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Dynamics of Essentialist Representations of Nationhood and the Politics of Interpretation:

The Role of Religion in the Making and Unmaking of the Sri Lankan Nation-State

Being a thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor in Philosophy
in the University of Dublin

by

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Irish School of Ecumenics

2008

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Summary

Sometimes the impression given of the Lankan conflict by both the local and mainstream media is that the conflict has been caused by primordial or perennial antagonisms that existed between the parties involved. Such a projection adds evidence to the unchecked hypothesis of a 'clash of civilisations' that is supposed to be gaining ground in the emerging world order. In my study of the Lankan conflict I argue that it is mainly a modern conflict which has its roots in the colonial and postcolonial state-building.

The present model of the Sri Lankan nation-state, which is upheld by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, is a Western colonial construction. They however have internalised it through a colonial and post-colonial recycling of pre-existing cultural narratives in order to consolidate the centralised state structure, territorial sovereignty of the entire island and cultural homogenisation. I also note how within the international system of nation-states there is an Orientalist-Occidentalist antagonism that divides geo-political spaces into 'East' and 'West'. Within this local and global context the perception of Sri Lankan nationhood has become essentialist and therefore exclusivist and has contributed to a process of discrimination particularly against the Tamil community in Lanka. The Tamil ethnic (cultural) consciousness has also grown into a Tamil national consciousness which demands the right to self-determination. Therefore, the Lankan conflict is a conflict between two forms of nationalism - ethno-religious (Sinhala Buddhist) nationalism and ethno (Tamil) nationalism.

The role that Western Christianity played in the colonial practice of state-building and the role that Buddhism played in envisaging the Sri Lankan nation-state were associated with justifications of dominant power structures. Such justifications have blurred the ethical dimension in these traditions. Nevertheless, I argue that these traditions can contribute to the envisaging of an alternative paradigm of state-building that would promote a just and peaceful co-existence among diverse ethnic and religious communities in Lanka. Such an attempt needs an alternative politics of interpretation, which has to emerge from the conscientised victims of the dominant structures of nation-building as a cultural, economic and political project.

In the present phase of globalisation where local and global realities are

interwoven, it is necessary to envisage an alternative paradigm both within Lanka and within Europe, (Europe as Lanka's former colonial power) in order to avoid the Orientalist-Occidentalist stereotypes. While tapping the *cultural and social capital* (as Pierre Bourdieu puts it), especially within Christianity and Buddhism, within the Sinhala and Tamil communities and within Europe, I propose an alternative paradigm of organising the political community in Lanka. In that endeavour I identify concrete local and European capacities that can facilitate the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state that will bring about a just peace.

The Lankan conflict therefore is not another example of a 'clash of civilisations' (Tamil Dravidian vs. Sinhala Aryans, East vs. West, etc.). Instead, the conflict itself evokes our moral responsibility and calls us to subvert the historicised *mythos* of these cultures and retrieve their liberative potential by identifying the complementary specificities within them that can promote the principles of equality, interdependence and diversity.

Acknowledgements

This work is the result of my constant interaction with the Lankan praxis over the last twenty five years. I was born into an extended Sinhalese Roman Catholic family of fishermen and women in the multi-ethnic and muti-religious city of Negambo (though the Catholics call it 'Little Rome'!). I began to learn Tamil after July 1983 as a moral response to the anti-Tamil riots that marked a crucial turning point in Tamil-Sinhala relationships on the island of Lanka. When the socioeconomic grievances of the vernacular-educated rural Sinhala youth, who were mostly Buddhist, caused their 1987-1989 uprising against the government, I gave up my English education as a sign of solidarity with them. Those who were educated through English had job prospects while the vernacular-educated were unemployed. These were not mere individual decisions, but the outcome of collective reflection by a group of friends who shared similar concerns and committed themselves to articulate and concretise an alternative vision for Lankan society. However, when the same Sinhala youth movement became chauvinistic in supporting the government's war against the Tamils, I and my friends became critics of that movement. This critical step necessitated a search both within Lanka and in other parts of the world for liberative knowledge, which will help to resolve the Lankan conflict. After my basic degrees in philosophy and theology I never dreamt of pursuing postgraduate studies. Changing personal and political circumstances (which are interwoven with each other) led me, after much persuasion from two of my mentors, to come to Dublin. One of them is Aloysius Pieris S.J., a Buddhist scholar, and the other is Xavier Karunaratnam, a Tamil human rights activist. Along with these two people I remember with great respect both Sinahla and Tamil groups with whom I have journeyed. It is they who gave me inspiration and the courage to continue with the search for knowledge that will help millions who are affected by the Lankan conflict.

I was out of the country as the 2002 ceasefire agreement began to fail. As the democratic space for cross-community meetings narrowed those who work for a just peace were considered to be aiding terrorism. My friends were affected. One was killed, some others were physically assaulted and others were threatened. I often felt that I should fly back home. In the meantime I heard the words of concern from my friends at home saying 'had you been there you would have been no more!' I had to

do all that I could to get some friends out of the country. Were it not for the caring concern of the Irish School of Ecumenics amid all this, I would not have continued with my studies. I owe very much to them. My supervisor Prof. John D'Arcy May constantly persuaded me to think about the contribution that academic research can make to peace-building in Lanka. Not only his intellectual insights but also his personal concern made me strong.

I also remember here with respect Prof. Linda Hogan, Dr Geraldine Smyth, Dr. Iain Atack, Dr. Andrew Pierce, Dr. David Tombs, Dr. Johnston McMaster, John O'Grady and Barbara O'Shea for help they gave me in so many ways. Sláine O' Hogain, Christine Houlahan, Aideen Woods and Mary Priestman always went out of their way to help me and other students whenever a need arose. All of these men and women formed the ISE ethos without which a person like me would not have continued to study. I thank Prof. Peter Schalk (Uppsala Univeristy), Prof. Lieve Troch (Sao Paulo University), Huub Vogelaar (Utrecht University), Prof. Jacques Hares (Louvain University), Prof. Francois Houtart (Centre Tricontinental), Edward Tissera (Boston), Sherard Jayawardene, Jude Preman (All-Ceylon Fisherfolk Trade Union) and Lal Lakshman (*Kithusara* Group) for their moral and intellectual support. Whenever I needed books and original documents Eddie, Sherard and Lal helped me to get them without any delay. I also remember the Churchtown Quaker Community, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Priory Institute, Tallaght and the Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka who helped me to ground myself in an Irish *praxis* and made my stay in Ireland meaningful.

A special word of thanks should go to Mary O'Connor and Rosy who proof-read my thesis with a lot of patience. Mary left the corrected versions in my letter box either in the middle of the night or in the early hours of the morning. I also remember here with respect and gratitude Trinity College and Porticus for bearing the financial burden of a non-EU student like me. Finally, my beloved Nadee had to bear the pain of long hours of my silence at our small apartment while I worked some days from 3.00 a.m. till 6.00 p.m. I owe her so much. Nadee's only brother was a soldier who died in the war. He was a Sinhalese. I have lost many of my Tamil friends whom I loved immensely and whose human aspirations for a just peace continue to inspire both me and Nadee. In the daily reflection and prayer of our married life we remember all those who continue to struggle for a just peace, particularly in Lanka. I remember here especially Rohitha Bashana Abeywardene (*Hiru* Group), a Sinhalese

who continues to envision a common struggle among all communities in Lanka. Sharmila Logeshwaran (All-Ceylon Teachers' Association), his wife, was born to a Tamil Hindu father and a Sinhala Buddhist mother. Sharmila while campaigning for the right to free education teaches Sinhala to Muslim students in Colombo. This thesis is ultimately an articulation of the collective aspiration of many Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Europeans for a just peace in Lanka. Any failures in this thesis are mine alone. Its success belongs to all those who contributed to it.

Jude Lal Fernando
Dublin
25 February 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MAIN INTRODUCTION 1
1. The Objective of the Study 1
2. Complexity of the Context 2
3. Complicity of the Ethical and Religious Traditions 4
4. Polarisations: 'A clash of civilizations'? 5
5. 'A clash of civilisations' Or Politics of Interpretations? 7
6. Political Myths of Nationalism and Nation-State 9
7. An Alternative Paradigm: Politics of Interpretation for Liberation 11
8. An Ethical-Political Movement 13
9. The General Theoretical Questions 14
10. The Particular Theoretical Questions 16
11. Theoretical Framework 17
12. Methodological Approach 20
13. Division of Parts and Chapters 21

PART I 23
CHAPTER ONE: AMBIGUITY OF MEANINGS 25
1. Theories about Nationalism and Nation 25
i. Critique of Theories 27
ii. Ethno-Symbolic Alternative 30
iii. Theory and Praxis 34
iv. Theory and Solutions 39
v. Theory, Mythos and Logos 43
2. Theories of Representation 48
i. Orientalist-Occidentalist Representations 50
ii. The Postcolonial Predicament 58
3. An Alternative Model of Interpretation 63
i. A Liberative Praxis 66

PART II 69
Introduction 70
CHAPTER TWO: RELIGION, EMPIRE-BUILDING AND THE BRITISH NATION-STATE 73
1. Theologisation of the Nation 73
2. Revolutionising of the Nation 85
i. A Republican Nation-State 92
ii. Christian Culture, the Spirit of Capitalism and Imperialism 97
iii. Mythologisation of History and Historicisation of Faith 99
3. Nation-State as the Cornerstone of Imperialism 102
i. Religion and the British Raj 108

PART III 115
Introduction 116
CHAPTER THREE: PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL FORMATIONS AND THE INITIAL COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS OF LANKA: SHIFTING OF SOVEREIGNTIES 119
1. Overlapping Territories, Histories and Identities 124
2. The Dynamics of the Initial European Encounters 138

i. Portuguese Society Meets the Lankan Society 140
ii. The Encounter with the Dutch 148
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND THE PROCESSES OF HOMOGENISATION 153
1. Homogenisation Through Economic Reforms 158
2. Homogenisation through Administration 164
3. Western Education as a Means of Homogenisation 165
4. Homogenisation and Historiography 166
5. Homogenisation and Cultural Revivals 175
CHAPTER FIVE: THE MAKING OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE AND THE PROCESS OF POLARISATIONS: POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION FOR DOMINATION ... 183
1. Nationalist Ideology within the Colonial State and Polarisations 188
i. Early Stages of Polarisations 188
ii. Pauperisation and Polarisation 191
iii. Political Representations and Polarisation 193
2. Dilemma of Nation-Building: Stages of Polarisation 204
CHAPTER SIX: A CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE AND THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION FOR A JUST PEACE 217
1. Tamil Movement for Self-determination 217
2. Sinhala Militancy and Tamil Militancy: A Convergence? 227
3. 'Uncleared Areas' and 'Liberated Areas': Contested Meanings 231
4. 'Men', 'Women' and Nationalisms 236
5. Missed Opportunities 238
6. Local and Global Dynamics of the Conflict 243

PART IV 251
Introduction 252
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE WESTERN NATION-STATE AND GLOBALISATION OF CAPITALIST SOVEREIGNTY 255
1. The Principle of Immanence and Historical Absolutism 255
2. The Principle of Secularity and the Politics of Interpretations 260
3. An Ethic for International Relations or Globalisation 263
i. A Clash of Civilisations or a Clash of Interpretations? 263
ii. Knowledge and Construction of the Other 266
iii. Religion and the Politics of Interpretation 267
iv. Rhetorical-Emancipatory Paradigm 269
v. The Principle of Immanence and the Burden of Moral Ambivalence 278
vi. Europe, Moral Imagination and Conflict Resolution 283
CHAPTER EIGHT: RELIGION AND AN ETHIC FOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE 291
1. Moral Imagination and Motherhood of Buddha 298
2. Transcendence and Politics of Compassion and Justice 307
3. Convergence and Confluence of Groups and Movements 316
4. The *Impasse* of the 2002 Peace Process 325

CONCLUSION 333
1. Two Distinct Forms of Nationalism 334
2. Violence and the Inevitable Risk of an Ethical Commitment 335
3. Life World, Convergence and Confluence 339
4. Religiousness of Secularity and Secularity of Religiousness 343

5. Resistance, Conflict and Hope 346

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 349
Books 349
Articles in Books 362
Journal Articles 365
Newspapers 367
Website Articles 368
Other Media 371

MAIN INTRODUCTION

1. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In the study I carried out for my M.Phil. thesis in 2004-2005,[1] the focus was on the paradigm of the peace movement articulated by Vietnamese Buddhist peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh and the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. during the war in Vietnam. I made an attempt to apply the basic ethical and religious principles in that paradigm to a peace movement in Sri Lanka. However, given the scope of a Master's thesis, I did not venture to deeply analyse the different complex dimensions of the Sri Lankan conflict itself, which was not the main objective of the study. Instead, I proposed that a peace movement, like the one between the Vietnamese and the Americans, can be formed through a reinterpretation of basic principles in Asian Buddhism and Western Christianity from the perspectives of the oppressed and the suffering. The objective of the present research is to address the Sri Lankan conflict itself and the challenge it poses to the ethical and religious traditions in searching for a liberative paradigm for the organising of the political community. This thesis intends to make an academic contribution to the discourse on the role of religion in resolving a conflict that revolves around the centrality of the dominant nation-state model.[2] By critiquing the existing politics of interpretation for domination it will make an attempt to introduce a politics of interpretation that can promote a just peace in Lanka. In suggesting a liberative ethic for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state both the local and global realities will be taken into consideration.

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1 Jude Lal Fernando: *A Paradigm for a Peace Movement: Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jn*, (Dublin, The Columba Press, 2007).

2 Sri Lanka is not a nation-state in the classical and literal sense as the Western nation-states like Britain, France or Spain are. However, the model of the nation-state (especially, with a unitary character), which has become a powerful marker of Sinhala Buddhist identity around which the present ethnic and religious crisis in Sri Lanka revolves, is an outcome of the country's encounter with its British colonial master. Therefore, in this thesis, the term nation-state will be used in its postcolonial and rhetorical sense with reference to Sri Lanka. This particular usage of the term can be found in the numerous works of the Sri Lankan political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda, who has written extensively on the dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state. Cf. Jayadeva Uyangoda: 'Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State' in *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Mithran Tiruchelvam and Dattathreya C.S., (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), pp.168-186.

The emphasis will be on the need for a moral imagination that can transform the existing dynamic between power and culture that generates conflict.

2. Complexity of the Context

The current ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka which revolves around the supposedly unchangeable fundamentalist belief in a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state has sharpened the identities of the other ethnic minorities, especially the Tamils. This has given rise to another type of militant nationalism with distinct claims to a separate traditional homeland, nationhood and the right to autonomy and self-determination. The emergence of Muslim political parties, clandestine militant Islamic groups, and many Christians who vote against the Sinhala Buddhist nationalistic parties that have proposed an anti-Conversion Bill in the Sri Lankan Parliament are clear indicators of the same process of polarisation which is taking place among diverse ethno-religious communities. The conflict revolving around the dominance of the nation-state has killed and maimed thousands, displaced millions and devastated the entire north and east of Sri Lanka, causing severe damage to the country's economy.[3] The process of polarisation that is taking place between the two main ethnic communities as well as other communities is accompanied by fear, suspicion, mistrust and enmity among them not only on the political level but also on the socio-cultural level.

The enormous suffering of the victims of war has not persuaded the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces who hold on to the nation-state to reconsider their exclusivist perception of nationhood and related dominant structure of the nation-state. Nor has the Western liberal paradigm based on human rights which the Churches advocate been able to arrest the escalation of violence and war. Instead, the loyalty to the model of the nation-state has continued to increase over time, even to the extent of the two main ultra-nationalist parties[4] pressuring the government for a

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[3] The cost of the Sri Lankan war has been studied from different dimensions. Cf. Mahinda Namal, and Jude Lal Fernando: *Sanvedi*, (Wattala, C.A. Printers, 1999). The Sri Lankan conflict has claimed 68,000 lives, displaced 1.3 million people (one million Tamils, two hundred thousand Muslims and one hundred thousand Sinhalese), and devastated the entire Northern and Eastern regions of the island. Moreover, 50,000 children were orphaned, 40, 000 women were widowed and over two million Palmyra trees were destroyed. Over two hundred thousand Muslims have been displaced due to the conflict. In the Christian- Buddhist tensions, over one hundred churches of different Christian denominations have been attacked or burnt in the recent past.

[4] One party led by Buddhist monks is called *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU), which means 'national

military solution. The parties want to abrogate the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) that came into effect in 2002 between the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with the mediation and influence of the international community, particularly the Western powers.[5] The ultra-nationalist groups who were mainly, but not solely, outside the governments during the twenty-five years of war, have gained more power by becoming the co-partners of the government in recent times, especially after the signing of the CFA, without allowing any compromise with the demands of the Tamils for autonomy.[6] Any intervention for a negotiated settlement, particularly coming from the West and the Churches is seen as a Christian invasion. The anti-Western and anti-Christian perspectives of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces reflect not only the historical memories of a colonial past but also a reaction to the present globalising power the West acquired through its colonial past.[7] However, it has to be noted here that even though the assertion of Sinhala Buddhist identity as the dominant nationalist force in Sri Lanka is

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heritage'. It has obtained nine parliamentary seats and the Buddhist monks represent them in the parliament. The other is *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP) which means ' national liberation front' and is comprised mostly of educated Sinhala Buddhist rural youth and Buddhist monks who led two armed insurrections in the years 1971 and 1987-1989 against the Sri Lankan governments. Having joined the parliamentary democratic system in 1994, they now have 40 seats in the parliament out of a total of 226.

5 *Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,* 13th February, 2002, www.tamilnation.org, downloaded: 18/05/2006.

6 The LTTE, after signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in 2002, made a policy statement changing their earlier stand of total separation which demanded external autonomy. Instead, they expressed the readiness to adapt to a solution that would give North and East of the Island an internal autonomy. Prof. Peter Schalk of Uppsala University who has carried out extensive researches about the history of Tamil language and culture in Sri Lanka as well as about the current political crisis describes how the Tamil freedom movement led by the LTTE, though goal-oriented, has been pragmatic during the last decade. Cf. Peter Schalk: *Methods of War may vary, the Aim not*, www.negotiatedpeace.com, downloaded: 21/05/2006. Although the two main parties which ruled the country after independence entered into agreements on devolution of power with the leadership of the Tamil freedom movement since 1957, on several occasions these agreements were unilaterally withdrawn by the governments in power due to the pressure from the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces outside the government. However, during the last decade such nationalist groups formed themselves by emerging as ultra-nationalist political parties that became power-brokers in forming governments. It is in this context that Jayadeva Uyangoda's description of the Sri Lankan crisis as a 'conflict between two ethno-nationalisms' – which makes dialogue extremely difficult – has to be understood and qualified for Sinhala and Tamil nationalism are qualitatively different ones. Cf. Jayadeva Uyangoda: 'Sri Lanka's Peace: Is Dialogue among Ethno-Nationalisms Possible?', *The Northeastern Monthly*, (April, 2006), pp.22-26, p.22.

7 Aloysius Pieris in one of his latest articles shows how Christianity is seen 'as an integral part of globalisation or the newest species of colonisation' by the nationalistic movements in China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Cf. Aloysius Pieris: 'The Asian Reality and the Christian Option: A Plea for a Paradigm Shift in Christian Education in Asia' in *The Religious Conversion Debate Against the Background of Material Progress and Spiritual Growth* in *Dialogue*, Vols.xxxii & xxxiii, (2005-2006), p.163.

politically expressed in the form of a unitary nation-state structure; without the support of the Western global powers such a structure cannot be maintained and safeguarded both economically and politically, for the EU and the USA are both the main investors in the country's economy and the main advisors and trainers of the armed forces.[8] The dominance of the nation-state has claimed lives as its predecessor, the colonial-state, had done before.[9] Compounding the situation more, another new development is the emergence of the militant Islamic groups in the Eastern part of the island, allegedly supported by Pakistan, and the re-surfacing of Indian interest in the conflict again due to pressure from the State of Tamil Nadu.

3. Complicity of the Ethical and Religious Traditions

While the paradigm defined in terms of an exclusivist ethno-religious national identity continues to dominate mainly the other ethnic and religious groups, the solutions suggested by the Churches and the West based on the Western liberal paradigm of human rights, on the one hand, do not have the capacity to address the deep socio-economic and cultural issues of the communities in conflict, and on the other hand, they do not check the economic and political interests of the global powers. Although the Christians are the only religious community in Sri Lanka that represents both Tamil and Sinhala ethnic groups –

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[8] It has to be noted that until recent times the Sri Lankan military's high ranking officers had been trained by the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, UK. Britain's traditional military relationship with Sri Lanka has been of immense help to the USA whose geo-political interests in the Indian Ocean are growing at the moment. Britain and the USA have a mutual defense treaty. The US army conducts annual training sessions of the Sri Lankan armed forces. Dharmaratnam Sivaram: *US's Strategic Interests in Sri Lanka*, www.tamilnet.com, 30th July, 2005, downloaded: 21st May, 2006. One of Britain's popular historians, Mark Curtis, notes how the British government provided the Sri Lankan state with military assistance, which was used against the LTTE. He describes how Britain's arms export is not only motivated by profit making but also by the need to support its 'favoured elites' who are accused of human right abuses. Cf. Mark Curtis: *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World*, (London, Vintage, 2003), pp.204-205.

[9] This is the principal argument of postcolonial criticism (such as post-Orientalist and Subaltern Studies) inspired by Edward Said's groundbreaking work *Orientalism.* Postcolonial criticism is a relatively new set of literature that focuses on the complicity between the discourses of colonialism, anti-colonial nationalist movements, and postcolonial nation-building. Michael Roberts has carried out an evaluation of the literature on nation and nationalism from the 1950s (the decade of the nation-building in post-independent Sri Lanka) up to the present period of postcolonial critics with special reference to Sri Lanka. Cf. Michael Roberts: 'Sri Lanka: Intellectual Currents and Conditions in the Study of Nationalism' in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited,* Volume I, (ed.) Michael Roberts, (Colombo, Marga Institute, 1997), pp.1-54.

thereby giving them the potential to be a peace maker between the warring parties – the complicity of the Churches with a political party (United National Party) that promoted neo-liberal policies in the country has put their credibility at grave risk. In the anti-Conversion debate in Sri Lanka, the churches are accused of 'exploiting the Global Power of the West and the Growing Poverty of the East'.[10] On the one hand, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces are culturally and religiously in conflict with the West, and on the other hand they are also heavily dependent on Western economic investments and political power. It is in that context that the polarisation among the diverse ethnic and religious groups continues to increase while the model of the nation-state with an exclusivist national identity is being reinstated; its oneness, indivisibility and the sacred absolute character is constantly being reasserted. Power sharing with the other ethnic groups is constantly and vehemently opposed even after the massive tragedy of forty thousand killed by the Tsunami in Sri Lanka.

4. POLARISATIONS: 'A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS'?

Ostensibly, it is a clash of ethno-cultural and religious groups that is taking place. The intractable Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict, the growing Buddhist-Christian tensions and the recent emergence of Muslim political parties, the very recent phenomenon of clandestine militant Islamic groups (particularly in the Eastern province of the country) and wider conflicts between West and East, between Western Christianity and other Asian religions seem to provide substantiating evidence for a supposed 'clash of civilizations' on both a local and global level.[11] Nevertheless, a careful study of the complex situation shows that the conflict in Sri Lanka which revolves around a dogmatic belief in a nation-state reflects the complicity between

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[10] Loc. cit.

[11] Samuel P. Huntington argues that the emerging world order after the Cold War would be characterised neither by class nor ideological conflicts, but by conflicts between largest groupings of cultures, namely civilisations. The Sri Lankan conflict is also represented in that light as a Sinhala Buddhist -Tamil Hindu conflict. Although this analysis highlights the overlooked cultural dimension in conflict analysis it conceals dangerously the economic and political dimensions. Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (London, Simon & Schuster, 1996), *The Clash of Civilizations?:The Debate*, (New York, Foreign Affairs, 1996). However, as Huntington himself admits his analysis is highly influenced by the emerging USA interests around the world and its foreign policy after the Cold War period. Cf. Oliver McTernan: *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, (London, Bath Press, 2003).

Third World Nationalism and Western Imperialism. The cultural nexus of this complicity lies in the representation of the other in the projects of colonial practice and post-colonial nation-building. It operates within an Orientalist-Occidentalist interpretation of each other within a network of unequal local and global power relationships initiated by colonialism and continued by postcolonial nation-building and the present phase of globalisation. This belief is mainly supported by dominant interpretations of ethical and religious traditions where the particular cultures and religions have been interpreted and continue to be interpreted in unchangeable homogeneous categories. Its main characteristic is the essentialist perception of ethnicity, religion and nationhood through which ethno-religious myths have been transformed into political myths of exclusivist types of nationalism and national identity. This shows the duplicity (or the schizophrenic political mindsets) of Sinahala Buddhist nationalism and Western Imperialism; both blending harmoniously at times, but without reconciling with each other fully, while antagonising geo-political spaces as East and West and causing polarisation among local ethnic and religious communities.[12] Essentialist representations that emerged from the politics of control in the colonial period are continued and sharpened within the postcolonial phase, which is entrenched in capitalist globalisation. The colonial legacy continues not only through unjust economic structures and postcolonial models of nation-building that follow the Western model, but also thorough an essentialist cultural perception of nationhood. This has raised serious ethical and theological questions regarding Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism and some of their theological and philosophical (buddological) discourses as to whether there is an inseparable link between religion and ethics or not. It is therefore of paramount importance to critically examine the assumptions or belief systems behind the standpoints shared by both local and global powers within the field of unequal power relations, if positive change towards peace and coexistence among diverse ethnic groups can come into effect. It has become imperative for academic scholarship, with an ethical commitment in the face of gruelling reality in Sri Lanka, to go beyond the ostensible view of the 'clash of civilizations' towards an examination of the cultural and religious beliefs that imbricate with economic and political factors in forming the

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[12] According to Edward W. Said, this type of political phenomenon needs a 'contrapuntal' reading by which 'overlapping territories and intertwined histories' can be discovered. Cf. Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, (London, Chato & Windus, 1993), Ch.1. pp.1-50.

dominant power structures such as nation-states in a network of local and global powers. Such academic scholarship needs to unravel the dilemma by searching for the root causes of the conflict. Without such an in-depth study, proposing alternative paradigms of organising societies to resolve conflict will be in vain. Thus, the analysis of the conflict in Sri Lanka requires an analysis of the politics of interpretation, for the very perception of the conflict as a clash of religion and cultures (clash of civilizations?) itself reveals a politics of interpretation which is associated with power. The cost of thousands of human lives lost in the war in Sri Lanka poses an enormous challenge to ethical and religious traditions – that have contributed to maintaining the dominant political structures – to search for new ways of resolving the conflict if they are to be credible witnesses to what they profess.

5. 'A CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS' OR POLITICS OF INTERPRETATIONS?

The present study intends to unravel and expose, through an analysis of the politics of interpretation, the complicity between Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Western Imperialism that is informed by an Occidentalist-Orientalist alliance. It will explore the process of politicisation of cultures as the socioeconomic and political structures change and how one particular cultural perception becomes dominant not allowing heterogeneous perceptions. Kumari Jayewardena's sociological studies show the growing relationship between the Sinhala Buddhist politics and the commercial and middle classes during the colonial and postcolonial phases was accompanied by essentialist perception of cultures.[13] These perceptions reflect a selective reading of the pre-colonial ethno-religious narratives within the colonial and postcolonial politics of control, domination and manipulation. The centrality of the nation-state, defined in terms of essentialist categories, has blurred other collectivities, both global and local. The belief in an exclusivist national identity, politically encapsulated into a centralised state, has not faded away, as predicted by historians like Eric Hobsbwam, as the liberalisation of the economy proceeds in the present phase of capitalist

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[13] Kumari Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness: 1883-1893*, (Colombo, Sanjiva Books, 2003).

globalisation.[14] It can be seen that the latter phase has brought about a hybridisation of new global and extra-territorial elites. However, an anthropological survey carried out by Stanley Tambiah shows how the subordinate urban social classes (the new middle class?) emerging from the service sectors of the Open Market Economy, which was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1977, formed the force that carried out anti-Tamil rioting in 1983 informed by the Sinhala Buddhist ideology and led by several ultra-nationalist politicians. He also carries out a political analysis of the link that the Sinhala Buddhist ideology has with the formation of different political parties, organisations, and movements from the colonial period up to recent times.[15] An analysis carried out by the *Hiru* Group regarding the ultra-nationalist parties that vehemently oppose peace negotiations with the LTTE shows that the voter base of these parties has emerged from educated unemployed youth and the state and public sector employees whose economic and cultural identities are at stake due to the process of privatisation of state and public sector institutions. They form the urban and rural middle classes. From a political point of view, the studies of the *Hiru* Group have shown the relationship between the changing phases of these social class structures and their growing identification with the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state.[16] In the face of economic and social uncertainties created by neo-liberal policies, their ethnic religious identities have become more sharpened and their allegiance to the nation-state is growing without allowing any compromise with the ethnic minorities struggling for devolution of power.

It is not only the oppressed minorities who are faced with the enormous suffering of poverty and displacement caused by the war waged in the name of the nation-state, but also the poor of the dominant community,[17] who are being asked by the nationalistic forces to bear the hardships for the sake of the country, which means

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[14] Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.182.

[15] S.J. Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, (Chicago / London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986). *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka,* (Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[16] Their studies have been serialised in their newspaper *Hiru* in 25 articles. Cf. Hiru Group: 'Ideology and Analysis', *Hiru* , (23/05/2003 – 15/2/2005).

[17] It has to be noted that there are 200,000 families living below the poverty line under the rule of the 'glorified' nation-state (government controlled areas). Sarath Fernando: 'Tokyo Ganudenuwa (PRSP): Duppatunta Marana Wareththuwak', *Sandeshsya* Vol.8, No.3, June, (Colombo, Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, 2003), p.7.

the nation-state.[18] In this way one oppressed group is put against another in the name of the nation-state. The essentialist perceptions of ethnicity, religion and nationhood have divided the millions of poor along ethnic and religious lines by the process of colonial and postcolonial identity-building.

6. Political Myths of Nationalism and Nation-State

Apart from exploring the interplay between the changing phases of economic structures and cultural representations that solidify an exclusivist national identity, this study also intends to examine how such an interplay is related to the unitary model of the nation-state and is being fortified both by internal and external factors in a process of capitalist globalisation given also the geo-political strategic location of Sri Lanka as an island in South Asia. The model of the unitary nation-state that the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists adhere to and by which other ethnic and religious groups are discriminated is mainly a Western construction. Sri Lanka's present model of the nation-state came into being through its colonial encounter with the British nation-state or the empire. With reference to the rise of nations in the West, Regina Schwartz points out how the myths of monotheistic religions – One God, One People, and One Nation – were transformed into secular myths of nationalism. '... Sacred categories of thought have not just disappeared. They have lingered into the modern world where they are transformed into secular ones.'[19] The Old Religious Order (the Christian Empire) has been replaced by a Rational State substituting the absolutism of God with the Absolutism of Reason. Additionally, there was not one, but indeed several, Absolutes, making French, British, Spanish and German nation-states. The birthmarks or the imprint of the Old Order was present in the New Enlightened Order, too. It was within this process that the belief in the nation-state as the principal signifier of the political community grew as another dogma that justified dominance.

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[18] As a result of an agreement reached between the Trade Unions and the political parties in the Sinhala majority areas – in view of reaching a consensus to prioritise concern for national security in the face of Tamil separatism – the May Day processions and the rallies of the workers (a substantial number of them are women-workers who work in the Free Trade Zone and have no right to form Labour Unions within the Zone) of 2006, which were meant to voice the ever-growing grievances caused by neo-liberal polices of privatizations, were cancelled. Most of the strikes in the government-controlled areas are considered by the state media as an obstacle to the ongoing war to safeguard territorial integrity of the nation.

[19] Regina Schwartz: *Curse of Cain: the Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, (London, Chicago Press, 1997), p.6.

It is in this sense that the making of the nation-state can be seen as having Eurocentric Christian origins. Thus, whether it is defined in terms of secular or religious categories the main political standpoint of the nationalist coalition of Sri Lanka, the EU and the US today is formed by the basic presupposition about the inviolability of the sovereignty of the nation-state. The centrality of such a notion emerges from the belief that the world is comprised of nation-states, that such a composition cannot be changed and that the model of the nation-state has to be protected at any cost. The existence of nation-states seems to be natural and the notion of sovereignty is uncontestable. Humanity is said to be divided into nations by the law of nature. The political motif of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces had been to define and determine nationhood and the political structure in terms of exclusivist ethno-religious national identity in the face of Western Christian colonialism, and this trend has been recurring in the post-colonial nation-building. The unitary state structure in Sri Lanka, which is a centralised political institution, not only has the colonial imprint but is also a nonnegotiable powerful marker of national identity: Sinhala Buddhist national identity.

One of the world's most intractable conflicts, Sri Lanka's revolves around the supposedly unchallengeable dogmatic belief in a nation-state with an exclusivist national identity defined in terms of the dominant majoritarian ethno-religious politics. Here, 'democracy' and 'sovereignty of the people' (the main principles of the French Revolution, American Revolution and the British Parliamentary democracy) are defined in terms of the majoritarian will of a dominant ethno-religious group. Beliefs in a system of nation-states that both the local (national) and global (international) powers share have interwoven the local issues with the global issues and the global issues with the local issues causing tension among the diverse ethnic groups not only in Sri Lanka but also in many parts of the world. They range from Quebec to the Basque region, from Kurdistan to Eritrea, and from Tamil Eelam to Aceh Sumatra. It is an outcome of the interplay between local and global actors – both colonial and post-colonial – who are engulfed in uncritical belief systems in a network of unequal power relationships. That is why a decision of the EU or USA to exclude one party in the conflict in Sri Lanka[20] strengthens the nationalist forces even as it

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[20] India, USA, Canada and the EU have included the LTTE into their list of banned organisations. The EU did so at a time when the ultranationalist parties in Sri Lanka were pressurizing the

devastates the hopes of the half a million Tamil (including Muslim) refugees who have been waiting for decades to go back to their homes, paddy fields, and the beaches which have been acquired by the Sinhala Buddhist state forces in defense of the nation.[21] Such a situation demands not only a critical appraisal of exclusivist perceptions of national identity, but also of secular notions like sovereignty. Such secular concepts which have their validity in particular contexts cannot be dogmatised, and need to be constantly re-evaluated.

7. An Alternative Paradigm: Politics of Interpretation for Liberation

With the above exploration of the dominant arrangement of the economic, political, and cultural spheres that interact with each other, causing the crisis in Sri Lanka – which will throw light onto the politics of interpretation for domination – the ultimate aim of this study will be to make an attempt to reinterpret the ethical and religious traditions from the perspective of the subordinate other(s), who have become the victims of the system of the dominant nation-state. Therefore, this study argues that cultures and religions could also be reinterpreted from an ethical perspective that involves mainly ethnic and religious minorities, as well as the poor, the underprivileged social classes, women, children and the environment – perspectives excluded by the centrality of the nation-state within a field of local and global powers. It will discuss how the religions could enter into a meaningful dialogue in a new locus for inter-religious dialogue that attempts a liberative reorganisation of the political community. This requires an alternative interpretation of the religious and ethical traditions involved in the conflict, which would avoid both essentialist and relativistic approaches. Such an attempt also necessitates an honest acknowledgement by each ethical and religious tradition of its complicity in the politics of domination.

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president and the government of Sri Lanka to abrogate the CFA which has been monitored by the Nordic countries which includes three member states of the EU. *European Parliament Resolution on the situation in Sri Lanka*, 17th May, 2006, www.europarl.europa.eu, downloaded: 18 / 05/ 2006.

[21] According to a report submitted by the NGO Home for Human Rights to the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in October 2002, the Sri Lankan state has created a High Security Zone by forcibly evicting 20,917 families. Cf. J.S. Tissainayagam: 'Jaffna's Displaced Residents Challenge HSZ in Supreme Court', *The Northeastern Monthly*, (February/2004), pp.8-9, 8.

Although Europe went through a series of revolutions and wars before church and state formally separated and gave rise to secular paradigms, how far the definitions of democracy and sovereignty in those paradigms are adequate to address the conflict-laden societies like Sri Lanka, with all its global and local complexities, is questionable: for, democracy is defined as the will of the majority, and in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Sri Lanka the ethno-religious majority becomes the dominating power in a 'democratically' elected government. Along with Western liberal democracy, Christianity also needs to be redefined in order to liberate it from one particular dominant interpretation; without this liberation, not only will any mediation by the Churches to solve the conflict be perceived as a conspiracy, but also the rise of Christian fundamentalism cannot be arrested, and thus a dialogue with other religious and ethical traditions becomes impossible. In the same way Sinhala Buddhism needs to be emancipated from its identification with the dominant nation-state that has continued the colonial legacy. The present state of Sinhala Buddhism needs not only a critical outlook towards the selective reading of its narratives in justifying the unitary state structure, but also an introspective view into the pre-colonial, feudalist caste system which is still associated with power politics. It is only through such emancipation that Buddhism could end suffering in a war-torn land. Sri Lanka is a clear case in which both the religious dogmatism that promotes an exclusivist identity and the secular dogmatism of the will of the majority defined as democracy have become interwoven with each other, culminating in a protracted ethnic conflict between the majority and minority ethnic communities. Also relevant is how ethical principles of both religious and secular traditions could be reinterpreted in searching for liberative paradigms by transcending the assumed total rupture between the religious and secular realms, both in academic studies and in the public sphere. The initiatives for a liberative paradigm need to emerge from within dominant communities in responding to the crisis both locally and globally, and particularly in the case under review, from within the Sinhala Buddhist community and from Western Christianity.

This study will also discuss how such alternative interpretations could be incorporated into a political discourse on devolution of power, and thereby help to effect transformation of the existing paradigm of a centralised nation-state into a de-centralised political community, where justice and peaceful coexistence are promoted, and religious and cultural diversities are cherished as complementing each other. In

this way, an attempt will be made to introduce a stream (rather than a system) of thought with a holistic view of human reality (transcending reductionisms) that will be able to initiate an ethical-political movement, which may be effective locally and globally in transforming the existing suppressive Sri Lankan nation-state, which has emerged as a result of an Orientalist-Occidentalist Alliance and of complicity between Western Imperialism and Third World Nationalism within an asymmetrical network of local and global power relationships.

8. An Ethical-Political Movement

As there are multiple factors involved in the conflict, a way to a resolution cannot be found by treating only one area. An ethical-political movement cannot be formed only by addressing cultural issues. It needs to concretely address economic and political grievances, too, for it is through the dominant interplay of culture and power that the conflict becomes protracted. Such an attempt requires a moral imagination that can transform the existing dynamic between power and culture. This necessitates identifying already existing and potential socioeconomic, cultural, and political locations that can affect transformation of the dominant model of the nation state; thus the movements both within Sri Lanka and in Europe will be surveyed. As the conflict in Sri Lanka has both a local and an internationalised dimension, both the local as well as international initiatives (particularly European) are equally important along with the reinterpretations of Asian Buddhism and Western Christianity in forming a liberative paradigm. Conflicts of today's societies cannot be analysed and resolved unless and until both levels are addressed seriously and simultaneously, and that only after having recognised their correlations sufficiently. Sri Lanka is a typical example of how the dynamics between the globalising and localising cultural and political strands initiated by colonialism operate in a postcolonial setting and give rise to intractable conflicts. The emphasis in the survey of actual and potential locations will be not so much on peace organisations and human rights institutes, which most of the time lack the power to implement, but rather on the possibility of building a peace movement which can also articulate and implement an alternative liberative paradigm for devolution of power among diverse, underprivileged groups.

Finally, the study will discuss in which way the Christian and Buddhist communities and other movements of resistance to the dominant nation-state can enter

into a process of convergence and confluence in creating space for a negotiated settlement for Lanka. In this endeavour an emphasis will be laid on how to bridge the existing gap between a theoretical articulation of the liberative knowledge and the praxis which calls for establishing people's movements that can affect the decision-making polity.

9. The General Theoretical Questions

What is under study is not merely a Sri Lankan crisis. The Sri Lankan situation reflects the crisis of a wider network of local and global relationships emerging out of particular paradigmatic socioeconomic and political structures, and cultural patterns and systems of thought. The issues arising from the conflict in Sri Lanka pertain to a wider world which grapples with violence, conflict and war. The theoretical questions arising out of the crisis in Sri Lanka, therefore, are many. There will be a range of questions that are interconnected and that will have to be addressed. They pertain to the realm of power and culture or rule (domination) and knowledge. In creating a dominant network of local and global relationships which continue to sharpen ethno-religious identities, how are culture, economics and politics related to each other within the colonial and postcolonial phases leading up to the present crisis, as mentioned above? In other words, how is knowledge or one's perception of ethnicity, religious affinity, and national identity related to power (colonialism, imperialism, nation building and postcolonial ethnic struggles)? What is the relationship between power and culture, or what is the relationship between culture and colonialism (and imperialism), and culture and postcolonialism? How far is knowledge about the meaning(s) of cultural and religious affinities conditioned by power, and to what degree? Is culture produced by power (materialistic reductionism) or power produced by culture (cultural reductionism)?

Connected with these are other questions, too. In the imbrications of power and culture how has modernist discourse affected the colony and the coloniser (postcolonial and subaltern critiques)? How have such influences intermingled with religious narratives in forming a dominant interpretation of national identity? How is it that the onetime coloniser and colonised align together in the postcolonial era is to protect the model of the nation-state, causing the subordination of other ethnic groups (such as Tamils in Sri Lanka)? What are the epistemological presuppositions behind

both religious and secular traditions which share belief in the nation-state? Whether it is secular or religious, how did such dogmatism pertaining to the organising of the political community come to be? Why is the nation-state so indispensable? How has allegiance to nation, nationalism and national identity been so persuasive? What are the roots of such allegiances to nation expressed in nationalisms? Whence did this emerge, or has it been perennialist and part of primordial human nature from the beginning? Or is it totally modern? If so, how is it that the premodern ethnic and religious symbols and meanings have been reappropriated by the nationalist movements? Have the symbolic meanings changed over time or do they remain unchangeable? What is the relationship between symbolism and socioeconomic and political conditions? Can we transcend nationalism? If so, can it be done by promoting a cosmopolitan society with a liberal ideology, or with a communist ideology, or by promoting a pan-nationalist ideology? In what way can religious and other ethical traditions enlighten us in this regard?

Why is nationalism so ambiguous? Is any type of nationalism intrinsically ideologically flawed? What is the difference between Western and non-Western nationalism? How far are non-Western nationalism and the colonial representation of the other interwoven within the colonial practice? What is the relationship between Orientalism (Western representation of the Orient) and Asian nationalism and how is it related to Occidentalism (representation of the Occident by others)? What is the role of religion in such representations of the other and the role of historiography in it? Is reality a mere representation or are there essentialist categories? If reality is considered to be a mere representation, where do we ground ethical principles needed in relating to the other? If reality can be reduced to unchangeable essentialist categories, can there be any possibility for dialogue? How can we transcend these ways of explanations and discover what the Orient and Occident have to offer for a meaningful dialogue? Could there be other (suppressed) ways of perceiving and interpreting reality apart from the Orientalist and Occidentalist approaches? What are the models of interpretation that have been used to represent reality? What are the ways of interpretation that promote justice and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups? Why is it that the ethical principles of religious traditions have not been a part of the political decisions of a society? Why are the masses distant from the scholarly findings of the intellectuals who analyse the causes of and suggest remedies for conflicts? What are the roles of the intellectuals and civil society (including ethical

and religious traditions) in educating the masses and in incorporating the ethical principles into political deliberations of a society that is laden with conflict? These questions show that the study of the conflict in Sri Lanka takes one not only beyond its territorial confinements but also to a range of discourses on colonialism, modernism, nationalism, identity constructions, globalisation and the role of the intellectuals along with philosophical and theological systems of thought linked to interpretations and representations of cultures and religions.

10. THE PARTICULAR THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

Sri Lanka's seemingly unsolvable ethno-religious conflict, as mentioned earlier, is a clear reflection on the one hand, of the complicity between European imperialism and Third World nationalism, and on the other hand, that the imbrications of power and culture in a non-Western Asian third world country like Sri Lanka are also heavily conditioned by its unequal power relationship with the West. In the same way, there are deep-rooted socioeconomic and political grievances beneath the Tamil movement for self determination, which too are caused both by the colonial past as well as exclusivist ideology of the nation-state. How has this taken place during the colonial and postcolonial phase? How have culture and religion overlapped with power in the construction of the British nation-state and empire? [22] What is the role of Christianity in this? What are the Western categories of cultural and religious belief systems as well as economic and political factors that influence the anti-colonial nationalist movement and the postcolonial nation-building in Sri Lanka through its colonial encounter with Europe, particularly with Britain? What is the role of Buddhism in this process? How far is what the Sinhala Buddhists believe about themselves (or their perception of national identity today) related to Western Christian imperialism? How have the British (Western) paradigms been considered the universal and the Sri Lankan (Eastern) paradigms narrow and particular? How has the Western representation of the East (Orientalism) conditioned the self-image of the Sinhala Buddhist identity, and how is it related to the perception of the East about the

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[22] The Portuguese (1505-1660) and the Dutch (1660-1796) could occupy only the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka. It was only after taking over of the Kandyan Kingdom (the central province) by the British in 1815 that the entire island of Sri Lanka became a colony of the British Empire and the basic structure for the present nation-state was formed substantiating it ideologically with the colonial perception of the Orient.

West (Occidentalism)? How does Orientalism reflect not only the Western perceptions of the East but also the fortifying aspects of the Occident and how could one cease to exist without the other? How does this process affect nationalism and nation-building in Sri Lanka and the other ethnic and religious identities? In other words, how did the nationalist paradigm of the Sinhala Buddhists internalise the colonial dominant power structures, and Western representations? What were the pre-colonial native narratives that corresponded to the Orientalist representations?

11. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

On the theoretical level this study will be an examination of the relationship between culture and power, surrounding colonial and postcolonial phases of nationalism and nation-building, and the ethnic conflicts that have emerged as a result. Therefore, the study will have to take a multi-dimensional approach which necessitates an interdisciplinary, intercommunity, interreligious and international analysis of the conflict, pointing at the multifaceted requirements needed for the resolution of the conflict. In a study that involves culture and power, the idea that culture and religion can function as an ideology is important, and such a thought would be helpful to identify false or enslaving ideologies (reason corrupted by material interests). Nevertheless, this should not mean that culture and religion are only ideological constructions and that they can be reduced to only material conditions. It has to be noted that power does not operate in mere material conditions, for it is within an arena of culture and religion that the power relations operate. There is no power in the abstract. On the one hand power is 'constituted in particular cultural forms' and on the other hand such 'cultural forms are embedded'[23] in a constellation of power relations. What needs to be emphasised is neither a materialist nor culturalist reductionism but an interactive process of arrangements of power, culture and religion as inseparable categories.

Theoretically, therefore, this study will be based on the interplay between power and culture, avoiding both culturalist and materialistic reductionism in analysis, and on the level of disciplines, without allowing a dichotomy between the sociological

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[23] Richard King points out how separating culture and power from each other becomes the first mistake in cultural and political analysis. Cf. Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, (Oxford/ New York, Routledge, 1999), p.1.

and philosophical (and theological) perspectives. The guiding tool of this emphasis will be the structured and structuring characteristics of *habitus* and *field* and their interplay in the understanding of the conflict under study. This has been demonstrated by Pierre Bourdieu whose work is focused on transcending the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity; the subjectivist position has been theorised by Jean Paul Sartre in his existentialism, and the objectivist position by structuralists like Levi-Strauss.[24] *Habitus* is the mental and cognitive structure within the mind which is historico-psychologically built. The *field* is outside the mind, and it is a network of relations among objective positions which are occupied by the agents or agencies with *habitus*. There are various kinds of *capital*, namely *economic*, *cultural*, *social*, *symbolic* which are invested in the *fields* as desired by the political *field*. The political *field* holds the primary position among other *fields*. The relations among the *fields* such as political, economic, cultural and religious and the nature of *habitus* change through historical circumstances, as there are not laws beyond history that govern these changes. Bourdieu points out that '*habitus*.... is a *historical transcendental* bound up with the structure and history of a field'.[25] He proposes *practice* as the way to overcome the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity. For him *practices* are not totally determined by the objective structure or by free will, but are rather an outcome of the dialectical relationship between 'structure and agency'. Bourdieu's definition of the interplay between *habitus* and *field* avoids the extremes of determinism of the structuralists as well as the unpredictable novelty of existentialists and places the role of *human agency* within the context of the interplay between *habitus* and *field* in a historical process.[26] Bourdieu does not want to propose a universal theory; instead, he emphasises *practice* or empirical research without overlooking the need for theory: 'Research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty'.[27]

Francois Houtart, in his study of *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, mainly adopts the theoretical approaches of Weber and refers to the concept of *field* not in the exact sense of the meaning that Bourdieu gives to it; instead he uses the term to refer

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[24] George Ritzer: *Sociological Theory*, (New York, McGraw Hill, 2004), p.533.
[25] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D.Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), p.189.
[26] Ritzer : *Sociological Theory*, p.530.
[27] Bourdieu and Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp.160-162.

to a structural part of the social space comprising the totality of the systems of the 'social ensemble' that interact with each other.[28] Houtart first takes society as a whole and then refers to each of its elements as a subordinate whole or *field*. Bourdieu defines *field* relationally, not structurally. However, both scholars recognise the importance of the political *field* by which the meanings and choices of various *fields* (defined relationally or structurally) are justified as legitimate while determining the structure of all the other *fields*. Both scholars also identify the social function of religion as a symbolic medium. Bourdieu defines it as 'a symbolic medium, at once structured and structuring'.[29] However, Houtart qualifies Bourdieu's definition by distinguishing it from other symbolic media as having a specific quality (which Bourdieu does not elaborate sufficiently) and defines it as 'a symbolic medium referring to supernatural forces, personified or not'.[30] Houtart's empirical study on Sri Lanka in the early seventies has made a significant contribution to the social and political function of religion, which is helpful if one is to understand the relationship between the fields of culture and power. However, examining the role of religion in the present conflict necessitates another level of philosophical and theological analysis in order to ascertain the politics of interpretation of the symbolic meaning of religion for which Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* will be useful. This necessitates a study of the interaction among *habitus* and *fields* both diachronically and synchronically, within a given historical political field, which involves several levels or layers of interpretations. In other words, as Clifford Geertz notes, elaborating a concept borrowed from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, the socio-cultural-political reality needs a 'Thick Description'.[31] Geertz shows that cultural analysis is not 'an experimental science' and should not be a search for a set of laws that determines collective human behaviour but a search for dynamics of interpretations that look for meanings. In search for meanings in *habitus* that interact with the political *field* the two notions of *mythos* and *logos* which is employed by Karen Amrstrong will be utilised.[32] As both Bourdieu and Houtart reiterate, it is only by a concrete application

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[28] Francois Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, (Bangalore, TPI, 1974), p.10.
[29] Cited by Houtart, p.6.
[30] Ibid., pp.6-7.
[31] Clifford Geertz: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), p.6.
[32] These notions reflect two ways of perceiving reality. *Mythos* is more concerned with origin and meaning of things than with practical matters and focuses itself on eternal and universal dimension of reality. *Logos* is more concerned with rational, pragmatic and scientific ways of perceiving

(through practice or empirical research) of these theoretical concepts to a situation that they can be tested and if necessary, modified.

12. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study uses evaluations of key intellectual currents that have emerged from the West, as well as from Sri Lanka, that examine the phenomenon of nationalism and nation-state with an emphasis on the interplay of power and culture. References will be made to statements, speeches, reports of the politicians and religious leaders in Britain during colonial era as well as in Sri Lanka during the periods of anti-colonial nationalist movement (mainly the British period) and the postcolonial period of nation-building to examine the politics of interpretation for domination. In order to obtain the perspectives of the subordinated social groups historical studies, economic and political analyses, anthropological surveys and sociological studies of various scholars will be taken. A study will be carried out to identify the continuities and discontinuities of the Sinhala Buddhist narrative traditions with the emergence of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle and the postcolonial nation-building and suppressive consolidation, while scrutinising Western (Orientalist) interpretations of the premodern narratives that provide an ethno-symbolic basis for the modern Sinahala Buddhist nation-state. The varying degrees of ethnic consciousness among different social classes during the colonial and postcolonial periods and the changing socioeconomic conditions that sharpen ethnic identities will be discussed while examining the imbrications of power and culture. This leads to a study of historicising *mythos* and the mythologising of history by social groups to assert their identity in the face of the cultural and economic domination (violence). An analysis of the cultural representation of the other within the practice of colonial empire-building, postcolonial nation-building, and consolidation of power against the struggles of the minorities in the present phase of globalisation will be undertaken. The postcolonial theories will be helpful in

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things in the modern context. However, these two notions should not be seen as separate mutually exclusivist ways of human thinking. They need to be complementary. Cf. Karen Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, (London, Harper Perennial, 2004), pp.xiii-xv. Armstrong defines most modern conflicts as an expression of a tension between *logos* and *mythos* throughout her entire work. In a search for meanings in *habitus* that interact with the political *field* the two notions of *mythos* and *logos* will be utilised.

discovering the interplay between power and knowledge which exposes the complicity between British colonialism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. However, this study is mindful of the extreme relativism and pragmatism that some of the postcolonial theories propose.

Particular attention in the religious and ethical sphere will be paid to Western Christianity and Sinhala Buddhism. The Scriptures (along with their philosophical and theological interpretations), official versions, and the popular traditions pertaining to nation-building and the political life of the people will be investigated while exploring how the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological scheme conditioned religions in support of an essentialist representation of nationhood. With a focus on resolving the Sri Lankan National Question in the present moment of globalisation, an ethic for reorganising the political community through a dialogue between East and West, and in particular, between Western Christianity and Sinhala Buddhism, will be explored. In the search for a liberative ethic the extreme forms of regulated totalitarian state structures found in some modern discourses, and extreme forms of relativism and individualism promoted by some postmodern discourses will be critiqued.

13. Division of Parts and Chapters

There will be eight chapters in this thesis, which will be divided into four major parts. The first part after the introduction (which has only one chapter) will discuss the theories of nationalism and the nation-state that will throw light on the politics of interpretation of nationhood. The second part (which is the second chapter) will explore the role of religion in the formation of the Western nation-state and the relationship between this particular model of the nation-state and the British Empire. Part three which has four chapters will explore the nature of Lanka's pre-colonial cultural and political formations, its initial colonial encounters and the emergence, persistence and persuasiveness of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in relation to colonial and postcolonial eras. This part will examine the interpretation of cultures and religions within the nexus of Western colonial practice and how such interpretations of belief systems are operating within the field of power to forge an Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological scheme. This scheme serves both Western imperialism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism while merging them together and concurrently antagonising the geo-political spaces of East and West. This will be an exploration of

the relationship between power and knowledge to assist in understanding the complexity of the crisis in Sri Lanka. The fourth part, which has two chapters will discuss an alternative interpretative model and will examine how religious and ethical traditions can be reinterpreted in evolving a liberative paradigm for reorganising the political community, which will enable a transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. The concluding remarks will focus on the need for a convergence and confluence of local and global movements that can facilitate a peace process for Lanka.

PART I

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER ONE: AMBIGUITY OF MEANINGS

1. THEORIES ABOUT NATIONALISM AND NATION

The perception of a nation-state as the paradigmatic unit of the socio-political identity and the principal signifier of political community contains ambiguities of meaning. This ambiguity derives from the entanglement of meanings that are attached to the terms nation or nationhood, nationalism and national identity. Although most scholars agree on the modernity within the congruence of the perception of nation and state with the people (people as masses or people as individual citizens), and the major role that the West played in shaping the modern principles of nationality such as sovereignty, autonomy, self determination and equality, many of them have different opinions as to what factors of modernity were more forceful or significant than others in bringing about the modern nation. Moreover, there are also theoretical debates over the antiquity, the nature of ethnic and religious ties, and the roots of the persuasive political character of nation and nationalism. In the study of the genesis, the process of formation, persistence and persuasiveness of nation and nationalism, there is no one grand theory or theorist. As Benedict Anderson puts it, 'no Hobbes, Marxes, or Webers'[1] who would explain with one theory the entire gamut of ambiguity of meanings involved in the discourse. Anderson, himself a theoretician on the subject, explains in three points the perplexity that the theorists of nation and nationalism face:

> (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of the nationalists.
> (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept...vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations...
> (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. [2]

Anthony D Smith while dealing with the above perplexities identifies, on the theoretical level, several schools of thought that propose antagonistic theories. They

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1 Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities*, (London / New York, Verso, 1991), p.5.
2 Loc. cit.

are regarding the antiquity and the nature of ethno-religious ties of nations and nationalism.[3] He demonstrates how the 'perennialist' and 'modernist' theories differ regarding the antiquity of nation and nationalism, and the 'primordialist' and the 'instrumentalist' theories differ regarding the nature of ethno-religious ties. The 'primordialists' argue that the nation is a part of the nature of human beings or of a divine plan whereas the 'perennialists' suggest that it has existed throughout recorded history, but not as a part of the natural order of things. He also notes how the 'instrumentalists' take a different approach saying that ethno-religious ties are socially constructed throughout history and used as instruments in forming nationalism and nation, while the 'modernists' assert that it is a phenomenon that emerged after the French and the Industrial Revolutions as a product of capitalism, industrialisation, vernacular mobilisation, bureaucratic state, urbanisation, secularisation and printing. In this modernist sense scholars like Eric Hobsbawm (whom Smith calls a 'modernist' theoretician) argue that nation is 'a historical invention of the past 200 years' and has not been an ancient phenomenon in human history. [4] There are also differences that Smith identifies within each of these main theoretical categories. He makes reference to Clifford Geertz's notion of 'participants primordialism', which is distinct from the other notions of primordialism, because it defines ethnic ties not as part of nature or a divine plan, but as 'givens' to or 'attributes' of members of a particular ethnic community. These 'givens' and 'attributes' have an 'ineffable overriding power'.[5] The category under 'perennialism' is also subdivided into 'continuous perennialism' and 'recurrent perennialism'; the former asserts that certain nations have existed over many centuries or at least over a millennium and the latter describes them as emerging and dissolving while reappearing in a given period of time.[6]

Apart from these major debates, there are also different views among the modernist scholars regarding the process of the formation of nationalism and nation, which reveals more about the complexity of the phenomena. They differ as to which

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[3] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford / New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), p.99.

[4] Eric Hobsbawm: *On History*, (London, Abacus, 2005) p.121.

[5] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.99. Geertz, while defining primordial attachments as a factor that emerges from cultural attributes, notes that the primordial bonds vary from person to person, society to society and from time to time. He observes that in societies where the tradition of civil politics is weaker the primordial attachments could seem stronger. Clifford Geertz: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), p.259

[6] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.5.

aspects of modernity were stronger than others in forming the nation. Elie Kedourie points out the philosophies of the Enlightenment that preceded the French Revolution, particularly that of Emmanuel Kant, and referring to the principle of nationality of the Revolution, writes that 'Such a climate of thought was necessary for the development and spread of doctrines like nationalism'.[7] Eric Hobsbawm, while rejecting both the objective and the subjective criteria used in the definition of nation, argues that 'the real nation can only be recognized *a posteriori*' not by an *apriori* definition.[8] He shows how the modern nation emerged as a result of capitalist development and that it will remain in history, but it will play only a 'subordinate' and a 'minor role' as the process of capitalist globalisation continues.[9] Benedict Anderson argues that capitalism linked with print and language, which he calls 'print capitalism', revolutionised the use of the vernacular and brought about a consciousness of nation which he considers to be an 'imagined community'. Ernest Gellner, another theoretician, refutes the Marxist idea – that nationalism was a class ideology formed within capitalism – while focusing more on the role that industrialisation played in bringing about nation and nationalism. He argues that the transition from agrarian (pre-industrial) to industrial societies brought about the modern nation. John Breuilly in his introduction to the second edition of Gellner's work – *Nations and Nationalism* – summarises Gellner's ideas as follows: 'The remorseless pressure towards a standard culture based on written vernacular which is congruent with the state is what produces 'nation''. [10]

i. Critique of Theories

Turning to critique the broader category of theories above, Anthony D. Smith shows how the 'sweeping certitudes' of these opposing positions can be overcome by identifying the particular nuances in the 'terms like nation, nation-state, national identity and nationalism' which are often entangled with each other.[11] As a first observation, it can be seen that the 'primordialists' and 'perennialists' make an

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7 Elie Kedourie: *Nationalism*, (London, Hutchinson University Library, 1960), pp.12-13.
8 Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.9.
9 Ibid., p.182.
10 Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p.xxii-xxiv.
11 Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.101.

attempt to address the factor of deep down loyalty and allegiance to a national identity that motivates the people not only to die for a nationalist cause but also to kill their opponent for the sake of their nation, but the above theoretical explanations as to why such allegiances emerge makes ethno-religious cultures and national identities essentialist and stereotypical. Referring to 'primordialists', Smith notes that they do not have independent evidence other than that of the nationalists to make their point and they also have underestimated the historical processes of increase of populations, migrations, colonisations and intermarriages. Such historical interactions problematise the idea of a primordial essence. Referring to Clifford Geertz who does not consider national communities primordial, but defines them in terms of the participating members' 'feeling' with 'an overriding efficacy', Smith admits that such an explanation helps to grasp the factor of the centrality of symbolism of national identity, but he notes that Geertz does not show a way to solve the problem. The explanation given by the 'perennialists' throws light into the history of communities with a perceived collective past, particularly with an emphasis on historical memory. This is an aspect that needs to be welcomed in addressing the contemporary reality of nation as a community. However as Smith notes, the 'perennialist', could fall into 'the danger of imposing a *retrospective nationalism* onto communities and cultures whose identities and loyalties were local, regional, and religious, but barely national'.[12] The emphasis on historical memory alone can lead to a situation by which the present is read into and perceived in the past, making the other the eternal enemy. In this sense 'perennialists' also could contribute to essentialist and stereotypical re-presentations.

The 'modernist' positions throw light on the vital role that modernity played in the emergence of the rational principles of nationality and the congruence of nation and state, but they tend to undermine, perhaps totally, the role of ethnicity and religious traditions or the ethnic and religious effect of culture on the national attachments. Therefore, the modernist position is critiqued for not being able to explain sufficiently the persuasive power of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith writes that for many 'modernist' scholars it is the 'state and social groups who occupy centre stage, while ethnicity and religious tradition are accorded secondary role'.[13] He also remarks that the 'modernists' 'exaggerate the gulf between tradition and modernity,

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[12] Ibid., p.5.

[13] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen People: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, (Oxford / New York, Oxford University Pres, 2003), p.10.

the impossibility of nations in traditional agrarian societies and their necessity in modern, industrial ones.'[14] He shows how Eric Hobsbawm, even though he mentions the existence of 'proto-national' communities of language, religion and region, fails to make a link between the pre-modern era and modern nations[15] and how Benedict Anderson, while recognising the need to address the role of religion, proposes altogether a different thesis. Anderson tries to overcome the perplexity of the bridge between 'modernist objectivity' and 'nationalist subjectivity' through the concept of 'imagined community' without recognising that the word community itself has pre-modern ethnic and religious connotations. Ernest Gellner in responding to his critics – in a new chapter added in 2006 to his earlier work *Nation and Nationalism*, written in 1983 – acknowledges the existence of patriotic loyalties of human collectivities throughout the history of humankind, but he distinguishes them from modern nationalism. He does not go beyond saying that 'nationalism is a species of patriotism' characterised by 'homogeneity, literacy and anonymity'.[16] Smith identifies in the earlier work of Elie Kedourie – one of the earliest pioneering modernist scholars on nationalism – the statements which radically depict the modernist position that considers the belief of Kant and his followers that 'good will is the free will proved to be the source of the doctrine of national self-determination'.[17] Smith notes that most of the 'modernist' scholars barely mentioned religion 'except as a backcloth' in their study of nation and nationalism because they perceived religion as a declining phenomenon and a residual category' which is being replaced by secular nationalism.[18] However, Smith recognises in the later work of Kedourie how the earlier position of 'secular replacement' has been qualified with two other positions that acknowledge the role of religion: Kedourie shows how religion has begun to function as a 'neo-traditional' phenomenon supporting nationalism and how nationalism is a kind of political religion which is characterised by religious millennialism.[19]

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[14] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, pp.100-101.
[15] Ibid., p.14.
[16] Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism*, p.132.
[17] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen People: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, pp.10-11.
[18] Loc. cit.
[19] Ibid., p.13.

ii. Ethno-Symbolic Alternative

Smith attempts a way out of the eternalising and historicising pathways of 'primodialists' and 'perennialists' respectively, and the exaggerated road diversion (or replacement) of 'modernists', by proposing 'historical ethno-symbolism' as an alternative to understand nation, national identity and nationalism. He describes values, traditions, collective memories, and popular myths and beliefs that are encapsulated in ethno-symbols and ethno-histories that 'give nationalism its power' and from which 'the modern national identities are constituted in each generation', as the members of the nation cope with new challenges. [20] More specifically, he identifies the religious dimension in historical ethno-symbolism as the primary source of national attachments and its object, nation.

> So, it is in the sphere of 'religion' that we must seek primarily the sources of national attachments. Behind and beyond ethnicity, language, and state, albeit entwined with all three, lie the fundamental sacred sources of national identity.[21]

Questioning mainly the modernist position, he substantiates his argument by showing the inadequacy of Benedict Anderson's hypothesis of 'imagined community' brought about by 'print-capitalism'. He points out that 'imagining' alone is not enough to explain the passions that nationalism arouses and that 'collective will and devotion' are vital in the persuasive character of nation and nationalism.[22] It is the common heritage of an ethno-religious history and symbolism among communities of people that provides this vital factor. Counteracting Hobsbawm's and Gellner's position of the 'invention of tradition', he, while admitting such a possibility, shows that traditions persist only if they have a 'popular resonance' and that such resonance is viable if they are 'harmonised and made continuous with a perceived collective past'.[23] Smith, by touching upon a basic philosophical or rather a theological aspect in the human condition shows that national identity functions as a guarantee against 'personal oblivion' in assuring 'a measure of personal immortality' that the scepticism of the secular age seeks to destroy. Therefore, 'to identify with the nation is to identify

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[20] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.8-10
[21] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen People: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.5.
[22] Ibid., pp.22-23.
[23] Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, (London, Penguin Books, 1991), p.159.

with more than a cause or a collectivity.'[24] This accounts for the place of nationalism as a secularised outcome of the answers given to the basic perennial questions that arise in life regarding the destiny of humanity in the face of the revolutions and changes (with the collapse of the previous systems). Some of these basic questions are 'who are we?' 'where do we come from?' 'where do we go from here?'. In nationalism, belonging to the nation becomes one's personal identity. To die for it is the goal in life. The perception behind the political standpoint that promotes the nation-state is not a mere presupposition, but a deeply rooted belief in the world of nations, that not only exists among the political elite but also among the masses: a belief for which some are ready to kill and die. Smith's view of the symbolic expression of collective identities highlights the basic need for the symbolic dimension in human existence. While the 'modernist' position throws light on the socioeconomic and political factors that contribute to the interpretation (motivated by corrupt ideological reasons), manipulation, construction and even invention of the symbolic meanings, such a process does not exclude the basic need for symbolic expressions in human life. It corresponds to *habitus* in the social world as Pierre Bourdieu shows. Such symbolic expressions are *historical transcendentals*.

Smith overcomes the third perplexity, mentioned by Benedict Anderson at the beginning regarding the persuasive power of nationalism and its philosophical incoherence. However, he identifies that most nationalist ideologies and nations are modern and as official ideologies they are secular. In other words they are 'doctrines of autoemancipation' contrary to the beliefs in miraculous divine intervention. Apart from this, he also notices another aspect of nationalism; it can be 'a form of culture and a type of belief system whose object is the nation conceived as a sacred communion'. In that way nation becomes the object of worship of nationalism.[25] Referring to Emile Durkheim's description of emotive collective qualities in totemic belief systems in primordial religions, Smith points out that a similar belief system is prevalent to a far reaching degree in nationalist beliefs where 'the deity is the nation itself' and the emotions expressed are directed to the community itself which is seen to be 'self-consciously extolling itself'.[26] Therefore, nations are modern as well as deeply rooted in belief systems of the people. Nationalism, albeit a secular ideology,

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[24] Ibid., pp.160-161.
[25] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen People: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.18.
[26] Ibid., p.18, Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.78.

cannot be classified with other secular ideologies as such liberalism and socialism, because its ethnic base is wedded to sacred symbolic meanings that change over time. This symbolism refers to territory, history and community. Smith's position is a vivid analysis of the modern phenomena of nations and nationalism. It is a phenomenon that has emerged as a result of historical ethno-symbolism that has been and is being recycled or translated to provide an ethno-religious cultural foundation for societies that struggle to cope with changing socio-economic and political conditions. In this sense, nation and nationalism have not emerged as total replacement of the religiously sanctioned older dynasties and empires. In his analysis, Smith gives defines nation, mentioning the aspects of territory, historicity and community as: ' A named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, a public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members'.[27]

The model of nation which constitutes the above components first emerged in the West. It had an enormous influence on the non-Western nations as mentioned above. Smith describes how the boundaries of the nation in the colonised non-Western world were forged and defined by the colonial states of the European powers in countries like India and Sri Lanka while the culture and the political identity of the 'dominant *ethnie*' of those lands shaped the character of the emerging nation.[28] While acknowledging the role that the native Western educated intelligentsia and Western scholarship played in influencing the nationalist thought of the ex-colonies, he still argues that such thoughts fell on native 'fertile soil' and rules out the explanation which goes on to say that nationalism is purely 'an invention' of the West.[29] He notes that the many minority struggles against the 'dominant-*ethnie* states' reveal the failure to 'invent' a new political culture that would transcend the majority-minority complexity.[30] According to Smith there are two main routes of its formation. One is the bureaucratic incorporation of a subject population by an aristocratic ethnic community, which he calls lateral *ethnie*: the other is vernacular mobilisation of the vertical *ethnies*, who are often subject ethnic communities whose membership is

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[27] Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.43.
[28] Ibid., p.114.
[29] Ibid., p.110.
[30] Ibid., p.114.

mostly defined by religious ties.[31] These routes of formation can be found in both Western and non-Western nations; sometimes both routes are found (in tension with each other) in the formation of one nation like India.[32] Contesting the argument of Eric Hobsbawm that nationalism preceded nation,[33] Smith shows that this is a Western idea and points out that in the West it is the state that formed the nation, whereas in the ex-colonies it is the nation that formed the state. In Sri Lanka the very model of the state and administrative structure is colonial. Another distinction he makes is that between anti-colonial nationalism and nation-building nationalism. He observes that the potential within anti-colonial nationalism (which he calls colonial nationalism) is exhausted once its goal of independence is achieved because its ideology was formed mainly to face an outsider, whereas nation-building nationalism has to look within the community for the potential to build the nation. He shows that 'colonial nationalisms are still-born; they are imitative nationalisms of the intelligentsia, unable to forge real nations' implying the ambiguity of nation-building.[34]

Anthony D. Smith makes an attempt to retrieve the 'suppressed other' of ethnicity and religious traditions in the modernist academic discourse of nation without falling into the trap of 'primordial essences' and 'perennial substances' saying that 'the modernist view is as much a myth as perennialism'.[35] In his analysis of nation and nationalism what is important on the one hand, is the avoidance of committing the 'sin of retrospective nationalism' by acknowledging the modern characteristics of the nation. On the other hand, it is important to note how he recognises the power of ethno-symbolic meanings, recycled throughout history under different social conditions, in forming human collectivities. The former sacred worldview of the pre-modern period has not been replaced by the modern secular view marking a sharp distinction between the two, but rather religious myths of chosenness have been translated, transformed and recycled under different and particular social conditions into secular myths of nationalism which is called the civic

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31 Ibid., pp.54-70.
32 Ibid., p.114.
33 Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, p.10.
34 Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.108.
35 Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.100.

religion or secular religion (this worldly) of nationalism. Nation here is treated as an entity, that is, it is given individuality.

iii. Theory and Praxis

Although Smith's categories are basic guidelines that help to identify the theories regarding nation and nationalism, his categorisation of theories is determined by his selection of authors for theoretical and methodological purposes; there could be more theoreticians who fall into the categories that Smith enumerates. They may add more distinctly subtle nuances to the variety within a broader category of conceptualising the manifestation of 'irremediable particularity' of the 'formal universality of nationality' which is one of the perplexities that Benedict Anderson mentioned. While differing from each other regarding the parameters of adaptation to modern times, the three main theoreticians who currently argue for the primordial existence of the Sinhala Buddhist nation in Sri Lanka are, Gunadasa Amarasekara, Nalin De Silva and Champika Ranawake.[36] They are a type of culturalist primordialists who assert civilisational differences. They argue for a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness that has an ancient civilisational foundation. Gunadasa Amarasekara, referring to Samuel Huntington's theory of 'clash of civilizations', considers Sinhala Buddhist culture as one of the civilisations that has primordial cultural traits, and that this is the main distinction between it and Dravidian and Western civilisations. It is civilisation more than nature, divine plan or kingship which acts here as the primordial factor adding to the variety of primordialisms which Anthony D. Smith enumerates.

Furthermore, a study of a particular case like Sri Lanka may reduce or increase the major theoretical categories depending on the emphasis placed on a particular dimension (cultural, economic and political), the perspective (the perspective of state-building or of the people) and the methodology that a particular author adopts. For example, Nira Wickramasighe, who studies the history of contested identities in Sri Lanka, notes three contrasting positions: the 'primordialist' position which conceives

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[36] Patali Champika Ranawaka: *Sihala Abhiyogaya*, (Colombo, Dayawansa Jayakody & Company, 2001), Gunadasa Amarasekara: *Deshapalana Samaja Vichara: 1986 -1993*, Vol.I, (Colombo, S. Godage & Bros, 2000), Nalin de Silva: *Ape Pravada*, (Boralesgamuwa, Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2006).

the present conflict as an internal reproduction of the 'fundamental antagonism that goes back to ancient times and is anchored in a collective memory transmitted in an uninterrupted fashion through language (Sinhala as opposed to Tamil) and religion (Theravada Buddhism as opposed to Hindu Saivism), the 'modernist' position that argues that the historical roots of the present conflict belong to the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries and later took shape through colonialism, and the 'postmodernist' position of recent scholarship that attempts to go beyond this debate through deconstruction.[37]

While Smith's theoretical framework throws light on the particular case under study and supplies a point of departure for our research, the encounter between the theory and the research (practice) may require a modification of the framework. The framework can be complemented with other perspectives and theories. Employing the ethno-symbolic alternative to the particular situation – the making of the Sri Lankan nation-state in the context of its colonial encounter with Britain – may bring to light an element of 'invention'. Whether it is inventing, recycling, translating or transforming ethno-religious symbolism, the degree of such activity has to be ascertained through a study of a particular context taking into consideration both cultural (mainly ethno-religious) and socioeconomic factors in the formation of ethno-nationalisms and identities. Smith, in his classification, does not consider the theories that emerged under the postmodern and postcolonial discourses as a separate category; instead he includes the idea of 'construction' into the 'modernist' category when referring to the concept of 'imagined community' articulated by Benedict Anderson. However, as this study intends to explore more deeply the process of essentialist re-presentation of nationhood within the colonial practice and postcolonial phases of nation-building, references to the theories of re-presentation which are informed by postcolonial criticism and some postmodernist theories will be made as a separate category.

Even though in his writings Smith admits the role of modernity in forming the modern principles of nationality and the congruence of nation and state, his attempt at proposing an alternative of historical ethno-symbolism inclines to a position more critical of the 'modernists' than of 'primordialists' and 'perennialists'.

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[37] Nira Wickramasinghe has cited here Eric Meyer's description of debate on identities in Sri Lanka. Nira Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, (New, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1995), p.xi.

Understandably, his main case is against the 'modernist' undermining of the power of ethno-histories and ethno-symbolism and their assumption that nationalism is the 'secular replacement' of a supposedly declining religious worldview, but his theoretical position needs to be interpreted in the proper context of the above academic debate. If not, it may overlook most of the valuable insights that the 'modernist' scholars make. Smith's position could be misinterpreted easily as saying that it is ethno-religious factors that cause nationalism. Anthony D. Smith's emphasis is important in the understanding of the persuasive character of national identity and nationalism, but this does not mean that the other factors that the 'modernist' scholars point out are insignificant. It is just the contrary. It is the interplay between the ethno-religious factors, classes and state that has given rise to the modern phenomenon of nation and nationalism. Smith himself writes:

> It is rooted in a long history of ethnic ties and sentiments that reach back long before the birth of our modern world, but that have been unexpectedly and powerfully revitalised by modern bureaucratic state systems, capitalist class structures and the widespread longing for immortality and the dignity in a community of a history and destiny in a secular age...'[38]

While Smith's view helps a student of nationalism to be cautious of the exaggerated positions of modernity as a total rupture from a traditional mythical past, the 'modernist' as well as some postcolonial critiques (informed by some postmodernist currents) helps one to be cautious of the exaggerated meaning of symbolism. It is here that the 'modernist' scholars are helpful. There is a danger in historicising ethno-symbolism by interpreting it more as a political reality that has been in existence from time immemorial than as a cultural reality. For example, Stanley Tambiah, who has researched the role of religion and kingship in South Asia, describes pre-modern politics as 'galactic politics'.[39] H.L. Seneviratna, a Sri Lankan social anthropologist, shows how the pre-modern relationship between the King and the people of vast areas of South Asia had more of a symbolic meaning than a deeply structural political relationship. Something similar could be said about Gananatha Obeysekara whose recent paper argues against Benedict Anderson's concept of nation

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[38] Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.170.

[39] Galactic polity – a system where a central planet is surrounded by other satellites which are autonomous to a certain degree, but within the sphere of influence of the centre – metaphorically refers to a political system of a cluster of centre-based, but overlapping semi-autonomous or autonomous societies. Stanley J.Tambiah,: *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.102-131.

– as an imagined community which emerged only after printing technology and capitalism – saying that it is state which is a modern Western construction, but the reality corresponding to the sovereignty of nation existed in premodern and pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is not the nation which is a Western model but the state. 'Sinhalas had no term that could be translated as 'nation'; they had the term that belonged to the same polythetic class as nation, namely *sasana*'.[40] In this way Obeysekara claims to assert an unchanging ethnic consciousness that seem to have existed among the Sinhala Buddhists in Lanka which forms the basis of modern Sri Lankan nationalism. Can we say that *sasana* corresponds to the modern notion of nationhood without taking into account the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial dynamics of interactions between power and culture? It is important to utilise Weber's notion of ethnicity here in order to clarify the relationship between ethno-symbolism and the political *field*. Weber defines ethnic groups as 'human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent'. He points out that ethnicity itself does not constitute a group identity, but rather it facilitates a group formation, particularly in the political sphere and 'it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common identity'.[41] Therefore the primacy of the political *field* has to be acknowledged in searching for ethnic roots of nationalism and nationhood. If such distinctions are not carefully made it will be difficult to analyse the current later phases of colonial and postcolonial politicisation of culture giving rise to Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

The role of economic and political fields emphasised by the 'modernists' is significant in understanding the role of ethno-religious factors that Smith has highlighted. Specifically, the Marxist idea which Hobsbawm proposes, that the nation-state is a phase in the historical development of capitalism, has to be understood in terms of the economic factors of capitalism that were decisive in forming the nation. Capitalism grew initially not as a world phenomenon, but in one locality. It needed a national economy and national resources and today it has spread beyond national boundaries through Western imperialism and the new phase of

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[40] Gananatha Obeysekara: *Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: The Premodern and Pre-colonial Formations*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), p.22. *Sasana* refers to Buddhism as an institution in the self conception of the Buddhists.

[41] Max Weber: 'The Origins of Ethnic Groups' in *Ethnicity*, (eds.) John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p.35.

capitalist globalisation. Adopting the same Marxist economic analysis, both Francois Houtart and Kumari Jayawardena make groundbreaking studies linking the rise of nationalist ideologies with colonial economic class structures in Sri Lanka.[42] Satchi Ponnambalam and N. Shanmugaratnam show how Sri Lankan colonial and post-colonial economies were not formed by industrial capitalism, but by mercantile capitalism which they call 'dependent capitalism'.[43] In this sense, in Hobsbawm's analysis, the role that industrial capitalism played in the rise of the Western nation-state has to be qualified when analysing the nature of the Sri Lankan nation-state which depends on commercial capital. This reinforces Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on empirical research and theory.

A similar comment could be made with regard to the element of 'invention of tradition' about which Hobsbawm speaks. The idea that national identity is an ideological construction by the ruling classes – an invention which maintains bourgeois economies (national economies) – and that it would disappear as the globalisation of capital proceeds is an important observation. Even though its fundamental reductionist position is contestable as Smith shows, such an analysis helps to identify the complicity of religions with ideologies that are formed by reason corrupted by economic and political interests. Moreover, it can also help to explain the emergence of today's extra-territorial, neo-liberal elite of the transnational corporations. The weakness of this analysis is that it does not explain sufficiently the emergence of another elite group who function as the vanguard of fundamentalist movements along with a polarisation of the vast majority of the masses into antagonistic ethno-religious camps. Referring to Sri Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena studies the interaction between the nationalist elite, the commercial and the middle classes, who are emerging from the colonial and the postcolonial economy.[44] With regard to Benedict Anderson's idea of 'print capitalism' and 'imagined communities' Smith correctly argues against Anderson's underestimation of pre-modern narratives

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[42] Kumari Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness, 1883-1893.* Francois Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, (Bangalore, TPI, 1974).

[43] Satchi Ponnambalam: *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy 1948-1980*, (London, Zed Press, 1981). N. Shanmugaratnam: 'Colonial Agrarian Changes and Underdevelopment' in *Capital and Peasant Production: Studies in the Continuity and Discontinuity of Agrarian Structures in Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Charles Abeysekara, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1985).

[44] Kumari Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka,* Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 2003.

which assumed that there had been a total rupture between the Old Order of things caused by the 'Age of Revolution' and the emergence of nations which was caused by print capitalism. However, such a critique of Anderson does not mean that his explanation of the role that the vernacular language, and its modern formulations in the print media, played in mobilising the masses to identify themselves with a particular national collectivity can be overlooked. Instead, it has to be explored how the press (print-capitalism) contributed to the recycling of the ethno symbolic narratives that Smith speaks about. In the Sri Lankan context, the role that school text books and the media play through the selective reading of ethno-religious narratives has become a crucial factor that fortifies an exclusivist national identity.

iv. Theory and Solutions

The different theoretical analyses of the dilemma of the nation-state determine the nature of the solutions that are proposed. Most of those who promote reforms to or transformation of the existing fixed structures of the Sri Lankan nation-state base their arguments on the 'modernist' theoretical position whereas the theories of 'perennialists' and 'primordialists' are adopted by nationalists to justify the pre-modern and pre-colonial existence of primordial nation or proto nation-state. The latter thereby oppose any degree of political reforms that alters the existing congruence of fixed national boundaries and national identity. In this light, therefore, the above theoretical differences can be categorised broadly, on the political level, as the modernist and the nationalist versions of the nation-state. These versions determine both conflict analysis and resolutions, often dividing academia itself.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, while carrying out a survey of studies done on the history of the nation in Sri Lanka, observes how the study of Sri Lankan history and Sinhala literature in the schools and universities of Sri Lanka has been highly 'appropriated, disciplined and colonised by the ethnic majoritarian state'[45] and confesses how little independent research has been done on the subject except by a few individual scholars. Along with the 'primordialist' theoreticians mentioned above who are directly engaged in ultra-nationalist politics in Sri Lanka today, and who argue for

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[45] Jayadeva Uyangoda: *Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State in Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, p.170.

primordial Sinhala Buddhist national identity, there is a gamut of Sri Lankan historians like Ellawala Medananda, Ananda Guruge, K.M.De Silva, K.N.O. Dharmadsa, who fall into the category of perennialist theoreticians because they assert the continuous historical memory as a justification for a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state.[46] With reference to the British nation, the same approach could be found in the work of authors like Adrian Hastings, who demonstrates the early modern roots of Scottish, Irish and English nationalism prior to the Age of Reformation. Adrian Hasting writes that England is 'the prototype of both a nation and a nation-state in the fullest sense'.[47] For nationalists, the nation existed from time immemorial and for secular modernists, it is (totally) a modern construction.

Smith suggests that if the nationalist conflicts are to be resolved and national identities to be transcended, (going beyond the nationalist and modernist versions of the nation-state) they need to be addressed taking into consideration the principles that shape nation and national identity. If the principles that form nation and nationalism are not adequately understood the alternative paradigms that are suggested for crisis situations arising out of them will not hold ground. Smith's contention is that the principles of the nation are those of nationalism.[48] It cannot be transcended without a similar kind. 'Hence it may only be possible to transcend the nation through another form of nationalism, one that is paradoxically broader than the compact nation that has usually been the object of its endeavours'[49] Therefore, he argues that neither the liberal (cosmopolitan globalization with a cultural homogeneity) nor the socialist (egalitarian social structures with a cultural homogeneity) paradigms proposed by the modernist scholars can transcend nationalism. He suggests a model of Pan-nationalism that would unite several nations under shared cultural characteristics or a 'family of cultures'. This model can maintain the national identity of individual

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[46] Ananda Guruge (ed.): *A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala: Return To Righteousness*, (Colombo, Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, 1991) and *Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Lake House, 1989), K.M. De Silva: *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, (New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1998). Ellawala Medhananda: *The Sinhala Buddhist Heritage in the East and the North of Shri Lanka*, (Colombo, Dayawansa Jayakody & Company, 2005). K.N. O. Dharmadasa: 'The Sinhala Buddhist Identity and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom 1739-1815' in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, Vol.I, (ed.) Michael Roberts, (Colombo, Marga Institute 1997), pp.79-104.

[47] Adrian Hastings: *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.4.

[48] Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.171.

[49] Loc. cit.

nations while arresting any exclusivist claim to a particular identity by giving them common regional cultural identity. It is the model of the European Union which he takes for an example and highlights here. In such an endeavour he suggests how the ethical principles within Western Christianity can be developed in forming a new Europe. Even though his emphasis is an ethno-religious symbolic alternative he is not blind to the fact that the present moves to unify Europe have arisen more from an economic interest than from an ethical concern (or from a Christian ethic). The current model of the European Union therefore has to be analysed in the context of the global network of asymmetrical power relationships which needs to be critiqued by an ethical-political movement that is based on the rich sources of religious and ethical traditions. In view of overcoming nationalism in Lanka, Jayadeva Uyangoda refers to the researches of Stanley Tambiah who defines pre-modern South Asian political systems in terms of 'galactic politics' – in which a high degree of autonomy could be exercised by the peripheral regions while symbolically expressing the notion of 'two wheels of dhamma' where the relationship between Buddhism and kingship is entangled.. Uyangoda writes, 'A South Asian problem requires South Asian alternatives. South Asian alternatives need a South Asian and not single-state specific, political imagination'.[50] With a postcolonial rhetoric, he critiques the present unalterable dogmatic position regarding the nationalist version of the Sri Lankan nation-state indicating that politically it does not have South Asian Buddhist roots, but that it is Western in construction. Therefore, a solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka needs to be sought within a South Asian framework.

The alternative that Uyangoda suggests for the Sri Lankan conflict does not explore the ethical principles in Asian Buddhism that promote political autonomy; instead he suggests 'fresh forms of political association' based on 'free movement of capital and all forms of labour' in the present phase of globalisation as a solution to the 'decaying nation-state'.[51] He identifies the problem correctly by referring to the dogmatist belief in the nation-state and also suggests the need for an innovative alternative, but would such an alternative be possible without finding an answer to how to implement such an alternative? The position of Uyangoda does not make clear how the ethno-religious beliefs and the belief in the nation-state are interwoven.

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[50] Ibid., p.178.

[51] Jayadeva Uyangoda: *Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State in Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, p.179.

Should not there be a way to reinterpret the ethno-religious narratives that points to resolution of conflict in a society where allegiance to nation-state is not a mere cognitive idea but a belief system with a collective will and a devotion? Those who adhere to this belief system are not only the nationalist elite and the middle classes but also the millions of poor. In what way can the poor and the underprivileged social classes overcome the internalisation of these dominant ideologies? Uyangoda's South Asian political paradigm suggests a radical step to liberate the project of Sri Lankan nation-building from a Western model (this suggestion is also important given the role of India and Pakistan in the Sri Lankan conflict). However, one has to be cautious of his encouragement of free movement of capital and all forms of labour in the present phase of globalisation, because the conflict in Sri Lanka is not only a result of the suppressive process of nation building, but also of the exploitative character of the Western developmental model.[52] In the words of Aloysius Pieris, Asia is characterised by many religions and many poor. He builds a thesis on the poverty of the religious masses and the religiosity of the poor.[53] In re-envisioning a solution to the Lankan conflict both these realities have to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, what both Smith (by referring to the model of the European Union) and Uyangoda (by referring to a South Asian alternative) miss is the geo-political dimension of these regions within a system dominated by a handful of global powers. The ostensible 'clash of civilizations' among religions and cultures – which also antagonises geo-political spaces – takes place within the geo-political strategies of these global powers. It is important to take up a hermeneutical task in order to avoid manipulation and stereotypical perceptions of cultures and religions, and search for an ethic of co-existence. Particularly, Sri Lanka's geo-political location in the Indian Ocean and in the Indian subcontinent and the role that religions play in the conflicts demands such a study not only on the local level but also on the global level.[54]

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[52] I have written elsewhere in an article arguing that the conflict in Sri Lanka is a result of the failure of both the model of the nation-state and Western development. Cf. Jude Lal Fernando: 'Towards a Convergence of Resistance in Sri Lanka?' in *The State of Resistance: Popular Struggles in the Global South*, (ed.) Francois Polet, (London, Zed Books, 2007), pp.180-185.

[53] Aloysius Pieris: *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988).

[54] Dharmaratnam Sivaram who was abducted and killed in Sri Lanka in April 2005 by an unknown group has written a large number of analytical articles regarding the geo-political strategic importance of Sri Lanka to the global powers which were published in *Daily Mirror*, *Hiru* and www.tamilnet.com. In one of the interviews I had with him before his death he wittingly said that Sri Lanka has become in the eyes of the global powers, particularly the USA, 'a Buddhist haven in an Ocean of Islamic Terrorists, Maoist Guerrillas and Tamil Tigers'. In the emerging politics of

v. Theory, Mythos and Logos

In taking up a hermeneutical task, another layer of philosophical and theological exploration is needed with regard to the nationalist and modernist versions of nationhood, that is, as Karen Armstrong puts it, the interactions between *logos* 'which was always reaching out for something fresh' and *mythos* which signifies the 'old mythological universe'.[55] This interaction emerged in the context of modern changes that the traditional societies face. The dichotomy between the nationalist and modernist versions of the nation-state is based on the responses evoked by the thoughts of the European Enlightenment, the rise of capitalism, industrialisation and secularisation, and the French and American Revolutions (the Age of Revolutions). In response to these modern changes that were followed by colonisation and imperialism marking a change in the former patterns of socioeconomic conditions, new theories were developed such as Marxism, liberalism, nationalism and racial fascism. These theories attempted to be comprehensive and they were totalising because they emerged from the context of the inexorably integrative vastness of the Western empires that began to take shape after the eighteenth century. While appreciating this context, but not agreeing with the totalising nature of these theories, Edward Said notes that by the beginning of the last century 'Europe held a grand total of roughly eighty-five percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions and commonwealths'.[56] Such theories have emerged based on certain philosophies and theologies regarding history.

On the level of historiography, the 'modernist' version is predicated on the presupposition of a radical historical rupture between modern and pre-modern periods

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energy (oil and natural gases) where China and USA will be main competitors, Sri Lanka's geopolitical location in the Indian Ocean is becoming significant. Out of the seven main sea lines of communication in the world four run through the Sri Lankan waters. One of Sri Lanka's Harbours (Trincomalee) which is situated in the eastern part of the island is the third biggest natural harbour in the world. This is the region that the Tamil Freedom Movement claims as their homeland. Furthering of essentialist representations of ethnic and religious identities (as 'civilisational differences') is related to this global setting. Cf. Dharmaratnam Sivaram: *Geo-Strategic Implications of Sethusamudran*, Daily Mirror, 06 October 2004, www.dailymirror.lk, downloaded: 05/04/2005. See also Teresita C. Schaffer: *Sri Lanka's Peace Efforts: The View from a Distance*, 30 July 2005, www.tamilnet.com, downloaded: 03/08/2005.

[55] Karen Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, (London, Harper Perennial, 2004), pp.4-5.

[56] Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.6.

or between pre-industrial (agrarian) and industrial societies or between societies of feudal and of capitalist modes of production. Accordingly, it is argued that it is the Age of Revolutions that brought about the modern nation replacing the older religious world- view, older dynastic families, empires, agrarian societies and feudal means of production with a people's sovereignty, citizenry, legal system shaped by a liberal or nationalistic bourgeois ideology. The modernist version looks forward and has recourse to the future to address the issues of the present; it offers a teleological outlook on history, analysing history as a process of successive unique events constantly breaking the chain of the 'traditional past' where progress is perceived in terms of secular paradigms (liberal or socialist) of nation-building and economic development. Conversely, the nationalist version looks back on a pristine past with a cyclical outlook on history and aims to build the nation on the principles of a glorified past civilisation asserting continuity, while considering modernism as an onslaught on their communities: because in the case of colonised countries modernisation is seen as Western colonisation. The nationalist movements, in fact, are not purely going back to the past but are attempting to adapt to the new socioeconomic and political situations with the assertion of an ethno-religious cultural identity that has pre-modern and pre-colonial roots. Nation-building and economic developments are perceived here as restoring the lost nationhood and national identity. It is the nation that is built on a particular past which would guarantee the continuity of their existence in the world as a political community and it is believed to be immemorial as an essentialist entity, perhaps, which is beyond history.

Mythos and *logos* are connected to the above teleological and cyclical approaches, and reflect the theoretical rift between the two main versions of nation-state. Epistemologically, it is also a struggle to define the secular and the religious spheres (or between the religiously interpreted world and the rationally defined world) which interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship. In times of crisis the response is to adopt mythologies of a golden past, which is characterised by the repetition of eternal laws, and articulate a vision of the future where the *mythos* rules. Nationalists oppose traditional interpretations of religion and adopt a critical approach to it while rationalising *mythos*. The modernist version is the way that looks forward with the eyes on a future secular golden age where *logos* rules. As Cilfford Longley

puts it, this tension can be called 'optimism vs. nostalgia and restlessness vs. inertia'.[57] In the case of the nationalist version, *mythos* has been historicised by the making of exclusivist ethno-religious identities. In that process, a critique is made of the systems of traditional religious beliefs that put emphasis on salvation in another world, while re-interpreting such religious and cultural beliefs to respond to modern issues. Therefore, it has to be noted that, as Smith shows, nationalism is basically a secular phenomena that functions as a civic religion. In the case of the 'modernist' verison, *logos* that has been mythologised, as Zygmunt Bauman succinctly puts it; 'God' (Church) has been replaced by 'Reason', where the moral ambivalence of human beings has been replaced by functional rationality, legality and the regulation of the state.[58] However, it has to be noted here that as the nationalist version is a critique of the religious beliefs that stress other world salvation, the modernist version is a critique of an exclusively religiously-defined nation while emphasising the need for secularity, separation between religious institutions and the state.

While the mythologising of *logos* has a tendency to end up in a modernist project where modernisation is considered an ideology to 'civilise' and dominate others, the historicising of *mythos* has a tendency to end up producing religiously inspired political myths of nation-building that do not recognise the existence of the cultural other. Both trends can function as ideologies that support colonisation (both internal and external) and despotic regimes. Generally, the nationalists are reluctant to acknowledge the 'modernist' version of the construction of the nation-state because it relativises the nation by considering it as a historical construction; if it is a historical construction it can be re-made, and the 'modernist' version does not want to consider the pre-modern ethno-religious effects of culture and polity. Protagonists of either version, who hold on to absolutist positions, seem to be in fear of being relativised by the other's paradigm. This is a crucial factor that has contributed to the process of polarisation among not only theoreticians but also peace activists for they represent different worldviews or ideologies.

The above cleavage is also a clear reflection of the tension between the wider geo-political discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism. Thus Sri Lanka's conflict

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[57] Clifford Longley: *Chosen People: The Big Idea that shapes England and America*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p.8.

[58] Zygmunt Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, (Oxford / Cambridge, Blackwell, 1995), pp.1-5.

needs to be analysed within the context of Orientalist-Occidentalist representations. If these cultural political tensions are not taken into consideration seriously in the analysis of the conflict in Sri Lanka the moves towards conflict resolutions will not hold ground. It is therefore necessary to initiate an intellectual movement that attempts to penetrate the basic perceptions and their contexts that lie behind the dichotomy between the two main versions of the phenomena of nation and nationalism to create a movement for peace with an enlightened civil society that can influence the decision making polity. The challenge of such a movement is to go beyond the rift between *mythos* and *logos*. There need not be a rift between the future-bound and past-bound perceptions 'if identities', as Nira Wickramasighe puts it, 'are best understood, not as substances, but as something embodied in practice'. 'People are sometimes more eager to say 'this is what we want' than 'this is what we are'.[59]

For Clifford Geertz, the dilemma of the nation-state is Sri Lanka's 'primordial problem'. He emphasises that the conflict should not be perceived as an impediment to the country's political, social and economic modernisation, but as a 'direct and immediate reflex' of its 'attempt to achieve such modernization'.[60] Even though he does not elaborate on the principles of modernisation that a country like Sri Lanka needs here, he identifies the problem correctly. The way out of the dilemma is determined by the extent to which the realms of *mythos* and *logos* can successfully complement each other without 'committing the sin of retrospective nationalism' and 'prospective liberalism', or in other words, without falling into the temptations of considering indigeneity as authenticity and Western modernisation as universality. What is needed therefore is an emphasis on theory and practice with an introspective search into the ambiguity of meanings in the 'modernist' and nationalist versions of nationhood.

Sociologically, Smith shows how ethno-symbolism is translated into the political myths of nationalism and nation-building. However, this sociological analysis needs to be supplemented with a hermeneutical task that engages in an exploration into the politics of interpretation in which myths, rituals, memories, values, symbols and traditions are recycled or transformed in the formation of nationalist ideological movements. Nationalism has a symbolic character that signifies

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[59] Nira Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p.xiv.
[60] Clifford Geertz: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.273.

a *historical transcendental* dimension, but how the interpretation of transcendence is entangled with the construction of exclusivist nationalist identities needs to be critiqued by the religious traditions themselves. This involves answering questions about the type of religion that is implicated in dominant power politics. How have the Western philosophical and theological discourses affected the ethno-religious nationalism of colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka? What is the relationship between power, and certain theologies and philosophies that influence Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka? How far is the Western liberal paradigm, which is linked to neo-liberal economic policies that some of the modernist theoreticians suggest in overcoming nationalism, related to a particular Western theological interpretations of Christianity? Explorations into such areas entail a study of the politics of interpretation of transcendence. The scope of this research is not limited to a sociological analysis of ethno-religious nationalism for this would dichotomise sociological from philosophical and theological analyses. Such analyses, despite their relative autonomy within the academy (or among academic fields), will not be dichotomised in this study. Such a study is also essentially a critique of the notions that consider the Occident (or Westernisation) as the criterion of universality and the Orient as the 'narrow particular' as well as the notions that consider indigeneity as authenticity.

In fact, without exploring the dynamics of the politics of interpretation, one of the perplexities mentioned by Benedict Anderson – the formal universality of nationhood and the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations – cannot be overcome. In ethical terms, exposing the complicity of particular interpretations of religious traditions with dominant power politics is a pre-requisite in the searching for a liberative paradigm to organise the political community, which needs an alternative politics of interpretation. Such a study will also throw light on the inherent contradictions in the anti-colonial nationalist movement, particularly in Sri Lanka. Resurrecting a myth to face a colonial other is one thing. Retrieving the liberative elements of that mythical culture to emancipate the enslaved community from within is another. If this distinction is not recognised any search for an alternative paradigm will end up, as shown by Regina Schwartz, in a 'rhetoric of victimisation'.[61] It is only

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[61] Regina Schwartz shows how the language of nationalism is infused with rhetoric of victimisation which justifies not only the possession of land, but also conquest and domination of others. The

through such a study with recourse to ethical principles of cultural and religious traditions that both liberal and exclusivist nationalistic paradigms of political communities can be transcended. Therefore, in analysing the modernist and nationalist versions of the nation while searching for an alternative paradigm there needs to be another layer of study; an examination of the dynamics of the politics of interpretation of nation and nationalism. This requires a consideration of theories of interpretation and representation most of which are informed by feminist studies and postcolonial criticism.

2. THEORIES OF REPRESENTATION

The ethno-religious alternative suggested by Anthony D. Smith qualifies the self-determining human subject of the modernist secular discourse – defined as a liberal autonomous self or the conscientised proletariat of the Marxian economic class – with an ethno-religious dimension. However, knowledge about the human subject characterised by an ethno-religious dimension needs to be analysed with an epistemological distance in order to avoid another discourse of essentialist ethno-religious categories. Such an analysis needs to be carried out by exploring the politics of interpretation involved in ethno-religious symbolic meanings.[62] Smith too admits that a process of interpretation is involved while opposing the idea of 'total construction'. Smith's ethno-religious alternative needs to be complemented with an analysis of the politics of interpretation, without reducing the human subject to either innumerable texts or to an unchangeable essentialist self and without assuming a

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principal argument behind conquest and domination of others by one time victims is that the latter were victims once and that they have the right to victimise others; 'it is our chance to rule now' Regina Schwartz: *Curse of Cain: the Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, (London, Chicago Press, 1997), p.56.

62 Studies pertaining to knowledge and power emerged in the seventies and eighties and questioned the modern human subject initiating anti-representational postmodern relativistic intellectual currents. After the system theories such as Marxism, functionalism and structuralism reached their climax in the third quarter of the twentieth century which marked the most intense period of the Cold War, the scholars began to question the grand theories, particularly exploring the relationship between power and knowledge. Such a trend gathered momentum since 1970s mainly with the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Smith has reservations, with regard to such trends in his attempt to retrieve the ethno-religious symbolic dimension that had been overlooked both by the 'modernist' and the postmodernist discourses. However, even though there are fundamental methodological and theoretical differences in the approaches of Smith and the theoreticians who explore the relationship between power and culture, this does not mean that the contribution of the latter towards the understanding of the interplay between knowledge and power can be sidelined.

dichotomy between *logos* and *mythos* or between rationality and ethno-religious symbolic belief systems.

The study of the politics of interpretation begins with the exploration of the influence of power on knowledge, specifically to discover the particular conditions of production of knowledge and the methods by which particular theses were achieved. It questions the positivist assumptions regarding social sciences and their claims to scientific objectivity. Such a study is significant in understanding the dynamics of interpretation involved in ethno-religious histories and symbolisms that underpin nation and nationalism. Even though the orthodox Marxist position is that cultural forms are ideological constructs of the ruling classes and that they cannot have an existence of their own without economic relationships, Marx himself in *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* notes how some groups of peasants opposed the French Revolution while supporting monarchy not mainly because of economic reasons but for cultural reasons. 'They cannot represent themselves. They need to be represented.'[63] In referring to religious culture, Marx initially analysed it as an ideology; here the meaning of ideology, which always connotes enslavement, was pejorative, but Lenin soon identified the possibility of a liberating ideology which would help to emancipate the proletariat and qualified Marx's notion of ideology which only had a negative meaning referring to corrupt economic interests.[64] Marxist scholars themselves have begun to question the strict demarcation between the base structure and the superstructure, especially in terms of meaningful cultural values. Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' does not allow total power to the ruling classes and leaves space for a civil society informed by enlightened organic intellectuals.[65] Michel Foucault while analysing the power of the Western state goes on to define it in terms of 'micro-physics of power', which is characterised by a discursive formation of fields of knowledge and multiple discourses that function as 'technologies of control'. Such controls subjugate other types of knowledge.[66] In analysing a given field, Pierre Bourdieu speaks about *symbolic capital*, *social capital*

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63 Cited by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p.21.

64 Aloysius Pieris shows how such introspective analyses are not new to human history. Even though Marx provided tools to analyse how capitalist ideology operates in modern societies, there have been methods in many ethical and religious traditions to analyse human behaviour or the hidden meanings of human actions. Aloysius Pieris: *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p.30.

65 Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds): *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2005).

66 Michel Foucault: *Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London, Routledge, 2006).

and *cultural capital* apart from the economic capital.[67] As mentioned earlier the totalising theories like Marxism, functionalism and structuralism emerged from an awareness created by a particular historical context; the totalizing effects of Western imperialism demanded an alternative – a totalising alternative – even though they reflected the particularities of the context from which they emerged. Positivism emerged as a reaction to the blind following of the unquestioned myths and traditions that justified the enslavement of the masses. However, proceeding with further research into day-to-day human experiences began to bring about more insights into the interplay between power and culture, revealing the diversity and ambiguity in social and cultural realities. As Pierre Bourdieu enumerates theoretically, it is the constant interplay between theory and practice that brings about such new dimensions to human knowledge.

i. Orientalist-Occidentalist Representations

One of the key areas to start a discussion on the relationship between power and culture, and the politics of interpretation, is Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Orientalism: Western Perceptions of the Orient.* Inspired by Michel Foucault's idea of discourse and Gramsci's concept of hegemony – though these concepts differ in their theorisation of power – Edward Said ventures to unravel the Western perception about the East and how it conditioned knowledge about the colonies and describes it as Orientalism, which functions as a discourse. He refers to Gramsci's idea within the concept of hegemony of 'mutual siege' in mounting a humanist resistance to hegemonic discourses.[68] This he analyses with reference to the Middle East. Following the lead provided by Said, there is an emerging scholarship of postcolonial criticism which critically analyses Orientalist perceptions regarding the once colonised parts of the world. Such critical studies pertaining to the East are called post-Orientalist studies and they have emerged mainly from South Asia, particularly India and Sri Lanka. In wrestling with the ambiguity of meaning in the phenomena of nation and nationalism in South Asia, particularly India, Carlos Beckenridge and Peter van der Veer have edited a collection of articles under the title, *Orientalism and the*

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[67] George Ritzer: *Sociological Theory*, (New York, McGraw Hill, 2004), p.536.

[68] Gauri Viswanathan: *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, (New York, Vintage Books, 2001), p.214.

Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia which critique the Orientalist construction of the Indian nation.[69] Another work of postcolonial criticism regarding the discursive fields of knowledge involved in the making of the Sri Lankan nation-state is *Unmaking the Nation: the Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* which is a compilation of articles edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail.[70] The Sri Lankan postcolonial scholarship is informed to a great degree by the Indian scholarship. The latter also has initiated an area of research called Subaltern Studies which concentrate on the voices of the subjugated classes that were undermined by the colonial and nationalist discourses. This has been published as a series under the heading *Subaltern Studies Collective.*[71] Apart from Edward Said, postcolonial studies are also shaped by thinkers like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Edward Said extensively examines how the discursive fields of disciplinary knowledge within the academic institutions of the imperial era in the West produced knowledge about the 'Orient'. As a body of knowledge, this is a perspectival knowledge, which was declared to be objective knowledge: it thus gave rise to the intellectual tradition of Orientalism without noting the colonial political perceptions attached to it. He defines Orientalism as 'a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident''.[72] The methodological approach used in the study of the Orient is empiricist and positivistic, and the conceptual categories with which it is defined are essentialist, which reflects 'Western superiority over Oriental inferiority'.[73]

> The Orient was viewed as if framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual. Orientalism, then, is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in the class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgement, discipline, or governing.[74]

It is rooted in the empiricism of the Enlightenment Project where factualised statements which are epistemologically detached from colonial politics are considered

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69 Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.): *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

70 Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds.): *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1995).

71 Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds): *Selected Subaltern Studies*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988).

72 Edward Said: *Orientalism*, p.2.

73 Ibid., p.42.

74 Ibid., p.41.

as objective science or divine truth. It not only expresses what the Orient is, but also what the Occident is in essentialist terms where cultures and religious belief systems are perceived as homogeneous static essentialist entities which are neither fluid nor malleable. The ethnicising of the present nations in the non-Western world takes place through this colonial discourse. Therefore, perception about the Orient not only does not allow other heterogeneous perspectives about the Orient but also about the Occident. Within the colonial practice 'knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge'[75] which means to know is to rule. In other words the will to know is inseparable from the will to rule and dominate.

Said's exposition shows that apart from colonial economic exploitation there is also cultural manipulation and violence involved in the colonial practice. In light of Said's argument, David Ludden shows how colonial empirical data about India projected it with the village as the basic unit that is ruled according to Hindu and Muslim laws. When these demarcations created conflict the colonial state intervened and in the same process religion became politicised and institutionalised by religious representations.[76] Without questioning these representations, Marx and Weber used such Orientalist facts for their theoretical formulations to demonstrate 'India's stagnant backwardness'.[77] Based on knowledge formulated by such a dominant discourse Marx welcomed the British conquest of India because it would introduce modern industrial culture, thus breaking down ancient civilisational 'backwardness'. Empiricism and politics were intermingled with each other. Ludden writes that 'Orientalism became the template for knowing an oriental other in contradistinction to European capitalism, rationality, historicity, modernity and powers of self-determination'.[78] Said does not propose nationalist discourse as a response to Orientalism because for him nationalism mirrors the positions of Orientalism itself. In other words, the self-perception of the social classes who spearheaded the nationalist movements had been conditioned by the colonial discourse. In the words of Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, for Said 'nationalism is the avatar of

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[75] Ibid., p.36.

[76] David Ludden: 'Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge' in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), pp.260-265.

[77] Loc. cit.

[78] Loc. cit.

Orientalism'.[79] On the political level, the cultural othering in Orientalism has polarised the geo-political spaces of the West and the East while enormously influencing the postcolonial projects of nation-building. This is very much reflected in today's nationalist movements in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, not to mention China. This is why Said suggests a contrapuntal reading of both colonial and nationalist discourses to unravel complicity of the Orientalist-Occidentalist 'Alliance' or 'Combine'[80].

Said's exposition throws light on how the ethno-religious histories and symbols of the colonies were perceived and interpreted by the West under the guise of scientific empiricism, and how such knowledge conditioned the self-perception of the Orientals themselves, particularly in forming the ethnic and national identities of the anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalist movements. This shows the correlation between knowledge about the modern national identities and the imperial project. However, there are certain questions that arise from this contention. Were all Orientalist scholars colonialists? Some really defended the local cultures by opposing the alleged religious superiority of Anglicanism of the period, particularly in India and Sri Lanka. It has to be noted here that Said's argument is not with the individual dispositions of scholars. In a field of power, they are not individuals: whether they like it or not, they belong to a system of colonisation that claims to have authoritative knowledge about the colonial subjects, and individual dispositions alone cannot make a change to the systemic field of power. As Richard King notes, 'implications of scholarly knowledge within a field of power relations cannot be reduced to the level of individual intentions'.[81] What Said stresses here is that essentialist representations of Asian cultures, which belong to a field of power, create conditions for manipulation. Another critique of Said's position is about the role of the natives in forming such knowledge about the colonies.

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[79] Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds): *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, p.12.

[80] In order to signify the dominant power that both Orientalist and Occidentalist discourses share Aloysius Pieris defines them not as oppositions but as an alliance or a combine that claim to be antagonistic. Aloysius Pieris: 'The Asian Reality and the Christian Option: A Plea for a Paradigm Shift in Christian Education in Asia' in *The Religious Conversion Debate Against the Background of Material Progress and Spiritual Growth*, in *Dialogue*, new series, Vol.xxxii & xxxiii, (2005-2006), p.160.

[81] Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, (Oxford / New York, Routledge, 1999), p.89.

Does it mean that the natives were passive recipients of the colonial knowledge and the essentialist terms with which they identified themselves have nothing to do with the native histories themselves? Said does not say so. The perception of the Orientalists is also dependent on elite native informants. David Ludden, referring to India, writes as follows:

> Orientalism began with the acquisition of the languages needed to gain reliable information about India. Indian languages became a foundation for scientific knowledge of Indian tradition built from data transmitted to Europeans by native experts...Reliable evidence with which to establish a factual basis for Company Raj thus came initially from reputable natives whose authority was rooted in their expertise and social status, as evaluated by Company authorities.[82]

This shows that there were native sources that corresponded to what the colonialists constructed. Also in his analysis, Said did not refer to German Indology which was associated with Orientalism. Although Germany did not have colonies for long periods of time like Britain, France and Spain, it had an internal colony within Europe with the ideology of a superior race and a fatherland. Sheldon Pollock shows that there is not only reliance on the elite native informants – that underlines the 'agency of the colonized subjects' – but there are also 'family resemblances between pre-colonial Brahaminical discourse and Oriental scholarship': the Brahaminical distinction between Aryans ('civilised') and non-Aryans ('uncivilised') was taken by the German Orientalists to define the Jews as non-Aryans.[83] Therefore, Orientalism as an authoritative knowledge is formed by an interplay between indigenous and Orientalist discourse of power. It is not the totality of the cultural phenomena of the Orient that is the focus of the Orientalist discourse, as Richard King points out, but 'those particular discourses that, in conceptualising the Orient, render it susceptible to control and management'.[84] Said is also critiqued for the use of Foucault's word 'discourse' when referring mainly to cultural practices as he does when referring back to Greek theatre. As a literary critic, for Said 'nation is narration' and he emphasises the power of narratives in forming the empire.[85] Foucault's term also implies Western state forms and their institutional controls. As Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer remark, it has to be noted that postcolonial cultural practices are not merely

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[82] David Ludden: *Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge*, pp.261-262

[83] Sheldon Pollock: 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond Raj' in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, p.83

[84] Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.82.

[85] Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.xiii, 8, 10.

products of Orientalist theory, but of colonial practice.[86] Thus, analysis of the interplay between culture and politics needs to be carried out not only within the colonial discourse, but also within a colonial practice of institutional and administrative transformations. As described by Michael Roberts, referring to the colonial practice in India and Sri Lanka, the British Raj not only brought about unification of these lands with an homogeneous representation but also 'implanted a capitalist rationality, a more unified market and a new grid of road, rail and telegraphic communications'.[87] Breckenridge and van der Veer point out that, in the attempt to overcome the Orientalist dilemma, 'the study of Orientalism without its colonial framework and a study of the colonial period as if it has no relevant successor' are the two dangers that need to be avoided both in public life and in academic practice.

The postcolonial feminist thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have shown how the Orientalist discourse is essentially a male-representation. While Said critiques Marx as Eurocentric due to the influence of the Orientalist discourse, Spivak, from a feminist perspective, sees Marx as both Eurocentric and male-dominated. She argues that the economic class in Industrial Europe was male, and today, in the system of capitalist globalisation spearheaded by transnational corporations, Marx's analysis is inadequate to incorporate the 'superexploitation of women's labour' in most of the factories in the world.[88] She also critiques Western feminism for undermining the diversity of women throughout the world. Nira Yuval-Davis, while echoing the perspective of Spivak and other feminist thinkers, critiques most of the theoreticians of nation and nationalism mentioned in the previous chapter of this work. She considers the belief of nationalist movements regarding the complete congruence of nation and state, as 'a fiction',[89] and remarks that 'hegemonic nationalism scholars' like Geertz, Kedourie, Gellner, Hobsbawm and Smith 'have ignored gender relations as irrelevant'.[90] She argues in her book that 'it is women – and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia – who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally

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[86] Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds): *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, p.6.

[87] Michael Roberts: 'Sri Lanka: Intellectual Currents and Conditions in the Study of Nationalism' in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume I*, (ed.) Michael Roberts, (Colombo, Marga Institute, 1997), p.22.

[88] Stephen Morton: *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (London / New York, Routledge, 2003), p.96.

[89] Nira Yuval-Davis: *Gender and Nation*, (London, Sage Publication, 1997), p.11.

[90] Ibid., p.1.

and symbolically'.[91] This critique retrieves the subordinate other in the dominant theorisation of nationalist phenomenon as women.

For Said and Spivak postcolonialism is more a reading strategy as Sugirtharajah points out; it is a reading posture which is 'a discursive resistance to imperialism' and its 'continuous incarnations'.[92] However, for Homi Bhabha postcoloniality is more than a reading posture; it is also a condition of being. While Said rules out any appropriation of the colonial discourse by the natives to respond to colonialism and imperialism, Bhabha, by utilising Jacques Derrida's concept of 'difference', recognises a process of 'hybridisation' by which the natives appropriate the colonial discourse for cultural resistance by 'mimicry and parody'.[93] The concrete example he takes is the role of the English speaking Indians in British India, which reflected the ambivalence of the colonial discourse. His notion of hybridity considers the 'originary' as an 'effect' as opposed to having an ontological status. 'Hybridity has no such perspective of depth or truth to provide', instead it reflects the ambivalence of the colonial discourse.[94]

In light of the arguments regarding colonial re-presentations, in the introduction to the compilation of articles written by the new generation of postcolonial critics concerning the making of the Sri Lankan nation, mentioned earlier, the editors of the volume write as follows:

> 'Each generation must', declared Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it'. Appearing at the beginning of the chapter 'On National Culture,' these words are addressed to the intellectuals of newly de-colonised countries, charged with the mission of unifying the nation, of virtually creating it from scratch. The Martinican psychiatrist turned Algerian revolutionary, the Ur-theorist of post-colonial nationalism, wrote thirty years – a generation – ago. His generation of third world intellectuals at de-colonisation, whether the forties South Asian or sixties African, never doubted what they had to do; make the nation. We – the contributors to this book, who share a generation – do not live in such certain times. Our project is different. We suspect the nation.[95]

The nation as a general concept is questioned here, not only as an idea, but also as a form of socio-political organisation. They believe that 'the inclusive pretences of the nation must be exposed, that not just its inadequacies but its very superfluousness

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[91] Ibid., p.2.
[92] R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.): *Postcolonial Bible*, (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p.93.
[93] Homi K.Bhaha: *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp.109-114.
[94] Loc. cit.
[95] Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, p.2.

must be called into question'.[96] Their critical appraisal of nation-building exposes the complicity between the discourses of the colonial and postcolonial nation-states. Their contribution to the study of the politics of interpretation unravels the relationship between power and culture or rule and knowledge or poetics and politics. As Pradeep Jeganathan writes, the 'historiographic, archaeological and aesthetic' knowledge that shapes the national consciousness is a 'collective representation' which is 'the real effect of the authoritative epistemological conquest of the nineteenth century'.[97] While their anti-representational and anti-essentialist perspective boldly prohibits any possibility of an exclusivist construction of identities, it does not explicitly articulate an ethical ground for collective movements emerging from dominated social classes. They implicitly point to an ethical ground in giving reason to suspect the nation. They note that nation – 'to be precise, those with power to act in its name – has always suppressed its women, its non-bourgeois classes, and its minorities'.[98] They also show how multiple histories and identities are suppressed in the project of nationalism:

> [T]here is a fundamental contradiction, a continuous oscillation between possible heterogeneity and implied homogeneity in the project of nationalism. The nation has histories, but it claims one as its own; its people have many identities but they must inhabit one; the nation has many political coalitions within it but they are to be suppressed in the aid of one mission; nationalism. And the pursuit of this single minded, monolithic object has brought nothing but violence, terror, and destruction.[99]

The modern Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka which originated at the end of the nineteenth century as a reaction to Western Christian imperialism with the aim of opposing colonial rule by unifying the natives, had the ideal of an independent nation which would not be subordinate to any other in the world. Idealising the nation with past glories and future aspirations was a characteristic component of the movement. The model of the political community had already been constructed by the colonial state with a centralised bureaucratic administrative system. Postcolonial studies show how apart from such restructuring of political landscape, a process of defining ethno-religious cultural identities in terms of essentialist categories was taking place. The perception of national identity therefore was highly conditioned by

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[96] Ibid. p.3

[97] Pradeep Jeganathan: 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura', in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, p.130.

[98] Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, p.3.

[99] Ibid., p.8.

such colonial factors. The construction of national identity is related to a particular type of interpretation of cultures and religions within the power politics of colonial practice and nation-building. It is here that the ambiguity of the meaning of the nation-state can be best understood. The colonial discourse on Sri Lanka is not informed by the totality of the religious cultural phenomena but is conditioned by the selective reading of historical narratives by the native elite, who represented a particular social class. This perspectival knowledge became the objective data that formed national consciousness and national identity which are supposed to be unchanging. Thus, the concept 'nation', although it served the anti-colonial freedom movements, is ambiguous in meaning because of its essentialist representations that could be manipulated within a field of power politics. Therefore, it is bound to give rise to inherent contradictions antagonising diverse ethnic and religious communities within a country as well as between geo-political entities such as East and West. Ambiguity lies in the very definition of nationhood and geo-political spaces in essentialist terms, where knowledge of national identity is interwoven with dynamics of power within a network of local and global asymmetrical power relationships. Said shows in the preface to the new edition (2003) of Orientalism how the present categorisations 'America', 'the West' and 'Islam' are a continuation of the Orientalist discourse.[100] Samuel Huntington's essentialist categorisation of cultures and religions in the present phase of imperialism or capitalist globalisation also reflects the principles of the same discourse. Huntington analyses the Sri Lankan conflict as a Buddhist-Hindu conflict. It is against this background that the perspectives of the postcolonial critics have to be taken seriously because they illuminate how far knowledge about identities is conditioned by power politics.

ii. The Postcolonial Predicament

The biggest challenge that the Orientalist dilemma poses to the postcolonial world is the predicament that is involved in the face of the other. Is knowledge of the other always a representation entangled with dominant power politics? Is there any chance of such knowledge becoming a tool in the hands of the indigenous people to respond to colonialism? This is also the same debate that surrounds Westernisation

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[100] Edward Said: *Orientalism*, p.xxii.

and modernisation. Said is critiqued for treating the native colonial subjects as passive and of not leaving any possibility of their using of the very same Orientalist perceptions to counter colonialism.[101] The argument that the Orientalist discourse has a positive aspect which can be subverted by the local elite who formed the nationalist movements is not permitted by Said, because its essentialist representations contain the potential for manipulation by the colonising power. However it must be noted here that Said's use of the radical Foucauldian critique of representation leads him neither to an anti-humanist end nor to an exclusivist position, which says that it is the Orient that can truly represent them. Instead, he adopts humanism as the fundamental principle in the resistance to colonisation and domination.[102] Said's position emerges from his perception of the role of the intellectual as secular critic, as opposed to religious critic. It is also connected to his involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he describes as one that is mostly entrenched in the religious discourse. As William Hart notes, for Said 'secularism is a term of approbation and religion is a term of disapprobation'.[103] Through a hermeneutics of connection based on human rights, Said proposes a secular paradigm against the religiously influenced paradigms that protract the conflict.

While Said adopts a humanist stance as a response to colonising representations, Spivak suggests 'strategic essentialism' as a way out of the dilemma of essentialist representations. 'For minority groups, in particular, the use of essentialism as a short- term strategy to affirm a political identity can be effective, as long as this identity does not then get fixed as an essentialist category by a dominant group'.[104] As Said's humanist approach is unable to provide principles for an articulation of a long-term solution to the ethno-religious conflict, so is Spivak's. As pointed out earlier, political identities also operate on a cultural level as ethno-religious collectivities where symbolic meanings play a vital role, but here Spivak does not sufficiently recognise that the symbolism of such ethno-religious collectivities has a potential that can be actualised to form a political movement for emancipation of the subordinate social groups. It is also important to recognise this

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[101] Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.86.
[102] Edward Said: *Orientalism*, p.xxii.
[103] William D. Hart: *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.12.
[104] Stephen Morton: *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, p.75.

potential in the particular ethno-religious cultures of women. Even though both Spivak and Bhabha deconstruct essentialist representations, the resistance to colonialism is formed within the rules of the colonial master's discourse, not outside of it. Spivak's 'strategic essentialism' is possible mainly within the ambivalence that is found in the hybridised condition that Bhabha speaks about. Even though their position recognises the agency of the oppressed it does not allow the colonial subject to be radically heterogeneous. Moreover, as Richard King points out, the mimicry and parody that Bhabha refers to can become the norm in creating stereotypes while allowing the dominant discourse to remain intact. The same could be said about Spivak's suggestion of the strategic use of the essentialist categories.[105] Sinhala Buddhist nationalism that was inspired by Protestant ethics ('Protestant Buddhism') which had an element of mimicry has today become a stereotypical entity.[106] The strategic essentialism of the Sri Lankan Marxists (JVP) who adopted the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourse to mobilise the masses (1987-1989) could not get away from it; the strategy has become the ideal to the extent that they support the governments and the military forces (that once suppressed them) to continue with the war, opposing any negotiated settlement with the Tamils.

Against the above background of the postcolonial predicament, the scholars of the Subaltern Studies Collective who were contesting both the colonial and native elitist discourses launched a research series into the resistance accounts of the subjugated social groups. The evolution of postcolonial criticism has reached recognition of the agency of the colonial subject as against the 'myth of the passive Oriental' or 'hybridised subjects'. It also has problematised the stereotypical homogeneous categorisation of East and West, South and North, First and Third World while contesting the privileged position of the nation-state as the paradigmatic unit of socio-political identity. It attempts to de-centre Europe as the home of modernity by 'provincialisng' it and enlightens by unravelling the dilemma of

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[105] Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.203.

[106] Gananatha Obeysekara and Richard Gombrich carried out research into how Buddhism in Sri Lanka entered into a process of transformation during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Obeysekara shows how under the Western influence a 'Protestant Buddhism' which underpinned the anti-colonial nationalist movement, emerged. Richard Gombrich and Gananatha Obeysekara: *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1988), pp.202-240.

modernisation as Westernisation.[107] However, such an endeavour should not undermine the historicity of colonialism and its cultural violence and oppression, which created an unequal global network of power relationships. The danger of Subaltern Studies (or postcolonial criticism) is its reduction of the colonial and the postcolonial reality to innumerable discourses. This will ultimately maintain the dominant systems of national and global powers. However, the very identification (by Subaltern Studies) of the local potential for resistance is significant. What is needed here is a vision of interrelatedness that would connect different resistance movements and take constant efforts to implement it both on the local and the global level.

Some studies of postcolonial critics like Qadri Ismail and the X-Group in Sri Lanka can lead to extreme relativism because of their total anti-representational position.[108] A theoretical opposition to any type of identity building that is perceived as an essentialist representation is totally unintelligible to the Tamil farmer, who languishes in a refugee camp for over a decade and who has physically experienced liquidation and ethnic cleansing because his only fertile land has been occupied by the Sinhala state military forces. The above theoreticians do not sufficiently discuss whether the assertion of Tamil identity (with ethno-symbolic and ethno-historic meanings) by the farmer whose existence is under threat, is moved by an essentialist understanding of ethnicity or by a dynamic between ethno-symbolism and concrete experience of oppression. There is, however an inclination to reduce such an identity to mere essentialist representations. It is understandable, given the complex background of the conflict, that the post-colonial writers vehemently attack essentialist language and consider it a colonial and postcolonial nationalistic intellectual construction. However, in doing so they undermine the role of symbolic meaning which is wedded to ethno-religious histories.

Generally, postcolonial critics excel in analysing the politics of interpretation, but do not venture to reinterpret the belief systems with an ethical commitment, and

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[107] Ranajit Guha (ed): *A Subaltern Studies Reader: 1986-1995*, (London, University of Minnesota, 1997).

[108] Qadri Ismail, writing on the multiple identities of the Sri Lankan Muslim community argues that one single Muslim identity is not possible in Sri Lanka, but does not address the issue of growing consciousness of them as a religious minority in the face of Sinhala Buddhist majoritarian politics and other regional and global power politics. Qadri Ismail: 'Unmooring Identity' in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, pp.55-105. X-Group is a group of young writers who argue in their monthly magazine, *London*, that there is no nation or national identity as such in Sri Lanka and the entire phenomenon of nationalism is a pure construction.

the nationalist theoreticians excel in rhetoric of the pre-modern narratives (with an Orientalist representation), but do not acknowledge the politics of interpretation. In overcoming this compartmentalisation there needs to be a study on the interaction between symbolisms of ethno-religious histories, representation (interpretation) and changing socioeconomic and political structures. In order to overcome the postcolonial predicament Wickramasinghe suggests a pathway that would go beyond the 'Saidian model' of Western representation and the 'Andersonian model' of utopian homogeneity of horizontal communities.[109]

Postcoloniality as a reading strategy or as a condition of being has radically shifted the definition of the relationship between the self and the other from an ontological to an ethical plane. Nevertheless, the above postcolonial critics wrestle with the question of an ethical principle to articulate a vision for the future that would bring sustainable peace and development to societies that are laden with conflict, violence and war. Their useful investigation into the dynamics of politics of interpretation unravels the complicity between the texts of the colonial state and of the project of nation-building, but they keep the future open-ended. They are clever at bringing down the old dominant regimes, but do not seem to have the tools to rebuild a new order.[110]. As Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer put it, in an endeavour aimed at overcoming the colonial and the nationalist dilemma, it is important to 'remain steadfastly focused on the present, seen as a historical moment that owes itself at least in part to the very heritage of Orientalsim that we seek to undo'.[111] While attempting to critique the essentialist representation of ethno-religious identities within the colonial and postcolonial nationalist practices it is important not

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[109] Nira Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, (Colombo, Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006), p.xv.

[110] Avoidance of fixed identities and non-commitment are postmodern currents that inform postcolonial criticism. As Zygmunt Bauman comments, it is characteristic of postmodernist presentism to keep the options open without committing to one ideal. 'The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but the avoidance of being fixed'. Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, p.89. In the context of the episodic and fragmentary character of the nation as an individual, what is emphasised is the uncertainty of the times; 'we do not live in such certain times' Pradeep Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail, *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, p.2. Bauman identifies the postmodern condition as a challenge which emerges in the face of the other. It is a challenge which can be taken up neither by avoiding commitment nor by adhering to convention, but with the ethical principle of *being for* the other which opens up the future. Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, pp.66-71.

[111] Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.): *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, p.18.

to reduce the element of ethno-religious symbolism that signifies transcendence and immanence into mere constructions. Such a reductionist approach is a suppression of otherness within human existence, which is same as the suppression of politics of interpretation by religious dogmatists and ultra-nationalists in their discourses. This thesis intends to problematise such a compartmentalisation in addressing the matrix of the national conflict in Sri Lanka by using Smith's ethno-religious, symbolic alternative (recognising the primacy of the political sphere as shown by Weber and also fluidity and malleability of ethnic identity) and the theories of politics of interpretation of postcolonial critics. Even though there are fundamental differences in the theoretical approaches of both Smith and the postcolonial critics they necessarily need to complement each other in the analysis and in search for solutions.

3. An Alternative Model of Interpretation

Although religious discourses by both Buddhists and Christians were supportive of exclusivist political ideologies of state formation, both have failed to realise their complicity in power politics. Postcolonial criticism helps to discover this complicity by illuminating the dynamic of politics of interpretation for domination that is found in European colonial practice and postcolonial nation-building. Which kind of religion is supportive of dominant power structures, such as the nation-state, at the expense of minorities, the women and the poor? Which kind of modernist, secular discourses support them by interplaying with the religious narratives? However, nationalist conflicts that are inspired by ethno-religious belief cannot be fully overcome by adopting only a secular humanist approach as long as the ethno-religious self-consciousness of the groups in conflict is not reinterpreted within the particular traditions for a liberative paradigm. Basically, this is what it means in Smith's argument that nationalism has to be overcome by something similar to it which articulates a paradigm underlining the very principles of nationalism. A position that reduces everything to social reality or religious reality or total separation of the two does not help such an attempt. Such an attempt should critique the presuppositions regarding the total separation of modern and pre-modern narratives or pre-colonial and colonial circumstances which determine the perspectives of historiography. Furthermore, if the religions are to bear a credible witness to peace and harmony

among the people, it is of paramount importance for them to rise above the politics of the state (that further divide the people) by rediscovering their spiritual sources.

Empirical religious studies, on the one hand should incorporate the study of the diversity of 'insider perspectives' and their interplay with the socioeconomic and political reality (if it is to become scientific and objective in the real sense of the terms) and on the other hand, theological studies need to relocate religion within the *habitus* of pluralistic belief systems and worldviews, as well as within the material and political fields.[112] Empirical studies of religion identify religion as a social reality, but these studies need also to incorporate study of the very belief systems that the religions signify and their effects on society. This means not only an engagement in social analysis but also philosophical and theological hermeneutics.

The politics of culture during the post-Reformation era which was associated with a theological current towards the search for the 'essence' in religion led the Orientalist scholars to re-present the 'true nature of Buddhism' or 'primitive' and 'authentic Buddhism' contrary to the supposedly corrupt ideological representations and practices.[113] This does not mean that the modern form of Buddhism is purely a Western representation. There had been movements within the history of Buddhism that searched for such 'authenticity'. What needs to be realised is that such essentialist representations fit into the Western colonial manipulations of cultures and religions and reflects the very cultural constructs of the Occident. It is this type of 'rational and scientific Buddhism' as against the popular Buddhism of the masses, which provided the ideological basis for the anti-colonial nationalist movement that was spearheaded by the new middle and mercantile classes of Sri Lanka. The search for 'authenticity' also became racialised as Sinhala Buddhism. The Western colonial construction of Christianity (which is a deviation from its Semitic origins) that served European imperialism and the internally colonising interpretation of Sinhala Buddhism (against

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[112] Richard King, by carrying out a survey on the evolution of the meaning of the term religion, shows how it is conditioned by a particular 'cultural and intellectual history'. He describes how the early Roman usage of the term *religio* and *traditio* signified the unquestioned adherence and binding to the rituals of the ancestors and the later Hellenistic Christian appropriation of the term referred to the adherence of the faithful to a doctrine with a strong emphasis on the historicity of the Gospels as different from the 'falsity' of the other mythologies of the time. This shows how the very notion of religion is a Western Christian theological category. It primarily denotes a theistic belief system by which a fundamental dualism between the human and the divine worlds is depicted which is a deviation from the Semitic origin of Christianity. Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, pp.35, 40-41

[113] Ibid., pp.148-149

the Tamils) reflect Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological interpretations of religions. These interpretations mix together in harmony in antagonising diverse ethnic and religious groups locally and the geo-political spaces of East and West globally creating stereotyped perceptions about each other. In searching for a liberative paradigm for the political community in Sri Lanka where many religions are involved in a complex network of colonial and postcolonial asymmetrical power relationships, the challenge is how to define religion from an insider's perspective, without overlooking the socioeconomic and political factors as well as the historical dimension.

An alternative model of interpretation of religions is needed to envisage a liberative paradigm for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. This necessitates a reinterpretation of the religious traditions in light of their liberating truths (out of which the ethical principles flow), from the perspective of the subjugated masses and social groups. Such a task entails unravelling power politics within the dominant models of interpretations and a reinterpretation of liberative potential within the religious traditions. The Rhetorical-Emancipatory Model suggested by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza will be utilised in this regard. This model necessarily involves 'a public character and a political responsibility' by which 'the perspectival and contextual nature' of the theological and buddhological knowledge is identified as being within a field of power for or against the oppressed. This model engages in a critical exploration of meanings in a process of 'conscientisation' because the oppressed have internalised the hierarchical structure as ordinary practice and 'commonsense'.[114] In this sense this model understands religion basically in ethical-political terms. Any attempt made towards resolution of the conflict needs to bring 'the voices from the margins' or the voices of the suffering and the oppressed to the political and public space.[115] The ethno-religious basis of nationhood, for which Anthony D. Smith argues, has to be evaluated within the emancipatory politics of interpretation and the role of Christianity and Buddhism has to be rearticulated in the search for a liberative paradigm. This needs to be done within the dominant communities i.e. Sinhala Buddhist and Western Christian (and secular) in an

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[114] She suggests this model as opposed to the Doctrinal-Fundamentalist, the 'Scientific' Positivist and the (Post-) Modern Cultural Paradigms of interpretation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *Rhetoric and Ethic*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999).pp.39- 46, 47.

[115] Fiorenza: *Rhetoric and Ethic* , 47.

interreligious and 'East-West' setting. This search is also an enterprise to save ethical and religious traditions from corrupt ideologies.

I. A Liberative Praxis

A liberative paradigm cannot be articulated only in theory. The academic articulation needs to emerge from involvement with the groups who have been suppressed by the essentialist representation of nationhood. It needs to be the fruit of an interaction between theory and praxis. The public and democratic space of the Rhetorical-Emancipatory Model does not permit the hegemony of academia. The formation of an intellectual movement which is in search of a liberative paradigm can be a reality only to the extent of the concrete involvement of academia with the subjugated groups and their various movements.

It is only the enlightened victims of the dominant economic and political structures and corrupt religious ideologies who carry the potential for transformation of the situation. The locus for interreligious dialogue – which needs to be started with an honest acknowledgement of past failure and ethical responsibility for the present and the future – broadly speaking, is the suffering of the conflict and more specifically, the oppressed victims of the dominant nation-state (particularly Tamils and Muslims) and the impoverished masses (of all communities, the majority of whom have been Sinhalese) of the colonial and postcolonial economic and political systems. A movement's articulation of a liberative paradigm and its capacity to implement it will be determined by the quality of consciousness of the deep seated grievances of the subjugated masses and their struggles (or resistance). These struggles are the potential cultural, socioeconomic and political locations that need to be brought to the public and political space of the Rhetorical-Emancipatory Model which should be facilitated by an ethically responsible intellectual movement. Without the identification of such struggles any theoretical articulation of an alternative paradigm will not hold ground. The transformation of the situation is possible only through a movement of the subjugated groups who can affect the decision-making polity. Such a movement should not function only as a pressure group to governments but as a community that is able to implement to a certain degree the liberative elements of the paradigm: this is because it is not ethical to 'preach' to the subjugated groups to wait for justice and peace till the entire system changes.

However, the most challenging task of articulating a vision for such a broader movement is the particularity of the struggles of various groups who consciously or unconsciously do not recognise another struggle. In light of the ethical principles enunciated in the Rhetorical-Emancipatory Model, and with the power of abstraction, the intellectual articulation needs to see the interrelatedness of the various struggles without overlooking the particularities involved in each of them. However, it has to be noted that the term 'struggle' is used here only in relation to those locations that have the potential to transcend the particularities. The formation of a liberative movement is possible only with those groups and struggles that carry the potential to transcend. This potential cannot be actualised without a responsible political leadership, both on the local level and on the broader level. The movement that is envisaged should not be merely a cultural movement. It needs to concretely address economic and political grievances too, for it is through the dominant interplay of culture and power that the conflict is protracted. As the conflict in Sri Lanka is a result of a network of both local and global asymmetrical power relationships, it is only through a congruence of both local and global liberative movements that the conflict can be resolved. This study will, therefore, carry out a survey of various groups who are involved in struggles both locally in Sri Lanka and internationally, particularly in Europe, who have the potential to form a movement. While acknowledging this potential their limitations will be critiqued in light of the emphasis on the imbrications of power and culture and the politics of interpretation for liberation that this study intends explore.

This exploration necessitates an unravelling of the politics of interpretation that informed the dominant model of the Western nation-state or the cornerstone of Western imperialism. The modern roots of the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological scheme that continues to construct a Sri Lankan national identity – and thereby polarise diverse ethnic and religious communities – lie in European colonial practice. The next chapter will discuss the emergence of the Western nation-state and its colonial practice.

PART II

MAKING OF A WESTERN NATION-STATE

INTRODUCTION

> The Western experience has exerted a powerful, indeed the leading, influence on our conception of the unit we call the 'nation'. A new kind of policy – the rational state – and a new kind of community – the territorial nation – first emerged in the West, in close connection with each other... They left their imprint on subsequent non-Western conceptions, even when the latter diverged from their norms'.[1]

What is this Western model of nation-state, which had a leading influence on the non-Western nations? How did the Western model emerge? How is Western nation-building related to Western empire-building? Answers to these questions will help us to realize its characteristics and imprint on non-Western nations. In the case of Sri Lanka, the British colonial encounter made a lasting impact in forming its present model of a nation-state that is in crisis. Today, this initial colonial relationship has developed into a global network of power relationships, which involves other global powers too. It is in this context that the Sri Lankan conflict is becoming increasingly internationalized. The conflict in Sri Lanka is not a mere reflection of a crisis within the Sri Lankan nation-state, but is essentially a crisis of the Western model of the nation-state and its close affinity to empire-building. It is important, therefore, to identify the dynamics within colonial powers, like Britain, in the construction of their nation-states and empires. It is within this process countries like Sri Lanka were colonised, subsequently leading up to the present phase of a globalized network of asymmetrical power relationships among nations. The root causes of the conflict in Sri Lanka lie mainly in the British colonial period. Understanding Western influence and the nature of power relationships that are entangled with the conflict in Sri Lanka is of utmost importance in analysing the conflict and in seeking a solution.

This chapter will explore the interplay between power and culture within the historical processes of Western nation-building and empire-building with a particular focus on Britain and discuss how that interplay contributed to the formation of the Western identities that constructed the colonial other. Study of the dynamics of such processes is necessary for an honest dialogue between East and West that is needed for the resolution of conflicts similar to Sri Lanka's. The initial European conquests that gradually turned out to be formal colonisations and the Orientalist construction of the colonial other reflect this interplay, and reveal the dominant characteristics of the Occident. In this process, the influence of Christianity on Western culture is a key

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[1] Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, p.9.

factor that needs to be taken into consideration in examining the dynamics between culture and power in the West. The secular assumptions that underpin the contemporary political systems in the West are a result of cultural and economic movements that emerged opposing the religiously defined political systems. However, such developments cannot be considered as not having any cultural influence from the Christian belief system itself. Instead, they carry the birth marks of the old order, some implicit and others explicit. It is with this perspective that the interplay between power and culture will be examined.

The factors that led to the emergence of the nation-states in Europe will be examined first. Secondly, the political and cultural justification of the inextricable affinity between the British nation-state and the project of empire-building will be explored while examining how Britain came to prominence among other nation-states and empires. This chapter will also examine how a new phase of globalization led by the United States of America began to emerge with the fall of the formal British Empire. The chapter will culminate in an evaluation of the dynamics and characteristics within the Western projects of nation-building and empire-building particularly of Britain and of the United States of America. This will help to understand in a better light the impact that the Western model of nation-state had and continues to have on countries like Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER TWO: RELIGION, EMPIRE-BUILDING AND THE BRITISH NATION-STATE

1. THEOLOGISATION OF THE NATION

The main political characteristic of Christendom was the unity between the church and the empire. It is this unity which formed the threshold principle of the Crusades. With the battles of Reformation and counter-Reformation which were also associated with economic and political movements such as state expansion, the growth of trade, communication, printing and increased use of vernacular literature this medieval unity began to dissolve gradually. With this, there were several stages of the development of both the idea and the phenomenon of nation, nationalism and nation-state. During this stage (by the end of the Middle Ages), there were a number of nation-states in which political unity and cultural unity could be identified to a certain degree.[1] Signifying their cultural unity Hugh Seton-Watson calls them 'old nations' as opposed to the 'new nations' that emerged after the French Revolution.[2] In Western Europe they were the English, Scots, French, Dutch, Castilians and Portuguese. Referring to their political unity E. H. Carr names them national states or national churches.[3] The essential characteristic of this stage is the identification of the nation with the monarch or the dynasty or the group of noblemen as opposed to (in the case of Protestant nations) and distinct from (in the case of Roman Catholic nations) the Papacy and Christendom. With an ethno-symbolic perspective, Anthony D. Smith calls these 'dynastic nations'.[4] The sacredness of the nation was derived from its identification with the monarchy. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe it, socio-politically and theologically 'the feudal property was a part of the body of the monarch' and 'the sovereign monarchic body was a part of the body of God'.[5] During the sixteenth century, in the midst of Reformation and the tensions created by the

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1 Alfred Cobban: 'The Rise of the Nation-State System' in *Nationalism*, (eds.) John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), p.246.
2 Hugh Seton-Watson: 'Old and New Nations' in *Nationalism*, p.134.
3 Edward H. Carr: 'Three Phases of Nationalism' in *Nationalism* , p.243.
4 Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, pp.54-59.
5 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, (London, Harvard University Press, 2000), p.94.

early modern currents this model was the rule that guaranteed social security and peace and the principle was *cuius regio, eius religio* by which religion was subordinated to the territorial control of the sovereign. In a way, in this new phase religion too was a property of the monarchy. The sovereignty of the nation-state was defined in terms of a person or the dynasty which is sovereign. Thomas Hobbes' writings which articulate the notion of sovereignty, clearly reflect the need for absolute authority in times of conflict and war. As God has retreated leaving the affairs of the world to the human beings, Hobbes suggested that there needs to be an absolute state which is sovereign like 'God on earth'.[6] In this sense, national sentiment was linked to the allegiance to the sovereign monarch and it was more vertical than horizontal. National identity was determined by the particular faith tradition of the monarchy. Reactions that arose against the later modern currents of the seventeenth century English Revolution celebrated this allegiance.

How did power and culture interact in this process? Did the Reformation cause the emergence of a monarchical nation-state or were there other factors that were involved? There were tensions that already existed before the Reformation among several countries in Europe. These tensions were caused by competition for wealth and could be seen already at the end of the fifteenth century when the Pope gave special powers to Spain to trade in the Americas and to Portugal to trade in Asia. The Maritime Provinces in Sri Lanka came under the control of the Portuguese during this period. As Niall Ferguson writes, Henry VII, imitating the crown of Spain which entrusted Columbus with voyages of 'discovery', also issued letters patent to English navigators to embark on such voyages with the aim of conquering, occupying and possessing any land 'unknown to all Christians'.[7] The motive behind these hierarchical moves were religio-political. There was not a wider social and cultural movement as in the seventeenth century (as Weber shows) that supports these moves during this period. However, these decisions reflect the initial tensions (even before the Reformation) or early signs of the emerging monarchical nation-states. Therefore, one cannot say that the Reformation caused the nation-states. The rise of monarchical

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[6] Thomas Hobbes: *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, (ed.) Bernard Gert, (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), pp.223-224.

[7] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), pp.3-4.

nation-states in Europe took place concurrently with the Reformation reifying already existing economic and political tensions.

Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Derek Wilson, in their detailed analysis of politics before and after the Reformation, clearly show how the Protestant theologians had to depend on and 'flatter the vanity and vindicate the ambitions of princes' ranging from Germany to England.[8] These alliances were made not out of theological reasons but for pragmatic reasons in the face of persecution from the official church of the time. While the princes were in conflict with the authority of the centre of Christendom due to political and economic reasons the Protestant theologians were in conflict with the official Church on doctrinal matters. The economic and political movements of the princes and the cultural movements of the theologians interacted with each other forming the political and cultural basis of the initial stage of the nation-state. The gradual dissolution of Christendom can also be called the initial stages of secularisation where the churches become a power under a secular authority. It is the initial stage of political modernity where the process of the emancipation of the political state begins. This secularity has to be understood mainly as opposed to Christendom and the authority of the Pope as the universal Ordinary.

The emancipation of the political state begins with the theologisation of the nation. This tendency is also not essentially a Protestant principle. By referring to Christianity's long history of compromise with the kingdoms and empires since the time of Constantine, Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Derek Wilson point out how 'Protestant thought was not inherently, necessarily or essentially secularising'. ' The prototype of "caesaropapism" belonged to the reign of the emperor Constantine in the early fourth century...the Christians of his day were beholden to him in the same way as the sixteenth century reformers would be to their lay patrons.' [9] What is new in the sixteenth century is the gradual dissolution of the unity between the church and the empire and the emergence of a new political order characterised by the model of the monarchical nation-state with a theological justification of the sovereignty of the monarchy, particularly in England. The interactions between the political and the cultural realms of this period resulted in the politicisation of the Protestant and Catholic cultures.

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[8] Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Derek Wilson: *Reformation: Christianity and the World 1500-2000*, (London, Bantam Press, 1996), p.290.

[9] Ibid., p.291.

Apart from these observations there is a debate revolving around the antiquity of the rise of the English nation which has become one of the most contentious issues among various scholars. It is important to examine this debate briefly for several reasons. One is to appreciate the novelty of the changes that began to take place after the sixteenth century and the other is to identify the role of pre-existing narratives in these changes. However, the most important reason for this is not a mere methodological one, but an ethical concern; to avoid history being used as a battleground to construct exclusivist identities.

Liah Greenfeld's detailed study shows how England elevated the whole people as the nation as early as the sixteenth century by replacing and modifying the existing meaning of the term – which signified an elite – with the 'people of England' as a 'sovereign people'. Greenfeld's parameter of defining a modern nation is its identification with the people or its cognitive association with 'the existing (political, territorial and ethnic) connotations of a population of a country' and she considers England as the first nation in that respect, perhaps with the exception of Holland.[10] However, for Adrian Hastings the parameter of defining a nation is the historical stage when an ethnicity moves towards a written vernacular literature from its oral usage. It is this transition that marks the 'Rubicon on the road to nationhood'.[11] In this respect he traces back the emergence and evolution of the English nation to medieval history from the tenth to the fourteenth century and attempts to prove that it was already a nation-state as far back as the eleventh century.[12] As the written literature emerged mostly out of the translation of the Bible he considers it as the 'prime lens' through which the nation is perceived by the literate people and argues that what happened in the sixteenth century with the Reformation can be understood only if the context of the pre-Reformation is recognised. Hastings shows how the Biblical influence on the English national sentiment of ethnic chosennes was prevalent long before the Reformation.[13] He attempts to substantiate this argument mainly by referring to the vernacular writings of Venerable Bede (tenth century) who defined the English national identity – 'nation-forging' – by applying the providential and spiritual

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[10] Liah Greenfeld: 'Types of European Nationalism' in *Nationalism*, p.165-171.

[11] Adrian Hastings: *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.12.

[12] Ibid., pp.5, 43.

[13] Ibid., pp.36-37, 42.

principles of Israel, and by showing how King Alfred pioneered the building of the nation-state by a unification of several kingdoms by uniting of laws.[14] Hastings goes to the extent of saying that this period already had that 'element of horizontality' of national culture, national language and national law.[15] Even though his researches question the generally held view about the intrinsic link between the cultural genesis of English collective identity (not necessarily national identity) and the Reformation, as Anthony D. Smith points out Hastings' analysis could lead to a 'retrospective nationalism' by which local, regional and religious loyalties, which were mostly elitist, might be interpreted as national.[16]

It is one thing to assert that there was a relatively wider reading of the Bible in the vernacular and knowledge of it in the pre-Reformation society than what is popularly recognised.[17] It is another thing to say that there was a national consciousness based on the Biblical narratives before the concurrent emergence of the nation-state and the Reformation. In order to avoid such an anachronism Susan Reynolds employs the word 'regnal' to refer to the collective loyalties that exited within kingdoms during the medieval period.[18] As we have seen in the previous chapter anachronisms could emerge out of the ambiguity of the term *natio*. This debate also creates a crisis in both epistemology and historiography. Reynolds shows how some medieval historians can become nationalists without being conscious of it because of their unquestioned belief in a world of naturally divided nations and their teleological perspective of history with which nation is viewed as a cumulative effect of a historical development. In light of this argument both Hastings' retrospective nationalism and Hugh Seton-Watson's teleological approach to the explanation of Old Nations evolving into New Nations is contested.[19] As Reynolds argues the reason for England to emerge as a nation-state is not that its monarchies were more 'national' than other kingdoms. Critiquing Hastings' assertion of the longevity of English

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[14] Ibid., pp.38-39.
[15] Ibid., pp.38-39.
[16] Anthony D. Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.5 and *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, pp.117-118
[17] Adrian Hastings' argument implies that the Bible was read in the vernacular before the period of the Reformation more widely than what is popularly known about the pre-Reformation era. Hastings: *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, pp.11-12.
[18] Susan Reynolds: 'Regnal Sentiments and Medieval Communities' in *Nationalism*, p.139.
[19] Ibid., p.135.

national sentiments Smith shows how England had been 'firmly Roman in outlook and fairly cosmopolitan in leadership' during the medieval period.[20]

Anthony D. Smith (and John Armstrong), while utilising the ethno-symbolic perspective in explaining the phenomenon of national sentiment, shows that it is only in the sixteenth century, mainly after the Reformation, that pre-existing myths of divine election found widespread expression, especially after the many printed translations of the Bible and the publication of Foxe's *Book of Martyers*. He points out how the historical writings of the period depicted England as following the true religion, by breaking away from Rome. They were viewed as a chosen people, like Israel, separated from others who have pre-Roman Christian origins and whose history has been led by Divine Providence. Foxe's book was based on the Protestant persecution under Queen Mary. Even though Protestantism was a European (or international) religion Smith notes how Foxe's 'dramatic martyrology', by its reference to the Old Testament imagery of a covenant with God, reflected an exclusive sense of Protestant English national sentiment which moved beyond the elitist perception of the kingdom. In the post-Reformation period kings were also represented as God's vicars on earth and they were equated to David, Solomon and Josiah. [21] It could be said that the emergence of the idea of an imperial monarchy is based on this new theory of divine kingship. Amalgamation of Wales, claiming feudal ownership of Scotland and calling himself the 'king' of Ireland by Henry VIII are clear concrete expressions of the belief in a mission entrusted to a chosen people led by their divinely anointed king. Edwin Jones shows how the very writing of English history after the Reformation has created a crisis in historiography as it was conditioned by the politics of the period. He shows how the official version of history by the Henrican government and later by the Whig interpretations (seventeenth century) bolstered this trend which began to rewrite the whole of English history mainly from an isolationist and insular perspective, implying that English history had begun since the Reformation.[22] This 'isolationist myth of English exceptionalism' and the nationalist and erastian image it propagated are intrinsically associated with construction of the other both internally and externally.

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[20] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.118

[21] Ibid., pp.118-120.

[22] Edwin Jones: *The English Nation: The Great Myth*, (Gloucestershire, Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp.24-25, 30-31

Initially Reformation in England was not popularly supported but it was implemented by the force of the state. Uniformity was achieved with a centralising monarchy as in Spain. It was an absolutist state that did not tolerate dissent and the opposition was crushed.[23] The statutes of the Reformation of Henrician government such as the Act of Supremacy (1534) and the Act in Restraint for Appeal (1533) which treated any appeal to the Papal Courts as treasonable made the king of England the supreme head of the Church of England. The early modern attempt to create an absolutist centralized state did not tolerate independent institutions and needed ideological uniformity. Uniformity was achieved not only by a political centralisation but also by a single official version of a cultural identity (later developed as English Protestantism). This identity was strengthened by empire-building and wars with neighbouring continental states later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[24] The rise of the nation-state, therefore, is associated with the suppression of other cultures. The expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain during the monarchy of Isabella and Ferdinand and discriminatory treatment of Catholics in England under the Protestant rulers are clear expressions of this patrimonial monarchic state. Linda Colley demonstrates how this process continued during the following centuries particularly with regard to the British national identity and also in other nation-building projects in Europe and America. She notes how the British nationhood was forged by 'recurrent wars' against external enemies (France) and 'persistent prejudices' as well against 'internal others' (Catholics).[25]

> The Roman Catholic was often feared and despised in Britain (and of course in Ireland) in this period and after; just as the Native American was harassed in the early American Republic, and Muslims were hated and enslaved in Ferdinand and Isabella's Spain. In each case, attacking an internal minority perceived as alien, dangerous, and inferior helped foster a sense of nationhood and a common purpose.[26]

As Karen Armstrong puts it, 'coercion was often a part of the modernizing processes both in Spain and in England'.[27] The cultural and political identities of modernity at their birth, therefore, were conditioned by these tensions. In this sense, the early form of modern national identity (of the dynastic nation-states) in Western Europe was

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[23] Ibid., p.21.
[24] Ibid., p.23.
[25] Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation: 1707-1837*, (London, Yale University Press, 2005), p.xiv.
[26] Loc. cit.
[27] Karen Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, p.6.

shaped mainly by Christianity and its two main strands, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. As Mahamood Mamdani notes: 'Europe on the threshold of modernity thought of nation in terms of culture and race'.[28] All these go to say that in the initial model of the nation-state monarchical absolutism was seen as transcendent and uniformity as unity (which was achieved through coercion). Both Protestant and Roman Catholic cultures were perceived in terms of unchanging essentialist categories by which the national cultures were defined.

The main characteristics of this new English nation-state were absolute power to the monarchical state, rewriting of an official history with a revisionist perspective which looks at the past in light of the present dominant interpretation, the idea of the elect nation associated with exceptionalism and isolationism, suppression of minorities (xenophobia towards Catholics) and suppression of individual conscience by the absolute power of the state. In this cultural-political ethos virtues were undermined and the warriors were praised.[29] Protestantism, Empire and war became centrifugal factors that kept the nation together.[30] Discovery of America placed England at the maritime centre and a continuous success of warfare gave the sense of a unique history of national success along with the government propaganda and the official version of history.[31] 'English history was newly interpreted entirely according to nationalist and erastian criteria. It was a new view of the past constructed to meet the needs of the new nation-state. The 'Reformation' was depicted as freeing the English nation from the 'slavery' inflicted upon it by the Papacy in medieval times, and restoring it to its original imperial state in which the English king had reigned supreme over all aspects of national life. All the proper English institutions had been created in England itself.[32] Jones' work shows how this superior mentality ruled British politics up to contemporary times. This is the root of belief that arose later in the form of American exceptionalism. It is anachronistic to say that this type of nation-state is a result of a nationalist movement of the masses; it is an outcome of a

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[28] Mamdani, Mahamood: *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War and The Roots of Terror*, (New York, Pantheon, 2004), p.5.
[29] Edwin Jones: *The English Nation: The Great Myth*, p.24.
[30] Ibid., p.23.
[31] Ibid., p.22
[32] Ibid., p.22.

monarchical declaration of national independence from Rome in the context of Reformation. The nation-state was a creation of the political power of the monarchy.[33]

However, Alfred Cobban shows that there had been a long history of representative institutions within the nations in Europe which originates from the medieval period, which began to decline with the emergence of the new monarchies in the sixteenth century (These institutions were revived after the French Revolution). He notes England as an exception that had a long history of an 'unbroken chain' of representative institutions. In England, the interests of the monarchy and the aristocracy became closely associated with the English Reformation without blurring fully the representative institutions. Paradoxically, this shows the limitations of the English monarchy. This also reflects the difference between the English nation-state and the other Western counterparts. Even though the early modern nation-state that emerged in Western Europe was monarchical and patrimonial there were differences in their degree of absolutism. Spain under Isabella and Ferdinand was absolutist and highly centralised; it was an autocracy, but the power of the English monarchy was restricted to a certain degree by the wealthy aristocracy and the two Houses of Parliament. Describing the ambiguity of the monarchical power in England Linda Colley notes,

> Neither the Bill of Rights of 1689 nor the Act of Settlement of 1701 prevented a British king from declaring war or making peace, from calling or dissolving Parliament, from appointing any qualified Protestant Britons he wanted as cabinet ministers, courtiers, army and naval officers, from nominating peers, bishops, judges and ambassadors exactly as he pleased....Great Britain remained, or so it seemed on paper, a strong monarchy in a Europe where the strong monarchies were the norm...Yet, in practice British kings had long experienced greater constrains than most of their continental counterparts... [34]

Linda Colley shows how the national identity, whether in terms of the monarchy or the Parliament, was highly conditioned by Protestantism. It is this historical peculiarity, along with the rise of a new bourgeoisie and the effects of the Reformation, that led to the first Revolution within a monarchical nation-state in the seventeenth century. Its wide spread Biblical culture aided by printing, began to form the intellectual base of the English Revolution.

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[33] Ibid., p.13. Jones contrasts the authoritarianism of the new English state with the more inclusive Christian humanism of Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus who were the leading representatives of the Renaissance in northern Europe.

[34] Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation: 1707-1837*, p.196.

Before moving on to the revolutionary phase of the nation-state let us examine how the early modern era was connected to the future empire-building. Initially, in the European competition for resources in other parts of the world England was relatively 'a late beginner'.[35] The English entered the competition by pirating gold and silver which the Spaniards had already accumulated from the Americas. However, the English thrust for empire became intense after the Reformation and became a matter between Catholic Spain and Protestant England. Niall Ferguson's account of this period shows how gold was the 'envy of the empire' and how pirating gold was justified with the rhetoric of Reformation, providing a religious foundation to build a new empire in England for Christ against Popery.[36] It was argued that England had the right to advance and build its own empire to propagate the faith in Christ on behalf of Protestantism as the Pope could entrust Spain with powers of conquest on behalf of Popery. This is why Niall Ferguson writes that 'The English conception of empire was thus formed in reaction to that of her Spanish rival. England's Empire was to be based on Protestantism; Spain's rested on Popery'.[37]

The Transition from Western Christendom to the monarchical nation-state takes place through a passage of rivalries caused by wealth and resources and the cultural changes of the Reformation. The economic and political ambitions of the princes were evident and therefore the imperialist thrust was inherent in this very context of conflict which started with pirating, possessing the lands in the Americas. The nation-state, therefore, arose with an imperialist outlook providing both the material and the cultural basis for a new empire. The process of colonising other lands started with battles for the possession of gold and other resources and moved towards a search for markets in the following centuries which sprang from the needs of Europe's expanding capitalist economy. The Spaniards, the Dutch and the Portuguese had been involved in trade to the East before England. The logic of capitalism necessitated the expansion of trade both internally and externally and it fuelled more and more conflicts among the nation-states sharpening their collective identities supported mainly by Protestantism and Catholicism.

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[35] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p.2.

[36] Ibid., p.4.

[37] Loc. cit.

Portugal had pioneered the first bases of European presence in India as early as the sixteenth century. This is how some parts, mainly Maritime Provinces, of India and Sri Lanka became Catholic. England, after a long period of commercial activity (1600-1758), began to dominate as a political force in the region only after the mid-eighteenth century, first in the coastal lines and then forming formal colonies to protect trade and the empire. In England the accumulation of wealth and resources and later the outgrowth of capital started with a period of pirating. It then moved towards sugar cultivation in Jamaica which was taken over from Spain. England was fast becoming a consumer society, the 'first mass consumer society' in Europe, or in the world. The imported commodities were sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco, textiles. Sugar became the largest import overtaking foreign linen by 1750 and it was overtaken by raw linen by 1820. The demand for primary products like sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco and textiles was so great, Niall Ferguson wittily argues, that it was this 'insatiable appetite' that contributed to the empire building through trade more than the 'Protestant work ethic and English individualism'.[38] Such imports also created a new national culture: sugar from Jamaica and tea from China and Japan. Trade with India started with textiles and England had nothing much to offer as commodities except its capacity to buy and sell, creating markets within its own territory and also re-exporting the imports to other parts of Europe. Even with regard to naval speed the Portuguese were superior in the sixteenth century, but the English learnt by experience and began to catch up. And by 1759 the British naval power had become superior in Europe once they defeated the French. With regard to the financial systems the Dutch were advanced. The Dutch East India Company (1602) was already in existence and took over the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka from the Portuguese. With regard to production for primary products like textiles India was superior.

The Dutch had dominated the Asian trade routes for over a century, from spices to textiles, and as Niall Ferguson notes this was the era of 'globalisation with gun boats'.[39] England entered into battle with the Dutch to secure sea routes in the seventeenth century and it was a *commercial battle* during which the English merchant navy was increased. Even though the English economy was bigger the Dutch financial system was still superior. The English had to overcome the difficulties

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[38] Ibid., p.13.
[39] Ibid., p.17.

of economy that were caused by wars. The English aristocracy with the support of the merchants in London city managed to overcome these difficulties staging a coup against James II who was Catholic, and invited William of Orange to invade England, resulting in an Anglo-Dutch business merger which allowed the English to trade more freely in the East. Creating a Protestant identity against Catholicism again played an important role in the 'Glorious Revolution' of asserting British liberties and the system of parliamentary monarchy. If the English were fighting with the Dutch for the domination of sea routes in the 17th century for commercial purposes, the next century was characterised by the wars between Catholic France and Britain for the political hegemony of the world. Here again the role of religion was crucial in sharpening the collective identities of both sides. Britain was not the first emerging empire in modern history. They took over from Portugal, Spain, Holland and France, dominating all the sea routes that are essential for empire-building by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Britain emerged as the largest and the most powerful empire in recorded human history by the nineteenth century. Demographically, it ruled a quarter of the world population and geographically, a quarter of the planet as if it had been 'a natural empire' existing from time immemorial.[40] As clearly shown by Enrique Dussel, Europe did not have any type of superiority over China, India or Arabian culture before the eighteenth century. He notes how Europe faced 'a secular underdevelopment' before the fifteenth century.[41] In spite of all this how did 'normal human condition' of a natural empire come to be?

The dissolution of Western Christendom was giving rise to another set of empires which were initially founded on the patrimonial model of the nation-state where the particular territories were beginning to identify themselves with exclusivist political and cultural collectivities. These were defined with a selective reading of their ethno-religious histories as shown above. However, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out 'celebration of the patrimonial state could not but be paradoxical and ambiguous, since the feudal bases of its power were withering

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[40] Niall Ferguson writes about the imperial ethos as follows: 'little may have been left of it on the map by the 1970s, but my family was so completely imbued with the imperial ethos that its importance went unquestioned' Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* , p.xvi.

[41] Enrique Dussel: 'Modernity, European Empires, Colonialism and Capitalism: Towards an Understanding of the Trans-modernity Process' in *Theologies and Cultures*, Vol.1, No.1, November 2004, p.29.

away...owing primarily to the emergence of new productive forces' creating primitive forms of capitalism that were beginning to affect the social structures.[42] It is under these circumstances that Biblical culture in England begins to create space for proliferation of meanings affecting the seventeenth century English Revolution (Biblical Revolution) as shown by Christopher Hill.[43]

2. REVOLUTIONISING OF THE NATION

The next phase of development of the Western nation-state is associated with the English, French and American Revolutions, the three bourgeois revolutions of the subsequent period (mainly 17th, 18th and 19th centuries). With reference to England, Edwin Jones laments the subordination of a much more inclusive history (with Latin and French influences) by the official version of history constructed by the new monarchy. Jones shows how otherness was suppressed with the concurrent emergence of the Reformation and of the nation-states and how English history was seen in isolation from the rest forming the myth of chosenness, whereas England had a richer cultural identity in relation to wider Europe and the Church while also contributing to it. Four hundred years of such isolationism have not only buried a past while emphasising conquest as heroism but also led the world into disaster, and today Britain has aligned with the USA in support of the American claim to global superiority. Jones reiterates the need to retrieve the age old inclusive European Christian tradition of universalism in building a more human Europe.[44]

However, Christopher Hill shows how the very moves of the monarchical nation state that were taken for national independence manifest a proliferation of Biblical meanings with the official vernacular translations of the Bible. Henry VIII could not control diverse interpretations of the texts as the Bible became popular among the different social classes: the aristocrats, middle and lower classes. Hill's vivid and in-depth reading of the English literature since the beginning of the Reformation up to the end of the seventeenth century shows how every sphere ranging from sexual relations to political theory was dominated by a 'Biblical culture'. It was

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42 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.94.

43 Christopher Hill: *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution*, (London, Penguin Press, 1993).

44 Edwin Jones: *The English Nation: The Great Myth*, p.17.

these interpretations that provided the intellectual climate for the English Revolution and the Civil War in the mid seventeenth century, as the thinking of Rousseau and Voltaire influenced the French Revolution and the thoughts of Marx influenced the Russian Revolution. Hill points out that it is anachronistic and tautologous to say that the English Revolution was about religion, looking at it from a present day perspective, because the contemporaries did not think in separate economic, political and religious categories.[45] After the fall of the authoritarian interpretation of the Bible (by the Roman Catholic Church), which was considered sovereign, the vernacular translation brought about a new form of sovereignty which gave rise to a multiplicity of meanings. Even though preaching ante-dated printing, in carrying Protestantism throughout the land printing surpassed the parochial boundaries, diversifying culture and interpretations and helping both indoctrination and counter-indoctrination.[46] Hill observes how all serious English critical theories emerged in this period: Hobbes and Harrington, Levellers, Milton and Winstanley. Most of their reflections, which were conditioned by a Biblical language, had far reaching consequences for democracy because of the promotion of reading of the Bible by all men and women. The Doctrine of priesthood of all believers was subversive. Milton's emphasis on the authority of the spirit as the individual's possession served to reify the belief in a common priesthood of all believers who could come out with innovative interpretations. The new approaches to the reading of the Bible, where people asked questions from the Bible emerging from their day to day life experiences, led to many interpretations. The concept of progressive revelation which emphasised mystery more than history, and spirit rather than letter, not only helped the individual life but also national life, especially in turbulent times. The emphasis was on the individual as against the authoritarian power of the official church. This trend was ambivalent; on the national level it could lead to a new idea of nation elect justifying also imperialism, and on the social level it could lead to liberalism. Bible reading, especially the Hebrew Bible, led many to think of themselves as the chosen people. New illustrations about Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau emerged form rereading of the texts in the context of social tensions of the period. The intellectual ethos that began to unfold after the Reformation has, therefore, given rise to diverse versions that reflected the tensions in

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[45] Christopher Hill: *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution*, p.34 -35.
[46] Ibid., p.38.

the society. As Hill says, 'to explain this we must study the society rather than – as well as – the Bible'.[47]

The political consequences of the vernacular Bible proved to be ambivalent with the spread of printing. God had been with the monarchy by choosing Henry VIII to lead the new Israel out of the bondage of Popery and then God had taken the side of the Parliament during the Revolution. Even though the Bible was used to oppose monarchy supporting the Parliament the latter too became connected to Protestantism, showing that God is with the Parliament. As this pattern of thought became inconsistent when the monarchy was established again, the political uncertainty of the times is expressed in the Quaker peace principle which was underpinned by the belief that Christ's kingdom was not of this world.[48] In this sense, neither the power of the Parliament nor of the monarchy was total. The uncertainties created by the English Civil War also promoted more secular thinking (though couched in a Biblical language) which is important for our understating of the state. One such thinker is Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) whose ideas will be considered soon.

At the end of the seventeenth century Hill notes how the 'Bible was dethroned' as Biblical literalism and certainty began to crumble. 'The Bible lost its universal power once it had been demonstrated that you could prove anything from it, and that there was no means of deciding once the authority of the church could not be enforced'.[49] Nevertheless this does not mean that the cultural influence it had on the society in forming the nation-state and the empire faded away. The tensions between the monarchy and the Parliament did not obscure the idea of chosenness. Instead, it led to another 'elect of the elect' who fled to the Americas forming the beginnings of a different kind of empire. Explaining this Biblical cultural influence on the socioeconomic and political *field*, Christopher Hill writes as follows: 'What matters is the locomotive, not the steam which appears to drive. But if there were no steam there would be no motion'.[50] Commenting on the ambiguity of the Biblical culture he writes 'on the one hand it (printing) created the possibility of more people receiving education, and so of extending the political nation; on the other hand, it offered new possibilities of manipulation and control of public opinion. In both processes the

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47 Ibid., p.415.
48 Ibid., p.414.
49 Ibid., p.428.
50 Ibid., p.415.

Bible was central. It also contributed to modes of thought justifying European expansion and supremacy'.[51]

The overall Biblical culture was connected with Protestant identity. Therefore, in spite of proliferation of meanings within that culture, as Linda Colley points out, Protestantism formed the national identity of Britain even after 'dethroning of the Bible'. Writing extensively on the formation of the British nation-state, Colley entitles her work as *Britons*: *Forging the Nation: 1707-1837*, saying that the title was intended to imply 'that element of counterfeit and invention' that has characterised the nation-building project in the later modern period. Even though she does not delve into the pre-existing myths of ethnic election as demonstrated by Anthony D. Smith, Colley's work clearly brings to light (without excluding fully the existence of pre-existing older loyalties) how religious narratives could interact with the drastic economic and political changes in the modern period which led Britain to global supremacy during the period of 1600-1850.[52] Utilising Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined political community' she points out that Great Britain is 'an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties'.[53] Her key argument revolves around the 'absolute centrality of Protestantism' in forming the national identity of the British nation-state and empire. The internal differences caused by the proliferation of meanings of the Bible as well as the dethroning of the Bible, according to her, did not blur 'what was still the most striking feature in the religious landscape, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic'.[54] The neighbouring predominantly Catholic continent, especially France and Spain, provided Britain with a formidable other against whom its Protestant identity could be forged. Linda Colley points out how Protestantism worked as a factor in 'the invention of Britishness'.[55]

Britain has not been a single kingdom throughout most parts its recorded history; it has been a set of kingdoms. The Acts of Union attempted in 1536 and 1541 finally and definitively succeeded in 1707, by which Scotland, Wales and Ireland

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[51] Ibid., p.19

[52] Linda Colley: *Captives: The story of Britain's pursuit of empire and how its soldiers and civilians were held captives by the dream of global supremacy, 1600-1850*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 2002)

[53] Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, p.5.

[54] Ibid., pp.18-19.

[55] Ibid., p.8.

were amalgamated into one kingdom led by England and called 'Great Britain' and 'British Empire'. This was not only a political unity of kingdoms but also a coming together of economic and political interests, especially in the case of Scotland, Wales and England. Overarching the particular regional cultural identities within Britain a monarchical national collective identity was provided by Protestantism. It was more a political uniformity that was achieved than a fusion of regional cultures which formed the British national identity. Therefore, the factors that held British national identity uniform and coherent were not the principles that were drawn form the regional cultural heritages, but it was Protestantism, empire-building and wars with the continental commercial and political contenders that united them together. Therefore, as Colley argues, British national identity has been constructed mainly in opposition to the other. 'In other words, men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not. Once confronted with an obviously alien "Them", an otherwise diverse community can become a reassuring or merely disparate "Us".'[56] This type of identity building has enormous implications even up to today in terms of Britain's global role, which is vacillating between the European Union and the United States. As the empire collapsed Britain began to wrestle to find out what her role in the world is.

Colley shows how the Protestant identity and the myth of chosenness formed the British identity, having interacted with the socioeconomic and political changes of the period. As the need for the expansion of the market both internally and externally increased the competition between the European powers also grew. Britain's consolidation of its power to face this competition was facilitated by a new form of Christianity that emerged after the Reformation. Britain's successes in trade, military victories over France and Spain and imperial conquest of the colonies were perceived as blessings given by God to the favoured nation. The belief that Britain is a chosen race grew as it emerged as the most powerful nation-state economically, politically and militarily in Europe. Colley notes:

> An apocalyptic interpretation of history, in which Britain stood in for Israel and its opponents were represented as Satan's accomplices, did not fade away in the face of rationalism in the seventeenth century, but remained part of the thinking of many devout Protestants long after.[57]

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[56] Ibid., p.6.
[57] Ibid., p.31.

Even the Parliament and Protestantism are connected as the success stories of military victories with France multiplied. It is this belief which is associated on the one hand, with evangelism arising in the form of religious proselytisation in the colonies, and on the other hand, with the liberal thrust (zeal) to civilise the rest of the world (white man's burden). The characteristics of this type of Protestant national identity were, therefore, related to a belief in a superior race and a nation. Ostensibly it was a uniform and homogeneous entity that pretended to treat all its citizens equally. However, there were social tensions between the commercial class and the landed aristocracy; the latter had been dominating the Parliament. Linda Colley shows how emerging commercial classes worked for the nation in times of war more vigorously than the aristocracy. Tensions arose between them not only because of profit motives but also for social recognition. Despite these rifts there was also a close relationship between the commercial classes and the government through the charities that were pioneered by the former. While the commercial class needed internal security and external security for their trade the government which was dominated by the aristocrats also needed the support of the commercial classes to militarily defeat the other continental competitors. This shows the link between trade and national identity. Patriotism was the pathway that brought social recognition for so many who were excluded from aristocracy.[58] National sentiment which was associated with empire-building was intrinsically interwoven with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the growth of towns, recurrent wars and the spread of printing.

Even though Britain had a record of a high rate of poverty, taxation and criminality, the poor also shared the common myth of chosenness as a result of popularising the myths by printing, reading, preaching and singing. While both Christopher Hill and Benedict Anderson take into account the role of 'print capitalism' in forming national consciousness, Linda Colley shows how singing became a more powerful instrument than printing in propagating the idea of Britain as Israel.[59] In the age of rationalism myths were rationalised by a process of mythologizing the historical material victories of Britain. What cemented the relationship between different social groups, transforming uniformity into unity, was this common identity of chosenness. Growing prominence made in trade, military,

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[58] Ibid., p.97.
[59] Ibid., p.31.

wealth and possession of foreign land gave 'a sense of reality', as Edwin Jones puts it, 'to the notion of English history as a continuous and unique story of national success achieved by a special people'.[60] This way of writing and perceiving history from the sixteenth century onwards was associated with the rise of the nation-state which formed the foundation of the British empire. A historical fact became an eternal myth propagating a self perception about a superior species of humankind or the elect nation 'whose destined role was exalted above that of others'.[61] Even though the majority of the British were poor and did not benefit from the wealth of 'the promised land', belonging to the elect nation gave them a sense of pride and a superior mentality against the French (and also Ireland) and later against the colonial others. This is a national identity created by culture and power (economic and political) that hides socioeconomic contradictions. Colley writes.

> Like all sustaining national myths, the idea that Britain was a chosen land and therefore fruitful, did not depend for its effectiveness upon its being true. Poor or not, a large number of Protestant Britons believed – believed precisely because they were Protestant, and because it was comforting to believe it – that they were richer in every sense than other people...[62]

She shows how the cultural identity of Protestantism has given a social recognition to the underprivileged classes who were 'held captive by the dream of global supremacy'.[63] Under particular historical circumstances there emerges a particular interpretation of Christianity by which the myths of chosenness or election and the idea of mission associated with it become instrumental in constructing a superior mentality over and above others. As Anthony D. Smith shows, 'Victorian Britain's imperial mission was, from one angle, merely an extension of this belief in national chosenness'.[64] Theologisation of the nation proceeded towards theologisation of an empire. Breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church and thereby shifting allegiance from a universal church to a national church, and reading the Biblical narratives that promote the idea of chosenness by the masses have shaped the British

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60 Edwin Jones: *The English Nation: The Great Myth*, p.22.

61 Ibid., p.23.

62 Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, p.33.

63 Linda Colley : *Captives: The story of Britain's pursuit of empire and how its soldiers and civilians were held captive by the dream of global supremacy: 1600-1850*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 2002)

64 Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.48.

and then later the American national ideologies. By 1815 British empire-building had extended to include one in every five inhabitants in the world within its boundaries.[65]

i. A Republican Nation-State

In what way did the emerging democratic republicanism of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries affect Britain? In the case of Britain the models of sovereignty, namely monarchic absolutism (along with the power of the aristocracy) of the early modern period and the democratic republicanism of the Revolutions, began to overlap with each other. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen outlines the principle of modern sovereignty as follows: 'The principle of sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation; no body of men, no individual, can exercise authority that does not emanate expressly from it'.[66] Rousseau is one of the key thinkers who inspired nationalism in this period and whose ideas rejected the sovereignty of the person or the dynasty, as having been embodied in the nation, and promoted the identification of nation with the people and the territory. The nation-state, therefore, was meant to represent collective interests of the people as against the personal interests of the monarch. Rousseau's idea of 'general will' as opposed to the 'will of all' which is 'a sum of particular wills' underpins the notion of modern republican sovereignty.[67] Even though the patrimonial absolutist model of rule and theological foundation of territorial patrimony were challenged by this model, as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt point out it was replaced by an equally new absolutist type by which territory and population were considered as divine or absolute. 'Or rather, the physical territory and population were conceived as the extension of the transcendent essence of the nation. *The modern concept of nation thus inherited the patrimonial body of the monarchic state and reinvented it in a new form*'.[68]

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[65] Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, p.323.

[66] Cited in Elie Kedourie: *Nationalism*, (London, Hutchinson University Library, 1960), p.12.

[67] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract*, (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Classics, 1998), p.29.

[68] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.95.The authors' definition of transcendence refers to political absolutism throughout their work. On the one hand, such a usage of the term shows how absolute political power is perceived as an unchangeable transcendent power, but on the other hand such a definition does not cover the gamut of other meanings as well as new interpretations of the term. See Schwartz for epistemological, ethical, aesthetic and political meanings of transcendence. Regina Schwartz: 'Introduction: Transcendence: Beyond...' in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, Theology: Approach the Beyond*, (ed.) Regina Schwartz, (New York, Routledge, 2004),

Even though Hobbes and Rousseau differ in their definition of original human nature Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt show how Hobbes' notion of sovereignty and its transcendent character can be applied to other forms of government: monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. With the rise of the new ruling elite (bourgeoisie), they observe that Rousseau's "republican absolute" is not that different from Hobbes' "God on earth".[69] The two (along with Jean Bodin in the second half of the sixteenth century) are wrestling with the perennial conceptual dilemmas of one and many or individual and public, and they replace sovereignty of the public domain (nation) with oneness of the state. As Negri and Hardt remark, 'democratic, plural, or popular political forms might be declared, but modern sovereignty really has only one political figure: a single transcendent power.'[70] Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy articulated theoretically this new transcendent political apparatus called the state with the idea of an absolute ruler with the right to act to prevent dangers of war.[71] Here the individual wills converge and rest upon the sovereign ruler who is both representational and transcendent. This is a contradiction in terms for the humanists: how could a transcendental absolute be representational? This is how Rousseau's democratic republicanism resembled the Hobbesian model: a republican absolute. Modern sovereignty can have only one political figure. Therefore, it cannot rest on several but only on one. In this sense it can exist only in monarchy because it is one. The theology of absolute transcendence that justified the status of the monarchy shifted towards justifying the status of the Parliament that represents the republican state. In this sense, both the monarchical state as well as the republican state have

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pp.vii-viii.

69 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, pp.84-85. Hobbes tries to address the fear of anarchy of his period (English Civil Wars). He asserts a flawed original human nature. This is the Natural Law and what humanity requires is a Natural Right to preserve itself. It is by surrendering of individual liberty to an overall sovereign power that social stability could be achieved. The idea of an all-powerful secular state or 'God on earth' who can preserve lives reflects the Biblical culture of seventeenth century England. Cf. Christopher Hill: *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution*, (London, Penguin Press, 1993). For Rousseau, whose writings reflect the early beginnings of modern liberal thought and Romanticism, the original state of human nature was pure and solitary and it is through the social culture that it became corrupted. His suggestion of a democratic republic is based on a 'civic religion' of heroic virtues (mainly patriotism) and reflects his opposition to Christianity, which he considers as a religion restricted to individual piety and other-worldliness. However, he overlooks the other strands of Christianity, particularly in Geneva and in England, which fused with patriotism. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract*, (London, Wordsworth, 1993), pp.129-138. Paul Strathern: *The Essential Rousseau*, (London, Virgin Books, 2003), pp.16-17.

70 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.85.

71 Ibid., pp.83-84

been given an absolute transcendental character. The idea of the state as a transcendent entity that has absolute power has entered into secular discourses. Despite the spirit of freedom of our modern times Zygmunt Bauman shows how the emancipation of the political state was associated with regulation of law by one absolute authority which removed the burden or the 'agony of moral ambivalence' of the human condition.[72]

Interpreting the emphasis of the idea of oneness of the modern nation-state from a theological point of view Regina Schwartz, in her study of the politics of interpretation of the Biblical God in monotheistic religions, shows how Biblical narratives have been translated into 'myths of secular nationalism' in the modern period. Demonstrating how certain religious categories have lingered into the modern secular discourse of nation-state, she writes:

> The modern nation-state reflected the ancient idea of nation deity. In theory, Christendom incorporated many nations under one God.... but in practice, when secular nations were carved out of that empire, instead of one God speaking Latin, the French God spoke French, the German God spoke German, the English God spoke English (with an Oxbridge accent) and the US God spoke English (with a southern accent).[73]

She also shows how, in the Bible, oneness is asserted in times of scarcity and multiplicity is promoted in times of plenitude.[74] On the one hand the material and cultural movements of the modern period have brought about the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, but on the other hand the very same process has led to totalitarianism (oneness), state terrorism and recurrent wars among nation-states.

From an economic perspective, the materiality of the notion of oneness of indivisible sovereignty or (as Negri and Hardt point out) the content that fills this sovereignty was provided by the capitalist development of the forces of production which created a competition among the nation-states to accumulate more wealth. The capitalist development functioned as the foundation of social production.[75] Competition to accumulate more and more wealth under the rule of capitalist logic presupposes scarcity. Even though Adam Smith's theoretical 'invisible hand', which regulates the public, presupposes liberality and plenitude, in practice the capitalistic

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[72] Zygmunt Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, (Oxford / Cambridge, Blackwell, 1995), p.4.

[73] Regina Schwartz: *The Curse of Cain: the Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, (London, University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.121.

[74] Ibid., p.xi.

[75] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.85.

logic of the individual or the private firm is motivated by reason corrupted by interest, that presupposes scarcity. It is in this process that political transcendence of the sovereignty of the state is conditioned by the economic transcendence of capitalist development and leads to competitions and war. The French Revolution is overtaken by the British Industrial Revolution demanding more industrial capital. The notion of plenitude is overtaken by the notion of scarcity, and multiplicity has been suppressed by oneness of the British nation-state which developed into the British Empire. As Eric Hobsbawm writes, in this period 'no economist of even the most liberal persuasion could overlook or fail to take account of the national economy'.[76] And it has to be noted that this era is believed to be a phase in social evolution and progress by which heterogeneous smaller groups enter into a process of homogenisation forming larger collectivities by expansion. Therefore, the 'threshold principles' of a nation-state were determined by several factors: capitalist development, geographical vastness, ability to conquer and expand, historical justification of the current state and the existence of a vernacular elite (or as Schwartz shows belief in the existence of a God who speaks vernacular).[77] It is in this context that the Western political modernity which brought about the idea of national sovereignty was born and it is inseparable from capitalist development. The capitalist logic also necessitated carving out formal colonies in the world while creating a competition between the nation-states which were extending their sovereignty to the colonies.

The model of the Western nation-state is the cornerstone of modern imperialism. The power of capital carried its imprint to the political communities of the other parts of the world. The power of capital is not merely material conditions but it is also constituted in particular cultural forms. Therefore, the power of the West is not only an economic and political influence, but also a cultural one. Modern sovereignty carried the totalising identity of the former patrimonial system. This totality of power was partly constituted by the new capitalist economy and partly by the old absolutist administration. The tensions between them were harnessed by a national identity which is formed by a cultural integration based on 'biological continuity of blood relations, spatial continuity of territory, and linguistic

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[76] Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.28.

[77] Ibid., pp.28-32.

commonality'.[78] Hardt and Negri analyse how this model was based on the transcendent power of the state and in Britain this was predicated on the belief in the myth of chosenness as shown by Linda Colley. The ruling elite in Britain managed to consolidate their power in the face of the effects of the French and American Revolutions by learning from the revolutionaries themselves. This consolidation had already been facilitated by the interaction between the landed aristocracy and the capitalist bourgeoisie who had begun to form the ruling class. Their initial social tensions had been fading away with demographic movements, profitability of land and standardisation of profits, intermarrying and education in public schools and universities. This is also a merging of English, Welsh, Scottish and Anglo-Irish elites who started showing patriotism and religious zeal. Colley describes their characteristics which became the features of British national identity that can be seen even today.

> Many of them now took more than usual care to appear scrupulously religious and morally impeccable and to identify themselves with military achievement on the battlefield and with a cult of civilian heroism at home... Relentless hard work, complete professionalism, an uncompromising private virtue and an ostentatious patriotism were beginning to remodel both the ruling class and the monarchy.[79]

In this process, the population of passive serfs was reformed as active citizens. In this sense, the nation becomes an active force of a horizontal community. However, these citizens were a select group of people and modern sovereignty of the nation covered the bourgeoisie's interests. The workers, women, the common people and the peasants were not included. The intensification of bourgeois interests led to competition among the nation-states that resulted in the First World War, proving the inadequacy of the liberal and nationalist thinking that characterised modern political sovereignty. Even though the very principle of liberty in modern sovereignty contains a democratic potential as opposed to its predecessor – the patrimonial model – the former also has entered into a crisis similar to its predecessor because of the transcendent absolutism given to the sovereignty of the nation-state. Here we see again how transcendence has been interpreted as absolutism. This dual crisis puts into question the (artificial) demarcations between the secular and the religious discourses. It is clearly a crisis in the interpretation of transcendence and immanence which needs

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[78] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.95.
[79] Linda Colley: *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, p.192.

to be addressed on a philosophical and theological plane. The challenge that our modern times faces is to recapture the spirit of the European Revolutions in reimagining nation-states in an era of globalisation without falling into the trap of historical absolutism. As Christopher Hill has shown us there were proliferations of meanings in the Biblical Revolution. It was the same with the French Revolution. Such a focus could help us to avoid absolutising both religious and secular discourses of nation-building. This will be attempted in the final part of this work.

ii. Christian Culture, the Spirit of Capitalism and Imperialism

As the building of the British Empire is a result of the logic of capitalist development what is the relationship between capitalism and Protestant culture? Max Weber shows how in the latter part of the seventeenth century social thinking in England, inspired by Puritan teaching, began to change towards the capitalistic logic affecting a wider section of society than before.[80] In the case of capitalism, it grew initially not as a world phenomenon, but as a local phenomenon. If so, was capitalism caused by one particular cultural setting? Even though Max Weber's hypothesis of the close affinity between Protestant culture and the rise of capitalism has made a pioneering contribution towards the interplay between culture and power (economic power) it has to be modified, carefully taking into consideration the history of capitalism. Weber has been criticised by many scholars as there have been non-Protestant centres of capitalist currents too. Weber's study of the writings of the English Puritans in the latter part of the seventeenth century shows how a new conception of religion emerged, challenging the established aristocracy of land and commerce which promoted a spirituality of social and economic backwardness as a virtue. The search for wealth, which was considered as an obstacle to the salvation of the soul, became an advantage, a duty or a divine calling that needs to be taken up under the new Calvinist theology. Money making and piety became closely related and compatible with each other. Was capitalism caused by a Protestant ethic or was the latter an ideological product of the former? Neither of the reductions reveals the complexity of the reality. As R. H. Tawney, in his foreword to the eleventh edition of

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[80] Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, (London, Unwin University Books, 1971).

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, writes, without attributing the phenomenon to one single cause and using it to 'unlock all doors' it is important to realise that it is 'the result of several converging causes' in reality.[81] Tawney shows how, even though Weber studies the impact of certain religious movements like Calvinism in creating a conducive culture for a new type of economic order, this does not exclude the parallel developments in the areas of commerce, finance and industry. It cannot be said that Calvinist theology caused capitalism. It is by examining the latter that the impact of the former can be identified.

The initial stages of capitalist currents could be seen in Venice and Florence in the fourteenth century and in Antwerp in the fifteenth century. There were large economic movements in Holland and England before Calvinism. Tawney points out how due to the recurrent financial crisis of the sixteenth century there was a wider intellectual movement that undermined traditional economic ethics within both Catholic and Protestant circles. Therefore, the rise of the particular form of Calvinism that promoted capitalism has to be placed within this context. Furthermore, Calvinism also varied from context to context and had diverse strands, ranging from advocating the spirit of capitalism, which promotes liberalism and individual freedom to collectivism or theocracy, which delimits individual freedom. Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Derek Wilson with an ecumenical perspective write against any generalisation of the link between Protestantism and capitalism, showing how 'if Protestantism at its most lucrative was not particularly austere, Protestantism at its most radical was actually anti-capitalist'.[82].

What can be said in this regard is that both the form of Calvinism that Weber writes about and capitalism are effects of changes in socioeconomic and cultural structures of a particular place and time in history. This period also marks a stage in the relative popularisation of the nation-state among certain social classes who were entering into the emerging capitalist culture in Europe. As Christopher Hill shows, the Biblical culture of seventeenth century England sought answers to the crises of the society mainly through the Scriptures. The type of Calvinism that promotes capitalist logic is one of interpretations of the Scriptures by a community in its conflicts with the aristocracy and in the economic crisis it was facing.

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[81] Ibid., p.7

[82] Felipe Fernández-Armesto and Derek Wilson: *Reformation: Christianity and the World 1500-2000*, p.279.

iii. Mythologisation of History and Historicisation of Faith

The present day process of globalisation is vastly dominated by Britain and the USA working in collaboration with each other. It is important to identify cultural and political roots of the USA. They are found in the period of English Civil Wars, English Revolution and Restoration in the seventeenth century, and in the proliferation of meanings in the Biblical culture of the period. The American tradition developed more after the Restoration in Britain in 1660 which was considered as a betrayal of God's covenant.[83] Subsequently colonial settlement, independence and civil war are the steps that led to the origin of the present day American Empire. In both the English civil war(s), the American Revolution and the American civil war the belief was that God is with the winning side. Both Roman Catholicism and the Native American cultures were considered pagan. God was with both Cromwell and George Washington. As Karen Armstrong rightly puts it, 'religion played a key role in the creation of the first modern secular republic'.[84] The establishment of the new colony was not only motivated by Puritanical motives that were associated with the power of the myth of covenantal chosenness: 'The Pilgrims might have come to the New World to escape from Popery. But the main end of the men of Marblehead "was to catch fish".'[85] Belief in a providential history where God favours the elect in spite of their merits is basic to the myth of chosenness. The modern empire building is a remnant of these Calvinist beliefs.[86] The question of identity 'Who are we' was answered by articulating the Declaration of Independence, which answered the question 'Who do

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[83] The tension between two cultural-political currents, the Anglican Protestants and Puritans, overlapped with the conflict between the monarchy and the Parliament. More radical Protestants (mainly the Puritans) saw England's sense of isolation as caused by both internal and external Papists. Amidst Spain and France they felt like Israel surrounded by Assyria, Egypt and Babylon and saw some of their leaders as internal threats who were not faithful to God's covenant and were betraying the nation. The hope of a new era that was brought about by the English Revolution in the 1640s began to dwindle after the English Restoration. This led the more radical Protestants to look for (and build) a more godly society elsewhere. They believed in divine punishment on England and decided to leave the land. A group of Puritans called Pilgrims fled to America. The Puritans who fled also felt that they were oppressed and fleeing persecution. A belief in a land of destiny was interwoven with this flight (exodus). See Christopher Hill, pp.265, 266, 285, 434.

[84] Karen Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, p.85.

[85] Niall Ferguson: *Empire:How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.62.

[86] However, the myth of chosenness not only shaped British and American national identities but its influence could also be seen in Ireland, in the late nineteenth century among the Afrikaners and in the early twentieth century among the Jews who led a Zionist Revival. See Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.77.

we want to be?' The Founding Fathers of the USA were Deists. The emphasis of Deism was more on the power of immanence than on supernatural miraculous interventions. According to one interpretation of the Protestant ethic as shown by Max Weber it is this productive power that expresses the divine power on earth. As Hardt and Negri point out the American Declaration of Independence 'celebrates the idea that power is not something that lords over us but something that we make'.[87] Such systems of belief fitted into Adam Smith's hypothesis of a non-interventionist state that reflected the 'invisible guiding hand' of the Providential God who leads the citizen towards prosperity in an entirely free economy.[88] In economic terms this immanence is based on the idea of productivity.[89]

From an ethno-symbolic perspective, Anthony D. Smith contrasts the two notions of sacred homelands that are found in the British and American national consciousness. These notions are interconnected and overlap with each other. The differences are also differences of emphasis. The British relied more on the belief in a land of history which is the ancestral home or the land of birth while the American consciousness was more conditioned by the belief in a land of destiny or destination or promised land. Both were inspired by the Biblical myths of Exodus and chosenness that were related to the ideas of wilderness and promised land. Smith also shows how this idea of chosen people expanded to the landscape by 'Territorialisation of Memory'.[90] Britain as a national community looked at a Biblical past to justify its present status and America looked to the future in building its republic and later the empire. Clifford Longley observes: 'at the heart of the American act of self-imagining was a willed belief in destiny, and however ill-defined, destiny demands faith. At the heart of the English acts of self-imagining was continuity. Most of the time, that demands nothing more than inertia'.[91] The geographical situation of Britain as an island that is surrounded by so many other nations tends to inertia in asserting its identity, whereas the vast area of land from the Atlantic to the Pacific that the USA has promoted the belief in destiny, while the Calvinist belief in predestination has

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87 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.165.

88 Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations Books I-III*, (London, Penguin Books, 1999).

89 The republican people were considered 'a new people, *a people in exodus* populating the empty (or emptied) new territories' as God's elect. This excluded the Native Americans and degraded the African Americans. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.170.

90 Ibid., pp.138-140.

91 Clifford Longley: *Chosen People: The Big Idea that shapes England and America*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p.8.

justified it theologically. Longley goes on to say that in this sense there are Whigs in America and Tories in Britain.[92]

Even though the needs of the modern republic required it to be secular in its constitution (by mentioning God in a perfunctory manner and later sanctioning coercion in matters of faith) the tensions between those who demystified faith and those who mythologized it did not wither away. Instead, the churches as they grew larger began to interpret the achievements of the Revolution as God's direct interventions, perceiving them as modern Israel, 'God's own nation'.[93] It is in this context that Christian fundamentalism begins to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. It was a battle to define the national identity of America, basing it on the artificial demarcations of *logos* and *mythos* which continue up to today. The crisis of this historical trajectory is characterised by a process of mythologizing history (as *logos*) and historicising faith (as *mythos*) with an exclusivist perspective that undermines the ethical implications that arise in relation to the colonised other (both human beings and nature). As Armstrong says, this process is the 'Janus-face' of modern Revolutions, which on the one hand, aspires to liberty, equality and fraternity and on the other hand leads up to state terrorism.[94]

As Christopher Hill shows, 'the idea that God was deserting his chosen Englishmen led some to emigrate to America, others to fight for a more godly society at home, and for a society more conscious of international obligations.'[95] Edwin Jones tends to show a kind of nostalgia for the past (before the English Reformation) whereas Hill adopts a more realistic approach by taking into consideration the socio-political developments of the period and provides a framework for reinterpretation of the Biblical narratives drawing analogies between seventeenth century Biblical reading and the future liberation theology.[96] While Edwin Jones' approach gives a wider framework for a Christian humanism within Europe based on ethical universal principles of Christianity, Hill shows how there developed alternative currents from within the English narrative of the nation-state. Similarly, Regina Schwartz develops Milton's ideas in *Paradise Lost* taking into account current postmodern trends in

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92 Ibid., pp.8-9.
93 Ibid., pp.85-86.
94 Ibid., p.76.
95 Christopher Hill: *The English Bible and the 17th Century Revolution*, p.438.
96 Ibid., p.447.

Europe, where she interprets chaos as creation or positive disruption.[97]Anthony D. Smith makes an attempt to reinterpret European culture in terms of Christian ethics in forming a politically responsible European Union.[98] It could be said that religious categories have lingered into the secular discourse, blurring the epistemological demarcation between the religious and secular discourses. As S. N. Balagangadhara puts it: 'Our secular world is a religious world in disguise'.[99] The above observations can be pointers that help us to develop an ethic for international relations today that will facilitate a resolution of the Lankan conflict. Let us now discuss how the British nation-state developed into an Empire.

3. NATION-STATE AS THE CORNERSTONE OF IMPERIALISM

What are the characteristics of the Western nation-state that formed the foundation of empire-building or how did the model of the Western nation-state develop into empire(s)? As it could be seen, the changing phases of the Western nation-state since the sixteenth century have largely been determined both by cultural changes and the growth of capitalism. The nineteenth century records the formation of the formal colonies that had already been conquered and imperialism becomes the norm of international order.

Eric Hobsbawm shows that in the nineteenth century, as the growth of capitalism continued with industrial development, there were new conditions that emerged within the international economic system. The ideals of political freedom in the French and American Revolutions were taken over by the ideals of economic growth of the British Industrial Revolution, bringing about a new phase in the interaction between the political and economic fields. The growth of mercantile capital was instrumental in creating the bourgeoisie which spearheaded the French Revolution and the next phase of industrial capital was associated with the creation of imperialism. With this growth of capitalism, the interpretation of the cultural sphere also took a different shape with the ideologies of modernisation and civilisation. A

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97 Regina Schwartz: *Remembering and Repeating: On Milton's Theology and Poetics*, (London/ New York, University of Chicago Press, 1993).

98 Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity*, pp.173-175.

99 S.N. Balagangadhara: *'The Heathen in His Blindness...': Asia, The West and the Dynamic of Religion*, (New York, E. J. Brill, 1994), p 297.

new form of *habitus* was formed out of the *social* and *cultural capital* as economic capital interacted with the political *field.*

As shown by Hobsbawm, by 1879 the principle of protectionism came to be applied as the economic pressures grew stronger within the particular countries. Geographically, the industrialising sector was expanding and new areas and countries were joining in as pluralism in the economy was growing while Britain maintained a central position. The Industrial Revolution brought to the fore new inventions pertaining to transport and communication. Drastic changes in the patterns of consumption of goods caused by the growth of population, urbanisation and real incomes created 'mass production' and a 'mass market'. In such a context the need for more mines for the industrial economy and the need for more plantations, farms and estates that produce primary products such as textiles, sugar, tea, coffee and bananas to meet the demands grew rapidly. With this there was a simultaneous need arising among a number of industrial economies to search for markets.

Competition between national groups of investors necessitated the affinity between the ruling classes and the bourgeoisie that led the process of bringing about the convergence of economic and political spheres. As the scepticism about the free autonomous market economy grew, the existing national territorial boundaries began to be sharpened by 1875 within Western Europe. These competing rivalries among them led to carving up the globe into different formal colonies. The earlier phase of trading with distant lands moved towards a process colonisation. It is under these circumstances that the Western nation-states turned out to be formal empires and the former became the cornerstone of the latter. As Eric Hobsbawm remarks, '...national economies developed into imperial economies that can turn the colonies into "banana or coffee republics" '.[100] While India became a colony that provided raw materials for the industries Sri Lanka became a colony that provided primary products like tea and rubber. In his *Age of Empire* Hobsbawm shows how the nation-states developed into empires between the years of 1875-1914. The colonies became producers of primary products to the world market controlled and regulated by the metropolitan states, and the former became dependant economies. Formal Imperialism emerged as the 'national economies' began to compete with each other in trying to monopolise resources. Formal imperialism means making formal colonies by annexing them to

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[100] Eric Hobsbawm: *Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, (London, Abacus, 2005), p.42.

the metropolis. The territorial boundaries of these European nations became the centres of power, which regulated the external territories through various channels, recording the biggest number of empires in human history. As it has been argued so far, this was not a mere material domination, but also cultural domination of the other. This is also the process that led to the formation of a particular type of historiography with a teleological approach which believes in an ancient great civilisation, a dark age and the present glorious moment. The contemporary glorious moment was also associated with a racial superiority that was imbricated with the idea of Westernisation as modernisation. This forms the *habitus* of the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological framework. Commenting on the relationship between this superior mentality and Christianity, Susan Bayly writes that 'this racial reading of the empire was in accord with what many Victorian writers were saying at this time about the supposed rationality and moderation of British colonialism' and Christianity was seen as 'widely characterised as moderate, civilised, and unprovocative' as opposed to other religions of the colonised people.[101]

While Hobsbawm analyses the material basis of the transition from the nation-state to empire, Edward Said throws light on its cultural processes. Through this transition the initial phase of nationalism of both the English and the French Revolutions developed into imperialism and the idea of the nation was transformed into a belief in a superior civilization (or race) as opposed to inferior colonies which need to be 'civilised'. The sense of being a nation became pride about the empire. The basis of the power of the empire that gives rise to this pride and self assurance is constituted by cultural (belief in the transcendence of the state and the myth of chosenness) and material (accumulation of capital) forms. It could be said that the transcendence of the nation-state and the empire is constituted by the cultural forms of the myth of chosenness and the power of capital which makes both the state and the empire absolute. *Habitus* which is a *historical transcendental* has been turned into an absolute transcendental. Said's critique of Orientalism presupposes the existence of this power in terms of the monarchical or republican nation-state which pretends to overcome the dilemma of one and many or the individual and the public and has been extended to the larger world through imperialism. Hardt and Negri write that 'the

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[101] Susan Bayly: 'Race in Britain and India' in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, (eds.) Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.75-76.

sovereignty of the nation-state was the cornerstone of the imperialisms that European powers constructed throughout the modern era... Imperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries'.[102]

As Adam Zamoyski shows, the king who is God's anointed has been replaced by the nation and it is the nation that validated the state. God has been replaced by 'Our Lord Mankind'.[103] The ideologies behind imperialism are shaped by this belief. Imperialism is believed to be an extension of this transcendent power to the other lands whether in terms of secular (liberal) categories or religious (evangelical) thrusts. It is from such a position of structured power that there arose a new awareness among the thinkers, artists and politicians in the West about the Orient, ranging from China to the Mediterranean. As Said points out, 'this awareness was partly the result of newly discovered and translated Oriental texts in languages like Sanskrit, Zend, and Arabic; it was also the result of a newly perceived relationship between the Orient and the West'.[104] The Royal Asiatic Society is one of the main bodies that pioneered such researches. The claim to universal objectivity of knowledge about the Orient is questioned by Said as it is dependent upon the position of power that the Western empire(s) enjoys. He notes that 'knowledge gives power' and 'more power requires more knowledge'.[105] Edward Said notes how the national imperial aims and the general national culture are connected and raises the following point:

> The important point – a very Gramscian one – is how the national British, French, American cultures maintained hegemony over the peripheries and how within them was consent gained and continuously consolidated for the distant rule of native peoples and territories.[106]

This shows that, even though political identities of the coloniser and the colonised were created apparently within a secular (rational) sphere motivated by the expansion of the markets, there were cultural and religious narratives involved in the project of Western imperialism. This, in fact, is a process of politicisation of cultures from both ends. It is against this background that the Orientalist discourse as well as the Occidentalist discourse that emerges as a reaction to the former has to be understood. In spite of a dominant material (capitalist) and cultural (Orientalist) system of power,

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[102] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.xii

[103] Adam Zamoyski: *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots, and Revolutionaries: 1776-1871*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1999), pp.1-2.

[104] Edward W. Said: *Orientalism*, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p.42.

[105] Ibid., p.36.

[106] Edward W.: *Culture and Imperialism*, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1993), pp.11, 12, 59.

the ambiguity of modern Western sovereignty and the ideas of liberalism that were associated with the emerging new social classes – especially the bourgeoisie and the middle classes – have been growing both within France and England (initially in the Dutch territory) along with imperialism.

Within Europe there was also a movement of democratisation of politics that took into consideration the welfare of certain social groups, particularly in England, with democratisation of politics in the West, while creating autocracy in the colonised countries. Nation at the end of nineteenth century was going through a process of homogenization. The culture was determined mainly by the bourgeois liberal elite with the transforming of already existing traditions as well as invention of new ones by the intellectuals.

As seen earlier the democratic paradigm that had underpinned the French Revolution is predicated on the idea of a horizontal relationship between the people and nation where the state is owned by the people, not by a king. The nation is equated with people who have sovereign rights and it is the nation which is the ultimate authority. Institutionalisation of citizenship differentiates post eighteenth century nations from early ethnic and territorial communities. Seen from below, the nation-people relationship is an expression of the need to represent the common interests against the particular ones and the common good against the privilege of a few. In principle, the ethnic group differences become secondary in this model as the emphasis is on the institutionalisation of a common citizenship. From a socialist point of view, this is revolutionary and democratic and is a novel step. However, in concretising such ideals Anthony D. Smith shows how the people who represent the nation became the peasants who were considered to be uncorrupted, unlike the urban population. In the context of the threat of capitalist industrialisation the Romantic emphasis on the rootedness in Nature and land is attributed to them (by intellectuals like Rousseau and Herder) as against their hierarchy who are not genuine and virtuous. It is believed that from Moses to the prophets and saints (like Joan of Arc who was a peasant girl) there have been those who 'preserved the vision of the people as the ultimate repository of virtue'.[107]

The modern phenomenon of European nationalism has taken these populist prophetic voices a step further. Smith's analysis shows how the democratic model is

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[107] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, p.35.

inseparable from an essentialist perception of nationhood whereby 'naturalness of nation' is asserted with a 'cult of authenticity'.[108] Here *logos* and *mythos* interact with each other by interweaving nature with history. As the Rights of Man and Citizen are represented by a nationalist culture (which is also connected to imperialism) the horizontal relationship that characterises the modern nation leads up to a vertical relationship. The historical dimension is overlooked and the natural dimension is emphasised. While the ideas of liberalism strengthened the capitalist expansion, cultural homogenisation of the nation was based on an exclusivist interpretation of a mythical past preparing the nation to compete with others in the growing global competition for hegemony. As shown by Hobsbawm the need to form formal colonies extending national sovereignty to Asia and Africa arose out of a context of competing national economies which resulted in the First World War. Hobsbawm's *Age of Capital* is followed by an *Age of Empire*. His researches on the cultural forms that emerged thirty years before the First World War show how there has been a mass invention of tradition with a particular assiduity.[109] From an ethno-symbolic point of view, in Britain, these inventions underpinned the myth of chosenness that promoted patriotism in the First World War.

Liberal thoughts could not contain the eruption of tensions between nation-states into a massive war. This competition created the background for the First World War and, as Hobsbawm observes, it is after the War that state intervention in the economy came to its fruition, bringing about national economies.[110] Imperialism was of greater importance to Britain than any other country because its economic supremacy was determined to a greater degree by its overseas markets and the sources of primary products.[111] No other country (except the Netherlands) had such a special relationship with non-industrial countries economically. This relationship was very crucial for Britain. It pushed Britain to form more formal colonies (with protectionism) than any other power, covering one third of the globe with the satellite states. This makes Niall Ferguson writes as follows: 'Once there was an empire that governed roughly a quarter of the world's population, covered about the same

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[108] Ibid., pp.35-37.
[109] Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.263.
[110] Eric Hobsbawm: *Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, p.55.
[111] Ibid., pp.74, 75,76.

proportion of earth's land surface and dominated nearly all its oceans. The British Empire was the biggest Empire ever, bar none.'[112]

i. Religion and the British Raj

The gradual dissolution of Western Christian Empire and the emergence of nation-states led to the multiplication of empires where Britain becomes the most predominant empire in the world. As shown above, the emergence of the monarchical nation-state took place in the context of a battle for trade (the most primary period of the origin of capitalism as shown by Hardt and Negri[113]) among the Western nations. The Reformation and counter-Reformation provided a cultural framework in building the emerging new national identities. The need for empire-building was inherent in the material and cultural forms of the nation-state even though they had not developed to form formal empires as such. It could also be anachronistic to distinguish economic and political forms from cultural forms, looking at this period from the perspectives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Competitive trade led to profit and the accumulation of capital. The theologies that called for a national allegiance developed into imperial theologies. The building of the empire based on the cornerstone of the nation-state is a result of the colonial expansion between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. The emergence of nation-states is a result of the outgrowth of industrial capitalism and they were associated with a distinct cultural superiority as opposed to the colonised other. The building of a formal British Empire in the nineteenth century is economic and political, but such interests simply cannot function without the cultural formulation of an empire. Niall Ferguson notes how the Empire was so natural to most of the British during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries that '...its importance went unquestioned. Indeed the legacy of the Empire was so ubiquitous and omnipresent that we regarded it as part of the normal human condition.' 'At home we ate "Empire biscuits". At school we did "Empire shooting".[114] Power is constituted in cultural forms which are assumed to be 'given' or 'natural'.[115]

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[112] Niall Ferguson: *Empire:How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.xi
[113] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.94.
[114] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.xvi.
[115] See Richard King for an analysis of the relationship between power and culture, *Orientalism and*

Edward Said argues that the idea of the empire precedes the very building of the empire by showing the history of cultural forms associated with empire-building in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism.* Eric Hobsbawm analyses the historical growth of the material power that implements the idea of the empire in the *Age of Capital, 1848-1875.*[116] This is the period in which the world became capitalist and a number of countries became industrial economies.[117] As the Western nations reached a certain level of capitalist development the interactions between material power and cultural forms resulted in the creation an international system along with competing national identities that are associated with formal empires. The national identities were perceived in terms of a mission. While the French thought of themselves as having a mission to modernise the world the British thought of themselves as civilising the world. The French invasion of the lands was culturally supported by the ideologies of modernization as expansion of the rational nation-state.[118] The belief that they, as a chosen people, have a mission to civilise the world was predominant in British thinking. This tendency was found not only in Christian missionary endeavours but also in secular liberal trends. As Ferguson puts it, the Victorians wanted not only to rule but also to redeem.[119]

Within Britain there were two currents of thought and movements in articulating the building of the Empire. On the economic and political level there was the liberal democratic movement led by thinkers like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, who argued for liberal capitalism while differing from each other with regard to state intervention. The other was on the cultural level, spearheaded by the Evangelical movement which believed in Christianising the Empire. In their perception the Biblical narratives of missionary chosenness and covenant were embedded in imperial conquests. Sugirtharajah shows how the King James Version of the Bible, which was provincial and vernacular, became the key text of the Empire and this was supreme

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Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East', (New York, Routledge, 1999), p.1 and 'The Association of "Religion" with Violence: Reflection on a Modern Trope' in *Religion and Violence in South Asia:Theory and Practice*, (eds.) John R. Hinnells and Richard King, pp.226-257.

116 Eric Hobsbawm: *Age of Capital: 1848-1875*, (London, Abacus, 2004).

117 Ibid., p.43.

118 Karen Armstrong notes how in colonising Algeria and Egypt the French imperialist conquests were shaped by the ideology of modernisation. Armstrong, Karen: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, pp.98ff.

119 Niall Ferguson: *Empire:How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.113

until World War II.[120] Even though liberal capitalism and evangelism were distinct, they were also interwoven with each other. Nationalism and imperialism, which were shaped by Victorian chosenness and liberalism and democratic radicalism, co-existed with each other within a dominant power structure of the Empire, at times in collaboration with each other and some other times in tension with each other. As shown by Ferguson 'Commerce, Civilisation, Christianity and Conquest' were the characteristics of the empire. These factors functioned together and separately depending on the historical circumstances.

The Evangelical movement in the early nineteenth century, which pioneered the anti-slavery movement based on the Christian belief in the equality of all God's children, was also widely supported by the liberal democratic movement. The former was also the movement that was behind the pioneering missionary activities to convert souls in Asia and Africa. The British government did not always support the missionary endeavours. At times they opposed them. Even though there were tensions between the two movements, even to the extent of liberal governments prohibiting missionary activity, there were moments when they worked together. Their shared interests could be clearly seen looking at the violent response to the Indian Mutiny. On the one hand, it was the political pragmatism of the liberal governments that led to toleration of other cultures and on the other hand, in the face of uprisings of the colonial natives, the evangelicals and the liberals joined hands in asserting their cultural and political superiority as a principled position.

Both currents had the belief that Africa and India have to be civilized and claimed a civilisational superiority over the colonised natives. Liberal thought believed in Anglicisation as modernisation (through commerce, education, communication and changing economic and political structures) and the missionary movement believed in Anglicising as Christianisation (along with the other factors). This is clear from the ideas of key representatives of both currents. John Stuart Mill saw Britain as the 'most conscientious of all nations' which best understands liberty. His vision is conditioned by the maximization of economic wealth through capitalist development which could be mediated to the globe by the British Empire free market, rule of law, investor protection, incorrupt governments and education that would

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[120] R.S. Sugirtharajah: *The Bible and the Empire: Postcolonial Exploration*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

make people desire the new objects of production.[121] Said cites in *Orientalism* many sayings and writings of British colonial officers, politicians and writers which reflect this civilisational superiority, most of whom represent the liberal current.[122] There were fifty-eight Church Missionary Societies, mostly evangelical, led by men like Reginald Herber, Wilberforce and George Goegerly by the mid-nineteenth century, most of whom considered Indian religions as cruel.[123] There were also those who represented both currents like David Livingston and a Governor-General of India, William Bentinck. Under the dominant power of the empire the economic transformation was interwoven with cultural transformation; either Christianised or Anglicised. Dispelling superstitions of the natives was viewed by both currents as bringing about civilisation. Introducing commerce and the markets was believed to be opening the dark continents to civilisation. Mutiny was interpreted by David Livingston as not doing enough to change the culture by Christianising it. As Ferguson puts it, 'these twin currents of the Evangelical desire to convert India to Christianity and the Liberal desire to convert it to capitalism flowed into one another, and over the entire British Empire'.[124]

Changing of thinking patterns to ideologies of capitalist modernisation was crucial for the liberal current, whereas for the missionaries changing the culture to Christianity was important. They are two sides of the same coin. While the liberal movement emphasised the goodness in all human beings (based on rationalism) and promoted liberal democracy and good governance within an imperial system, the missionaries emphasised the need to be born again (with the belief in the immortality of the soul which can be safeguarded only by becoming a Christian) in the context of commerce and colonization which formed the foundation of the empire. Even though there were fluctuating moments in history, from liberalism to conservatism, from secular liberalism to religious zeal, that affected the colony, and there were undercurrents that considerably differ from each other with regard to the attitudes towards the colonial natives; and even though there was a conflict between the Anglicists and the Orientalists, none of these could overrun the imperial agenda. The

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[121] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.138-139.
[122] Edward Said: *Orientalism*, pp.1-49.
[123] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, p.137.
[124] Ibid., 139.

overall impact upon the natives was determined by cultural, economic and political domination. Said's critique of Orientalism is based on this power of domination.

With regard to the concrete formation of the British Raj in Asia, free trade was taking place in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries as capitalism was established fully in Europe without state intervention. The East India Company was sovereign until the East India Act of 1858, which brought India under direct control of the British Crown, whereas the island of Lanka had been brought under the direct control as far back as 1815. This reflects on the one hand the local and regional realities of the colonised native populations and on the other hand, the political and strategic mapping of the emerging empire. The power of the empire constituted the modes of capitalist production associated with the ideology of liberalism (with mercantile and industrial capital which had distinct impacts on India and Sri Lanka). As Ferguson points out the British 'sought to globalize not just an economic but a legal and ultimately a political system too.'[125]

However, as shown earlier, in the formation of the absolute power of the state and its modern sovereignty there has been an inextricable relationship between theologies and philosophies of transcendence and immanence. In short, there is an inextricable relationship between modern European politics and metaphysics. Modern sovereignty wanted on the one hand to eliminate the medieval form of absolutism which inhibited production and consumption, and it also wanted to impose a new form of absolutism that would control the multitudes and the spontaneous creativity of individual persons. In this sense liberal critique was not sufficient. It constantly became overshadowed by the absolutist power that was attributed to the state with its power of capital accumulation. Has this power been total in all its forms in the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised?

Elizabeth Harris in her recent researches on the British encounter of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka attempts to stress the 'multiplicity of the Orientalist gaze', particularly in terms of cultures, and adds complexity to generalisation of Said and Almond.[126] However, she admits how such complexities do not undermine the imperial power relationship. Discovering the complexities within the empire and nation-building projects throws light onto the contradictions inherent in such

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[125] Ibid., p.371.

[126] Elizabeth J. Harris: *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, (London, Routledge, 2006), pp.3-4.

processes questioning exclusivist cultural identities. Conflicts that exist in the former British colonies like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka reflect the colonial agenda as well as the particular interpretation of Christianity and Western culture that corresponded with the particular local strands of religious traditions which created space for manipulation of cultures under colonial conditions.

Like Christopher Hill's attempt to detect the proliferation of meanings of the Bible in the social and cultural space in the seventeenth century, Elisabeth Harris's retrieval of subtle complexities within the encounter between the colonised and the coloniser in the nineteenth century can help to initiate a dialogue between East and West. David Tracy tells us how resistances to generalisation of texts of power relationships, with a hermeneutics of retrieval, could create space for a dialogue bringing about hope.[127] However, as Richard King points out, in searching for multiple meanings 'the complicity of Orientalist representations in the colonial enterprise and the maintenance of British hegemony' over the colonial people needs to be recognised.[128] In other words, these complexities need to be viewed with a political dimension that revolves around the dynamics of Orientalist and Occidentalist power relationships today. The Occidentalist-Orientalist Alliance has blurred as well as kept the geo-political spaces constantly in tension. The real challenge here is to assess the impact of this dominant power relationship (economic and political or material conditions) on the multiple meanings in the cultural and social space. Both Said's cultural generalisation and Harris' retrieval of multiplicity seem to underestimate these material conditions in assessing the Orientalist gaze. Critiquing Said, Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer remark that the postcolonial cultural practices are not mere products of Orientalist theory, but of colonial practice.[129] Harris's multiplicity of discourses within the Sinhala Buddhist community in Sri Lanka seems to undermine the relatively powerful economic and political conditions that community enjoyed within the British Raj during the nineteenth century (at least their elites, the mercantile and middle classes), which Kumari Jayawardena has researched extensively. [130]

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[127] David Tracy: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*, (London, SCM, 1987).
[128] Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.154.
[129] Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.): *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, p.6.
[130] Kumari Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness 1883-1893*, (Colombo, Sanjiva Books, 2003) and *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise*

We have seen so far how the *historical transcendental* of the Western nation-state was constructed – which formed the cornerstone of imperialism – out of *social*, *cultural* and *economic capital* within Europe. It is this cultural-political process which informed the European colonial practice in Lanka. The next section will explore the Lankan encounter with the European colonial practice and the Western nation-state. We shall begin the next part with a discussion of the pre-colonial cultural and political formations of Lanka which will help us to understand the nature of the European colonial encounter and the subsequent formation of the colonial and the postcolonial nation-state.

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of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka, 2003).

PART III

MAKING OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE

INTRODUCTION

> All forms of state brutalize human beings but the wonder of the brutalizing capacity of the nation-state is that, unlike other forms of the state, it surrounds itself with two powerful and universally-shared foundation myths: centralized sovereignty and fixed-bordered territory... The majoritarian nationalist discourse is primarily a discourse constituted by these two attributes of the nation-state. And these are attributes that have no South Asian social or historical roots; they are enduring legacies of our encounter with Europe and its modern political forms.[1]

> It is often held, especially by nationalist intellectuals and opinion leaders of Sri Lanka, that the island is and has always been a unitary Sinhala Buddhist state in which the minorities are assumed to be non-existent, are aliens, or in some way peripheral to the Sri Lankan polity... Even the most cursory glance will show that the model behind this understanding is the modern nation-state, which came into being in the world history no earlier than the last few centuries.[2]

As it is stated above, if the present model of the Sri Lankan nation-state and its attributes are an outcome of Lanka's colonial encounter with the West, how did the Western model of nation-state come to be perceived as something that is very indigenous? On what grounds do the nationalist scholars try to justify the pre-modern and pre-colonial existence of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state? What were the pre-existing cultural/political belief systems and structures of a state that were prevalent in Lanka before it was first partly colonised by the Portuguese (sixteenth century) and the Dutch (seventeenth century), and finally fully colonised by the British (nineteenth century)? What were the factors that these powers contributed separately, and together as Europe, in forming the present model of the nation-state in the land? In the process of the colonial encounter, what was the nature of the interaction between the colonising cultural belief systems and political structures and the already existing native counterparts? Were there some areas in the native political structures and systems of beliefs that corresponded with the European cultural and political models and what is the relationship between such pre-existing factors and the colonial ones? In this interaction what was the nature of the agency of the natives who were heterogeneous in their religious and ethnic formations? What are the dynamics of the

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1 Jayadeva Uyangoda: 'Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State' in *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Mithran Tiruchelvam and Dattathreya C. S., (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), p.176.

2 H.L. Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), p.1.

process of interpretation that established the present model of nation-state? In other words, in what way were the existing cultural and political formations recycled or transformed in making an essentialist representation of nationhood, which is associated with a majority-dominated centralised system of state with a fixed-bordered territory?

This section will focus on how the Western cultural and political models – that began to develop with the rise of the nation-states and empires as examined in the previous section – influenced, intermingled and overlapped with the local ones in creating the present model of the Sri Lankan nation-state. Theoretically, it will explore the process of interactions between cultural and political fields in the area of colonial state-building which started as a part of empire-building in the Indian subcontinent and how that process made an impact on postcolonial nation-building. More specifically, it will examine how, initially, the emerging European mercantilism and, later more particularly, British capitalism had an impact on feudal economic and social relationships within the island of Lanka and on the relationship among the diverse ethnic and religious groups within the island. It is within this process that the role played by European Christianity (as both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) and Asian Buddhism (particularly, its Theravada form) in forming both the colonial state and the postcolonial Sinhala Buddhist nation-state will be studied. As the present conflict revolves around the claim to a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state, which is of mainly colonial making, how the diverse ethnic and religious communities respond to such essentialist representations of nationhood both culturally and politically will also be discussed. There will be four chapters in this section. Chapter three will explore pre-colonial political formations and the initial colonial encounters of Lanka. Chapter four will examine the dynamics of power and culture in the British colonial encounter with the island of Lanka. Chapters five and six will discuss the process of politics of interpretations associated with the anti-colonial nationalist movement and postcolonial nation-building.

CHAPTER THREE: PRE-COLONIAL POLITICAL FORMATIONS AND THE INITIAL COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS OF LANKA: SHIFTING OF SOVEREIGNTIES

In the previous chapter, Adrian Hastings argued for the perennial existence of an English nation-state linking 'old Englishness' with 'new Englishness' of Protestant nationalism.[1] Similarly, the textual scholars like Walpola Rahula, Heinz Bechert, Ananda Guruge and several others argue for the existence of a Buddhist state since ancient times, at least two thousand years old. Referring to the period of Duttagamini (101-77 BCE) found in *Mahavamsa* which was written in the sixth century CE, Walpola Rahula writes; 'The entire Sinhala race was united under the banner of the young Gamini. This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. It was a new race with healthy young blood, organised under the new order of Buddhism'.[2] Heinz Bechert considers Buddhist nationalism not a modern but an ancient phenomenon which had formed the ideological basis of a prototype Buddhist nation-state where 'national identity and Buddhist religion' were inseparable. According to him, it was this Buddhist nationalism which determined the historiography of the island and its concept of national identity.[3] In this regard, both authors make a distinction between canonical Buddhism and traditional Buddhism.[4]

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1 Adrian Hastings: *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, p.83.

2 Walpola Rahula: *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period: 3rd Century BC – 10th Century AC*, (Dehiwala, Buddhist Cultural Centre, 1993, Third Edition), p.79.

3 Heinz Bechert: 'Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahavamsa and Political Thinking', in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Bardwell Simith, (Chambersburg, Anima Books, 1978), pp.8-9. Heinz Bechert: "Theravada Buddhist Sangha – Some General Observations on Historical and Political Factors of its Developments" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.29, No.4, (August, 1970), pp.761-778, p.777. Following the argument of Bechert, Trevor Ling also writes that a few decades after the introduction of Buddhism to the island of Lanka an Asokan type of Buddhist state had been 'reproduced' with all its essentials; Buddhist king, *sangha* and people, and persisted throughout history. Trevor Ling: *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon* (London, Temple Smith, 1973), pp.183-184. Trevor Ling: 'Kingship and Nationalism in Pali Buddhism' in *Buddhist Ethics: Ancient and Modern*, (eds.) Philip Denwood and Alexander Piatigorsky, (London Curson Press 1983), pp.65-67.

4 Heinz Bechert: "Theravada Buddhist Sangha – Some General Observations on Historical and

Ananda Guruge making a further qualification, writes that even before the arrival of Buddhism the Sinhalese had 'the urge to assert their cultural identity' and consolidate it 'into a unitary state' which provided them a historical sense associated with a nationalist ideology. This cultural identity of the state was formed by the dominant Indo-Aryan Sinhala population spread in 'all parts of the island without exception' which was distinct from the Dravidian population, which remained 'sporadic, intermittent and secondary'. It was in this nation that Buddhism gained roots becoming 'the national – if not, the state -religion of the island', the main events of which were transmitted by the *sangha*-historians.[5] While Bechert is careful enough to admit the influence of Dravidian South Indian religious influence on Buddhism and not to make the Buddhist national identity exclusively a Sinhala identity, both Rahula and Guruge attempt to assert the Indo-Aryan character or 'Sinhalaness' of Buddhism making Buddhism an essentialist or racial feature of Sinhala ethnicity.[6] According to them, it is this ethno-religious character that binds the *sangha*, kingship and the masses together forming a homogenous ethno-religious community, namely Sinhala Buddhist, with an overarching hegemonic identity and a centralised system of state that covers the entire island. This argument is based on the evidence of a continuous historical memory of the *sangha* belonging to the Mahavihara monastery of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, which is reflected in the texts, namely the post-canonical Pali literature or *vamsa* tradition, particularly the Deepavamsa, Mahavamsa and Chulavamsa. As Smith has demonstrated, in theorising nationalism and national identity, this approach falls under the category of perennialism and this could also lead to a 'primordialist' version of nationhood.

Political Factors of its Developments", p.777. Walpola Rahula: *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period: 3rd Century BC – 10th Century AC*, pp.76-80.

5 Ananda Guruge: *Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Lake House, 1989), pp.89-90, 169. Also see Ananda Guruge (ed.): *Return To Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*, (Colombo, Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, 1991), p.xxiii.

6 Guruge, p.105, Walpola, pp.30-31. These two scholars follow the line of argument of the renowned Lankan archaeologist and historian of the Peradeniya School Senerath Paranavitana, who assumed a difference and a tension between Aryan and Dravidian thinking. For an analysis of the Peradeniya School see K. Indrapala: *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka C.300 BCE to C. 1200 CE*, (Sydney, MV Publications, 2005), pp.7-11. Romila Thapar has shown how Vedic-Aryan speakers whose prestigious profession was pastoralism had used the proto-Dravidian loan words that refer to agricultural processes giving an insight into the interrelatedness and mutual interactions among the two language groups. Romila Thapar: *Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History*, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, Reprinted from Review in winter 1982), p.339.

Based on the 'perennialist' approach of the above scholars, but adapting it to an essentialist cultural approach to identity formation, there are also three other main theoreticians who argue for the primordial existence of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state. While differing from each other regarding the parameters of adaptation to modern times, they argue for a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness that has an ancient civilisational foundation, which they call *Jatika Chintanaya* which means national ideology, thinking or consciousness.[7] They are Gunadasa Amarasekara, Nalin De Silva and Champika Ranawaka.[8] Even though they admit that civilisations are more historically formed than emerging from nature, divine plan or kinship, they treat civilisations as primordial substances or the 'givens' which they see as nationhood.[9] In this respect they fall under the category of cultural 'primordialists' who assert essential differences among civilisations. However, they differ considerably from the cultural primordialism of Clifford Geertz who makes a distinction between national identity, which is a part civil politics, and ethnic identity which has primordial bonds that can be a threat to the former.[10]

Gunadasa Amarasekara, referring to Samuel Huntington's theory of the 'clash of civilizations', which contests Francis Fukuyama's theory of the 'End of History', writes that the future of the world will be determined by the rise of ancient civilisations one of which is the Sinhala Buddhist civilisation that has primordial cultural traits. This civilisation is distinct from Dravidian and Western civilisations.[11] Nalin De Silva considers the formation of state by King Duttagamini as the origin of the primordial Buddhist state. In this sense, he writes that Duttagamini is uniquely different from Asoka. The latter did not build an empire as a Buddhist, but became a Buddhist only after conquering an empire whereas the former, as a Buddhist, built a

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7 *Jatika* can be translated as both 'racial and 'national'. Peter Schalk notes how its meaning can correspond to German 'völkish'. Peter Schalk: 'Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva' in *Religion and Violence in South Asia; Theory and Practice*, (eds.) John R. Hinnells and Richard King, (London, Routledge, 2007), p.142.

8 Patali Champika Ranawaka: *Sihala Abhiyogaya*, (Colombo, Dayawansa Jayakody & Company, 2001). Gunadasa Amarasekara: *Desapalana Samaja Vichara:Dena Sitiya Yuthu Karunu: 1986-1993*, Vol.I and *Desapalana Samaja Vichara: Dena Sitiya Yuthu Karunu: 1994-2000,* Vol.II, (Colombo, S. Godage & Bros, 2000). Nalin De Silva: *Panashaye Daruwo*, (Colombo, Chinthana Parshadaya, 2005).

9 Clifford Geertz uses this term to refer to 'attachments' that 'seem to flow more from a sense of natural – some would say spiritual – affinity than from social interactions'. Geertz, pp.259-260.

10 Ibid., pp.260-261.

11 Amarasekara: *Desapalana Samaja Vichara: Dena Sitiya Yuthu Karunu: 1994-2000,* Vol.II, pp.117-121. Also see Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, pp.15-20.

unitary state against the foreign invaders.[12] According to De Silva it is this national thinking that could rise against the *Batahira Chintanaya* (Western Thinking), which he considers to be essentially Judeo-Christian and disastrous to humankind and nature. Therefore, Sinhala Buddhism is Duttagamini Buddhism, which is essentially a state-Buddhism. It is this main dynamic force, which should determine the common culture of the island of Lanka as Anglo-Saxon culture determines the British identity.[13] Champika Ranawaka, who is the youngest of the three theoreticians, classifies the nations in the world into three categories as inherited nations, historically modern nations and politically modern nations. He goes to the extent of arguing that the Sinhala nation is one of the earth's inherited nations which has been built on nature and culture.[14]

Both the above 'perennialist' and 'primordialist' approaches are not only theoretical assertions. They also form a political ideology: nationalist ideology. The *habitus* of theoretical cultural studies interacts with the political *field* here where *mythos* has been historicised and history has been mythologised. As a matter of fact the above three theoreticians are also the leaders of Sinhala Buddhist political parties and organisations who campaign to define the national identity of the island of Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist identity.[15] Walpola and Guruge also have made public statements in support of the unitary character of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state against the demands of the Tamil movement for self-autonomy. In his work, while admonishing the Sri Lankan scholars who critique essentialist version of nationhood as western, Gunadasa Amarasekara praises Trevor Ling for justifying the perennial existence of a Buddhist nation-state.[16] Therefore, these theoreticians could generally be categorised either as nationalist intellectuals or as those who assert the antiquity

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12 Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, p.21.

13 De Silva: *Panashaye Daruwo*, pp.40-41.

14 Ranawaka: *Sihala Abhiyogaya*, pp.126-134.

15 Ranawaka is the lay leader of the political party of *Jatika Hela Urumaya* (National Heritage) that has been formed by mainly the Buddhist monks. He represents the party in the Sri Lankan Parliament and is the Minister for Environment in the present Cabinet. Amarasekara is one of the main leaders of *Desha Hiteshi Jatika Viyaparaya* (National Patriotic Movement). This is an umbrella organization of the Sinhala nationalist groups which campaigns for a militaristic solution to the current ethnic conflict. Their monthly journal is called *Muragala* which means 'Guardian Stone'.

16 Amarasekara: *Desapalana Samaja Vichara: Dena Sitiya Yuthu Karunu: 19861993,* Vol.I, p.40

of the nation-state. Smith has shown how their thinking could lead to retrospective nationalism.[17]

Theoretically, 'perennialist' and 'cultural-primordialist' approaches, while emphasising the power of Sinhala Buddhist culture in the formation of the state and national identity of the island of Lanka, assume that culture is an unchanging substance. Even though these theoretical approaches recognise the role of culture (more specifically ethnicity) in nation-building, they undermine the interplay between culture and power or rule and knowledge in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Similarly, they also have ignored the cultural and political impact made on diverse ethnic groups in the island of Lanka by the interactions arising from migration, intermarriage and dynastic conflicts mainly within the Indian subcontinent during the pre-modern and pre-colonial period. In so doing, they have also undermined the nature of the pre-modern systems of society and polity and the geo-political dimension of the island of Lanka. Politically, in conflict situations, these approaches help the protagonists to assert each one's identity against the other by reading each one's history in an insular way. Such a reading supports the claims of culturally and territorially tracing the origins of one's collective existence and constructs a nationalist historiography where perspective knowledge is considered to be objective knowledge. Here the emphasis is more on specificities than on commonalties. History is depicted more as an exclusivist linear development than as a development through multiple interactions. This we have seen in the previous chapter in the nationalist historiography of the British nation-state and its cultural (Protestant) identity. From an ethical point of view these theoretical approaches tend to define the nature of collective identities not in relation to the other, but in opposition to the other.

Hastings' reading of English history has underestimated the notion of the interactions of groups in Britain with a wider Europe. In the same way Lanka's historical relationship with the Indian subcontinent has been minimised by the above scholars. Similarly the transformations brought about by the cultural and material movements of the modern era in Britain, specifically the impact of capital accumulation, the official version of English history constructed after the Reformation and the building of the British Empire, have been sidelined; while in the case of Lanka, the role of the colonial project in the recycling of pre-existing cultural forms

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[17] Smith: *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, p.5

has not been recognised. In the official construction of the history of the British nation-state and the empire, we have seen how the pre-Reformation biblical myth of chosenness and the collective identity of the elites (which cannot be called a national myth and a national identity respectively) played a role in forging 'Britishness'. What has been the nature of culture and polity in pre-colonial Lanka? In studying a particular human collectivitiy it is important to perceive it as part of a wider human community. As British history cannot be properly understood without situating it in the wider European history, the history of the island of Lanka cannot be comprehended without contextualising it in the wider history of the Indian sub-continent.

1. Overlapping Territories, Histories and Identities

The work of K. Indrapala, which is based on the research of a gamut of archaeologists, anthropologists and historians, clearly shows that South India and the island of Lanka have been 'part of a single cultural region in the period before the rise of the states' which is technically called 'South India Sri Lanka region' (SISL), the core of which is southern Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.[18] The two main groups in the island of Lanka, Tamil and Sinhala, have their roots in the Mesolithic people and their languages had begun to develop a few centuries before the Common Era.[19] The Tamil speaking group have been predominant in the north, northwest and northeast and the Sinhala in the south and in the centre of the island. As shown by S.J. Tambiah, with the rise of states in the region, what developed was 'galactic politics' or a system of *mandala* of ancient Indian cosmology, where there were autonomous and overlapping territories neither of which had a permanent centre nor a periphery. Tambiah, in his study of the traditional Thai polity, points out this peculiar nature of the pre-modern political dynamics of South East Asia and South Asia, where each constituent entity within a given region becomes eligible to be as pre-eminent as any other by expansion

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[18] K. Indrapala: *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka C.300 BCE to C. 1200 CE*, (Sydney, MV Publications, 2005), p.65.

[19] Peter Schalk demonstrates how the historical studies of the two languages show that their developments are interdependent. Sinhala evolved from Prakrit and there has been a Tamil substratum in Prakrit. Peter Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, (Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2002), pp.30-31.

where centre and periphery is in constant change.[20] Here, centre-periphery relations are represented more by a 'concentric-circle system' than by a centralised system.[21] Both the Mauryan Empire and other south Indian Empires followed this model and this developed as a characteristic of Buddhist polity reflecting the relationship between the *sangha*'s soteriological quest and the this-worldly political role of the monarchy; *the two wheels of dhamma.*[22] H.L. Seneviratne shows how in the galactic system of politics, the relationship between the king and the people of vast areas of South Asia had more of a symbolic meaning than a deeply structural political relationship and it should not be seen as a bureaucratic system of a centralised state . The polity did not encompass the entire territory as a whole. Referring to the island of Lanka, Seneviratne writes.

> There was nowhere in pre-colonial Sri Lanka the kind of orderly and smooth handing down of administrative and bureaucratic authority the history textbooks declare and history teachers transmit to trusting students, such as, from king to the *dissava*-s and downwards to the *korala*-s, the *atukorala*-s, and the *vidane*-s. Such a picture is no more than a projection of modern bureaucratic hierarchical organization on to the Kandyan system.[23]

Making a further observation with regard to the political unit, Romilar Thapar, contesting Karl A.Wittfogel's hypothesis of the oriental despotism of bureaucratic systems[24], notes that the unit of history in early Indian historical writings, *itihāsa-purāna*, has not been the empire, but the '*janapada*, the territory settled by a tribe,

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[20] Galactic polity – a system where a central planet is surrounded by other satellites which are autonomous to a certain degree, but within the sphere of influence of the centre – metaphorically refers to a political system of cluster of centre-based, but overlapping semi-autonomous or autonomous societies. Stanley J. Tambiah: *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.102-131.

[21] Tambiah, p.112.

[22] Frank Reynolds notes how the concept of a universal king who would rule by *dhamma* (*chakkavtti*) has to be understood in a mythical context either related to past or future and the Asokan period is considered as such a reign by the Theravada *sangha*. Frank Reynolds: 'The Two Wheels of Dhamma: A Study of Early Buddhism' in *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in Indian and Ceylon, AAR Studies in Religion*, No 3, 1972. p.20. The mythic figure has been historicized through Asoka and an essential affinity was built between the kingship and the *sangha.* Both processes of mythologisation of history and historisisation of myth have taken place here.

[23] Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, p.7.

[24] Wittfogel, in his study of the political models of Russia and China, revives Marx's concepts of Asiatic modes of production and Oriental Despotism while defining Asian statehood as constituted by ' a ruling class that comprised an agro-manegerial bureaucracy and a supreme autocrat'. It is argued that it is this type of statehood that solved the ecological problem of aridity of the land by introducing large scale irrigation works through mass labour and thereby creating a 'hydraulic culture'. Karl. A. Wittfogel: 'Results and Problems of the Study of Oriental Despotism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.28, Ch.2. (Feb., 1969), p.361.

which later evolves into a state, generally a kingdom': and in the Buddhist tradition which is found in the post-canonical Pali literature, the unit of history has been the *sangha* who had a close relationship with the political authority.[25] The empires had a short duration and they were infrequent. References made to emperors as *cakravartin* or the universal rulers were abstract and symbolic and it was in the modern historiography that 'the imperial golden ages were interspersed with the dark ages of smaller kingdoms' which we have already seen in relation to British historiography. This will be explored further in the next chapter.[26]

This evidence shows that Asokan patronage of Buddhism as well as the rise of the Saiva movement, which converted the Pandyan dynasty from Jainism to Saivism, has to be understood within the context of the symbolic system of galactic politics which was also a system of dynastic politics. However, this system was compounded by the ruler's patronage of a particular religious sect. From the religious *habitus* of the period there emerged, among others, institutional, educational and personal polemics. As this *habitus* interacted more with the economic and political *fields* the nature of the polemics changed and developed into further conflicts because the religious groups were dependent on the ruler who was the landowner. Peter Schalk remarks 'We may talk of (royal) patronage, which was a competitive system that created conflicts between religious organisers...The polemics could itself become a reason for the deepening of a conflict, but the most serious forms of conflict were those which were connected with secular interests, with loyalties to class, nation, or state'.[27] Therefore, the dynastic conflicts within the island of Lanka as well as the influence of the Buddhist and Saiva movements on it have to be analysed in this light.

Although the sectarian tensions were compounded by political patronage of different dynasties, the conflicts of the pre-colonial period were neither ethnic nor national. They were mainly dynastic conflicts which took place under the symbolic system of galactic politics.[28] However, as this system was also associated with a politics of expansion and plunder the effects of such politics began to shape both the religious and political historiography (which were interwoven, though not

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[25] Thapar: *Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History*, p.407.

[26] Ibid., p.401.

[27] Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, pp.21-22.

[28] As the dynastic conflicts were not essentially ethnic and religious, group identities of the pre-colonial Lanka cannot be called ethno-religious identities in the strict sense. There were also many instances when rulers, out of sheer pragmatism, patronised several religious sects.

inseparable) of the literati monks of the period thus conditioning the system of religious symbolic meanings. The reign of Duttagamini, mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*, reflects such an expansion of the ruling domain under galactic politics. This war of expansion was against a just king according to the *Mahavamsa* itself. In fact, the earliest chronicle of the *vamsa* tradition, *Deepavmsa* (fourth century CE), which is relatively closer to the actual war, does not elaborate on it. It contains only two lines about it compared to *Mahawamsa* (sixth century CE) which allocates a major part. It goes to the extent of justifying the war against Elara in the name of protecting Buddha *sasana*. The perspective of the author-monk has been shaped by the fifth century South Indian invasion of the island and the sectarian tensions among various monasteries. The main preoccupation of the author-monk was not the protection of the ethnic group or the entire island but the *sasana*. This shapes the definition of sovereignty of the kingdom (as Buddhist sovereignty) which patronised *sasana*. The chronicle considers *dhamma* as a lamp that gives light to the island.[29] However, the political unit – the kingdom – is not identical with the geography of the whole island. This further reiterates the symbolic meaning of galactic politics. As Indrapala puts it,

> Mahanama was not writing history the way we in contemporary society want it. The *Mahavamsa* may be described as a chronicle of that famous Buddhist institution Mahavihara. It tells us about its foundation and the rulers who patronised this institution. It chronicles some of the main events in the kingdom of these patrons, the domain they controlled from Anuradhapura. This domain was, in the period covered by the *Mahavamsa*, never the whole country now known as Sri Lanka. Whatever information we glean about other matters from the *Mahavamsa* is incidental – about other Buddhist and non-Buddhist institutions, other religions (like Jainism), and other kingdoms in the island.[30]

The *sasana* was not identical with the Sinhala speaking group as claimed by some ethno-nationalist intellectuals. Monks belonging to diverse language groups ranging from Tamil to Chinese have visited Mahavihara to study and copy the Buddhist Pali canon and its commentaries.[31] Mahavihara was a monastery of Theravada Buddhism. Analysing the pre-colonial cultural identities, Peter Shalk adopts an interreligious or intrareligious perspective. He notes how in the vamsa tradition, Buddhism is depicted as 'strictly sectarian' and how 'it promoted Theravada

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[29] *Mahavamsa* 1.84.

[30] Indrapala: *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka C.300 BCE to C.1200 CE*, p.16.

[31] Ibid., p.334, f.n. 36.

in the special version of the Mahavihara' with 'an inter-religious xenophobia directed towards Jainism and an intra-religious xenophobia directed towards Mahayana'. He also points out how this form of Theravada was not anti-Tamil even when it was anti-Saiva during the second century to the first century before the Common Era. Even though there was an anti-Tamil position taken by some sections of the religious and the political establishment during the later period (particularly the late Anuradhapura period went through another wave of South Indian invasions), the connection was made 'between being Tamil and anti-Buddhist' while laying 'emphasis on being anti-Buddhist, not on being Saiva'.[32] Commenting on the very text of *Mahavamsa* where King Duttagamini is consoled by the *arahats* justifying the war with Elara (where many Tamils were killed), saying that it was only one and a half human beings who had been killed, Schalk notes how the parameter of being human was being Buddhist. Not only on a textual basis but also by analysing the religious culture of the period Schalk argues that the text does not rule out the possibility of Tamils becoming Buddhists.[33] This buddological interpretation is neither enthnicised/racialised nor nationalised; it is religiously sectarian in interpretation where conversion to Buddhism was open irrespective of the language group.[34] Contrary to the ethno-nationalist interpretations, according to the early *vamsic* tradition itself Tamils could become Buddhists and the latter cannot be exclusively identified with the Sinhalese as an essentialist (racial) trait.[35] The ethnonym, *damila* (Tamil) was not used in a totally pejorative sense as against the Sinhala. 'The early Mahavmsa is extremely sectarian but not racist'.[36] It was the official history of the state written with a sectarian perspective; 'it was anti-Jaina, anti Saiva and at times anti-Mahayana, but not exclusively anti-Tamil'. Within this context 'anti-Buddhist meant anti-state and anti-state meant anti-Buddhist.[37] However, the domain of this state was constantly

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[32] Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, p.28.

[33] The pre-colonial existence of Tamil Buddhists is not hypothetical. It was a social fact. The oldest available textual tradition of Brahmi inscriptions in Prakrit gives evidence to this. Schalk, p.38.

[34] Schalk makes a similar observation arguing against the racialised definition that developed in Germany in the nineteenth century against the Jews. Schalk, p.45. They were converted to Catholicism in Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal during the Middle Ages and were not seen as a racial category.

[35] Schalk: 'Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva', p.147.

[36] Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, p.39

[37] Ibid., p.44.

changing due to dynastic and galactic politics. Therefore it cannot be seen as a modern centralized state.

In this sense, the factors that created conflicting identities were not the particularities of Sinhala (spoken mainly in the southern parts) and Tamil (spoken mainly in the northern parts), but the claims to orthodox interpretation of the monks of the Mahvihara as opposed to the other groups who lived within the system of galactic politics. The well-known essay, 'The People of the Lion', written by R.A.L.H. Gunawardene, which is based on a rational historiography, shows how *Mahavamsa*, the chronicle of Mahavihara, itself gives contradictory evidence of a Sinhala Buddhist national identity. According to the chronicle, Duttagaminini who is projected as the Sinhala Buddhist nation-builder by the ethno-nationalist intellectuals, fought against not one principality in the north ruled by a Tamil, but thirty-two different other rulers within the island. On the one hand, 'not all the people who fought against Duttagamini were Tamils' and on the other hand, there were Buddhists among the Tamils.[38] There was not an ideological connection between language and religion. Both language groups could become Buddhists on the basis of a *lingua franca* that was Prakrit.[39] Making a further step in countering the ideology of a two thousand years old, perennial, overarching Sinhala identity, Gunawardene shows how the Sinhala grouping, which was initially elitist, became identical with the linguistic grouping only in the twelfth century. Even though there has been a close link between the Sinhalese and the Theravada Buddhists there has been no period that these two groups completely identified with each other denoting the same group of people.

All these arguments indicate that the interpretation of the Duttagamini-Elara war utilised by the nationalist scholars as a foundation for an exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and nation-building do not hold ground when we analyse the pre-colonial cultural and political systems. Even though there is a strong link between Saivism and Tamil culture which could also be used as evidence by some of these scholars to justify their arguments, there is clear evidence that many Saivites make a distinction between Buddhism and Sinhala Buddhism.[40] In searching for a liberative

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[38] R.A.L.H. Gunawardene, 'The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography', in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp.58-59.

[39] Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, p.43.

[40] Ibid., p.34.

paradigm for peaceful co-existence among diverse ethnic groups in Lanka today, Buddhism could be reinterpreted as a common heritage of both Tamils and Sinhalese thus countering the claims to exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist national identity. We will make that attempt in the sixth chapter of this work.

Having said that it can also be seen how the later *vamsa* tradition, especially after the tenth century, makes further qualifications (even some total changes) to the state ideology of *Mahavamsa* by reconstructing a Sinhala Buddhist historiography. This has to be understood in the context of the invasions of Chola (eleventh-twelfth centuries) and Magha (thirteenth century). The Magha invasion was not without religious motives and his anti-Buddhist stand was clear, but the earlier Cholas were not anti-Buddhist because they patronised Buddhism in South India.[41] These invasions happened in the context of a politics of plunder associated with galactic politics, which has been analysed by George Spencer. He points out that the politics of plunder of the Cholas was part of traditional 'redistribution of wealth'.[42] In fact, as Peter Schalk has rightly pointed out, Magha is the only forceful converter in the whole of the *vamsa* tradition who would seem to have attempted to annihilate the Buddhist identity; but he is seen in the later vamsa tradition itself as a paradigmatic case reference for all the other Tamil rulers of the island. Magha has been referred to as *damila* by *Chulavamsa* though the text itself says that he is from Kalinga (present-day Orissa) which is not a part of Tamil Nadu. With this *vamsa* perception, in Rajawaliya (17th century), a just *damila* king, Elara (according to *Mahavamsa*), becomes an evil doer, totally contradicting the *Mahavamsa* version. He is depicted as anti-Buddhist. In this later *vamsa* cultural construct, as Schalk observes, there is no

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41 Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-colonial Tamilakam and Ilam: The Period of the Imperial Colar.Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part 2, p.526

42 Countering the popularly held Theravada view of victimhood of the Island of Lanka, Spencer shows how kings of both the island of Lanka and the continent were engaged in plundering and were plunderers of each other's territory. 'Ceylonese policy toward the mainland continued to vacillate between fear of Indian neighbours when the latter were aggressive, and the temptation to intervene in continental affairs when Indian states were disorganized.' He analyses this activity more as a politico-economic instrument of redistribution of wealth in the traditional sub-continental politics than as a religious invasion. George W. Spencer: 'The Politics of Plunder: The Cholas in Eleventh-Century Ceylon', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.35, Ch.3. (May, 1976), pp.405, 408. Moreover, Ponnambalam has shown how the depiction of the island's early history by the ethno-nationalists as 1000 years of constant Tamil invasions and Tamil-Sinhala war has undermined the historical fact of Sinhala Kings constantly seeking Indian Tamil military support to protect the throne or come to power in the context of dynastic conflict. Ponnambalam, p.231.

place for Tamil Buddhism and Tamil bhikkhus.[43] The ethnonym, *damila* has been turned into a pejorative sense.

As Seneviratne notes, the writings of the *sangha* reflect the trauma that they went through as a result of a politics of plunder.[44] In articulating the experience of victimhood the above different dimensions of the invasions have been ignored by the author-monks of the later *vamsa* tradition and they have created a stereotypical image of the Tamils (*damila*) making an essentialist connection between Sinhala and Buddhism. Based on the Asokan and Duttagamini paradigms of 'two wheels of dhamma', where the *sangha* expected the dynasties to protect *sasana*, royal patronage was more sought after and history was seen in a more insular way. In writing down history, they made the Theravada tradition a sectarian anti-Tamil state ideology and expressed aspirations for a stronger Buddhist kingdom. This is mythologisation of victimhood in history. We have seen a similar pattern in terms of English Protestant identity in the sixteenth century. These types of processes show how some articulations of the experience of victimhood can blur the right view (*samma ditti*) or, as Regina Schwartz pointed out the previous chapter, can lead to 'rhetorics of victimisation' in terms of the selective reading of the Biblical narratives which construct the other. This is an ideological contamination (*mittcha ditti*) of Buddhism which needs to be critiqued in unmaking the Sri Lankan nation-state. This will be attempted in chapter six.

Furthermore, despite the fact that there had been an exclusivist Sinhala consciousness associated with Buddhism as found in the later chronicles, like *Pujavaliya* (thirteenth century) and *Chulavamsa*, Gunawardene points out that this ideology had not been persistently propagated by the state. His work shows how there had been more inclusive paradigms of state-building that were promoted by the kingdoms in the south of the island after the late Anuradhapura-Polonnaruwa periods (even after experiencing the Chola-Magha invasions). In the words of David Scott (even though he critiques Gunawardene's historicism), because of 'the extraordinary comprehensiveness of its historical critique' Gunawardene's essay is 'the most timely and formidable of possible interventions' in the face of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism

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[43] Schalk: *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-colonial Tamilakam and Ilam: The Period of the Imperial Colar.Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part 2, p.533

[44] Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, pp.5, 12.

that asserts 'a continuous authentic identity'.[45] Referring to the cosmopolitan culture promoted by the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1412-67) of the Kotte Kingdom, which became heir to the Anuradhapura-Pollonnaruwa kingdoms, he demonstrates how this period can be considered the high point of Tamil and Sinhala cultural contact when fluency in Tamil and the ability to preach both in Sinhala and Tamil were treated as a great accomplishment by the Sinhala monk-scholars. This was also the period when Tamil culture in the form of poems and songs, and the Saiva cults of Ganapati and Pattini were popular among the Sinhala community.

This trend also can be seen during the later Kandyan period. Some Tamil works of Buddhist inspiration were translated into Sinhala and there were occasions when South Indian scripts were used to write the Sinhala language.[46] Gunawardene also shows how during the last century of the Kandyan Kingdom, the ideology of status (belonging to the *ksatriya* caste) and religious affiliation (declared adherence to Buddhism) legitimised kingship rather than membership of the Sinhala group. Because the Sinhala feudal nobility (*radala*) was severely disunited due to factional rivalries and none of them could claim *ksatriya* status, none of them could become the king. This was why a South Indian dynasty, which allegedly fulfilled these conditions of ritual status, ascended the Kandyan throne and this happened to be the last dynasty before the British colonised the entire island.[47] The Buddhist community led by the *sangha* legitimised the kingship through the latter's declared allegiance to Buddhism. The king was expected to carry out duties towards the *sasana* in return, which meant guaranteeing the orthodoxy of interpretation of the doctrine (*Dhamma*), the appointment of religious authorities, the guardianship of the Sacred Tooth Relic, the organisation of the religious ceremonies in Kandy, mainly the *asela perahera* (the annual procession associated with the Sacred Tooth Relic) and the patronage of the *perivenas* (temple schools).[48] Such functions gave a religious legitimacy for the political power more than the very religious belief of the monarch himself. This also shows that the Aryan origin of the dynasty as opposed to Dravidian origin as proposed

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[45] David Scott, ' Dehistoricising History' in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association,1995), p.16

[46] Gunawardene: 'The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography', pp.66-67.

[47] Ibid., p.69.

[48] Francois Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, (Bangalore, TPI, 1974), p.181.

by the nationalist scholars was not a factor that legitimised the political power of the Sinhala-Buddhists. Ironically, the term 'Aryan' was used to refer to the Tamil (Dravidian) dynasty of Aryachakravarti that founded the Jaffna Kingdom in the north of the island in the twelfth century.

During the last part of the pre-colonial period there were three main kingdoms in the island of which only one claimed Buddhist sovereignty in line with the *vamsa* tradition. With regard to the collective perceptions of the masses about the political unit, Gananathaa Obeysekara's study of the names given to the Island and its different parts clearly shows how the outsider's perception of the island differed from that of an insider.[49] The inhabitants of each kingdom perceived the territory that came under their king as the land to which they belonged. The country was the kingdom. Moreover, during the Kotte period, among the three main kingdoms in southern Lanka there were small kingdoms along the coast, but they were vassalages which came under one of the kingdoms. Reflecting the very nature of galactic politics, as Nira Wickramasinghe rightly notes, there were no clear boundaries among the kingdoms. There were overlapping boundaries, identities and histories. There were chieftains who had dual allegiances to both the kings of Jaffna and Kotte and no kingdom had power to overcome the other during this period. Therefore, despite the fact that it was a feudal society where the king and the nobility claimed the right of possession of the entire land, 'sovereignty was never total and was often a contested terrain' as there were overlapping territories. There was mainly a difference between ritual or symbolic sovereignty and actual political control. [50] As this symbolic sovereignty of the Buddhist kingdom of Kotte cannot be considered a centralised system of state that covers the entire territory of the island it cannot be seen as the precursor to the modern Sinhala Buddhist nation-state.

Having critiqued so far the 'perennialist' and 'cultural primordialist' approaches to the theorisation of nationalism and the nation-state let us now turn to the ethno-symbolic model suggested by Smith. Following this model, Gananatha Obeysekara makes an attempt to link Buddhist symbolic sovereignty and the present concept of Sinhala Buddhist nationhood and national sovereignty. He

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[49] Gananatha Obeysekara,: *Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity: The Premodern and Pre-colonial Formations*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), pp.28-32.

[50] Nira Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, (Colombo, Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006), pp.8-9.

argues against Benedict Anderson's concept of nation – as an imagined community which emerged only after printing technology and capitalism – and says that it is the state which is a modern Western construction, but the reality corresponding to the sovereignty of a nation existed in pre-modern and pre-colonial Lanka. Therefore, it is not the nation which is a Western model but the state. 'Sinhalas had no term that could be translated as 'nation'; they had the term that belonged to the same polythetic class as nation, namely *sasana*'.[51] Drawing parallels from the forging of an English Protestant identity, Obeysekara remarks that albeit 'church is both universal and particularistic, very much like the Sinhala concept sasana' the Elizabethan writers could argue for an inextricable link between Protestantism and Englishness.[52] This means that the nation and national identity existed from antiquity as a cultural form.

This approach sounds somewhat 'cultural perennialist'. The idea of a modern nation is not only a cultural construct or a moral community but also a structural political arrangement or a product of the interplay between both power and culture in our theoretical analysis. We can say that a symbolic expression of sovereignty was existent in another political arrangement (galactic politics) during the pre-modern era, but not in a centralised structure. Even though Obeysekara's argument emphasises the need to recognise the pre-existing religious symbols that correspond to the present nationalist consciousness, to say that the notions of *sasana* and nation signify the same reality is an imposition of modern categories on pre-modern ones by which the past is moulded with a contemporary ideology. On the soteriological level any particular local *sasana* can represent the universal *sasana* that goes beyond a particular state. It is on the same level that the term, *dhammadipa* – which means the island, having *dhamma* as a lamp – has to be understood.[53] Although experience of the trauma of invasions conditioned the particularity of the local *sasana* with an aspiration (and a sense of chosenness and mission in terms of Theravada tradion of Mahavihara) to create a strong Buddhist kingdom, this tendency cannot be equated with a movement of nationalism that envisions a

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[51] Gananatha Obeysekara: *Buddhism, Nationhood and Cultural Identity:The Premodern and Pre-colonial Formations*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), p.22.

[52] Ibid, p.44.

[53] For different interpretations of this term. see Schalk: 'Semantic Transformations of the Dhammadipa' in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Mahinda Deegalle, (London, Routledge, 2006), pp.86-93.

culturally homogenised nation because there were multiple cultural interactions within the Sinhala polity, which itself was not a highly centralised system in the modern sense. Michael Roberts also emphasises the pre-existing ethno-symbolic character of the modern Sri Lankan nation-state. 'The Sinhala people, too, believed they were a chosen people...their thinking was permeated by the *Dhammadipa* and *Sinhadipa* concepts. These lines of thought undoubtedly contributed towards the resistance to Western rule on the part of the Sitawake and Kandyan Kingdoms...'[54]

Like Obeysekara, while recognising the role of pre-existing religio-cultural myths in the formation of national identity, Roberts has overlooked the dynastic nature of the polity of this period that had overlapping boundaries, territories and histories. As shown by Schalk and Gunawardene above, ethnic identities were fluid and malleable and there was no persistent durable essential link between religion and language constituting a fixed Sinhala Buddhist *ethnie*. As Weber has shown, us 'it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires' the belief or the sense in a common ethnicity often expressed through religio-cultural symbolisms.[55] This belief as a *habitus* could persist as symbolic means at once structured and structuring even after the disintegration of the political community, if there aren't drastic differences of language and customs among the members of that community. However, the constant interaction between *habitus* and political *field* can change the very nature of ethnic consciousness when informed by the different interpretations of the symbolic meanings that are inspired by the political community.

There is a qualitative difference, in the ethnic consciousnesses of the Sinhalas, between the impact made by the pre-colonial invasions of galactic politics and the modern European colonial practice. This difference that makes the ethnic identities fluid, has not been emphasised by the above two scholars. This mirrors one of the limitations in the ethno-symbolic model proposed by Smith: in theorising nationalism his model could implicitly refer to pre-colonial collective sentiments as a lower degree of nationalism. Such an approach could eventually underestimate

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[54] Michael Roberts: 'Meanderings in the Pathways of Collective Identity and Nationalism' in *Collective Identities Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Michael Roberts, (Colombo, Marga Institute, 1979), pp.28-29.

[55] Max Weber: 'The Origins of Ethnic Groups' in *Ethnicity*, (eds.) John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p.35.

the difference between the modern nations and the earlier ethnic communities.[56] While recognising the role that the system of pre-existing religio-cultural symbolism plays in nationalism and national identity we need to lay emphasis more on the contingency of collective consciousness than on an unchanging continuity. Such an approach is necessary to avoid historicisation of *mythos* or mythologisation of history.

As we have seen the relationship between Sinhala polity and Buddhism has been symbolic and it has been often interpreted by the *sangha* and the nobility who were a landed elite. Even though the Sinhala language group had a close affinity to Buddhism and the Tamil speaking group to Saivism, religious identities had not been essentially ethnicised or racialised during the pre-colonial era. However, there had been strong tendencies, mainly among the literati-monks, to construct a Sinhala Buddhist exclusivist state ideology out of this symbolic relationship in relation to invasions associated with the system of galactic politics. How did these pre-existing aspirations and symbolisms come to be identified with structural formations of a modern Sinhala Buddhist nation-state? The process of these structural identifications is the process of Lanka's colonial encounter with Europe.

Jayadeva Uyangoda and H.L. Seneviratne clearly show that the present model of the Sri Lankan nation-state is mainly a modern construction (colonial and postcolonial) They also make an attempt to overcome the reductionisms (cultural and material) in theorisations of nationhood, nationalism and nation-state. However, in the former's analysis there is less recognition of the pre-existing symbolic meanings. Seneviratne, while acknowledging the existence of 'a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness and a model of a hegemonic and unified Sinhala Buddhist state' in the pre-colonial literary work in Sri Lanka sees such work as 'a response to the trauma' that emerged 'from time to time, and among some sections of the people' (mainly the literati monks) to the pre-colonial South Indian invasions of the island.[57] He argues that the present form of Sinhala Buddhist national consciousness is 'quite a different matter altogether' which is 'no older than hundred years' and

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[56] For a general critique on the ethno-symbolic model see Umut Özkirimli: *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (New York, Palgrave, 2000), pp.183-189 and for a specific critique of the model applying it to Sri Lanka see Nira Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1995), p.xx.

[57] H.L. Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), p.5.

which emerged within a particular socioeconomic and political condition. The symbolic meaning of some of the *vamsic* narratives had potential for Sinhala Buddhist hegemony and it could be arrested under a responsible political leadership and favourable socioeconomic conditions.[58]

Uyangoda's observations illuminate how material colonial conditions accompanied some peculiar attributes of state and these attributes were different from those of the galactic states in South Asia. While discussing the nature of the characteristics of the nation-states in South Asia and particularly Sri Lanka, he refers to Durkheimian attributes of totemic belief by giving them a more postmodern ring. He defines the modern nation-state as a 'universal form of totemism' dominating 'all forms of modern civilisation' with the 'two universally shared foundation myths: centralised sovereignty and fixed bordered territory'.[59] 'These are the markers that give the modern state a sacred character'.[60] Uyangoda, critiquing the principles of the nation-state as opposed to the state in general, qualifies the Marxian definition of the state – i.e. an instrument deployed by the propertied class to suppress the labouring classes – and the generalised Weberian definition of the state – a monopoly of violence. He describes the nation-state as a phenomenon which is violent by definition because of its fundamental attributes of 'fixed sovereignty, fixed territorial borders and fixed demands of political loyalty and obligations from its citizenry'. Referring to the dominant nationalist discourse (which is informed by the 'primordialist' and 'perennialist' theoreticians), he writes that it is this violent fixity that is 'eminently sacred in our intellectual beliefs, discourse and practices.'[61] What are the colonial and post-colonial processes of interpreting and appropriating the pre-existing Buddhist symbolic meanings (Seneviratne) as the modern sacred attributes (Uyangoda) of the Sri Lankan nation-sate? As the myths of chosenness have been recycled in forging the British nation-state and the Empire under the mercantile and capitalist material conditions, the island of Lanka enters the stage of formation of a modern nation-state by the recycling of pre-existing myths mainly through the material conditions of colonialism within the British imperialist project.

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[58] Ibid. p.13.
[59] Uyangoda: 'Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State', pp.174-176.
[60] Ibid., p.177.
[61] Ibid., p.174.

2. THE DYNAMICS OF THE INITIAL EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS

A drastic change in the political and cultural formations of the island of Lanka began to take place with the entry of European powers into the East from the sixteenth century onwards. This encounter took place in the context of the emerging order of the European monarchical nation-states, who were competing with each other in trade as we have seen in the previous chapter. The political ideology of these states was informed by Christian cultural homogenisation and centralised political systems that promoted the interests of the Christian commercial classes against their Jewish and Muslim counterparts. Landlocked by the Ottoman Empire, the Iberian powers were searching for sea routes to reach the East for trade.[62] As the need for cinnamon and other products increased after the Crusades and with the retreat of China from the seas, these powers entered into their distant commercial activities to the East as well as further to the West (crossing the Atlantic) using the Chinese maps that came to them through Venice.[63] In the relationship between Europe and the East, in the context of competition for trade routes, Lanka's geographical location as an island close to the Indian subcontinent has been significant for the European powers.[64] The island of Lanka, with its close proximity to the mainland of India, is situated in between the Homuz Strait – the entry point to the Mediterranean and the West – and Malacca Strait – the entry point to the Far East. With this strategic importance, in the initial European conquests and the later phases of formal colonisations, a new type of power relationship began to emerge between a European centre and an Asian periphery. It is within this politics of conquest and colonialism that the modern process of formation of cultural and political identities within the island of Lanka has to be analysed. Such politics need to be seen in relation to the dynamics of the political (the emergence of nation-

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62 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.107.

63 Enrique Dussel shows how Europe did not have any superiority over China, India and Arabia before the eighteenth century. Until the 15th century it suffered a secular underdevelopment. India and China were the main powers in trade during the first three centuries following the fifteenth century. Dussel: 'Modernity, European Empires, Colonialism and Capitalism: Towards an Understanding of the Trans-modernity Process', *Theologies and Cultures*, Vol.1, No.1, (November, 2004), p.27-29.

64 K.M. De Silva outlines three significant features in the island's foreign trade. They are in relation to the West, South East Asia and China, and to India from Cambay to Bengal. De Silva: *A History of Sri Lanka*, (London, Hurst & Company, 1981), p.90.

states), economic (mercantile and capitalist modes of production) and cultural movements (the religious ideology of chosenness and the liberal ideology of civilising the colonies) in Europe.

Even though it is the British colonisation in particular that has been the most proximate factor that contributed to the formation of the present model of nation-state and national identity in Lanka, it is important to identify, in brief, the types of influence of the other colonial powers on the island. The three European colonisers of the island of Lanka had diverse approaches. They were informed by different philosophies, theologies and ideologies. The circumstances they faced were different from each other both within the colony and in Europe. In terms of material conditions, these differences were conditioned by the process of development from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism, and culturally, from religious legitimation of political power to liberal ideologies of democracy. Assessment of the particular impact of each coloniser would avoid generalisations and throw light on the complexities in the dynamics of the interactions between the various European powers and the island of Lanka. Also such a perspective would help us to evaluate the overall European impact on the identity formation of Lanka that has contributed to the present model of nation-state both as an ideology and a structure. However, this section will argue that the present model is mainly a result of British colonisation. As Smith has shown, the route of formation of nationhood here is different from the routes of formation of Western nation-states. In chapter three we saw how the very emergence of the nation-state in Europe was predicated upon an imperialist outlook. The British built the material basis of the present Sri Lankan model, as a colony, as a part of its imperialist agenda in the Indian subcontinent. The local cultures were perceived within the imperialist agenda. Under new material conditions they interacted with the imperial cultural representations conditioning the agency of the natives who entered into a process of interpreting pre-colonial ethno-symbolisms in forging national identity. The impact of previous Portuguese and Dutch colonisations contributed to this process more in terms of internal diverse identity formations than in forming the overall material conditions and ideology of the nation-state. As all the three colonial powers emerged in close relationship to Christianity, a new Christian community (both Sinhala and Tamil) also emerged. Under the burden of both the cultural and material violence of colonialism, the collective consciousness of pre-existing Buddhist and Hindu communities began to

be sharpened. Let us now examine these cultural and material processes during the periods of the three colonisers.

i. Portuguese Society Meets the Lankan Society

As we have seen the first phase of capitalism did not develop evenly within all of Europe. While the new types of modes of production that formed the basis of capitalism were developing in certain Northern European cities, Portugal remained an agrarian as a society when it made its first colonial (trading) presence in Lanka. Even though there was an accumulation of capital that formed a commercial capital this did not change the modes of production in the Portuguese society.[65] A commercial bourgeoisie was emerging in a society that maintained a feudal structure and at this period European society in general and Portuguese society in particular saw their objectives in religious terms. As an emerging monarchical nation-state, while building the commercial capital, Portugal asserted an exclusivist Roman Catholic identity opposing its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants. This perception was exemplified in their trading conquests of the other lands that were commissioned to the Kings by Pontifical Bulls. With the Reformation, this identity was defined as understood to be anti-heretical. As the conquests proceeded towards Asia, Catholic identity began to be defined as against other faiths and the latter were perceived as beliefs of heathens. In other words, conquests were given a divine guarantee and religion functioned as a political ideology. As Satchi Ponnambalam puts it: 'the Portuguese set out to discover an alternative Christian trade route to seek the wealth of the Orient'.[66] The active intervention of the religious agents formed the moral basis of the conquests and the later colonising of the other lands. In return, the religious organisation was protected by the King. Francois Houtart outlines the triple character of the objectives of the Portuguese conquest as follows:

> The political objective was the grandeur of Portugal and the destruction of the Arab and the Turkish Powers. The economic objective consisted in maritime commerce, a source of riches for the Portuguese bourgeoisie, and in the seizure of the Arab spice monopoly, which would feed the royal exchequer. The religious objective was the

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[65] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.132.

[66] Satchi Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, (London, Zed Books, 1983), p.41.

> maintenance and expansion of Christendom against Islam first of all, and against other religions later.[67]

At the time of the conquests in Asia the ethos that prevailed during the Crusades was still alive, where the peoples within Christendom were seen as a new chosen people.[68] Vivid mythologies of Portuguese conquests mentioned by Houtart show how victories over the Muslims as well as the Asian territories were seen as granted by God.[69] The religious terms were inseparably interwoven with political and economic meanings. When the Portuguese arrived in 1505 they were in the process of 'discovering' India and in their overall commercial conquest in the East they saw the strategic importance of the island of Lanka which was then a set of kingdoms. In a letter to the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa, King Emmanuel of Portugal writes as follows:

> We are informed on your return voyage, if the good Lord permits, you will be able to land in Ceylon, very important kingdom in India....We also understand because excellent cinnamon, various pearls, elephants and other precious and valuables can be obtained in the island and it is situated close to the harbour of Bengal and Malaka and to a place called Kayal and because no ship sailing between the Straits of Malaka and the harbours of Bengal can pass unnoticed,... when you make this aforementioned isle your headquarters as decreed you become the centre of all of our fortresses and possessions in the east and from this place you may organise everything better than from any other place. Therefore it is our wish and our decree that you endeavour to fulfil this.[70]

When the Portuguese landed in the island of Lanka they first came into contact with the kingdoms of Kotte and Jaffna. In the eyes of an outsider, it was an island which was called by one name, or a part of India, but for the insider it was a set of kingdoms; one Tamil and two Sinhalese. Jaffna kingdom in the North had been mainly Saivite and Tamil and two other Sinhala kingdoms in the South had been mainly Buddhist and Sinhala. This shows that at the time of the Portuguese encounter, Lanka had not been a politically centralised and culturally homogenous entity. The Kingdom of Kotte with which the Portuguese made their first contact in the sixteenth century was founded in 1415 and, due to dynastic conflicts, another kingdom was formed as Kandy in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Kotte was heir to the ancient Kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa which held the

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67 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.105.
68 Ibid., p.109.
69 Ibdi., pp.119-121.
70 F. de Queyroz: *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, (translated by S.G. Perera s. j.), (Colombo, Richards, 1930), p.10.

guardianship of the Sacred Tooth Relic. This symbolically reflected the political legitimacy of the King and the royal patronage given to the *sasana* and the *sangha*. As the Catholic hierarchy played a crucial role in the case of Portugal the *sangha* played a crucial role in Kotte. Here, Theravada Buddhism was functioning as a political ideology similar to the role played by Roman Catholicism, but more in the context of galactic politics than in proselytising commercial conquests. Even though both the church and the *sangha* shared a similar interest in feudal ownership of the land, the former had its own centralised authority whereas the latter was dependent on the local king. The Portuguese believed that their conquests were guaranteed by God and that they had been entrusted with a mission to propagate the Christian (Roman Catholic) faith. The theology that informed the Portuguese ideology of society and polity was based on a concept of 'Christ-against-religions' whereas the religious ideology of the kingship of Kotte was based on the Buddhist concept of *Two Wheels of Dhamma* and the *sangha* relied on the local King to protect *sasana*.[71]

However, it was a political power with a religious ideology that was meeting another power of the same kind. In both cases the religious field – which was interwoven with the political field – consisted of religious organisations and a system of religious meanings that were symbolically expressed. However, they were two diverse systems of religious beliefs that were meeting each other politically and culturally in an asymmetrical power relationship and with differing interests. Niall Ferguson shows how in this asymmetry, the Portuguese had a far superior naval power compared to other rising European powers during this

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[71] At the time of the initial Portuguese arrival on the island in 1505, the Mogul Empire in the Indian subcontinent was rising as a power and the Muslim traders held the monopoly in the port of Colombo in the Kingdom of Kotte. There were also dynastic tensions growing within the island. The Kingdom of Kandy also posed a threat to the rule of Kotte. Under these two threats, one sub-continental and the other a native dynastic one, the European power was welcomed and an alliance was made by the King of Kotte. A religious ideology legitimised the Portuguese aim of dominating trade in the region opposing Muslims and other groups while Kotte wanted to consolidate its power guarding it economically from the Muslim traders and politically from the Kingdom of Kandy. Kotte also faced an internal power struggle which was characteristic of dynastic politics of succession at that period and led to the formation of three kingdoms, Sitawake, Rayigama and Kotte. This shows that the politics of dynastic identity caused more divisions within the island than ethnic or religious collectivities. Later Sitawake and Raigama were amalgamated by King Mayadunne, who made an alliance with the Muslims against the Portuguese. The more the internal dynastic tensions grew the more Kotte became dependent on the Portuguese. See Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.135.

period.[72] Even though the Portuguese did not establish dominance over the politics of South Asia, as K.M. De Silva points out, they used 'their sea power and superior technology at points of weakness or where there were sharp divisions', and thereby attained 'an influence out of all proportion to their real strength'.[73]

Houtart has analysed how under the Portuguese, a process of restructuring and replacements took place in both the religious and political fields. The Buddhist system of meanings was replaced by the Roman Catholic system of meanings which were based on the theology of 'Christ-against-religions' and accompanied by conversions.[74] Conversion was considered to have a double effect – personal salvation and entry into a new political structure. The entry into the political field had to be made through the religious field. Buddhist temples were destroyed or were given to the missionaries. This severed the link between the *sangha* and the king. Although the form of religious expression changed, the social and political structure remained the same. 'Since the structure of social relations was not dissimilar in the two societies, the social function of the new religion was also similar to that of old.' [75] However, it was a different *habitus* that was introduced. A different type of religious sanction was required for political legitimacy.

As the cultural violence of the Portuguese increased through conversions and destruction and displacement of Buddhist places of worship, the *sangha* left Kotte and formed their power base in the Kingdom of Sitawaka and later in Kandy. With the conversion of the King of Kotte to Catholicism in 1557 Sitawake came to symbolise the political resistance of the indigenous sovereignty of Sinhala kingdoms culturally epitomising the religious tensions between Christianity and Buddhism. With the fall of Sitawake and the complete takeover of Kotte by the Portuguese after the death of the indigenous Catholic King in 1597, Kandy became the symbol of native sovereignty and resistance. Jaffna Kingdom was annexed in 1619 after two failed attempts. This was the context in which the native traditions of Buddhism, Saivism and Islam first encountered Christianity in the island of

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[72] Niall Ferguson: *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p.9.

[73] Silva, p.100.

[74] I have borrowed this term from Paul Knitter who contrasts it with the inclusivist theology of Vatican II. Paul Knitter: 'Foreword' in *Asian Theology of Liberation*, Aloysius Pieris, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988), p.xiii.

[75] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, pp.152-156.

Lanka in the early modern period. This encounter took place under a system of dynastic politics which consisted of several kingdoms with overlapping boundaries that did not have a centralised system of state in the modern sense. However, in envisioning modern Sinhala Buddhist nationhood, the historical memory of this encounter has been retrieved by the Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalists not only to counter the Western influence but also the other ethnic and religious minorities in the island.

Nira Wickramasinghe differentiates between virtual and real sovereignty. As Kandy became the only indigenous kingdom remaining in the land it came to be seen as a symbolic expression of the sovereignty of the whole island (virtual sovereignty) in contrast with a Catholic power holding real sovereignty in the Maritime Provinces. The Buddhist symbolic expression of sovereignty was defined not against the Tamils or the Muslims, but mainly against the Portuguese. Politically, the contingent and ambiguous nature of this sovereignty was evident as the King of Kandy made an alliance with the Dutch with the intention of ousting the Portuguese.[76] Houtart's work is excellent in showing how Portuguese political control was a progressive transformation of phases that developed from the making of alliance to full political control of the Maritime Provinces and was accompanied by conversion and military dominance. However, his definition of guardianship of the 'historic legitimacy' of the Kandyan Kingdom needs elaboration in order to avoid an exclusivist interpretation of Kandyan sovereignty as Sinhala Buddhist.[77] Within the social space, cultural violence was inflicted upon Buddhism, Saivism and Islam in the Kingdom of Kotte. In the Jaffna Kingdom the Portuguese carried out a similar proselytising process against the Savites and other traditions. Even though Houtart has not treated this factor adequately (perhaps for methodological reasons), this is also a major element that is overlooked by Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalism today in its insular reading of history.

Moreover, as Peter Schalk has reminded us, it was not only Sinhala-speaking Buddhists but also Tamil-speaking Buddhists (even though a minority), who 'felt selected for a privileged destiny to transmit the *dhamma* as lamp on the island from generation to generation... and they had reasons to feel the infiltration

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[76] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.10.
[77] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.172.

of Christianity as threat to their mandate.' [78] Ponnambalam has pointed out how the Tamil King of Jaffna gave 'great assistance to the Sinhala King of Kandy by obtaining reinforcements from south India in the latter's war against the Portuguese'[79] Even after the Portuguese takeover of Jaffna a combined Tamil and Sinhala force rose against them in 1628. Also the Portuguese persecution of the Muslims in the Island has not been treated adequately by scholars. Arguing against the Portuguese depiction of Muslims as those who were settled by the King of Kandy for strategic reasons in the seventeenth century, Dennis B. McGilvray shows how Muslims were already a well-established community in the east coast exactly like the Tamils.[80] Even though the King of Kotte made an alliance with the Portuguese in order to arrest the influence of the Mogul Empire (that was spreading through trade) in the island, it was with the aid of the Muslims that Sinhala forces first rose against the Portuguese attacking the fort of Colombo and building a stockade alongside it.[81]

In the following century, with the Dutch persecution of Catholics, an understanding grew between the Buddhists and the Catholics in the Kingdom of Kandy especially in the person of Venerable Joseph Vaz. The Goan priest's selfless service to the people of Kandy at the time of an epidemic of smallpox helped to shift the existing expression of Christianity from one of proselytisation to one of service to humanity.[82] Within the context of an encounter between two exclusivist religious ideologies – one with a sense of chosenness to propagate Christian faith throughout the world and the other with a sense of mission to protect the 'pure form' of *dhamma* in the island – the witness of Vaz could be an inspiration to both

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78 Schalk, *Buddhism among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam*, Part I, p.43.

79 Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, p.29.

80 The Muslims in the East of the island and elsewhere share commonalties with the Muslims in the coastal line in South India from Kalyalpattinam to Cannanore.They are Sunnis and belong to the Shafi School. Dennis B. McGilvray: *Tamil and Muslim Identities in the East*, (Colombo, Marga Institute, 2001), p.3.

81 Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.9

82 S. G. Perera: *Life of Blessed Joseph Vaz: The Apostle of Sri Lanka*, (Ontario, Humanics Universal Inc., 2005). p.131. In the foreword to the third edition of this work Aloysius Pieris has reconstructed the life and mission of Joseph Vaz as one of 'option to be poor and option for the poor'. With an ecumenical perspective, Pieris shows how Joergen Moltman as a Protestant theologian has scripturally demonstrated 'the marks of the Church' as 'spiritual poverty' and identification with the 'social poverty of the oppressed masses'. 'The fact remains, however, that the leader and the representative of the Catholic Church of that period (Vaz), though initially hunted by the Dutch Protestants, had been branded with that very mark of holiness, which Moltman, the renowned Protestant theologian of our times, has discovered for us from the Revealed Word of God.' pp.xx-xvi.

traditions and awaken them to a meaningful role in society. This again will be considered in chapter six of this work in our attempt to rearticulate the meaning and role of religious traditions in the present context of Lanka. All the interactive encounters among diverse groups described above show that ethnic and religious identities have not been persistently exclusivist. They have been fluid depending on multiple interactions among groups of people under diverse socio-political conditions.

Should the native resistance and the shifting of sovereignty during the Portuguese period be called nationalism in the modern sense and should it be considered a precursor to later nationalism? Michael Roberts is one of those who answer in the affirmative. Critiquing the emphasis laid on the printed word by Benedict Anderson in the spread of nationalism, Roberts refers to the war poems and folk tales of the Kandyan period and argues for a Sinhala collective consciousness that could be the precursor to nationalism. He also suggests that during the period between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries the illiterate people may have exchanged ideas about the polity at public places through oral tradition, visual arts, dance and music. Particularly, 'dancing and music were a 'significant aspect of popular culture and part of the celebrations of victory'.[83] As a methodological approach, it is important to recognise modes of communication other than the printed word in the formation of a collective consciousness, but in the Kandyan resistances what was reflected was more an allegiance to the King than to 'a Sinhalaness' or Sinhala identity. As Wickaramsinghe rightly puts it 'the allegiance to the King as *chakravarti* by the peoples of the highlands who fought and died for him was a testimony to his power to mobilise rather than the expression of a sort of a collective consciousness'.[84] Even though cultural violence against the natives strengthened more the kingship associated with Buddhist sovereignty, there was not a move to think of the land in terms of the homogeneous entity that characterises the present envisioning of nationhood.

In considering the effects of the initial colonial encounter that were compounded by other European colonisers, it is evident that such effects did not impact evenly on the whole island. The isolation and insularity of many people in

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[83] Michael Roberts: *Modernist Theory: Trimming the Printed Word: The Instance of Pre-modern Sinhala Society*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), pp.5-12.

[84] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.19.

the western and south western parts were broken by the initial phase of the European conquests and colonisations where the Maritime Provinces were the first targets. The central parts became insular because the Portuguese could not capture the interior Kingdom of Kandy despite failed attempts. As we have seen, these differences began to be politicised, making a demarcation between real and virtual sovereignty. They also developed into the cultural categories of Low-Country and Up-Country, the politicisation of which began during the British period. Religiously, there emerged a new community of Sinhala and Tamil speaking Catholics whose relationships with both Buddhist and Saiva communities were tense. Socially, many Catholics were from the *karava* cast and they were mostly fishermen. Even though conversion was a matter of convenience for the monarchs and the nobles, the allegiance of the fishing community to their Catholic faith remained intact and this could be seen during the Dutch persecution of the Catholics. Economically, apart from the Catholic fishermen, the majority of Buddhists and Saivites remained agrarian, bound to the feudal structure. There was also a new group of peelers who were connected to the cinnamon trade and who had migrated from India.

Socially, feudal relationships were maintained, where the colonialists and the native nobles at the centre dominated the other groups – the peelers, the fisher folk, interior groups of Buddhists, Hindus and the Muslims in both the Sinhala and Tamil speaking regions. The customary hierarchy fashioned by landownership and the caste system remained unchanged.[85] The Portuguese administered the Tamil and Sinhala areas separately. The memory of Portuguese colonisation has been retrieved by the later Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalist movement without paying much attention to these complexities and with an insular reading of history in order to construct the ideology of a unitary-state and a cultural homogenisation which is conditioned by an essentialist perception of Sinhala Buddhist nationhood. For example, Nalin de Silva argues that there has not been a Tamil Kingdom in the island and those who ruled the Jaffna Kingdom were sea pirates, whereas 'Sri Lanka had existed as an *eksesath rajya* for thousands of years with a well developed

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[85] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.13.

rata system' under the Sinhala Kings. This was not a federal system, 'the Indian model preached by the *Kautilyas*'.[86]

ii. The Encounter with the Dutch

As we have seen in the previous chapter the Dutch emerged as another commercial power after they became independent from Spain and their influence was growing in South East Asia. The King of Kandy made an external pragmatic alliance with the Dutch in the beginning of the seventeenth century to oust the Portuguese from the island. Kandy was becoming stronger internally as it welcomed those who underwent religious persecutions under the Portuguese. The Dutch Commercial Company, having gained control of the cinnamon lands, managed to expel the Portuguese out of Colombo and Jaffna. However, the Dutch controlled areas were considered feudatories of Kandy. Here, Dutch sovereignty became 'more virtual than real'.[87] Exploiting the differences that existed among the European powers, more pragmatic alliances against the Dutch were attempted by the King of Kandy with England and France and he also organised resistance against Dutch rule by making use of the intermediary belt between the two areas of the Maritime Provinces and the Kingdom of Kandy. Within a political context of emerging and invading European powers, sovereignty of the Kandyan Kingdom was maintained by pragmatic alliances with one of such powers which eventually deepened the crisis of the local polity. This shows the dilemma of maintaining sovereignty. Internally, it was the *mythos* of 'two wheels of *dhamma*' that legitimised the sovereignty of the King, but externally the King had to depend on the *logos* of pragmatic alliances. After several battles between the two parties in 1766 the Kandyan King was forced to hand over the Maritime Provinces to the Dutch.

The new plantations, ports and canals changed the material conditions of the Low-country. It was the Dutch who introduced the first plantation agriculture and brought in South Indian labourers to the Island on a seasonal basis. The Dutch

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[86] Nalin de Silva: 'Indian Model has no Relevance', *The Island, Midweek Review*, (26th July, 2006), p.2. *eksesath* here means a unitary system as opposed to a decentralised system and *rata* means country with fixed territorial boundaries. However, *rata* is also used in Sinhala to refer to a region within a kingdom.

[87] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.11.

themselves managed these plantations while promoting not only cinnamon but also coffee, cotton and indigo. They also created a demand for pepper, cardamon and nuts. With the system of plantations and the canals that were built connecting different areas for the transport of spices and other crops the Dutch began to turn the province into 'a colony of exploitation'.[88] The approach towards existing religions reflected both Christian exclusivism and the main religious tensions in Europe between the Protestants and the Catholics. They banned Roman Catholicism and replaced it with Protestantism: this affected a sizeable population of Catholics from the Maritime Provinces. Conversions were promoted with incentives of upward social mobility. Buddhist and Saiva practices were banned in the towns, but they were less suppressed in the rural areas and the Buddhist monks from Kandy were allowed to visit the places of worship within the Dutch territory for special religious festivities. There also emerged a community of Sinhalese and Tamil Protestants. The Dutch Burger community also emerged as a result of Dutch soldiers marrying local women.

How was sovereignty expressed and what were the indicators of collective conscience or what was the political culture of the period? What was the role of both new and traditional religions during this period? It is important to look at the resistances of the period to identify the nature of collective consciousness as they are the reflections of particular identities. Were protests that emerged from the natives carried out by particular classes whose interests were under threat or did they have a popular base across social, cultural and religious groups, and across class, cast, religious and ethnic divides? As in the case of resistance towards the Portuguese organised by the King of Kandy, the resistance against the Dutch reflected more the King's power to mobilise people who lived under a feudal social system rather than an expression of a collective identity. Could the peelers revolt against the Dutch be considered a precursor to future nationalism? Looking at the outcome of this resistance Wickramasinghe shows how it was mainly due to economic grievances related to cinnamon cultivation rather than political reasons. Because the Dutch compromised, the peelers returned to work willingly under the colonial master. [89]

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[88] Ibid., p.15.
[89] Ibid., p.19.

Like the fishermen who belonged to the *karawa* caste, the peelers formed the *salagama* caste. They along with those who belonged to the *durawa* caste were originally Tamils and Malayalis who migrated during the fourteenth to eighteenth century from South India to the Kingdom of Kotte later called Low-country. Even though they became 'Sinhalaized by acculturation' they were treated as 'low' caste by the 'highest' caste of *Goyigama* Sinhalese who consisted of 51% of the population in Low-country and 85% in Up-country.[90] The Kings of Kandy also brought peasant soldiers from South India and settled them in the intermediary belt between Up-country and Low-country. They too joined the other groups and became Sinhalaized and Buddhist while introducing the worship of goddess Pattini to the Buddhist popular devotions. Diverse groups were incorporated into the Sinhala feudal society which was based on the caste system that rendered services to the royalty. In this sense, social identities were more caste-based than ethnic. As Wickramasighe shows, the caste system also had a flexibility of its own. For example, the members of the *salagama* caste absorbed some other groups as cinnamon peelers.[91] This shows how while new modes of production were being introduced by the Dutch, new identities were also overlapping with each other in the Low-country. Most revealingly, with the later developments of commercial capital under the British, those who entered the mercantile class from these groups became the ardent supporters of the Buddhist revival at the end of the nineteenth century.[92] They also formed a caste-based Buddhist institution called *Ramanya Nikaya* as opposed to the exclusivist claims to Buddhist ordination to monkhood (*upasampada*) by the *goyigama* caste-based *Siam Nikaya*.[93] As Ponnambalam points out, in the era of the racialised postcolonial project of nation-building in the 1950s it was the *karava* elite and the monks of the *Ramanya Nikaya* who relentlessly spearheaded the 'Sinhala-only' law. It is anachronistic to say that there was a

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90 Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, p.26.

91 Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.23.

92 Kumari Jayawardena : *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka, 2003), pp.263-269.

93 See L.A. Wickremeratne for caste-based divisions among the *sangha* that led to the formation of different sects and how Olcott made an attempt to unite them. Wickremeratne: *Religion, Nationalism and Social Change: 1865-1885*, (Colombo, Studies in Society and Culture, reprint, 1993), pp.8-11.

continuous unchanging collective consciousness throughout history with a homogenous identity of a particular group.[94]

The political division between the Maritime Provinces under the Dutch and the Kingdom of Kandy continued. Like the Portuguese the Dutch also maintained separate administrative areas for Tamil and Sinhala speaking areas. European powers were increasing their competition with each other for wealth, power and prestige forging new cultural and religious identities that emerged after the Reformation. As was shown in the previous chapter, Britain (as a United Kingdom forged with an English Protestant identity as shown by Linda Colley) and France (with its Catholic identity) continued their wars for the seas. When the British first entered Indian politics at the end of the eighteenth century as the British East India Company, they identified the island of Lanka as a strategic place. The main particular strategic location in the island for the European powers was the port of Trincomalee which is situated in the eastern part bordering the traditional Tamil and Sinhala Kingdoms. The French and the British competed for the port which was controlled by the Dutch. As France began to occupy Holland the Stathouder sought refuge in Britain. Fearing that the Napoleonic wars would spread to South East Asia, the British and the Dutch governments agreed to hand over the Maritime Provinces to the British East India Company in 1795-96.[95] This shows how the emerging new set of dynamics within the European polity was becoming crucial in determining the destiny of the island of Lanka. In 1802 by the Treaty of Amiens the island became a British Crown Colony. We shall see in the next chapter how Lanka's cultural and political life was transformed by the British colonial encounter.

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[94] Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, p.27

[95] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, pp.176-177.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND THE PROCESSES OF HOMOGENISATION

In the emerging context of wars between France and Britain for rule over the world – where the dominance over India was most crucial – the island of Lanka became of even greater strategic importance for the British than to the previous colonial powers. William Pitt, in his statement to the British Parliament in 1802, referred to the island as 'the most valuable colonial possession on the globe, as giving to our Indian Empire a security it had not enjoyed from its first establishment'.[1] Tensions also had arisen within the Kandyan Kingdom due to the rule of the Sri Vikrama from the Nayakkar dynasty. The opposition was more against his tyranny than against the South Indian Tamil dynasty. Even though he was called *demela* by the Kandyans, he was not viewed as somebody favouring the Tamils in the North and East, nor did the latter look up to him as such. There had been others from the dynasty who had rendered a 'tremendous service to Buddha *sasana*'.[2]

In the subsequent colonial conquests, the British did not conquer Kandy in a brutal war. Instead, they were invited by the *radala* (the aristocracy) to oust an unpopular ruler, thus forming another alliance in the history of pragmatic politics. The earlier alliances were made by the kings, but this one was made by the aristocracy to oust the local king. This created the future trajectory of Lankan polity. This was another occasion where the politics that represented religious systems of belief were overtaken by pragmatic politics. The Convention between the representatives of the *radala* and the British government was made on a 'contractual basis' and the Kandyan Convention was perceived by the *radala* as a bilateral agreement. 'The Kandyan aristocracy and the *sangha* were satisfied with it,

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1 Quoted by E.F.C. Ludowijk: *The Modern History of Ceylon*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.19.

2 K.N.O. Dharmadasa: 'The Sinhala Buddhist Identity and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom 1739-1815' in *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, Vol I, (ed.) Michael Roberts, (Colombo, Marga Institute 1997), pp.120-122.

for it retained the existing feudal and religious structures.' [3] The Convention affirmed the duty of the British Crown to protect Buddhism – in keeping with tradition, as the legitimacy of the ruler was granted by his duty to protect the *Buddha sasana* (Buddhism as an institution) – and to adhere to the traditional system of administrative power of the *radala*. The socio-political position of the *radala* and the *sangha* was kept intact while the kingship was replaced by a Christian monarch associated with a liberal government in Britain. The colonial socio-political system consisted of the British administration, the traditional dominant group called *radala*, the rural masses and the *sangha*. However, compounding the situation, in the interaction between the cultural field and the political field, the *habitus* of Kandy was different from that of Britain.

Culturally, the British were also developing their ideological apparatus of 'civilising the world' and this was a novelty compared to the Portuguese and Dutch, who did not think of their colonial endeavours in terms of introducing modern economic and political ideas. The Portuguese and the Dutch did not go 'beyond trade and conversion to Christianity' unlike the British who introduced a liberal philosophy in principle.[4] Therefore, the British did not replace the existing religious ideology of the Kandyan Kingdom with another religious ideology as the Portuguese and the Dutch did with Kotte. The reason for this liberal position is closely connected to the change from feudal social relationships to the capitalist mode of production within Europe. The agrarian model of the economy characterised by the feudal social relationships in the sixteenth century sought a religious legitimacy for the political field and the conquest was the furtherance of this system, whereas in the nineteenth century the industrial economy began to rely more on the social space for legitimacy rather than on an outside reality.[5] British colonising society in the 19th century had entered into a capitalist system of industrialisation where the middle class was a 'class of producers' building the industrial economic power.[6] In the new system both liberal and exclusivist evangelical ideologies existed side by side, creating tensions within the British society and polity. In other words, the liberal *logos* was in tension with the religious

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3 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, pp.177-178.
4 Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.26.
5 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.223.
6 Ibid., p.173.

mythos. Nevertheless, on the political level, both liberalism and religious exclusivism were envisioning an empire; the former 'a civilised world' and the latter a Christian empire. On the cultural level, liberalism was also a reaction to Christian exclusivism. However, the former carried the birth marks of the latter's cultural superiority. While the British nation-state was consolidating itself as the corner-stone in building the empire, the initial exclusivist English Protestant identity became transformed into an inclusivist nationalism with a sense of imperial mission to civilise the world. As Peter van der Veer has shown, this meant 'a moral universalism that extended grace to all the inhabitants of the world', and the liberal doctrine of improvement of society fits well with this Christian moralism.[7] Theologically, liberalism could be predicated upon the existence of a personal soul that guarantees freedom of the individual.

> The biblical affirmation that humankind was one, derived from a single pair in the Garden of Eden, as well as the Enlightenment notion of universal sameness and equality were rapidly giving way to ideas of radical racial difference in the second half of the nineteenth century. Philologists like Renan and Max Muller equated race with language, and Renan asserted the right of superior races to colonize the inferior ones.[8]

The faithful application of the duties of a superior race towards the other was the ideological basis of the British Empire. These ideological formations, the new material conditions of the capitalist modes of production and the strategic importance of the island of Lanka in European politics fashioned the British approach towards Kandyan polity during the nineteenth century.

Even though there was a juridical guarantee with regard to the protection of *Buddha sasana* and the local system of administration there was a cultural incompatibility between the symbolic representation of sovereignty and actual political authority. The liberal and Christian colonial officers could not comprehend the native practices and systems of belief associated with the existing administrative system. Houtart wittily puts it: 'It is difficult to see how the King of England, the Head of the Anglican Church, could simultaneously fulfil this function as the authority responsible for *sasana* (Buddhism as an institution)'.[9] This incompatibility

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7 Peter van der Veer: 'The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India' in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe an Asia*, (eds.) Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999), p.24

8 Ibid., p.27.

9 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, pp.181-182.

was resented by both sides, which gave rise to deep cultural tensions within the colony exposing not only the very inadequacy of the liberal ideology but also its inherent contradictions. When polities are informed by *mythos*, pragmatic alliances based on *logos* could lead to crisis situations. Moreover, although the Kandyan aristocracy thought of the Convention as a mutual contract between two equal partners, the polity and culture of the colonised encountered the polity and culture of the coloniser within an imperialist agenda. The causes of the 1818 Kandyan rebellion could be understood within the context of these tensions between the British and the aristocracy and the *sangha*. The rebellion was led by the aristocracy in 1818 with the support of the *sangha*. The British brutally crushed the rebellion and took measures to maintain political stability. These measures neither totally ousted the *radala* from power nor removed the privileges of the *sangha*. Instead, the colonial government only reduced the powers of the *radala* and brought them under the jurisdiction of the Board of Commissioners and British Agents by incorporating them into the colonial administration. It was the autonomous functioning of the *radala* which was removed: but by paying them for their administrative services and allowing them to hold land, their social and economic privileges were kept untouched. *Rajakariya*, the traditional feudal system of services offered to the king and the aristocracy by different caste groups, was abolished, and the structural base of land-holdings was abolished and replaced by taxes and rent: however, it is revealing to note here how the British kept the privileges of the *sangha* intact by exempting the temple lands from tax and showing explicit consideration to them.

Culturally, in contradiction with the liberal ideology, old cultural practices of servitude were replaced by new protocols that expressed the British superiority. Even though they wanted to destroy servitude they replaced it. While making compromises with the native ruling class the British style of government, both structurally and symbolically, took the place of the traditional social order, where all persons were made liable for the service to the government with paid and unpaid labour and with due respect. 'These so-called "exemplary" measures were aimed at destroying traditional loyalties by violence, and at demonstrating to the peasant masses that the power of the "new king" was at least equal to that of the former

Kandyan sovereigns'.[10] In the political *field*, this was a clear expression of the overall British strategy in the Indian subcontinent where the island was treated as a military colony for ruling India. A strategic colony needs internal stability which was mainly achieved by making compromises with the ruling natives. In the economic *field*, this enabled the British to save financial investment on personnel to maintain the military colony, and this solution also enabled the aristocracy to maintain their land and social position among the native population. It is important to note how the shared interests of the local elite and the British formed the power base in keeping the political stability of the island, which was necessary for the British to rule the subcontinent. A political parallel could be drawn with the process of privileging the Protestant landed elite in Ireland by the British in the context of war with Catholic Spain and France. The nature of the relationship of the British with the *radala* and the *sangha* reflects the overall strategic importance of the island, 'the most valuable colonial possession on the globe' for the British Empire as stated by William Pitt earlier.

In consolidating and maintaining this power base a process of cultural homogenisation and administrative centralisation was introduced in keeping with the model of the British nation-state. It is within this setting that both the material and cultural conditions within the island were reshaped, thus determining the nature of different types of collective consciousness and identity formations. Within this power base a new mercantile class and a new racial consciousness emerged; also, some interpretations of Buddhism gained more prominence than others, a factor which played a key role in the formation of modern Buddhist ethno-nationalism or the ideology of the Sri Lankan nation-state. Before exploring the process of this identity formation, which will be discussed and scrutinised in the next chapter, let us first examine the processes of homogenisation by economic, educational, administrative and cultural means. As we have seen Britain was also going through processes of change on diverse levels, for example from a mercantile to a capitalist mode of economy, from an exclusivist Protestant identity to a racialised imperial nationalism etc. The encounter with Lanka needs to be analysed in the context of these processes.

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[10] Ibid., pp.184-187.

1. HOMOGENISATION THROUGH ECONOMIC REFORMS

After the victory over France, Britain emerged as the single most powerful empire on the globe leading it into another phase of economic growth. This growth was characterised by the economic exploitation which accompanied the ideology of liberalisation. As we have seen in the previous chapter this economic strand was theoretically based on the philosophy of ultilitarianism proposed by James Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. This in effect proposed that all the colonies should have the benefits of British liberalism which is characterised by democracy and individual liberty.[11] As van der Veer has shown, this process was also accompanied culturally by a shift in the belief in an exclusivist Protestant state to a 'British moral state' that has a mission to civilise the world.[12] In practice this meant removal of any type of state monopoly over the economy with the aim of a maximisation of profits, which was viewed as progress towards civilisation. It is for this reason that the Colebrook Commission was appointed to introduce necessary reforms to Lanka. Their reforms were aimed at liberalisation of the economy with a view to maximisation of production. This meant the emancipation of the modes of production from administration or separation of the economic sphere from the political sphere, and also the introduction of the increased use of money in order to facilitate exports and imports.[13] These reforms initiated a process of transforming the policy of land tenure which was the very foundation of the traditional socio-political system.

Houtart's study of the system of land ownership in the Kandyan Kingdom shows how traditionally, in principle, the entire land belonged to the king while maintaining three levels of ownership in its distribution. There were royal villages, some of which were given to the peasants (*goyigamas)* or to members of other castes for the services rendered to the King. The other villages were given to the local chiefs either temporarily (*nindagams*) – determined by a particular function attached to it – or permanently (*pravenins*) depending on the family lineage and the continuation of the function attached to it: the temple lands also came under the

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[11] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.28.

[12] van der Veer: 'The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India', p.21.

[13] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.194.

same category. The latter could be termed a kind of private property. On the village level, where the local chief claimed his share (*muttetu*) and the rest of the land was distributed along the same line as above the same pattern was applied. The British abolished this system and introduced another, based on the very same principles of the traditional system, where every person was juridically bound to render service to the government by paying revenues: with regard to the paddy fields either the farmer or the cultivator was bound to pay one tenth of the revenue. In terms of road building, they also maintained the old system of *rajakariya*. The land owning peasants (*goyigamas*) freed themselves from all other obligations to the local chiefs and the rule 'was applied to the letter by the Sinhalese peasantry, a group which aspired to the possession of the land' and this began to create a new social space for groups with different interests.[14] However, the cultural basis remained the same as the social and economic privileges of the *sangha* and the *radala* were unaltered even in the Colebrook reforms. Houtart writes.

> The Colonial political power, on its side, conscious of the powerful symbolic value represented by the *sangha* in the minds of all sections of the population, preserved its means of existence (the temple lands) to the extent of maintaining it as a vital institution of feudal continuity, and this at the very moment when a capitalist economy was developing alongside it.[15]

It has to be kept in mind that when Houtart refers to 'all sections of the population' it means the population of Kandy, and not of the whole island.

With the new reforms that advocated a laissez-faire economy there began to emerge new plantations, mainly coffee, and later tea and coconut. These had a large scale private ownership. Due to the pressure from the planters, who required more land, in 1840, under the new law called Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance, the colonial government claimed all the uncultivated (including forests and pastures) and periodically cultivated land (*chena*). Because the British rule, which was characterised by the liberal and Christian ideologies, could not comprehend the system of local culture and religious beliefs, the capitalist logic of civilising the world could not comprehend the eco-friendly system of farming, where the farmers did not use the entire land for cultivation, leaving some parts for the forests that are necessary for rain. In keeping with the 'new civilisation', in opposition to 'wild' nature, clearing of waste land was carried out. 'The extension of cultivation was

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[14] Ibid., pp.187-188.
[15] Ibid., p.219.

synonymous with progress and the "reclamation of waste land" was a civilising project'.[16]

Along with the influx of capital investors, planters and traders there was also a new movement of labour, mainly from South India. These labourers arrived under hard conditions and worked under gruelling circumstances. Although the liberal and evangelical ethos in Britain had initiated the anti-slavery movement, the capitalist logic of maximisation of profit associated with this ethos introduced a new form of slavery in the plantations in the island of Lanka. The first social group who suffered the capitalist exploitation of the British Empire in the land of Lanka were neither the Lankan Tamils, the Muslims nor the landed Sinhalese peasants. They were mainly the Indian labourers and also the 'low' caste groups whose service-based subsistence was removed and who did not own land. The number of Indian origin Tamils had increased to 128,000 by 1855.[17] Their plight continues even today with a day wage of less than a euro.

The second insurrection took place after the Colebrook reforms and with more reforms being introduced which affected the peasants negatively. If the first one was caused by cultural tensions, the second one, in 1848, was caused by social and economic factors that affected the peasants. The two insurrections reflect different tensions on two different fields – one cultural and the other socioeconomic – as the colonial rule began to develop. The proximate cause of the 1848 uprising was the introduction by the colonial government of a new scheme of taxes. These new measures were introduced when government's revenues began to diminish after the coffee plantations suffered a disease. The coffee plantations, introduced by the Dutch, had flourished so much that the crop was called the 'golden bean'. The pressure of the planters – who by now had formed an association – on the colonial government was strong in seeking the latter's intervention in maintaining the infrastructure of the monoculture economy, which had been badly affected. The village population, comprised of peasants, along with the 'low' castes' groups, who had already been affected by the burden of the plantation economy, formed the material basis of the uprising. Even though the majority of the Sinhala peasants had not lost their land at this time, there were growing social tensions between the

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[16] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.34.
[17] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.200.

planters who sought title deeds in buying land, and the peasants, who did not have them. Some peasants wanted to sell land because the demand was increasing. There was also a growing dependency on the small traders who had arrived from the Maritime Provinces and Malabar. Social tensions were also created by the British government's introduction of licensed liquor shops. *Chena* cultivation and the basic traditional infrastructure of villages were disrupted by the building of roads and coffee roasting factories. The cultural basis for the uprising was provided by the religious system and the model of the traditional monarchy. The Leader was a person who claimed to be a descendant of a former king.[18] The uprising was brutally crushed by the colonial government. Even though the Kingdom of Kandy was annexed as a British colony without a battle, the two insurrections reflected the conflict between the native and the colonial powers.

Could the above two insurrections be called precursors to modern ethno-nationalism? In order to understand the nature of collective consciousness of the period, it is important to identify the nature of the resistance of Kandyan society to British rule and to the changes the latter introduced. It has often been said that the Sinhala peasants did not want to work in the plantations as a mark of protest because they thought that it was demeaning to them to work under the colonial ruler, thus depicting it as a sense of national pride with an essentialist collective consciousness. Even the well-researched recent work of Elizabeth Harris on the British encounter with Theravada Buddhism also makes this claim. 'Since the Sinhala people were unwilling to work for the British on what had been their own land, labour came from India, at first seasonal and migrant.'[19] However, an analysis of the economic base of the peasantry shows evidence to the contrary. More than a sense of national pride prevented the peasants who owned land from working in the plantations – they had no need to. The process of pauperisation of the peasants had not started at this stage of the colonial economy. A process had been initiated that on the one hand incorporated the elite into the colonial administrative system asserting their social position, and on the other, still allowed the majority of peasants to maintain some parts of land, which formed the village based cultivation. In questioning the popularly held views about the Sinhala peasants, N.

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[18] Ibid., pp.202-205.

[19] Elizabeth J. Harris: *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, (London, Routledge, 2006), p.37.

Shanmugaratnam clearly shows that compared to India, it took a long time for Sinhala peasants to become landless. Even so, by showing the difference between pauperisation and proletarisation he points out that the pauperisation of the Sinhala peasants did not lead to the creation of a working class because the peasants who later became landless due to the expansion of the plantations to the Low-country were resettled in other areas by the British government. This helped the colonial government to maintain political 'tranquillity' in the military colony by maintaining the feudal system of social relationships under the *radala*.[20]

In such a setting the feudal relationships were maintained on a village basis and the relationship between the aristocracy and the peasants continued unchanged. The religious meanings that operated as social function and the traditional forms of expressing political sovereignty through monarchy remained the same during the first half of the nineteenth century. These conditioned the nature of both uprisings which were articulated as an expression of allegiance to the old monarchy. The rebellions were about a return to the former kingdom to establish a monarchy and it was the aristocracy who led the resistances with that ideology. Even though the role of the *sangha* was significant in expressing the symbolic meaning of sovereignty on both occasions, the resistance had not been racialised. Therefore, despite the fact that the process of homogenisation through economic reforms had already been initiated these movements cannot be considered as fully representing the ideological movement of nationalism that later envisaged a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state based on a centralised sovereignty and a fixed bordered territory that covers the entire island. Even though the second insurrection emerged from the peasants as a consequence of economic and social grievances why did they aspire to go back to the monarchy? Houtart remarks:

> We must take account here of the real situation of these masses, for whom the political issues were incomprehensible, but who understood in a thoroughly practical manner the injustice and the corruption of a power which they found difficult to identify. On the contrary, the "possible King"

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[20] N. Shanmugaratnam: 'Colonial Agrarian Changes and Underdevelopment' in *Capital and Peasant Production: Studies in the Continuity and Discontinuity of Agrarian Structures in Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Charles Abeysekara, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1985), pp.1-10. He substantiates his argument with the letters of the period edited by K.M. De Silva. See K.M. De Silva (ed.): *Letters on Ceylon 1846-50: The Administration of Viscount Torrington and The 'Rebellion' of 1948*, (Kandy and Colombo, K.V.G. De Silva & Sons, 1965), pp.17-18. Within the imperial economic agenda it was the peasants in India who first were pauperised with the victory of industrial capital over merchant capital.

> symbolized a known social order, "a society without planters, without labourers and without taxes", a society of the past, which by the structure of its organisation would provide the populations, today reduced to an amorphous mass, with a regular and quasi-natural leadership, in which the social groups – even the dominated – retained an identity, in which the system of meanings shared by all ensured the stability of the present and future order.[21]

Shanmugaratnam and Kumari Jayawardena show that the economic reforms led more to an accumulation of mercantile rather than industrial capital.[22] A new commercial class, mainly from the Low-country, who were totally dependent on British capital – invested in the plantations – began to emerge.

In this sense, the Lankan colonial economy was based on British capital, Lankan land and Indian labour appended to the landed peasantry, *sangha* and *radala* who were conditioned by a feudal system of social relationships. Homogenisation through economic reform was therefore attempted through dependent capitalism and this dependency conditioned the cultural recycling of a pre-existing ethno-symbolic belief system articulated in the Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalism in the late nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. This will be discussed in relation to the Buddhist revival in the next chapter.

S.J. Tambiah describes the pre-colonial feudal era as 'regimes which clearly manifested differentiation and hierarchy of power'[23] where the land belonged to the king and the aristocratic families.[24] As N. Shanmugaratnam writes when the British first captured the Maritime Provinces, the pre-capitalist traditional economic structure had already been modified to serve the mercantile interests of the Dutch East India Company and before them, the Portuguese.[25] The British introduced a plantation economy in the Sinhala regions, undermining not only the interests of the peasantry, but also of the aristocracy. Shanmugaratnam points out how the peasant revolts in 1818 and 1848 caused the British to reconsider their policies and reintroduce the

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21 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.206.

22 Jayawardena notes that this type of accumulation was an appendage to imperialism which created a 'dependent' as opposed to 'independent' economic class whose 'existence was based on protection and opportunities provided by the colonial state'.p.xviii.

23 S. J.Tambiah: *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.107.

24 The economy was village based where the peasant cultivated the land and had to send a portion of the harvest to the king or to the landlords. There was also compulsory work that had to be done in service to the king. Cf. Houtart, Francois and Lemercinier, Genevieve: *The Great Asiatic Religions and Their Social Functions* (Louvain-la-neuve, Universite Catholique de Louvain, 1985), pp.108-117.

25 N. Shanmugaratnam: 'Colonial Agrarian Changes and Underdevelopment' in *Social Science Review*, No 2, Jan, (1980), p.4.

traditional aristocratic land ownership in view of keeping the peasants 'within the confines of the traditional relations emanating from traditional land tenure.'[26] This created an elite Sinhalese land ownership under the colonial system that entered into the plantation economy with the British.[27] As shown by Kumari Jayawardena, by 1889 there were five members of one aristocratic family who owned 7,346 acres and six members of another family who owned 10,142 acres, all of whom were Sinhalese.[28] She writes that the landowners who belonged to the *goyigama* caste (top in the hierarchy of Sinhala caste system) by their loyalty to the British 'gained titular rank and further extensions of their landed wealth.'[29] It also has to be noted, as described by N. Shanmugaratnam, that the Sinhala peasantry was also pacified by the British by constructing irrigation works in the Dry Zone bordering Tamil areas and that they were not pauperised at the initial stage of the plantation economy for there was no need to acquire their land. This explains the rationale behind employing the South Indian Tamils as plantation labourers by the British.

2. HOMOGENISATION THROUGH ADMINISTRATION

The repression of the two insurrections made it possible for the British to dismantle the differences that existed between the former Kandyan kingdom and the Maritime Provinces and implement their plan of making one single administration. The colonial government also had already started the creation of a single administrative unit by 1832. In keeping with attempts to build homogenised nation-states that would guarantee the individual liberties in the colony, the Colebrook Commission introduced a uniform administrative system dividing the island into five administrative units.[30] These divisions were later increased to seven, one being added in 1845 and the other in 1873; and again made into nine in 1889. With these units the ideology of a uniform administration was implemented materially by creating an infrastructure of new roads that connected the main traditional territories with each

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[26] Loc. cit.

[27] Frank Wright shows why the colonizers followed this strategy in some colonies because 'the colonizing presence was slender' and 'it was essential to generate some indigenous support for the system.' Cf. Wright, Frank: *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p.56.

[28] Kumari Jayawardena,: *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association and Sanjiva Books, 2003), p.196-197.

[29] Ibid., p.14.

other and made Colombo the capital. The road that connects Kandy and Colombo had been built and bridged by 1832 and the road leading from North to South was built around 1870. This brought to an end the pre-existing divisions that were based on galactic politics with overlapping boundaries, as well as the political division of the Kandyan Kingdom and the Maritime Provinces created by the previous two colonial powers.

3. Western Education as a Means of Homogenisation

While the symbolic reinforcement of Buddhist sovereignty was taking place, another cultural process of homogenisation was introduced through education. Along side administrative uniformity, steps towards a cultural homogeneity were initiated with the introduction of an education system which was aimed at creating a class of people to work in the civil services and this also cut down the expenses of the colony. As the *radala* began to realise that their position would be secure under the British system they asked for English education and adopted British forms of knowledge and ideology. Because the British liberal ethos permitted religious pluralism there was no need for the *radala* to break away from Buddhism and they continued to maintain their relationship with the *sangha* and the peasants while consolidating their socio-political leadership in the Kandyan Provinces – 'as authentically Sinhalese' – and tried to maintain a distinct identity opposing the elites of the Maritime Provinces who emerged as a new class through the commercial sector of the plantation economy.[31] The Buddhist and Christian elites were also culturally homogenous. They shared the ideology of a British Empire, though religious belongings were different. If this liberal ethos is seen as the beginning of a process of secularisation in the Island of Lanka, it took place not with the separation of the state and the religious institution as in Europe, but with a reinforcement of Buddhist symbolic sovereignty where feudal social relations as well as loyalty to the British Empire were maintained. As we have seen the liberal ethos was also closely associated with a civilising mission carried out by a superior race. In that sense the Lankan initiation to secularisation was racialised. Also the ambiguity of the liberal ethos can be seen, as the education system was solely run by the Christian institutions. Even though the British government

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[30] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.29.
[31] Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.218.

maintained a secular liberal ideology officially it was considered to be a superior cultural ideology and the missionaries maintained the religious equivalent of this superiority. Moreover, even though the colonial government was neutral in principle in matters of religious faiths, in practice it was ambiguous, as the colonial officers as well as educational institutes were Christian. These institutes also had an agenda for proselytisation. Tambiah writes,

> The Central School Commission, which took its place in 1842, was packed with Christian ministers but no Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim was included (The number of English schools rose from 38 in 1841 to 60 in 1948)... (U)ntil 1879 every grant-in-aid school was a Christian school and in 1899 out of a total of 1172 grant-in-aid schools, fewer than hundred were Buddhist institutions.[32]

Within this context, while the religious symbol of the Sacred Tooth Relic that legitimated political power was handed down to the local elite, on the social level religious institutions began to create conflicting identities based on religious affiliations. However, the education system catered to the economic and political interests of the empire. Imtiaz Ahmed notes how this began to create 'conditions for the organization and reproduction of an intellectual dependency of the Sri Lankans on the West' producing an English educated Sinhala and Tamil elite.[33] The Sinhala elite came mostly from the landed families engaged in plantations, mining and trade. The Tamil elite, who did not have access to the benefits of plantation economy, came from the professions that were created under the colonial state. Most of the schools were based in the low country Sinhala regions and in the Jaffna peninsula of the Tamils. In fact, as Imtiaz Ahmed points out, it is this system of education that contributed to the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils in the later years over public and state sector employment.[34]

4. HOMOGENISATION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Administrative unification was not only accompanied by the rational principles (*logos)* of the British (and also the French) nation-states and an ambiguous

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[32] Tambiah: *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka,* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.36.

[33] Imtiaz Ahmed: 'Communal Conflict in Modern Sri Lanka: Search for a Resolution' in *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol.1, No.2, p.85.

[34] Loc. cit.

education system, but also by an ideology or worldview of racial categories and of a civilising mission which reinforced a particular reading of the native history. Knowledge about the society and history of the colonised people and their land was necessary to rule. With regard to knowledge about the colony, it was the colonial officers themselves who gathered information and began to write at the initial stage of the British rule about the religion, culture and society of the peoples. Their perceptions were conditioned by their relationship to the British Empire and its worldview. Romila Thapar shows how the two key categories with which the Orient was perceived were race and Oriental Despotism. It was this type of knowledge that was imparted in the school for the colonial officers in London.[35] Race fitted into cultural superiority, and the other justified the project of modernisation characterised by a liberal economy and democracy. Orientalism, as we have seen reflects the very characteristics of Occidentalism. The desire to identify the authentic culture of a glorious past emerged from the very British perception of its history and it was heavily conditioned by the English Reformation. This type of perception reflects a crisis in the epistemology of history or historiography of collective identities. We have seen in our analysis of the emergence of the British nation-state how its historiography was conditioned by a belief in a golden past, a fallen age and the contemporary moment of reclaiming the pristine glory. The contemporary moment of the colonial practice was also a moment to fulfill the mission of civilising the world, which is associated with reclaiming the glorious past.

In the colonial practice of administration, economic reforms and education what was the process of the development of a collective consciousness of the diverse ethnic and religious communities within the island and how were existing cultural forms conditioned by the perception of racial categories and the belief in the coloniser's civilising mission? As Elizabeth Nissan notes it is important to identify the 'history of the making of history' in order to understand the politics of interpretation of modern Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism.[36] The natives were not passive recipients of new identities that were imagined and given by the British. What the latter did was to create a cultural, economic and political field associated with processes of homogenisation within which the already existing, but fluid collective

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[35] Thapar: *Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History*, pp.394-397.

[36] Elizabeth Nissan: "History in the Making: Anuradhapura and Sinhala Buddhist Nation" in *Social Analysis*, Vol.25, 1989, Part 1, p.64.

memories and identities (within galactic and dynastic politics) could be interpreted as fixed, stable and essentialist. The 'perennialist' and 'primordialist' approaches to understanding nationalism and national identity often underestimate the dynamics of the history of making history. The 'modernist' approach as we have seen earlier, does not recognise the symbolic meanings of pre-existing cultural narratives. Some studies carried out by postcolonial critics will illuminate our understanding of the recycling or transformation of pre-existing cultural narratives and their politics of interpretations under the colonial practice.

Pradeep Jeganathan notes that the making of new roads by clearing forests was an ordering of the landscape in a civilising mission. This process led to the discovery of the ruins of Anuradhapura, which later became a powerful material space to justify the perennial existence of a two thousand year old Sinhala Buddhist civilisation. *Mahavamsa* was also 'discovered' and first translated into English by a colonial officer. Jeganathan calls this process a 'violent transformation'.[37] During the same period the Anuradhapura civilisation (543 BCE- 302 CE) was romanticised by the British colonial writers (most of whom were officers) who equated it with the 'zenith that was reached by Greece and Rome'.[38] John Rogers points out how the writings of William Knighton and James Tennent in the middle of the century had a lasting impact on the island's historiography.

> Knighton and Tennent applied nineteenth-century notions of nationality to the people described in ancient texts. They pictured Sinhala-Buddhists as possessing an inherent identity separate from (others) both Veddas, whom

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[37] Within a context where the British assumed that neither the people of India and Lanka had a sense of chronological history or positivist historical records texts such as *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, *Puranas* or epics like the *Mahabarata* and *Ramayana* were considered ahistorical fiction, the *Mahavamsa* was discovered in 1830 by George Turner, a colonial officer. However, in the case of Lanka this perception changed with the 'discovery' of *Mahavamsa*, the existence of which was not known to most of the Lankans. As Obeysekara points out there had been more than one (oral) tradition regarding the life and death of King Duttagamini, the central character of the narrative. Obeysekara: *Meditation on Conscience*, (Colombo, Social Scientist's Association of Sri Lanka, 1988), 26-32. Jeganathan outlines three levels of 'transformative operation' of the text carried out by the colonial officers: from oral to textual, from text to positivist history and from claim to acceptance. The text was seen as a chronological history of the island of Lanka which also illuminates the history of Indian Buddhism. Undermining the reality of pre-colonial galactic politics, the reading of the text began to treat the history of Lanka as 'a separate analytic field' from the history of India. Pradeep Jeganathan: 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura', in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1995), pp.110-113.

[38] This statement of William Knighton has been quoted by Jeganathan in his work. Jeganathan, p.116.

> they believed were the pre-Vijayan inhabitants, and Malabars, who spoke Tamil and various southern Indian languages.[39]

The age of decline of Sinhala-Buddhist civilisation was seen as caused by the South Indian invasions (along with Portuguese and Dutch). In the age of mature colonisation the native writers themselves, in association with the Royal Asiatic Society of Colombo which was mainly formed by the Christian clerics, colonial officers and planters, had the same approach in perceiving local history. Ideologically, as Jeganathan shows 'the degradation/decline of the "Sinhala civilisation" and the ascendancy of British "civilisation" suits the *contemporary* moment' of the colonial practice of restoring the colony's glorious past under the British Empire – the civilising duty of the superior race.[40] Ostensibly, the liberal ethos of the empire seems to have identified and recognised a 'great' Sinhala Buddhist civilisation, but this identification was made by a selective reading of native histories whereby an essentialist difference between Aryan and Dravidian civilisations was reiterated. Marisa Agnell, in her critique of the Aryan myth of racial superiority shows how Max Muller transformed his initial Aryan theory of languages into an Aryan theory of race which was propagated by the British Orientalist writers.[41] By a critical examination of the publications of the Royal Asiatic Society of Colombo (which she calls 'a Voice for the Aryan Theory of Race, 1880-1895') Agnell shows how British and German Orientalism overlapped and led to the perception of the existence of a close affinity between 'the Sinhalese Aryans and British Aryans' as opposed to the 'inferior' Dravidians (Tamils).[42] This was also accompanied by the idea that the Tamils were invaders and that 'they built nothing in Ceylon, but had destroyed what others had built'. Even though the British were colonising the land during that contemporary

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[39] John Rogers: "Historical Images of the British Period" in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routeldge, 1990), pp.90-92.

[40] Ibid., pp.116- 117.

[41] Marisa Agnell: 'Understanding the Aryan Theory', in *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Mithran Tiruchelvam and Dattathreya C. S., (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998) pp.44- 48. Even though Muller himself later rejected any essential link between language and race the racialised notion of language gained predominance in the nationalist discourse both in India and Lanka by the end of the century. Thapar, p.391.

[42] Arjun Gunaratne using the term 'hybrid' as anything that is of mixed origin (as opposed to the idea of a mixture of pure and original substances) writes that 'all cultures are hybrid and have always been so. They are admixtures of mixtures. And so on ad infinitum'. With this notion in mind he has shown how Aryan and Dravidian languages intermingled with each other and how Sinhala and Tamil cultures had a mixed origin. Arjun Gunaratne: "What's in a Name? Aryans and Dravidians in the Making of Sri Lankan Identities in *The Hybrid Island: Culture Crossings and the Invention of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Neluka Silva, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 2nd Printing, 2004), pp.21-26.

moment Agnell notes how the British were depicted as those who 'brought progress'.[43] The colonial government restored the archaeological sites in Anuradhapura creating a physical space that depicted the ancient glory. Jeganathan remarks that 'at the centre of the archaeological project is restoration: remaking of Anuradhapura, and perceiving it in its 'ancient glory'. Anuradhapura is now *not* degenerate: it is an 'ancient', 'aesthetic' commodity. It has emerged as a 'sign of the modern'.[44] In the eyes of the Sinhala Buddhists this sign of the modern became a sacred space which evoked a *mythos* of chosenness related to the guardianship of a pure form of Buddhism. The belief that Buddha himself handed over this responsibility to the Sinhala Buddhists was reinforced. It is within this context that the territory became sacralised. Moreover, historiography was informed by a racial theory and the sectarian perspective of the *vamsic* tradition was transformed into a racial one whereby perspectival knowledge was treated as objective knowledge. In this process the symbolic meaning *(mythos)* of the perspectival history was totally ignored and was treated as a positivist history leading to the historicisation of *mythos* and mythologisation of history. A choice of the 'pasts' was made and the knowledge about the past was filtered by the lenses of the present. At the end of the nineteenth century this knowledge began to be propagated as the authoritative history of the island of Lanka. It was this type of a perspectival knowledge which assumed an inseparable link between Sinhala ethnicity and Buddhism (Buddhism as a racial characteristic of the Sinhalas, as Schalk puts it) that was propagated through the press, fiction, theatre and preaching and began to form the collective consciousness of the emerging merchant classes at the end of the century. As the formal education system improved, the vernacular literate (who knew some of the narratives of the *Mahavamsa* orally but were not aware of a written document) started viewing the existing myths through a new lens. Wickramasinghe notes.

> The Mahavamsa as a written text was valued by nationalists more than folktales and oral culture and the revivalist leaders, in their search for ethnically and energising themes from the community's historical tradition, found a most satisfying solution in giving credence to Aryan origins in northern India.[45]

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[43] Agnell: 'Understanding the Aryan Theory', p.59.
[44] Jeganathan: 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura', p.128.
[45] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.89

Homogenisation through administrative unification (based on *logos*) was compounded by a racialised *mythos* of an authentic past (the historicisation of *mythos*). The very *logos* of administrative unification was ideologically conditioned by the British belief in a civilisational superiority. The consideration of the Sinhalas as Aryans (as opposed to the Dravidian Tamils and other minorities) within the colonial discourse created a superiority complex among the elite of the majority similar to that of the British. This constructed cultural affinity was also necessary to maintain the required political stability in the military colony of the Raj.

Furthermore, rationalist interpretations of Buddhism which was promoted by the Theosophists, especially Olcott were opposed to the Christian view of an omnipotent creator God. This, in conjunction with the racialised version of Buddhism, contributed to downplay the symbolic and moral meanings of popular myths. Obeysekara remarks:

> Thus the great life stories of the Buddha, the jataka (?), tended to be rejected as folk tales meant for the edification of an ignorant populace, and not as a repository of Buddhist ethics and morality, and a concretisation of the difficult and abstract doctrinal tradition.[46]

He argues it is within this modern process that 'the myth-model of the troubled conscience' of the Asian kings (Asoka, Duttagamini and also Arjuna), who engaged in wars by taking the lives of others was suppressed and a king (or the polity of the nation) without a conscience was resurrected (or constructed) in envisaging a Sinhala Buddhsit nationhood.[47] In spite of this unintended outcome of the rationalist reading of Buddhism in Lanka, we also need to appreciate the positive contributions that Olcott made by retrieving the universal ethical principles in Buddhism as opposed to its racialised version. In doing so we need to differentiate between Olcott's romanticisation of the East and British and German racial theories.[48] This will be

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[46] Obeysekara: *Meditation on Conscience*, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1988), p.39.

[47] This myth-model, according to Obeysekara reflects the real life conflicts of people who have a sensitive conscience and it is constructed from reality and affects the reality and its trajectory. Ibid., p.16.

[48] Colonel Olcott (1832-1907) was an American who was a social reformer and a spiritualist who helped to revive Buddhism in Lanka. With Helena Petrova Blavestky, he founded the Theosophical Society, which sought to explore the spiritual wisdom of the 'Eastern' religions. Olcott became a Buddhist in Lanka and wrote a Buddhist catechism by retrieving the basic ethical principles in Buddhism. He was also a critic of the Christian churches in Lanka and intervened to secure the rights of the Buddhists from the colonial state. His association with Sinhala and Tamil politicians alike carried the potential to generate an inclusive form of nationalism. For a detailed account of his role in religious and political life of Lanka see Saddamangala Karunaratne: *Olcott's Contribution to the Buddhist Renaissance* (Colombo, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1980). For a buddological

discussed when we explore the impact of religious revivals on Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

While these intellectual and cultural undercurrents were being generated in the latter half of the century by historicising *mythos*, the renaming of the administrative units applied the *logos* of the liberal ethos where differences were levelled by an ideology of uniformity and progress, (or progress defined as uniformity) which treated the entire land as one single unit. Also, because the Kandyan aristocracy remained the native leadership, this very renaming of the entire island created a new material space for the *mythos* of Buddhist symbolic sovereignty to be interpreted as a structurally centralised territory. The Kandyan Convention did not use the word unitary. Its focus was to annex the Kandyan Provinces to the British Empire: 'the Dominion of the Kandyan Provinces is vested in the sovereignty of the British Empire...'[49] Nevertheless, within the new administration the Kandyan aristocracy could represent the entire land both symbolically and structurally. The symbolic representation was reinforced in 1852 when the British Crown, following the tensions on both sides, handed over custody of the Sacred Tooth Relic to the *radala*. The handing over of custody of the Tooth Relic, which was the symbol of native political legitimacy, implicitly recognised the role of the *radala* and the *sangha* in the polity of the island. It expressed the ancient legitimacy of the Sinhala Kingdoms, and the British did so while setting in motion a new set of administrative and economic practices and the recycling of the pre-existing ethno-religious narratives of the *vamsic* tradition.

There were two strands of thought that gained ground with a racial perspective. One was the Kandyan heritage and the other was the historical landscape of Rajarata (the land of the kings), the political domain covered by *Mahawamsa*. With regard to the former Wickramasinghe shows how its culture was seen as 'pure' (despite the fact that it was a hybrid of local, south Indian and Western cultures), whereas the Low-country Sinhalese culture was seen as 'composite'. There was also a tendency to view hybridity as a mixture of East and West, but when the 'Oriental' cultures mixed they

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analysis of his contribution to the religious life in Lanka see Harris: *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, pp.139-147.

[49] 'The Kandyan Convention: The Proclamation of 2nd March, 1815', clause 4 cited in Wimalanada Thennekoon: *Buddhism in Ceylon under the Christian Powers and the Educational and Religious Policy of the British Government in Ceylon: 1797-1832*, (Colombo, Gunasena, 1963), pp.425- 429.

were seen as authentic.[50] Although the Low-country was more literate and developed and culturally heterogeneous than the Up-country, the latter claimed to represent authenticity and therefore, political leadership which was supported by the British. However, Wickramasinghe argues that both the Kandyan heritage and the *vamsic* tradition co-existed as two strands in the emerging nationalist discourse, in the emerging mercantile economic order, where the Low-countrymen outnumbered the Kandyan elite, the *vamsic* tradition became more popular than the Kandyan heritage as a result of its use by the Low-country mercantile class to assert their 'authenitic' right to political recognition (that the colonial state had only given to the Kandyan elite) and also to economic expansion over the Muslim and the Indian mercantile classes. [51] At the beginning the twentieth century in the later stages of the incipient nationalism and in the later postcolonial nation-building both narratives overlapped and created an inseparable link between territorial sovereignty (of the whole island) and Sinhala Buddhist national identity, based on the notion of a glorious past informed by the racilaised interpretation of the *vamsic* tradition. On the social level, as shown by Jayawardena, this overlapping is a result of the process of 'nobodies' of the Low-country becoming 'somebodies' (like the Kandyans) through intermarriages, economic expansion and political consolidation. In the era of post-colonial nation-building the alliance between these two elite groups emerged as a 'dynastic democracy' with an overarching Sinhala Buddhist national identity and a dependent colonial economy.[52] This will be explored more in the next chapter.

In the process of the colonial recycling of knowledge Wickramasinghe points out how in the area of gender differences the perception of biological differences was informed by the British ideology of the nineteenth century. 'Men were to be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth; while women from the sanctuary of the home were to nurture their husbands and children.' However, the British did not romanticise the women in Lanka. Their attire was not exuberant as expected and it was perceived as improper by the British men. The women in Lanka did not fit into the category of idealised 'oriental woman as a person mysterious, beautiful, but tragic, feeble and in need of protection'.[53] The British found

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[50] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, pp.62-65.
[51] Ibid., p.73.
[52] Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies*, pp.357-358.
[53] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.67.

more stereotypes to solidify the Orientalist categories among the local elite men who were aspiring for power with claims to authenticity than among women.[54] In this way, the process of homogenisation within the colonial state was conditioned by a male-dominated perspective. However, as shown by Jayawardena in the era of post-colonial nation-building gender was not an obstacle for the women of the elite ruling 'dynasties' to be rulers of the country.[55] Tessa Bartholomeusz shows how the rise of two women to state leadership in Lanka – within a context where women were considered inferior in society – reflects the popular image of Buddhist motherhood which was a 'metaphor for dependent-rising' and therefore 'compassion' and 'cooperation' which could have brought about ethnic and religious harmony to the land.[56] These leaders could not comprehend the deeper meaning of this metaphor and could not rise above their class and party interests, which were compounded by the Sinhala Buddhist ideology. The compassionate image of Buddhist motherhood was subsumed by the image of the Vihara Mahadevi (in *Mahavamsa*), the mother of Duttagamini, who is believed to have encouraged her son to wage war with the Tamil King. In the post-colonial nation-building the image of this ancient queen was used both by the nationalist theoreticians as well as political parties in propagating the belief in a centralised nation-state with a Sinhala Buddhist identity.[57] This we will discuss in detail later.

The analyses of Wickramasinghe, Jeganathan, Agnell, and Gunaratna (as post-colonial critics), that we have so far discussed have thrown light on the relationship between power and culture in the formation of collective identities, especially Sinhala Buddhist. However, the process of deconstructing needs to be complemented with an alternative interpretation of pre-existing narratives to form a vision that can reconstruct the Lankan culture and polity to promote peaceful co-existence among diverse groups. This will be attempted in the last part of this work. Even though the religious revivals that emerged were primarily a reaction against colonial Christianity and asserted the local cultures in a modern way through the press and schools, these

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[54] .Loc. cit.

[55] Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p.358.

[56] Tessa Bartholomeusz: 'Mothers of Buddhas, Mothers of Nations: Kumaranatunga and Her Meteoric Rise to Power in Sri Lanka' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol.25, Ch.1. (Spring, 1999), p.223.

[57] Micheal Schaffer: 'From Victoria to Vihara Mahadevi' in *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Mithran Tiruchelvam, and Dattathreya C.S. (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), p.82.

revivals, especially the Buddhist revival, could not articulate a broader nationalist movement that would embrace diversity. The material basis of this movement was built on the support of the merchant classes who were in constant tension with other trading communities within the colonial economy. Let us now explore the rise of the merchant classes and their relationship with the religious revivals.

5. Homogenisation and Cultural Revivals

As the plantation economy gave rise to a new native bourgeoisie class – who were predominantly Low-country Sinhalese – the tension in the social space gained a material basis. Their need for further economic expansion was curtailed, mainly by Muslim and South Indian traders: their hopes for social and political recognition were blocked by the local aristocracy who were closer to the colonial government. The structural dependency on the colonial economy and the feudal relationships maintained by the Kandyan landed elite did not create any material space for this new class to deal with the contradictions that they faced within the British Empire. The only way of facing the contradictions was through a cultural resistance, which surfaced as a Buddhist revival based on the pre-existing cultural tensions between the native traditions and Christianity. As Aloysius Pieris puts it, the colonial government and the Christian missionaries indulged in 'a three-pronged aggression against the non-Christians in general and the Buddhists in particular' through the arenas of education, press and public debates.[58] The revival movement against the Anglicised elite and the missionaries – who mainly controlled the education system, which was also the path to economic gain and political power – were funded by the new merchant class. Kumari Jayawardena details in her well researched work *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* how the castes particularly *karava*, *durawa* and *salagama* from the Low-country who had joined this class sponsored the Buddhist revivalist movement.[59] The context of the revival has to be kept in mind here. On the political level, it was the context where the religious symbol of the Sacred Tooth Relic that legitimised political power had already been

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[58] Aloysius Pieris: *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Interreligious Studies in the Reverential Mode*, (Colombo, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2005), p.9.

[59] Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p.263-269.

handed down to the local elite, and on the social level, religious institutions had began to create conflicting identities based on religious affiliations.

Among the diverse ethnic and religious groups of the emerging class there were various levels of involvement in the new economy. Because of the unfavourable conditions for agriculture in the peninsula the Tamils from Jaffna entered the new system as professionals through missionary education.[60] The Muslims were mostly traders. The bulk of the new class consisted of Sinhala Buddhists from the Maritime Provinces who were merchants, plantation owners, professionals and different types of renters (transport, liquor etc.) who formed the main material basis of the emerging Sinhala polity. Awareness about these economic formations of the colonial state is necessary in understanding the characteristics of the formation of ethnic and religious consciouness of diverse groups in the land. Even though the professionals from Jaffna had a Western education they resisted conversion and the Christian dominance of education and promoted Hinduism, particularly its Saiva Siddhanta (wisdom of Saiva) form, and the Tamil language and culture. This was mainly pioneered by Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879).[61] The Muslims also responded by asserting their religiosity and constructed mosques and schools for Arabic instruction and opened up Muslim charities.[62]

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[60] For a detailed analysis of the relationship between the Tamils' (particularly the Northern Jaffna Tamils') socioeconomic and cultural life and their participation in the state and public sector employment see R. S. Perinpanayagaam: 'The Social Foundation of Educational and Economic Activity in Jaffna, Sri Lanka' in in *Kailas:Kailasapathy Commemoration Volume*, (eds.) M. Chitralega, K. Shanmugalimgam, S.Maunaguru (Jaffna, Prof. K. Kailasapthy Commemoration Committee, 1988), pp.83-100.

[61] Jayawardena, p.274. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson outlines the early beginning of Tamil-Hindu revival pioneered by Navalar. Countering Christian proselytisation, Navalar organised a system of Tamil Hindu schools so that Tamil children would not be subjected to conversion while attending Christian schools. He himself was educated under Fr. Peter Percival and had helped the latter initially to translate the Bible into Tamil. It has to be noted here that on the scholarly level, compared to the relationship between the Sinhala Christians and the Sinhala Buddhists, the relationships between the Tamil Christians and Hindu Tamils have been more dialogical and enduring. One of Navalar's brilliant students was C.W. Tamotheram Pillai (1832-1901), a Christian who became an eminent Tamil scholar and formed the 'Jaffna School'with a group of Tamil scholars by promoting Navalar's literary work. Even though the key features of this movement were love of country, love of language and love of the classical dance (as a devotional practice), as the movement tried to disconnect language from religion 'the Tamil cultural awakening did not become segmented or sectarian... The Tamil language, with all its literary formations, had a universal appeal...'. The Tamil Christians also shared the effects of this revival. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson: *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origin and Development in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (London, Hurst & Company, 1999). pp.28-30.

[62] Jayawardena , pp.224-226, 277. Orabi Pasha, who was the Egyptian leader of the 1882 revolt against the British , during his exile in the island (1883-1901) began to inspire the local Muslims ' in matters ranging from dress to modern education' and promoted the education of Muslim children

Obeysekara's use of the term 'Protestant Buddhism' refers to the two main characteristics of the Buddhist revival: antipathy towards the British colonial rule and this-worldly asceticism. The latter was a feature in Protestantism which was reflected in the Buddhist lay leadership and the temperance movement in Lanka. Elisabeth Harris evaluates Obeysekara's position from a theological and buddological perspective.[63] Addressing specifically the British encounter with Theravada Buddhism and the Buddhist revival she has demonstrated a vast ambivalence of responses among the British to Buddhism during the nineteenth century. They are categorised into periods of interaction of scholarship, which were conditioned by particular contexts which gave rise to multiple discourses. There were Christian proselytisers as well as Buddhist sympathisers (especially the Theosophists) among the British. Harris, showing how in forming modern Buddhism, there was mutuality between the Western sympathizers with Buddhism and the Lankan Buddhists lays emphasis on the agency of the latter. She writes that the key to this process is not the Orientalist stereotypical projections, ' but the need of Buddhists on the ground to counter missionary writing and their discovery that the best strategy was to use the arguments of European contesters of Christianity and to counterbalance each missionary criticism with alternative textual material.'[64] She shows how modern Buddhism reasserted its superstition-free, ethically superior, scientifically rational and positive character in reaction to the missionary projection of irrational, unscientific and nihilistic Buddhism. She also notes how non-reliance on an outside power that determines the human fate (non-theistic character in Buddhism) became the central theme in modern Buddhism compared to the theistic notion in Christianity. The Four Noble Truths were seen as rational and *nibbana* was depicted as worth attaining.

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including the girls. Siddi Lebbe (1838-1898) and A. M. Wapche Marikkar (1868-1925) were the local pioneers of this revival. See also Vellaithamby Ameerdeen: *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka*, (Kandy, Centre for Minority Studies, 2006), p.41. See M. A. Nuhman for the development of meanings of the words 'Moors', 'Mohammedans' and 'Muslims'. The first two words were used by the colonisers and the non-Muslims. Initially these were also used interchangeably by the Muslim educated class, but later as the ethnic consciousness grew they began to use only the word Muslim for themselves. He shows how an ethnic consciousness began to develop among different heterogeneous groups of Muslims as a result of the Sinhala and Tamil hostilities towards them during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nuhman: *Understanding Sri Lankan Muslim Identity*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2004) pp.3-4, 13-15.

63 Richard Gombrich and Gananatha Obeysekara: *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1988), pp.202-240.

64 Harris: *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, p.187.

'Above all, Buddhism was presented as optimistic, and Buddha as the greatest of teachers, whose historicity could not be doubted and whose life was unconnected with any form of violence or evil'.[65] There was also a strand of thought showing that Buddhism was capable of generating Christian-like qualities necessary for the emerging capitalist enterprises. Harris points out given the diversity within Buddhism most of these currents of thought are not altogether at variance with the Lankan Buddhist tradition.

However, what is most revealing for our study is her comment on the overall context of the revival: 'what is new was the entity created when all parts were put together in the context of imperialism, socioeconomic change and Western scientific rationalism'.[66] This she does not elaborate sufficiently, perhaps due to methodological reasons (I would argue that our methodological approaches can prevent us from seeing the wider political picture, which is necessary for our understanding of the exclusivist construction of Sinhala Buddhist nationhood). The emphases laid on the multiple discourses and on the native agency are useful as long as they provide space in countering generalisations and exclusivist ideologies within the colonial practice and in the moral envisioning of an alternative paradigm for a just and peaceful co-existence among diverse ethnic and religious communities. However, the danger here is to overlook the overall political impact of the British Raj on the collective consciousness of particular groups within the colony and their relationships with each other. For example when Harris writes that there are different faces of Buddhism – as there had been different British encounters with Theravada Buddhism – it does not help us to understand the nationalist project and the imperialist project.

As Harris shows it can be argued that the Buddhists retrieved categories from their own tradition and that modern Buddhism is not solely a Western construction. She notes that "this worldly asceticism" that has been linked with Protestant Buddhism was in fact a linear development from earlier centuries.'[67] However, the linear developments that she suggests are less convincing. The political need to articulate Buddhism emerged in the context of colonial practice and imperialism. Colonial practice introduced new economic classes. Imperialism introduced a new race theory. One can say that even in race theory there was a pre-existing reference to

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[65] Loc. cit.
[66] Loc. cit.
[67] Loc. cit.

ethno-nationalist currents, but such currents were ideologically interpreted with a race theory only within the imperialist agenda. It has to be noted that it is within the colonial practice and the imperialist agenda that these retrievals took place and that one interpretation became more predominant than another within an already initiated process of globalisation and a new set of relationships between East and West. The imperialist agenda was capitalist and its modes of production created a commercial and a middle class within a dependent economy in a politically strategic colony in the Indian subcontinent. In throwing light on the economic and social fields of Protestant Buddhism Richard Gombrich and Gananatha Obeysekara show that it needs to seen within the context of 'embourgeoisement' and the rise of the middle classes.[68] Because of this context the agency of the natives was ideologically corrupt and stifled. The 'post-feudal situation' that Harris refers to – in which the laity would have 'sought more ownership of Buddhist teaching'- was not as independent as in India. The post-feudal Lankan situation was conditioned by dependent capitalism and did not create an independent economic class.

In this sense Harris's analysis needs to be complemented with Jayawardena's socioeconomic analysis. Even though Harris admits this confinement she does not discuss it in relation to the emerging merchant classes and the racial theory of an Aryan myth as shown by the postcolonial critics. The predominance of the racialised (Ariyanised) interpretation of Buddhism, (based on the new interpretation of the *Mahavamsa*) propagated by Anagarika Dharmapala over the more universalised version promoted by Olcott, can be understood only if one pays attention to the phenomenon of the emerging mercantile class, which led to the ideological contamination of the revival. Within a sociological analysis certain cultural analyses can be glossed over and within a cultural and theological/buddological analysis sociological analyses can be overlooked. Even though each *field* has some degree of autonomy it is important to note how they interact within the colonial practice while nationalism, both as an ideology and a movement, developed. Even though the Buddhist revival began as a response to Christian missionary activities, the racialised interpretation of Buddhism which ignored Tamil Buddhism began to disclose itself as the Sinhala merchant and middle classes made attempts to consolidate their power

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[68] Richard Gombrich and Gananatha Obeysekara: *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, p.207.

within the colonial state. Thus the potential to construct the ethnic otherness of the Tamils who interacted with the colonial state through state and public sector employment, was generated, even though this was not actualised at this stage.

Olcott's universal ethical principles, which led him also to support the anti-slavery movement in the West as well as anti-colonial movements, was informed by an appeal to reason (*logos* as Karen Armstrong puts it). Although his approach romanticised the Orient with an Aryan origin he could not comprehend the popular devotional Buddhist practices and narratives. However, he articulated the ethical dimension in Buddhism with a universal appeal against both Western colonialism and Christian missionary activities. In articulating the ethical dimension of a religious tradition it is also important to pay attention to popular devotional religiosity while at the same time avoiding exclusivist and essentialist romanticism. Otherwise, the cultural space of devotion can be colonised by exclusivist claims in forming collective identities. The impact of material conditions and the inability of Olcott and the Theosophists to comprehend popular religiosity led to the predominance of a romanticised and racialised version of Buddhism.

Cultural expressions of Buddhism began to be conditioned by its interaction with the western education system as the new classes entered into this system by opening Buddhist schools at the second half of the century. Native narratives and the Orientalist perceptions (that were communicated by education) began to interact with each other within the colonial practice of a dependent economy and a centralised system of state under the British Raj. The free movement of capital within the Raj made trading communities from the subcontinent migrate to the island. It is within this context that a new process of recycling of pre-existing cultural and religious narratives began and gained ground. Under a new set of material (both economic and political) conditions, which was the locus of interpretation or recycling, new forms of buddhological discourses emerged and paved the way for new interpretations of history. Dissemination of this knowledge was available to the different social classes through formal education, theatre, the press, novels and new religious practices.[69] It is this process which will be discussed in the next chapter as politics of interpretation for domination which is the dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

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[69] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, pp.74-88.

As a conclusion to chapters three and four we could say that the pre-colonial system of politics in the South Indian Sri Lankan region was galactic politics with overlapping boundaries, identities and histories. Its expression of sovereignty was more symbolic than structural. As it was also a system of dynastic politics, the collective consciousness of the masses was conditioned more by allegiance to a king than an ethnic identity. Religious allegiances were more sectarian than racist. These characteristics were evident even during the Portuguese and Dutch rule and also during the early part of the British period. Colonialism introduced Christianity among both the Tamils and the Sinhalese and also paved the way to Low-country and Up-country divisions. It was during the British period that the entire land was transformed into one single administrative unit. While maintaining the plantation economy the British maintained the privileges of the local landed elite and also pacified the peasants through resettlement and welfare schemes for the purpose of consolidating a necessary strategic political stability for ruling India.

The building of a centralised state was inextricably interwoven with the economic gains of the majority ethnic community. Resistance to colonial rule took a cultural form and was dominated by an exclusivist interpretation of Sinhala history where Buddhism became a racial feature. Such interpretations were facilitated by Orientalist perceptions of existing cultures in essentialist categories such as Dravidian (Tamil) versus Aryan (Sinhala) civilisations. As part of the competition for economic gain and political power, the emerging Sinhala bourgeoisie (mainly those who are from the *karawa*, *durawa* and *salagama*) from the Maritime Provinces (who had themselves been arriving in the island as Tamils and Malabars since the thirteenth century) began to promote a selective reading of history along with racialised images of diverse ethnic and religious groups. Even though ethnicity had not previously been seen as natural or essentialist, but fluid and malleable – depending on the socioeconomic and political conditions – a fixed notion of identities began to inform the making of the Sri Lankan nation-state with a Sinhala-Buddhist majority-dominated ideology and a movement leading to the polarisation of diverse communities and the creation of a major violent conflict. The next chapter will explore how this polarisation took place and also how a reinterpretation of Tamil, Muslim and Christian identities began to evolve as a reaction to the dominant ideology.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MAKING OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE AND THE PROCESS OF POLARISATIONS: POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION FOR DOMINATION

> The pagan beliefs of monotheism and diabolic polytheism were unknown to the people. Christianity and polytheism are responsible for the vulgar practices of killing animals, stealing, prostitution, licentiousness, lying and drunkenness...This ancient, historic, refined people, under the diabolism of vicious paganism, introduced by the British administrators, are now declining and slowly dying away.[1]
>
> What the German is to the Britisher that the Muhammedan is to the Sinhalese. He is an alien to the Sinhalese by religion, race and language. He traces his origin to Arabia, whilst the Sinhalese traces his origin to India and to Aryan sources...To the Sinhalese without Buddhism death is preferable. The British officials may shoot, hang, quarter, imprison or do anything to the Sinhalese but there will always be bad blood between the Moors and the Sinhalese...The whole nation in one day have risen against the Moor people. The causes are economic and spiritual. The powerful British nation is waging war against German militarism and millions of pounds are spent daily to crush Germany. England is fighting on behalf of smaller nationalities.[2]
>
> True that I criticise in my articles the officials; but my loyalty to the British Throne is as solid as a rock and I have invariably expressed sentiments of loyalty to the King. But I love my religion, and Sinhala Race, and my happiness depends on their welfare.[3]

The above statements of Anagarika Dharmapala in the early part of the twentieth century mirror the most fundamental characteristics of the modern Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement. Culturally, it reflects a racial understanding of collective identities both in Europe and Asia. In this sense nationhood is seen in racial and religious terms blurring the differences between race, ethnicity and religion.

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1 This was written by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1902. Ananda Guruge (ed.): *Return To Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*, (Colombo, Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, 1991), p.482.

2 Ibid., p.541.This is a part of the letter written by Dharmapala addressed to the Secretary of State for Colonies in 1915 in the aftermath of the anti-Muslim riots in Lanka and the response of the colonial government in arresting the Sinhala leaders who were behind it. Dharmapala was in India and was not allowed to come to the island by the British officials.

3 This is a part of the letter written by Dharmapala as the government was collecting evidence to arrest him. Guruge: *Anagarika Dharmapala*, (Colombo, The Department of Cultural Affairs, 3rd edition, 1991, first published in 1965), p.46.

Religion, ethnicity and race are depicted as inseparable: a racialised version of Buddhism has come to the fore with a belief in a glorified past which was authentic and pure. This ethno-religious nationalism is in conflict with Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. It is in tension with the British bureaucrats too, but at the same time it is loyal to the British Crown. Politically, the superiority of the Sinhala Buddhists is equated with the British nation while other groups in Lanka are considered 'smaller' ('nationalities') or inferior and subordinate. The politics of interpretation for domination is informed by a primordialist perception of nationhood. There is 'bad blood' between the Moors and Sinhalese and it seems that there is 'good blood' between the Anglo-Saxons and the Sinhala Buddhists ('My loyalty to the British Throne is as solid as a rock.').

As Karen Armstrong puts it, colonialists have transformed their colonies into 'dependent blocs' and 'this lack of autonomy induced an attitude and habit of subservience that was profoundly at odds with the modern spirit'.[4] Even though there are anti-British sentiments in his speeches the political perspective is not only colonial but also imperialistic. This again reflects the interaction between power and culture where the Sinhala Buddhist national identity is depicted as akin to British imperial identity. Even though on the religious and social level there is a tension and a conflict between Christianity and Buddhism, on the cultural and political level the terrain on which religious identities are contested (Christian and Buddhist) is based on beliefs in racial superiority which are not opposed to each other, but in relation to each other (Anglo-Saxon and Aryan or Sinhala Aryan and British Aryan). Marisa Angell's study on the articles on Aryan theory published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Colombo and the parallel political developments in the 1880s shows how 'there is a marked confluence of identities – in orientalist scholarship, between Sinhala Aryans and British Aryans; and in politics, between the Sinhala Kandyan elite and the British'.[5] Through the racialised representation of the *vamsic* tradition the Low-country Sinhalaese also adopted the same mentality.

One of the causes for 'uprising' was seen as 'economic'. Economically, there were growing tensions between the new Sinhala Buddhist rich and the other minority

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[4] She observes this phenomenon in analysing Islamic nationalist movements that emerged in the Middle East during the colonial period. Armstrong: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, p.160.

[5] Agnell: 'Understanding the Aryan Theory', p.57.

groups who engaged in trade. The essentialist representation of nationhood gained predominance within a context of economic tensions that existed among the different groups in the island. The movement held the minorities responsible for limitations that the Sinhala Buddhists faced within the colonial economy ignoring the fact that these limitations were the very result of the colonial economy of the Empire. The spirituality or morality of the movement was informed essentially not by the universal ethical principles of Buddhism, but by a racialised view of humanity (racialised Buddhism). The colonising power was criticised not because of its exploitative economic and political structures, but because of its religion and 'vulgar practices'. These practices were attributed to non-Buddhist religions.

While Dharmapala's statements show the tensions within the Island of Lanka in the beginning of the last century, this also reflects the conflict among European nation-states on a global level. It was the period of the First World War which erupted as a result of the imperial needs to consolidate the nation-state as shown in chapter two (Hobsbawm). It is evident how economic interests interacted with the cultural and religious awareness of the period compounding the liberal principles of the British Empire. While the key articulator of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism was perceiving nationhood in Sinhala Buddhist essentialist terms, European powers were engaged in a war to consolidate their economic power with cultural constructs that were exclusivist. Britain's collective consciousness of the period shows how the war was viewed as reasserting chosenness and the moral duty to safeguard the world. Like the British who wage a war against the Germans the Sinhala Buddhists are also at 'war' with the minorities. 'Why shouldn't the Crown recognise the right of the Sinhala Buddhists to assert themselves?' This seems to be the question that Dharmapala raised and it clearly reflects the ambiguity of the notion of equality among nations that are based on liberal principles. Liberalism within the Empire seems to have taken for granted racial superiority and economic exploitation.

The logical consequence of the colonial cultural, economic and political processes of homogenisation during the nineteenth century – that consisted of a recycling of pre-existing ethno-religious narratives with a racialised perspective – is reflected in Dharmapala's representation of nationhood. The logic that the incipient nationalism generated was a hegemonic ideology of nationhood which initiated a process of polarisation of diverse ethnic and religious communities. The superior mentality of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist elite fitted in with the strategic interest of

the British Raj in Lanka in consolidating its rule in the Indian sub-continent. As the material and political conditions of state formation developed, the key articulators of the incipient nationalist ideology could not think beyond the confinements of the colonial state. They were dependent economically on the colonial state and politically on the British Raj. The Buddhist revivals were mainly cultural and had a semi-political content. The universal ethical principles that were promoted by the Theosophists, under the leadership of Olcott, were subsumed by a racialised version of Buddhism, the material basis of which was provided by the Sinhala merchant class. In this sense the very ideology of incipient nationalism was corrupt. The first two rebellions against the British were envisaging a monarchy and were led by the *radala* and the *sangha* within a feudal system. The incipient nationalism of the late nineteenth century was led by the dependent economic elite.

After the 1848 uprising Lankan history does not record any other organised resistance to colonial rule other than the religious revivals, which were not broad enough to envisage an inclusive nationhood at least similar to the Indian nationalist movement. In India the Gandhian philosophy of *ahimsa* was based on the belief in this-worldly sacredness which is a main characteristic of the Indic cultures (Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism).[6] Instead of an anti-colonial movement, what we witness in the island of Lanka is an anti-minority movement. The Buddhist revival turned into an anti-minority movement and the ideology of national identity began to be built on the construction of the other (minority). If the Buddhist teaching of non-self could be seen as interdependent co-origination (nothing exists by itself), the very construction of the other is against *dhamma* and is anti-Buddhist. In this sense violence is not only what we do to the other, but the very construction of the other which is a *false view* (as opposed to *right view* of interrelatedness of reality). This wrong view was inherent not only in the colonial state but also the incipient nationalism. In the present stage of globalisation where the Western Powers play the main role, this ideology of exclusivist and dependent nationalism echoes in the speeches of the key defenders of

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[6] Aloysius Pieris names Indic cultures that emphasise 'sacred this-worldliness' as 'cosmic religions' even though he does not mention Hinduism explicitly. Pieris:'The Asian Reality and the Christian Option: A Plea for a Paradigm Shift in Christian Eductaion in Asia' in *The Religious Conversion Debate against the background of Material Progress and Spiritual Growth*, in *Dialogue*, New Series, Vol, XXXII and XXXIII, (2005-2006), p.165

the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state against the minorities. This will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Often, in conflict analysis the Lankan ethnic conflict is depicted as a consequence of the colonial economy and the failure of post-colonial nation-building.[7] Such analyses pay little attention to the process of cultural recycling that took place within the colonial practice. As we have seen already the seeds of conflict were sown within the cultural and economic practices of the colonial state of the British Raj itself and the contradictions of material and cultural conditions within the colonial state set in motion the wheels of a process of polarisation of diverse ethnic and religious communities. Within this colonial matrix of dependent capitalism the modern Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism emerged both as an ideology and a movement envisaging a Sinhala Buddhist nationhood, but it could not lead an anti-colonial mass nationalist movement (at least like in India) against imperialism and feudalism. Compromises were made between the coloniser and the colonised on the basis of racial superiority while overlooking the contradictions within the socioeconomic fields.

The British strategic interests in Lanka necessitated such a compromise with the majority community, which was in fact a religiously and culturally distinct minority in the Indian subcontinent. The Orientalist representations of the culture of the local majority reified some already existing exclusivist perceptions of group identity found in *vamsic* tradition. Indian culture was also perceived in Aryan and Dravidian categories and the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists perceived themselves as descendants of North Indian Aryans. Nevertheless, in India the Orientalist representation of Hinduism (which was the common tradition of both racial categories) as a universal spirituality was utilised by neo-Vedanta Indian reformers like Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Mohandas K. Gandhi in developing an anti-colonial and more inclusive form of nationalism.[8] It also has to be kept in mind here that the material basis of Indian nationalism was more

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7 Ted Robert Gurr, after surveying 275 ethno political groups throughout the world who agitate for their rights (not necessarily all in the form of civil wars), points out how some of such struggles are caused by discriminatory policies of 'long term processes of state building and economic development' of the de-colonized countries. The study mostly focuses on the political and economic aspect of the multi-faceted origin of conflicts emerging from colonial state building and post-colonial nation building. He also sees causes of some of the conflicts in 'global and regional transitions especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union.' Ted Robert Gurr: *People versus States: Minorities at risk in the new century* (Washington, Institute of Peace Press, 2000), p.xv.

8 Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.86.

independent than in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The response to the need to rationalise one's collective existence in facing modernity introduced by colonialism differed in India and Lanka. In Lanka, among the Sinhala Buddhists, it was an exclusivist *mythos* that was historicised and made the *logos* and this also distorted the relationship with India (especially with Tamil Nadu) during the period of post-colonial nation-building and the conflict with Tamil nationalism. Belief in an exclusivist mythical past began to inform a new form of historiography: it was articulated by Sinhala nationalist intellectuals from Anagarika Dharmapala to Champika Ranawaka of *Jatika Hela Urumaya* (National Heritage Party) today.[9] This was the beginning of the modern Sinhala-Buddhist historiography mentioned by Seneviratne and Uyangoda earlier in this work. Within the context of colonialism and incipient dependent nationalism (which was neither anti-colonial nor anti-imperialistic) let us now examine the process of polarisation of ethnic and religious communities.

1. Nationalist Ideology within the Colonial State and Polarisations

i. Early Stages of Polarisations

Even though the grand cultural narrative of incipient nationalism was Duttagamini's unification of the island against the Tamil King Elara, the social and cultural tensions were initially not between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, but between the Buddhists and the Christians. Set against a background of an exclusivist theology of Christ-against-religions and proselytisation the initial polemical confrontations between Christians and Buddhists were based on arguments for the merits of one's own tradition while showing that the other was false. The Christian dominance in the government compounded this situation and later developed at the end of the nineteenth century into violent clashes.[10] Jayawardena points out the Christian dominance in the colonial state as follows:

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[9] The latter is the minister for environment in the coalition government of President Mahinda Rajapaksha which has promoted a militaristic solution to the ethnic conflict of Lanka.

[10] See Elisabeth J. Harris: *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka*, (London, Routledge, 2006) for a critical reappraisal of this debate from theological and buddological perspectives and Kumari Jayawardena:

> It is, in fact, however, that in colonial Sri Lanka, while foreign and local Christians (Catholic and Protestant) formed less than 10% of the population, the Christian elite dominated the political life of the country and held very privileged positions in society. To give a few examples, in the Legislative Council, from 1833 to 1912, the Low-Country Sinhala representatives who were appointed by the government were (with one exception) Protestant Christians; a high percentage of Sinhala and Tamil entrepreneurs, professional people and government servants were also Christian, the products of missionary schools.[11]

The first religious riot between the Buddhists and the Catholics in modern Lanka took place in 1883 in Colombo. A leading monk of the Buddhist revivalist movement, whose temple was close to the Colombo Cathedral, organised Buddhist ceremonies during Easter Week, which was perceived by the Catholics of the area as a provocative act. With the emerging perception of a glorified past that is associated with the ancient Kingdom of Anuradhapura there were moves spearheaded by Walisinha Harischandra (another leader of the revivalist movement who was a close associate of Dharmapala) to declare the area of Buddhist sites as a 'Sacred City'. His disputes with the colonial officers of the area were based on anti-Christian polemics. The colonial officers imposed restrictions on Buddhist processions during the *Poson* festivities in June in 1903 which culminated in an anti-Christian rioting led by Harischadra.[12] The conflict was a consequence of cultural violence caused by colonial rule and its complicity with Christianity. However, cultural nationalism which arose as a response to colonial cultural violence did not develop into an anti-colonial nationalism uniting diverse ethnic and religious groups in the country. Not being able to articulate an alternative vision of an economically and politically independent state due to its racialised perceptions of nationhood and dependent capitalism it remained at the level of competing for cultural space. The anti-Christian movement was not necessarily anti-colonial even though it had the potential to evolve as an anti-colonial movement if combined with the intervention of the Theosophical Society, which was also critiquing and opposing Western imperialism and the ideological function of

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Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka, 2003) for an economic analysis of the material basis of the Buddhist revival.

[11] Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala Buddhist Consciousness: 1883- 1983*, (Colombo, Sanjiva Books, 6th Printing, 2003), p.6

[12] Ibid., p.10. Jeganathan: 'Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura', pp.128-129.

Christianity. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement was more a battle against the missionaries and the colonial officers than against the colonial system itself.

The commercial interests (material basis) of the leaders of this movement and the racialised perspective promoted by the British overshadowed a moral imagination of an inclusive nationalist movement. Even though the Theosophists did articulate the universal ethical principles of Buddhism these principles alone were not sufficient for a moral imagination of an inclusive nationalist movement. The cultural recycling that took place within the colonial practice, that is, the mentality of a superior (Aryan) race akin to the British was more applicable to the emerging competition with other ethnic and religious trading groups in Colombo than with the ethical principles of Buddhism. In the area of commerce, the Muslim and Indian traders were also competing with the Sinhala merchant class in a growing primary commodity sector. The Sinhala capitalist successes which formed the material basis of the Buddhist revival and incipient nationalism imbricated with the recycled cultural narratives of the *vamsic* tradition.[13] Within this new cultural and political context certain classes of Sinhalese (the new Sinhala urban merchant class and the middle classes) scapegoated the minorities for the economic crisis caused by the colonial system itself. It led to the anti-Muslim riots in 1915 during the time of the First World War, where shortage and inflation led to a general rise in the prices of essential items. Jayawardena describes:

> There was a keen competition between Muslims and the Sinhala shopkeepers and traders, the latter at times arousing consumer hostility against Muslim shopkeepers...Serious riots occurred in many parts of the country, ostensibly sparked off by religious provocation, but in reality reflecting the economic and political tensions of the period.[14]

The racialised interpretation of Buddhism which depicted Sinhala Buddhists as natives and others as aliens was utilised during this period as the above statements of Dharmapala show. However, it is important to note here, as John Rogers points out, that at the turn of the century the Sinhala masses had not yet adopted Dharmapala's explicit racial remarks in their social and cultural attitudes towards either the Lankan Tamils or Tamils in the plantation sector. 'Although there were a good many small riots along ethnic, religious, and caste lines, Sinhala-Tamil clashes were very rare'[15].

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[13] Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka,* p.357.

[14] Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lank: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness, 1883-1983*, (Colombo, Sanjiva Books, 1985), p.14.

[15] John D. Rogers: "Historical Images of the British Period" in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), p.101.

The Tamils were not attacked during the anti-Muslim riots in 1915. Anuradhapura was predominantly Tamil but it was the Christians and the Muslims who became the main targets of anti-minority rioting. The Tamils from Jaffna did not come into the picture at this stage because the economic tensions within the colonial state were mainly in the trading area where the Sinhala and Muslim traders were competing with each other. The political power was in the hands of the Christian elite. We will see how this competition expanded to the state and public sector employments later. However, on the political level of communal representations (based on a racilaised categorisation of diverse communities) there were undercurrents that were leading to tensions among the elite representatives of mainly Tamil and Sinhala communities, which we will discuss under the section 'Political Representations and Polarisation'. The racialised version of the *Mahavamsa* contained great negativity towards the Tamils and this would be activated in the post-colonial nation-building and lead to one of South East Asia's most protracted ethnic wars.

ii. Pauperisation and Polarisation

The levels of polarisation spread further as the economy of the colonial state expanded with the participation of the local elite. The Sinhala Buddhist new rich who emerged from the Low-country began to acquire wealth from the expanding commercial opportunities. Their initial source of income was as renters of paddy, arrack, fish, ferry and gaming, the most lucrative of which was arrack renting. They gradually began to invest their accumulated wealth in Low-country plantation, transport, labour contracts, graphite mining, commerce as well as servicing the colonial bureaucracy. This group and the middle classes (small traders, white-collar workers, writers, journalists and teachers) who spearheaded the movement were dependent on the colonial economy.[16] During this period, there was also migration of Indian workers to the urban commercial and semi-industrial sector. While the British managed tea, the local planters entered into coconut plantations covering both the Maritime Province and some parts of the Kandyan territory. The percentages reflect

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[16] Ibid., p.10.

the strength of the local planters who were mainly Sinhalese by 1900. They owned 40% of coconut plantations, 21% of tea plantations and 32% paddy plantations.[17]

The majority of those joining the rank of the planters were the Sinhala bourgeoisie, who constantly rallied to the aid of the British against peasant rebellions and working-class agitations. They also supported the Empire during the Boer and the First World Wars and contributed to the war funds.[18] The colonial government also sponsored peasant resettlement programmes thus pacifying both the peasants and the local landed elite. This reinforced the feudal social relationships. This tranquillity was increasingly needed as the Indian independence movement gained its momentum inspiring the Tamils in the north and east of the island. Political stability and economic gains were maintained at the expense of the Tamil plantation workers and the emerging working classes in the cities. The colonial government's expenditure on the infrastructure of roads, transport systems, and irrigation schemes along with the welfare schemes of schools, peasant resettlement schemes and the renovation of ancient Buddhist sites came from the income of the plantation economy, whose workers lived under gruelling conditions.

It was within this period that a process of pauperisation also took place among the Sinhala peasants. They began to come to Colombo in search of jobs in the service sector of the colonial economy. As Shanmugaratnam showed in the previous chapter, though they were not pauperised at the initial stage of the plantation economy, as it further expanded weakening the agricultural sector, the growing population of peasants was made landless and impoverished. As they migrated to the urban sector, where there were Indian workers, ethnic tensions began to grow. V. Nithiyanadam remarks:

> However, by this time, both in plantation and in the incipient urban sector, the market for unskilled labour had already been saturated by the Indian migrants. When the Sinhala peasants found that penetration was not going to be easy, their frustration turned into hatred towards Indians. This ethnically based dislike was increasingly evident during times of economic difficulties.[19]

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[17] Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, (New, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1995) pp.35-36

[18] Jayawardena: *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka*, p.307.

[19] V. Nithiyanadam: 'Ethnic Politics and Third World Development: Some Lessons from Sri Lanka's Experience', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.21, No.2, (2000), p.287.

The exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist ideology gained ground among the working classes who also had heard Dharmapala's sermons after he returned from India as a Buddhist monk. His influence on the Colombo working classes was clear. On his return he addressed twenty meetings in the country where the public was mostly working class. The distinction between 'us' and 'them' was reiterated. Jayawardena shows how the official paper of the leading trade union in Colombo used racist terms in distinguishing Sinhala and non-Sinhala workers.[20] The leading Sinhala labour leader was addressed as a lion by his party; and its official paper used the example of Hitler to emphasise the need to keep 'Sinhala blood pure' by avoiding mixed marriages.[21] While in Germany it was anti-Semitism which was promoted in defence of the 'German Aryan race' in Lanka it was anti-Dravidianism that was ideologised in defence of the 'Sinhala Aryan race'. The racialised interpretation of Sinhala was reinforced among the working class, resulting in attacks on the south Indian migrant workers which divided the trade union movement in 1930s during the period of the Great Depression.[22] The anti minority nationalist stance was expressed by the Sinhala trade unions of the time who demanded the 'Ceylonisation' (Sinhalaisation) of the workforce while the treatment of all workers, both Indian and Lankan, as one working class was promoted by Indian and Lankan left-oriented trade unions. The practice of scapegoating that began in the areas of trade in relation to the Muslims now developed in the labour market in relation to the Indian urban workers. Limited economic opportunities within the colonial state fuelled an essentialist notion of national identity. This identity was based on a *vamsic mythos* that was historicised, and it interacted with the economic *field* of the time forming a *habitus*, an exclusivist collective identity that would inform the political *field* in envisaging the political community of the nation.

iii. Political Representations and Polarisation

While the economic arrangement of the colonial state and the racialised interpretations of group identities under the colonial practice created a ground for the

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[20] Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lank: The Emergence of Sinhala: Buddhist Consciousness, 1883-1983*, p.30.

[21] Ibid. p.33.

[22] It has to be noted here that this was also the time of rise of fascism in Germany and Italy.

construction of conflicting identities, on the political level, this process was reified by racial (communal) political representations introduced by the British Raj. Elisabeth Nissan and R.L.Stirrat write as follows:

> In England in particular the myth of Anglo-Saxonism, in which exclusivity was stressed, had developed from the time of Reformation. It is associated with the rise of England as a nation-state, and its subsequent spread in empire – justified in part by ideas of inherent Anglo-Saxon superiority over other races, and by the idea of the civilizing mission. European scholarship on Sri Lanka (as on other colonies) was structured by these interests too, and they conditioned colonial historiography.[23]

The very first appointment of native unofficial members to the Legislative Council in 1833 was based on communal representations. The Legislative Council was composed of British and native members, whose representation was categorised as Low-country Sinhalese, Burger and Tamil. The next change was made in 1889 adding two unofficial members to represent the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Muslims. The social and political tensions between the Kandyan elite, the traditional elite (whose social and economic power was maintained by the British within their supervision after the two insurrections), the Low-country elites, and the new elite, (who emerged from the colonial economy) were reinforced by the communal representations. The Up-Country elites formed a Kandyan Association in 1917. The Western educated elite who belonged to diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds (though predominantly Low-country Sinhalese) formed the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) in 1918 based on 'Ceylonese' nationalism which claimed to represent the entire land. The Low-Country and Up-Country identity formations were a direct consequence of the colonial practice and their separate representations were based on the racial theory of the colonial practice. However, based on the same racial theory, by 1922 it was ruled in court that both these groups 'did not belong to different races but the same race'.[24]

There was an ambiguity in the term 'Ceylonisation'. Even though the official ideology of CNC was developed from the idea of a nation based on equal rights of all citizens where each individual was valued, there was also the undercurrent of a racialised version of nationhood which had been promoted by Dharmapala. CNC under the leadership of Ponnamblam Arunachalam, a Tamil, advocated a more liberal

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[23] Elisabeth Nissan and R.L.Stirrat: 'The Generation of Communal Identities' in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp.29-30

[24] Loc. cit.

and a secular form of 'Ceylonese' nationalism. Arunachalam also supported the workers' rights irrespective of their ethnic origin. However the ideology among some elites in the CNC that was founded on race and the social hierarchy of the Kandyans conditioned the social and political fields which justified racial superiority and the colonial presence. 'Indeed, the legitimacy of colonial rule was strongly sustained by an ideology which propagated the image of an essentially holistic Ceylonese society where order and conformity of each element to the whole was valued, inequality accepted and hierarchies determined by birth'.[25] This whole is not a mere social whole but a political one which is situated in the Indian subcontinent. This whole is the colonial state of Ceylon as a single entity. The British with their political interest in keeping order in the strategic location of the island devised their ways of introducing political reforms. In the wake of the progress made in constitutional reforms through the efficacy of organised action in India, the colonial government saw the need to consolidate its power in Lanka. The Manning Reforms pandered to the 'high' caste landed Kandyan elite rather than the new elite, who were forming the CNC that began to cut across ethnic and social divisions.[26] Manning managed to detach the Kandyans from the CNC by extending the communal principle and giving them separate representation. Tamil leaders left the CNC in 1921 because they were not given a representation in the Western Province by the Sinhala leaders of the CNC. The former formed the Ceylon Tamil Congress.[27]

Although this system of communal representation was replaced by territorial representations in the 1920s, its impact was crucial in the formation of collective identities in the island. The territorial representations were compounded by notions of majority and minority races. The reformed Legislative Council elected 13 Sinhalese and three Tamils on the basis of territorial constituencies. Tamils began to campaign for more seats in the Council again in 1923. As a result the Sinhalese, who were 67% of the population, were given 16 seats and the Tamils who were 11% were given 8 seats. The Manning reforms are known to have manipulated ethnic politics in the

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[25] Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p.47.

[26] Manning was appointed by the British government in 1918 in the wake of the rise of organised actions in India for constitutional reforms and the mistrust of the colonial government about the liberal Lankan elites who had begun to assert individual rights. Freedom of the right of expression of the individual contradicts the imperial interests in the colony in this context. The notion of Oriental Despotism reflects the Occidental imperialistic tyranny here.

[27] Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka,* p.44.

beginning of first quarter of the century and also to have introduced the categories of minority and majority to the constitutional reforms. Ostensibly these categories were based on liberal democratic principles, but they were used to consolidate colonial rule in the Island. The major achievement of the British was splitting the CNC and dividing it into Kandyans, Low-country Sinhalese and Tamils. This happened in a cultural and political milieu where the Sinhalese had begun to assert their identity with an authentic past as opposed to other minorities. Liberal principles of democratization of the political *field* can be counterproductive when it is associated with a historicized *mythos*. The *habitus* that is generated by this interaction would lead to the justification of an exclusivist form of nationalism in the name of democracy. Besides, British liberal democracy is associated with the *mythos* of civilizing mission or 'white man's burden' which is the secular version of myth of chosenness. Modern democratic forms were introduced to Lanka within this complex colonial and imperialist reality.

Apart from the system of communal representations, the census conducted by the colonial government also reflects the technologies of rule by categorisation of people in exclusively defined groups. Initially the categories of black and white were used to differentiate between the natives and the British in expressing the notions of inclusion-exclusion. Later the terms race and nationality were used interchangeably where Sinhalese and Tamils were seen as both races and nationalities. The term nationality which entered into the official usage in the West in the middle of the nineteenth century in the context of the rise of the nation-states was dropped at the beginning of the twentieth century and the term race was used with a rationalist view; the 1921 census categorised ten such races in the island.[28] These designations were never innocent and were conditioned by cultural, intellectual and political contexts. Terence Ranger, in his study of the European perception of African society, reveals how both continuous and 'infinitely flexible' traditions of these societies were depicted as unchanging single identities undermining their pre-colonial multiple identity formations. [29] Similarly, the colonial practice has depicted the racial representations of group identities in Lanka as unchanging singular identities blurring

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[28] Ibid., p.48.

[29] Terence Ranger: 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa' in *The Invention of Tradition*, (eds.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.247-248.

the multiple interactions that these groups had during the pre-colonial system of galactic politics. Commenting on the rationale behind the census taking of the colonial states Benedict Anderson notes 'a passion for completeness and unambiguity', 'intolerance of multiple, politically "transvestite" or changing identifications'.[30] Apart from racialising pre-existing cultural collectivities the census introduced a systematic 'quantification' which blurred the ambivalent interactions between minority and majority groups.[31] It is within this context that by the beginning of the twentieth century the idea began to spread that there had been a great past with an unbroken continuity, particularly among the Sinhala Buddhists.

The above developments show that at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Roger pointed out earlier, although the ethnic divisions between the Tamils and Sinhalese had not come to the fore economically and socially, politically there were tensions growing among the elites of the two communities as a result of the system of political representations. The Low-country Sinhala merchant classes, who also entered the plantation sector, formed the majority of both the cultural and the material basis of the emerging Sinhala Buddhist national identity and nation-state. Dependency on the colonial economy and the belief in a Sinhala Buddhist cultural superiority were further compounded by the system of political representation that was introduced by the colonial state. A process of exclusivist identity creation was set in motion which would lead to the polarisation of communities: concurrently a constitution based on principles of a rationalisation of the nation-state was introduced. Based on the liberal democratic principles here the individual citizens seem to have equal rights.

Even though the representatives consisted solely of the elites of the particular communities as the colonial economic system created new classes of people who had to compete with each other for trade, land, education and employment, the communal perceptions began to spread among the masses. New social classes emerged who perceived the past with the lens of race and voiced the grievances of each particular group. These groups were mainly Sinhalese, Tamils, Indians, Muslims, Burgers, Malays and Europeans. In the wake of the many constitutional reforms that were suggested by the colonial government and the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism these groups also formed ethnic, religious and regional political organizations in an

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[30] Anderson: *Imagined Communities*, p.166.
[31] Ibid., p.168.

attempt to obtain or secure their political representation within the colonial system. Under the new economic and political circumstances selective readings of the past were accompanied by a selective amnesia about interactions and exchanges with the other communities. The process of choice of the 'pasts' was conditioned by the colonial recycling of pre-existing perspectival knowledge and formed the communal thinking. The answer to the question 'who are we?' was given by the answer to another question 'who were we?'. It was authenticating and glorifying the past with texts and ancient ruins whereby history was mythologized and perspectival knowledge was presented as objective knowledge. The perception of origins was a result of a recycling of perspectival knowledge of the *vamsic* tradition. This peculiar way of representing the past reflects the politics of the contemporary moment.

The dynamic of interaction between material and cultural conditions within the colonial state generated a spirit of 're-conquest' of the minorities among the Sinhala majority, first among the elites and gradually among the other social classes.[32] With universal suffrage the legitimacy of the state was drawn from the vote of its citizens. Was it a nation of individuals who have equal rights? In theory, the answer could be in the affirmative, but the theory does not hold ground within the context of a racialised notion of nationhood and the dominance of the majority (which is also associated with the strategic interests of the Empire). Wickramasinghe comments: 'A form of Ceylonese nationalism based on the right of representation of the individual was not allowed to develop from the very inception. The entity which was chosen as the political interlocutor of the British was not the individual but the group'.[33] Communal representation was introduced first with a racial perspective conditioned by a colonial historiography and recycling of pre-existing ethno-symbolic narratives. Then territorial representations were introduced which were manipulated with majoritarian and minoritarian constructions.

The franchise or the right to vote was extended from landed and educated Ceylonese, to those who were literate in the vernacular.[34] This expanded the consciousness about nation as a political community. The nation as a cultural community began to be seen essentially as Sinhala Buddhist paving the way for an exclusivist ethno-nationalist ideology of the future nation-state. This franchise was

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[32] Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p.99.
[33] Ibid., p.47.
[34] Ibid., pp.77, 123.

also initially male. In 1927-28 through the Donoughmore Reforms residency became the criterion for civic rights, abolishing the other criteria.[35]

> Through the vote the legitimacy of the state was consolidated and the boundaries of the nation affirmed...the Nation was not a group of people who had common lineage and history; neither did it include all the people who had a common will to live together. The recommendations of the Commission granted the vote to those who could prove residency in the island. The nation included all those who happened to have lived within the state boundaries for a period of five years.[36]

This created boundaries between those who were defined as Ceylonese and others who were migrants. This system in a way forced the emerging nationalism to negotiate the difficult terrain of 'us' and 'them'. The conjunction of universal suffrage and territorial representations also created a fear among the minorities that they would be dominated by the majority dominated State Council.

The rationalisation of nationhood on the basis of residency created new parameters to define nationhood excluding the migrant. It was not only the British who brought groups from south India but also the former kings of Lanka. From time immemorial as part of the South Indian Sri Lankan region, the island has been a place of migrant communities. The kings themselves promoted this trend during internal conflicts; and there were groups of south Indians who came to support the local dynasties as soldiers and were integrated into the Sinhala polity under the caste system and within the system of galactic politics. Such moves did not create ethnic conflicts among diverse groups. Many Low-country Sinhala Buddhists were descendants of these initial south Indian migrations. However, under the new cultural and material conditions created by colonial practice the issue of the migrants (as labourers and traders) became a matter of conflict. The Indian traders were competing with the local traders and in the imperial mapping the entire region was a part of the Empire. The British were the colonisers, but the selective reading of the local past saw minorities as invaders distorting the relationship with the Indian subcontinent on cultural and economic levels. The *vamsic* narratives of dynastic conflicts, which had a galactic political background, were utilised in the modern era of centralised systems of state to categorise masses in racial terms within the British Raj.

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[35] Ibid., pp.124-125.
[36] Ibid., p.124.

With the enactment in 1931of the Donoughmore Reforms, which were based on universal suffrage, the politics of the elite was expanded to that of the masses. The defining parameters of citizenship of the colonial state began to reify the existing cultural and economic tensions and conflicts between the majority Sinhalaese (us) and the other minorities (them). The new parameters also became a nationalist rhetoric among the working classes (who were also inspired by Dharmapala's nationalist ideology, as mentioned above) against the Indian workers in Colombo thus breaking the solidarity between the working classes in the 1930s. A similar process took place in the era of post-colonial nation-building when the Indian Plantation workers were disenfranchised. Rationalisation of citizenship can be helpful in arresting the dominance of one ethnic or religious or ethno-religious community over another within a polity, but it can also compound the situation in a context where one group (mostly the majority) is in a more favourable position economically and politically. They can consolidate their power using the same rationalisation with an essentialist perception of nationhood. In such a situation *mythos* of racial chosenness can be historicised and made to appear as rational. In the case of Sinhala Buddhist ethno-religious nationalism we can see how in envisaging nationhood the *mythos* is historicised (Armstrong) and is transformed as the *habitus* in relation to the political *field* (Bourdieu).

Parallel to this politics of interpretation for domination existed a process of counter interpretations (Theosophists, a secular form of Ceylonese nationalism and the left movement) which made an attempt to be more inclusive and egalitarian despite many limitations. There was another development in this regard in the north of Lanka which is predominantly Tamil. Having been influenced by the Indian freedom movement, the Jaffna Youth League, which was started in the late 1920s and modelled on the Indian National Congress, acted with a broader vision of *swaraj* (complete home rule for the whole island). They refused to compromise with the colonial reforms which were divisive. Ironically it was the Tamils, who are now accused by the Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalists of being separatists, who pioneered the unity of Lanka by working against communal representations. They also campaigned for social emancipation of the masses by opposing caste and dowry systems and promoted equal seating in schools where the 'low' caste students had to sit on the floor. These moves of the Youth League were heavily opposed by the 'high'

castes in the region. The League was the first organised group to agitate for *swabasha* policy (the use of both the Tamil and Sinhala languages) in the island. Like Gandhi they promoted local dress. The moral imagination or envisioning of *swaraj* did not gain ground in Lanka and it was opposed by the elite politicians of both communities. *Swaraj* was misinterpreted as separation by the Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalists. The two ethnic communities in Lanka also began to build up a relationship with two allies (Britain and India) from the 1920s with two different perspectives about independence. While the Sinhala polity, led by elite politicians, discussed with Britain constitutional reforms rather than total independence, influenced by the Indian freedom struggle, the Tamil community initiated numerous non-violent demonstrations in their areas for *swaraj*, even to the extent of boycotting the first elections held in the island in the 1930s, to the State Assembly. Sinhala parties did not reciprocate and a full Sinhala State Assembly was formed.[37] Jane Russell makes an in-depth analysis of this period and comments that it was a lost opportunity for the unity of the two communities.[38]

The movement for Sinhala Buddhist 're-conquest' was reinforced by the effect of pan-Sinhala ministries of the State Assembly on the minorities. In the 1930s and 40s the colonial officers further defined what they saw as Sinhalese civilisation by promoting the study, perseveration and translation of post-canonical Pali texts. Wilhelm Geiger, the German Orientalist scholar, who had translated the *Mahavamsa*, was invited by the colonial government to complete the translation of the *Chulavamsa*. Dharmapala, who was a critic of Western culture and values, was now considered to be someone who served Buddhism.[39] The definitions of extremism and moderation by the British were contingent. These were determined by the interests of maintaining the political stability of the colony. The historical trajectory of the emergence of a dependent Sinahala Buddhist ethno-nationalism reflects the very nature of colonial practice in the island of Lanka. The need to reinforce the same ideology was felt again in the 30s and 40s with the rise of the Left which created a power base among the Tamil plantation workers while promoting an interethnic unity among the working classes. Understandably, due to the capitalist logic associated with

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[37] The elections were contested in 1931 and 1936 for the State Council.

[38] Jane Russell: *Communal Politics under Donoughmore Constitution: 1931-1947*, (Colombo, Tisara Prakashakayo, 1983), pp.15-67.

[39] Wickramasinghe: *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*, p.149

the liberal democracy, the British could not entertain such a unity based on the rights of the working classes. In this context 'moderate' Sinhala Buddhist leaders and the Sinahala Buddhist culture were promoted to counteract the leftist 'extremists' and their ideology of the transference of power through formal independence.

As the plantations expanded in the Low-country the rural Sinhala peasants became landless. In the face of an imminent landless peasant revolt in the 1940s, another phase of ' re-conquests' was started by the State Council, dominated by the Sinhala landed elite. Twelve new peasant settlements (virtually Sinhala) were created in the Dry Zone bordering Tamil areas; thirty million rupees were spent by the colonial government.[40] It is a known fact that the highest expenditure on welfare in a British colony was spent on Sri Lanka. Political representation was dominated by the Sinhala landed elite while the economic wealth that was spent on welfare was generated by the colonial plantation economy. The spirit of re-conquest was created by the ideology of Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalism. The Tamil plantation workers, who were the main contributors to the economy, lived under gruelling conditions of exploitation without having basic infrastructures of health and education. [41]

The colonial state did not view the moves and the ideology of the pan-Sinhala State Assembly as a threat to the minorities. Instead the British strengthened the majority power both culturally and politically. The Soulbury Commission that was established in 1944 to introduce reforms just before the formal declaration of independence ignored the growing minority grievances and declared that there were no such discriminatory policies. While the minority fears and grievances grew, the majority too began to raise their grievances of less representation in public and state sector employment. It is a fact that in the areas of education and employment the minorities were proportionately overrepresented, but it was more a structural consequence that stemmed from the colonial practice than from an inherent ethnic or religious feature of the minorities. Although the ethnic divisions of the period before independence were expressed in political rather than economic terms, there was already an economic disparity between the two communities because the colonial

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[40] Satchi Ponnambalam: *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy 1948-1980,* (London, Zed Press, 1981), p.22.

[41] S. Muthiah: *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200 years saga*, (Colombo, Indian Heritage Foundation, 2003), p.35.

plantation economy had already created Sinhala hegemony over the economic sphere, leaving the Tamils a limited space for economic gains mainly through the professions.

Tambiah, voicing the grievances of the Tamils, writes about the legacy of the colonial economy as follows:

> As it turned out, the principal beneficiaries were the low country Sinhalese who were engaged in the most vital maritime and commercial developments, and the indigenous Tamils of the north, who living in a barren area farthest away from both the commercial and plantation developments of the southwest and the central highlands, were eager for education that could open the door of white collar jobs. [42]

The colonial rule maintained the dominance of the English of language and Christianity but at the same time the majority (Sinhala) were led to believe that they were the true heirs of the national wealth mediated by the state. Within the framework of nationhood perceived in majoritarian and racialised terms, which was promoted by the British Empire, nation-building was bound to discriminate against the minorities. Jayawardena cites a part of a speech of D.S Senanayaka, the minister of agriculture in the State Assembly and the first prime minister of independent Lanka which he made on the occasion of the Sinhala-Hindu Traditional New Year (Ironically it was the Traditional Sinhala-Hindu New Year!) in 1939. 'We are one blood and one nation. We are a chosen people. The Buddha said that his religion would last 5500 years. That means that we, as the custodians of that religion, shall last long'.[43] S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who was educated in Cambridge and who stood for separate representation for the Up-country in 1927 on liberal principles of federalism, changed his position by 1939 and addressed a gathering in Balapitya, saying: 'I am prepared to sacrifice my life for the sake of my community, the Sinhalaese. If anybody were to try to hinder our progress, I am determined to see that he is taught a lesson he will never forget'.[44]

Smith, while writing on the ambivalent nature of nationalism, identifies both 'danger and hope in the division of humanity into nations and the persisting power of national identity throughout the world'. He observes how it could be a 'source of

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[42] Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, (Chicago / London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.66.

[43] *Ceylon Daily News*, 17/4/1939. Cited by Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciousness, 1883-1983,* p.33.

[44] *The Hindu Organ, Jaffna*, 26/01/ 1939. Cited by Rajan Hoole: *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Power*, (Colombo, University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, Colombo, 2001), p.5.

pride for the down-trodden people'.[45] In this sense, it would have given self-esteem to a people who were under the colonial domination for four hundred years in the island of Lanka, but what constituted this self esteem for them was a complex and a distorted reality. Economically it was dependent on the plantation sector, the wealth of which was shared both by the British and the Sinhala merchant classes and planters. Socially, the middle classes benefited from the welfare systems that were built on the wealth created from the plantation economy. While the plantation workers lamented the lack of fair and just wages in the line rooms, the Sinhala peasants were becoming pauperised and the fishermen were neglected. The Sinhala leaders who engaged in nation-building had initiated a mechanism of scapegoating minorities for economic and social crises. While the material basis of the new nation was built on the plantation labour the cultural basis was formed by an ancient Sinhala Buddhist past: Wickramasinghe remarks that '...the cultural reconquest was selective in its orientation, drawing only upon Sinhalese myths and deeply associated with the idea that Ceylon was the land where Theravada Buddhism had to be protected and preserved in its pristine form. Thus the national myth was one of a Sinhala conquest of the past'.[46] As she notes, the process of post-colonial nation-building was already in progress before the formal declaration of independence with an incomplete conquest of employment and education.

2. Dilemma of Nation-Building: Stages of Polarisation

By the time of independence, the majoritarian and minoritarian complexes had already been created between the two communities by the 'head counting'[47] 'arithmetic democratic politics'[48] of the Westminster system. Referring to the new national leadership Tambiah writes as follows:

> It was to these loosely associated elements of the traditional English educated elite that the British transferred power ...The chief beneficiary

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[45] Smith: *National Identity*: p.176.

[46] Wickramasinghe: *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, p.99.

[47] Frank Wright observes the crisis of the legitimacy of political institutions that gives rise to conflict among different groups when democracy is defined in terms of head counting or as will of the majority. Cf. Wright: *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis*, (1987, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin) p.157.

[48] Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, p.77.

> ...was the aggregate of politicians that formed the United National Party which earned from its critiques that it was neither united, nor national, nor a party.[49]

Post-colonial nation-building was seen as completing the 're-conquest' by the majority initiated since the beginning of the twentieth century with the accumulation of wealth through plantations, majoritarian political representation and the propagation of an exclusivist nationalist ideology. As we have seen this process was facilitated by the British themselves from the beginning of their rule in the island by their maintenance of the social and economic privileges of the Kandyan aristocracy. The majority of the elite Sinhala political leadership did not feel a need to form a movement for independence. They were at peace with British rule and the reforms that guaranteed their privileges, which also maintained the feudal social relationships they had with the native masses. The political will to remain under the British was expressed by D.S Senanayake, a minister in the State Assembly, who later became the first prime minister of independent Lanka.[50] The movement of the Sinhala polity after independence was, unlike India, not to restructure the economy to suit the local needs, but instead to suppress the growing Left movement, the rising Tamil national consciousness, and the peasant farmer unrest caused by landlessness due to the expansion of the plantation sector to the Low-country by the Sinhala land owners. At independence the cultural symbolism of the national flag was the lion which reflected the process of historicisation of *mythos* envisaging the future 're-conquests'. The symbolic city of *vamsa* tradition, Anuradhapura, was restored with a new town. *Mythos* was rationalised with a spatial 're-conquest' within the colonial state. The city was considered 'historically' Buddhist and the majority of the inhabitants of the area were Tamils and Muslims. Elizabeth Nissan writes:

> Soon after Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the "secular" town was built on the New Town site in order that the Sacred City, "desecrated" under the British colonial rule, could be preserved in keeping with its acclaimed status as the national heartland. And since that time, the Sacred City has

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[49] Ibid., p.6.

[50] One of Lanka's foremost historians K.M. De Silva shows how Senanayake abandoned 'the concept of a secular state, the principle of state's religious neutrality', but continued to adhere to the constitution of Dominion which was of British origin. This constitution was different from the one that was drafted by a constituent assembly for the Indian Republic. Lanka's political leadership also took pride in 'smooth and uneventful' transfer of power (compared to India) from the British. Even now this version of history is taught in schools. K.M. De Silva: *A History of Sri Lanka*, (London, Hurst & Company, 1981), p.491.

> been used by government ministers and politicians to publicly demonstrate both their piety and their commitment to a history the Buddhist nation...[51]

In the ordering of the landscape of Anuradhpura by the colonial state in the nineteenth century it was the south Indian labourers who cleared the thick forests of Rajarata. One of the first acts of Independent Lanka was to abolish the citizenship rights of the Indian origin plantation workers – thereby weakening the vote base of the Left while increasing the percentage of Sinhala voters in the Central Province.[52] The next step was to initiate new settlements in the Tamil borders of the north and eastern regions ensuring that on one hand the Sinhala farmers would avoid a landless peasant revolt against the land-owning Sinhala political leadership, and on the other, Sinhala hegemony would be imposed in the Tamil areas. Both of the above mentioned moves were made as part of a nationalist agenda, claiming to alleviate the hardships of the Sinhalese, but they were carried out at the expense of the minorities. The post-colonial nation-building process proceeded as a majoritarian state formation.

The most crucial rift in the Sinhala-Tamil relationship began to take place with the emergence of the educated Sinhala middle classes. Jayawardena calls them 'the Sinhala petty-bourgeoisie'.[53] They were the Sinhala intelligentsia, students, clerks, monks, school teachers, local physicians, shopkeepers and newly rich merchants who were growing in numbers since the early part of the twentieth century. In a society dominated by the Christianised English-educated, these groups were deprived of various socio-economic privileges. They formed the most powerful section of the nationalist movement. Initially their grievances were social and cultural. As Jayawardena describes, they were more critical about the language (English), religion (Christianity), lifestyle and 'wicked habits' of the local and colonial capitalists than the accumulation of land and wealth by them and the exploitation of the workers.[54] However, as the education system which was geared towards white-collar jobs began to expand further, in the early fifties unemployment of the educated rural Sinhala youth also began to grow. Language became not only a cultural issue, but also an economic one. The existing racialised Sinhala perception was reinforced at this

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[51] Elizabeth Nissan: 'History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation' in *Social Analysis*, Vol.25, Part 1, (1989), p.65.

[52] Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist Consciouness,1883-1983*

[53] Ibid., p.69.

[54] Ibid., p.73.

juncture. The Tamil white-collar workers were considered economic enemies. As Tambiah notes, 'in the first two decades since independence the most important factor contributing to the ethnic tension in Sri Lanka had to deal with the bread and butter issue of the middle class.'[55]

The movement for nation-building, which emerged in the 1920s in Sri Lanka with the rise of the Sinhala middle classes and the new merchant class, claimed its victory in 1956 (eight years after independence) by forming a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist government, declaring Sinhala as the only official language of the state. This led the Sinhala youth to think that they would get employment as soon as the new government was formed. It is clear how the *mythos* of racial chosenness was reinforced under unfavourable economic conditions. Tambiah names Sinhala Buddhist nationalism as the 'gospel of excluding Tamils from competition.'[56] He describes how such nationalism could be fuelled by 'the frustrations of unemployment and poor employment, and of lebensraum in a crowded island.'[57] As we have seen, during the colonial period, the minorities were the scapegoats for the economic and social deprivation felt by certain classes within Sinhala society. As Jayawardena shows, this is a result of the process of 'nation building' in some de-colonized countries where the major ethnic group has equated its own ethnic identity with the national identity.[58] Imtiaz Ahmed calls this process 'communalization of nationalism or modern state and reproduction of hegemony'. [59] This hegemony is often concealed by the veil of a liberal democratic principle of the will of the majority and reinforced by the representation of an authentic past to which the majority is said have belonged.

The process of nation-building managed to free the masses from the English-dominated administrative and educational system, but the very process scapegoated the minorities, particularly the Tamils, depriving a vast number of them through the Sinhala Only Act of opportunities in state and public sector employment. The Campaign for the 're-conquest' of language, education and employment expounded by the document *Betrayal of Buddhism* produced by the All Ceylon Buddhist

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55 Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, p.74.
56 Ibid., p.127.
57 Loc. cit.
58 Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of SinhalaBuddhist Consciouness, 1883-1983*, p.117.
59 Imtiaz Ahmed: 'Communal Conflict in Modern Sri Lanka-Search for a Resolution' in *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol.1, No.2 (1996, Formosa College, Taiwan), p.88.

Congress (ACBC) played a key role ideologically. The Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (United Front of the Monks), which was mainly a Colombo-based group of monks, campaigned for the promotion of 'Sinhala as the only official language and for the implementation of democratic socialism'. The group was 'anti-West, anti-Catholic and anti-UNP'.[60] The Churches were often considered to be supporters of the United National Party which was seen as catering to Western imperialist interests. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party was formed in opposition to the UNP. Mara's attack on Buddha before the enlightenment – *mara yudda* – was often quoted by the monks in interpreting the contemporary conflict between the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces and others.[61] The 'primordialist' and 'perennialist' theoreticians of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism define this movement as the resurgence of an ancient civilisation that had been suppressed for centuries. While de Silva sees this as a *jatika vimukthi aragalaya* (national liberation struggle) where even the leftist parties joined along with different social classes of people, *sangha*, *veda*, *guru*, *govi*, and *kamkaru* (monks, ayurvedic physicians, teachers, farmers and workers) Amarasekara names this body of the social classes as *kavandaya* (a body without the head) which was given a head under the leadership of Bandaranayaka, the founding leader of the SLFP. [62] The theoreticians also perceive this movement as a continuation of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism spearheaded by Dharmapala. The essentialist perception of nationhood could not comprehend the patterns of identity formation that had taken place within the colonial state and the dynamics of the asymmetrical relationships that had been created on the economic and political level. As *mythos* was historicised envisaging nationhood with an emphasis on a glorified past, introspection into the relationship between psychosocial and economic and political reality, or a clarification of ideological consciousness (*samma dithti* – right view or understanding) diminished thus blurring a more inclusive future moral imagination for the nation-state.

In India Buddhism was seen as promoting a *samma dithti* of an egalitarian society by Ambedkar (who also became a Buddhist) who led the Dalit movement for

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[60] The group belonged to the reform chapter that emerged from Low-country as opposed to the 'high' caste chapters in Kandy during the nineteenth century. Tambiah: *Buddhism Betrayed*, pp.42-44.

[61] Ibid., p.44. This also gained a popular currency as it was the period of celebrating the 2500 year celebration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away – *Buddha Jayanthi*.

[62] Nalin de Silva: *Panashaye Daruwo*, (Colombo, Chinthana Parshadaya, 2005), pp.6-7. Gunadasa Amarasekara: *Deshapalana Samaja Vichara: Dena Sitya Yutu De: 1986-1993, Part 1*, (Colombo, S. Godage and Brothers, 2000), pp.162-168.

emancipation against the Hindu caste system. It was he who was the key architect of the Indian constitution based on the principle of secularity. This principle was promoted by the neo-Vedanta philosophy of *sarva dharma sambhava* (let all religions prosper) of the Gandhian movement even though Ambedkar was critical of the Gandhian use of the term *harijan* (people of God) which did not recognise adequately the caste oppression of the Dalits. The differences in the role of religion (mainly Buddhism) in Lanka and India are determined by the politics of interpretations which are conditioned by the imperial mapping of the British Raj that treated the island of Lanka as a strategic location where the majority (within the Raj the Sinhala were a minority) needs to be pacified. While the Tamils engaged in *satyagraha* forms of protest inspired by Gandhi, the Buddhist monks marched against any accommodation of the Tamil language within the centralised administrative system. The heritage of Buddhist teaching was buried under the altar of a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state which was made unto the image and likeness of the Western nation-state. The leadership of the UNP was a part of the same elite that led the SLFP and the former had no difficulty in promoting the same ideology of the nation-state that was promoted by the latter.

Satchi Ponnambalam also notes how the Sinhala speaking Churches supported the Sinhala Only Bill and initiated a process of inculturation that did not recognise the interactions between the Tamil and Sinhala cultures throughout history nor the complicity of politics involved in the nation-building project. The Churches who maintained the education system entered into conflict in the 60s, during the nationalisation of schools, with the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement. The church hierarchy openly encouraged its faithful to vote for the UNP against the SLFP which was in power at that time. It was also considered a sin to vote for the leftist parties who were seen as a 'body of Godless people'.[63] During the conflict both the Buddhist and the Christian institutions managed to maintain a select set of private fee-paying schools in the cities which catered for the elite and wealthy families.[64] The poor Christians, mostly Catholics who came from the fishing community were neglected by the Churches. This was also not recognised by the Sinhala Buddhist

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[63] Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, pp.122-123.
[64] Tambiah: *Buddhism Betrayed*, p.65

nationalist movement. It could not differentiate between the Christian elites and the poor Catholic fishermen and women.

In defining national identity while maintaining the colonial system of education and employment which was mediated by the state to the middle classes, English was replaced by Sinhala thus excluding Tamil. The education system itself was programmed to service the centralised colonial state. When Sinhala became the official language it also became an economic opportunity and a social identity for the middle classes. This social identity is related to the racialised Sinhala ideology and explains why the middle classes expressed their allegiance to the centralised state structure. The wealth of the state was generated through plantations whose workers were disenfranchised and were not considered citizens of the nation and the national elite came to power with the votes of the Sinhala majority. The only native component of the national identity was the Sinhala language and Buddhism, and the rest (economic and political structures) was colonial. Both the major parties, UNP and SLFP, criticised each other either when one was in opposition or in government by accusing each other of betraying the Sinhala Buddhist nation in making attempts to accommodate the demands of the Tamil leaders for devolution of power on an administrative level. In 1965 Dharmapala's writings were collected and published by the SLFP government with the title *Return to Righteousness*: it was also republished by the UNP government in 1991.[65] Return to righteousness for Dharmapala meant to return to an exlusivist glorified past (where cultural interactions between Hindu and Buddhist traditions and Tamil and Sinhala cultures are assumed not to have existed) based on the historicised *mythos* of a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state. In other words righteousness is derived here from an allegiance to an *historical transcendental* (Bourdieu) of the nation-state. Transcendence identified vis-a-vis the other (or interdependent co-origination) has been the key ideological construct by which the Sinhala political elite sought ascendancy to power. It was on this foundation that the Sri Lankan nation-state was built.

Analysing the nature of the economic structure of the post-colonial period, Ponnambalam notes how the foreign-oriented ruling class had 'no commitment to national development' and 'no desire to change' the economic system inherited from

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[65] Ananda Guruge: *Anagarika Dharmapla:Return to Righteousness*, (Colombo, Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information, Ministry of Socio-Cultural Integration, Department of Cultural Affairs, 1991).

the colonisers. The plantations were not integrated into the traditional sector of farming and there were no attempts made to build 'the new nation on foundations of egalitarianism and social justice.'[66] Such an attempt would have united diverse ethnic and religious groups. Instead of changing the colonially inherited economy the ruling class managed it with the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state. The post-colonial economy was in a dilemma; it contained inherent contradictions. As Nithiyanadam explains, the ruling elite, while placing 'their entire eggs in the plantation basket', also contradicted themselves by disenfranchising the Tamils in the plantation sector, causing enormous frustration, which in turn affected the productivity levels.[67] Expansion of this sector had already begun to create marginalization of the Sinhala peasantry. The few irrigation works carried out had more strategic and political overtures than economic ones. The new industries were scarce and there was no diversification of productive activities. A large sum of money was spent on education producing more and more youth who sought public and state sector employments. 33% of the total expenditure in 1955 was spent on welfare.[68] As Tambiah notes, these contradictions not only created ethnic tensions, but also increased the gap between the rich and the poor.[69] By the end of 60s the (colonial) economy could not any longer absorb the educated youth into the state and public sector, as the very education system itself was based on servicing the colonial state.

The ever growing unemployment and the economic crisis of the 1960s, which was caused by the dependent capitalism of the post-colonial state, gave rise to the first armed insurrection in 1971 of the Sinhala youth led by Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (People's Liberation Front). The five lectures that were given to the recruited members of the Front were based on Marxism-Leninism. The Front rightly identified perpetuation of a dependent economy through neo-colonialism in a context of American imperialism competing with British imperialism, while critiquing the privileged positions of members of the *sangha* who were large landholders (not all monks owned land; there was also an economic disparity within the *sangha*) and the

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[66] Satchi Ponnambalam: *Dependent Capitalism in Crisis: The Sri Lankan Economy: 1948-1980*, (London, Zed Press, 1981), p.1.

[67] Nithiyanadam: 'Ethnic Politics and Third World Development: Some Lessons from Sri Lanka's Experience', p.289.

[68] Loc. cit.

[69] He quotes the Report of the Committee for Rational Development (November 1983, Colombo) which was formed in the aftermath of 1983 July violence. Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, p.148.

Churches who owned private schools (only the rich Christians could afford to join these schools).[70]

However, in envisaging an alternative economic structure they did not differentiate between the colonial capital of the plantations and the Tamil labourers. There was a move to scapegoat them in favour of the Sinhala peasants by connecting them to south Indian dynastic invasions of the pre-colonial period. With Western imperialism the lectures also mentioned Indian expansionism and the latter was interpreted as relating to both the Tamil plantation workers and the Tamils in the north and east. The distinct nature of the Lankan Tamils as well as their cultural affinity with the south Indian Tamils were not recognised by the JVP. Gamini Samaranayaka notes: 'Instead, the cultural affinity was interpreted purely as an integral part of Indian expansionism, mainly manipulated by India'.[71] The movement barely represented other ethnic groups and believed that a revolution cannot be won with the support of the minorities. The uprising was against the Sri Lankan government, not against the ethno-religious nationalist ideology of the state.

There were undercurrents of Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalism within the movement led by the JVP. The leader of the movement came from Ruhuna, the deep south of Lanka, which is connected to the epic king of the *Mahavamsa*, Duttagamini. The name of the king's closest lieutenant was given to the two main leaders of the JVP, while the flag of the Front depicted a lion on a red background. Samaranayake remarks:

> The strong chauvinistic element within the JVP attracted the Sinhala Buddhist youth from the rural areas and at the same time acted as a strong barrier to the mobilisations of Tamil youth from the North and East; it also inhibited the party's understanding of the grievances of the Tamil population.[72]

Even though the JVP recognised the need to change the colonial economy due to an absence of analysis of the colonial recycling of cultural narratives, they failed in their moral imagination of an inclusive nation-state. The insurrection led by them, where 10,000 were killed, mostly young men and women, was suppressed by the government. The government strengthened the Sinhala Buddhist ideology of the

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70 Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, p.353

71 Gamini Samaranayaka: ' The Changing Attitude Towards the Tamil Problem within the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Charles Abeysekera and Newton Gunasinghe, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1987), p.279.

72 Ibid., p.282.

state with the new constitution of 1972 which explicitly recognised the primacy of Buddhism while the clause that protected the rights of the minorities was removed from the previous constitution. Until this time it was the Soulbury constitution that was in effect. The promulgation of the new constitution was depicted as a major step in post-colonial nation-building. After attending a religious ceremony in the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy the prime minister, invoking the blessing on the constitution, declared: 'Today we are in a proud position of not owing allegiance to anyone else, but totally and in every respect, owing allegiance only to our own country'.[73] The key articulator of the constitution was the leader of one of the socialist parties. The promulgation of the Indian constitution on the principle of secularity by Ambedkar, who was a Buddhist, and the formulation of the 1972 constitution by the leader of a party which upholds a secular tradition (leftist) in Sri Lanka that privileges the religion of the majority reveal the two different ideological underpinnings of Buddhism in state formation.

After the suppression of the insurrection and the enactment of the new constitution, in an attempt to redress the frustrations of the Sinhala youth, the government in 1972 introduced a scheme of standardization; its aim was to increase the number of rural youth (mainly Sinhala) entering the university, and it severely reduced the number of Tamil undergraduates. The Sinhala youth who revolted in 1971 were the sons and daughters of the movement for the Sinhala Only Bill of 1956 and the Tamil youth who were affected by the standardization scheme of 1972 were the sons and daughters of the Tamil public servants who lost their jobs due to the Sinhala Only Bill. While the economic formation of the post-colonial state was based on the colonial economy and education system its political formation (centralised state structure) was reasserted with a Sinhala Buddhist national identity. As the crisis of the colonial and postcolonial economy affected different classes of people, Jayawardena observes that the tendency to scapegoat the minorities also increased. V. Nithiyanadam notes how the policy of redressing the grievances of the majority community has been one of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'.[74] However, within the spirit of 're-conquest' the Sinhala community was made to believe that the Sinhala Only Act, the Scheme of Standardisation and the 1972 constitution were their due right.

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[73] Cited by Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle,* p.163.

[74] Nithiyanandam: 'Ethnic Politics and Third World Development: Some Lessons from Sri Lanka's Experience', p.294.

It is evident that the process of the emergence of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism has been a process of alienation and discrimination for the minorities, especially the Tamils, in Sri Lanka. The colonization schemes that were carried out in the 40s and 50s in the Dry Zone areas bordering the Tamil region were monopolized by the majority Sinhalese, neglecting the Tamils who were short of land for agriculture. There was no proper irrigation scheme planned for the north and east[75]. Unlike the Sinhala farmers, the Tamil farmers had to dig deeper into the ground for water. Industrially, there were only three small-scale factories started after independence, namely Valachchenai Paper, KKS Cement and Paranthan Chemicals. While the means of livelihood were narrowing, as there was no regional development at all, the Sinhala Only Bill (1956) and the Scheme of Standardization (1972) deprived two generations of the available employment opportunities. Although the proportion of Tamils in the public and state sector was higher than its demographic percentage, the proportion of Sinhalese increased to be much higher than its demographic percentage after the Sinhala Only Bill. There was a drastic drop in the proportion of Tamils in state employment in the period between 1956 –1970. It was 'a drop from 30 to 5 percent in the proportion of Tamils in the Ceylon Administrative Service, from 50 to 5 percent in the clerical service, 60 to 10 in the professions (engineers, professors, lecturers), 40 to 1 in the armed forces and 40 to 5 in the labour forces.'[76] Adding more salt to the wound, the media and district based quota system introduced in 1972 severely reduced the percentage of Tamil students entering university, obliterating their future. As indicated by Victor Ivan, there was a drop in Tamil engineering students from 48.3% to 16.6% and medical students from 50% to 19%, where as the percentages of the Sinhala students respectively increased from 51.7% to 83% and 50% to 81%.[77]

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[75] The Gal-Oya scheme had been a failure and also a missed opportunity. Cf. Robert J. Muscat: *Investing in Peace: How Development Aid Can Prevent Or Promote Conflict*, (New York, M.E.Sharpe 2002), p.60-70.

[76] Ahmed: 'Communal Conflict in Modern Sri Lanka-Search for a Resolution' p.89. As shown by a report of the Committee for Rational Development, by 1980 'with 74% of the population, the Sinhalese have 85% of all the jobs in the public sector, 82% in the professional and technical categories, and 83%in the administrative and managerial categories. On other hand, the Tamils, with 18%of the population, have only 11% of all public sector jobs, 13% of professional and technical posts, and 14% of administrative and managerial positions.' Committee for Rational Development: *Sri Lanka: The Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives*, (New Delhi, Navarang, 1984), p.3.

[77] Victor Ivan: *Arbudaye Gaman Maga: Eitihasika Vikashanaye Athem Lakshana*, (Galkissa, Rawaya Prakashana, 1988), p.61-62.

Since 1977 a process of liberalisation of the economy was introduced inviting the foreign investors while relaxing labour and tax laws. New irrigation projects were initiated with foreign aid. Both the agricultural and the industrial patterns of development that followed 1977 reflected ethno-based measures. Industrial development which was promoted with foreign investments was basically concentrated on the western province surrounding the metropolitan city, carving a special region called the Greater Colombo Economic Commission. Mostly young women were recruited to work in these factories which were situated in an area called 'Free Trade Zone'. The agricultural development which was carried out through the Mahaweli Development Project in the Dry Zone bordering Tamil villages was accompanied by state sponsored colonizing schemes of Sinhala settlers who were later armed to 'guard the borders'. Malinga Gunaratne, who was an officer in charge of this resettlement programme writes in his book *Ekiya Rajjayak Kara* (For a Unitary State) how the very ideology behind these settlements was Sinhala Buddhist colonisation of the Tamil areas.[78] The Mahaweli Project was depicted as a regaining of the grandeur of the ancient hydraulic culture of the Sinhala Buddhists. Serena Tennekoon's article 'Rituals of Development' shows how culture (Sinhala Buddhist) and politics (politics of development) were engaged in the government's reinterpretation of these projects. The Sinhala Buddhist rituals that related to agrarian forms of production were utilised to depict these projects to the masses as rebuilding the 'spiritualist East' against the 'materialist West'. This move was taken by the government in a context where its consumerist free market, 'Open Ecomomy' was critiqued by the nationalist intelligentsia.[79] It was also a period when the Tamil movement for self-determination had gained its momentum. The main theme of the government was worded as *nidhahas dharmishta samajayak* (a just and a free society). The word *Darmishata* is associated with the concept of *darmishita raja* (just king – an idea connected to the

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[78] Malinga Gunaratne writes how Israeli advice was sought by the Sri Lankan government to built buffer-zones with Sinhala settlements (armed) in the Eastern province like in the Gaza and the West Bank. Malinga H. Gunaratne: *Ekiya Rajjayak Sandaha*, (Galkissa, Rawaya, 1989) A special military unit called S.T.F. (Special Task Force) was also formed following the British S.A.S in order to combat Tamil insurgency in the North and East. Mark Curtis shows how the British government provided the Sri Lankan state with military assistance which was used against the Tamil insurgency. He describes how Britain's arms exports are not only motivated by profit making but also by the need to support its 'favored elites' who are accused of human right abuses. Cf. Mark Curtis: *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World*, (2003, Vintage, London), pp.204-205.

[79] N. Serena Tennekoon: 'Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahaväli Development Program of Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist*, Vol.15, No.2, (May, 1988), p.301

concept of *chakkavatti*, universal king, particularly in relation to the Asokan rule in the system of galactic politics). The term *nidhahas* (free) is ambiguous and denoted the idea of an open economy against the closed economy of the previous government. The first executive president under the 1978 constitution considered himself as the 193rd head of state 'describing himself as the inheritor to the Sinhala monarchy' and commissioned a group of monks and laymen to continue writing the *vamsic* tradition which was called *Mahavamsa Nutana Yugaya* (new era).[80] A new translation of the *Mahavamsa* was published and in the first sentence of its foreword the president writes as follows: 'An unrivalled distinction which the Sri Lankans as a nation had attained is an unbroken written record of their history no less than twenty-five centuries.'[81] The foreword is concluded with the following words: 'Collectively, we are not merely the products of our past history but, more importantly, the makers of our future.'[82] Representation of the past is associated with the politics of the present. The government while maintaining and reasserting both the ideological (Sinhala Buddhist) and structural (centralised) features of the state envisaged the future with a free market economy which was also ethno-based. The next chapter will explore the politics of counter-interpretations to the Sri Lankan nation-state.

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[80] Steven Kemper: 'J.R. Jayawardene: righteousness and *realpolitik*' in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp.193-199

[81] J.R. Jayawardene: 'Foreword' in *Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka*, (ed.) Ananda Guruge, (Colombo, Lake House, 1989), p.1

[82] Ibid., p.4.

CHAPTER SIX: A CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE AND THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION FOR A JUST PEACE

1. Tamil Movement for Self-determination

The history of the process of polarisation of ethnic and religious communities discussed in the previous chapter is also a history of polarisation of more inclusive and exclusive ideologies of nation-building. I have already mentioned the emergence of several counter-interpretations of nationhood during the colonial era itself. On a cultural basis the influence of the Theosophists, mainly in the person of Olcott, could have envisaged a more inclusive paradigm of building the cultural community of the future Lankan nation. However, a nation is not only a cultural community, but also a political community where the material conditions have to be arranged in such a way that diverse groups are treated equally. It is only in that sense that a nation can become a moral community or an ethical-political community. Moral envisioning of a nation requires a political imagination within a given concrete situation. The Buddhist revival of the Theosophists could not reach this level and it was overshadowed by the economic interests of the rising Sinhala merchant classes and the racialised interpretation of Buddhism.

The next stage of a more inclusive form of nationhood called Ceylonese nationalism (as opposed to the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism of Dharmapala) was pioneered by the CNC under the leadership of Ponnambalam Arunachalam. This was based on liberal democratic principles of equal rights and was a metropolitan endeavour made by the western-educated elites. Even though they had the political imagination they were not in dialogue with the local cultures, which were politically dominated by the feudal and semi-feudal elites. One of the most promising paradigms for nation-building emerged in Jaffna under the leadership of Jaffna Youth League, which was inspired by the Indian freedom movement and modelled their movement

on the Indian National Congress. Due to a lack of political and cultural space within the Sinhala movements during this period not only could they not succeed, but Sinhala domination increased through the pan-Sinhala State Assembly. The left movement, who could cut across ethnic and religious boundaries in envisaging the political community which was also promoted by a good number of Buddhist monks, could not sufficiently collaborate with Jaffna Youth League.

Post-colonial nation-building could be seen as a process of accomplishing the incomplete 're-conquest' by the Sinhala majority, which was based on the *mythos* of a glorified past of the Anuradhapura period that was inaugurated by King Duttagamini of the *vamsic* tradition. Just as theological interpretations of the British nation-state were based on a choice of pasts, the buddological interpretations of the Sri Lankan state have taken a peculiar shape where symbiosis of ethnicity and religion functions as an ideology supported by racialised reading of the *vamsic* tradition. This ideology upholds an exclusivist formation of nationhood and state where some canonical texts are also interpreted in rationalising violence in defence of the state. Defence of *dhamma* was perceived as defence of a centralised state against the rights of the Tamils. Like the colonial state, the post colonial nation-building was violent. Violence is not only what we do to the other physically, but it is also the very construction of the other.

A dogmatist view of the nation-state does not create space for dialogue among diverse groups of people who struggle to articulate the meaning of their existence in ethnic and religious terms in the face of state oppression. It is necessary to look deeply into the counter-interpretations that these groups have found in asserting their existence in ethnic and cultural forms. In this sense the term ethnicity, as Weber puts it, is a political expression, but not an essentialist term. Let us now examine how mainly Tamils in Lanka articulated their ideology and movement for self-determination as a counter interpretation to the dominant Sinhala Buddhist ideology of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

The political alternative that was put forward by the Tamil leadership, in the face of majoritarianism of the state, was federalism. As Satchi Ponnambalam writes: 'With the Sinhala Only law on the statute book and the firm resolve of government not to accord equal rights to the Tamils, federalism became the only way out for the

integrity and future of the Tamil nation'.[1] However, the federal demands were not based on national rights, but on language rights (a 'Tamil linguistic state' based on a 'democratic and rational constitution') as we can see from the declaration of the convention of the Federal Party held in 1956 in Trincomalee.[2] Even though a more radical form of separation based on the *mythos* of an ancient Tamil heritage was campaigned for by a few Tamil politicians in the 1960s, these politicians were defeated by the Tamil community in the Parliamentary elections. The political concept of federalism was basically a secular notion which was inspired by the Indian Freedom Movement. However, this form of secularity was also supported by the Gandhian neo-Vedantha philosophy of reverence for diversity. Even though the Federal Party did not envisage secularity in neo-Vedantha terms they adopted the Gandhian *satyagraha* as a means to demand a secular constitution. We see here a blurring of artificial demarcations between secular and religious discourses.

There was also a liberal space within the Sinhala polity to respond positively to this historical need for an inclusive nation-building project, which was reflected in the bi-lateral agreements that were made between the government and the Tamil political leadership. However this liberal space was limited because its material base was semi-feudal and at the same time dependent on the colonial political and economic structures. Ideologically, any attempt at compromise with the Tamil demands was considered by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces, led by the *sangha*, to be giving away the Sinhala heritage to the Tamils or a betrayal of the Sinhala nation and Buddhism. In the face of deterrent action by the ethno-religious nationalist forces the Sinhala polity unilaterally withdrew from the agreements they had made with the Tamil leadership.[3] Demands for reforms, put forward by the Tamil

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1 Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, p.106.

2 Loc. cit.

3 In relation to Northern Ireland (or North of Ireland) Frank Wright describes how Orangeism with its parades and rituals was a system of communal deterrence: 'Communal deterrence practices may ritualize and conceal their origins in vigilance.' This could be seen clearly during the civil rights movement organised by the Catholics in the 60s. Frank Wright: *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis*, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p.154. In the case of Sri Lanka during times of political negotiations between the government and the Tamil leaders the marches by the monks dressed in yellow robes in the capital city became a ritualised deterrent action against the government. The only exception to this was in the latter part of the 90s when the government itself mobilized a group of monks against the monks who opposed any political solution to the conflict. The latter accused the government of causing division among the *sangha* which is one of the *parajika*(s) (unforgivable acts) according to the *Vinaya Pitaka*. It has to be noted here how unity of the *sangha* is closely associated with the ideology or belief in a unitary state.

leaders, needed an accommodative space at least on an administrative level on the part of the Lankan state.

Unilateral withdrawal from the agreements by the Sinhala leaders reflects the two myths of the nation-state (Uyangoda), mentioned initially in this work: centralised territory and centralised sovereignty supported by ethno-religious nationalism. For the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists it was a battle to reclaim the state that they had lost in the face of colonialism, but in this battle they were unaware that they were claiming the very structure of the colonial state which they had mythologised as their own. Is the Lankan conflict a conflict between secularity and religiosity? In that sense what do secularity and religiosity mean? Are they polar opposites or are they complementary? We will disuses this in detail in the coming chapters.

Deterrent actions by the forces that strongly adhered to the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state were also followed by anti-Tamil rioting. Therefore, it was not only a process of scapegoating Tamils for the grievances of the majority Sinhalese and 'robbing from Peter to pay Paul' but also a process of violent suppression of non-violent opposition to such policies. In 1956 alone 150 Tamils were killed.[4] The two communities were not in a symmetrical relationship within the emerging system of sovereign nation-states. The Indian government failed to enlighten the Sinhala polity with a moral imagination at this juncture because the preoccupation was the sovereignty of postcolonial nation-states. The continuous unilateral withdrawal of the agreements, the violent suppression of the non-violent protests, military and police harassments of Tamil civilians in the North-East and the detention of Tamil leaders in custody tended to sharpen further Tamil political consciousness, which culminated in the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in the 70s.[5] The initial federal demand for a linguistic state developed into a demand for separation based on the right to self-determination as a nation. The Vaddukkodai Convention declared that

> ...Tamils of Ceylon, by virtue of their great language, their religions, their separate culture and heritage, their history of independent existence as a separate state over a distinct territory for several centuries till they were conquered by the armed might of European invaders and above all by their

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4 Ponnambalam: *Sri Lanka: National Conflict and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*, p.106.

5 It was Tamil United Front which was formed first and later the name was changed.

> will to exist as a separate entity ruling themselves in their own territory, are a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese...[6]

It was on these principles that the TULF contested the 1977 elections, winning all the seats in the North-East and becoming the main opposition party in the parliament. The unity of the Tamil parties, who formed one front under a common manifesto based on the demand for self-determination of the Tamils, was seen as a defiant action by the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists after the former won all the seats in the Tamil North and East. There was also a process of disillusionment growing among the Tamil youth regarding the Parliamentary means of securing their rights and they began to organise themselves into militant political movements.[7] As Jayawardena writes, equating the ethnic identity of the majority with the national identity 'has led to the marginalization of minority groups and to overt expressions of frustration, which in turn have raised the levels of ethnic consciousness in the major group...' This process, she remarks, 'has revived antagonisms that were dormant during colonial rule and has led to riots, guerrilla warfare and even civil war'.[8]

Although Tamil was accepted as a national language and the university quota system was dropped at the end of the 70s, the deep-rooted grievances were aggravated by the market economic policies and the reassertion of the Sinhala Buddhist state ideology. The government expected the Tamils to give up their demand, but the relative economic boom of 1970-1977 of the Tamil farmers had also been destroyed by liberalization of the economy in 1977. Both industrial and agricultural development were majority dominated. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist claim for the entire land with the colonization schemes in the eastern province threatened the very existence of the Tamil community.[9]

The government adopted two approaches to counter Tamil demand for self-determination; one through the legislature prohibiting demand for separation and the other through militarizing the Tamil regions with Emergency Regulations and the

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6 See 'List of Selected Texts -Laws, Agreements, Manifestos...' in *Tamil Eelam Struggle for Freedom:* www.tamilnation.org, downloaded on 28/11/2007.

7 For full detailed analysis of Tamil militant youth groups that emerged in the 1970s see S. Sivanayagam: *Sri Lanka: Witness to History: A Journalist's Memoirs: 1930-2004*, (London, Sivayogam, 2005), pp.157-172.

8 Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of SinhalaBuddhist Consciouness, 1883-1983*, p.117.

9 Malinga H. Gunaratne, an officer in the government, describes how he was involved in settling thousands of Sinhala families in these areas with the aim of strengthening the unitary structure of the state against the Tamil movement for self-determination in the North-East. Malinga Gunaratne: *Ekiya Rajjayak Sandhaha*, (Galkissa, Rayaya Prakashakayo, 1989).

Prevention of Terrorism Act. Such repressive actions led more youth to join the Tamil militant movements.[10] In the latter part of the 70s they began to target first those few Tamils who were supportive of the government in Jaffna. Later, the militants' attack on 13 Sri Lankan soldiers in 1983 in Jaffna was responded to with massive anti-Tamil riots instigated by the Sinhala nationalist groups, which claimed the lives of 3000 Tamils and resulted in half a million being displaced.

There is also a link between anti-Tamil rioting and the effects of the market economy on the Sinhala community. The new urban-based and service- oriented economy caused 'a glaring contrast between the rich and the poor' creating 'lumpen sections of the city population'[11] Both Tambiah and Jayawardena show how most of the groups that were involved in the anti-Tamil riots that were accompanied by plunder in 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983 had come from the above sections of the society.[12] Their actions were justified by scapegoating the Tamils who were falsely accused of benefiting more from the market economy. Jayawardena points out how 'the deprived sections were given a licence to plunder by the racist propagandists'.[13] Such violence not only further destroyed the economic means of the Tamils, but also caused a huge migration overseas, especially to the West. A. J. V. Chandrakanthan notes the economic consequences of migration as follows: 'The uncontrolled exodus, especially of students, intellectuals and professionals, has severely dented the home based economy in the north as well as the general development of the Northern and Eastern Provinces'.[14]

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist agitation against the demands of the Tamil parties resulted in an amendment to the constitution. The Sixth Amendment to the constitution, which was passed in the parliament immediately after the 1983 July anti-Tamil pogrom, prohibited any demand for a separate state and thereby closed all democratic means to resolve the conflict. Before the Vaddukkodai Convention disillusionment among the Tamil youth had already grown regarding the traditional political parties as we noticed earlier. The emergence of several armed Tamil political

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[10] A similar development could be observed during the government of Margaret Thatcher in Northern Ireland.

[11] Jayawardena: *Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Emergence of SinhalaBuddhist Consciouness, 1883-1983*, p.113.

[12] Loc. cit. Tambiah: *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, pp.49, 53.

[13] Jayawardena: p.113.

[14] A.J.V.Chandrakanthan: 'Eelam Tamil Nationalism: An Inside View' in A.J. Wilson's *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, (London, Hurst, 2000), p.170.

groups who based their ideology on the above principles of a Tamil traditional (historical) homeland, and a right to self-determination and nationhood had already taken place when the parliamentary means for dialogue were closed. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as an armed political movement gained prominence among these groups in launching a military-political programme for Tamil national independence. Balasingham, the theoretician of the LTTE, writes as follows:

> Learning from the historical experiences of anti-colonial armed struggles in Africa and Latin America, the Tiger leader perceived that the guerrilla form of armed struggle was the classic method that could be adopted by a weak, oppressed nation to resist and fight back the organised military power of a modern state.[15]

The symbol 'Tiger' is related to ancient Chola kings, but it is given a more secular meaning related to the movement for political freedom of the Tamils in the North-East from the Sinhala Buddhist state rather than a mythologized historical meaning of conquest. Here the meaning of an ethnic symbol (not an ethno-religious symbol) has been recycled and it has been given a secular political meaning. The aim of the Tiger movement is a secular Tamil state. In this sense the popular interpretations of the conflict as a battle between the 'Tamil Tigers and the Sinhala Lions' do not help us to identify the particularities in two nationalisms.

This process of counter-interpretations clearly shows how the politics of the present has evolved from the demand for a linguistic state to a separate nation-state. Representation of the past as a 'history of independent existence as a separate state' has been shaped by the politics of the contemporary moment which is the domination of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state that claims an authentic past (*mythos* historicised) associated with the land. Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam points out as follows:

> The choice of the 'pasts' has been at once a problem and an opportunity for Tamils ever since: they were free to view and define their identity in quite different ways, *without losing their identity as Tamils,* whereas for the Sinhala there has been only one history available. Even more importantly for Tamil identity, history was not confined to the island of Sri Lanka, but could always be found in India and Tamil Nadu. One could perhaps even say that history held little importance for the Tamils because their identity did not depend on it exclusively. It still does not, but history's significance has without doubt increased since independence.[16]

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[15] Ibid., p.26.

[16] Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam: 'The Politics of the Tamil Past' in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), p.113.

The emphasis in Tamil nationalism is on territory, history, language and culture and not on religion and race. This emphasis is the distinctive mark of Tamil (ethno) nationalism as opposed to Sinhala Buddhist (ethno-religious) nationalism. This distinctive feature is often overlooked by scholars who analyse the conflict. For example, when Uyangoda analyses the conflict he does so only as a conflict between two ethno-nationalisms.[17] In my readings so far it is only Schalk who makes this distinction as follows:

> The *Īlavar* follow a secular tradition of arguing for territory as *tāyakam,*motherland. Their main categories of instrumentalisation are not race, but language, history and human rights which provide 'people' with the right to self-determination. Therefore, there is no symmetry in relation to the other party, to the *Simhalatva* movement. This latter movement operationalizes/instrumentalises religion and race.[18]

It also has to be noted how the LTTE justifies the ideology of a separate state more as an outcome of the military domination of the Sri Lankan nation-state than as a result of a belief in a mythologized past. Speaking in a public meeting one of the former leaders of the LTTE once said as follows:

> I was once asked by an Englishman connected with the British Refugee Council: 'You say Tamil Eelam, but where are the boundaries of this Tamil Eelam that you talk about? Show me.' I was taken aback by the directness of the question. I thought for a while, searching for an appropriate response. Then I replied: 'Take a map of the island. Take a paint brush and paint all the areas where Sri Lanka has bombed and launched artillery attacks during these past several years. When you have finished, the painted area that you see – that is Tamil Eelam'. [19]

In one of the Sinhala publications of the LTTE Appa identifies the evolution of the Tamil national consciousness and its relationship to the territory of the North-East within the context of anti-Tamil rioting within the areas where the Sinhalese were the majority in the south of Lanka. 'What was the message given to us when we were chased away from the South to the North and East? "You are not worthy to live with us. Go there and live."'[20] These words express not only the human pain of exclusion, but also the growing aspiration for freedom and equality.

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[17] Uyangoda: 'Sri Lanka's Peace: is Dialogue Among Ethno-Nationalism Possible?', *The Northeastern Monthly*, Vol III, No,1, (April, 2006), p.22.

[18] Schalk: 'Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva' in *Religion and Violence in South Asia; Theory and Practice*, (eds.) John R. Hinnells and Richard King, (London, Routledge, 2007), p.143.

[19] Nadesan Satyendra: *Tamil Eelam Struggle for Freedom: Boundaries of Tamil Eelam*, www.tamilnation.org, (November, 1993), downloaded on 24/ 11/2007.

[20] Appa: *Vanniye Sita Liyami,* (Killinochchi, Political Wing of the LTTE, 2004), p.46.

The term Sri Lanka is often used by the Sinhala polity to undermine the historical grievances of the Tamils, saying that all the people belonging to diverse ethnic and religious groups are Sri Lankans. As we have already seen the Sri Lankan identity is interwoven with the cultural homogenisation and centralised state structures which have resulted in a counter interpretation of Tamil nationalism. The history of the conflict has clearly shown how the Tamils developed a particular nationalist consciousness as a result of exclusion from the Sri Lankan state and began to envisage a separate state called Tamil Eelam.[21]

Referring to the dilemma between the consciousnesses of the two political communities Uyangoda observes how the Tamil polity is in a post-federal state and the Sinhala polity is in a pre-federal state.[22] Puduvai Rathnadorai, the leader of the cultural wing of the LTTE, in an interview to one of the Sinhala newspapers said:

> Five decades ago when discriminatory laws were passed against us, we told the government, 'look, we are Sri Lankans, don't do this.' Then they said, 'no you are Tamils.' We kept on stressing that we are Sri Lankans, but it was not accepted. Ultimately we asserted our identity and said 'alright we are Tamils.' After decades of struggle now they ask us, 'Look, why can't you think like Sri Lankans?'.[23]

This reflects the rationale behind the two polarising paradigms of nationhood, Sri Lankan and Tamil Eelam. These internal dynamics of politics of interpretation also interacted with the external factors within the context of regional and global politics.

There had been protests in India (particularly in Tamil Nadu) against the discrimination against Tamils by the Sri Lankan government since the independence of the country, but the government of India did not venture to intervene in a decisive manner. However, India began to support the militants since the 80s by providing facilities for training with the intention of challenging the pro-US Colombo regime. It was during a heightened phase of the Cold War, the effects of which were felt mainly in south-east and central Asia. The Sri Lankan government had renewed its ties with the USA, Pakistan and Israel. India, which had made bilateral agreements with the Soviet Union, was made to feel insecure by these developments.[24] Even though both

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[21] Asserting the right to self-determination has historically been easier if the group has a clear association with a territory. This is one reason why the Kurds have difficulty asserting their right and also the Nomads of the Western Sahara.

[22] Uyangoda: 'Peace Watch', *Polity*, Vol.1, No.4, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 2004), p.13.

[23] 'Puduvai Rathnadorai Samaga Sammuka Sakachchawak' in *Rawaya*, 01/12/2004, p.13.

[24] The Reagan administration had entered into a 'strategic partnership' with Pakistan in order to

India and Sri Lanka claimed to be non-aligned countries they could not hold to this status. The Sri Lankan government also turned towards the USA, China, South Africa, Israel and Pakistan for military assistance to counter the Tamil insurgency. There was also growing opposition to the Sri Lankan government in Tamil Nadu with the increase of outflow of Tamil refugees from the North-East of Lanka. It was within this context that India supported the Tamil militant groups at the initial phase of the conflict.[25] As Frank Wright points out, this situation could be seen as 'imperialization of human relationships,' which is 'a thinly veiled relationship of force.'[26] This reflects the dynamics of international power relationships that emerged after the Second World War and within the context of the Cold War.

It is evident how the dynamics of representation of collective identities among nation-states and within nation-states are interwoven with the regional and global political interactions. The crisis in Lanka is a result of the dominant model of the nation-state whereas its effects are felt across the territorial boundaries of the state (particularly in Tamil Nadu). In securing the national interest of territorial sovereignty, the politics of nation-states have been determined solely by pragmatic alliances with each other. Such alliances could often undermine the ethical component within the movements that have emerged from the oppressed masses, movements like the Tamil movement for self-determination, and thereby increase polarisations among diverse ethnic and religious communities. As Sankaran Krishna points out, there needs to be a 'a fairly decisive re-negotiation of the very fundamentals of an inter-state system premised on the assumption of sovereign states whose writ runs across their territories'. The Tamil movement for self-determination, therefore, can be viewed not as 'an anachronistic outfit fighting for an obsolescent idea (the territorial nation-state) but rather the harbinger of a fundamentally new way of being in a post-national world'.[27] However, such an analysis was absent within the dominant polity.

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contain the Soviet influence in central Asia. China also assisted Pakistan's covert war in Afghanistan in order to contain Soviet influence. Anton Balasingham shows how India became more concerned about the military partnership between the USA and Pakistan when Afghanistan became a 'hotbed of superpower hostility'. Anton Balasingham. *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers*, (Mitcham, Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2004) p.49.

25 Frank Wright using the concepts of ethnic frontier and metropolis in analysing the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Algeria and the American South notes how the nature of the relationships between the *ethnic frontier* and the *metropolis* could determine the nature of the conflict. Wright: *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis*, p.55.

26 Ibid., p.27.

27 Sankaran Krishna: *India's Role in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict* (Colombo, Marga Institute, 2001),

The process of militarization of the conflict continued while India entered into a pragmatic alliance with the Sri Lankan government at the end of the Cold War, changing its earlier position. By the end of the last century the numbers of the Sri Lankan Army increased from 25,000 to 125,000 while the Tamil militancy turned into a conventional army of 25,000.[28] The number of deaths and displaced families increased due to the Sri Lankan military operations in the Tamil areas. At the initial stage Tamil militancy also targeted the Sinhala settlements in the North-Eastern border that had been built by the different governments in power. The Muslim community was also affected by the conflict between the two main protagonists. This contributed to the rise of a Muslim consciousness which led to the formation of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. The East became one of their major power bases.[29]

2. Sinhala Militancy and Tamil Militancy: A Convergence?

The mechanism of robbing Peter to pay Paul did not alleviate the economic and social grievances of the Sinhala masses either, even though they were made to believe constantly by the Sinhala nationalist polity that they were the true heirs of the nation. The neo-liberal economic policies of the government began to create enormous hardships for the majority Sinhala peasants, and workers, as well as to public sector employees. In 1981 over 81,000 state and public sector employees who went on strike demanding a pay increase were sacked and some of them committed suicide. Proposals were made to privatise state sponsored welfare schemes such as health, education and transport. Within the growing service oriented economy the English educated had better chances of employment than the Sinhala or Tamil educated.30 The uncertainty created by these circumstances led to the second insurrection of the JVP from 1987-1989. The JVP, as in 1971, once again did not recognize the Tamil

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p.14.

[28] These figures have been cited in Kithusara Group: *With the Eyes of Faith*, (Kalutara, Kithusara, 2000), p.3.

[29] For a detailed analysis of the rise of Muslim consciousness and the formation of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress see Vellaithamby Ameerdeen: *Ethnic Politics of Muslims in Sri Lanka*, (Kandy, Centre for Minority Studies, 2006), pp.166-186.

[30] There was wide spread unemployment among the educated youth. Thirty percent of graduates were unemployed. The total number of unemployed had reached 1.1 million. See Ivan: *Arbudaye Gaman Maga: Eitihasika Vikashanaya Athem Lakshana*, (Galkissa, Rawaya Prakashana, 1988). The title of this work means 'the road to crisis: some characteristics in the historical development', pp.44-45.

grievances. In principle it laid emphasis on class struggle, but in practice its base was the urban and rural middle classes who were the product of the colonial and post-colonial mechanisms of the state. Their articulation of Marx's class struggle was theoretical and dogmatist whereas the very material basis of the movement consisted of rural and urban educated youth. They attacked the government which was prompting neo-liberal economic policies, but did not critique the very state structure which was suppressing the Tamils. Theoretically state power was necessary for them to establish socialism, whereas in practice the existing state is ideologised with a Sinhala Buddhist identity. Both habitus and field were not tested by the praxis.

Bourdieu shows how theory and praxis need to complement by each other; '... research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty'.31 This complementarity could not be found in the JVP's theorization of social change in Lanka. Bourdieu also shows that the habitus is 'a transcendental but a historical transcendental bound up with the structure and history of a field'.32 The habitus of the Sinhala Buddhist national identity was a historical transcendental which was bound up with the structure of the unitary state and the history of the political field of colonial practice and post-colonial nation-building, but the JVP perceived it as an absolute transcendental that cannot (or should not) be changed.

The potential space for social and political transformation within the Sinhala society was occupied by the JVP's essentialist perception of nationhood. They demanded a sadarana smajayak (the word sadarana also means just, mainly social justice). They used this word to avoid the ambiguity of the word dharmishta that was used by the government in reinterpreting the imperial rule of Asoka which is said to have been righteous. Nevertheless, they borrowed very comfortably the ethno-religious narratives of the past to symbolise contemporary politics and interpret their movement giving it a nationalist flavour. The process of recycling cultural myths continued with an essentialist representation of the past. The leading commander of their military wing, Deshapremi Jatika Viyaparaya (Patriotic Nationalist Movement) was named as Kirthi Vijabahu. The latter was a prince from the south of Lanka who in the eleventh century fought against the Cholas in the north. Within the system of

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[31] Pierre Bourdieu, and Loic J.D.Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), pp.160, 162,

[32] Ibid., p.189.

dynastic politics he also had to face three other rebellions from his own brothers. The nature of pre-colonial galactic politics is undermined in the process of recycling these narratives in depicting the present. The choice of the past in contemporary politics is also a process of forgetting past(s).

The JVP also continued to perceive the Tamil movement for self-determination as part of Indian expansionism, not differentiating between the distinct nature of Lankan Tamil politics and the cultural affinity of Lankan Tamils and their south Indian counterparts. History was mythologized again by constructing the other. Mythos was historicised with an exclusivist interpretation of the past by the movement that emerged from the underprivileged Sinhala social classes too. The movement rightly identified the deep rooted grievances of the Sinhala masses caused by colonial and post-colonial economy, but they did not identify the cultural recycling that took place within the colonial practice and its political implications in the formation of the state. In the treatment of culture they adopted a 'perennialist'view, but in analysing the economy they utilised modern Marxist tools. They assumed that state formation is based on cultural homogenisation and centrality of the state. This approach not only disallowed recognition of ethnic and religious diversities but also led to a process of scapegoating the minorities for the economic ills of the nation, depriving two generations of youth (1971 and 1987-89) of a moral imagination of an island where diversity is respected through the transformation of state structures.

The JVP was also critical of the churches and the Western-funded NGOs who were accused of aiding the neo-colonial interests of the Western powers. The NGOs that were promoting socioeconomic development projects were seen as social reformists who were considered a hindrance to radical structural economic changes. System change meant basically a government change. Many among the poor masses who could not wait until a system change occurred remained with the government (UNP at the time), which maintained welfare projects, or with the main opposition party (SLFP at the time), which promised such material help. The NGOs encouraged local initiatives for economic and social development among these masses without addressing the political dimension of the crisis. In their criticism of the churches the JVP also could not differentiate between the hierarchy and the ordinary faithful. As a result the poor Catholic masses, many of whom were fishermen and women, were undermined.

The government was facing battles from two ends, one from the Tamil militancy and the other from the Sinhala militancy. The latter opposed the government and the former opposed the state. The former demanded a separate state and the latter called for a change of the government. Instead of creating conditions for dialogue with the parties in conflict the government, within the system of nation-states in South Asia, entered into an agreement with India (Indo-Lanka Peace Accord) inviting the Indian Army as a 'Peace Keeping Force' to the North-East of Lanka. The Sri Lankan army was brought back to the southern parts of the island to suppress the Sinhala militancy. 60,000 were mercilessly killed including over 600 Buddhist monks. The military used the term *dhamma chakkare* (wheel of dhamma) to name one of the methods of torture where the victim was kept for hours and days tied to a rotating iron bar to extract information. The use of Buddhist terms *dharmishata* and *dhamma chakkare* to refer to a repressive regime reflects clearly the ambiguity of Sinhala Buddhism in Lanka. The JVP also killed some monks who were accused of aiding the government.

It looked as if a Sinhala dynasty was making a pact with an Indian dynasty, but this agreement was made within a nation-state system where the communities have been polarised. The agreement was vehemently opposed by both the militant movements. The JVP's opposition was based on their theory of Indian expansionism. Apart from placing this theory in the context of geo-politics they borrowed extensively from the *vamsic* narratives of South Indian invasions. Ironically the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist state which was upheld by the government and the JVP was the same. The LTTE opposed the agreement on the basis of an imposition of a solution against the mandate of the Tamils which we will discuss under the section 'politics of counter interpretation' below. As in the period of the Tamil Youth League in the 1930s which was pioneering the campaign for *swaraj* for the entire island of Lanka (with some support from southern leftist groups) this period could have been another occasion where the Tamil and the Sinhala movements that voiced the grievances of their communities could have joined hands with each other on the political level. This demanded a moral imagination based on the particular cultures of the two communities. The Tamils carried out a series of Gandhian type fast unto death campaigns trying to evoke the moral consciousness of 'mother India' demanding de-militarization of the North-East. This was a non-violent way of articulating the moral

imagination within the Hindu culture. Schalk notes how the LTTE utilises both violence and non-violence to reach its aim of Tamil Eelam.

> For Gandhi non-violence as method was not only a method; it was Truth itself, a holy principle that could not be replaced by violence. The practice of non-violence as method was at the same time a manifestation of the ultimate aim called Truth. Gandhi's point was to let the method itself anticipate the ultimate aim. The method itself already expressed Truth and was at the same time on the way to Truth...The LTTE is not selective and exclusive about methods. That is the point: it does not exclude armed struggle from the beginning like the Gandhians. Non-violence is not a holy principle, is not Truth itself as Gandhi would say, but a strategy in the politicization of the masses. [33]

The racialised notion of Buddhism failed to create space to enter into dialogue with the Tamil movement for self-determination in articulating the moral imagination of the Sinhala Buddhist masses with Buddhist ethical principles. The Sinhala militancy, even though they demanded the withdrawal of the occupying Indian troops, did so within the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist state and opposition to devolution of power to the North-East under the Indo-Lanka Accord which was seen as part of Indian expansionism. Hostilities that arose between the Indian army and the Tamil community under the leadership of the LTTE resulted in another bloody battle turning the North-East of Lanka to 'India's Vietnam' disproving that the Tamil movement for self-determination is part of Indian expansionism. This was also a moment where the double-minority mentality could have been problematised.[34]

3. 'Uncleared Areas' and 'Liberated Areas': Contested Meanings

After the suppression of the JVP uprising by the Sri Lanka military, the Indian army withdrew from the Tamil areas, and again the Sri Lankan security forces were moblised in those areas. The war between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE continued, creating more victims, and deepening polarisation between the communities. Twenty years of civil war, 1983-2002 (with short intervals of ceasefire agreements and attempts made at negotiations) destroyed the entire infrastructure for

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[33] Peter Schalk: 'Methods of War may vary, the Aim not', www. negotiatedpeace.com, downloaded: 28/11/2007.

[34] The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups perceive themselves as a minority within the Sri Lankan South Indian region as there are 60 million Tamils in Tamil Nadu whereas the Tamils in Lanka perceive themselves as a minority within the majority-dominated Sri Lankan state.

livelihood in the Tamil region creating enormous hardships to the masses. This situation further reinforced the Tamil demand for separation. While the Tamil movement for self-determination built a separate administration under the leadership of the LTTE, the on-going war against this movement burdened the entire economy with heavy military expenditure. 0.12 billion US Dollars (1.2 billion Rupees) of military expenditure in 1983 had increased year by year and reached 4.79 billion US Dollars (47.9 billion Rupees) in the year 1999 and for that year, it was 20% of the Gross National Income. In 1999 the expenditure on education was 1.5 billion US Dollars. For youth affairs 1 billion US Dollars was spent. Only 0.9 billion US Dollars was spent on health care. The defence budget was increased again up to 5.7 billion US Dollars within the same year.[35] It has to be noted that there are 200,000 families living below the poverty line under the rule of the Sri Lankan nation-state (or in government administrative areas).[36]

In the terminology of the government the LTTE administrative areas are called 'uncleared areas' whereas the Sri Lankan military controlled areas are called 'cleared areas'. In the eyes of the Tamil movement for self-determination the 'uncleared areas' are the 'liberated areas'. While the governments continued to uphold the model of the unitary Sinhala Buddhist state this perception gets further embedded in the consciousness of the Sinhala masses as monuments are built for the dead soldiers who have allegedly died for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation-state. Buddhist religious ceremonies are held to invoke blessings upon the soldiers. Numerous war songs have been composed, sometimes depicting them as *bodhisattvas*.[37] Schools are often instructed by the department of education to remember the dead soldiers. Recently the schools were asked to celebrate the military take-over of the eastern province by the Sri Lankan security forces. The religious leaders were requested to attend the ceremonies.

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35 Mahinda Namal and Jude Lal Fernando: *Sanvedi*, (Wattala, C.A. Printers, 1999), pp.25-26.

36 Sarath Fernando: 'Tokyo Ganudenuwa (PRSP): Duppatunta Marana Varenthuwak' in *Sandeshsya*, Vol.8, No.3, June, (Colombo, Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, 2003), p.7.

37 A song composed by a Buddhist monk expresses the sentiments of a mother of a soldier as praising her son for going to war for the sake of the motherland. According to the composer, the mother says that this act is meritorious enough to attain Buddhahood in the next birth. It is only *bodhisattvas* who aspire to become Buddha in the next birth. This particular monk is also one of the leaders of the Desha Heteshi Jatika Viyaparaya (Patriotic National Movement). Some of the other leaders of the movement are the propaganda secretary of the JVP and the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist theoretician Gunadasa Amarasekara.

The Tamil consciousness has grown not only as a reaction to the dominant Sinhala Buddhist consciousness, but also as a collective assertion of Tamil nationhood where the fighters who died are seen as heroes (*mahaverar*). Days of commemorations are held on behalf of them and numerous war songs have been composed. Their photos and pictures appear at public places. One of key symbolic physical places of these commemorations is the heroes' cemetery *(mahaveera thuilum illum* – the home where the heroes sleep). Rationalisation of violence by both parties takes place, as Peter Schalk notes, despite the fact that

> both parties are aware of, and are strongly influenced by, restrictions going back to Gandhism, also to the silent enduring of martyrdom of Christian tradition, to the explicit distancing of all violence by the Buddha (even for self-defence), and modern secular concepts of human rights.[38]

The use of the terms *deshaya* and *desham* with differing meanings by the two communities expresses the political reality of the conflict which revolves around the centralised system of the state. The Lankan Tamils have begun to use *desham* to refer to the North-East of the island (also referred to as *thayakam* which means motherland) where as the Sinhalese use *deshaya* to refer to the entire island (also known as *muabima* which means motherland). In the eyes of the Sinhalese the state security forces are perceived as 'warriors of the nation' (*jatiye ranaviruvo*) and the Tamil fighters as 'terrorists', whereas the Tamils in the North-East perceive the Sinhala soldiers as 'an invading army' and the fighters as 'liberators'. These perceptions are associated with the conflicting political ideologies of the two communities in relation to the formation of the state. These are the ideology of Tamil Elam, which considers the North-East as the traditional homeland of the Lankan Tamils who are also called Eela Tamils, and the ideology of the unitary Sinhala Buddhist state which is built on ethnic homogenisation and a centralised state structure which has been informed by a racialised interpretation of the *vamsic* tradition. In the case of Tamil Eelam the emphasis is more on the rights of the Tamils to form a nation in their traditional homeland whereas in relation to the Sinhala Buddhist state ideology it is the historicised *mythos* of the *vamsic* tradition that is emphasised.

These ideologies also underpin the definitions of peace. Within the Sinhala Buddhist ideology promoted by the perennial and primordial theoreticians peace

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[38] Peter Schalk: 'Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva', p.140.

means 're-conquering' the North-East as part of the unitary state. They oppose any moves of devolution of power within a united political arrangement that are sometimes proposed by the Sinhala politicians during the attempts made at political negotiations. However, there is no consensus within the Sinhala polity regarding this. Peace for the Lankan Tamils has an ambivalent meaning ranging from internal autonomy to external autonomy (which means total independence). The response of the Tamils led by the LTTE with regard to state formation varies depending on the standpoint of the Sinhala polity. For example at the beginning of the ceasefire agreement in 2002 as a response to the lifting of the ban against the LTTE by the Sri Lankan government the former issued a statement saying that they were ready to reconsider the demand for total independence and would consider internal autonomy. The ideological underpinning of peace also determines the means of achieving the goal. A moral conscience of non-violence evoked by particular religious traditions exists within the individuals, but in the context of the assertion of collective identities within the dominant nation-state the ideological interpretations of religious traditions inform a rationalisation of violence. As Schalk puts it, the 'voice of conscience has to be silenced or marginalised by ideologies'.[39]

Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, which is based on a mythologised glorified past, presents itself in essentialist terms and perceives the other through the same prism. We have seen how such essentialist perceptions emerged as technologies of rule within the colonial practice by a process of recycling of pre-existing narratives within the system of pre-colonial galactic politics. Orientalist representations reflect the characteristics of the Occident. The very construction of the Sri Lankan nation-state (ethno-nationalist) as a political and cultural formation is a historical outcome of the colonial encounter with the Occident. The dominance of the Sinhala Buddhist ideology mirrors the dominance of Occidental paradigms of nation-building that were introduced to Lanka through the colonial encounter. The conflicts that have arisen within this dominant paradigm, therefore, cannot be called a clash of cultures (or civilisations). They are conflicts that have been caused by political interpretations of cultures. Even though the counter-interpretation of Tamil nationalism is not based on essentialist categories of race and religion, its antagonism is with a racialised interpretation of nationhood which sees Buddhism as an essential feature in the

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[39] Loc. cit.

formation of the state. The militants of the Tamil movement for self-determination attacked Buddhist places of worship that have been politicized by the Sinhala polity. Schalk notes:

> When some of them attacked the *bodhi*-tree of Anuradhapura in 1984, the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy in 2001 and the Naga vihara in Yalppanam city in 1985, their aim was not the destruction of the teaching of the Buddha, but the destruction of political Buddhism as state ideology. In response, *Simhalatva* operationlises/intrumenatlises these acts as anti-religious acts, as being directed against the pure teaching of Buddhism.[40]

The attacks on Hindu and Christian places of worship by the Sri Lankan security forces are not seen as anti-religious (anti-Hindu or anti-Christian) by the LTTE but as anti-Tamil. Similarly, the refusal of the Sri Lankan government to withdraw from Hindu, Christian and Muslim places of worship is not seen as anti-religious but as the arrogance of the Sri Lankan nation-state that is justified by the Sinhala Buddhist ideology of a unitary state. It is important to recognize these subtle differences and internal dynamics between the two ideologies of nation-building in enlightening a future peace process. Even though military parity between the two parties, the economic crisis caused by the burden of war and international pressure (which is ambiguous) move the governments towards negotiations with the LTTE there needs to be a movement that emerges for peace from within the Sinhala community, a movement with an ethical and political programme of action. The challenge that lies ahead is how to liberate Buddhism from the dominant state ideology and put it in service of such a programme of action that would promote just and peaceful co-existence among diverse groups in the island. The leader of the LTTE, while recognizing the right of the Sinhala nation, made the following statement:

> We are not chauvinists. Neither are we lovers of violence enchanted with war. We do not regard the Sinhala people as our opponents or as our enemies. We recognise the Sinhala nation. We accord a place of dignity for the culture and heritage of the Sinhala people. We have no desire to interfere in any way with the national life of the Sinhala people or with their freedom and independence. We, the Tamil people, desire to live in our own historic homeland as an independent nation in peace, in freedom and with dignity.[41]

What constitutes the Sinhala nation? Is its identity built in opposition to the other ethnic and religious groups or in relation to the other? What has the Buddhist doctrine

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[40] Ibid., pp.143-144.

[41] *Velupillai Prabhakaran – Leader of Tamil Eelam*,www.tamilnation.org, downloaded on 28/11/2007

of interdependent co-origination got to offer to us in re arranging the political structures of the island of Lanka? How could Buddhism inform our moral imagination in envisaging the Sinhala nation in relation to the Tamil nation? The democratic space created by the ceasefire agreement lacked both the political will of the Sinhala polity and a moral envisioning. These are internal concerns that need to be taken in to account in resolving the conflict which will be explored in the final part of this work. However, as the local realities are interwoven with the global realities, any movement that attempts to resolve the conflict has to see the interrelatedness of the Lankan conflict with the global political, economic and cultural setting.

4. 'MEN', 'WOMEN' AND NATIONALISMS

The crisis of the Sinhala Buddhist post-colonial state deepened during the last two decades of the century as it began to be dependent more and more on global capital through privatisation of state and public sectors and foreign investments while continuing with a heavy military budget spent in defence of the unitary state. It was a kind of selling one's own household to transnational cooperations and buying weapons to destroy the neighbour's household in the North-East with whom one has lived for two thousand years.[42] The women were subjected to superexploitation in the apparel industry and other types of foreign investments where labour laws had been relaxed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that while Lehman Brothers earn about 2 million Pounds Sterling within 15 minutes of work through the use of the computer a woman in Sri Lanka has to work 2, 287 minutes to purchase a T-shirt.[43]

> It is a well-known fact that the worst victims of the recent exacerbation of the international division of labour are women. They are the true surplus army of labour in the current conjuncture. In their case, patriarchal social relations contribute to their production as the new focus of super-exploitation.[44]

Prasanna Vithanga's film *Death on a Full Moon Day* depicts the story of a family in the north central Dry Zone in Lanka where the younger daughter goes to work in one of the apparel factories after the death of her brother in war. Working in

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[42] See Victor Ivan for details of selling of state owned industries and lands of the farmers to Transnational Corporations by the government. pp.29-34

[43] Dona Landry and Gerald Maclean (eds.), *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (London, Routledge, 1996), p.129.

[44] Cited by Stephen Morton: *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (London, Routledge, 2003). p.98.

such a factory is seen by her boy friend as immoral.[45] Studies by Caitrin Lynch show how such perceptions of women have been a result of a particular interpretation of Sinhala Buddhist culture. The women workers in foreign owned apparel factories are seen by the Sinhala Buddhist intelligentsia as 'our innocent girls' who have been defiled by foreign influence. The word innocent in Sinhala is *Ahinsaka*. Even though it comes from the word *ahimsa* (non-violence), when it is used for women it connotes purity, mainly sexual purity. Some factories manufacture underwear for the foreign market and the very association of Sinhala women with this process of production is perceived as defiling them. White foreign women wearing this underwear have been imagined as sex objects by the social and cultural psyche through the images promoted by the market economy (specifically by the tourist industry). Lynch names this type of criticism of society as 'underwear critique' where national culture is defined in terms of biological differences and the 'sexual purity' of women:

> The implication was that innocent girls, who should be associated with local traditions, are now working in global capitalist industry and, even worse, sewing immoral products for white women...This concept of "innocence" is an important component of a widespread spatialization of authentic Sinhalaness in terms of rural/urban divide... [I]t consists of a pervasive conceptual linkage between villages, discipline, tradition, and morality that is ascribed to many Sinhala Buddhists.[46]

Vithange's cinematic work makes an attempt to link the tragedy of war waged in the name of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state with the tragedy of poverty of the rural Sinhala masses. Both the action of the Buddhist monk and the villagers to celebrate the death of the war hero by erecting a monument and the reaction of the boy friend of the woman apparel worker (who is the sister of the dead soldier) have underestimated the pain of loss of life of a man and the superexploitaion of a woman within the dominant construction of national identity. What is emphasised here is not the superexploitation of a woman, but her 'sexual purity'.

The economic formation of the Sri Lankan state began to be based on foreign capital and superexploitation of women since the 80s while unemployed men were recruited to form the security forces in defence of the unitary political formation of the Sinhala Buddhist state against the Tamil movement for self-determination.

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[45] Prasnna Vithanage: *Death on a Full Moon Day*, DVD, (Colombo, Torana Music Box, 2004). See also www.vithange.com

[46] Caitrin Lynch: 'Economic Liberalization, Nationalism, and Women's Morality in Sri Lanka' in *Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Deborah Winslow and Michael D. Woost, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004), p.175.

Ideologising Buddhism in relation to the colonial and post-colonial political structure of the unitary state and the exclusivist Sinhala identity has blocked the path of right view of interdependent co-origination that would show the interconnectedness among the exploited Sinhala women and unemployed Sinhala youth in the south and the displaced Tamils and Muslims in the north and east of the island. There are three groups who have recognised this interrelatedness and whose work has created some space for dialogue. They are the *Hiru* Group, the *Sadujanarawa* Group and the *Kithusara* Group. Their work will be evaluated in the final part of this work in articulating the politics of interpretation for just and peaceful co-existence.

5. Missed Opportunities

The seventeen years of rule by the UNP spearheaded the neo-liberal policies and the suppression of the Sinhala militancy, but the ethnic conflict had been protracted with loss of many human lives and with a heavy economic burden. In the meantime conditions laid by the International Financial Institutions and the World Bank on the government demanding restructuring of the economy disallowed maintaining the welfare state. Welfare both on the national and electoral level was the material basis that solidified the traditional and feudal social relationships between the Sinhala political elite and the masses. These relationships were often used on the electoral platform to win elections. A new government formed by Peoples' Alliance (a coalition formed by the SLFP and few other leftist parties) came into power in the mid nineties under the leadership of a woman prime minister (and later president) whose victory was interpreted by Tessa J. Bartholomeusz as a reflection of Buddhist motherhood as mentioned earlier. The president, who came to power by a massive support promised to solve the ethnic conflict through negotiations while 'humanising' the neo-liberal economy. The LTTE also responded positively and there was a ceasefire agreement followed by peace talks which are known as the 'Jaffna Talks'. The government sent four of its civil servants for talks with the political leadership of the LTTE.

Six months of talks failed due to lack of political will from the government to attend to the immediate humanitarian needs of the affected masses in the North and

East.[47] Moreover, sending a delegation of civil servants reflected the government's reluctance to recognise its dialogue partner as an equal. This also meant it underestimated the political nature of the Tamil movement for self-determination. The government which came to power with the promise of stopping war and bringing peace initiated another round of military operations called 'War for Peace'. This period is termed 'Elam War III'.[48] During this period while the Sri Lankan security forces gained control of Jaffna displacing over five hundred thousand people, the LTTE overran several large military camps in the North.[49] Promises given to humanise the economy did not last long either as the process of privatisation continued. As the mass base of the government weakened with the furtherance of the market economy the only factor that bound the Sinhala political elite with the masses was the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology. It is here that the narrative motherhood of Buddha was overshadowed by the narrative of Vihara Mahadevi, mother of Duttagamini, who is said to have encouraged her son to go according to the *vamsic* tradition.

It was during this phase that a vast region within the North and East was transformed into a *de facto* state by the LTTE. Kristian Stokke points out, that in Lanka there is 'a *de facto* dual state structure'. The *de facto* state that the LTTE has formed in the North-East (the east was taken over militarily by the government in 2007) 'includes revenue collection, police and judiciary as well as public services and economic initiatives'.[50] This type of state formation has led to a shift from victimhood to self- assertion where part of the Tamil cultural and linguistic community in the

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47 In my many visits to the North and East during this period to facilitate cross-community meetings organized by *Hiru* and *Kithusara* Groups there were some frequent statements and questions raised by the Tamil participants. 'We know that we can move around in Colombo freely without being checked as military check points have been removed in the capital city. We are also happy that many Sinhalese are able to come to the Buddhist Shrine in Nagadeepa here in North. Why is it that we here have to go through so many military check points still? Why is it that we still do not get our houses, lands and schools back from the Sri Lankan military?

48 The period of the conflict between 1983-1990 is called Eelam War I. The Eelam War II (1990-1995) began after the withdrawal of the Indian army from the North-East and a short period of unsuccessful negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE.

49 See for a detailed account of this event where nearly half a million Tamils were displaced, S. J. Emmanuel: *Let My People Go*, (Germany. Tamil Catholic Chaplaincy, 1999), pp.21-30. See also the Sinhala work *Sanvedi* which in a narrative form published some experiences of the people, especially women, who had to go through this mass displacement. Mahinda Namal and Jude Lal Fernado: Sanvedi, (Kalutara, Kithusara, 1999), p.12.

50 Kristian Stokke: 'Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institution and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.6, (2006), p.1022.

North-East has been transformed into a Tamil nation-state. The LTTE also negotiated with several Tamil political parties and the latter formed the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The TNA contested the 2001 general elections on the principles of the Tamil movement for self-determination and won all the twenty seats in the North and East.

These internal dynamics of the conflict interacted again with the geo-political interests of the West. The free flow of global capital into Lanka required political stability. Powers such as the EU and the USA (also Japan), who control global capital and who also had a high percentage of investments in the country, demanded this stability from Lanka. The investors became interested in political 'peace', peace achieved through free flow of capital. The need for political stability was being reiterated more by the interests of the promoters of global capital as the LTTE mounted an attack on the Sri Lankan air force base and the adjoining civilian airport at the beginning of the new millennium. The UNP formed a new government in the Parliament while the president was from the People's Alliance.[51] Outlining the background for the next phase of peace negotiations between the two main protagonists of the conflict Stokke writes:

> A series of military victories in the late 1990s brought extensive areas under LTTE control and created a certain military parity of status with the government of Sri Lanka. Thus the third Eelam War (1995-2001) ended in a military deadlock which, together with economic crisis, regime change and favourable international conditions, led to a Ceasefire Agreement on 22 February 2002 and to subsequent peace negotiations in 2002-2003.[52]

It is in this context that the ceasefire agreement between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE was brokered by the Royal Norwegian Government and supported by forty donor countries along with the International Financial Institutions with the promise of an aid deal for development on condition of the adoption of the peace process. The ceasefire agreement of 2002 was based on the *de facto* borders of the two areas, naming them as 'the areas controlled by the GOSL and the LTTE'.[53]

The guns were silenced. The movements from two areas increased. A democratic space was created to discuss the differences. *Parity of esteem* between

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[51] Sri Lanka's 1978 constitution introduced an executive presidential system which has power over both judiciary and the legislature.

[52] Stokke: p.1022.

[53] Article 1.5 of the 'Agreement on a ceasefire between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Libertaion Tigers of Tamil Eelam'. See 'List of Selected Texts-Laws, Agreements, Manifestos...' in *Tamil Eelam Struggle for Freedom* in www.tamilnation.org, downloaded on 27/11/2007, and Anton Balasingham: *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers*, (Mitcham, Fairmax Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp.491-501.

both parties was established which was a drawback in the previous 'Jaffna Talks' in 1995. Even though cessation of hostilities is not a just-peace it is a non-negotiable pre-requisite towards negotiating a just-peace. During the peace process we see the Tamil nationalist movement, while maintaining its basic principles of homeland, self-determination and nationhood, enter into an ambivalence of proposed political arrangements that would resolve the conflict with the Sri Lankan state. At the beginning of the ceasefire agreement they made a policy statement saying that they would reconsider their demand for external self-determination and consider a political arrangement based on internal autonomy. This was a gesture that invited the Sri Lankan government to address its political will by reconsidering the transformative incapacity of the state. In the peace negotiations, the priority given to issues of development by both parties and the international community was recognition of the growing economic grievances mainly caused by war, though the core political issues of the conflict were not addressed. It was also a pragmatic approach of addressing the immediate economic issues before a final solution is discussed. This approach was meant to build confidence between the two main protagonists of the conflict. The donor countries and the financial institutions had promised 4.5 billion rupees for the 'project of peace building through development' in a meeting held in Tokyo. In principle, though not in practice, this could have avoided the policy so far of taking from one to give to another and scapegoating. As Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah rightly notes, the promise of development has been used as 'the proverbial carrot' to draw popular support for the peace process.[54]

An agreement was made during the initial rounds of peace talks with the Sri Lankan government to form joint sub-committees to implement confidence building measures between the two parties with regard to rehabilitation, reconstruction and demilitarisation. There was also an agreement to form a sub-committee on gender issues. The government rejected these sub-committees on the basis of the centrality of the unitary state and said that it could not share its powers on monetary matters with any other parties and thereby refused to allocate funds needed for immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs. The government also refused to implement the necessary measures suggested by the subcommittee for demilitarization to withdraw

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[54] Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah: *The Return of Peace in Sri Lanka: The Development Cart Before the Conflict Resolution Horse?*, (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2003), p.29.

partly from the HSZ (High Security Zones) and let the displaced people return to their lands and houses acquired by the Sri Lankan Army.

Could a purely economic approach resolve the conflict in a situation where political sovereignty based on ethnic (Tamil) and ethno-religious (Sinhala Buddhist) ideologies form the terrain of the conflict? The history of the conflict evolved through a process of interaction between power and culture in the colonial practice and post-colonial nation-building. The encroachment of global economic pragmatism is seen as the new species of colonialism by the trade unions, farmers and students. The promise of foreign aid for development is attached to neo-liberal policies of privatization and restructuring of the economic system. Commenting on the documents on development projects that were made public during this period by the Sri Lankan government and the World Bank, Michael D. Woost and Deborah Winslow write: 'Besides the focus on resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees and the rebuilding of regions that experienced the most destruction, the other major emphasis is on "growth".[55] Judging the economic wellbeing of a society by its economic growth is based on a kind of social Darwinism where economic gains are achieved through competition. The projects proposed by the International Financial Institutions demanded shifting of public resources from social welfare to investments. This policy had already caused enormous opposition not only from the Sinhala working class and the rural peasantry, but also from public and state sector employees. The campaign of the LTTE for economic development emphasised more the immediate humanitarian needs of the people affected by war in the North-East than the economic policy itself. The mobilisation of trade unions by the JVP laid more emphasis on opposition to the political negotiations with the LTTE than against the dictates of global capital that affected the masses. In other words, they undermined the economic rights of the Sinhala masses while rallying the trade unions in opposition to the political rights of the Tamils. In their political agenda priority was given to mobilising the masses in defence of the unitary state against the Tamil movement for self-determination. The main slogan was *rajjaya ape! eya aiti apata! ape abilashayan venuven eya meheyaviya yutui!* (The state is ours! It belongs to us! It should be led to meet our

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[55] Micheal D.Woost and Deborah Winslow: 'Epilogue or Prelude to Peace' in *Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Deborah Winslow and Michael D. Woost, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004), p.199.

aspirations!)[56]. It sounded as if that all the problems will be solved once the unitary state is protected. The economic and social grievances of the Sinhalese once again have become a breeding ground for the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist claims of a unitary state blocking the peace process.

6. Local and Global Dynamics of the Conflict

Parallel to the above developments the first international donor group meeting, which looked into the reconstruction and rehabilitation needs in the war torn North-Eastern provinces, was held in Oslo, Norway, in November 2002 with the participation of both parties along with representatives of the donor countries. There the parties agreed to have a second round of the same meeting in Tokyo, Japan, to discuss matters further and evaluate the progress made. A meeting in Washington was decided unilaterally by the GoSL with the backing of the USA, but without the consent of the LTTE after the first Oslo meeting. The decision prevented the LTTE from participating in this crucial meeting, on the basis that it was a banned organization in the United States. As a result the LTTE decided to boycott the important Tokyo meeting, in order to mark their protest against the violation of the principle of parity of status by their exclusion from the Washington meeting. In the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami both parties formed a joint mechanism to reconstruct and rehabilitate the affected areas. Soon after, it was suspended by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka due to two law suits filed by the JVP and the *Jatika Hela Urumaya* (National Heritage Party) reflecting further the incapacity of the Sri Lankan state to be flexible even in times of natural disaster. At this stage we see how both the local and global factors have contributed to protract the conflict rather than helping to facilitate the peace process.

We have seen how the island of Lanka has been a strategic location since the colonial period. Even though the political stability that was required by global capital is in disarray, furtherance of the conflict in the name of the 'war against terror' has helped the global powers who have geo-political interests in the island. The present phase of globalisation not only works on an economic front but it also operates

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[56] Deshahiteshi Jatika Viyaparaya: *Batahira Balaya saha Lankave Iranama*, (Colombo, Desha Hiteshi Jatika Viyaparaya, 2007), p.145.

militarily in the context of the growing trade war between China and the United States of America. The island of Lanka is situated just at the centre of the sea lines of communication between these two global powers. The strategic harbour of Trincomalee which is located in the east has been a pivotal location for the global powers since the colonial period. Direct military support was given to the Sri Lankan government by the US in taking over LTTE controlled areas in that region (Trincomalee is situated in the Eastern Province) and in maintaining the region after the takeover is a clear reflection of the geo-political interests that have compounded the conflict. The meta-narrative of the 'global war against terror' has been instrumental in suppressing the particular struggles of ethnic and religious others. This 'campaign against terror' can be seen as a furtherance of the 'civilising mission' of the British nation-state and Empire. The ideologues of the Sri Lankan nation-state constantly appeal to the West, particularly the USA, to implement its policies against terror 'honestly' in Sri Lanka.[57]

Locally, the last decade marks the waning of the power bases of the two major parties with the disillusionment of the educated rural classes (university students, state and public sector employees) who began to rally around the JVP, giving them 39 seats in the Parliament out of 226. It was in this matrix of economic and political instability that an ultra-nationalist Sinhala Buddhist political party emerged headed by Buddhist monks. This is the first time that the monks formed a party with the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist state. Their manifesto was based on the establishment of *dharmarajya* (kingdom of dharma) which meant a centralised Sinhala Buddhist state. Could this be called Buddhist fundamentalism? It is a more political form of fundamentalism which is associated with the centrality of the unitary state and ethnic homogenisation than a doctrinal religious fundamentalism based on an interpretation of the Pali canon. It is doctrinal to the extent that it bases itself on a racialised interpretation of the post-canonical *vamsic* tradition where Buddhism, Sinhala ethnicity and state are seen as inseparable. At times it can also be doctrinal fundamentalism where some texts of the Pali canon are interpreted in the light of a racialised interpretation of post-canonical Pali literature. For example, de Silva, one of the theoreticians of Sinhala Buddhist ideology, argues that Buddha did not condemn

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[57] The leader of the Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) appealed recently to the U.S. to implement its 'global war against terrorism' in Sri Lanka. 'Somawamsa Samaga Sanvadayak' in *Sunday Divaina,* 11/07/2004, p.14.

the existence of an army and ask the kings to dissolve them whereas he listened to king Bimbisara's complaint about soldiers leaving the army to become monks. Buddha wanted the soldiers to obtain prior permission of the king before leaving the army. According to de Silva it is Anagarika who is in line with the post-Duttagamini Buddhism of the *vamsic* tradition as opposed to pre-Duttagamini Buddhism, which was officially introduced by *arahat* Mahinda. Duttagamini radically and necessarily contextualised Sinhala Buddhism by introducing war into Buddhism. This martial dimension was lacking in the Asokan Buddhism. Asoka became a Buddhist only after he waged a war. Olcott Buddhism, which is internationalist, is a western construction of Buddhism.

De Silva also justifies martial Buddhism by making a separation between *eschaton* and the present (this-worldly). At present the Sinhala polity needs an army to protect Buddhism and it is only after this phase that *Nirvana* (*eschaton*) can be promoted.[58] In his interpretations of canonical literature de Silva makes a separation between *eschaton* and this-worldly, the laity and the monks and the path and the goal. In this approach there is a separation between transcendence (*nirvana*) and immanence (the eightfold path).

While de Silva defines Sinhala Buddhism in essentialist categories which he politicises in envisaging a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state, Schalk sees it as a racialised ideological category which has its roots in some strands of the *vamsic* tradition, colonial cultural practice and post-colonial nation-building. For the former, Sinhala Buddhist identity is an unchanging perennial substance, whereas for the later it is a malleable entity conditioned by socio-political contexts. De Silva's approach does not create space for moral reimagining of Buddhism in Lanka whereas Schalk's approach identifies a space within Lankan Buddhism (even in the *vamsic* tradition as seen in an earlier chapter) for moral imagination based on just and peaceful co-existence.

While the JVP has a base among the farmers, working classes and the university students the JHU's base is mainly among the urban and semi-urban middle class intellectuals. However both parties are competing for the Sinhala Buddhist middle class power base. Often the extreme demands put forward by the JHU are taken up by the JVP in the campaigns to consolidate their mass base. In the

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[58] Nalin De Silva: *Panashaye Daruwo*, (Colombo, Chinthana Parshadaya, 2005), pp.39-40. Also see Seneviratne: *Buddhism, Identity and Conflict*, pp.21-23.

competition between the JHU and the JVP for the power base of voters, each one seems to make a constant attempt to project oneself to the masses as more patriotic than the other.[59] Amid the uncertainty of the market economy and the unitary state structure strong allegiances to collective identities are formed in essentialist terms. In such a setting in Sri Lanka politicisation of culture is expressed in claming ownership of state power by these parties. Even though they do not claim a majority within the Parliamentary system of politics the major political parties have to compromise with them in forming governments. None of the major parties (the SLFP and the UNP) are in a position to claim an absolute majority to form governments. It is in this context that the exclusivist ideology of a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state is further reinforced continuously justifying a military option to resolve the conflict. The JVP and JHU formed a wider coalition government with the SLFP under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksha in 2005 in presenting a manifesto called *Mahinda Chintanaya* which mainly aimed at seeking a military solution to the ethnic crisis. The JVP propaganda secretary along with the leaders of *Deshahiteshi Jatika Viyaparaya* which is an umbrella organisation of Sinhala nationalist groups began to visit military camps and address the soldiers, politicising them with the ideology of the unitary nation-state. The youth who joined the army for economic reasons are given political reason to remain in the army. The monks of the JHU frequent the military camps in the North East to 'encourage' the soldiers. The ceasefire agreement collapsed and the government publicly used the rhetoric of 'global campaign against terror' in asserting the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state. The very term terrorism has blurred the understanding of the socioeconomic and political reality of the Tamils who have been subjected to oppression by the present model of the nation-state and the conflict has been further prolonged.

The Sinhala nationalists led by the JVP and the JHU see the ceasefire agreement as a conspiracy and a betrayal of the Sinhala heritage (*Sinhala Urumaya*). As the power base of the two main traditional parties, is constantly threatened by the JVP and JHU, instead of making attempts at transforming the state the governments led by the main parties continue to compromise with the demands of the two ultra-

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[59] Both the parties are led by the middle class intelligentsia who are distinct from the landed elite and the new rich who lead the two main traditional parties, the UNP and the SLFP. Even though the JVP and the JHU accuse these parties of not been patriotic, they criticise the UNP more than the SLFP with whom they have made a coalition.

nationalist parties. The latter, who have formed a coalition government with the SLFP, see their victory as a 're-conquest' by the Sinhala Buddhist state which according to them has been threatened by the Tamil movement for self-determination. The latter is seen as the new generation of Chola-Pandya invaders who are also depicted as agents of Western imperialism.

The liberal framework of human rights has not been able to identify and check the economic and political interests of the global powers whose decisions have compounded the local situations in conflict zones like Lanka. The EU explicitly stated the violation of human rights by the LTTE as the reason for the ban imposed against the latter while calling both parties to enter into a negotiated settlement. However, the EU failed to create concrete conditions that are needed for such negotiations. Therefore, since the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksha aided by JHU and JVP and the EU ban against the LTTE the conflict has claimed more than six thousand lives, displacing over three hundred thousand people. Ironically, appeals to protect human rights by the Western countries have been interpreted by the Sinhala ultra-nationalist parties as western imperialist interventions. Campaigns have been launched against NGOs, the UN Human Rights Commission, Norway and the West in general by utilizing the colonial memory and neo-colonial discourse.[60]

This tension also could be seen between the churches and the Buddhists in the context of the proposed anti-conversion bill. In the anti-conversion debate Christianity (mainly evangelical Christianity) is accused of using the 'global power of the West' and exploiting the 'growing poverty of the East' by converting the poor and the

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[60] The UN is constantly viewed as an ally of the Western Powers. The Patriotic Nationalist Movement (PNM) recently threatened to close all the local UN organisations as a response to a call made by Louise Arbour to both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to protect human rights. While the LTTE has accepted the appeal made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour to set up an independent human rights commission in Lanka, the GoSL has constantly criticised this proposal through its UN representative in Geneva, Dayan Jayatilake. One of the statements issued by Jayatilake says as follows. 'Allowing UN monitoring missions and an extended UN field presence to go wherever they like in the country is not in keeping with our laws. We don't want to be preached at by countries whose own human rights records are far from perfect'. See *Don't preach to us on human rights – Ambassador tells the West* , www.lankadissent.com, downloaded: 15/12/2007. In a protest organised by the JVP and PNM in front of the UN office in Colombo recently there were posters which said 'Neo-colonial Arbour, Hands Off Sri Lanka' (pictured by Pradeep Dilrukshana). See Daily Mirror, (Wednesday 23, January, 2008), p.1. Also see www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmHome.aspx, downloaded: 25/01/2008 and *Day when patriotic masses close UNO offices is not far away – PNM*, www.lankadissent.com, downloaded: 25/01/2008

impoverished to Christianity.[61] The appeals for a negotiated settlement are also often seen as a conspiracy of the churches who are accused of aligning with the West. Christianity is seen as an ideology that enables the West to do all that it does. Representation of the West as evil and the East as backward and unscientific has its origin within the colonial practice and the responses to it by the colonised. These blend together in antagonizing the Orient and the Occident. Even though the essentialist perception of nationhood and the Western discourse of human rights seem to be in tension with each other on the social and cultural level, on the geo-political field there is an ideological marriage between Orientalism and Occidentalism in maintaining power over the economically and culturally other who resists being subordinated. In this sense the Sri Lankan state is protected by the global powers both economically and politically (militarily) against the Tamil movement for self-determination in the name of the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. More precisely, on the political level the interest of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces in consolidating the power of the Sri Lankan nation-state and the American geo-political interest in South Asia have imbricated with each other. The evolution of the definition of political sovereignty and national identity has not been innocent.

While the ideological marriage between the meta-narratives of Orientalism and Occidentalism continues in the form of a political alliance between the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists and the global powers, polarisation between the Tamil and Sinhala communities has deepened. The east of Lanka where Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese live has become the main physical space where the polarisations are clearly manifested. There has been a growing consciousness among the Christians about their rights, especially after the proposed anti-conversion bills and the recent attacks on the churches. They have begun to distance themselves from the nationalist coalition and align more with the UNP. However, the majority of Sinhala Christians and the churches also continue to fall in line with the majoritarian politics by supporting the state against the demands of the Tamil movement for self-determination. On this issue, the churches are divided as Tamil and Sinhala. Police and military harassment in the Tamil plantation areas has increased. Within this complexity lie the Sinhala farmers who commit suicide due to indebtedness caused by the fall of the paddy

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[61] Pieris: 'The Asian Reality and the Christian Option: A Plea for a Paradigm Shift in Christian Education in Asia', p.163.

market; workers whose factories have been closed; public sector employees whose departments have been privatized; the rural masses whose land has been acquired by transnational cooperations (TNCs); Tamil (including Muslim) farmers who are unable to go to the paddy fields due to land mines (over one million) and military camps; fishermen who cannot go to sea due to regulations imposed by the Sri Lankan Navy, and thousands who have lost their means of livelihood and continue to live in refugee camps.

The fear of each other, trauma and suffering that people undergo due to the conflict need to be seen as a result of the interplay between culture and power within colonial practice and post-colonial nation-building. While strengthening local initiatives for a just peace, as the local and the global issues are interwoven within a network of asymmetrical power relationships among nations, the way out of the conflict lies in addressing the moral consciousness of global civil society in relation to the local situation and thereby formulating a global ethic of just-peace that would support local initiatives. As moral agents the religions, while accepting their culpability, need to take the responsibility of negotiating a moral imagination of a just peace with power politics if they are to be credible to the society both on the local and global level. Development workers, human rights campaigners and peace activists, who draw inspiration from secular forms of humanism, need to re-examine approaches to conflict resolution by identifying dynamics between power and culture and entering into a dialogue with alternative interpretations of ethnic and religious narratives that would promote justice and peaceful co-existence.

The conflict in Lanka is a consequence of the interplay between power and culture within the colonial practice and post-colonial nation-building. The conflict is protracted in the present phase of capitalist and militaristic (American) globalisation. Therefore the moral imagination of the way out of the conflict also needs to address both factors of power and culture, both locally and globally, in transforming or un-making the Sri Lankan nation-state. The challenge is to find ways of going beyond both the dominant model of the nation-state and the global market. In that, local situations need to be assessed in a wider global context and global powers need to be challenged for change with a network of liberative local movements. The next part of this work will make an attempt to envision the future of the island of Lanka proposing a paradigm for an ethical political movement that would effect transformation of the

present nation-state. It will be an attempt to develop the politics of interpretation for liberation.

PART IV

Overcoming the Dilemma of the Sri Lankan Nation-State

In Search of a Liberative Paradigm

INTRODUCTION

Until now, little attempt has been made to retrieve the potential in the religious traditions that would bring to light the ethical principles that would renegotiate and reorganise the political life of the people in Lanka in a just and peaceful coexistence. On the one hand those who justifiably critique religious institutions as sectarian and divisive, and propose secular paradigms of power sharing and development as solutions to the conflict have not attempted to explore the liberative dimension in religions. There is a tendency among them to underestimate the ethical dimension in religious *mythos* by replacing it with *logos*.[1] On the other hand, those who represent faith communities and appeal for peace do not venture to reinterpret their faith by exploring what peace means contextually (culturally, socioeconomically and politically) through a hermeneutical process that is supported by secular sciences. Their appeals for peace do not go beyond preaching on texts about peace.[2] Those who represent the secular and the religious spheres need to initiate a process of introspection into their ways of conflict analysis and resolution while transcending the

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1 Most of the discussions of political resolution of the conflict revolve around the Indian model of federalism. See Ram Manikkalingam: *A Unitary State, A Federal State or Two Separate States?*, (Colombo, Social Scientists Association, 2003), pp.32-33. These discussions undermine two important factors about the nature of the conflict. The first factor is that the Tamil movement for self-determination has developed into a post-federal phase while the Sinhala polity is grappling with the dilemma of not having a consensus among themselves even for a federal solution. See Uyangoda: 'Sri Lanka's Peace: Is Dialogue among Ethno-nationalism Possible?', *The Northeastern Monthly*, Vol III, No,1, (April, 2006), pp.22-26. The second factor is the underestimation of the cultural dimension of the conflict. As there is a process of politicization of culture that prolongs the conflict it is necessary (though not adequate) that an alternative culture be envisioned informed by the ethical principles of the religious traditions. The secularity of the Indian constitution that formed a basis for federalism was also culturally interpreted from within Hindu tradition by the Gandhian movement through the principle of *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (let all religions prosper). See Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, p.51. The work of Seneviratne and Sivathamby shows the importance of addressing the cultural dimension constructively in resolving the conflict in Lanka. See H.L. Seneviratne: *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1999). Karthigesu Sivathamby: *Being A Tamil and Sri Lankan*, (Colombo, Aivakam, 2005).

2 The very meaning of peace is a contested terrain. For the JHU it means a Sinhala Buddhist state, For the LTTE it means the establishment of the state of Tamil Eelam. The liberal intellectuals who represent civil society suggest federalism. The JVP sees this suggestion as a western conspiracy and asserts the unitary structure of the state as the only mode that can guarantee peace. In such a context the religious leadership is grappling with the dilemma of not having a consensus among themselves about what peace means. Statements about peace are inadequate if they are not accompanied by a moral envisioning that touches the harsh realities of the masses that cause, maintain and prolong conflicts.

assumed dichotomy between the religious and the secular spheres.[3] In this endeavour it is an imperative that the mutual fear that these spheres have about each other are overcome. The ethical and moral principles emanating from such a forum could be incorporated into the political discourse of peace negotiations. Without such a collective effort to discuss the dynamics of power and culture in creating conflicts and resolving them, a moral envisioning of the Lankan society cannot become a reality.

There will be two chapters in this final part of my work. The first chapter will make an attempt to develop an ethic for international relations or globalisation that can enlighten the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state and interreligious dialogue that would help to initiate, facilitate and maintain a peace process. Focusing mainly on Europe (as a cultural and political entity) it will first critique in brief the religious and secular absolutisms that compounded the formation of the Western nation-state, empire-building and the present phase of globalisation or imperial sovereignty, and then discuss ways and means of evolving an ethic of transforming international relations that would promote a just peace. This will facilitate a dialogical process within international relations which would contribute to the transformation of the dynamic between power and culture that has led to the present conflict in Lanka. Without a dialogical process that seriously takes into account the dynamics of the interaction between power and culture and the particular interpretations that emerge from them any international mediation in conflict resolution will be counterproductive. In generating a liberative praxis within Europe that can contribute to a just peace in Lanka a survey of groups and movements within Europe who carry such potential will be identified at the end of the chapter. In the second chapter, Sri Lanka's internalisation of the Western model of nation-state and its representation with selective readings of the past will be critiqued in exploring an alternative politics of interpretation for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. It will also explore the potential cultural socioeconomic and political locations that can initiate a dialogue among diverse communities in Lanka in view of building and consolidating local capacities for just peace. In a process of convergence and confluence (by overcoming the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological barriers), in what way can both

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[3] Compartmentalization or dichotomisation of knowledge as secular sciences, religious studies, theological and buddological studies in modern academia is reflected here. See May for a critique of this system in his attempt to correlate ethics and religion in education. John D'Arcy May: *After Pluralism: Towards an Interreligious Ethic*, (London, Lit Verlag, 2000), pp.1-8.

the local and international (particularly European) initiatives contribute to resolve the conflict? This final part of my work will make an attempt to answer this question.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE WESTERN NATION-STATE AND GLOBALISATION OF CAPITALIST SOVEREIGNTY

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF IMMANENCE AND HISTORICAL ABSOLUTISM

The history of the emergence of nation-states and empires is also the history of the emergence of an irreversible consciousness about the centrality of the human subject and the principle of immanence. The British emphasis on the Parliamentary system, French Republicanism and American deism reflected this realisation of the principle of immanence. Charles Taylor calls this a 'metaphysic of "republican" allegiance'.[1] The human potential to create and regulate the nation-state became the new sacrament that mediates the wellbeing of its citizens. Here the growing consciousness of freedom, equality and solidarity of humanity was a remarkable achievement. However, the birthmarks of the previous absolutism of the monarchical states could be found in the secular nation-state where religious narratives were also recycled in constructing national identities.[2] The principle of immanence that was associated with freedom, equality and fraternity was compounded by belief in an absolute political sovereignty which led to a sense of an unlimited economic and political power. The modern nation-state confused its *historical transcendental* of *habitus* – which was characterised by the principle of immanence – with historical absolutism leaving less space for ethical transcendence. It could contain neither internal and external colonialism nor the two world wars. The absolutist ideology of the Roman Empire and Christendom was replaced by the modern power of capital

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[1] Charles Taylor: 'A Place for Transcendence' in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, Theology: Approach the Beyond*, (ed.) Regina Schwartz, (New York, Routledge, 2004), p.8.

[2] As Hardt and Negri show the European nation-states were built on the notion of scarcity within the competition for capital accumulation. Both Rousseau's democratic republicanism and Hobbesian monarchical absolutism could have only one sovereign ruler. In this sense a definition of sovereignty was based on the notion of scarcity of space for the other and fear of plurality or multiplicity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*, p.169.

accumulation that diminished the spirit of freedom and equality of the Western Revolutions. The eruption of the two world wars was a result of the competition among European nation-states (or empires) where capital was increasing and where exclusivist cultural narratives were reinforced in defining national identity (or competing imperial identities). The political sovereignty of the nation-states began to be redefined by the nature of the process of economic production as consciousness of economic rights grew with the emergence of the working classes and with the Russian Revolution. The terrain where identities were contested became more ideological than cultural and religious. The conflict between the absolutised ideologies threatened the world with a nuclear war.

Today (the post Cold War era) belief in the unlimited power of the human subject has taken another turn where modern sovereignty of the nation-state is shifting towards a global sovereignty through capitalist globalisation with an absolutist reliance on the power of capital. There is a move to create an open space of imperial sovereignty led by the USA. This ideology is based on the belief in the sovereignty or economic transcendence of the market economy which necessitates subduing the lands, nations and peoples. It is also seen as a divine mission, especially in the USA. While the economic programme of this phase is termed liberalisation of the market, the political phase is termed 'global war against terror'. Because of the image of the post Cold War globe as a village of closely knit relationships where one single economic system is propagated through the ideology of the world market, the nature of the sovereignty of nation-states began to change. Sovereignty did not cease to be but its meaning began to change.

There is an emerging global sovereignty which is regulated by global capital causing a redefinition of the political sovereignty of individual nations in Europe within the European Union. Within the changing notion of sovereignty the American political belief of leading the world, aided by the ruling British ideology, has set in motion a new imperial system which is both harmonious and in tension with the European Union. One of the tensions lies between the moral project of the European Union (which developed in response to the two world wars) and the militaristic agenda of the USA. The new form of sovereignty puts into crisis both economically and politically the countries in the Global South. Within the new global political setting China, Iran, India and countries like Venezuela have emerged competing in the world market. Even though the political sovereignty of individual European nation-

states has been superseded by the economic sovereignty of the Euro Zone the very formation of the EU as a political entity has a political sovereignty which is clearly reflected in its tightening of border controls. Naming the EU as the 'European Fortress', Bauman points out how it consists of both 'inclusivist and exclusionary tendencies' in spreading the global capitalism.[3] Within this system a new social hierarchy is created where those who come from developing countries and conflict zones and the underclass or internally excluded have become economically and politically vulnerable. It is also a cultural zone which is both Christian and secular with a constantly growing population of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who belong to diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds. For decolonised countries who have been struggling with colonial political, economic and cultural narratives, this new global setting of USA/UK political domination and the economic power of the EU compounds the local realities. The International Financial and Trade Institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO assert that the free flow of capital – as the economic transcendence – would eradicate poverty and resolve conflicts in the world. Similarly, on the political level the 'Global War against Terrorism' is seen as a way of bringing peace to particular conflict zones and the world at large. Free trade (that claims to eradicate poverty) and a 'global war against terrorism' (that claims to achieve political peace) are the two major dogmas of modern imperial sovereignty.

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement in Lanka perceives the contemporary global political and economic power of the West, rightly or wrongly, as associated with a Christian exclusivism of chosenness.[4] The emergence of a secular social imagination and a realisation of the principle of immanence within the Western societies have not healed the historical memory of European colonialism experienced by the countries in the South. Moreover, because in the West the immanent principle has been articulated more in terms of the power of capital than in terms of its moral dimensions of freedom and equality such memories remain unchanged or are further deepened. Furthermore, even though the formation of the United Nations' Organisation after the world wars and the formation of the EU after the Cold War

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[3] Zygmunt Bauman: *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Cambridge, Polity, 2007), pp.49-53.

[4] Nalin de Silva in constructing the ideology of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism sees the economic and political power of the West as having its roots in Judeo-Christian thinking. We will discuss this hypothesis in detail in the next chapter. See de Silva: *Ape Pravada*, (Boralesgamuwa Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2006), pp.155-156.

created an ethical space for securing human rights, justice and peace within and among nations within the international system of nation-states, the economic and political power of the West – dominated by the EU and the USA – has blurred this useful space. While the EU and USA differ in their means of resolving conflicts and implementation of standards of human rights they share the same ideology of a world market. Furthermore, the alliance between Britain and the USA in the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq contributes towards an ambiguity of politics within the EU. This ambiguity is also seen in its failure to facilitate the Sri Lankan peace process.

On the international level, today the conflict between Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil nationalism has to be situated within the present moment of the transition from the sovereignty of the Western nation-state to imperial sovereignty through capitalist globalisation. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is both in harmony and in tension with the global power of the West reflecting the nature of Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological schemata. It is in harmony with the West within the political project of the 'global war against terror'. In asserting the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan nation-state against the Tamil movement for self determination led by the LTTE the ethnic conflict is depicted by the Sinahala nationalists as 'terrorism' of a particular group rather than a failure of the formation of a colonial state and post-colonial nation-building. The sovereignty of the state has been defined in terms of territorial integrity, a centralised state structure and cultural homogenisation that is associated with a historicisation of *mythos* reflecting another form of religio-political fundamentalism. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is the motor of Sinhala nationalism. At the time of writing while JHU has become the main political agent of the former the JVP has become the main interlocutor of the latter. While the European and American influence on the economy of Lanka continues to grow through investment, the American influence has specifically increased through military support. While the EU has banned the LTTE under pressure from the UK/USA alliance, the American government has made a military agreement with the Government of Sri Lanka.[5] This move is associated with

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[5] This agreement which was reached on 5 March 2007 is called Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA). It will give authority to institutions under the American Department of Defense to obtain practical military support, supplies and services from the government of Sri Lanka and also render the same to the later. See *Indian Ocean Geo-Politics and the US-SL Defense Pact*, 18 March 2007, counterstrategy.wordpress.com/2007/03/, downloaded: 04/02/2008.

the American geopolitical strategy in the Indian Ocean to secure sea lines of communication or trade routes that connect the Arabian and South China Seas because of the growing 'trade war' between the USA and China.[6] Labelling the Tamil movement for self-determination led by the LTTE only as terrorism is associated with this geopolitical interest which in turn reinforces the Sinhala nationalist claim to a unitary state and essentialist perception of nationhood.

Ironically, even though the Western Powers have not supported the demand for a separate Tamil homeland the ideologues of the Sri Lankan unitary state constantly accuse the West of mostly conspiring to divide the country – 'the only Sinhala Buddhist country' in the world. Churches who call for a peaceful settlement are also seen as collaborators in the same conspiracy while both the international and western funded local NGOs are accused of covertly supporting Tamil separatism by threatening the national interests. A parliamentary select committee proposed and headed by the JVP has been appointed to investigate the dealings of the NGOs.[7] NGOs are also perceived by the JHU as aiding proselytisation. In this sense they are seen as neo-missionary organisations.[8] In my reading of the texts of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists I have not found that military support by America is seen as an infringement of sovereignty of the country. The rhetoric of national defence is constantly utilised with an Orientalist-Occidentalist combination. (If they can do it in Iraq why cannot we do it here?)[9] There is also a tension between the Sinhala nationalist movement, expressed by the JVP and the JHU, and the West about

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6 Keen on maritime security the US has set up a container scanning system in Colombo port. And it will be providing maritime radars for the surveillance of the western coast. In November last year, US Ambassador Robert Blake journeyed to Trincomalee in the east coast to hand over to the Sri Lankan Navy a radar-based maritime surveillance system and some Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs). In his address, Blake said these equipments were meant to 'interdict arms shipments by the LTTE'. Although because of a 2008 US law, Washington cannot supply military equipment to Sri Lanka because of the latter's unsatisfactory human rights record, US military assistance of a non-lethal and defensive kind is expected to continue. When he was in Colombo in January, the chief of the US Pacific Fleet, Admiral Robert F. Willard, vowed to help Sri Lanka beef up its maritime security. See P.K. Balachandran: 'Global Concern Over Maritime Security Cripples LTTE', in.news.yahoo.com/indiaabroad/20080121/r_t_ians_wl_asia/twl-global-concern-over-maritime-securit-d5d6288.html?printer=1 *Mon, Jan 21 12:39 PM,* downloaded: 22/01/2008.

7 One of the government ministers said that the West should probe human rights abuses in Iraq first before accusing GoSL of human rights violations. See *If Iraq is the problem for Rajitha, we are for both Iraq and Sri Lankan probes -Mano Ganesan*, www.lankaenews.com, downloaded: 11/12.2007.

8 A similar attitude about NGOs can be seen in the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which is a pan-Hindu organisation in India. See M.T. Cherian: *Hindutva Agenda and Minority Rights: A Christian Response*, (Bangalore, Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2007), p.214.

9 One of the senior ministers of the government said that the West should probe human rights abuses in Iraq first before accusing GoSL such violations. See *If Iraq is the problem for Rajitha, we are for both Iraq and Sri Lankan probes -Mano Ganesan*, www.lankaenews.com, downloaded: 11/12.2007.

liberalisation of the economy. The JHU is in conflict with the West, particularly with Christianity in relation to fundamentalist evangelical conversions. While the appeals of the American government for religious freedom in Sri Lanka in the face of the proposed anti-conversion bill have become ambiguous given the background of the fundamentalist lobby that backs the Bush administration, the growing institutional fundamentalism and Christian exclusivism in the Vatican have compounded the interreligious relations. The internationalisation of the Sri Lankan conflict has to be understood within the above geo-political dimension.

However, the *cultural* and *social capital* of Europe carries a potential that can transform the global capital led political ambiguity of the EU into an ethical-political movement, which can contribute to a just and peaceful network of international relations. This ethical-political space is crucial in facilitating negotiations for a just-peace in Lanka. From a Christian point of view, the World Council of Churches' declaration of a decade to end violence and Vatican's uncompromising stand against the USA's invasion of Iraq, reflect some major constitutive elements of the *social and cultural capital* (civil society) of Europe. From a secular point of view, the existence of human rights associations, journalists associations and humanitarian agencies within Europe reflect a deep ethical concern for right to life and freedom of expression. Taking into consideration the politics of interpretation that I have discussed so far regarding the European colonial encounter, the postcolonial nation-building and the present phase of the conflict in Lanka, it is necessary that both the secular and religious spheres enter into a dialogue in search for ethical-political strategies that will facilitate a transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

2. The Principle of Secularity and the Politics of Interpretations

The principle of secularity enshrined in the formation of the EU has introduced a functional rationality to distance policy-making from any affiliation to a particular religion. Such a principle is useful in promoting a recognition of plurality and multiplicity that is much needed to arrest exclusivist construction of national identities. However, in the eyes of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement Europe is still Christian and neo-colonial. Europe's notion of secularity has not healed Lanka's historical memories of colonialism. In healing these memories it is not

enough (though necessary) to promote the principle of secularity based on functional rationality of pluralism within Europe when the conflicts are religiously supported at the local level and have roots in the European colonial past and in the present phase of globalisation. Even within Europe, faced with a crucible of cultures, the present articulation of secularity is not sufficient to respond to the new challenges. The conflict in Sri Lanka and the challenges it has posed problematise the secular paradigm of Western nation-states as much as they problematise the complicity of Christianity in colonial practice (and also the present alliance between American politics and fundamentalist evangelical groups) and of Buddhism in the essentialist representation Sri Lankan nationhood.

The ethno-nationalism of the Tamils which justifies violence as a means to achieve national liberation is at variance with the Western human rights discourse. The Tamil movement lays emphasis on the collective rights of the Tamil people as a nation within a particular region and defines individual rights in that light. In its rationalisation of violence it refers to national liberation struggles of Western nation-states in modern times and sees the Western appeals for human rights and negotiations as ambiguous, especially in the context of some Western powers militarily supporting the Sri Lankan state. The Tamil freedom movement led by the LTTE emphasises the need to establish military parity with the Sri Lankan state, which it believes would create space for political negotiations. In a recent development, the leadership of the LTTE called for a pan-Tamil nationalist movement to achieve its aim.[10] While the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism rationalises violence by the process of historicisation of *mythos*, Tamil nationalism rationalises its violence on the basis of the modern right to self-determination. Both justify military force of their own accord, constructing a particularistic ethic.

However the democratic content of the Tamil movement for self-determination has to be understood within the modern political ethic of the right to form a nation-state which is based on the principles of freedom and equality. In the face of discrimination by the majority-dominated Sri Lankan nation-state the Tamil movement for self-determination grounds itself in terms of a specific ethnic identity

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[10] See the speech made by the leader of the LTTE on 27 November 2007 in commemorating its members who have died in the conflict. *Propping up genocidal Sinhala State counterproductive, International Community should change approach – Pirapaharan,* www.tamilnet.com, Downloaded: 28/01/2008.

that has grown into a national consciousness. However, the political articulation of this consciousness is not exclusivist as the movement envisages a modern secular nation-state which includes Muslims and Sinhalese in the Eastern Province. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism promotes an exclusivist cultural homogenisation which is predicated on the belief in a primordial or perennial existence of a Sinhala Buddhist nation-state. Specificity and exclusivism are not the same. Therefore, the conflict cannot be classified as a competition between two nationalisms as some western liberal analysts claim.[11] The violent nature of the conflict and its representation by the mainstream media, both locally and globally, have blurred the understanding of these subtle nuances of the conflict. Furthermore, the increase in the belief in military victories by both parties is seen by the West as a stumbling block for a negotiated settlement, but the geo-political dynamic that has also contributed to the failure of the 2002 peace process where the Western Powers are also involved is not examined in many analyses of the conflict.

We have seen how the local reality of the Lankan conflict is interwoven with global reality as the cultures continue to become politicised (interacting with changing material conditions) within the colonial, post-colonial and the present phase of globalisation. The dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state is not only an internal crisis but it clearly reflects the crisis of the present worldwide process of capitalist globalisation led by Europe and America. In mapping the Lankan conflict, how the interaction between power and culture(s) operates (both in Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism) within the geopolitical dynamic needs to be taken seriously. Lack of such a perspective is not only a methodological issue but also an ethical matter in conflict and peace researches. In envisaging a liberative paradigm for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state ethical principles of specific cultures and religions have to be retrieved to avoid exclusivist ways of imagining nationhood. By accepting the moral failure of both secular and religious traditions we could make an attempt to retrieve their basic ethical principles to show us the path towards a resolution of the conflict. Both the principle of immanence in the secular discourse and the principle of transcendence in the religions discourse have to be reinterpreted in taking into consideration the present geo-political context.

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[11] See the Asia Report of the International Crisis Group. International Crisis Group: 'Sri Lanka: Sinhala Nationalism and the Elusive Southern Consensus', *Asia Report* , No.141, (7 November 2007), p.ii.

In envisaging a liberative paradigm or an ethic to reorganise the polity in Lanka it is important to engage in a critique of the 'Power of Europe' from within Europe's culture which is both secular and religious. Such a critique could help to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist stereotypes that continue to be politicised and that have contributed to the protraction of the Sri Lankan conflict. Such a critique will make Europe credible in its efforts at safeguarding human rights and the peace process in Lanka. It will not only help to enter into a dialogue with people of other faiths in countries like Lanka but also within Europe itself, which is becoming a crucible of cultures today. A similar process has to emerge within Lanka. The internalisation of the Western model of nation-state by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, representing it with a reinterpretation of Buddhist narratives, has to be critiqued for an honest dialogue to be initiated in resolving the conflict. The political representatives of Tamil nationalism have to make an attempt to reinterpret the modern principle of secularity that they envisage through an intercultural and inter religious dimension too.

What follows next is an attempt to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist formation of cultural perceptions that obstruct a moral imagination in resolving the conflict in Sri Lanka. First, I will examine the cultural stereotypes that form the basis for polarization between 'East and West' (in relation to Buddhism and Christianity), and Tamil and Sinhala (in relation to Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism). Secondly, I will make an attempt to search for an ethical ground that would promote a negotiated resolution for Lanka both locally and globally.

3. An Ethic for International Relations or Globalisation

i. A Clash of Civilisations or a Clash of Interpretations?

De Silva argues that civilisational differences are based on differences in thinking patterns or ideologies. He argues that *Batahira Chintanya* (Western Thinking or Ideology) is based on Judeo-Greco-Christian thinking.[12] What is Judeo here is belief in abstract reality (*viyukthabawa*) as opposed to concrete reality (*sanyuktabawa).* De Silva writes that it was the former that was retrieved by the

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[12] De Silva, Nalin: *Ape Pravada*, p.156.

Protestant Reformers against the God of Roman Catholicism. The God of the Roman Catholics was a concrete God who could be experienced through Jesus the son of Mary. The notion of objective reality (*vasthavika yatharthaya*) in Western science is derived from the belief in an abstract reality: *mulu mahat batahira vidyawema nirapeksha viyukta stya galaenne yudev deviyanvahanse harahaya* (The absolute abstract truth of whole of Western science flows through the Jewish God).[13] Therefore he argues that the roots of Western modern thinking which gave rise to Western sciences and on which the modern Western civilisation has been built is not modern but ancient. The belief that man is made unto the image of God and is entrusted with the mastery of the earth (as an objective reality) is the origin of measuring development by time allocated to 'work' and the 'efficiency' of that work. Referring to Weber's theory about the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism, de Silva tries to show how capitalism and its commodification of human beings through labour and objectification of nature are generated by the Judeo-Greco-Christian thinking. Over the last five hundred years the political leadership of Western modernity was transferred from the Pope to the British monarch and today to the American President. Even though the Catholic Church initially opposed Western modernity and science, as its power is weakened it has come to accept it.[14]

De Silva also differentiates the notion of Judeo-Greco-Christian God from the Brahman of the Vedas where the latter is not perceived as an abstract reality, but as one who is identical with the world. In this sense there is no basis as in Western thinking for an objective reality that could commodify human beings and nature for exploitation. Even the *sudras* (the 'low caste') had a place in the body of Brahman. Vedic thinking is based on spiritual reality whereas Judeo-Greco-Christian thinking is based on objective reality. [15] Because the notion of Brahman also only served certain social classes in society Siddhartha rejected this notion from the beginning of his learning. He saw that the notion of Brahman was leading to a belief in an abstract reality or an eternal soul (*paramathmaya* or *sadatana atmaya*) which justified the domination of Brahmanism. However the rise of the *kshatriyas* challenged this power. Siddhartha's search for a new thinking has to be understood in this context: he rejected the existence of an individual reality and asserted *anatma* and *anichcha* while

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[13] Ibid., p.162.
[14] Ibid., pp.172-175.
[15] Ibid., pp.226-229.

emphasising interdependent co-origination and cyclic thinking of history. Even though Guatama's main intention was to show the way out of the cycle of *samsara*, this way had an enormous impact on the socio political life of the society.[16] The main difference between the Judeo-Greco-Christian thinking and the Sinhala Buddhist thinking is that the former believes that every thing exists outside our concrete reality whereas the latter realises that nothing exists outside our concrete reality or without us (*apen thorawa*). [17] This is found in the Theravada form of Buddhist thinking and it could be preserved among Sinhalese because it is intrinsic in the nature of their culture to grasp the cyclic thinking in Buddhism as opposed to belief in abstract reality. The Theravadins realised that giving in to Mahayanists is not different from accepting the Vedic belief system. [18] Buddhism did not succeed in India and among the Tamils.[19] Thus for de Silva it was Duttagamini, who, by defeating Elara politically (in de Silva's sense also culturally), established the Sinhala Buddhist state that would protect Sinhala Buddhist culture and thinking. De Silva's categorisation of East and West resembles the Orientalist-Occidentalist division which has underestimated both the biblical idiom of Christianity and the ethical dimension in Buddhism.[20] The suppression of the Tamil movement for self-determination is where Orientalism and Occidentalism intersect in Lanka where the sufferings of both the Tamil refugees and of those within the Sinhala community are unheard.

De Silva is right in saying that knowledge is not devoid of cultural thinking patterns.[21] However, even though he admits that the rise of Western thinking cannot be reduced to one single cause (which he says is a Western way of analysis) his main argument is that modernity has been caused by the belief in an abstract reality. As we have seen in the theoretical framework of this work in the second chapter, the rise of capitalism has been the result of multiple movements, mainly economic and cultural. The Biblical idiom has been reduced to a belief in an abstract reality ignoring the concrete and existential meaning that faith in a transcendent God has for the Semitic culture and its peoples. Culture as a thinking pattern has been perceived as a fixed unchanging consciousness and the ideological contamination of a particular tradition

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16 Ibid., p.240.
17 Ibid., p.266.
18 Ibid., p.238.
19 Ibid., pp.284-285.
20 Ibid., pp.166.
21 Ibid., p.179.

has been confused with the ethical dimension of that tradition. De Silva's theorising of cultures in which religion is the main component does not leave space for dialogue. By making an attempt to de-centre the Western Ego he has replaced it with a Sinhala Buddhist Ego – which is characteristic of the Orientalist-Occidentalist Combine or Divide – with a particularistic ethic as opposed to a universalisable ethic in Buddhism. This, in fact, contradicts the Buddhist teaching of clarification of consciousness based on the doctrine of impermanence.

ii. Knowledge and Construction of the Other

The 'primordialist' and 'perrenialist' articulation of collective identities and nationhood are attempts that have been made to envisage the future. Return to the past is really a way of imagining the future. Here what is perceived as the actual form of the past is what is envisioned as the future. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalism which emerged as a reaction to Western colonialism is a mirror image of the latter. The answer to the question 'Who we are' is given by the answer to the question 'Who we were'. My exploration in Part III of this work of the emergence of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the ideology of the Sri Lankan nation-state has shown that the historical consciousness that has been generated by a mythologization of history and the historicisation of *mythos* has to be understood always within a given political context. However, this consciousness was built by constructing the ethnic other through eternalizing the conflict using history as the battle ground and thereby blocking any negotiated settlement to the conflict.

The dimension of transcendence that is found in the religious texts is taken to claim absolute power through exclusivist political formations against the ethical dimension that those texts evoke. Religion, which needs to emancipate masses from fear, has become a factor that reinforces fear. Even though some cultural political formations can be seen as *historical transcendentals* that emerged within a context of invasions that a particular group faced (like in the *vamsic* tradition), such formations of *habitus* cannot be absolutised. Instead, in each given period of history the *habitus* of *historical transcendental* has to be understood in relation to the political *field*, despite the existence of historical memory of invasions within the *cultural capital* of that community. A realisation of the relativity of the *historical transcendental* of the

nation-state, in both its religious and secular articulations is important in working for a just peace among the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the world.

Should the future be envisioned always with a selective reading of the past by excluding the other? Should envisaging a future always be exclusivist? How could religion be a pointer towards an alternative vision of the future? How can religions contribute to create a culture of peace that constitutes a moral imagination of the future? Knowledge about reality is conditioned by cultural thinking patterns or cultural consciousness. Ethics is determined by consciousness about reality. Religion as a vital component of culture does condition that consciousness. Nevertheless, when religion is associated with a corrupt ideology (or reason corrupted by interest or false view according to Buddhism) it generates a false consciousness. Imperial ideologies can influence ways of thinking about religion (both in Christianity and Buddhism) and at the same time resistance to such ideologies can be found within the same religions themselves. How do we disentangle a religion from the ideological contaminations? In what way could Christianity itself help in relativising the global power of the West which is seen as a Christian construct by the nationalist movements that are informed by Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism in Asia? The complicity of Christianity in aiding colonialism and in propagating the civilising mission of the empire is constantly referred to by these movements. Similarly how can Buddhism enlighten us to engage in a process to overcome the dilemmas of the Sri Lankan nation-state which has been informed by the Sinhala Buddhist ideology?

iii. Religion and the Politics of Interpretation

As we have seen already in the first chapter, the word 'religion' itself is a culturally and intellectually conditioned term that has been privileged historically through colonialism. Richard King has shown how, within the West, the Roman term was borrowed by the early Christian writers to refer to the Christian faith and thereby lay emphasis on monotheism, dualism and exclusivism which distanced Christianity from the biblical meanings within the Semitic culture. It is this notion of religion that informed the Orientalist-Occidentalist interpretation of religions which disallow any other alternative perspective. Pieris distinguishes three levels, stages or moments in religion which help us to avoid a fixed stereotypical perception of religion. While appreciating the 'insider's perspective' of a particular tradition and a sociological

dimension, he defines religion as the 'collective memory of an Absolute Future, a memory of Total Liberation which is realisable at least partially here and now'.[22] The three levels are 'the primodial EXPERIENCE of liberation' of a particular person or a group of persons, 'the collective MEMORY' of that experience that is passed on from age to age, and 'the INTERPRETATION of that experience' adapting it to historical needs.[23] Normally, it is through the third level of interpretation that the first contact with a religion is made, which is often distant from the first experience. Pieris also identifies three areas of interpretation: intellectual or philosophical interpretations (Scriptures), ideological or political accommodation to secular structures (traditions) and popular cultural expressions of religious practices (popular ceremonies, rituals and beliefs), and considers them 'necessary but dangerous'.[24] They are necessary because without them there is no other way to access religion, but dangerous when religion remains only at the level of interpretation without fulfilling its function of reaching the primordial experience (Exodus, Resurrection, Nirvana etc). When a religion gets stuck at a given level of interpretation it loses its liberative potential and becomes counterproductive. This involves a task of liberating religion from corrupt versions. He suggests that constant reference to the first liberative experience is the way out of corrupt interpretations of religion.

The Western colonial interpretation of Christianity and the internally colonizing interpretation of Sinhala Buddhism (against the Tamils) reflect Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological interpretation of religions. These interpretations mix together in harmony in antagonizing diverse ethnic and religious groups locally and in the geo-political global spaces of East and West globally creating stereotypical perceptions about each other. In facilitating a way to transcend the interpretation of religious belief systems that are conditioned by the Orientalist-Occidentalist Alliance, Pieris suggests the terms *gnosis* (liberative knowledge) and *agape* (liberative love) that refer to the two basic human languages which characterize every religion.[25]

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[22] Aloysius Pieris: 'Faith Communities and Communal Violence: The Role of Religion and Ideology', in *War and Peace: Violence and Reconciliation*, *Dialogue*, new series Vol.xxix, (2002), p.119.

[23] Aloysius Pieris: *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Interreligious Studies in the Reverential Mode*, (Colombo, Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2005), p.109.

[24] Loc. cit..

[25] While Vedantic Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Daoism emphasise *gnosis* without excluding the other language, Judaism, Christianity and Islam tend towards an *agapeic* idiom without overlooking liberative knowledge. Aloysius Pieris: 'The Asian Reality and the Christian Option: A Plea for a Paradigm Shift in Christian Education in Asia' in *The Religious Conversion Debate*

Reference to the primordial (not primordialist!) liberative experience of each tradition brings to light an ethical-political dimension in each religion which can critique and transcend the 'primordialist' and 'perennialist' approaches to collective identities and nationhood and to the justification of a global imperial order led by the capitalist logic of the market economy. Retrieval of the primordial experience and the predominant idiom in each religious tradition helps to problematise the essentialist construction of cultures and religions that polarize communities and disallow dialogue. Distancing ideological contaminations from the primordial experience of both Christianity and Buddhism helps to create a space to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist Divide or Combine that blocks the way for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The predominant idiom of the Semitic and Indic tradition has emerged from a particular culture and is universalisable as an ethic. However, as the very primordial experience that is associated with the predominant idiom has been communicated through particular cultural forms in a given historical (political) context it is necessary to engage in a process of identifying how that particular cultural-political situation has shaped the transmission of that experience. For example how did the Western empire (from Roman times to the modern Age) condition theologies?[26] How have the particular kingdoms and in some periods imperial kingdoms (dynastic politics which was interwoven with the galactic politics), European colonialism and the post-colonial nation-building influenced buddologies? At the same time how have theologies and buddologies resisted both the Western empire and the other forms of domination?

iv. Rhetorical-Emancipatory Paradigm

In formulating a moral imagination for transforming international relations by critiquing the dominant interpretation of culture and polity in the West I will consider the Rhetorical-Emancipatory Paradigm suggested by Fiorenza as a model of

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Against the Background of Material Progress and Spiritual Growth, *Dialogue*, new series, Vols.xxxii & xxxiii, (2005-2006), pp.164-165.

[26] By referring to the work of the classical theologians from Paul to Mercy Amba Oduyoyu this subject has been studied in a recent work exploring how their theologies were influenced by the power of the empires of the particular periods and how at the same time they have resisted these powers. See Kwok Pui-lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger: *Empire: The Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007).

interpretation which will also be illuminated by David Tracy.[27] The Rhetorical-Emancipatory model which was utilised in critiquing the ideological contamination of Western Christianity is also valid in critiquing the nationalist Sinhala Buddhist ideology in so far as the latter is a reflection of the Orientalist-Occidentalist Combine. By critiquing the Occidentalist empire-building, Orientalist nation-building is also critiqued. Such an approach will help to recognise the moral failure in both traditions and facilitate an interreligious dialogue. However, as the ideology of Sinhala Buddhist nation-building has also been constructed by a selective reading of Sinhala Buddhist narratives, it is necessary to utilize hermeneutical tools from within Buddhism to critique the essentialist perception of nationhood, so that a genuine dialogue can be initiated by respecting the uniqueness of particular traditions. Uniqueness does not mean that each tradition has an unchanging fixed essence opposed to another. It means that each tradition has a system of core teachings which is culturally conditioned.

The Rhetorical-Emancipatory Model would not understand religion as in the other models, but it 'rather is seen in rhetorical-ethical terms'. In this way, a critique of the Doctrinal-Fundamentalist and Positivist interpretation of theologies becomes an essential factor here. This necessarily involves 'a public character and a political responsibility' by which 'the perpectival and contextual nature' of the theological knowledge is identified as being within a field of power for or against the oppressed. This model engages in a critical exploration of meanings in a process of 'conscientisation' because the oppressed have internalized the hierarchical structure as ordinary practice and 'commonsense'.[28] Fundamentalist and positivist currents within Christianity – by which *mythos* has been historicised – can be critiqued here by retrieval of the historical emancipatory potential in religious *mythos*. Furthermore, the texts that have inscribed within themselves hierarchical structures can be resisted with the experience of the suffering and the oppression of those who are under such cultural and political systems of domination. Like Pieris, Fiorenza utilises the liberative memory within Christianity that can envisage human wellbeing. The essential characteristics of this paradigm, such as the public and the political space, necessarily imply an interreligious dialogue, thereby making it an alternative

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[27] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *Rhetoric and Ethic*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999). David Tracy: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*, (London, SCM, 1987).

[28] Fiorenza: *Rhetoric and Ethic*, p.47.

interpretative model. Within the public space the faith language cannot be the only language. The secular humanist language of human rights, justice and peace has to be brought into the dialogical process.

The strategies of resistance, attention and hope that have been suggested by Tracy can be utilised within the public rhetorical-ethical space in reinterpreting religious narratives. In relation to a Eurocentric interpretation of Christianity Tracy writes as follows:

> We should, above all, learn to listen to the narrative of others, especially those "others" who have had to suffer our otherness imposed upon their interpretation of their own history and classics. Through all these conflicting strategies, we should at least recognize that the de-centering of the Western Ego can also occasion a de-centering of our Eurocentric history. And that resistance to ourselves is also hope.[29]

He also warns about some of the modern and postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion that sometimes reflect a superiority complex – similar to those found within traditionalist conceptions of theology, which is: we have the truth, the way, the purity of knowledge.

In searching for an ethic of transformation of the power relationships between the Europe-America and Sri Lanka in the emerging global order let us first focus on the biblical narratives within the public phase of the Emancipatory paradigm. It has to be made clear here how de Silva in his critique of the God of Europe confuses biblical faith with the Babylonian cosmology. The Israelites who were in exile had to assert their faith through their remembrance of the God of the Exodus. In communicating this faith they borrowed the metaphors of the Babylonian culture which perceived the cosmos as a static three-dimensional space. The above-below language that is used in the Book of Genesis is not the core of the Biblical message, even though the descent-ascent binominal is part of the Biblical culture.[30] The core revelatory message revolves around a God who frees people from slavery and enters into a covenant with them to form an alternative community to that of the Empires of Babylon, Assyria and Egypt. The biblical scholar, Bas Wielanga, contests the philosophical notion of the Biblical God, which was informed by the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

> The answer ' I AM WHO I AM' (vs. 3) is an explanation of the name YHWH based on the Hebrew verb ' hayah', which means to be, to become,

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[29] Tracy: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*, p.72.

[30] Pieris: 'Christ Beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor', *Louvain Studies*, Ch.25, (2000), pp.211-213

> to happen. The ancient Greek translation of the O.T., the Septuagint (LXX) rendered this as 'I am the Being'... But both the Hebrew language and the context of the Exodus 3 do not permit such philosophical explanations. It would not be of much help to Moses and the people in this situation to be told about the Ultimate Being as such.[31]

It is the faith that 'God is with us' (Emmanuel) in the Hebrew Scriptures which is expressed in the messianic writings of the Christian Scriptures where Jesus says 'I and the Father are one'.[32] The faith that 'God is with us', as Walter Brueggemann notes, created 'a new social reality' that imagined 'a new social community'. [33] This faith radically discontinued the social reality of Egyptian oppression that was based on the mythic and static triumphalism of the Empire and countered it with a politics of justice and compassion. 'In place of the gods of Egypt, creatures of the imperial consciousness, Moses discloses Yahweh the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom, is extrapolated from no social reality, and is captive to no social perception...'[34] The experience of YHWH was communicated 'through HISTORY', 'within a PEOPLEHOOD' and 'in terms of a COVENANT'.[35] The covenant is associated with the promise of building an alternative community against the dominant powers of the earth which Pieris calls 'Mammon', and it is this vision which formed the prophetic imagination about which Brueggemann writes. In exile an alternative view of Creation that is radically different from the Babylonian cosmology is imagined. In this sense within the Jewish religiosity the boundaries between transcendence and immanence are blurred. Cosmic and meta-cosmic perceptions flow into each other.

However, it has to be noted that within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves there is a tension, as Pieris puts it, between 'God Above' and 'God Ahead'. It is the tension between the faith in a God who is invited to descend through cultic worship in the Temple (the settlement tradition) and the faith in a God who is moving with people in search of a land (the Sinai tradition). [36] By allowing this tension within the Hebrew Scripture the Biblical author also maintains an ambivalence of interaction

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[31] Bas Wielanga: *It's a Long Road to Freedom: Perspectives on Biblical Theology*, (Madurai, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1998), p.60.

[32] Ibid., p.61.

[33] Walter Brueggemann: *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1978), pp.15-17

[34] Ibid., p.16.

[35] Pieris: *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Intereligious Studies in the Reverential Mode*, p.112.

[36] Pieris: 'Christ Beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor', p.214.

between transcendence and immanence. It is within this ambivalence, as Brueggemann points out, that hope and history are correlated. Neither a religious hope based on a belief in a transcendent being who is detached from the realities of the historical process nor a human participation in a historical process that ends in despair is meaningful, and 'both a historyless hope and a hopeless history is a betrayal of the biblical faith'.[37]

The Temple festivals were a cyclic remembrance of God's liberative acts in the past and enkindled the hope of the fulfilment of God's promise for the future. In this sense, as Schwartz demonstrates, Creation in the Bible is not a beginning which determines everything once and for all with a linear development. It is, rather, a beginning that implies return and repetition. Repeating is connected to remembering. Waters that separated heaven and earth continue with the same action continuously in Exodus, Jordan.[38] Creation is more a struggle for a just peace than a finished project. Good and Evil (dynamic, intertwined forces) are interwoven rather than existing as separate entities that are foundational stable notions. Chaos is a struggle and that is the reality. 'With Chaos continually threatening, creation must be perpetually reasserted'.[39] The chosenness is not to assert one's superiority over and against the other but to join the struggle of creating an alternative community entering into the hope of the prophetic imagination of that community. The prophetic call is an appeal to return to an alternative community, which means to an alternative relationship to land and the other. This repetition and remembering holds in tension the collective memory of an absolute future of Total Liberation (ultimate reality) with the tendency towards an exclusivist possession of land and nationhood that tends to construct the other. This tension also rules out an arbitrary separation of transcendence from immanence and history from hope. Transcendence is imagined in relation to the politics of compassion and justice which generates hope within history as opposed to the politics of suffering and oppression.

By utilising the two anthropological notions of 'scarcity' and 'plenitude' Regina Schwartz critiques the use of the biblical faith to construct exclusivist identities. She suggests the notion of plentitude found in the Bible as an antidote to

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[37] Brueggemann: *Hope within History*, (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1987), p.3.

[38] Regina Schwartz: *Remembering and Repeating: On Milton's Theology and Poetics*, (New York, The University of Chicago Press, 1993). p.2

[39] Ibid., p.1.

the notion of scarcity which she argues provides the basis for violence and shows how history in the Bible, though treated as a continuous development to support a fixed exclusivist project, is in fact full of ruptures rather than a continuous process. Even though there is a tendency to fix identity in the Biblical narratives themselves, it is impossible to fix such definitive identities when referring to a vast number of other narratives that run throughout more than thousand years. 'The Hebrew Bible depicts a history that stubbornly resists any notion of fulfilment or completion.'[40] Although one uniform fixed identity is attempted, Schwartz shows how the notion of Israel is an inconsistent, fractured and multifarious concept. In other words, in settled times the wilderness is glorified as opposed to the corruption of the state, and in unsettled times the land is glorified to enkindle hope of a new rule. The Biblical narratives, rather than giving settled defined answers, are interested in exploring the 'questions of definition'. Conflict is generated by allegiance to one deity. 'When truth is multiple instead of single, when memories are plentiful instead of scarce', rather than considering them as contradictory Schwartz suggests that they can be treated as complementary and as stories illuminating each other so that 'creativity could be generated by many'. [41] Her reading of the Bible is essentially a critique of historicizing the *mythos* of the Promise Land and chosenness which have been utilized in some of the nationalist discourses in modern times.

The Occidentalist perspective on the Biblical faith which is informed by the ideologies of the absolute power of the Empires (Roman, Christendom and post-Christendom) removes this ambivalence of faith through a selective reading of the Scriptures. As we have seen in the third chapter of this work, the biblical myths of Chosen People and a Promised Land shaped the histories of Britain for over four centuries and North America for over three centuries. Studies of scholars like Anthony D. Smith, Linda Colley and Clifford Longley show us that these religious myths are not mere metaphors.[42] Anthony D. Smith notes how, from one angle, 'Victorian Britain's imperial mission' was 'merely an extension' of the belief in the

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[40] Schwartz: *Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, (London, The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.124.

[41] Ibid., p.173.

[42] Anthony D. Smith: *Chosen People*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), Colley, Linda: *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, (New Haven/ London, Yale University Press, 2005), Clifford Longley: *Chosen People: The Big Idea that shapes England and America*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2002)

Biblical myth of chosenness.[43] The perception of racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxons and the myth of chosenness are related and have informed Orientalist perceptions. Schwartz shows how nineteenth century Biblical scholars critiqued the narratives as having being written by human beings who are culturally and historically conditioned and thereby promoted secularism, but they forgot the fact that these narratives were influencing German nationalism at the time.[44] Selective reading of these narratives has not only conditioned the histories of these imperial powers but also has intersected with the current secular discourse of Western hegemony (particularly North American).[45] At the heart of such interpretations lie wealth and power. The other philosophical factors that compounded the modern secular-immanent consciousness – that emerged as reaction to religious absolutism of the state – will be discussed shortly when I attempt to engage both secular and religious spheres (within the cultural field) in developing an ethic for international relations.

In the nationalist adaptations of the biblical narratives we can see how ruptures in history were totally suppressed. Otherness in the narratives was overlooked. Memories that are treated as certain and fixed have become so by suppressing other memories. It is by referring to the ruptures and suppressed memories that we can critique such fixity and recover an alternative vision. Referring to the story of Joseph, Schwartz shows how the narratives of scarcity and violence give way to the narratives of plenitude and reconciliation, and how recovery of memory brings reunion; unlike Cain, the brothers of Joseph realize that he is their brother (the Egyptian is their brother). The essentialist perception of difference based on racialised categories is critiqued here. Possession of the land, which all monotheistic religions claim as the will of God, Schwartz points out, is critiqued by an inbuilt narrative in the Bible itself. She writes.

> Their (Biblical writers') alternative vision embraces the values of nomadism, is suspicious of settled agriculture and even idealizes the

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[43] Smith: *Chosen People*, p.48.

[44] Schwartz: *Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, pp.10-11.

[45] Michael Northcott, analyzing the vote base of George Bush, shows how the Southern Baptists, evangelical mega-churches and conservative religious groups backed him not because his policies were different from the other candidate but because of their worldview, especially the messianic certainty that their world view is the right one. Michael Northcott: 'The Triumph of Imperial Politics' in *Tablet*, 2004/Nov/6, p.5.

> wilderness. A closer look at the etymological relation between man, Adam, and land, adama, reveals that it is between human beings and all land.[46]

She asks the question whether the people own land or whether the dynamic is the more possessive idea of land owning people and shows how the story of the tower of Babel offers a critique against nation building.[47] In this sense supporting the building of a Western or an American Empire, a Jewish state or an Islamic state as opposed to the other, in the name of God, is highly questionable. Building a new global empire that is characterized by the market economy and the UK/USA military power that subdues the earth becomes problematised.

In conclusion, we can say that instead of a deity characterized by scarcity who therefore favours Abel against Cain, Jacob against Esau, Sarah against Hagar, Israelites against Canaanites we can discover a God of plenitude whose first command is to uphold multiplicity, who opposes the possessing of land and the building of dominant nations in the Bible. Geraldine Smyth illustrates this point by noting how in the Bible the covenant and chosenness imply 'the moral imperative to look out for the stranger,' which means taking the responsibility for the other as a holy duty. Even though the notion of transcendence offers an epistemological certainty this comforting stability is always determined by the obedience to the covenant. Faithfulness to the covenant means protecting the rights of the other. To be true to one's own chosenness means to maintain the capacity to transcend borders in accepting the other. In this light Smyth suggests 'the possibility of both inhibiting and transcending ethnic identity.'[48]

Rodney Stark, from a sociological perspective, shows how the human images of God in the Hebrew Bible evolved from a moody to a touching one, from a terrifying to a loving transcendent being.[49] 'God who is with us' in the Hebrew Scriptures becomes a *kenotic* God in the Christian Scriptures. *Kenosis* becomes the foundation on which the new heaven and new earth will be built. The alternative community of disciples is called to be a concrete sign of that new era here and now and to enter into the struggle of a process of re-creation. Justice, peace and freedom

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[46] Schwartz: *Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, p.43.
[47] Ibid., p.38.
[48] Geraldine Smyth: 'Envisaging a New Identity and a Common Home: Seeking Peace on our Borders', *Milltown Studies*, Ch.46 (2000), .p.80
[49] Rodney Stark: *One True God:Historical consequences of monotheism*, (New Jersey, Princeton University, 2001), p.28.

are achieved not by constructing one's identity as opposed to another and thereby entering into a mimetic rivalry, but by a process of identification with the other or the otherness of the other. This also involves the refusal to imitate: as Roel Kaptein describes – 'freedom means to be out of mimesis...and model-obstacle relationship'[50] Walter Wink notes how in the scriptures 'The human desire to be God is countered by the divine desire to become human.'[51] Faith in a crucified God (*kenotic* God) probelmatises absolutist forms of power structures breaking the walls that separate transcendence and immanence. The emphasis here is more on one's obligation towards the other than assertion of one's exclusivist rights against the other. Such a *kenotic* perspective can certainly inform our international relations. Jürgen Moltmann undertakes a theological critique of political monotheism and its absolutism (both in secular and religious forms) by employing the Trinitarian dimension. 'It is only when the doctrine of Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, and his divine patriarchs in the world, that earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants cease to find any justifying religious archetypes any more.'[52]

The vision of transcendence of a God who is associated with a politics of compassion, justice and *kenosis*, who calls for an alternative relationship with the other and land (Brueggemann, Wielenga, Pieris), who is also the God of plenitude (Schwartz) who upholds multiplicity as opposed to an exclusivist construction of identity, could enlighten Europe (and also America) in forming an ethic for international relations. The covenantal theology of Pieris could critique the history of colonialism and absolutist economic transcendence that is propagated by the Western Powers through the market economy in the present phase of globalization. Pieris demonstrates the covenant as an alliance between God and the poor who struggle together for justice, freedom and equality. Schwartz's retrieval of multiplicity and plurality could be a critique of the exclusivist versions of European identity which exclude the migrant, the refugee and the asylum seeker (and also of exclusivist American identity).

In envisioning the role of Europe in international relations it is important to bring to the public space the above mentioned ethical principles. In this endeavour,

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[50] Roel Kaptein: *On the Way of Freedom*, (Dublin, Columba Press, 1993), p.83.
[51] Walter Wink: *Engaging the Powers*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), p.152.
[52] Jürgen Moltmann: *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1981), p.197.

within the crucible of cultures in Europe, as John D'Arcy May points out, it is also necessary to translate the vision of transcendence so that it becomes 'culturally multifaceted and ethically self-conscious' to avoid a Christian inclusivist mediation of transcendence.[53] Thich Nhat Hanh from a Buddhist point of view utilises the notion of *interbeing* in emphasising the need to see the relationality among nations by co-relating inner peace with outer peace.[54] The above retrieval of liberative meanings within religious *mythos* and their reinterpretations (through an intersection between *mythos* and *logos*) will help to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological barriers that continue to obstruct a fruitful dialogue for peace building at the local level in Lanka.

Furthermore, the role of the Churches in retrieving the prophetic imagination has to be articulated, as Charles Taylor rightly points out, within the context of the post-Christendom era today where there is an irreversible consciousness of immanence which is expressed in the form of secular humanism. Without creating an artificial demarcation between the religious and secular realms it is important that both discourses enter into a constructive dialogue. In order to facilitate this process let us pay attention to the secular consciousness of the modern era and to its implications.

v. The Principle of Immanence and the Burden of Moral Ambivalence

Let us look into the modern principle of immanence – which informs the secular understanding of the world – that emerged as a critique of the religiously defined political absolutism and (cultural) worldview of pre-modern times in Europe. As Charles Taylor puts it, this emergence is accompanied by an 'eclipse of God in our civilisation' and has contributed to the 'eviction of transcendence from the public sphere'.[55] The allegiance to the immanent-humanist option guided by reason has helped to envisage utopias that resulted in building nation-states and empires even though they were not fully devoid of religious justifications as seen before. Within the

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[53] John D'Arcy May: 'Europe's God: Liberator or Oppressor? The Postcolonial Meditation of Transcendence' in *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue*, (ed.) Norbert Hintersteiner, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007), p.69.

[54] Thich Nhat Hanh: *Creating True Peace: Ending Conflict in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community and the World*, (London, Rider, 2003), p 194.

[55] Charles Taylor: 'A Place for Transcendence' in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology: Approach the Beyond*, (ed.) Regina Schwartz, (New York, Routledge,2004), p.8

same process utopias of class solidarities were also formed countering the economic exploitation of empires.

Even though the principle of secularity emerged as a result of justifiable struggle with the institutional religious hierarchy, two factors began to compound the secular-immanent option. The first is replacement of moral ambivalence with regulation and the second is the Cartesian philosophy of Man, both of which are also interrelated. While appreciating the freedom of human agency and consciousness of a common humanity that modernity achieved in contrast to blind following of tradition, Zygmunt Bauman identifies how the modern project replaced the moral ambivalence in human agency with law and regulation out of fear of the failure of human beings, a belief that characterised the pre-modern religious worldview too. The modern project, he argues, organized human behaviour and regulated it with a reason-guided ethical code, using legislation as a tool, and thereby 'separated moral responsibility from human choices thus reducing the agony of moral ambivalence to a *simplified straightforward dilemma* – obey the rule or not.' [56]

With the collapse of the hegemony of the religiously interpreted reality of the world and with the dawn of reason-guided modernity, Bauman, utilizing the notion of Christian pilgrimage, notes how the journey still continues but not as a spiritual choice, rather as a material necessity of survival in the world. In the pre-modern cultural view the earth was seen as a sacred place, but in the new purview it has to be subdued for survival. This material necessity was informed by the Cartesian philosophy which conceived the subjectivity of self-consciousness as the absolutely certain foundation of representation.[57] With this theory the perception about the whole of nature was transformed into a subjective world of represented objects. Perspective knowledge was seen as objectivity, assuming that objectifying (commodifying) nature for material survival is the destiny of man and the utmost duty of the regulated state, as if this design had been there from the beginning.[58]

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[56] Zygmunt Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Cambridge, Blackwell, 1995), p.4.

[57] See Jameson for a critical appraisal of the Cartesian theory. Fredric Jameson: *A Singular Modernity:Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, (London, Verso, 2002).

[58] In the religious field transcendence of God was also perceived with this subjective certitude which was the origin of secularism. The secular-immanent principle began to be compounded by secularism and the absolutism of the state, none of which has Semitic roots. The churches were engulfed in insular religious conflicts without being able to utilize both *logos* and *mythos* that would inform a prophetic imagination against this current. Pieris notes how the churches were 'too busy

Bauman writes that in the journey in the world which has already become a desert-like place, meaning and purpose has to be given according to human capabilities (by building identity, saving for the future) and must be rendered 'orderly' and made 'predictable' so that it can be 'hospitable for pilgrims' without them being lost in the desert. The modern pilgrims 'lost their battle by winning it'.[59]

> Footprints do not last long in the desert... The problem of how to get there was the problem of the pilgrim but in the post modern era where could I go or should I go, becomes the question. Where will this road that I have taken end up?[60]

He states that the world of postmodernity is not a world of pilgrims but of 'vagabonds, strollers, tourists and players' amidst the collapse of reason-guided universalized states and classes.[61] He describes the fading away of such uniform ideals and the liquidation of one-time fixed identities as caused by uncertainties that have been generated by the process of deregulation (through the market economy) and disillusionment. Bauman also identifies how the reason-guided regulated modernity associated itself with the capitalist logic of the economy. He observes how the radical leap in the technology of speed causes instant changes in the global financial markets ('nomadic capital') that leads to non-territoriality of space. With this, the tripod of political sovereignty of state – economic, military and cultural sovereignties – has been shattered.[62] This is the 'ultimate freedom' that has been achieved by the capitalist logic where 'a free choice for some descends as a cruel fate on others'.[63] Poverty becomes the fate of majority on the globe where the poor themselves are seen as responsible for their condition.[64] According to Bauman 'globalisation' in this sense is not what we do but 'what is happening to us all'.[65] Bauman identifies religious fundamentalism (in a political sense) and postmodern discourse (in a socio-cultural sense) as a reflection of the crisis of the universalizing principle (modern) of capitalist globalization.

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with religious wars' to be able to critique the scientific revolution. 'It is the Cartesian theory of Nature as a gigantic Machine in Man's (not woman's) hands that generated a technocracy in the genesis of technology itself'. Pieris: 'Globalisation: Buddhists and Christians in a World Colonized by the Market', *Dialogue*, New Series Vol.XXIV, (1997), p.iii.

59 Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, p.90.

60 Ibid., p.88.

61 Ibid., p.91.

62 Bauman: *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1998), pp.65-66.

63 Ibid., p.70.

64 Bauman: *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, pp.72-73.

65 Ibid., p.60.

We have seen how global capital destabilizes social classes in Sri Lanka who are directly related to the state structure through employment and how they have begun to reassert themselves through the JVP and JHU with a fundamentalist allegiance to the centrality of the state while propagating an exclusivist cultural homogenization. While problematising both the atomization of life and reality, and the collectivism of fundamentalism, Bauman raises some important questions. 'Is post modernity the ultimate crowning of the modern dream of freedom where there are no more obligations and fake duties?' 'Cannot precisely the opposite of the postmodern account of post modernity be said?' Since there is not a universal ethical code, he questions, should not the responsibility of the subject be more profound and should not that bring about a greater awareness of our moral responsibility? Does a crisis of ethics necessarily betoken a crisis of morality? Cannot the end of the ethics of modernity be the beginning of a new era of ethics and will this situation make our world a better place to live? 'Post modernity is the bane and the chance of today' and whether we make it the opportunity to bear responsibility for the other is itself a moral question.[66] In non-theistic secular terms doesn't this moment of history call for a deep awareness of human responsibility? In a novel way doesn't this moment represent the spirit of European Revolutions that calls us to learn from past failures and work for a just and peaceful web of local and global relationships?

Even though Bauman assumes (like Hardt and Negri) that any state-building through regulation is essentially flawed, his critique of modernity and its relationship to the capitalist logic is based on a profound ethical concern for victims of globalization in the world. His thesis, which is a critique of the modern state, emerges from his experience of the Holocaust which he defines as the sum total of modernity.[67] The separation of economics from politics is also a political decision which sometimes he fails to see. His notion of *being for* the other which he borrows from Emmanuel Levinas can inform our moral imagination in helping to lay emphasis on the human agency that can generate a political will in restructuring the polity and society.[68]

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[66] Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Post Modern Morality*, p.42.

[67] See Bauman: *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (London, Polity, 2003).

[68] For Levinas ethics is prior to philosophy or relationality is prior to ontology. In his philosophy he retrieves the Jewish tradition and notes that 'the problem of God is related to the problem of the Other'. 'Divinity is not met as a great Other, as 'the absolute Thou' of Buber. It has within itself a sign of the Other...Is morality possible without God? I answer with a question: is divinity possible

> Instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalizing world to speak of identification, a never ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged.[69]

In this sense we cannot be talking about stereotypical religious or secular discourses, unchanged and unchangeable, because ethics is prior to philosophy and the ground for ethics is not necessarily *being* but *being for*. Enrique Dussel identifies *being* as the totality of systems and the other as 'the alterity of all possible systems'. 'Others reveal themselves as others in all the acuteness of their exteriority when they burst in upon us as something extremely distinct' and as 'the poor and the oppressed'.[70] It is this otherness of the other that provokes the moral responsibility of *being for* the other.

The principle of imagining a new humanity is the principle of identification with the other. As Charles Taylor demonstrates in his *A Secular Age* this form of secular humanism, which has displaced God, has also developed into an eco-humanism liberating secularity from secularism.[71] The principle of *being for* or identification with the other can inform a moral envisioning that unites the victims of globalization within Europe (workers, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) and within the particular context of Lanka (the majority of Sinhala impoverished masses, the Tamils in the North and East whose land has been devastated by war, the Tamils in the Plantation Sector whose day wage is less than a euro and the Muslims who are grappling with a Lankan identity). *Being for* the other or recognizing and respecting the other means becoming aware of the concrete forms of articulation of the other's cultural, socioeconomic and political resistances and struggles. This perspective is necessary in re-imagining Europe and its interaction with the Lankan society and polity. The recognition of the particularity or the uniqueness of the other will also avoid an abstract notion of 'multitude' suggested by Hardt and Negri [72] It will avoid the trap of Occidentalist-Orientalist imposition of stereotypes. Let us explore now the

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without relation to human Other?... As Jews, we are always a threesome: I and you and the Third who is in our midst. And only as a Third does He reveal Himself.'. Seán Hand: *The Levinas Reader*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989), pp.246-247.

69 Bauman: *Individualized Society,* (Cambridge, Polity, 2001), p.152.

70 Enrique Dussel: *Philosophy of Liberation*, (Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, previously published by Orbis Books in 1985), p.43.

71 Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

72 Hardt and Negri introduce the notion of 'multitude' to represent the resistance of the masses throughout the world against the imperial sovereignty of the present phase of globalisation. Hardt and Negri: *Empire*: pp.60-66.

potential cultural socioeconomic and political locations within Europe that can facilitate a peace process in Lanka.

vi. Europe, Moral Imagination and Conflict Resolution

The failure of the Lankan peace process and the fall of the ceasefire agreement between the GoSL and the LTTE reflect not only the moral failure of the Lankan society and polity but also of the European Union. Its ban against the LTTE – even though it is said to have been carried out due to human rights violations of the latter – has been counterproductive and has contributed to the *impasse* of the 2002 peace process. A question arises whether the EU is driven by its moral imperative to facilitate the resolution of conflict by peaceful means or by the dynamics of US-led global power politics in South Asia. Banning of the LTTE was more related to such dynamics than to the issues of human rights.[73] Why could not the promise of an aid deal – connected to implementation of liberalization of the economy – for reconstruction and rehabilitation of Lanka succeed? Had Europe considered the local realities of failure of the economic development model that had been implemented by liberalization of the economy in Lanka? Furthermore, did the EU have an assessment of the history of the conflict and the distinct nature of the two nationalisms in Lanka before banning the LTTE at a time the JHU and JVP were entering into an alliance with the SLFP opposing any moves taken for a negotiated settlement? Other than the uniform approach of conflict resolution through economic development did the EU have a genuine concern for the 1.2 million refugees whose land has been devastated and an eco-concern for the natural *habitat* of the area where two million Palmyra trees have been destroyed by the war? In what way can the EU arrest the militaristic geo-political interests of the USA in Lanka that fuel the conflict? Can only punitive measures taken against the LTTE lead to resolution of the conflict or should not there be a moral imagination within the EU that can help to transcend the spiral of violence? Lederach defines moral imagination as 'the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that include our enemies', 'a paradoxical curiosity that

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[73] The human rights abuses by both parties were more during the time of war than during the time of the ceasefire agreement. One can argue why punitive measures were not taken then. Were all the diplomatic measures taken to implement the ceasefire agreement in full? See Prof. John Neelsen: 'The Proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the EU', www.negotiatedpeace.com, downloaded: 21/01/2008.

embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity', a search for 'the creative act' and the acknowledgement of the 'inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown'.[74] This requires seeing reality beyond its appearances. A moral imagination is possible only through a realization of the interrelatedness of reality where members of a particular human collectivity begin to define themselves not in opposition to the other, but in relation to the other. Such an imagination has to be ethically self-conscious and culturally grounded within a particular community. Through the use of human agency, the *social* and *cultural capital* of that community can be reinterpreted in forming a moral imagination so that the interaction of *habitus* and the political *field* within that community will not lead to exclusivist construction of identities. Here, Jürgen Habermas's use of the terms 'life world' and 'communicative action' throw light on to the process of forming a moral imagination. Life world is constituted by actors who initiate problem solving processes within a given context while drawing resources from the traditions, solidarities and the processes of socialisation to which the actors belong. Communicative action means a process of understanding the complex interactions within a given context that can help to facilitate and coordinate the action plan of several actors for problem solving based on a shared life world.[75]

In order to constructively engage in a peace process in Lanka, the EU needs to ground itself in a moral imagination that informs its culture, economics and politics. We have already seen the liberative cultural potential within Europe. Anthony D. Smith by utilising the ethno-symbolic model suggests pan-European nationalism in searching for ways to arrest exclusivist nationalist constructions among nations in Europe.[76] This we have seen in the second chapter of this work. While being cautious about his somewhat essentialist notion of *ethnie* it is important to re-imagine Europe by a recapitulation of the ethical principles of its cultural *capital* that can enlighten the political community of Europe. This has to be done mainly through a reinterpretation of its Judeo-Christian roots and the secular humanist ethos which form the main *social* and cultural *capital* of the West. The utilisation of the ethno-symbolic model that Smith suggests has to be evaluated through an emancipatory

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[74] John Paul Lederach: *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), p.5

[75] Jürgen Habermas: *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1990), pp.134-135.

[76] Smith: *National Identity*: pp.170-177

politics of interpretation (Fiorenza) and the critique of modernity and postmodernity (Bauman) within the context of the present phase of globalisation. In concretising this critical evaluation of the interaction between *logos* and *mythos* (Armstrong), 'the voices from the margins' have to be incorporated into the political and public space in Europe or more precisely in democratising the EU.

This means, in the technical terminology of Lederach, the second and the third track within Europe have to be incorporated into the first track of the political decision body of the EU.[77] Track three is the voice of the refugees, asylum seekers, migrants from countries like Lanka and the specific European social classes, who are being affected by the global market economy. As Bauman puts it succinctly they are the waste of order building and economic progress.[78] Track two involves the groups in the civil society such as academics, journalists, human rights activists, aid workers as well as the intellectuals who engage in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Such an interaction of communicative action which is informed both by *transcendence of politics of compassion and justice* and an ethic of *being for* will form a life world that will help to overcome the bureaucratic stagnation of the EU and help to see the reality beyond appearances.

Seeing reality beyond its appearances is the most rational enterprise that can guide actions in a peace process. The engagement with the reality of constant social and economic instability of the working classes in Europe will bring to the fore the failure of the market economy. The encounter with the refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from countries like Lanka will show the same failure as well as the failure of the postcolonial project of nation-building which has its roots in the colonial past. Furthermore, the encounter with the emerging multiplicity of religions within Europe poses a challenge to rethink the dichotomy between the secular and religious spheres.

Tomas Halik by utilising Nietzsche's discourse on the death of God problematises the mutually exclusivist modern constructions of fears that exist between the secular and the religious spheres. He points out that what Nietzsche

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[77] Lederach identifies three levels of leadership within a process of conflict resolution. They are the top-level leadership (the key protagonist of the conflict), the middle-range leadership which represents the civil society and the grassroots leadership who are directly involved with the victims of the conflict. See Lederach: *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), pp.38-43

[78] Bauman: *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, (Cambridge, Polity,2004), p.12,

critiqued was the existence of an unchanging metaphysical reality that is intolerant of change.

> The anti-evangelist of Nietzsche's parable does not come in order to bring about his listeners' conversion to atheism, but to arouse in them a sense of responsibility for the acknowledged or forgotten reasons for their atheism...They are both victims and joint-perpetrators of God's death.[79]

Does not this responsibility involve recognition of the very liberative potentials or humanist principles that are found in diverse cultures (ethnic communities like Tamils, Kurds and Palestinians) and religions (Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism) while critiquing their ideological contaminations? Fundamentalist and sectarian currents that are interwoven with the political conflicts cannot be arrested purely by applying a pluralistic principle without engaging the religions as well as secular discourses in a constant dialogue which can enlighten a redefinition of the principle of secularity.

The European Socrates Programme sponsored by the European Commission which ran for three years (2003-2005) explored the ways and means of encountering the reality of the crucible of culture in a postcolonial Europe.[80] The principle of *being for* means to identify with the uniqueness of the other or unique otherness of the other that can form the foundation of the principle of secularity in the postcolonial and postmodern Europe. Such an approach to secularity will pave the way to diminish fears that are found in Lanka about European mediations.

On the level of civil society it is also important to make an attempt to form solidarities between the refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and the underprivileged European social classes to foster their mutual search for just peace. Interactions between similar groups in Lanka have to be initiated which will help to identify the distinctiveness as well as commonalities that exist between and among their diverse resistances. Such an interaction will help to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological barrier by helping to build confidence across the borders. Involvement of

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[79] Tomas Halik: 'Afterword: How Secular is Europe Today?' in *The Religious Roots of Contemporary European Identity*, (eds.) Lucia Faltin and Melaine J. Wright, (London, Continuum, 2007), p.196.

[80] There are three ground breaking publications that have been produced by this endeavour. The importance of this work is that it is a collective effort that aims at forming a shared life world within Europe which is also supported by the EU. See Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen and Hendrik M. Vroom (eds.): *Probing the Depths of Evil and Good: Multireligious Views and Case Studies*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007). Jacques Haers SJ, Norbert Hintersteiner and Georges de Shrijver SJ (eds.): *Postcolonial Europe in the Crucible of Cultures: Reckoning with God in a World of Conflict*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007). Norbert Hintersteiner (ed.): *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007).

both the victims of the market economy (both within Europe and in Lanka) and of the exclusivist construction of the nation-state (Tamils in Lanka) in the search for a just peace carry a potential to evoke the moral responsibility of the polity in effecting the transformation of international relations. Can a life world be formed that can enlighten the EU on these multiple dimensions that needs to be addressed in the resolution of the conflict in Lanka? Such attempts need to initiate a process of interaction with all the three tracks of conflict resolution, removing the artificial demarcations between and among them. Let me identify some initiatives of groups and movements within Europe in this regard.

One such initiative emerged in Britain during the regime of Margaret Thatcher at the end of the 1980s at the time of the Sri Lankan government's war in the North and East and suppression of the JVP insurrection in the South. Groups of both Tamil and Sinhala refugees, asylum seekers and migrants were joined by working class groups in Manchester, also supported by several churches (both Roman Catholic and Protestants), to campaign for human rights in Lanka. As Thatcher's regime obtained a court order to deport the chief coordinator of the campaign, Viraj Mendis, to Sri Lanka as an illegal immigrant a stronger solidarity among the above groups emerged. The Christian community of the Church of Ascension in Hulme provided sanctuary to Mendis for two years in the sacristy of the church justifying their action by the 'higher law of God' until the British police forcibly entered the church and deported the asylum seeker who was under threat from the Sri Lankan government.[81]

It is evident that this is not a single story about an individual. It reflects a concrete articulation of the moral imagination that can unite diverse communities by promoting a genuine dialogue between and among them. The ethical principle that is within the *cultural capital* of the Christian community was recovered in identifying with the other. Mendis, who was granted political asylum in Germany later, has followed this paradigm and was instrumental in forming a refugee organisation in Germany called IMRV (International Human Rights Association). Its main theme is 'Victims of War are Messengers of Peace'.[82] This group comprises journalists, students and workers from Germany and refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from

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[81] See David Wastell:'Appealing to the Higher Law of Sancturay', *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 May 1988. Amanda Mitchison: 'The Refuge of Viraj Mendis', *The Independent Magazine* 14 January 1988 pp.34-35.

[82] *Victims of War are Messengers of Peace*, www.humanrights.de, downloaded: 22/12/2008.

different parts of the world, especially Sri Lanka, both Tamil and Sinhala. The group, while campaigning for the rights of the asylum seekers, concentrates on generating awareness about the multifaceted dimension of conflicts that led the people to flee their home countries. The following is an extract of one of their statements:

> Each and every one of us have had to flee different combinations of war, terror, vicious discrimination, abuse, starvation and untold hardship. Further, the economic interest of one or other western power can be traced as being the root cause of the problem that each and every one of us faced in our home country. Leaving our brothers and sisters, our homes, has been painful for us and we cannot forget the people that we have left behind. We all have a burning desire to alleviate the suffering of the people in our countries of origin and to help to lay the basis for sustainable peace in our land – in other words – peace with justice.[83]

I have attended some of their gatherings where they facilitate understanding and solidarity among the Tamil refugees who leave Lanka due to war, the Sinhalese who fled the country during the government's suppression of the JVP and the others who migrate due to economic instability caused by the market economy. In these gatherings they share each one's particular narratives and make an attempt to see how each issue is related to the other. The group's journalists continue to visit Lanka and cover the reports on the plight of Tamils in the North and East as well as the grievances and resistances of fishermen and women, workers, students, and farmers in the Sinhala community in the South. Their campaigns in Europe have helped to raise awareness within the civil society in Europe about the geo-political implications of the Lankan conflict. For example in the European Forum of the World Social Forum which was held in London in October 2004 they conducted a programme under the title 'Stop the war against Iraq spreading to Sri Lanka'.[84] Their reliance on the material support given to them by the workers' unions and the refugees themselves carries a potential to evoke a moral consciousness both in Europe and in Lanka at a

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[83] Refugees-Victims of War are Messengers of Peace, www.humanrights.de, downloaded: 21/10/2008.

[84] They wrote in a leaflet how the Trincomalee harbour in the Eastern Province in Lanka has become an important strategic location for the USA in occupation of Iraq. It is the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, which is used by the USA Pacific Command for their operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This island is a British colony which was leased out to the USA in the early seventies and is not logistically optimal for present military requirements. In addition, the islanders who were evacuated have won a lawsuit in the British courts against their evacuation. The lease of the island will also terminate by 2015. In this context Lanka's Trincomalee is to become a viable option. Diego Garcia is situated 2000 nautical miles further away to the south of Lanka. IMRV's programme at the European Social Forum, which is a net work of movements of resistance to the capitalist and military forms of globalisation, can be seen as a step towards forming a solidarity for just peace in Lanka See also John Pilger's movie on Diego Garcia, *Stealing A Nation*.

time when peace initiatives are seen by the Sinhala nationalist groups as connected to economic interests of the West mediated by NGOs.

The other groups and movements that I could identify within the civil society in Europe in helping to generate a committed life world in relation to peace in Lanka are 'Friends for Peace in Sri Lanka', 'European Initiative for a Negotiated Settlement for Sri Lanka'[85], the 'Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka' and the All-Party British Parliamentarians' Group for peace in Sri Lanka.[86] The first group is comprised of mainly European academics from Germany and Britain who interact with the first track in the EU by emphasising the need to adopt an equitable approach in helping to resolve the conflict. The second group has been formed by several European academics – who have lived in Lanka and have specialized on the multidimensional facets of the conflict – and some community leaders of the Sinhala and Tamil Diaspora. While identifying the distinct nature of two nationalisms in Lanka they write to the European media and conduct seminars and workshops to raise awareness about the nature of the conflict. They also lobby within the political parties in Europe for a negotiated settlement for Lanka that recognizes the rights of the Tamils for self-determination. The European Initiative for a Negotiated Settlement for Sri Lanka in their attempts to interact with the churches in Europe made an appeal to the ninth general assembly of the World Council of Churches quoting one of the statements issued by a group of Asian churches regarding the Lankan conflict and the role of the international community.

> 'Often, religious loyalties connected with ethnic identity are being used for purposes of legitimizing and mobilizing in situations of violent power conflicts' while, at the same time, 'All religious communities and traditions are facing the expectation and the challenge to show the way towards peace and overcoming violence.' It is therefore of great importance that the committed efforts for peace with justice of all people of goodwill in Sri Lanka, whether of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim background, are supported and not undermined by actions from within the international community.[87]

The third group which is a recent formation whose members are mainly from Ireland aims at promoting standards of human rights in Lanka and a negotiated settlement to the conflict as opposed to a military option. The unique feature of this

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85 See www.negotiatedpeace.com, downloaded: 21/01/2008.

86 See www.irishpeaceforum.org, downloaded: 21/01/2008.

87 *Call to Support Peace with Justice in Sri Lanka: From the European Initiative for Peace in Sri Lanka to the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, www. negotiatedpeace.com, downloaded: 12/02/2008.

group is its relationship to Ireland which is going through the implementation of a negotiated settlement for Northern Ireland. The members state that they intend to learn lessons from the Irish Peace Process for Lanka. It is important here that distinct and common features of the two conflicts are identified in this endeavour.

As Paul Murphy in a debate in the House of Commons on the Lankan conflict said, the major lessons that Lankan peace efforts can learn from the Irish context is 'parity of esteem' where both parties are treated equally.[88] The All-Party British Parliamentarians' Group has been formed by those who are concerned about Lanka and some of whom represent the communities in the Tamil Diaspora in their constituencies. They seek to influence the British government and the EU in this regard. This is a process where the first track of political leadership and the third track of grassroots interact with each other. As a state in Europe (not in the EU) Norway played a key role as the official facilitators of the 2002 Lankan ceasefire agreement and the peace process. The biggest challenge that all these initiatives face is how to help to restart a ceasefire agreement and a peace process. The European facilitation is seen by the Sinhala nationalist parties as neo-colonial intervention at the time when the government is claiming military victories over the LTTE. The latter accuses the West of not adopting an equitable approach and calls Tamils throughout the world to unite to support the movement in gaining a state for themselves. There are frequent demonstrations in Tamil Nadu in South India against the Sri Lankan government compounding the regional dynamics of the conflict. In this setting the EU has to rethink and rearticulate its role in conflict resolution. While accepting its culpability in compounding the conflict the EU has to go through a process of introspection in looking into the multifaceted dimension of the conflict and facilitate. In other words the EU in relation to Lanka needs to enter into a communicative action with a life world (with an intersection of both secular and religious discourses) that can positively contribute to a process of seeking a just peace for Lanka. Without going through such process any attempt taken at this juncture will be counterproductive. The next chapter will explore the liberative potential within Lanka which can form solidarities across the community divide as well as across the borders with Europe.

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[88] See *House of Commons Debate: Orders of the Day: Sri Lanka*, Wednesday, 2 May 2007, www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansard/cm070502/indexes/cx70502.html), downloaded: 12/12/2007.

CHAPTER EIGHT: RELIGION AND AN ETHIC FOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE SRI LANKAN NATION-STATE

The Rhetorical Emancipatory model helped us to overcome the Occidentalist interpretation of the biblical tradition and created space for dialogue with other traditions, both secular and religious. Bauman (and Dussel and Levinas) threw light on how to ground a secular humanism. What are the ways that would help us to critique Orientalist interpretations of Buddhism that are associated with the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideology? In the Emancipatory model the memory of the signs of the kingdom of God form the basis of envisioning a liberative praxis for the Christian communities. In the Buddhist tradition of decision making the *sangha* is governed not by the will of the majority, but by the consensus which is informed by the dhamma. Dhamma is the ultimate authority which can annul even a unanimous opinion and is not a mere body of cognitive teachings but the realization of the Four Noble truths and the principle of interdependent co-origination. The *Vinaya* (ethical code of the *sangha*) is an elaboration of *Panchasila* (the basic five precepts in Buddhist practice: abstention from killing, stealing, unchastity, false speech and intoxication) which is derived from a realization of the interdependent co-origination and the non-existence of an individual ego. Even though Buddha did not put forward a direct economic or political plan, as in the case of Muhammad or Confucius, it is not difficult to identify his vision of a sociopolitical order that would be in accordance or at variance with the realization of dhamma. The model of *sangha* itself is a prototype social organization that can enlighten society and polity in order to restructure itself so that the socioeconomic and political conditions will be in consonance with the path to Nirvana. Therefore, the realization of the path to Nirvana, which is concretely manifested in the way of thinking and life style of the community of monks, forms the ethical ground of the public space in a given society that can inform policies of a state.

In giving up the hierarchical model of governance that was enshrined in the absolute monarchy of his day Buddha opted for a different model – that corresponded somewhat to the tribal socialism of his Sakyan clan – in envisaging the *sangha*. Even though the predominant idiom of Buddhism is clarification of consciousness (*prajna*)

that helps one to overcome the cycle of *samsara* (the wheel of rebirth) the overall teaching consists of liberating loving kindness or compassion (*karuna*) that drives one to engage in restructuring society, a society that would be supportive for someone to reach the supreme goal of Nirvana. The difference between these two idioms, which is expressed by the idealising *arahat* model in the Theravada tradition and *bodhisattva* model in the Mahayana tradition, should not be seen as conflicting but as complementary. Even within the Theravada tradition in Sri Lanka these two constitutive elements are found in the practice of a few *vanavasi* or *aranyavasi* (forest-dwelling) monks who aspire to inner emancipation and the *gramavasi* (village-dwelling) monks who have an influence on the socio-political sphere.[1]

In envisaging polity in Lanka (influenced by the Asokan rule) Buddha was seen as the supreme universal spiritual authority and the king as the universal monarch who is expected to rule according to dhamma. The politicization of spirituality (Buddha as king) and the spiritualization of polity (king as *bodhisattva*) reflect symbolically the Buddhist imagination of restructuring society and polity that would pave the way to the Ultimate Bliss of Nirvana. Buddha was given a secular title *Budurajananvhanse* which means 'Buddha the king' and the king was expected to be a *bodhisattva*.

However, a process of feudalization of the *sangha* began to unfold as the relationship between monarchy and the *sangha* grew which led to a 'monastic landlordism' and sectarian conflicts, which characterized the *vamsic* tradition as we have already seen.[2] The attempts made to concretize Buddhist moral imagination of society and polity within an imperial (dynastic and galactic politics) and feudal

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1 *Uppalawanna: A Contemporary Theri-Gatha* is a recent Sri Lankan movie made by Prof. Sunil Ariyaratna (a Tamil-Sinhala scholar by profession) which depicts cinematically how in particular the lives of *aranyavasi* women monks can enlighten the lives of the village folk who are politically divided. In the story a woman monk gives sanctuary to a member of the JVP who escaped to the forest monastery after killing his political opponent and being seriously wounded in the incident. While attending to his wounds she makes him realise the suffering of his victim's family. Both the killer and his victim are university students who held opposing political views. Ariyaratne depicts the role of the *aranyavasin* as complementing a *gramavasin* male monk in the village who is directly socially engaged. When the villagers hear that the forest monastery has given sanctuary to the killer they stop bringing *dhana* (alms-giving) to the women monks. The *gramavasin* monk admonishes the villagers saying that what the women monks have done was perfectly according Buddhist teaching. Sunil Ariyaratne: *Uppalawanna: A Contemporary Theri-Gatha,* DVD, (Colombo, Torana Music Box, 2007).

2 Gunawardena's studies have shown how the relationship between the *sangha* and property developed in Lanka. R.A L.H. Gunawardana: *Robe and Plough*, (Arizona, University of Arizona Press, 1978).

system has led to an ideological contamination of Buddhism. As we have already seen in the previous chapters this has developed into a racialised interpretation of Buddhism (Sinhala Buddhism) and to a dogmatist belief in inseparability of a centralized state structure, territorial integrity and Sinhala Buddhism. In the case of Sri Lanka it is the Buddhist symbol of *Dammachakka* (the wheel of dhamma) which is the emblem of the police and the army. The Sri Lankan security forces build a little shrine for the Buddha within their camps and continue this practice when they occupy Tamil villages. They are also frequently being 'blessed' through *pirith* chanting by the *sangha*.[3] Paradoxically, some of the statements of its main critic, the Tamil movement for self-determination, have reminded the Sinhala polity of the Buddhist idiom of compassion. The leader of the LTTE in a recent statement made the following remarks:

> Buddhism is a profound spiritual duty. Its philosophy emphasizes a life without desires, a life of love and justice. The Sinhala nation, claiming that it has followed this path for more than two thousand years, has in fact remained immersed in the poison of racism.[4]

Within the same speech he interpreted the Tamil movement for self determination as one that has been 'struggling non-violently and by armed struggle for a very long time against national oppression' caused by the Sinhala nation.[5] While referring to planting of *Bo* trees and erecting Buddha statues in the Tamil areas occupied by the Sri Lankan security forces K.V Balakumar writes as follows:

> The *Bo* tree is one of the most valuable trees in nature. Buddha dhamma is one of the great teachings in the world. It has become unavoidable to perceive both the Bo tree and the statue of Buddha as symbols of invasion in the eyes of Tamils...Truly in our history there was great space for Buddhism. We acknowledge that with honor and joy. (Translated from Sinhala)[6]

Can the doctrine of interdependent co-origination help us to see beyond the spiral of violence and address the root causes of the conflict as we have been discussing so far? Can the principle of secularity that the Tamil movement for self-determination envisages be articulated within Buddhism as is expounded in the

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3 *Pirith* chanting is a ceremonial chanting of Pali recitals that invoke wellbeing to people on different occasions in life.

4 *Propping up genocidal Sinhala State counterproductive, International Community should change approach – Pirapaharan,* www.tamilnet.com, Tuesday, 27 November 2007, downloaded: 12/12.2007.

5 Loc. cit.

6 K.V. Balakumaran: *Hadaknathiunge Hardayashakshiye Handa*, (Killinochchi, The Political Wing of LTTE, 2004), p.32.

Aggañña-Sutta where polity is presented as a human institution formed by a social contract rather than by a divine institution or by a primordial binding? As Pieris puts it, according to the Sutta 'proper government is based on people's consensus, not on a divine will manifested through a privileged person. This way even monarchy is relativised'.[7] The social contract here is made with a view to avoiding the conflicts caused by the acquisition of wealth and land, the root cause of which is *tanha* (greed). In this way does not the very exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist ideology that is associated with the Sri Lankan nation-state become problematised within Buddhism itself? Can the *Chakkavatti-sihanada-Sutta*, which sees bad governance as the immediate cause of poverty, help us to critique the dependent economy of the Sri Lankan nation-state and the promotion of a liberalization of the economy that causes socioeconomic hardship and insecurity for the masses, which in turn fuels an exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist nationalism against the minorities?[8]

Based on basic Buddhist idioms of *prajna* and *karuna*, a process of introspection into the present psycho-social and political reality of Lanka can be undertaken to critique the feudalist, colonial and post colonial making of the Sri Lankan nation-state. In what way could we re-imagine Buddhist political practice with idioms of *prajna* and *karuna* in Lanka today? Can demythologising history by utilizing rational historiography where *mythos* is enlightened by *logos* help us? Such an approach certainly, as Gunawardene has shown, throws light on the historical dynamics between power and culture in the formation of identities. Schalk, arguing against a perennial perception of a racialised form of Buddhism in the *vamsic* tradition (especially in *Mahavamsa*) noted how the author-monk does not exclude the possibility of Tamils becoming Buddhists. Pieris points out how the *Mahavamsa* itself could not deviate fully from dhamma. Even though the Southern king becomes the hero of the epic, the very name Duttagamini means 'wicked warrior' and Elara (the

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[7] Pieris: 'Towards the Sovereignty of the People', in *A Search for an Alternative form of Democratic Politics in Asia: A Christian Discussion*, (ed.) Commission on Theological Concerns and Christian Conference of Asia, (Singapore, CTC-CCA, 1983), p.137. *Aggañña-Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* contains a theory of evolution of human beings and their socio-political institutions.

[8] *Chakkavatti-sihanada-Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* depicts the original ideal stage of a just and a peaceful society which disappeared as the king stopped ensuring the wellbeing of the destitutes which resulted in violence and war. The very experience of the suffering caused by the conflict makes some people give up violent ways and aspire for a righteous king who will re-establish the ideal society. The *Sutta* shows how poverty leads to a moral degradation of a society causing social and political turbulence. See Dissanayake for a commentary on both *Aggañña* and *Chakkavatti-sihanada -Suttas*. Piyasena Dissanayake: *Political Thoughts of the Buddha*, (Colombo, Saddepa Book Shop, 1999), pp 77- 88, 92 -94.

enemy king) is treated as a just king.[9] As Obeysekara shows, in the narrative of war between Duttagamini and Elara, where the *sangha* seems to have justified the killings of Tamils, the focus is the conscience of the king. Similar narratives of the conscience of warrior kings in South-East Asia can be found in ancient religious traditions. In fact, Emperor Ashoka was a warrior king, who, troubled by his conscience, became a Buddhist.[10] Referring to the monastic tradition itself Seneviratne identifies how monkhood in Lanka – which opposes any devolution of power to the Tamils today – is 'one of the most extreme forms of decentralisation immaginable'. He cites many examples from Lanka.[11] 'Throughout its (Lanka's) history monastic groups have had the privilege and freedom to break away from the hegemony of the majority and establish a consensual community of their own'. Ambedkar employed Buddhist egalitarian principles to uplift the social classes who were discriminated against by the caste system. Buddhism in Lanka as a missionary tradition can utilise this dimension in emancipating social classes oppressed by the caste system.[12]

The above retrieval – through Canonical Buddhism, the *vamsic* tradition and the monastic tradition – can help to critique the present mode of Sinhala Buddhism which is associated with the unitary state and Sinhala national identity. However, such a critique needs to be accompanied by a moral vision of the future taking into consideration the cultural, socioeconomic and political reality of the present. The politics of the past has to be differentiated from the politics of the present. Representation of the past is determined by the politics of the present. As David Scott rightly puts it, history is about community; community in time and space, the current community at present which is within a socioeconomic and political system distinct from the past.[13] The study of the dynamics between power and culture in the formation of the ideology of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism shows how, depending on multiple causal factors through the colonial practice of state-building to the postcolonial practice of nation-building, the collective consciousness has been

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9 Pieris: 'Towards the Sovereignty of the People', p.142.

10 Gananatha Obeysekara : *Meditation on Conscience*, (Colombo, Social Scientist's Association of Sri Lanka, 1988), p.34.

11 H.L. Seneviratne: *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.324-325.

12 Ibid., p.324.

13 David Scott: ' Dehistoricising History' in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, (Colombo, Social Scientists' Association, 1995), pp.11-12, 21.

changing. Ethnicity, therefore, does not form national consciousness but it only facilitates such a consciousness, particularly when it interacts with the political *field.* The *habitus* or the *historical transcendental* of the collective consciousness of this process has not been static but dynamic. Therefore, it cannot be declared as an *absolute transcendental.* Such a claim is in contradiction with the realization of interdependent co-origination.

As Seneviratne showed earlier the pre-colonial Buddhist symbolic meanings had the potential in building the nation-state either by asserting one community's hegemony or by uniting communities that respect diversity depending on material conditions.We have seen how its destructive potential feeding on adverse economic conditions has been unleashed, appearing in different forms in recent Sri Lankan culture and electoral politics. This, Seneviratne calls 'the subjugation of the pragmatic and the economic to the ideological and the narrowly cultural'.[14] The JHU believes that forming a government with the ideology of the Sinhala Buddhist nation-state will secure the due place of the Sinhalese in an insecure world. Strategies to gain power, therefore, are a necessary condition, as Ranawaka, the policy maker of JHU, writes.[15] A particularistic Sinhala Buddhist ethic has been developed which is in contrast with the universalisable ethic of Buddhism that can remove the roots of fear and mutual suspicion about each other through right view (*samma ditthi*).[16] This insular social imagination is prevalent not only among middle class intelligentsia like De Silva, Amarasekara and Ranawake, who articulate and propagate a 'primordialist' or perennialist perception of nationhood, but also among the social classes who face socioeconomic uncertainty in the present phase of globalization. The JVP, which campaigns among the working classes, rural unemployed educated youth and the younger generation of monks, while calling for protests against the high cost of living, also calls the masses to support the military efforts of the government. They also

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[14] Ibid., pp.14-15

[15] Ranawaka writes that as a nation is not only a community of a particular language it also should have the right to military, economic and ideological power to maintain a state. Patali Champika Ranawake: *Sihala Abhiyogaya*, (Colombo, Dayawansa Jayakody & Company, 2001), p.180.

[16] Having interviewed the spokesperson of JHU , Rathana Thero and several other Buddhists who justify war Tessa Bartholomeusz points out how there is an 'ethical particularism' among the Sinhala Buddhists rather than an 'ethical system of absolutism'. She also notes how while expounding a just war theory they also claim that Buddhism is the most pacifist tradition in the world. This creates a particular ethical dilemma in a particular culture. Tessa Bartholomeusz. 'In Defense of Dharma: Just War ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka ' in *The Ethics of War in Asian Civilisations: A Comparative Perspective*, (ed.) Torkel Brekke, (London, Routledge, 2006) pp.154.

make statements saying that the people are ready to make sacrifices to protect the unitary state, disregarding the economic burden of war that falls on them.[17] The JHU appeals to the trade unions to suspend strikes in favour of military operations that the government is carrying out in the North and East; it also accuses the JVP of leading workers' and students' strikes and thereby weakening the government which is engaged in protecting the Sinhala Buddhist state from the Tamil movement for self determination.

A militaristic and nationalistic euphoria has overshadowed awareness of the suffering of the Sinhala majority (caused by the burden of both the market economy and war) and of Tamil and Muslim communities in the North and East (caused by death, displacement and destruction). Because the basic agrarian means of sustenance has been dismantled (caused by governments' neglect of subsidising paddy cultivation) through a market economy, where rice is imported from China and India, the experience of poverty in the rural areas has led unemployed youth to join the Sri Lankan military. It is the same military which engages in the liquidation of Tamil villages and occupies them with heavily fortified camps that surround paddy lands, beaches, temples, houses and schools in the North and East.[18] A part of the resistance of the afflicted working classes (affected by the socioeconomic uncertainties accompanying the liberalisation of the economy) continues to interact with the exclusivist Sinhala ideology which is mainly propagated by JHU and JVP, by supporting war. Within the Tamil community the resistance of those who are afflicted continues to be ideologised by the Tamil movement for self determination led by the LTTE which demands a separate state. Within a context of seeking military parity with the GoSL, the Sinhala victims of the counter violence of the LTTE have also contributed to a reinforcement of Sinhala nationalist sentiments. The effect of war on the Muslim community and on the Tamils of the Plantation Sector is another factor that is underestimated.

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[17] Tilvin Silva, the general secretary of the JVP, addressing a media conference on 23 January 2008 said, 'Army soldiers are making huge sacrifices at the expense of their lives to see a victorious end to the battle against terrorism. The people are also making enormous sacrifices tolerating the sharply increasing prices of commodities, but the government keeps on burdening the people using the same situation as an excuse.' See *Without making any Sacrifice, government keeps on heaping burden on people who are making enormous sacrifices – JVP*, www.lankatruth.com, downloaded: 02/02/2008.

[18] J.S. Tissainayagam: 'Jaffna's displaced residents challenge HSZ in Supreme Court', *The Northeastern Monthly*, February / 2004, (Colombo), pp 8-9.

On the social level communities continue to become polarised in the absence of an independent media that cover the tragedy of war from the side of the suffering. The majority of Sinhalese are unaware of the human tragedy of starvation and displacement caused by war in the North and East. Media institutions and journalists who make an attempt to cover these are intimidated constantly by the government and the security forces.[19] The suffering of one community has been distanced from the suffering of another community where understanding has been replaced by fear, hatred and suspension. The security forces who engage in war in the North and East are also deployed in the South to attack the students and the workers (mainly Sinhalese) who protest against the privatization of education and pay hikes respectively. It is revealing how some of the protesters have questioned the soldiers while they were being assaulted by the latter, 'Why do you attack us? It is we who donated blood to the security forces'.[20] When I write about a moral imagination I mean a vision that touches the interrelatedness of these deep down realities of human experience, which can evoke a moral responsibility within the Lankan society regarding each other. Such a vision also needs to take on board the geo-political dimension of the conflict in Lanka as discussed in the previous chapter. How do we form a moral imagination that touches the adverse socioeconomic and political realities in overcoming the dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state that is in conflict with Tamil nationalism for self-determination?

1. Moral Imagination and Motherhood of Buddha

A realisation of suffering is the entry point to the search for emancipation in Buddhism, but the very experience of suffering has been represented as caused only by 'terrorism' without referring to multiple causes that led to the present conflict in Lanka. The cause has been identified as the other but not as the very consciousness about self and the other within a concrete cultural, socioeconomic and political

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[19] An international group of journalists who form the organisation Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom appealed to the Sri Lankan President to restrain his close associates and political allies form intimidating journalists. See *Irresponsible comments and actions by ministers endanger journalists*, 29 January 2008, www.rsf.org, downloaded: 04/02/2008.

[20] Blood donation campaigns are organized both by state and private sector institutions in support of the security forces. The humanist impulse in saving the lives of the wounded soldiers by giving one's blood is dominated by the nationalist ideology.

situation. The doctrine of interdependent co-origination calls us to see reality beyond appearances. *Prajna* is needed to see through this reality and identify how one's psychosocial and political world is conditioned by it. *Karuna* will be evoked by a realization of interdependent co-origination as one sees the interrelatedness of Sinhala and Tamil 'worlds'. It is within a given socioeconomic, cultural, psychological and political setting that the identities of their 'worlds' have been constructed. Culturally, violence is not only what we do to the other, but the very construction of the other. Politically, this very construction of the other that has led to a spiral of violence which revolves around the centralized state structure and a demand for a separate state cannot be resolved until and unless the sufferings of both communities are seen as co-related and their concrete expressions of resistance to their experience have been recognized. The aspiration for freedom from suffering and oppression which emerges as resistances is not without an ideology, but what needs to be differentiated is a right view (*samma ditthi*) from a false view (*michcha ditthi*). While the right view sees reality based on interdependent co-origination that evokes compassion, the false view is based on *avidya*, (ignorance) and *tanha* (greed) and *moha* (delusion). Within the *cultural capital* of the Lankan Buddhists there are symbolic images that inform right view based on the principle of interdependent co-origination.

Tessa J. Bartholomeusz identifies the memory of motherhood of Buddha that is prevalent in the cultural and social *capital* of the Buddhist community in Lanka, which was capitalized on by the election campaign of the People's Alliance Party in 1994 in presenting its woman candidate for the premiership. [21] Buddha himself is addressed as mother in dhamma preaching and ritual ceremonies in Lanka. *Amamaniyo* is one of the main titles given to Buddha which means 'eternal mother'. The term *gedara budun amma* ('mother is the Buddha of home' – not the father) is a common usage among the Buddhists. There are men both in rural and semi-rural areas who tattoo their bodies with the word *amma buduweva* ('may mother become Buddha'). Even though this has to be critiqued against the domestication of women the *symbolic capital* of this imagery is impregnated with an integral vision (eco/wo/man) of reality. Buddha, who is the embodiment of the realization of interdependent co-origination, is depicted as a mother. This means that the theory of

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[21] Tessa Bartholomeusz: 'Mothers of Buddhas, Mothers of Nations: Kumaranatunga and Her Meteoric Rise to Power in Sri Lanka', *Feminist Studies*, Vol.25, Ch.1. (Spring, 1999), pp.211-212.

dependent-arising is concerned with eco-human relationships and informs moral development around the understanding of responsibility, cooperation, and compassion, which are considered motherly virtues in Lanka.[22]

The campaign of the People's Alliance opposed the neo-liberal economy and the ideology of a dominant unitary state, both of which had been promoted by the then government for over one and a half decades in the name of a just and free society. We already have seen how the Buddhist concept of righteous kingship in the doctrine of two wheels of dhamma was politically manipulated by J.R. Jayawardena's regime. In opposition to a male figure the People's Alliance utilized feminine imagery in the Lankan Buddhist culture to present its woman candidate to the masses in electoral politics. It promised to give a 'human face' to the economy and solve the ethnic conflict by peaceful means by devolution of power. The suffering of the working classes and the farmers caused by liberalization of the economy were remembered as were the 60,000 men and women (mostly Sinhala) who were killed in the JVP-led uprising against the government. While mentioning the loss of lives and destruction caused by the conflict in the North and East the 1983 anti-Tamil rioting, the killing of Tamil prisoners and the burning of the Jaffna library by the Sinhala groups were remembered.[23] The woman candidate was presented as the symbol of compassion who would understand the particular grievances of diverse communities and their interrelatedness. Within the *cultural capital* she was projected as the embodiment of motherly or Buddha virtues.

From a secular perspective the 1994 campaign for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state also identified the social democratic space within the Sinhala polity. This space had been created mainly by the traditional leftist parties and the liberal intelligentsia, who joined the Alliance, arresting to a certain degree the

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[22] Ibid., p.212.

[23] There were two main texts that helped to build awareness within the Sinhala society regarding the interrelatedness of crises in the South and the North and East, which were written by Victor Ivan. See Victor Ivan: *Arbudaye Gaman Maga: Eitihasika Vikashanaya Athem Lakshana*, (Galkissa, Rawaya Prakashana, 1988) and *Demala Abhiyogaya*, (Galkissa, Rawaya Prakashana, 1989). The first work analysed how the colonial dependent economy and the market economy, which were promoted by the Sinhala polity, led to the crisis within the Sinhala society, and was expressed through the two Sinhala insurrections. The second work shows how the inability of the Sinhala polity to transform the colonial state led to the Tamil militancy. These texts were read by the working classes, university students, journalists, teachers, state and public sector employees and some sections of the clergy (both Buddhist and Christian). This enterprise clearly shows the role that intellectuals can play in building a life world through a communicative action for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist ideology of the SLFP.[24] The social conscience that had been evoked within Sinhala society by the death of young men and women during the uprising gave an impetus to the Alliance to campaign against the government. The woman candidate for the premiership even visited some of the mass graves as an act of defiance to the government. The tabloid newspapers *Rawaya* (Voice), *Yuktiya* (Justice) and *Hiru* (Sun) captured this social conscience as well as the democratic content of the Tamil movement for self-determination through a secular humanistic perspective. Numerous agonising stories of Sinhala families – whose sons and daughters were killed by the government forces – and stories of thousands of Tamil refugees – whose land, houses and villages were acquired by the same military – which were reported side by side, were widely read by the masses. It has to be noted here that the editors of *Rawaya* and *Yukthiya* were former members of the JVP who left the party after the failed insurrection in 1971. After the suppression of the 1987-1989 insurrection of the JVP, *Hiru* was started by a wider group of journalists and some of them were members of the JVP who escaped death. *Hiru* was not the official organ of the JVP even though it emerged from its socio-political matrix and was supported by the party. *Rawaya* was initially sponsored by the *Sarvodaya Viyaparaya* and later built its own publishing house.[25]

This moral consciousness, which was articulated both in religious and secular forms, was subdued as mentioned in the previous chapter, by the government of the People's Alliance who restarted another round of military operations which was termed 'peace through war', which today is reinforced by the coalition government of SLFP, JVP and JHU as implementing the Mahinda *Chintanaya*.[26] While the military choice of the Alliance government shattered the liberal and social democratic space

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[24] The LSSP (Lanka Samasamaja Party), the CP (Communist Party) and traditional left and the new left.

[25] Sarvodaya Viyaparaya in its initial phase was a Buddhist lay initiative that made an attempt to translate Buddhist teachings into the economic and social development of the rural poor. It later transformed into a well-established NGO throughout the country. Its leader A.T. Ariyaratne emulated Anagarika Dharmapala as a national hero. Even though the organisation has conducted a number of public sessions of mediations for peace it has not clearly articulated its stand with regard to the dilemma of the Sri Lankan state. See Richard Gombrich and Gananatha Obeysekara,: *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1988), pp.243-254

[26] According to Nalin de Silva, Mahinda Chintanaya (Mahinda's Thinking) constitutes *Jatika Chintanaya* (National Thinking) that can oppose both 'Western Thinking' and 'Tamil Separatism'. See Nalin de Silva: *Mahinda Chinthanaya*, www.sinhale.com/mahinda_chinthanaya, downloaded: 22/01/2008

within the Sinhala polity, the JVP's unconditional support for the present government's military solution has suppressed the social conscience that was evoked by the killings, abductions and torture carried out by the same military in 1987-1989 period.

Even though the political parties during the last three decades of the conflict utilized the *cultural capital* of Buddhists in coming to power – as we have seen by the use of imagery of a righteous king (1977-1990), the motherhood of Buddha (1994-1995) and the memory of Mahinda *Thero* (2005-) – the vital role that the autonomous space of the cultural *field* can play in evoking understanding and compassion was clearly visible in the feminine imagery that is related to the doctrine of interdependent co-origination. Masculine imagery of the righteous kingship in the two wheels of dhamma has not been utilized in evoking moral consciousness during the last three decades in the attempts made for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

The JVP (in their attempt to change the government, not the structure of the state), in fact, used a more secular term *sadarana samajayak* (which means 'social justice'), than (as we noted earlier) J.R. Jayawardena, who used the Buddhist term *dharmishta* (righteous or just) to represent his rule as resembling the ancient Sinhala Buddhist kingship. The JVP did not publicly articulate their social ideology through Buddhist narratives and metaphors, but did so through secular Marxist terms. However, in addressing those who are not their members (especially in small groups) some of them used *Aggañña-Sutta* to explain the origin of private property which generated social and political tension and to reiterate the need for the establishment of a government that would guarantee the distribution of wealth and equal treatment for all people.[27] In this sense, state formation within Buddhism is a social contract based on justice and equality.

Even though the JVP has an ideology that the state must have a unitary character and the JHU has represented it as essentially a Sinhala Buddhist one using the term *dharmarajya*, the Buddhist notion of state reflects secularity as opposed to

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[27] At the end of the eighties both in Kandy and Kalutara, which are predominantly Buddhist areas, I listened to the *Aggañña-Sutta* for the first time in two small group meetings of 'awareness raising' that were organised by individual members of the JVP. What I heard about the content of the sutta is as follows: Initially, in human history people gathered rice from commonly owned fields according to each one's need without accumulating them. As some started storing rice, tensions erupted which led to stealing, quarrelling and conflicts. There arose a need for a universally accepted ruler called *Mahasammata* (the great elect) to form a system that would guarantee justice and equality.

divinization within the Brahminical tradition.[28] In this sense non-theistic (not atheistic) secularity in Buddhism problematises the absolutisation of a Sinhala Buddhist state. Such a dogmatist approach resembles a Brahminical divinisation of the state. However, we can identify a *social* and *cultural capital* in Lanka, in both secular and religious forms that intersect with each other and that have the potential to broaden a democratic public space for transforming the Sri Lankan nation-state.

This potential was concretely manifested when the *Hiru* newspaper disassociated from the ideology of the JVP when the latter entered into nationalistic electoral politics in1994-1995. The JVP withdrew the support it had given to the paper. The journalists of the paper formed the *Hiru Kandayama* ('*Hiru* Group') not only opposing the military approach of the government but also supporting in principle the Tamil movement for self-determination. The frequent use of the term *hardayasakshiya* (which means conscience) in their articles reveals how they attempt to raise a moral consciousness against war among the Sinhala masses who have lost many of their sons and daughters as a result of the government's militaristic policy during the JVP uprising.[29] The group also pioneered interviews with the families of the dead soldiers and gathered data on their socioeconomic background. They dedicated one of their publications to revealing the poverty-ridden lives of these families that led their sons and daughters to join the military.[30]

A group of artists and writers who backed the People's Alliance to rise to power during the same period withdrew their support for the government, opposing the latter's militaristic option, and started *Sadujanarawa Kandayama* (*Sadujanrawa* means 'peace-loving masses'). This group, who are Buddhists and come from the ancient city of Anuradhapura, utilised Buddhist metaphors in highlighting the interrelatedness of the suffering of both communities by composing songs and organising island-wide public musical programmes to promote an understanding

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[28] Peter Schalk has coined the term *dharmacracy* to refer to the concept of a totalitarian Buddhist state suggested by JHU. See Schalk, Peter: 'Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva' in *Religion and Violence in South Asia; Theory and Practice*, (eds.) John R. Hinnells and Richard King, (London, Routledge, 2007), p.141. It can also be termed as 'dhamma-regime'.

[29] The JVP who considered the Sri Lankan security forces as a murderous army during the peiod between 1987-1989 began to change this attitude by calling the latter *the deshapremi hamudava* (the patriotic forces) after the commencement of war against the Tamil movement for self-determination. See ' "Alugosu Hamudawange" Sita "Deshapremi Hamuda" Dakwa...', *Hiru,* No.1, Vol.1, (March, 2002), p.9.

[30] Special Research Group: 'Ranawiru Kedavachakaya', *Hiru*, No.3, Vol.2, (January-March, 1998), pp.21-26. Here, the title of the article means 'the tragedy of war heroes'.

among diverse communities. There were many other individuals and groups who withdrew support for the government's militaristic option. One of them was *Diyesa Kandayama*.[31] The very term *Kandayama* ('group') is evidence that these groups neither wanted to form political parties nor function as traditional non-governmental organisations. They perceived themselves as ethical socio-political movements that help to broaden the political consciousness of the public. The important dimension in the formation of these groups is that they emerged from within the majority Sinhala community through the intersection of secular and religious perspectives that were embedded in its *cultural and social capital*. The resistance to generalized texts generates hope that can envisage a liberative paradigm. The emergence of these groups marks such a resistance to the generalised texts about the (unchanging and essentialist!) consciousness of Sinhala society and polity. The space that these groups create is a potential that enables the Sinhala community to belong to their social and cultural roots while transcending the barriers of exclusivist 'primordialist' belonging.

Secularity is not only the equal treatment of citizens and communities but also the recognition of diverse forms of resistance that have been articulated through the socio-political history of each community through its particular *social* and *cultural capital* in a way that would promote belonging and transcending at the same time. Even though a system of functional rationality based on cosmopolitan values can help to raise consciousness about our common humanity (which needs to be maintained and promoted), within the context of Lanka it is important to articulate such a consciousness within a particular cultural religious milieu so as to arrest exclusivist representations of that culture. In forming a moral imagination by employing the social and cultural resources within Lankan Buddhism and Sinhala society, these groups attempt to create a common space where the poor Sinhala masses and the Tamil movement for self-determination can enter into a dialogue with credibility. In overcoming the present stalemate, where both parties are seeking military parity, such a space is more important than ever before. In the search for the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state what is needed is an ethical and political movement that would consistently try to maintain this space, however small it is. The very existence

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[31] This group consists of social activists who broke away from the JVP, after participating in the JVP-led uprising in 1971. The group took its name from the magazine they publish to promote democratic dialogue among those who oppose war and the capitalist mode of globalization in Lanka. See their website diyesa.wordpress.com, downloaded: 12/01/2008.

of such a space provides hope of a resistance against political pragmatism without a moral consciousness even within the euphoria of claims of military victories. I will discuss how this space is maintained through the work of these groups at the end of this chapter.

Ethics without pragmatism is utopian and pragmatism without ethics is opportunism. Transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state is not possible without a moral imagination that is associated with a liberative praxis that addresses innovatively the dynamics of culture and power (both economic and political) within a geo-political perspective. The geo-political dimension can be viewed from two sides which are interrelated – the South Asian cultural and political dimension and the geographical location of the Island of Lanka in the unfolding process of economic and militaristic globalisation. The regional dimension also has to be viewed in terms of Indian (particularly South Indian) and Lankan relationships and also in terms of Asian Buddhism. The global dimension has been studied by the *Hiru Kandayama* which sees the dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state not as a mere internal conflict but one which is interwoven with the present phase of globalisation which I will enumerate in making suggestions as to how to translate such awareness into liberative praxis.

In addressing the regional dimension of the Lankan conflict, we have seen how Uyangoda referred to the symbolic system of galactic politics that existed in South Asia. 'A South Asian problem requires South Asian alternatives. South Asian alternatives need a South Asian and not single-state specific, political imagination'.[32] With this insight it is important to resist the generalised cultural and political text that depicts South Asian history, especially South Indian and Sri Lankan history, as a history of antagonistic cultures and polities. The role that Buddhism plays in the emancipation of the Dalit population from the caste system and the role that Hinduism played in envisaging the secularity of the Indian Constitution have to be highlighted in searching for South Asian roots. While Seneviratne, a Sinhalese and a Buddhist anthropologist, reiterates the need to raise awareness among the Lankan Buddhists with regard to the emancipatory role that Buddhism played among the Tamils in India, especially among the Dalits, Karthigesu Sivathambi, a Tamil scholar in Lanka, shows how the Dravidian movement that emerged in South India in opposition to

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[32] Jayadeva Uyangoda: 'Biographies of a Decaying Nation-State in *Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka*, (eds.) Mithran Tiruchelvam and Dattathreya C. S., (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), p.178.

Brahminic domination admired the egalitarian Buddhist worldview. The latter writes as follows: 'The Dravidian movement always admired the strands of equality and absence of excessive ritualism in Buddhism, especially its focus on meditation. But unfortunately in the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche none of this was known.'[33]

The study of Sri Lankan history in the universities in the South of Lanka is often colonised by the ideology of the Sinahala Buddhist state and it is this perspectival knowledge that informs Sri Lankan historiography. To educate the masses in order to reduce the polarisation of communities that obstructs a negotiated settlement to the conflict, in searching for Asian roots to envisage a transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state it is an imperative to capture numerous interactions between Buddhism and other cultures.[34] This is a task that remains yet to be initiated in the area of education. The double minority complex (Tamils are a minority within Lanka and the Sinhalese are a minority within the Indian subcontinent) that characterises the conflict can be problematised by this approach.

Sri Lanka is not the only location in Asia where Buddhism is linked to a conflict situation. In Thailand there is tension with the Muslims. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh the minority Buddhist areas are being militarised by the Dhaka government. In Burma Buddhist monks led non-violent demonstrations against military rule. Tibetans are still a stateless people, who under the leadership of the Dalai Lama continue to express their aspiration for freedom, thus evoking the moral responsibility of the international community including China. Sulak Sivaraksa from Thailand has built a Buddhist critique of the market economy. Unlike de Silva – who argues that the logic of the market economy emerges from a Judeo-Greco-Christian belief in an objective abstract reality – Sivaraksa identifies the roots of the market economy as modern. He places it in the tradition of Cartesian philosophy of 'I think therefore I am'. 'With this statement, it was assumed that any being that cannot think is inferior and can therefore be exploited by those who can think.' He shows how the market economy has changed this phrase into 'I *buy* therefore I am'. He suggests 'I breathe, therefore I am' as an alternative way of perceiving human existence based on

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[33] Karthugesu Sivathamby: *Being A Tamil and Sri Lankan*, (Colombo, Aivakam, 2005), p.92. Seneviratne: *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, p.324.

[34] An initiative has been taken by the Hiru Groups in this regard. They conduct a day long workshop titled as 'Liberating the Conflict from History' every month with the different groups of students, workers and grassroots leaders of various people's organizations.

the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. [35] I have written how the Vietnamese Buddhist peace movement in the 1970s led by Thich Nhat Hanh could enlighten a process of transformation of Lankan polity and society by recognising the interbeing or interrelatedness of suffering within and among the communities affected by war.[36] Because the Lankan conflict is a result of both the Western development model and the exclusivist form of post-colonial nation-building, Sivaraksa's critique of the market economy can be complemented with a Buddhist critique of state formation that I have tried to develop so far.

In some form, space needs to be created for a regional effort to share diverse Buddhist responses to conflict situations which will help to envisage a liberative paradigm for Lanka. This also becomes crucial in arresting the sectarian tensions within Buddhism in Asia. Moreover, such a shared life world will help to enlighten regional politics that is becoming infiltrated with the growing global militaristic and economic interests in South Asia. The coordination of all these needs to be seen as a dynamic process and it cannot be achieved by a single static project. Theresa Der-lan Yeh, in an excellent article on Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution notes three key notions that can facilitate our attempt at assisting the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state for a just and peaceful co-existence. There are 'the process-oriented paradigm, peace by peaceful means, and the micro-macro linking in a holistic framework of peace.'[37] In exploring and suggesting ways and means of actualizing such potential and of articulating a vision for the transformation of the Sri Lanka nation-state our next consideration will be to discuss the role of Christianity in Lanka and also in brief of Islam and Hinduism.

2. Transcendence and Politics of Compassion and Justice

The Christian community in Lanka is divided on the issue of national identity (Tamil and Sinhala) as well as on the issue of evangelism. Even though all the

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[35] Sulak Sivaraksa: *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalising World*, (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2005), p.58.

[36] Jude Lal Fernando: *A Paradigm for a Peace Movement: Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr*, (Dublin, The Columba Press, 2007).

[37] Theresa Der-lan Yeh: 'The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol.11, Ch.1, (Spring/Summer, 2006), p.104

churches (Roman Catholic and Protestant) consistently reiterate that Lankan society is multi religious and multi-ethnic, as opposed to the exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist national identity, the Catholic weekly newspapers *Gnanartha Pradeepaya* (a Sinhala publication) and *The Catholic Messenger* reflect the ambiguity of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the ethno-nationalist conflict. In times of peace agreements the papers expressed the need for a negotiated settlement and in times of war they stood for territorial integrity and a centralized state structure which is interwoven with the Sinhala Buddhist identity.[38]In the meantime the *Jaffna Catholic Guardian* published by the Diocese of Jaffna in the North continues to publish reports on the unresolved plight of the refugees. Although pilgrimages, prayer meetings and rallies are organized for peace by the Dioceses in the South it has also become customary to pray for the 'security forces that protect the country'. In this way the tensions and polarisation within the wider Lankan society are reflected within the churches too.

Despite this ambiguity, however, the Christian community also has a potential to be a bridge between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, because it represents both ethnic groups, which other religions do not. The Catholic Church's calling of both Sinhalese and Tamils to pray for peace particularly in the ancient shrine of Madhu which is in the *de facto* state governed by the LTTE, is a symbolic gesture of the need for peaceful coexistence. This symbolic gesture, organised by the church hierarchy, (also supported by both LTTE and some Sinhala politicians) lacks a moral imagination, more precisely a prophetic imagination that touches the harsh realities of war in the North and East and the poverty and social degradation in the South. Prayer without a prophetic imagination cannot generate a liberative praxis. Nevertheless, within the Christian community in the North and East there is a growing awareness of the need for such a prophetic imagination. The biblical phrase ' Let My People Go' has become popular among the Tamils because of their experience of displacement due to the acquisition of their land by the Sri Lankan security forces.[39] At least three priests

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[38] *Gnanartha Pradeepaya,* in its editorial on 15 July 2007 appealed for a political solution to the conflict. 'Deshapalalana Visadumakta Vedi Dayakathwayak Demu', *Gnanartha Pradeepaya* 15 July 2007, p.8. (The meaning of the title of the editorial is 'Let us give priority to a political solution'). However, on 9 September 2007, in a separate article the paper praised the Sri Lankan government and the seculrity forces for gaining militray control of the Eastern Province and maintaining law and order in the region. See Samson Jayasinghe: 'Uturu Nagenahira Godagannatanam', *Gnanartha Pradeepaya*, 9 September 2007, p.3.

[39] See S.J. Emmanuel: *Let My People Go: The Tamil Struggle for Survival and Self-determination in Sri Lanka*, (Germany, Tamil Catholic Chaplaincy, 1997).

who defied the military occupation have been killed and some have left the country due to death threats. Within the church in the South initiatives have been taken by groups of priests, nuns and lay men and women – despite the ambiguity of the official churches – to address the socioeconomic and political realities of both Tamils and Sinhalese in the light of their Christian faith about which I will expand later.

All the churches also come together to oppose the Anti-Conversion Bill that has been proposed in the Parliament. It could also be seen that while maintaining the right to change religion, the mainline churches accuse the Pentecostal churches, saying that it is they who convert unethically, 'not us'. Many Buddhists and Hindus do not know the above differences within the Christian community, but for the evangelicals and the mainline churches there are two Baptisms! The agreement reached by the world ecumenical movement to accept one Baptism is a remarkable achievement, but if the Christian communities fail to interpret the meaning of Baptism for the local churches, especially in multi-religious contexts, the idea of one Baptism will only evoke the colonial memory among people of other faiths.[40] This is also related to the theological problem of how to translate faith in God in a multi-religious context. While retrieving the Semitic idiom of Christianity as *agape* Pieris develops a covenant Christology. He sees Christ as both the 'Word of Promise' coming from God to the poor and the 'Word of Protest' rising from the poor to God.

> The Promise is fulfilled at a cost to a God who loved the losers of this world so passionately as to win for them their Kingdom by suffering defeat with them. For there was no other way *worthy of God* to confound the powers of this world... This God, who never asks the poor to change religions but only to join Her in the battle against idolatry (Power, Prestige and Wealth or Racism, Materialism and Militarism), speaking in them and through them, is indeed "Good News to the poor"! To proclaim it by word and deed is our specific mission! It is the essence of our Christology.[41]

Pieris also writes that churches in Asia have to partake in the Baptism in "the Jordan of Asian religiosity" and in "the Calvary of Asian poverty"[42]. Faith in Christ that one professes through Baptism means to listen to the 'Word of Protest' arising from the poor and the oppressed that has been articulated in diverse cultural and religious forms and join them by emptying oneself (*kenosis*) in actualizing the 'Word of Promise'. Pieris' perspective can inform the prophetic imagination within the

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[40] This is also being reinforced by the rise of evangelical fundamentalist groups in Lanka.

[41] Pieris: 'Christ Beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor', p.222.

[42] Pieris: *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988), pp.45-50.

Christian community in Lanka. It is important to complement it with the notion of transcendence as enumerated by John D'Arcy May. In this sense encounter with transcendence means to identify with a politics of compassion and justice which is communicated in culturally multifaceted and ethically self conscious ways.

Within this understanding of God what does baptism in Asian religiosity and Asian poverty mean for the churches in Lanka who are daily challenged by the crisis of the Sri Lankan nation-state? In relating to the Buddhist community it means to identify oneself with the spirituality that is generated by the realization of Motherhood of Buddha (*gnosis* of interdependent co-origination). In relating to the Tamil community this means to identify oneself with the liberative core of the Tamil movement for self-determination. This core is based on love for one's language, culture and territory expressed within a context of oppression caused by the Sinhala community's attachment to the exclusivist ideology of the Sri Lankan nation-state.[43] Many Tamil and Sinhala Christian communities have incorporated into their liturgical services the local cultural expressions which are interwoven with Hindu and Buddhist practices respectively, but they have not entered into a core-to-core dialogue with their co-religionists. There is a general recognition within the churches of the mutual (not exclusivist) relationship between the Sinhala language and Buddhism and the mutual (again not exclusivist) relationship between the Tamil language and Hinduism. However, the relationship between the Tamil language and Buddhism and the Sinhala language and Hinduism has not been recognized. Both these languages are impregnated with the *cultural capital* of the *cosmic* spiritualities in which both ethnic communities partake while believing in the *meta-cosmic* traditions of Hinduism and

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[43] Even though the political roots of ethno-nationalism of the Tamils in Lanka lie within the context of colonial and postcolonial state-building, its cultural articulations (love for language and culture) lie in the Dravidian Movement which emerged in South India as opposed to Brahminic domination of Tamil culture and society. Buddhism, rationalism and socialism became the three main philosophies and ethical traditions that guided this movement. The term 'Dravidian' was a Sanskrit way of denoting the non-Sanskrit culture. The movement used this very term to oppose the claims of Aryan superiority of the Brahmins and upheld egalitarian principles. Love for Tamil language and culture developed within this context which has been borrowed by the LTTE to articulate its movement for self-determination. I am thankful to Prof. Peter Schalk in Uppsala University who is an expert in both the Tamil struggle for self-determination in Lanka and the history of Tamil Buddhism in Lanka and South India for giving me this insight. For an in-depth study of the Dravidian movement see Prof. K. Sivathamby: 'Understanding the Dravidian Movement: Problems and Perspectives' in *Kailas:Kailasapathy Commemoration Volume*, (eds.) M. Chitralega, K. Shanmugalimgam, S.Maunaguru (Jaffna, Prof. K. Kailasapthy Commemoration Committee, 1988). Sivathamby also shows in another work how the Dravidian Movement also sought help from Buddhist hierarchy in Lanka through Olcott to promote Buddhism among the Tamils in countering Brahminic supremacy. See Sivathamby: *Being a Tamil and a Sri Lankan*, pp.143-149.

Buddhism and Christianity.[44] This common heritage is concretely manifested in the four hundred years old Madhu Shrine which is located in one of the large forests in the North. Both Sinhala and Tamil Catholics and the Hindus meet every year at this Shrine, which is dedicated to Mary. Madhu is seen as a sanctuary by the Tamils (both Christian and Hindu) who are displaced and the area often becomes a large refuge camp at the time of intense fighting between the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE. Madhu reflects the people's social imagination of sacredness of land and nature. It is the fruit of an intersection between *cosmic* and *meta-cosmic* spiritualities. The refugees who seek sanctuary in Madhu have lost their land which is sacred for them. The Tamil movement for self determination led by the LTTE also perceives land as sacred. This sense of sacredness reflects a particular *cosmic* sense (not associated with a meta-cosmic dimension) which they associate with the deaths of their members who fight for national liberation. The LTTE distances itself from any religious justification of right to land.

The mountain, Adam's Peak, which is situated in the central hills in the South – surrounded by Buddhist and Tamil villages of the Plantations – is another place which is seen as sacred. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians climb this mountain-shrine as a pilgrimage, usually on full moon days during winter and spring. The government is negotiating with an American company to sell and privatise the rain forest that surrounds Adam's Peak, a move that is being challenged by the Sinhala farmers and Tamil plantation workers alike. While the refugee camp at Madhu Shrine reflects the result of a war waged in the name of the Sri Lankan nation-state (which is also militarily supported by the USA), tensions created within the Sinhala majority caused by the moves to acquire the rain forest around Adam's Peak reflect how the influx of global capital makes commodities of eco-humanity. The *cosmic* spirituality that is embedded in Lankan religious tradition, which is couched in terms of a this-worldly sacredness, is a solid foundation for an eco-human spirituality

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[44] Peiris introduces the term 'cosmic' to refer to the dimension of 'sacred this-worldliness' that is found in Asian religions. He contrasts this term with the modern use of the word 'secular' in the Western literature that desacralises the world which leads to secularism that does not respect Mother Earth. Anthropologists have pejoratively termed cosmic religiosities as animism. It has been more benignly named as primal religions or traditions. The word 'metacosmic' or 'beyond' (*meta*) refers to the dimension of transcendence within major religions. This does not mean an otherworldliness because transcendence is already within the world (or is interwoven with immanence) and at the same time is calling the world to go beyond towards its Ultimate Bliss. See Aloysius Pieris: *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Intereligious Studies in the Reverential Mode*, p.128

that can evoke the moral consciousness in uniting diverse groups against war and capitalist globalisation. By such a genuine approach the social space of the exclusivist nationalist ideology propagated by the JVP and the JHU among the Sinhala rural masses can be arrested.

A principle of secularity evolved through a long, justifiable struggle in Europe against the domination of society and polity by the institutional churches, but this was overshadowed by a desacralised relationship with the world as a result of the rise of Cartesian ideology that perceived nature as a means of fulfilling the needs of man. The *cosmic* dimension in Buddhism and Hinduism (and also Islam) can help the churches in Lanka to recover the same dimension within Christianity by a reinterpretation of the creation as a gift or a sacrament (not as an instrument). The churches could identify this potential, especially in relation to Madhu, in envisioning a local theology for peace-building in Lanka. In facilitating a dialogue between Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism within the context of the Lankan conflict it is necessary that the dimension of this-worldly sacredness, both in non-theistic and theistic forms, be taken on board. Any suggestion made by the churches about democratising the Sri Lankan nation-state – through devolution of power – needs to differentiate secularity from secularism. Such an approach will be more constructive than mere appeals made by the churches to recognise the Lankan society as a multi-religious culture in the face of Sinhala Buddhist exclusivist claims to nationhood. Acceptance of pluralism based on functional rationality is not adequate in resolving the conflict in Lanka. Pluralism has to be articulated from within the particular tradition identifying both distinct features and commonalities within and among them. This can open a space to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentist stereotypical representations of religions and cultures.

Core-to-core dialogue that is initiated with such recognition will certainly help to broaden understanding between the polarized communities. The common heritage of liberative *gnosis* (in Buddhist non-theistic and Hindu theistic traditions that also generate compassion) that is mediated through these multiple identifications has to be complemented by the churches' faith in the *kenotic* love of God as expressed through Christ. This love calls the churches to join the struggles of the poor within the majority Sinhala population (the peasants, the working classes, fishermen and women, women apparel workers and other socially marginalised groups including gays and lesbians), the Tamil labourers of the Plantation Sector and the struggle of the Tamils

in the North and East and the Muslims who grapple with the dilemma of both Tamil ethno-nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The Tamil movement for self-determination is culturally and politically articulated in the present moment of history as the Tamil national liberation struggle, which seeks autonomy, self determination and a right to nationhood. Exclusivist tendencies apparent in this movement, particularly in times of more aggressive war on the part of the Sri Lankan state, can be arrested by the churches' constructive engagement with the movement by co-relating the Tamil struggle with the struggles of the many poor among the Sinhalese. In this way the churches can be of service to create the groundwork for recognising the distinctiveness as well as the commonality of the diverse struggles in Lanka for a just peace.

The dialogue with Buddhists as well as other religions is possible only to the extent that the Christian communities in Lanka attempt to become autonomous, self-governing, communities instead of local churches of another continent. It is only with this approach that the churches can become credible witnesses to a just peace. Such an approach carries the potential to counter the accusations (of Western conspiracies) levelled against the NGOs (funded by the churches) by the JVP, JHU and Patriotic Nationalist Movement (PNM).[45] The initiatives for peace need to emerge more as a moral imperative than as an economic project. The promotion of local peace initiatives with grassroots support and transparency in financial transactions are themselves moral imperatives. The economic power of the churches (mainly funded by the West) is still a stumbling block that hinders credibility in dialogue. A critique of the exclusivist construction of the Sri Lankan nation-state needs to be carried out by the churches while they distance themselves from their colonial roots as well as the power of global capital. However, it is also necessary to envision an international solidarity across the Orientalist-Occidentalist divide where grassroots movements in Europe, who share similar concerns of justice and peaceful co-existence, are formed. I have discussed the prerequisites for such initiatives within the European context at the

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[45] A song composed by the propaganda secretary of the JVP, Wimal Weeravamsa, depicts NGOs as 'dollar sanniya'. In Sinhala Buddhist mythology 'sanniya' means an evil spirit that possesses human beings. This song has been included in a CD with another set of Sinhala nationalist songs. The CD has been produced by PNM. Deshahiteshi Jatike Viyaparaya: *Sihina Aran Enna*, CD, (Colombo).

end of the previous chapter. More will be discussed in this regard within the Lankan context at the end of this chapter.

One such group that I can identify which has in a significant way attempted to articulate concretely the above moral imagination within the Christian communities, is the *Kithusara Kandayama* (*Kithusara* means 'core of Christian message'). They are an ecumenical (though in number there are a majority of Roman Catholics) group of priests, pastors, nuns and laymen and women who throughout the last 15 years have been making efforts to enter into the *kenotic* process of multiple identifications. They emerged initially from within the country's western coastal Christian belt during the period 1987-1989 in responding to 'the signs of the time in the light of faith'.[46] Through their publications, their very lifestyle and their commitment to the poor – especially fishermen, women and children – this group with a prophetic imagination appealed to the Christians to recognize the voice of the God of the Bible calling for a politics of compassion and justice when the government suppressed thousands of voices calling for a structural change in the country during the JVP uprising. Personal conversion was correlated with a commitment for social and political change.

They were inspired by the dialogue of life initiated by Michael Rodrigo, an Oblate priest and a Catholic theologian who was killed in 1987 by 'unknown gunmen' like many others who called for justice and democracy in the country during that period. He publicly professed that he was a Christian by faith and a Buddhist by culture, and engaged in programmes empowering the rural poor who were victims of British colonialism and the present phase of globalization.[47] The *Kithusara Kandayam*a did not consist of members of the JVP like the members of the *Hiru Group*. The former attempted to articulate the need for social and political change from within their faith without condoning the means of the JVP. Like the *Hiru*

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[46] The name *Kithusara* means 'core of Christian message'. The group earned its name from their monthly publication of the paper called *Kithusara*. The editorial of the paper was termed as *Visavasye Desa* which means 'with the eyes of faith'. It was an attempt to articulate a Christian response to socioeconomic and political issues of the country. The 'eyes of faith' were the eyes of the poor, children, women, other religions, ethnic other and the planet earth. There were columns allocated in the paper for each of these categories. Its column which highlights the perspectives from Tamil and Muslim communities is called *Sahodara Balum* which means 'from the eyes of the neighbours or brothers'.

[47] Rodrigo's community comprised two Catholic nuns, several Buddhist monks and many lay Buddhists who engaged with the rural poor in the district of Monaragala where land of the peasants had been acquired by multinational cooperation through the policies of privatization of the government. For a collection of his writings see Milburga Fernando (ed.): *Fr. Mike and His Thought*, *Logos*, Vol 27, Ch.4, and (October, 1998).

Kandayama, the *Kithusara Kandayama* critiqued the JVP's position with regard to the rights of Tamils and engaged more concretely with the churches in the North and East by carrying out cross-community meetings, bi-lingual musical programmes, poster campaigns, and demonstrations that highlighted the distinctiveness as well as the commonality in the struggles of the Tamil and Sinhala communites.

They published a Tamil quarterly called *Oliyai Nokki* parallel to the Sinhala language paper *Kithusara* thus witnessing to a bi-lingual identification or affinity. Distancing themselves from project-oriented foreign funds they relied on local initiatives which they termed 'widow's mite'. The group has shown its transformational capacity by contributing to the development of the *Jansetha Action Foundation*: this focuses on the economic development of the rural and semi rural poor through systems of cooperatives where price hikes are arrested or controlled by removing agents between the producers and consumers. In response to the commercial media that promote consumerism (which targets women, children and teenagers) and the militaristic war propaganda of the government that calls the youth to join the defence forces, the group publish a teenage monthly called *Youn Piyawara* ('young steps'). While promoting artistic creativity among the teenagers *Piyawara* introduces them to humanist songs, poems, novels and films.[48] They also continue to interact with Tamil youth and children in the North and East by helping to build similar initiatives.

The group's reading of the Creation narrative as opposed to the Cartesian philosophy of technocracy can be clearly seen from their participation in the campaign of the lagoon fishermen in Negambo which was launched in 2001. Its aim was to protect the lagoon islands from acquisition by private companies. The lagoon fishermen whose industry has not been mechanized – many of whom are Catholics – consider the lagoon a sacred place. This *cosmic* spirituality was theologized by the *Kithusara* Group who depicted the lagoon as a blessing from the God of Plentitude in the Creation narrative. Individual acquisition was seen as a sin against the common heritage of creation. In their attempt to generate a prophetic imagination and a liberative praxis that could enlighten the entire island some of them joined the fishermen and women in forming the All-Ceylon Fisheries Trade Union. In a research

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[48] The group maintains a large selection of movies from all over the world that carry humanist perspectives through diverse religious and cultural idioms. Film screenings are organized both on school and village levels every month.

project carried out by Maryknoll on grassroots peacemaking efforts of Christian communities in different conflict zones in the world, *Kithusara* was one of the groups that has been identified as an example. Note the comment of Shirley Lal Wijesighe who carried out this study in Lanka. 'The major achievement of *Kithusara* is the formation of a group of youth who are able to understand the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka from the perspective of the oppressed.'[49]

In what way did the diverse groups and movements that have emerged as mentioned above, opposing war and capitalist globalisation in Lanka, come together in an effort to transform the Sri Lankan nation-state for a just and peaceful co-existence? While belonging to each one's particular articulations of resistance, can they develop a universalisable ethic that would help them to belong and at the same time go beyond each one's particularity with a moral imagination that could enlighten the Lankan society and polity?

3. Convergence and Confluence of Groups and Movements

There is a need for a convergence and confluence of groups and movements in envisaging the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. The moral imagination that is required for such an endeavour needs to grasp not only the particular socioeconomic and political grievances of diverse communities but also the very interrelatedness between and among them. It is of paramount importance here that the particular cultural, religious and spiritual articulations of their resistance are recognised in envisaging convergence and confluence. Convergence does not mean levelling of distinct forms of resistance. It means an engagement in a dialogical process where each aspect complements and thus enlightens and strengthens the process of transformation. As Jonathan Sacks rightly puts it 'difference does not diminish. It enlarges the sphere of human possibilities'.[50] The attempts at convergence must bear in mind the three levels of actors whom Lederach mentions: top level leadership, middle-range leadership and the grassroots leadership. A

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[49] Shirley Lal Wijesinghe: 'Prophetic Initiatives amidst Deadly Conflict' in *Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacmaking among Christian Communities*, (eds.) Mary Ann Cejka and Thomas Bamat (Marynoll, Orbis Books, 2003), p.182.

[50] Jonathan Sacks: *The Dignity of Difference: How to avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, (New York, Continuum, 2003), pp.201, 209.

committed life world which is enlightened by the multifaceted dimensions of the conflict can mediate the communicative interactions between and among these three levels and thereby increase the moral consciousness of the society and the polity. It is only through such a process that the political will that is needed for change can be generated.

The Lankan peace process lacked the incorporation of such a life world and of the grassroots. In concrete terms what I mean by grassroots are the voices of diverse groups who are affected by war and the market economy whose suffering becomes subversive in calling for transformation of socioeconomic and political structures. It is only an enlightened life world which belongs to a particular community but is capable of going beyond the 'primordialist' attachments without self interest – that can throw light on the forgotten dimensions that need to be addressed. As we have seen, while a militaristic option is costing thousands of human lives, in the religious *field* both the *sangha* and the Church are becoming more and more culpable as the polarisation of communities increases. If they are to be credible witnesses to the ethical traditions they profess they need to accept the unavoidable challenge of contributing to the life world in its efforts at convergence and confluence for transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. Particularity or specificity or the uniqueness of one's tradition needs to be differentiated from a particularistic insular ethics. Essentialist representations of nationhood not only exclude the other but also deprive those within that nation of a moral heritage of their own. Particularity has to be promoted only to the extent that its ethic can be universalisable in relation to the other (Ethics is prior to philosophy), but not in opposition to the other. There was potential in the 1994 movement for peace and justice for such a principle to be concretely applied to resolve the Lankan conflict.

The social imagination that developed in the campaign for a change of government in 1994 reflected a convergence of movements within the Sinhala society as shown above. However, with the government's military option the initial convergence of movements began to be divided between those who justified a military means to achieve peace and those who called for democratic dialogue. Promises given to humanise the economy also did not last long as the process of privatisation continued. A considerable section of the life world which facilitated the convergence could not arrest this situation as many of them depended more on the government than on direct communication with those who were affected by war and

the increasing process of liberalisation. However, we have discussed above how some groups within the life world became independent from the government and restarted attempts at a convergence and confluence even within the new phase of military conflict.

It has to be said that the 2002 ceasefire agreement was not an outcome of the convergence movements as was the case in 1994. The former, as we have already mentioned, came into being due to military parity, an economic crisis and international pressure. Nevertheless, unlike the 1994 peace talks, the 2002 peace process recognised *parity of esteem* which contained a potential for political negotiations. It also created a democratic space for a life world to make attempts at consolidation of communicative action. However, both the government and the international powers were more concerned about the economic gains of the process than proactively promoting a culture of dialogue between communities who had been affected by 20 years of war. The government focussed itself more on the aid deal than on humanitarian needs of the displaced Tamil population and a political solution.[51] It did not venture to begin educating the masses for such a solution while addressing the crucial religious, cultural and socio-psychological dimensions of the conflict. Without a constant communicative process that involves all the three tracks mentioned above, peace processes cannot last long. In concretising what I mean by a process of convergence and confluence let me illustrate such a process by referring to the attempts of some of the above mentioned groups to interact with each other to try to form a broader forum to envisage and concretise the process of transformation.

The democratic space created by the 2002 peace process was utilised by the cultural wing of the LTTE to initiate a communicative process with Sinhala society with a view to broaden understanding. In August 2002 the Cultural Wing organised a three day public conference in Jaffna called *Manudaththin Thamul Kudal* which was advertised in Sinhala as *Manushyatwaye Thamul Hamuwa* which means 'Tamil conference of Humanity'. Over 100 Sinhala academics, artists, writers and journalists

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[51] In my many visits to the North and East during this period to facilitate cross-community meetings organized by *Hiru* and *Kithusara* groups there were some frequent statements and questions raised by the Tamil participants. 'We know that we can move around in Colombo freely without being checked as military check points have been removed in the capital city. We are also happy that many Sinhalese are able to come to the Buddhist Shrine in Nagadeepa here in the North. Why is it that we here have to go through so many military check points still? Why is it that we still do not get our houses, lands and schools back from the Sri Lankan military?'

from the South (some of them were from *Rawaya*, *Hiru*, *Yukthiya*, *Kithusara* and *Oliyai Nokki*, and *Sadujanarwya*) were invited for an exchange on the subject of the distinct and common features of the historical struggle of particular communities. The Muslims as well as the Plantation Tamils were represented at the gathering. The very name of the conference appealed to the humanity in all while identifying the distinctiveness of particular communities. Note Prof. Sivathamby's comment on the event:

> The response of the Sinhala artists and writers at the conference was stupendous. Having walked through the ruins and debris of the war and read in translation some of the post 1981 writings, they called for human understanding of the Tamil problem at the level of the Sinhala people. [52]

The sessions were bilingual and were planned for the day commemorating the death of Tamils who were killed at that same venue in 1974 by the Sri Lankan Police who fired at the gathering of the World Tamil Conference. The participation of representatives from all communities in commemorating the dead has a potential to heal through remembrance. Responding to this initiative the Sinhala *Hiru* Group, with the support of the trade unions and the *Sadujanarawa* and *Kithusara* Groups organised a similar event called *Demala-Sinhala Kala Hamuwa* (Tamil-Sinhala Art Festival) in 2003: 300 Tamils and Muslims from the North and East along with representatives from the Plantation Tamils and 300 from the Sinhala community participated. The cost was covered by the grassroots groups with which *Hiru* has been working. For meals rice was provided by the Sinhala and Buddhist farmers from the border villages of the North Central Province and the fish by the Catholic fishermen and women from the Western coast.

Five Sinhalese were wounded (two journalists and three railway workers) in defending the Tamils from members of the JHU when the latter attempted to attack the gathering.[53] Police were deployed by the government and the commentator on the stage said 'the government has deployed police for the first time to ensure peace!' He also said that 'even though there have been Sinhalese in the past who gave sanctuary to the Tamils when they were being attacked by the racist groups this is the first time

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[52] Sivathamby: *Being a Tamil and a Sri Lankan*, p.185

[53] See *Death threat on the organizers of Sinhala -Tamil culture conference in Sri Lanka*, www.humanrights.de, downloaded: 21/01/2007.

that the Sinhalese were wounded in doing so'.[54] There was a spontaneous standing ovation by all which reflected a profound solidarity.

In broadening democratic space for peaceful negotiations this was a moment where an interaction of the three levels (Lederach) was visible. This initiative reflects the potential of the life world within the Sinhala society for peace-building. The conference did not discuss the technicalities of power devolution such as federalism or confederation, but it highlighted the humanist principles of the struggles of the oppressed Tamils, Plantation Tamils, Muslims and the Sinhala working classes, farmers, fishermen and students. The sessions consisted of reading poetry, singing songs, demonstrating dances, staging dramas and screening films created by particular communities expressing their aspirations for freedom, equality and for a just peace. These were followed by discussions which focused on both the particular and common themes that underlie the creative works. Note the observations made by one of the leading journalists in Lanka, Lakshman Gunasekara on the local capacity of the *Hiru* Group to build peace:

> In fact it is this identity of a 'poor' Sinhala journal, for years, actively working for the Sinhala poor, in a fearless manner with much sacrifice and commitment, that gives Hiru the credibility and ethno-national legitimacy that enables it to link up with social groups like non-Sinhala ethnic communities without the risk of being perceived as 'betraying' the Sinhala community. In this, Hiru parallels the JVP, but the Hiru Group vigorously distances itself from the Sinhala hegemonism inherent in the JVP's current campaign against a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. Indeed it is the Hiru Group's active support for a negotiated settlement, on the basis of its acknowledgment of equality of all ethnic and social sectors, that prompted it to organise the Sinhala-Tamil Arts Festival last week. In its stance in support of the peace effort, the Hiru Group is no different from numerous small Left-wing or social activist groups arising from among the less Westernised middle and lower-middle class intelligentsia. [55]

The political wing of the LTTE also started an official Sinhala paper called *Deduna* (rainbow). In April 2004, in an interview with the editor of the paper who is conversant in Tamil, Sinhala and English, he told me that the term was borrowed from the South African national movement against apartheid.[56] In 2004 they also launched for the first time two books in Sinhala which were compilations of two sets of articles

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[54] See *'Sinhala blood shed to protect Tamils'*, 30 October 2003, www.daliymirror.lk, downloaded: 21/01/2008

[55] Lakshman Gunasekara: 'Dangers of Sinhala extremism: Hiru vs. Hela Urumaya: a draw for now?', 02 November 2003, www.sundayobserver.lk, downloaded: 21/01/2007.

[56] This term is also being utilised both by the *Kithusara* and *Sadujanarwa* Groups in their musical programmes to lay emphasis on the need to accept diversity as the basis of a just-peace.

that were published in *Dedunna*. One book titled *Hadak Nathiyunge Hardaya Sakshiye Handa* (the voice of the conscience of the voiceless) was written by K.V. Balakumar. It made an attempt to reread Lankan history in an inclusive way. The words of dedication are as follows: 'We dedicate this book to the rare human spirit of the Sinhala progressives who through critical scholarship have committed their lives to throw light on the historical heritage of Tamil-Sinhala friendship that has been darkened by bigotry and supremacism' (translated from Sinhala).[57] The other book was a set of letters written by Appa, an old Tamil father (who has become a refugee due to the acquisition of his land by the Sri Lankan military), addressing a Sinhala youth Gamini as his son. The words of dedication are addressed 'to you Sinhala brothers and sisters who know what suffering means... There is no other who can understand our words of pain, love, aspirations and heroism except you' (translated from Sinhala).[58] It is not the name *Duttagamini* (*dutta* means disobedient and aggressive) who went against his father (according to the Pali chronicles Gamini's father did not want him to fight the Tamils.) which is used here, but it is the name *Gamini* or *Duttagamini's* conscience which is addressed by the letters. At the book launch there were over 200 Tamil and Sinhala participants, who gathered in Vavuniya (the city that connects North with South). The book was presented to the leader of the *Sadujanaraywa* Group, Jayatilake Bandara, who himself is a Buddhist from the ancient city of Anuradhapura. Prof. Sucharita Gamlath, a prominent Sinhala scholar, gave the keynote address by critiquing the racialised interpretation of the *vamsic* tradition while demonstrating the fluidity and malleability of ethnic identities.[59]

In a Sinhala initiative the *Sadunajanrawa* Group has gathered people throughout the country even during the height of the war in co-relating the sufferings of all the communities through their musical programmes. The songs are full of a moral imagination couched in the cultural imagery of both Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian narratives. One of the songs employs the images of Patachara – the woman who lost her family and went to meet Buddha for consolation – and Mary at

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[57] K.V.Balakumaran: *Hadaknathiunge Hardayashakshiye Handa*, (Killinochchi, The Political Wing of LTTE, 2004).

[58] Appa: *Vanniye Sita Liyami*, (Killinochchi, The Political Wing of LTTE, 2004).

[59] See *Southern intellectuals, artists participate in book release*, 20 June 2004, www.tamilnet.com, downloaded: 21/01/2008/. Sucharitha Gamlath is one of the very few Sinhala intellectuals in Lanka who writes and speaks publicly about the historical interactions between Tamils and Sinhalese. His historical findings and insights in this regard are published by one of the Sinhala weekly papers (*Lankadeepa*) under the title *sirilakvata* which means 'information about Sri Lanka'.

the foot of the crucified Jesus: these are evoked in referring to all the sons and daughters killed in war.[60] The writer joined the group's campaigns both as a participant and an observer during the period 2000-2004. In 2004 during the *poson* festival where thousands of Buddhist pilgrims come to Anuradhapura to commemorate the *arahat* Mahinda, who was the first to preach dhamma to Lankans, the group organised a meditative musical programme. The leading commentator of the session quoted the words of the *arahat* which were addressed to the king of the Anuradhapura Kingdom. The *arahat* is said to have met the king while the latter was hunting. *Put down your arrow. All those others should live in this land. You are not the owner but only the caretaker of this land.* Interpreting this saying in the context of the militarization of the Tamil areas by the Sinhala Buddhist state and the counter-violence it generates affecting the Sinhala villages bordering the North and East, the speaker said the theme of the campaign for peace is "let the millions of Tamil refugees (including Muslims) live in their villages and go to their places of worship like the Sinhalese who also want to live peacefully in the land. This is the path to peace shown to our kings and to the people by Mahinda Thero."

Buddha was addressed as *Amamaniyo* (eternal mother) and all those who had been affected by war were remembered. The speaker addressed the suffering of mothers and widows and expressed both in Tamil and Sinhala how particular languages voice such grief. It was the conscience of the king (of the Sinhala polity and society) which was evoked with the principle of interdependent co-origination.[61] The group continues to build a network of grassroots movements singing in the Tamil refugee camps, Sinhala workers' strikes, *satyagraha* sit-ins of Tamil plantation workers for pay hikes, in the campaigns of the women apparel workers in the Free

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[60] Vincent Kurubapitiya and K. Sunil Shantha (ed.): *Sithalada Balan Me Unu Kandulu Yapane:Sadujanarawa*, (Colombo, MONLAR,1997), p.11.

[61] Serena Thennekoon shows how in the eighties the writers to the Sinhala newspaper, *Divayina*, tried to differentiate Sinhala Buddhist nationalism from racism by referring to the troubled conscience of the King. Duttagamini was represented (as symbolising Sinhala nation) more as a national hero who carried out the duty of uniting the fractured nation than as some one who is responsible for killings of Tamils. The troubled conscience is the proof. Thennekoon argues that this representation resembles symbolically a collective exorcism of the stigma of racism attributed to the Sinhala particularly – and because of – the July riots against the Tamils in 1983. Serena Thennekoon: 'Newspaper Nationalism: Sinhala Identity as Historical Discourse' in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (ed.) Jonathan Spencer, (London, Routledge, 1990), pp.220-221.By referring to the teaching of the Mahinda Thero who first preached dhamma to Lanka the campaign of the *Sadujanarawa* Group problematises the exclusivist state-building of the Sinhala nation by referring to its victims.

Trade Zone where trade union actions are restricted and in the peasant demonstrations against the acquisition of lands by private entrepreneurs both local and multinational. Some of their programmes are sponosred by Buddhist monks themselves.[62] This gives evidence to the existence of an alternative space for peace that cannot be colonised by the dominant Sinhala Buddhist culture

The other movements that show potential for convergence and confluence are the fisheries movement, the farmer associations and the trade union movement in Lanka. The *mythos* of the sea has the potential to transcend the ethnic and religious divide. The Sri Lankan government's constant declaration that certain areas of the sea are high security zones affect all fishermen irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. Due to the effects of the market economy the fishermen also face a high cost of production while prices for their catch are decided by the non-producing private companies. The common experience of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala fishermen who are arrested, detained and sometimes killed by the Sri Lankan Navy has created solidarity among them. High security zones have not been able to supress the waves that sustain the livelihood of the fisherfolk. The grievances of the Tamil and Muslim fishermen in the North and East were issues in the two large scale demonstrations which were organised by the All-Ceylon Fisherfolk Trade Union against the market economy in the South in 2004 and 2007. The Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala fisheries representatives from different parts of the island met togther to celebrate May Day in 2004 at the Town Hall in Negambo.[63]

Farmers who are faced with losing their traditional farming lands due to the government's privatisation of natural resources are also a part of the convergence. Buddhist farmers in the ancient city of Anuradhapura filed a legal suit against an American company that planned to buy one of the richest natural manure (phosphate) resources in the region. The case was filed by the farmers' groups who retrieved the memory of the first dhamma, mentioned earlier, preached to the inhabitants of Lanka. The judge who heard the case gave the verdict against the government's move to sell

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[62] The writer has participated in such programmes in several temples in Anuradhapura, Kurunegala and Vavuniya during the period between 2001-2002.

[63] Apart from the *economic capital* that is connected to the fishing industry there is also a *social and cultural capital* that has a potential to unite them. Socially, fishing is still seen as a profession of the 'uneducated'. Culturally, many fishermen and women are Catholics (either Tamil or Sinhala). In my interactions with them I discovered that they had a grievance against the official church which has increased support to private schools (where only the children of the middle and upper classes can go) rather than to village schools where the children of the fishing families go.

the natural resource and referred to the same first dhamma preaching that the farmers had quoted in the law suit. In November 2004 the Buddhist monk who led this campaign joined a fisheries rally which was held in the predominantly Catholic City of Negambo. He was invited by the All-Ceylon Fisherfolk Trade Union despite the opposition of some Catholic clergy in the area: some of them have been in conflict with some Buddhist monks over promotion of private Catholic schools and claims to public spaces for the erection of statues. The monk appealed for solidarity against the privatisation of land, lagoon and natural resources, and the editor of the *Kithsasra* paper led a meditation engaging the thousands of participants in the idioms of both *agape* and *gnosis* and made an appeal to renew commitment as Christians and Buddhists to the integrity of creation and for a just peace among the diverse communities in the island.

In the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami, while some Christian fundamentalist groups pasted posters in Colombo saying 'This is the land of God! This is the Wrath of God', the spokesperson for the JHU made a statement saying that the Tsunami was wrath of nature opposing the Western conspiracy against Sri Lanka. Despite such polarising tendencies the life world of the above-mentioned converging groups within the Sinhala community organised relief work. They collected seventeen lorries of essential items from the Sinhala areas and with over a hundred people, who were joined by Buddhist monks, Christian priests, nuns, trade unionists, fishermen and women and journalists, journeyed to the LTTE controlled areas. They were receivied by Appa, the writer of one of the books mentioned earlier. On a previous occasion the political wing of the LTTE made a similar gesture by carrying aid to the Sinhala flood victims in the South of Lanka. Even though both the main protagonists of the conflict accuse each other of increasing their own military capacity, the above processes are witness to the initiatives taken by the life world of both their communities to broaden the democratic space for peaceful negotiations. The convergence of these movements and groups reflects a process of intersection of secular humanism (*Hiru* and the trade union movement) and religiously inspired humanism (*Sadujanrawa* and *Kithusara).* Such an intersection clearly reflects the potential to transform a violent conflict into a non-violent movement for peace. As they entered into the ceasefire agreement the Sri Lankan government did not have a clear plan to enter into a constructive dialogue with the LTTE, but the Sinhala groups mentioned above clearly show that the Sinhala community, as well its *cultural* and *social capital*, cannot be fully colonised by the

exclusivist Sinhala Buddhist ideology. Also there was a process within the ceasefire agreement that identified the common concerns such as children's rights, gender and ecological issues which were mediated by different concerned groups.[64] The convergence of the above groups reflects the potential within both communities to articulate a principle of secularity within particular cultural idioms while accepting diversity, equality and interdependence that could overcome the electoral politics that lacks a moral imagination.

4. THE *IMPASSE* OF THE 2002 PEACE PROCESS

At the time of writing the eruption of an economic crisis in the majority Sinhala society is temporarily arrested by the government's promises of a military victory over the *de facto* LTTE state in the North. This victory is depicted as imminent because the government gained control of key areas of the East that were part of the *de facto* state of the LTTE. The latter shifted to guerrilla mode by targeting the security forces in the region. While the civilian population of the region (who are Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese) live in constant fear and suspicion of each other, abductions, disappearances and killings are reported frequently. Initiating a new round of military operations with a view to capture the rest of the LTTE-controlled areas in the North, the government of Sri Lankan officially withdrew from the 2002 ceasefire agreement in January 2008. While the JVP and the JHU have warned of toppling the government in the event of any political negotiations with the LTTE, international human rights groups continue to appeal to the government to implement human rights standards in the country. While the GoSL appeal to the international community for funds to rehabiliate the Eastern Province the donor countries have indicated that human rights need to be assured for funds to be guaranteed. In the meantime the USA supports the Sri Lankan security forces in the East with naval gunships and communications equipment. In this present heightened phase of the conflict, where someone speaking for human rights and peace can be charged with aiding terrorism, in what way can a life world consolidate its potential and restart a much needed

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[64] During the initial phase of the peace talks there was a committee established between the two parties to discuss gender issues. There were also groups in civil society which held cross-community meetings on issues of children and ecology.

ceasefire agreement and a peace process? Even amid fear of abductions and death can those groups and movements still maintain the space for a peaceful settlement?

In November 2007 the *Kithusara* Group, with the support of similar groups, organized a commemoration of Michael Rodrigo in Jaela, a predominantly Sinhala area.[65] The main speaker led the gathering of nearly 200 people into meditation by remembering the slain priest who utilised both *gnosis* and *agape* in Buddhist-Christian dialogue.[66] The speaker said that the practice of dhamma and the gospel has political implications and that it cannot be restricted to personal life. He remembered all the victims of war. In concuding he said '*siyalu sathwayo nidukwewa, nirogiwewa and suwapathwewa* (may all beings be free from suffering, sickness and be healed), including those whom we are told are our enemies and including Tamilchelvam at whose death we were told to be jubilant'.[67] One of the leading members of the Patriotic Nationalist Movement who is also a Catholic writer objected to the mention of the name of the Tiger leader who was assassinated by a Sri Lankan government air force attack in November 2007. The speaker reiterated that according to the dhamma and the gospel he has to say the same again. I could hear a huge round of applause from the audience! Such symbolic gestures reveal the cultural and religious space that still exists within the Sinhala community for moral imagination. On the back cover page of one of the *Kithusara* publications the group has utilised the Christian spirituality of relationality as follows:

> Whatever you would not like to happen to yourself, do not let it happen to your brother and sister. As you do not wish to see your land destroyed then do not allow the land of your brother and sister to be destroyed...As you wish for your grievances and struggle to be understood, understand the grievance and the struggle of your brother and sister... As you wish your race, culture and land to be respected, accept and respect the race, culture and land of your brother and sister.[68]

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[65] Thanks to the technology of speed of communication that introduces 'non-territoriality' of space the writer could listen to the speeches via Skype!

[66] Having been invited by the monk Rodrigo preached in the village temple. He led the Buddhists into meditation while preaching on the melting heart of Buddha (*metta*- melting heart of compassion) through Jataka tales that depict the rebirths of Buddha as *bodhisattva*, and also quoting *suttas* that bring to light Gautama's compassion as Buddha. He also wrote about the 'bowels of compassion' of Jesus relating it to the melting heart of Buddha. See Milburga Fernando: *Harvest Dreams of Fr. Mike Coming to Fruition*, (Colombo, Centre for Society and Religion, 1998), pp.56-57.

[67] On hearing of the death of the chief negotiator (the head of the political wing of the LTTE) there were reports of firecrackers and drumbeating in the major cities of Colombo, Kandy, Galle and several other places.

[68] Kithusara Group: *With the Eyes of Faith*, (Kalutara, Kithusara, 2002), back cover.

While the economic instability of the working classes grew due to the high cost of living caused by both war and the market economy, the government started to suppress the workers' right to carry out strikes by obtaining a court order in May 2006. As a result fifty two trade unions throughout the country have formed one forum face the repressive measures of the government. The All-Ceylon Fisherfolk Trade Union joined this forum and has given a voice to the socially marginalised fishermen and women, highlighting the plight of the Tamil and Muslim fishermen and women who live under the military controlled areas in the North and East. In my interviews with the members of the *Hiru* Group who work with the Trade Union Movement I discovered that the former has initiated a process of education within the movement to identify the distinctiveness and the commonalities of diverse struggles in Lanka to counteract the polarising exclusivist ideologies of the JVP and JHU. Such an effort will potentially build an enlightened life world among the workers who can see the co-relation between their economic grievances and the political aspiration of the Tamils.

Civil society needs to look into the liberative characteristics of the potential life world that I have illustrated above. To move beyond the present impasse, civil society, which concerns itself with power devolution and development, needs to incorporate farmer movements, fisheries trade unions, student bodies, and workers' trade unions, as well as the Tamil movement for self-determination, promoting crosscutting meetings that recognize each other's grievances. There needs to be an alliance between the Tamil farmers, who are deprived of their land by the High Security Zone in Jaffna, and the Sinhala farmers, who are in debt because of high production costs and low paddy prices caused by new economic reforms.[69] A similar approach should be taken by the Tamil fishermen, whose fishing hours are restricted by the Navy, and the Sinhala fishermen, who are affected by the market economy. The Tamil teachers and students, whose schools are occupied by the military, and their counterparts in the Sinhala areas whose education is in the process of being privatised, should also adopt the same approach. Such attempts should consist of re-

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[69] In promoting this perspective the *Hiru* paper published two sets of photographs on the same page. One was of the Sinhala farmers who started a fast-unto-death campaign first in Polonnaurwa and later in Colombo demanding the government to put down the prices of manure. The other was of the Tamil farmers who initiated a similar campaign demanding the government to allow them to go to their lands which have been occupied by the Sri Lankan military. See 'Pratigamee Jayarupaya Thoranna', *Hiru*, No.1, Vol.4, (March, 2004), p.11.

visioning cultural and religious traditions that can arrest exclusivist perceptions of nationhood.

The failure of the past peace processes demonstrates that a mere pragmatic change of government without addressing the material as well as the cultural base that prolongs the conflict does not have the potential to transform the Sri Lankan nation-state. The role of civil society and the nature of a peace movement have to be redefined in this light.[70] It is these joint communities who should propose alternative economic models as well as models of power devolution. The references in this paper are themselves taken from authors of diverse communities in Sri Lanka who have attempted a common analysis. Within this space sovereignty can be redefined by an enlightened and broader consensus that recognises both distinct sovereignties as well as a joint sovereignty in the unmaking of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

So far I have identified the capacities of the life world within Lankan society, even within a phase of high intensity war where both parties rely on military means to resolve the conflict. However, because the local reality of Lanka is interwoven with the dynamics of regional and global politics, such an effort should be coordinated with the global life world. In the Northern Ireland peace process, the convergence and confluence of both the local and global efforts was crucial in creating space for dialogue.[71] The *Hiru* Group has suspended publication of its paper due to security threats to its journalists. Under the sponsorship of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany, who support writers and journalists who are under threat from their respective governments, a leading member of the *Hiru* Group, Bashana Abeywardene, has left the country. With this new opportunity the group initiated a series of seminars – titled 'Understanding the Larger Picture' – among the Lankan diaspora in Europe and other groups in European civil society who are concerned about the Lankan situation.[72] The Lankan diaspora reflects the ideological tensions that exist in the

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[70] The Movement for National Agricultural, Land Reform and All Ceylon Fisherfolk Trade Union and All Ceylon Teachers' Union are currently attempting this approach.

[71] Although peace does not mean cessation of hostilities it is a non-negotiable condition for any process to move further. This needs moderate forces within the ethnic frontier as well as in the metropolis. In the case of Ireland the role of the SDLP (also Gerry Adams and the SDLP working together) and some moderate Unionists, along with the moderate positions of Dublin and Britain and the other external players such as the USA and the EU, have facilitated the Good Friday agreement and the move away from deterrent politics, though they are not fully overcome.

[72] I had the opportunity of attending two such seminars in Europe, one in Rome and the other in Bremen. There were both Sinhalese and Tamils who were also joined by Europeans. After identifying multiple dimensions of the conflict the discussion was centered on exploring the role of

conflict. The forum that is created by the seminars conducted by the *Hiru* Group can create a space where both Sinhalese and Tamils and European human rights activists and journalists can increase awareness of the interrelatedness of global politics with the Lankan conflict. Such a space has to be developed in Europe to form a committed life world that can help the European Union to contribute positively to a peace process in Lanka while arresting the militaristic option which has been encouraged by the USA (and also by the banning of the LTTE by the EU).

Concurrently there is an urgent need for the formation of local and global solidarity with the right to freedom of expression in Lanka. The *parity of esteem* that was lacking in the 1994 peace talks was established in the 2002 peace process, but the cultural constructs that are interwoven with the economic and political fields were not addressed. Talk of human rights is seen by those who promote war in Lanka as a Western conspiracy. The duplicity of politics in applying human rights standards by the powerful countries (especially by UK/USA in their invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan) is used as an excuse to by-pass human rights standards in Lanka. The culture of impunity in Lanka today is associated with essentialist representation of nationhood and the belief in a centralised state structure. Human rights are seen as an Occidentalist discourse against which the Orientalist nation-state has to be defended! What is not seen by the groups who argue this way is that the very sovereignty of the state is dependent on the economic and military support of the Occident. In a recent cover story the *Diyesa* Magazine pointed out that the Sri Lankan president himself when he was in the Opposition worked with the UN agencies in 1987-1989 to safeguard human rights in Lanka.[73]

Without reducing their statements to mere technical words, the appeals by Europe and the UN for basic human freedom of expression need to evoke the moral consciousness of those who attempt to justify violations of human rights in Lanka.

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those who are gathered to raise awareness within Europe about the geo-political implications of the Lankan conflict within the emerging globalised network of relationships.

[73] His constituency, Tangalle, was one of the main areas where many abductions and disappearances were reported. The article shows how his house was constantly full with the loved ones of those who disappeared, appealing to him to mediate. Rajapaksha, as a member of the Opposition, initiated forming citizens' committees to protect human rights while also addressing the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Appeals made on behalf of human rights were not seen as a betrayal of one's nation during this period, either by the SLFP or JVP. By recovery of this memory the *Diyesa* Group makes an attempt to raise the moral consciousness of Sinhala society against the present state of affairs. See Diyesa Kandayama: 'Manava Himikam: Katha Karamuda? Amathaka Karamuda?' *Diyesa*, No.3, Vol.6, (January-February, 2008), pp.4-8.

Memory of one's own suffering under repression is a sure way to understand another's suffering caused by repression. It is also important that appeals to protect human rights are interpreted through faith and ethical traditions. Human rights are not a relative issue to be determined by the nationalistic political rhetorics of a particular country. They are a universal concern that addresses the basic freedom of human beings. However, to arrest nationalistic interpretations it is important that human rights are understood from within religious and ethical traditions. The Christian faith in transcendence of politics of compassion and justice and the Buddhist doctrine of interelationality can be a foundation in protecting human rights. Such a task necessitates a dialogue between human rights activists, theologians and buddologists.[74]

Overcoming the artificial demarcations of 'religious' and 'secular' in efforts to contribute positively to peace in Lanka and while distancing secularism from secularity, the EU also has to promote an ethic of intereligious dialogue by publicly accepting Europe's culpability in the colonial practice. It should also examine its complicity in global politics that has compounded the Lankan situation to the extent of restarting the war. It needs to engage track three and two in its decision making process and this process has to be enlightened by a life world that sees conflict resolution with a multidimensional approach. Such an attempt will certainly enhance the democratic framework of the EU. The failure of the Lankan peace process reflects the absence of such an approach.

Can the EU remember the suffering and the millions of deaths of the two world wars that were caused by competing nation-sates? Mahmood Mamdani reminds us how Nazism applied to Europe the colonial practices that had previously been applied to the colonized countries by Europe. [75] The British treatment of the Irish and the other colonies and also the treatment of the proletariat within Britain reflected a similar pattern. Is our history cyclic and repetitative or has it moved forward morally by learning from the past failures? The moral project of the unification of Europe and the success of the Irish peace process reveal our readiness to create a culture of peace.

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[74] 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World Religions' where human rights are discussed from diverse religious perspectives can enlighten such an effort. See Joseph Runzo, Nancy M.Martin and Arvind Sharma (eds.): *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*, (Oxford, Oneworld, 2007), pp.131-208.

[75] Mahmood Mamdani: *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York, Pantheon, 2004,), p.8.

Could the memory of the European conflicts be correlated with the 1.2 million refugees (mostly Tamils) and the 2 million families who live below the poverty line (mostly Sinhalese and Plantation Tamils)? The encounter with the Lankan migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Europe will certainly help to initiate such a process. A growing awareness within Europe with regard to the interconnectedness of European politics with local politics in Lanka can help the EU to positively contribute to the peace efforts by creating conditions for a negotiated settlement that will address the suffering of millions of refugees.

As this study has shown the subverted traditions of our religious and cultural heritage, along with the gift of reason – reason that is meant to serve the cosmos, not to dominate it – can surely enlighten us in this direction. Protracted conflicts like the one in Lanka need protracted peace processes that need to address multiple dimensions that prolong the conflict. However as Frank Wright, one of those who articulated the life world of the Irish peace process, writes, 'none of us can be innocent of violence everywhere.'[76] The increasing number of deaths (soldiers, LTTE cadres and civilians) and the cry of the suffering of the many displaced masses in Lanka challenge the very moral ambivalence within us demanding us to redefine our socioeconomic, political and cultural relationships with each other by transcending cultural and political frontiers in order to uphold the right to life. A life world (comprised of Europeans, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims) can play a crucial role in creating conditions to stop loss of life by enlightening the polity to take concrete measures that would broaden a democratic space. Wright reiterates the need to create moderate democratic space by both external and internal actors of the ethnic frontier that would 'accommodate each other' in order to avoid chaos.[77] In Lanka what would guarantee (at least relatively) right to life and democratic space is an immediate ceasefire agreement which is an absolute necessity. Within such a space interim arrangements can be implemented to address the multidimensional facets of the conflict. In those arrangements envisioning a culture for peace through the contribution of religious and ethical traditions is a basic requirement that cannot be neglected. Without promoting the human capacity for moral imagination a peace

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[76] Frank Wright: *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p.289.

[77] Frank Wright: 'Northern Ireland and the British- Irish Relationship', *Irish Quarterly Review* (Summer, 1989), p.160.

process cannot last long. This is the basic drawback in the 2002 ceasefire agreement.

Peace processes that are initiated with only pragmatic politics cannot last long. They will only be determined by dynamics of power without ethics. Similarly conflict that is religiously supported cannot be resolved without engaging religious *mythos* with *logos*. Conflict needs to be subverted with an ethical-political programme that touches human experience of suffering and oppression. The transformation of the Sri Lankan nation state can become effective with such a process. In my conclusion I will summarise the basic prerequisites (that we have identified so far) that are needed to form such an ethical-political programme.

CONCLUSION

Absolutising *habitus* or the *historical transcendental* of the nation-state and imperial global sovereignty either through the historicisation of religious *mythos* (construction of exclusivist identities) or absolutisation of the immanent principle of *logos* (rationalisation of capitalism, secularism and military intervention) has constructed or suppressed the other. The roots of 'perennialist' and 'primordialist' perceptions of nationhood as well as exclusivist forms of modern sovereignty of nation-states and emerging global capitalist sovereignty lie in this historical absolutism where the ethical dimension within both *mythos* and *logos* is undermined. It is important to resist both the historicisation of *mythos* and the absolutisation of *logos* by paying attention to the suppressed other or the otherness of the other with the hope of initiating a dialogue for a just and peaceful co-existence among diverse ethnic and religious communities.

What this study has attempted so far is to engage both *mythos* and *logos* in a dialogical mode in forming a moral imagination which is needed to overcome the dilemma of the Sri Lankan nation-state, which continues to polarise diverse communities. It has done so bearing in mind both the local and global (particularly European) dynamics between power and culture. Within the religious field the main dialogue partners were Christianity and Buddhism. The local political context has been the conflict between Tamil (ethno) nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist (ethno-religious) nationalism. On the global level, culturally the context has been the Orientalist-Occidentalist Divide or Combine. Politically, the positive facilitating role that Europe can play in broadening the democratic space for dialogue in the Lankan conflict in contrast to the militarily approach of the USA has been reiterated.

On an epistemological level, in articulating a moral imagination that can inform the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state, I have attempted to problematise the artificial demarcations between secularity and religiousness. In effecting a transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state emphasis has been laid on the need for a convergence and confluence of movements of resistance – facilitated by a life world – towards the dominant discourses of exclusivist form of nation-building and the capitalist globalised market. These considerations demand a process-oriented

approach to the resolution of the conflict, which engages all the three levels that Lederach demonstrates.

1. Two Distinct Forms of Nationalism

Basically, the Sri Lankan conflict revolves around the dogmatic belief in the nature of its nation-state, a centralised state structure, territorial sovereignty and cultural homogenisation. Should this form of sovereignty of state be the only solution to the present conflict as suggested by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists or should the present new form of capitalist global sovereignty be promoted as 'the end of history' as suggested by the world market? It is evident after fifty years of conflict between the proponents of an exclusivist form of nation-building and the Tamil movement for self-determination – a conflict which has claimed thousands of lives – that an essentialist form of sovereignty of nation-state should be abandoned. Similarly the ultimate authority of the world market cannot be accepted because it has upheld a system, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, where 'riches are global and the miseries are local'.[1] He notes how 'globalisation divides as much as it unites', not only in economic terms but also in cultural terms, the two fields flowing into each other. 'Neo-tribal and fundamentalist tendencies, which reflect and articulate the experience of people on the receiving end of globalisation, are as much legitimate offspring of globalisation as the widely acclaimed 'hybridization' of top culture – the culture at the globalised top'.[2] In this sense, for Bauman, fundamentalism is a postmodern condition.[3] The political fundamentalism of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is a reflection of this reality.

We have seen how modern Western sovereignty is moving towards a global sovereignty both in the form of economic power (EU) and political power (USA). However, despite the global sovereignty of capital, the EU is linked to a particular political and social culture whereas the USA is associated with a political-militaristic construction. In this sense the Western nation-state has not ceased to be even within the present phase of globalisation. Ellen Meiksins Wood shows how global capital requires many nation-states to administer the global economy. As the only remaining

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1 Zygmunt Bauman: *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1998), p.74
2 Ibid., pp.2-3
3 Zygmunt Bauman: *Post Modernity and its Discontents*, (Cambridge, Polity, 1997), p.184.

superpower, the USA uses its military power to create political allies throughout the global system of multiple nation-states, either through direct intervention or by forging alliances.[4] It is in this geo-political setting that the Sri Lankan nation-state – which is a strategic location in South Asia – becomes pivotal for the USA; and therefore the centralised state structure has been solidified. This has overlapped with the interest of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces who oppose the Tamil demand for self-determination. By military resistance, the Tamils also have established a *de facto* nation-state in some parts of the North and East of Lanka. The Tamil movement for self-determination defies overtly the exclusivist form of Sri Lankan nation-state while covertly opposing American militaristic strategies in South Asia whereas the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement maintains a strategic alliance with the USA while attempting to consolidate its already fractured unitary state. What is most revealing is how the very notion of nationhood is still being used both by the victim and the perpetrator of the exclusivist form of nation-state. Any resolution of the conflict needs to take into account these two distinct imaginations of nationhood.

2. Violence and the Inevitable Risk of an Ethical Commitment

When a nation-state is defined by the historicisation of *mythos* by means of a selective reading of the past it tends to construct the other, whereas when a nation-state is defined in terms of freedom, equality and justice, as found in the Tamil movement for self-determination, which emphasises the immanent principle of secularity, it has potential for a just peace. However, the latter also justifies violence to achieve its goal. This was the dilemma of the French Revolution. 'Since the French Revolution, violence has come to be seen as the midwife of history' writes Mahmood Mamdani. In political modernity violence is justified by the progress it achieves.[5] On the one hand political modernity has problematised the historisication of *mythos* and the mythologisation of history in the exclusivist project of nation-building. On the

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4 Ellen Meiksins Wood: 'A Manifesto for Global Capital' in *Debating Empire*, (ed.) Gopal Balakrishnan, (London, Verso, 2003), p.71.

5 With this perspective the Lankan conflict is neither an ethnic conflict nor a communal conflict. Nor is it a clash of civilisations, but rather a national question which revolves around two distinct forms of nationalism. For a critical appraisal of the relationship between violence and political modernity see Mahmood Mamdani: *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, pp.3-8.

other hand its reliance on violence in achieving its goal of freedom and equality problematises the very goal that it intends to achieve. Violence deepens polarisations of the communities, blurring the possibility of reconciliation. A just peace requires not only justice and equality but also reconciliation; but calling for reconciliation without creating democratic space for dialogue is ambiguous and leads to delay in justice. This is why it is of paramount importance to ensure a democratic space for negotiations between the parties in Lanka to prevent a violent protraction of the conflict. The 2002 ceasefire agreement in Lanka created this space and minimised violence. Due to the American need to consolidate global capitalist sovereignty in South Asia this space has been closed down leading to an *impasse* that continues to claim many thousand lives at the time of writing.

The failure of the peace process in Lanka is not only a moral failure of the Lankan society but also a failure of European politics, which could not implement the EUs' moral project that evolved after the two world wars – the project of non-violent conflict resolution. This project has the potential to contain the American military globalisation of the world. The failure of the peace process also reflects the moral failure of Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism. As religious and ethical traditions they have not been able to overcome the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological constructs that continue to polarise geo-political spaces and concurrently maintain dominant polities both in Lanka and in the West. Without realising these, a mere general condemnation of violence of the Tamil movement for self-determination is a moralising preaching and will not help to resolve the conflict. Francois Hourtart notes as follows:

> We do not live in a non-violent mode, and Mgr. Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, rightly said that it was necessary to distinguish between the violence of the powerful and that of the oppressed, even if he favoured non-violent means. That is the inevitable risk of an ethical commitment within social relations of exclusion and oppression.[6]

The Venerable Walpola Rahula Thero, the erudite Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar writes in *What Buddha Taught*:

> According to Buddhism there is nothing that can be called a "Just war" which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence and massacre. Who decides what is just or

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[6] Francois Houtart: 'The Cult of Violence in the Name of Religion' in *War and Peace: Violence and Reconciliation* in *Dialogue*, new series, Vol.xxix, (2002), pp.9-10.

> unjust? The mighty and the victorious are "Just", and the weak and the defeated are "unjust". Our war is always "just" and your war is always 'unjust'. Buddhism does not accept this position.[7]

What are the ways of transforming a violent conflict into a non-violent mode of political negotiations? Isn't the conflict in Lanka an extension of politics? If so, why wage war to engage in politics? Isn't everything political? But can everything be reduced to politics? Can politics be detached fully from ethics? Who decides what is ethical or unethical? Isn't that itself an ethical question? As John D'Arcy May puts it, there is a need for a new approach in resolving our conflicts 'in a post modern period of increasing globalization with the prospect of contributing to the ethical consensus of an emerging non-violent global society.'[8] If ethics is prior to philosophy as Levinas, Dussel and Bauman have shown us what does political power mean? Engaging in politics is an ethical responsibility. Enrique Dussel writes:

> Those who hear the lament or protest of the other are stirred in the very center of their world, are decentered. The cry of pain of the one we cannot see signifies someone, not just something. The someone signified by the signifier – the cry – exhorts us, urges us to take on the suffering, the cause of the cry.[9]

The EUs' moral project evolved as a response to the cry of millions of those who were affected by the world wars. Isn't it the same cry which is emerging from Lanka, which is not only Europe's former colony, but also one of the main suppliers of apparel to its market?[10] Does not the cry of many thousands of Tamil refugees, who live in Europe, itself signify the cause of their displacement from their homeland? What are the options available for the EU to respond to its ethical-political responsibility of a non-violent resolution of the Lankan conflict? One option is the present *status quo* where the EU banned the main political agent of the Tamils which as we have seen, became counterproductive. The second option is to impose sanctions

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7 Walpola Rahula: *What Buddha Taught*, (Bedford, Diemer & Reynolds, 1959), p.84.

8 John D'Arcy May: *Transcendence and Violence: The encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, (London, Continuum, 2003), p.152.

9 Enrique Dussel: *Philosophy of Liberation*, (Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, previously published by Orbis Books, 1985), p.60.

10 The biggest portion of Sri Lanka's exports consists of textile exports. Garment product exports to the EU markets are valued at US$ 1-2 billion annually. The other part is exported to the United States. For details see an interview with the German Economic Cooperation and Development Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul published in www.tamilnet.com. *Germany wants sanctions if Sri Lanka continues war*, Wednesday, 13 February 2008, www.tamilnet.com, downloaded: 14/02/2008. The majority of the apparel workers are women who have no right to form trade unions. While many rural young women join these factories many rural young men join the Sri Lankan army. These are the two main sources of employment that have been created by the dominance of the exclusivist form of the Sri Lankan nation-state and the market economy.

on the government of Sri Lanka as suggested by the German government with the aim of containing the government's military solution and the violations of human rights.[11] Even though in the short term it might throw the government into an economic crisis, given the nature of the political formations of the government which is supported by the JVP and the JHU, economic sanctions will not guarantee nonviolent political negotiations. The third option is to establish *parity of esteem* between the two main protagonists following the example of the Irish peace process, as suggested by the All-Party British Parliamentarians' Group for Peace in Sri Lanka, while establishing mechanisms of monitoring human rights standards which will ensure basic freedom of expression.

However, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism will continue to oppose any European facilitation towards a negotiated settlement considering such a move a neo-colonial political strategy. This opposition is inseparably associated with a justification of the majority-dominated nation-state supported by a Sinhala variant of Buddhism and the Orientalist-Occidentalist ideological scheme. In overcoming these cultural and political constructs both Christianity and Buddhism, aided by a life world that is formed from an intersection of secular and religious spheres, have to play a pivotal role. This has to be attempted simultaneously both within Lanka and Europe. We have seen how the life world both in Lanka and Europe can inform a confluence and convergence of movements, which will subvert the dominant discourses of nation-building, the market economy and the American military agenda in South Asia. This was the ethical-political strategy that led to peace in Vietnam where there were movements for a just peace that emerged from within the Vietnamese society as well as within Europe and the USA.[12] These movements converged with an intersection of religious and secular discourses. What was lacking in the Iraqi situation was the absence of such a convergence of movements locally and globally. Lanka has a potential to form such a movement that can interact with European movements for a just peace. A shared life world whereby diverse secular and religious traditions complement each other can help to envision a liberative paradigm for Lanka.

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[11] See the above interview with the German Economic Cooperation and Development Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul

[12] See my work on the convergence of the Vietnamese and American peace movements during the war against Vietnam. Jude Lal Fernando: *A Paradigm for a Peace Movement: Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King Jr*, (Dublin, The Columba Press, 2007).

3. LIFE WORLD, CONVERGENCE AND CONFLUENCE

The studies carried out so far on the construction of the Western nation-state, empire-building and the postcolonial Sri Lankan nation-building show how perspective knowledge has become objective knowledge and how the colonial and postcolonial agendas are attached to such patterns of knowledge. Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'the organic intellectual' has shown how intellectuals do not represent an independent social category, but are part of a social class who 'direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong'.[13] As noted by Elisabeth Süssler Fiorenza 'intellectual neutrality is not possible in a historical world of exploitation and oppression'.[14] Gramsci's idea of a civil society that counteracts the hegemony of the state entails an intellectual who is organically related to the diverse oppressed social classes.

Edward Said, echoing and qualifying Gramsci's idea, identifies intellectual life as a vocation and sees power, money, and nationalism as temptations.[15] Both Noam Chomsky and Edward Said who are secular critics, define the role of the intellectual as 'speaking truth to power'.[16] 'Speaking truth' for Chomsky is to expose the 'manufacturing of consent'[17] and for Said it is to expose the relationship between the essentialist representations of collective identities and power politics. Their vision of a liberative paradigm is defined by a paradigm of human rights which is based on their perception of human reality. However, we also have seen, through the studies of Anthony D. Smith, how ethnic and religious symbolism also plays an important part in the social imagination of human collectivities. We have qualified Smith's *ethnie* with the primacy of the political *field* as reiterated by Weber, Bourdieu and Houtart.

Therefore, while appreciating contributions made by secular humanists in defining the role of intellectuals as speaking truth to power and standing for human rights, this study also attempted to enter into a dialogue with the ethical and religious

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[13] Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.): *Selections form the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p.3.

[14] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *Rhetoric and Ethic* p.47.

[15] Cited by William D. Hart: *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, p.42

[16] Gauri Viswanathan: *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, (New York, Vintage Books, 2001).

[17] Noam Chomsky: *Media Control*, (New York, Open Media, 2002), p.18

traditions to break the dichotomy between the secular and religious spheres in the contexts in which they are involved. It was an attempt to engage both *mythos* and *logos* in a constructive dialogical mode rather than compartmentalising these dimensions which in itself I consider violent. The ethical and religious traditions, in the case of this study, Christianity and Buddhism, have distinct ways of perceiving human reality, where the polarisation of self and the other is overcome. Similarly, the buddologists, the theologians and other religious philosophers need to examine their discourses in light of the studies of the politics of interpretation that the secular humanists have made while entering into a dialogue with them and to attempt to reinterpret the ethical and religious traditions with a political commitment.

A critical intersection between *logos* and *mythos* will help not only to overcome the representation of the Sri Lankan conflict as part of 'clash of civilisations' as suggested by the 'perennialist' and 'primordialist' theoreticians of nationhood. It will also help to form a moral imagination based on the ethical principles of both secular and religious traditions. The very realisation of the fact that the nation-state is a modern construct that emerged through a process of interaction between power and culture is the first step to evoke the moral responsibility of recreating a new future with a new politic of interpretation. Acknowledgement of the moral failure that has resulted in absolutising paradigms of state-building itself is a guide towards an alternative politic of interpretation that is based on ethical principles of particular cultures and religions.

Absolutising the immanent principle with an unlimited power has led to secularism and the present form of global capitalist sovereignty while absolutising transcendence has led to construct the religious and the ethnic other. A deep awareness and an acknowledgement of these failures will qualify both the secular and religious spheres as credible partners in a communicative action that can form a shared life world. In this attempt there are two important factors that need to be considered. First, those within the life world should be able to connect her or his internal reality with the external reality. Socioeconomic, cultural and political analysis and personal introspection should go together. Secondly, their role should not be limited to academia, but should extend to taking up the obligation of building an ethical-political movement which necessitates a constant concrete engagement with the *praxis* of the marginalised voices of those who are victims of the dominant and exclusivist cultural and political discourses.

While the churches both in Lanka and Europe need to accept their complicity in the dominant power politics of the Western nation-state, empire building and the present phase of capitalist globalisation, the internalisation of these dominant structures can be critiqued by methods Fiorenza demonstrated.

> Focussing on the socio-political situation of wo/men on the bottom of the kyriachichal pyramid, the criterion 'for the sake of wo/men's well-being' allows one to measure everything said in scripture as to whether it fosters wo/men's wellbeing' in particular social political situations. This criterion allows one to reject the authority of those biblical texts that are inscriptions of empire and violence. It allows one to free oneself from internalised ethos of empire, in a process of critical reflection which traditionally is called the 'discernment of the Spirit'.[18]

The 'discernment of the Spirit' calls the churches to retrieve the biblical idiom of *agape* and interpret it in terms of a politics of *transcendence of compassion and justice* (Walter Brueggemann and Bas Wielenga) in contrast to the *absolutist transcendental* of the hegemony of globalised capitalist sovereignty and exclusivist forms of nation-building. The paradox of transcendence of the *kenotic* God in the biblical tradition, who enters into an alliance (the covenant-theology of Aloysius Pieris) with the marginalised voices, victims of the dominant structure, problematises the construction of an *absolutist transcendental* and utterly blurs the boundaries between transcendence and immanence. Such an interpretation of the biblical faith will open doors to initiate a dialogue with secular humanists who lay emphasis on the principle of immanence. Recognition of a God of plentitude whose first command is 'go and multiply' (not 'thou shall obey one God'), which means 'be plural' or recognise plurality and diversity (Regina Schwartz) and multiple cultural forms of expression of transcendence (John D'Arcy May), will dismantle the theological imperialism that fuels Orientalist-Occidentalist antagonism. Such an approach will help to initiate an interreligious dialogue which can inform an ethical-political movement to help to transform the Sri Lankan nation-state.

The two baptismal callings (the baptism of water and fire) of the churches in Sri Lanka have to be seen not as callings to increase numbers but as vocations to identify oneself with the cultures and ethnic groups subjugated by the Orientalist-Occidentalist Combine and to participate in the struggle against poverty and ethnic discrimination.

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[18] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*, (Minnapolis, Fortress Press, 2007), p.66. For Fiorensa, *kyriachy* refers to a regime of power dominated by the emperor, the propertied elite, father and husband.

Using this hermeneutical approach the internalisation of the European colonial state by the postcolonial Sri Lankan nation-building of the *sangha*, the local churches, the landed aristocracy and the mercantile classes can be problematised. This will expose the complicity between the coloniser and the colonised in the building of a dominant structure at the expense of the Sinhala rural poor, the working classes, the fishermen and women and the Tamil plantation workers. It is within this dominant structure that the Lankan Tamils were gradually excluded. It is necessary to recognise the European colonial memory of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Tamil plantation workers and at the same time it is also important to identify the complicity of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism with European imperialism and with the present phase of American militarism which promotes a military option to resolve the national question. In building a life world within the EU with the aim of facilitating a negotiated settlement this perspective is of utmost importance. Such a life world needs to accept the culpability of European colonialism that affected all communities in the past, (mentioning in particular the economic violence against the Sinhala peasants, the middle classes and the Tamil plantation workers, and cultural violence against Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam) and the present American militarism that supports the government of Sri Lanka in its on going war against the Tamil movement for self-determination. Such sensitivity to the historical memories as well as to the present geo-political dynamics will certainly help to reduce polarisation between the diverse communities who are trapped by the dominant cultural and political constructions.

The Lankan Buddhist *symbolic capital* of the motherhood of Buddha, as used by Tessa Bartholomeusz, can be employed to critique the male-dominated, dynastic, feudal yet colonial (supported also by the dominant interpretation of Western Christianity) affiliation of Sinhala Buddhism with state structures. The image of the motherhood of Buddha is not merely a symbolic expression of the interrelatedness of reality in the Lankan Buddhist culture but it also reflects the reality of the life of women in Lanka within the context of war and the market economy. The Sri Lankan economy is based mainly on women apparel workers (who are mostly Sinhala), migrant workers to the Gulf States (who are Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim) and the Tamil women plantation workers. Over thirty three thousand Tamil women in the North and East and 28 percent of Sinhala women in other parts of the country (the South) have been widowed by the conflict. Yet Lankan Buddhist culture views the motherhood of woman as an embodiment of Buddha who realised interdependent co-

origination (liberative knowledge) and who is full of compassion (liberative love). Within the Tamil movement for self-determination gender equality has been emphasised. The militant Tamil women campaign against the dowry-system that dehumanises women within the Tamil society.[19] Should both the Tamil and Buddhist moral imagination not lead to a realisation of the interrelatedness of the suffering of all women on the island? It is a collective suffering caused by structural and organised attachment to the exclusivist form of the nation-state and the market economy. Should this realisation not trouble the conscience of 'Asian kings' and their Western counterparts in the present moment of a globalising network of relationships?

The engagement of both Christianity and Buddhism in the reality of the life of the masses affected by war and the market economy will certainly help these traditions to purify themselves from their ideological contamination and be of service to humanity. By retrieving the basic liberative characteristics of the Tamil movement for self-determination, it is necessary that its life would also engage in a constant communicative process with the Sinhala and European counterparts. The movement drew its inspiration basically from the secularity of the Indian freedom struggle and from the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. The latter's movement against Brahminical domination was based on the secular humanist and Buddhist egalitarian principles. Amid a violent conflict such a retrieval by the life world of the Tamil movement for self-determination will help to broaden a democratic space for dialogue. With this approach the human experience of suffering and oppression caused by the 'Battlefield of History' can form the locus of interreligious and interethnic dialogue between diverse communities in conflict that will help to imagine an alternative form of the state.

4. Religiousness of Secularity and Secularity of Religiousness

An essentialist representation of nationhood cannot be overcome simply by an acceptance of plurality based on *logos* while the social imagination of the masses

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[19] For a detailed socio-political analysis of women's participation in the Tamil struggle see Adele Balasingham: *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance*, (Mitcham, Fairmax Publishing Ltd, 2003). For a cultural analysis of Tamil feminism see Peter Schalk: 'Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ilam: The Martial Feminism of Atēl Pālacinkam', South Asia Research, Vol.14, No.2, (Autumn, 1994), pp.163-183.

continues to define itself in terms of the mythologisation of history or the historicisation of *mythos* within a given socioeconomic, cultural and political setting. Both *logos* and *mythos* have to engage with each other in redefining what secularity means. While appreciating the profound humanism in the critique of Orientalism, I differ from the Saidian approach to conflict resolution which suggests a secular humanist approach that can transcend ethnic and religious consciousness. Even though such an approach is necessary to maintain the consciousness of our common humanity within a pluralist society, the cultural particularities within each distinct community also have a potential to either polarise or to unite communities in a given context. Recognition of this cultural space has become ever more important in an assumed 'age of clash of civilizations'. It is not the cultures which lead people into conflict but the dynamics of the politics of interpretation. An alternative interpretation which makes an attempt to retrieve a universalisable ethic from the particular can help a community to belong to a culture while transcending this belonging in identification with the other. Therefore, in envisaging a transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state, I would suggest to interpret humanist secularity in terms of religiousness (diverse) and religiousness in terms of humanist secularity. Such an attempt will help to engage both the secular and the religious spheres in a process of purification.

Doesn't the biblical tradition itself reflect a form of secularity where the transcendence of God was viewed in relation to the poor, the widow and the stranger? This form of politics of transcendence of God was distinct from the politics of divinely ordained pyramidal polity of Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian imperial mythologies? Wasn't the Jesus movement secular within the Roman imperial system of domination? Wasn't the Buddhist movement of monastic communities, which was a critique of the divinely ordained Brahminical hierarchy of society, secular? Did not Buddha himself envisage polity as a social contract rather than a predetermined 'perennialist' or 'primordialist' hierarchy which was believed to be unchanging? Can we see Islam as a movement that grapples to overcome the artificial demarcations between secularity and religiousness?

Modern secularity emerged as a result of a justifiable struggle against the domination of the institutional European churches. However it could not separate itself from a secularism that relies on a belief in an unlimited power of material wealth and consumption at the expense of the mother earth. However, today European secularity also has developed into an eco-secularity in defining environmental policies

with the EU. There is a growing concern both within the secular and religious spheres about the threat that the mother earth is facing. The cosmic religiousness that is interwoven with the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim communities in Lanka that considers nature sacred when faced with acquisition of land in the South by the multi-national companies and the destruction by war in the North and East can help to redefine secularity with a holistic approach. Using this approach a life world in Europe and Lanka, which intends to facilitate a negotiated settlement, can dispel the fear felt mainly among the Sinhala Buddhist community about a 'secular' state. Similarly, the principle of secularity that Buddha himself advocated in defining polity as a social contract can be revived from within Buddhism by critiquing the mythologisation of a Sinhala Buddhist perennial state.

These processes are not possible without a convergence and confluence of victims of both the exclusivist form of the Sri Lankan nation-state and of the market economy. In the Lankan context, the Tamil movement for self-determination, which resists the dominant state ideology and its structures, and the many socioeconomic, cultural and political movements within the Sinhala community that resist the market economy need to be assisted by a life world. This life world has to be constituted by the civil society, the churches and the *sangha* in order to create a common space that will enable the above marginalised movements to raise voices. Such a common forum needs to recognise the particularities of the distinct struggles while perceiving their interconnectedness. Because the Lankan conflict has been internationalised, a similar initiative within Europe has to be taken forming solidarity across the borders for a just peace. It is through this communicative process that a broader movement for a just peace can evolve. In this communicative process of attempting to transform the Sri Lankan nation-state, it will be evident that we are not in an age of 'clash of civilisations'.

Through an intersection of secular humanism and Buddhist egalitarian principles the South Indian Dravidian movement has subverted the Brahmin-dominated cultural and political constructs. This attempt has retrieved a universalisable ethic from the Tamil culture which is expressed through love for the Tamil language and culture. The Lankan Tamil movement for self-determination has drawn inspiration from the Dravidian movement in articulating its struggle against domination of India, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and American militarism. The Sinhala perception of motherhood of Buddha has subverted the male-dominated

Sinhala Buddhist exclusivist discourse of nation-building. The Lankan Christian communities who are engaged in the struggles of the eco-human-victims of both war and the market economy bear witness to a liberative praxis within Christianity. The moral project of the EU with its emphasis on eco-human rights has already initiated a process of subverting its colonial past. Instead of a clash of cultures, religions or civilizations and of geo-political spaces, each of these ethical-political strands can certainly complement and mutually enrich the other in a *symbiosis* and in an *osmosis of discourse* in the transformation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. The process of decolonizing the cultural, economic and political formations of the dominant model of the Sri Lanka nation-state has already begun through various movements that we have identified so far. What is needed is to recognise them and promote their complementarity by facilitating a process of convergence and confluence of such movements which will draw inspiration and courage from a shared life world. Such facilitation will certainly transform a dynamics of essentialist representations of nationhood into a dynamics of a negotiated settlement for a just peace.

5. Resistance, Conflict and Hope

I do not intend to propose a blueprint for the resolution of the Lankan conflict. The focus of this study has been on the politics of interpretation that we human beings engage within the given circumstances of our socioeconomic, cultural and political life. We continue to engage in this process in response to our burden of moral ambivalence. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it ''to be moral' does not mean 'to be good'', but it means that we have the potential to exercise moral authorship in our encounter with the other.[20] This authorship, which has been used to build a politic of interpretation for domination, can also be used to evolve a politic of interpretation for liberation. We are in a challenging moment of transformation in history where this moral ambivalence of the eco/wo/man subject is confronted as never before calling us to take responsibility for the other in a postmodern and postcolonial setting. As David Tracy puts it, 'we are all historical social beings struggling for some new interpretations of ourselves, our language, history, society and culture.'[21]

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[20] Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, p.1.

[21] David Tracy: *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London, SCM Press, 1987),

Finally, conflicts are not evil in themselves, but they do challenge us to re-examine the humanly created cultural, socioeconomic and political structures that polarise distinct communities and cause us to ignore interdependent co-origination and the *transcendence of a politics of compassion and justice* and the basic moral imperative of *being for*. In the biblical tradition creation is a struggle that aspires to 'be plural' in relation to the other. Within Buddhism the realisation of suffering is the first step towards an understanding of the interrelatedness of existence that guarantees the cessation of suffering and wellbeing. Conflicts invite us to question our perceptions of essentialist identities and to engage in a process of humanizing the world through an act of identification with the other. In this sense we are, in a moment of transformation, confronted with the emerging challenge of the other that calls us to enter into a process of identification with the otherness of the other that opens a creative future filled with hope. This moment of transformation calls us to exercise our moral authorship in reorganising our society and polity with the principles of interdependence, equality and diversity. The key to resolving the Lankan conflict lies in the concrete realisation of these principles by the local and global actors who are involved in the conflict. This work is a humble attempt to help each other to seize this moment of transformation in working for a just peace in Lanka while humanising international relations.

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p.50.

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