are interested in investing in Sri Lanka and we will still be a poor country with low labor cost and low cost of production. We will produce cheap so the Western world can be richer. Imported products are too expensive to buy for the local Sri Lankan so we are deprived from such products as well.” Another person told that the Norwegian initiative for peace in Sri Lanka was only an excuse for the Western countries to enforce their political ideologies on Sri Lanka. All these arguments and considerations confirm that there is an understanding of an intended uneven socioeconomic balance, not within but rather from outside. This is where Tamil and Sinhalese stand together against the alien powers, not against each other.

Furthermore Claire Mitchell in her article *The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities* (2003) states that the religious dimension of ethnic identities have been under-theorized. She argues that in many contexts there is a two-way relationship between religion and ethnicity. Each can stimulate the other, rather than religion simply playing a supporting role to the ethnic centre piece.⁶⁹ Religion is from this point of view actually an adhesive keeping societies and groups alive. We recognize this as a Durkheimian approach.

MYTHS AND HISTORY

In the Journal of Buddhist ethics, the Sri Lankan renowned professor Gananath Obeyesekere (2003) states that ancient history has to be culturally constructed and fostered through wars and other mechanisms before they may be linked to the “...historical consciousness of a group through the myths and literary products of an age ranging from serious literature to jingoistic national anthems.”⁷⁰ He particularly refers to Sri Lanka but also aims his ideas towards a general address. Obeyesekere further argues that what such identity enfolds is the contents of a self-conceived perception of one’s “true” cultural legacy. This is even more so

⁶⁹ <http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/40/6/1135>

⁷⁰ <http://www.buddhistethics.org/10/obeyesekere-sri-lanka-conf.html>

when this legacy of the nation is under threat.

METHODS AND MATERIAL

There was great confusion when I started looking for literature and data to provide information on the topic of this work. I had quite some information from my several stays in Sri Lanka as well as there was a vast ocean of literature to draw from in libraries, bookshops and on the Internet. Especially the Internet has been a very valuable resource because of its ability to provide daily news across the continents within seconds and thus make information available on several fields as far as the political situation in Sri Lanka evolved through my time of writing. I did, though, experience that some of this information actually transformed in between my visits. I was therefore very cautious when selecting those websites used in this master thesis and decided to find at least two or three other independent sites to verify the information before drawing the data into my writings. Anyhow, I have given trust to those e-books and digital copies collected from university libraries and from renowned academic publishers. Here I have read articles and essays in addition to parts of books online. I consider these sources reliable and not subject to unpronounced editing as long as there are also concrete paper copies available. I have spoken to some professors at different universities in Norway and from the USA who have advised me to get hold of the paper copies to read. Nevertheless I have also discussed the same problem with other professors from Norway, the USA, Sri Lanka and UK who have had no problem accepting my argument for the methods I have used. I do, though, see that there are good reasons from both points of view. As far as this master thesis is concerned I do find it appropriate to probe the liability and validity of my data. I also believe that my method of doing this is to a large degree being achieved. The problem was not finding data but rather to select prudent information from which to draw into my work.

The classic question of whether using quantitative or qualitative methods was discussed and I concluded that quantitative data might have been useful for some of my questions. I was on the other hand not so much concerned about measurable numbers or tangible details and I also

was more interested in understanding Sri Lankan young people's thoughts and feelings rather than explaining them. Another problem using quantitative data was the question of semantics; was there a common understanding of the use of words like religion, ethnic conflict, Sri Lankans etc? It might also have another meaning to me than to those asked. Through the opportunities for me to travel to Sri Lanka, as well as I do speak some Sinhala, I found that using interviews, TV-news and local Sri Lankan newspapers, as well as having conversations with bikkhus, professors and government officials would give a more nuanced information for my work. It would also give a more reliable data to derive from. The result was that I held qualitative interviews two times in Sri Lanka as well as held a few informal conversations with people relevant for my work.

Another question that rises here is how representative my respondents are. To answer this question I believe one needs to have several thoughts running at the same time. For one it could be claimed that my segment does not include those who have less education, and whom will also be the future work force in Sri Lanka. It would be a real challenge if those not educated are not responding the same way to the same questions. In order to find whether information from this group was reliable I have, however, spoken to several people outside my segment about the same questions as well. These are not part of my material due to the lack of criteria for fitting into my segment. Nevertheless their answers were still drawing in the same direction as those given by my respondents. This is not to say that all young Sri Lankans will confirm my findings but rather that those asked and those with whom I have had conversations, either formal or informal, will provide the same ideas. Even so I do believe my respondents, as they came from many different backgrounds, do represent a selection of reliable information which to a certain degree can be generalized. And I do challenge other scholars to do so.

At a trip to a larger town in Norway, Kristiansand, I asked ten random people about one issue in order to provide data for one of my observations, and thus collected data which could be considered quantitative in the sense that the same question was given to all ten people and their answers were interpreted in a dichotomy; (1) – The LTTE was the opposition, (2) the Tamil people was the opposition.

In the further I do explain the different methods applied and also try to define their strengths and weaknesses for their purpose.

FACTORS I HAVE STUDIED

The factors I have studied are selected to enlighten the approach to the problem. The influence of religion on one's understanding of the Sri Lankan people's own identity was one variable I found important. It was also important to find how this influenced identity has an effect on the Sri Lankans' relationship to other ethnic groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka. I wanted to know about my informants' understanding of the conflict as well as how they identified in-group members from out-group members as far as ethnicity was concerned. I wanted to know more about whom the rightful inhabitants of Sri Lanka are and how one determines this. In the forming of opinions on ethnic identity I focused mainly on the role of religion in my interviews and then asked how this legacy was important for their understanding of who they understood were the rightful Sri Lankans. It was also important for me to find out how religion plays a role for the understanding of one's own group identity in comparison to other existing ethnic groups. I have used theoretical approaches from those theories described above when undertaking the interviews and I have also tried to present the findings I made in the chapter on analysis below.

In order to find respondents for my interviews I have to some extent been forced to focus on education level above Sri Lankan A/L, equivalent to High School or Upper Secondary School level. There are mainly two reasons for this; Education has a high priority in Sri Lanka today, and those of higher education are the ones who most likely will lead the country in the future. It is therefore very interesting to get information on to what extent religion matters in forming these people's identity as well as to what extent religion matters in inclusion or exclusion of other ethnic groups. The other reason is that many people of none or less education only to some extent seemed to be able to communicate in advanced English and therefore fell outside my own ability to communicate, in Sinhala or Tamil. If I would communicate in Sinhala, which is possible to a certain extent, I would still have very little knowledge in Tamil and would therefore need an interpreter or use English in communication with the Tamil people of my segment. This may of course be a weakness of method as many potential respondents

thereby are exempt from my selection. I have, though, tried to compensate for that fact by narrowing my conclusion with this in mind.

NEWS AND MEDIA

News and media in Western countries like Norway, Sweden, USA, United Kingdom and Canada have been easily accessible either through visual media like television or Internet, as well as paper versions of newspapers. The latter has been mostly through Norwegian newspapers and magazines. News and media data from Oriental countries have mostly been collected from Indian and Sri Lankan newspapers, as well as from radio and television while residing in the respective countries. As described above, while being in Norway versions of Sri Lankan newspapers have been accessible through the Internet.

INTERVIEWS

The interview data for this work are mainly collected from my August 2009 journey to Sri Lanka. Nevertheless I have also mentioned another pilot survey below done in December 2008. One informal survey was made in Kristiansand, Norway, where I asked 10 randomly chosen people on the main shopping street, Markens, one question if they knew what the war in Sri Lanka was fought over. The answers I got all insinuated that either the LTTE or the Tamil people fought for their separate state. I interpreted these answers into two categories as described above. This latter survey should not be considered a highly scholarly scientific research but is still an indication and an emphasis of the point underlined below.

December 2008

During one of my journeys to Sri Lanka, in December 2008, I held eight random experimental interviews with Sri Lankan adolescents, four Sinhalese and four Tamil. My respondents came from different locations of the island. Due to the political situation, though, it was not possible for me to travel to the Northern areas, mainly inhabited by Tamil people. This may to some extent weaken my informant's broader representation and the understanding of my conclusions should therefore be comprehended with this in mind. Through these interviews I

got some basic experience in how cautious people were to speak about the conflict of the nation. At the time there was a great tension as the government army started their main offensive on eliminating the LTTE from the island. Some questions were more difficult to get answers to than others. One place I stopped and approached three boys in their early twenties no one would answer even one question. They suspected me of working with a political group who tried to map those in opposition to the present government. When I assured them that was not the case they still declined to participate and even to speak to me at all. This made me think that those who had already spoken to me perhaps had answered me with great caution and thus were less reliable sources of information. It also seemed as if the Sinhalese considered Tamils to be their equal peers to a larger scale than the Tamil conception of this.

August 2009

In August 2009 I held another 14 interviews with young people in Sri Lanka between 18 and 28 years of age, both Sinhalese and Tamil.

Of the 14 young people six were Tamil and eight were Sinhalese. All of my respondents were either Sinhala Buddhists or Tamil Hindus. My selection has to some extent been random in order to get a representative selection from the main population. Each person interviewed has been selected through personal approach and they were invited to participate in a scientific research project for a master student from a Norwegian University. They were individually asked about their age, religion and educational level. Culturally these questions are not considered controversial in Sri Lanka and I therefore found them appropriate to ask.

If the individuals asked were not within my segment, I still asked them a few questions and thanked them for their gentleness. For me as a Westerner, even though I have lived quite some time in Sri Lanka, my assumptions of age and education was not always correct when approaching the people. More than twenty people, male and female, were “off target”. Even though these people are not composing the foundation of my findings, each of them – without exception – gave me the same impression that those constituting the selection of this master thesis did.

AGE

As mentioned before, when selecting the objects for this interview of 14 people I also limited the age segment from 19 to 26 years of age. The upper perimeter is set to find people who have only lived in Sri Lanka throughout the war⁷¹. The lower limit was necessary in order to find those who had completed their A/L.

GENDER

As far as gender is concerned in this interview I only had four female respondents in addition to ten young men. This may of course weaken a female point of view and should be considered in the further. The reason for the low number of female respondents was to some extent the cultural challenge that I as a married man from a Western society in his mid thirties would be alone with a single girl (read: young lady), either on a public arena or in a more private environment. This could bring her into dishonor and thereby create future difficulties for her. Reputation can apparently easily be smothered and is therefore also still protected accordingly by many Sri Lankans. Two of my female respondents agreed to the interview only if another female were present. The third one was interviewed in her work place where it was accepted to have more private meetings with the opposite gender. The fourth lady was married. I did know that this woman was married and I also knew her husband from before. This interview was done in their home as the husband was also present. The male respondents were interviewed in different locations like restaurants, homes as well as in a bar (over a cup of tea). All interviews were initiated with a brief introduction on what the survey was about as well as they were assured full discretion and assurance that their comments would not be used for any other purpose than that of this master thesis.

CONVERSATIONS

⁷¹ The war broke out in 1983

I have also had informal conversations concerning this master thesis with Sri Lankan politicians, both members of parliament and government ministers. I have spoken to professors of religion and to professors of political science in Sri Lanka who have given me information of great value to my works. Some renowned scholars, American and Sri Lankan, who have written extensively on Sri Lankan religion and politics have personally contributed with suggestions for further readings as well as brought to the fore some thoughts of my approach to the problem.

TOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

First of all I need to focus on my promise to all my informants, a guarantee of full anonymity when displaying their answers in this work. I have therefore changed names and gender on some of them but on others I have not. Nevertheless I do not mix essential characters as Tamil and Sinhalese, religious attachment or age. I have sometimes used the pronouns he and she inconsistently. It was, however, very important for my informants that their names would not under any circumstances be revealed. One of the young ladies, on the contrary, said she would be proud to have her name in this master thesis and that she would be proud to speak her opinions out loudly. Nevertheless I have declined to meet this aspiration in order to focus more on the information than on personal desire.

Some of the theories mentioned above will be applied to my analysis in more thorough ways than others. This may seem obvious but on the other hand it may also leave a question of why they are drawn into this master thesis at all. I do nevertheless believe that those not so heavily applied are functional and important in order to shed light on certain aspects on this study. I will in the following chapter discuss the theories in light of the answers given by the informants. Their subjective answers do indeed challenge or support the theories applied.

There are many artifacts and circumstances that I am not able to reproduce in writing, such as gestures, smells, sounds and voice intonation. That is a pity because there are many feelings from the respondents that were made obvious through the conversations. Sri Lankan people are also in general speaking with more than just words. They use hands, face gestures, breath

and small sounds with their mouth when uttering different meanings. In the further I have not been able to give too much room for such descriptions but in certain cases I have tried to add such artifacts to the respective text.

In the following chapter I will draw on the theories from the chapter on theories above and also from the data collected from my respondents. Even though some theories are mentioned in-between and together with others I strive to hold a steady path where the following theories are enlightened respectively; starting with socialization, then identity where I will firstly focus on the social identity theory, furthermore the face of the other before I will draw on the theory of different layers, presented by Bruce, while dealing with Kriesberg's different identities. Then a section on semantics is presented before I will deal with primordial hatred, socioeconomic tensions and finally a short example of myths and history.

ANALYSIS

Now what do all of this have to do with to what extent religion is influencing young people's understanding of their own identity in post-conflict Sri Lanka and how? Perhaps are these viewpoints inherited and transferred to the young generation growing up to become the new bearers of the Sri Lankan society. Perhaps they have changed due to evolution of society through this time period? One way to find out was to ask the young people themselves how they interpret the situation today.

Generally I was quite surprised by the results gained from the interviews. I did have some narrow-mindedness in advance on how Sinhalese and Tamils looked at each other as different groups. My understanding, even after being in Sri Lanka for quite some occasions, was that there was more rigid practice of in-group policy among older people than among the young. Yet, I thought this in-group traditional thinking was still pretty strong in both groups; the Sinhalese and the Tamil. On the other hand the results give a reason for looking at the Sri Lankan situation from a different perspective than many scholars and writers have done before. Both Tamil and Sinhalese in this study seemed to be of the opinion that ethnic markers were perhaps not so important anymore for being a true Sri Lankan.

SOCIALIZATION

Growing up and residing in Sri Lanka, include immeasurable impressions to an individual. There are so many different cultural artifacts one is exposed to and even more ideas of how to apply these artifacts in the lives of the people. Every family and its substitutes meet these challenges and try to formalize them into a meaningful comprehensiveness for their own lives as well as for the lives of those cared for. Through these processes of socialization it seems to be crucial to the community of how adaptive and enlightened these processes really are. In Sri Lanka some people think that their own social groups are the only in-groups with the right to live in and govern their county. Others are more open-minded and accept anyone to do so. Between these poles I was fortunate to meet a variety of people who had different experiences and whom also exerted their social background in diverse ways.

Two of my respondents, both Tamil from Northern Sri Lanka, told they were afraid of a segregated Sri Lanka in the future. One of them told the following story:

“We will always be Tamil; nothing can ever change that fact. The government hates us. They want to kill all Tamil in Sri Lanka. You can just look at how they come on weekends to Periamullah⁷². These Buddhist people (read: the Sri Lankan Police and the army) just walk into the houses and arrest people even with no reason. Perhaps there is one or two that are LTTE but most people are not. I am not, my wife is not, this man, this family...none of them is LTTE, so why should these buggers come and disturb like that? If they suspect this man being LTTE, they arrest that house owner and even other people in the house. That is crazy. This has been like that all my life and I can't see how this is going to change in the future. The government hates us and that Buddhist President with his red scarf just wants to rule us and make us like slaves – understand?”

⁷² *Periamullah is a suburb to Negombo and is mostly inhabited by Tamils.*

I asked this person if he had Sinhalese friends or if he mingled with Sinhalese in school or other places. He answered that he had only attended Tamil schools and that he had no reason for mingling with the Sinhalese Buddhists during his upbringing. I then asked him if he was talking about Sinhalese people or Buddhist people.

It's all the same – Sinhalese-Buddhist, Buddhist Sinhala...

This person was also born and raised in Jaffna. He told me that he didn't know about Sinhalese people before he was 14 years old. Before that he only thought that he himself and all other people in Sri Lanka were Tamil. That is what he learned in school in Jaffna, he told. He came to the town of Negombo on the West coast when he was 17 years old. First he found it very difficult to live there because the people spoke another language that he was not familiar with. His family in Negombo, that is his auntie's mother's home, were all Tamil and experienced what they considered to be persecution – all because of their Tamil background.

The other Tamil person who thought that Sri Lanka was going to be a segregated country in the future had only attended Tamil schools as well. This person had a job at a foreign factory and was working together with both Sinhalese, foreign and Tamil co-workers. He was even married to a Sinhalese girl with whom he had a child:

"There is nothing different between Sinhalese and Tamil. We are all Sri Lanka people. Only thing not all Sinhalese people understand that. When Sinhalese people see a Tamil boy they think: "He is LTTE!" They think I am LTTE. That is not correct. I want to live like normal Sri Lanka man in my family. I am married to Sinhalese girl and my child is mix. I don't care Sinhala or Tamil. Only thing I care is Sri Lanka people. We all are Sri Lanka people. Problem is government. They think I am LTTE, so I can't go outside in evening. Then police will come and arrest me and my wife and child will be scared. This will not change, no, no, no, government does not like LTTE, and so they don't like Tamil. They don't like LTTE now or in future. This is always going to be problem in Sri Lanka. Problem is not normal people. See, my wife is Sinhala, I am Tamil..."

The two Tamil persons described above both did only attend Tamil schools and had been raised within a Tamil social network. The person who came from Jaffna was socialized into believing that there were only Tamil people in Sri Lanka. He then moved to a multi ethnic and multi religious town, Negombo, where he settled in a Tamil dominated area of the town. I have myself witnessed how the crowds of police and the army are blocking areas in this person's part of town in the search for LTTE members. On the other hand it seems to me that the officials are searching where Tamil groups are gathered or more correctly, live. Tamil people live all over Negombo as well but there are very seldom raids in other areas where they live among other ethnic groups. What may be the case is that this person is right about the government and the police. It may also be the case that one searches for honey where the honey pot may be. It is perhaps more likely for LTTE sympathizers to camouflage in a Tamil neighborhood than elsewhere. And thus more likely for the official authority to look for LTTE where there is a greater possibility to find them.

Nevertheless through the socialization process these two persons have experienced something that has formed their understanding of their ethnic identity. The result of this is that such socialization and identity has given them an understanding of the government victimizing them. They are both victims of a segregating government. The first one seems upset with the Sinhalese and Buddhist government. He also thinks that Sinhalese people are all Buddhist people and even adds an equal mark between them. He thinks religion and ethnic belonging is two sides of the same coin. It also seems that he who have not interacted very much with Sinhalese people is afraid of something unknown and that he interpret his life view from a socialization within a mere Tamil society. Drawing from Levinas he might be afraid of what he has not met, or he has not in reality seen the face of the other. This person's life view is strongly colored by his Tamil upbringing and he also has a way to identify himself with his in-group and keep a pretty thick line between his peers and other out-groups.

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

The other person seems to have a totally different life view. He has even married a Sinhalese girl. To him there is no difference and no hostility between the Tamil and the Sinhalese as Sri Lankans on the general level. The problem he finds erected is that the government is not discerning who is Tamil and also LTTE, and who is only Tamil. I had lunch in this person's

home and during my stay there several people came by, both Sinhalese and Tamil. They came into the living room, had a glass of sweet and salt lime juice and left after a small chat. It seemed to me as if this family was well integrated in both the Sinhalese and the Tamil society and that this was the most normal way of life in Sri Lanka today. I did not really pay so much attention to whether people are Sinhalese or Tamil while in Sri Lanka as it seems like most people consider each other equal and Sri Lankans. The in-group of this person is quite larger than the one of the first person described above. This latter man's in-group was labeled: "Sri Lankans who were not government and not LTTE". This person never considered religion to being a problem, not even for the upbringing of their child. He thought it would be most practical raising their child through the Buddhist religion and traditions, sending it to a government school as well as teaching it the Buddhist moral and ethics. The primary socialization of this child is to my understanding providing it with the definitions needed for in-group membership. Not only because of its probable rearing in a Sinhala - Buddhist environment but also because of the fact that both its parents are from different ethnic background and that they most probably will teach it not to discriminate between the two as far as ethnicity is concerned. Through my many stays in Sri Lanka I have actually met many young ethnically mixed couples with children who have a similar practice to this family.

All of my other informants rebuked me when I asked about whom they favored the most; Sinhalese or Tamil? One man looked at me and said:

No, no...I can't believe you are even asking such a question at all...If you honestly ask this question you can't be very much educated. I don't mean to offend you, Sir, but you should know that people in Sri Lanka should not favor anyone more than the other. I am Sinhalese, he is Tamil. Why should any one of us have more value than the other? Who is to decide, me or him??? No, you can't ask such a question. If you by such a question try to ask if I would favor him because he is my friend, I will tell you yes. But not because he is Sinhalese or Tamil. You see, some people think Sri Lankan people are just Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or Burgher. In one way that is true but that is not how we look at each other. We are all Sri Lankan. A true Sri Lankan live in this country and will give his life to protect his family and friends

against any enemy. It doesn't matter what race you are from. We are all Sri Lankan.

I asked him if he would join the army to fight against the Tamils for the government troops. He instantly confirmed that he would fight any hostile enemy who tried to destroy his country. He strongly instructed me not to use Tamil as synonym to LTTE. Educated people should definitely know the difference, he told me.

At the moment of our conversation the Sri Lankan troops were fighting the LTTE in a nearby zone on the East coast and we could actually hear the sounds of bomb shelling from where we spoke. His face suddenly changed to a different gesture when a loud shell sounded from the other side of the mountain.

These people (read: LTTE) have destroyed our freedom as long as I can remember. They are real buggers who only spread fear and trouble to all Sri Lankans. They make trouble for the Sinhalese, the Tamil and for the Muslims.

I kindly asked him to clarify this and tell me what made him separate between these groups.

You see, the Sinhalese people is majority in Sri Lanka. Almost four out of five is Sinhalese. That is about 75-80 per cent. The Sinhalese have their own culture and their religion. They are Buddhist. They eat kiribath and stringhoppers and do many things different from the Tamils. Their religion is maybe Hindu, maybe Muslim or Christian or some Astrology – I don't know... They eat chapathis and other stuff. Most Muslims are Tamils. They have their own way of life, they don't eat pork, they don't drink alcohol, or they are not supposed to do that, I think. They are good people – all are good people. We all live in Sri Lanka as one people with different ideas of what is the good life. We don't kill or shout to this one or that one just because his religion or his food. We like all Sri Lankans to have a good life. Only thing is LTTE who just happen to be Tamils but they are Tamil buggers. I don't see them as Tamils. Tamils don't behave like this, Tamils are good people, just like you and me. The LTTE does not belong here. They are not Sri Lankans and all this

bomb shelling is good; after few days or weeks the Sri Lankan army is winning and we will have peace – I hope.”

The other informants were all of the opinion that Sri Lankans were those living in the country not trying to separate it for ethnic, political or religious reasons. This is in great contrast to an interpretation of Dharmapala’s speech above⁷³, where he segregates his Sinhalese peers from “the others”. His understanding of in-group in contrast to out-groups is also becoming clear as the “barbaric vandals” came and destroyed the “Paradise”...made by “the Aryan Sinhalese”. As Tamils consider themselves Dravidan descendants they are not Aryan and thus also a different race, according to Dharmapala. They belong to an out-group, like Europeans and other Hindu and Christians “... who do not know religion.” In Dharmapala’s time these pagans were fading away and the dream that the genuine Sinhalese were getting back their beautiful paradise was about to come to pass.

This vision did not seem very relevant to the Sinhalese in my interviews. One Sinhalese lady who owned a beauty parlor told me:

“Some years ago I thought all Tamils were terrorists and I was afraid of them, not as persons but as a group. My parents and my grandmother always told me to stay away from those dangerous people. I was born and raised in the South and we hardly ever had any Tamils in our schools even. On the other hand I had a distance to Tamils, partly because I lived in a very Sinhalese dominated area but also because those people lived in the North. They told me that. So when I went to do my degree in Colombo I met lots of Tamils every day, in school, at the shops and even in my class. First I didn’t think about it but then one girl told me she was Tamil. First I thought, oh my god, but then I thought that I never thought of her like that before. I don’t know, perhaps I was very ignorant while I was growing up, but I swear I never thought she was Tamil. After collecting my mind I decided to give her a chance. And after a while I never even considered her different than me –

⁷³ *IBID:17*

speaking of her being Tamil, I mean. Of course she was different than some of the others but so was many of the girls too. I think you understand me, don't you..?

THE FACE OF THE OTHER

Another interesting conversation brought to the fore something that might be of great importance in order to understand the present situation where young Sri Lankans seem to care less for the in-group/out-group identification than I initially expected. I met this young man in a restaurant. He invited me to sit at his table because of the lack of seats. After finding out that he fit my segment of informants I asked him to participate in my survey. He worked in a computer business in Colombo and told me he was Sinhalese and Buddhist.

“I really think you are looking for something that may not even be there.” He caught my attention and really pushed my buttons;

Today we learn in school that there is no reason for dividing into race and religion. What is important is not finding the differences between people but how we can live together without fight and war. My responsibility is not just to protect my own religion and my own identity as a Sinhalese. There is a greater responsibility for me. I have to learn about how the Tamil religion is. I need to know what kind of values are important to the Tamil people. Then only I can understand why the Tamil people behave the way they do. I don't think that there is a big problem between the Tamil and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. If I don't understand why my Tamil brother hates me I have to find out what I did to him. If he thinks I am angry with him he has to find out why I am angry with him. It is only when I meet him I can understand why he is angry. I have to meet the Tamil man to understand what he thinks...

This brought up the theory described above about the face of the other. Levinas' hypothesis is here on the test, and passes. It is through the face of the other that I learn to know the other –

and myself. Other informants also mentioned similar ideas. One young man said in the interview:

Those days the fighting between the Sinhala man and the Tamil people was about revenge. People from a Sinhala family was killed in a bomb blast. Then they get very angry at the Tamil people and hate them. They want to kill all Tamil people, like that. This happen many times and then the bad feeling grow. This is not like that today. It is true that Sinhala people are killed by Tigers (read:LTTE) but it is also nothing wrong with Tamil people. When we meet Tamil people he can be my friend same way Sinhala man is my friend. My friend is someone I know, not Tamil, Sinhalese or Norwegian, like you. You are my friend because I know you.

IS IT REALLY AN ETHNIC CONFLICT?

One very important question to ask oneself was brought to my attention through a conversation with a minister of government when I visited a jungle area on one of my trips to Sri Lanka. This was not in an interview setting. We ate lunch together and were learning to know each other when he told me that we should perhaps revise certain expressions when talking about the Sri Lankan conflict. It is not really an ethnic conflict, he told me in a sentence. This opened my eyes to something most of my interview respondents had also told me. One can clearly see that the LTTE has been fighting and still is advocating a standpoint of power devolution based on ethnicity. In this same perspective one can see the Sri Lankan government's prevention of this perception by treating Tamils as suspicious representatives of the LTTE. This point of view has been heavily focused in Western media for several years. I believe this may be a partly correct judgment up to the change of the Millennium. Nevertheless there is no doubt in my research that there is a clear tendency to understanding the conflict from another perspective today. By *today* I refer mainly to the last decade. In this period the tendency to understanding the Sri Lankan conflict as mainly a conflict between the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka is strong. The conflict itself is not between any claimed ethnic groups in today's Sri Lanka but rather a fight between LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. The claims made by the LTTE have up till now been rejected by the present President. The President believes that all Sri Lankan ethnic groups can live

harmoniously together as one nation in one nation state under the same flag. He has stated in one of his most famous speeches that there are only two peoples in Sri Lanka: Those who love the country of their birth, and those who do not. He accepts that there are different shades of Sri Lankans in the sense that they have different religions, different customs and different backgrounds. Even so there is to his understanding no need for a separate state or power devolution. As an example he refers to India which has many different groups of people, different religions and is widely differentiated culturally. Nevertheless the members of the nation are all Indian. In the same way the President of Sri Lanka seem to have a desire to govern one people – the nation of Sri Lanka -not the Sinhalese nor the Tamils or any other group inhabiting the island state. The situation today brings up the hypothesis that Sri Lanka is evolving into a nation state with democratic principles which are supposed to be equal to all. Perhaps this is not the complete portrait today but the new generation of Sri Lankans seems to have an idea to continue advocating such a point of view for the future. I discussed this matter with an intellectual man in Sri Lanka during a social gathering. As this was not an interview I cannot quote him directly, due to lack of notes, but I am referring our conversation according to my memory. I challenged him by asking how it may be possible for Sri Lanka to achieve such a situation with all the tensions that we have witnessed through the last part of the 20th Century. He instantly pointed to the USA and reminded me of how the black people there were suppressed and how they fought for their democratic rights, especially after World War II. He also told me that they fought their way into presidency and said that even though they are a minority in the USA they do today have the same rights as any other American. There is no legal use of segregation between black American rights, white American rights, Irish American rights or Hispanic American rights etc. We are only speaking of American rights because the people who live in the country are Americans and are not separated by ethnic typologies. The same way we may experience a Sri Lanka in where there are Sri Lankan rights. Education is not restricted by ethnicity anymore, the national language is not only Sinhalese anymore, the democratic rights of Tamils are judicially equal and the options for official jobs are no longer restricted for Tamils, as they were before. There has been a change, or an evolution, in the Sri Lankan society through the last decades, providing more unity and more equality among the inhabitants of Sri Lanka. It is believed that those fighting for self rule or independency, like the LTTE, are not really fighting for a Tamil liberation anymore. This liberation is already in progress in Sri Lanka regardless of the LTTE, and the

LTTE is fighting for their old non-evolved agenda dating back to a time where revolutions and strong Tamil voices were imperative. Actually the LTTE's battle for a home land is a distress for the Tamil people. Because of the LTTE they feel oppressed by the government in times of discerning who among Tamils are LTTE. Today Sri Lanka also offers higher socio economic circumstances for all and thus this is a way by which education, for one, is a very important artifact.

Both Tamils and Sinhalese agreed to the fact that they were all Sri Lankans no matter the conflict situation in the country. Two of the Tamil respondents and one Sinhalese told me that I was looking for something that was not there, there was no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka as such. They both agreed to the fact that there was a conflict in Sri Lanka but that this conflict was not a conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The conflict, to their understanding, was between the LTTE, who had support only from some of the Tamil people but far from all. According to their opinion the LTTE had most of its supporters from the exile Tamils. One told me that most Sri Lankan Tamils are so tired of the LTTE because they are causing oppression of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Through the many conversations I had with my respondents they were all informing me that there is no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka today. They all blame the different incidents of segregation through the last decade on the LTTE and they are all telling that they are happy the war is over. Some think it may emerge again after a few years if the government does not keep control and live up to its promises but only two of the respondents are not supporting the present President politically. These two vote for the oppositional political party UNP.

MANY IDENTITIES

Kurth argues that when identifying collectively, people feel injured when those who share their identity are injured. I will suggest that if this is the case then the LTTE who profess to share the collective identity with the Tamil people would be supported by the Tamil people and would not be excluded as an conflicting group. There is at least none of the Tamil respondents, except for one, who seem to feel injured if the LTTE is injured. Nevertheless they do seem to share a pretty strong tendency of the LTTE as an enemy who is trying to

destroy Sri Lankan people with whom both Tamil and Sinhalese people seem to identify to a higher degree.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Focusing on the role of religion there was one Sinhalese man who submitted a very interesting approach to this subject:

Religion is not fundamentally important for being a good Sinhalese. I went to an international school where we all shared the same values. We were all the same; Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims... all were the same. These differences are not something that make us less or higher than any other. We are all Sri Lankans, we live in one country, we have one flag, we are one people. Religion is not important for us. We need to show a universal love to all people.

Nevertheless this person professed to be Buddhist but expressed clearly that he did not live a devotional Buddhist life with pujas and visiting in temples.

I know the teachings of the Lord Buddha, of course. I am a Buddhist. I was raised like that in my family. But in school I was never able to practice my religion as a devotee. I don't think religion is very important to understand other people. In school we learned to respect all people regardless of religion, skin color, money or anything like that.

For this person it was more important to understand other people beyond religion. His idea was that one should accept one another not because of any cultural artifacts but rather despite of such addendum. Not surprisingly this person clearly told that he did not have a devotional Buddhist practice but nevertheless considered himself a Buddhist and also considered the Lord Buddha's basic teachings being important for daily life, not because of its religious significance but rather as a good alternative of morals and ethics. To this person religious basic values were important for discerning right from wrong and for how to live one's life in the best way possible. Furthermore the idea of ethnicity was neither a matter of conscience.

He claimed he did not even think of other people's ethnic background and argued that he had learned his ethics from Buddhism but that Christians, Hindus or Muslims all had more or less the same basics for ethics and morals in their religions. Another person agreed to this fact:

"I cannot speak for all peoples in Sri Lanka but I think all Sri Lankans must be true to their religious culture. If anyone is Buddhist he doesn't have to be a monk and wear an orange robe. Being a Buddhist is being a respectful person who live a life according to the Lord Buddha's teaching. I can't say that I have no religion. I believe that all peoples in Sri Lanka has a religion. Not a religion where they go to temple or some go to church, like that. Buddhism, OK(?), Buddhism is not telling peoples to worship many times every day or go to church to please any god or so. Buddhism is a way of living, you see. When I see someone poor, I should give that person something, if someone ask me a question I should tell the truth. What I do good things every day is Buddhism, understand..? That is why all peoples in Sri Lanka are religious. I can't tell to another person that his life is not good because that he has another religion. I think Christian and Hindu also have things like that. It is not all the worship and going to church. It is how you live. This is something all peoples in Sri Lanka teach to the children. Christian, Hindu and Muslim peoples also, not only Buddhist people do that."

Another young Tamil lady, who was married to a Sinhalese man had in a similar point of view:

"My husband is Sinhalese and I am Hindu. Sometimes I have to do my religious things like pray and go to puja in the devali. He respects that and that makes it much easier for me to practice my religion. He is Buddhist and sometimes I go with him to temple also. I think religion is not only all the things we do to make the gods happy when we visit the devali. The gods are also very happy when we do the right things in the home and in the street. I have to love my husband and honor him and respect him. I also have to be a good mother to my child. Sometimes my

mother needs a place to stay and then I have to give one room for her. Like that every day I have to think how the gods will be happy...”

The impression I get through speaking to these young women and men is, almost in a Durkheimian spirit, that religion has an adhesive function in the Sri Lankan society, influencing its members to having a conscious perspective on morality and ethics. Religion also has the function of comparing one's own values with those of others. It seems like the young Sri Lankans in my study is able to use religion as an instrument to understanding other's life views and concepts and in turn receive the respect of the others. In this perspective religion is not only being an artifact in a cultural terminology but also a constructive instrument in social- as well as political- and psychological sciences in Sri Lanka.

For the Tamil respondents religion was important in order to being a good Tamil. Religion was very important in the upbringing of a child because this was when to learn the rules of life; how to separate right from wrong and good from evil. All the Tamil respondents claimed to be practicing their religion. Two of the respondents had background from Jaffna and both told that they were brought up believing that there was only one people in their country – the Tamil people. One of them tells a story of how he came to a larger town in Sri Lanka because the parents fled from the North. The first meeting with the new Sinhalese dominated area was terrifying to him. The family found a Hindu temple in where to worship but had little contact with the rest of the Sinhala population. One of the scariest artifacts was the language. There was no knowledge of the Sinhalese language and therefore it was very difficult to communicate with all the non-Tamil people. This person only got Tamil friends although living in a Sinhalese majority area. He continued attending a Tamil school where Sinhalese was also taught and after a few months of schooling he eventually learned how to communicate with other Sri Lankans.

These interviews are yet again building a foundation for the question whether this conflict has mostly been understood from an outside perspective or not. It seems like when it comes to essential attributes the social identity formation and division into in-group and out-group is not heavily depended on religion or ethnicity as far as the case of the conflict in Sri Lanka is

concerned. The larger picture seems to be LTTE or not, Sri Lankan or not. Perhaps is this a result of the focus the present President has had on his parole “One Nation under One Flag”, implying that all ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka, who love their country, is entitled to carry the in-group element of being true Sri Lankan.

MYTHS AND HISTORY

According to the idea of Obeyesekere the myths and the ancient history has to be culturally constructed and fostered through wars and other mechanisms before they may be linked to the “...historical consciousness of a group through the myths and literary products of an age ranging from serious literature to jingoistic national anthems.”⁷⁴ Through all of my interviews I asked my respondents if they could tell me “the Vijaya story”. Only two of the Tamil respondents did not know this myth and only one person knew it well enough to tell it with the main contents. I asked what this story meant to them with replies like:

“I am not sure what it means but it is a nice story to tell our childrens”

“The story is about the Sinhalese and how they came to Sri Lanka those days. To me it means that some of those people was also Tamil, I think. It is not very important.”

“Vijaya was a great man, he was actually a lion-man, with the blood of a lion... Can you imagine what will happen when this blood gets into our vains? We will roar like lions and scare everybody away. We don't need that. We have just got rid of the Tigers...”

“This story has nothing to do with real life. We know it as a fairytale and it is part of our culture.”

Obeyesekere argues that myths and history may have a function of creating identity but this function is rather a self-conceived perception of what one thinks is a true cultural legacy, and

⁷⁴ <http://www.buddhistethics.org/10/obeyesekere-sri-lanka-conf.html>

especially when the nation (read: the Sri Lankan people) is under threat. There is no doubt that Sri Lanka has a cultural legacy that is also being fought the ownership over. According to the Sri Lankan constitution it is the country's obligation to foster and nourish the Buddhist religion. This is also what the government claims to do. Nevertheless Tamils and Sinhalese alike in my interview agree to the fact that democratic elected representatives should have the vote to change the country's constitution if they are not satisfied with its content. The heritage from "the Vijaya story" is pretty much compared to folklore and is not, by my respondents, considered to be the true story and evidence of anyone's right to claim legitimacy of Sri Lankan dominion. However, when asking the respondents who are then the genuine Sri Lankan people all, except one, answered "The Vaddas".

CONCLUSION

To some of the readers of this master thesis it may seem like I am advocating the side of the Sri Lankan government. I do see this possibility but nevertheless I need to emphasize the fact that I really did think I would find a totally different situation in Sri Lanka when starting my works. Through readings of literature on the subject of war and ethnic conflicts around the world, as well as reading newspapers both from Europe and America, in addition to news from Sri Lanka. I was surprised to find these results as most materiel I had read before did focus generally on an ethnic conflict in which religious attributes had an amplifying effect, or no effect at all.

It must also be strongly enlightened that only two of my informants came from Jaffna and the Northern Province. The reason for this is the lack of accessibility to the refugee camps in the North. At the same time there may have been complicated accessibility to relevant data as the current situation is very tense in these camps. It would nevertheless have been very interesting to do a similar survey in another 3-5 years to see if and in that case how the situation may have changed.

The Sri Lankan situation is very complex and it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to understand all the sides and reasons for the initiation and development throughout the last part of the 20th Century and until today. Nevertheless there are some certain details that emerge which have caused more implications than others. As this also seems to be the fact we should be aware of the possibility that such an enduring conflict could change its focus throughout the years. The importance of understanding the circumstances from different layers is crucial in order to speak of the Sri Lankan conflict today. What may have been a strongly supported political revolutionary riot based on ethnicity some thirty years ago may perhaps not have the same bearing from the same groups today. Society has developed, or should I rather use the term evolved. Through this evolution of the Sri Lankan, as well as the international society, demands and desires from the people involved have been met along the way and is thus not needed anymore. Hence the fight for a separate or federate state in Sri Lanka is no more a need for the Tamil people the same way it was before. Issues like language and ethnic selection for university education are not issues anymore, as these laws through the decades have been changed in favor of those suppressed. Speaking to Sri Lankan people today give a different picture than what might have been the situation two or three decades ago.

RELIGION AND ITS INFLUENCE

Religion has been a large factor of ethnic identity and ethnic formation, mostly through socialization. This becomes clear through the similar comments from the interview respondents, and also through the many conversations held. What seems interesting with this is the fact that this religious identity is used as a reference to how one relate to those not in the same in-group and gather the out-groups into a larger group. Like this the otherness is in many ways set aside through the meeting with face of the others and thus a new in-group is comprised of those who share the sameness, as Sri Lankans.

I would suggest the statement that the armed war was initiated because of a high political and ethnic tension in the seventies, brought about of an unstable and to some extent impulsive political ideas leading back to the time of independence. The impulsiveness was acted from both sides and they were not able to understand each other's intentions before acting. We must understand the development and evolution that has taken place in Sri Lanka for the last

three decades, as Bruce suggests; on different layers. I would also agree with Kurth in general but it must be emphasized that times change, I would rather use the term evolve, and through a post-modern influence in a progressing globalized world, so do attitude and tolerance, as my interviews indicate. Through this evolution not only the quality of each artifact have changed, the needs and requirements have also evolved and are different from what they initially were.

Religion was the comfort when moving to a new district where everything was new and unknown. Through religion one learns to understand one's own identity but also how to understand other people's principles and values as they become comparable or contesting to your own. The thoughts of Levinas⁷⁵ it is in the meeting with others you get to know who you are and what values you possess, as well as learning to understand these qualities of the other. In this perspective the understanding of religion was very important in the formation of one's identity and also in order to understand others'.

The young people in my study all had a firm religious relationship, implying they lived according to the teachings of their religion. Religion was important for their identity and for the way they lived their daily lives. They focused on how religion had been shaping their daily life since early childhood and how they were influenced by religion in school, at home, at Dhamma School and in the divali or temple. Most of their childhood friends belonged to the same religion as well. Religion was also the foundation for their perception of right from wrong and also for how to relate to others with different values.

I will close by underlining the importance of religion in dialogue. It seems as if religion may actually promote dialogue and understanding among diverse groups, even through conflict. Religion may even be considered an adhesive keeping societies and groups vital. Finally it is important to realize that the image of religion as impeding for dialogue is overstated. We should not ignore that religion may be more important in interdisciplinary approaches

⁷⁵ Peperzak, Levinas. *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Purdue University Series in the History of Philosophy

between the humaniora and the social- and political sciences, than might have been assumed in the past.

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