An Opportunity Lost
The Entrenchment of Sinhalese Nationalism in Post-war Sri Lanka
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Abstract

This research studies the trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa from 2005 to 2015. The role of nationalism in the protracted conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils is well understood, but the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009 has changed the framework within which both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism operated. With speculations about the future of nationalism abound, this research set out to address the question of how the end of the war has affected Sinhalese nationalism, which remains closely linked to politics in the country. It employs a discourse analytical framework to compare the construction of Sinhalese nationalism in official documents produced by Rajapaksa and his government before and after 2009. A special focus of this research is how through their particular constructions and representations of Sinhalese nationalism these discourses help to reproduce power relations before and after the end of the war. It argues that, despite Rajapaksa’s vociferous proclamations of a ‘new patriotism’ promising a united nation without minorities, he and his government have used the momentum of the defeat of the Tamil Tigers to entrench their position by continuing to mobilise an exclusive nationalism and promoting the revival of a Sinhalese-dominated nation.

The analysis of history textbooks, presidential rhetoric and documentary films provides a contemporary empirical account of the discursive construction of the core dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. It explores how the end of the war has affected the myth-symbol complex underlying national identity as well as the motives and rationales of nationalist politics. The research identifies continuities and changes in the content and use of these dimensions as a response to the transition from war to peace. These shifts, however, do not signify a challenge to the traditional hierarchical framework of Sinhalese nationalism. Instead, post-war triumphalism has reinvigorated its ethnic core that places the Sinhalese, their culture and religion, above other communities in Sri Lanka. The military victory has reaffirmed the link between the Sinhalese nation, Buddhism and the state that has traditionally been used to legitimise Sinhalese claims to a Sri Lankan nationalism. Furthermore, developments, such as the victory itself and growing international criticism, are incorporated within traditional nationalist frames and, in turn, help to reinvigorate them.

Overall, this research demonstrates implicit and explicit discursive modes of how the Rajapaksa regime continued to perpetuate an exclusive Sinhalese nationalism, marginalising minority communities, their long-standing grievances and the crucial issue of reconciliation after the end of the war in 2009.
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the original work of the author and has not been submitted previously to any other academic institution. Where use has been made of the works of others it has been duly acknowledged and referenced.

Material from chapter four has been published under the following citations:


Signed:

Date:
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Chapter 1

Introduction

For nearly three decades Sri Lanka had been known to the world mainly for the prolonged violent conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government. In May 2009 the decisive military victory of the government forces finally ended one of the bloodiest intra-state conflicts in recent history. For close observers of the country the end of the war was a cause of relief, yet it also raised several questions. How would the end of prolonged violence affect community relations, the underlying conflict and grievances? How would it affect the ideological space within which actors view themselves, each other and the conflict, and within which politics operate? What would the end of the war mean for the Tamil community? How would the victors react in light of the defeated separatist threat?

This research explores the opportunities and challenges posed by the end of the war, investigating its effects on Sinhalese nationalism. It provides an empirical study of Sinhalese nationalist ideology during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa from 2005 to 2015. This research studies official discourses, contributing to our understanding of the short-term effects the defeat of the LTTE had on Sinhalese nationalism within its wider historical trajectory. At the outset of this research in 2010 the country and people were in flux and these issues were mainly a matter of speculation, but during Rajapaksa’s second term in office the situation stabilised into an uneasy peace that has reiterated the need to study the force that has significantly shaped politics in the country since independence: Sinhalese nationalism.

Locating the Research Problem

Ideologies like nationalism are socially shared belief systems that organise social representations of group members. These ideas and mental representations are the basis of social practices and allow groups to pursue goals through coordinated actions (van Dijk 2007: 116f.). Nationalism is an ideology of and about the nation, promoting its autonomy, unity and identity (Smith 2009: 61), but the content of
nationalisms differs according to their unique historical context, circumstances and experiences (Calhoun 1997: 22). Sinhalese nationalism is basically a set of beliefs shared widely among the majority community that the Sinhalese nation, Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state are inseparably linked (Tambiah 1986: 93f.).

In the early twentieth century it emerged as a major driving force of mass mobilisation and elite politics alike, and its gradual merging with the post-independent state played a major role in the deterioration of community relations and the subsequent violence.

Chapter two provides a more extensive discussion of the origins and content of Sinhalese nationalism as well as the historical background of the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils. It explains the latter as the consequence of a number of social, political and economic forces that converged in the post-colonial bureaucratic state. The conflict was not the result of ancient communal hatreds, but of increasing ethnic mobilisation and polarisation that resulted from modern nationalist ideologies (Tambiah 1986). After independence the democratic state, lacking safeguards for minority rights, facilitated the gradual ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka, creating a Sinhalese Buddhist state that increasingly marginalised minority communities (DeVotta 2004; Manogaran 1987). As Tamil resistance to Sinhalese rule grew more and more fierce, the country began to spiral into violence. Instead of granting Tamil dominated areas far-reaching devolution, the Sinhalese government reaffirmed the centralised state, resulting in the Tamil movement openly adopting a separatist agenda (Sitrampalam 2009). In the late 1970s the LTTE established itself as the main representative of the Tamil community and subsequently fought for the next four decades for an independent state, Tamil Eelam, in the north-east of the island.

The history of post-independence Sri Lanka is the story of the growing influence of Sinhalese nationalism on the one hand, and Tamil counter-mobilisation on the other. Nationalism became the way of doing politics and the main mechanism through which economic and political grievances gained significance within increasingly strong Sinhalese versus Tamil tropes. Sinhalese

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1 It should be noted from the outset that there is no the Sinhalese nationalism, but rather many different ideological representations competing for hegemony, of which we seek to study those expressed, enacted or endorsed by the Rajapaksa regime.
nationalism became the major rationale of the Sinhalese Buddhist state and was furthermore entrenched by the fears and insecurities of nearly three decades of separatist violence that pitched Tamils and Sinhalese against each other. In May 2009 the government of Sri Lanka defeated the LTTE, changing the context within which both nationalist ideologies were constructed and nationalist movements operated. The military victory brought a respite for the country and its people, especially those living in the former war zones, as it ended the fighting between the LTTE and government troops. For Tamil nationalism the defeat of the LTTE, which had forcefully established itself as the sole voice of the Tamils, was a considerable blow, leaving a vacuum in its wake to be filled by domestic and diaspora actors. Sinhalese nationalism, on the other hand, gained a resounding victory, defeating the separatist threat to the Sri Lankan state, reaffirming its unitary character and the dominant position of the Sinhalese within it.

It seemed that the absence of a serious domestic challenge may enable the Sinhalese nationalist project to become truly hegemonic, but as chapter three discusses in more depth, emerging speculations of scholars indicated that the future of Sinhalese nationalism was not as clear-cut as the military victory. The immediate post-war literature tried to come to terms with the new situation, predictions ranging from gloomy accounts of a ‘victor’s peace’ to cautious hopes that the defeat of the separatist threat may have opened a space for more inclusiveness and reconciliation. On the one hand, following May 2009 some scholars argued that the ruling nationalist elites had no interest in change and could use the triumphalism of the post-war period to consolidate Sinhalese dominance (Uyangoda 2011; 2010; Bopage 2010). DeVotta (2010) even suggested that, backed by nationalist ideology, the country might move further towards authoritarianism. On the other hand, more hopeful voices were speaking of a ‘golden opportunity’ for the country (Lunn et al. 2009). Wickramasinghe (2009a), for instance, identified signs of a ‘new patriotism’ that could potentially form the basis of a more inclusive, civic nationalism in the post-war period.

The end of the war opened up new opportunities, but also posed challenges to the ideological framework of a Sinhalese nationalism that had come to increasingly rely on anti-LTTE tropes (DeVotta 2007). The issue was put most succinctly by Goodhand, who asked whether ‘in its moment of triumph Sinhala
nationalism may be at its most vulnerable’ (2010: 359). It was this intriguing and seemingly counter-intuitive thesis that inspired this research to take up the issue of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism in late 2010. It raised awareness that despite, or possibly precisely because of, the military defeat of the LTTE posed both challenges and opportunities to Sinhalese nationalism. The end of the war seemed elusive for a long time and in its immediate aftermath it was unclear how Sinhalese nationalism would respond to the defeat of its long-standing antagonist, the militarised Tamil movement. This research therefore addresses the following question:

*How, if at all, has the end of the war affected Sinhalese nationalism?*

**The Research Project**

This research investigates how the defeat of the Tamil Tigers has affected the content of Sinhalese nationalism and thus the ideological framework of politics in Sri Lanka. The research period covers the two terms of the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa, spanning November 2005 to January 2015, divided by the end of the war in May 2009. Within a critical discourse analytical framework it examines the short-term shifts within Sinhalese nationalism by comparing how it was (re)constructed and reproduced before and after 2009.

Ideologies shape, and in turn are shaped by, social reality as their belief systems are the basis of ideological practices and societal structures (van Dijk 2007). In the case of Sri Lanka, Sinhalese nationalism has been crucial in shaping politics since independence, and has come to justify, legitimise and perpetuate a Sinhalese Buddhist state. The manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism are manifold, including landmarks like the 1978 Constitution, controversial issues such as the settlement of Sinhalese in the north and east, and many everyday practices, like local traditions and the behaviour and dress of individual politicians. In the years following the end of the war observers (e.g. Hyndman 2015; DeVotta 2014; Höglund and Orjuela 2011; de Silva 2010) have drawn attention to the continuous manifestations of the Sinhalese victory, signifying the perpetuation of nationalist politics under Rajapaksa: public triumphalism and the erection of Buddhist statues across the island; increased nepotism and corruption; heavy militarisation, especially of the north; unresolved issues of reintegration
and resettlement of former militants and internally displaced people; flaring up of religious violence; opposition to international investigations into war crimes; and largely unanswered calls for accountability and justice. Overall, the end of the war ushered in an uneasy peace that saw the consolidation of Rajapaksa and his government at the expense of political reform and reconciliation.

Many of these developments were not foreseeable and by no means inevitable at the outset of this research, but they illustrate the continuing permeation of Sinhalese nationalist ideology throughout the state apparatuses, its representatives and large parts of the Sinhalese community. These material manifestations of nationalist ideology, however, provide only a limited insight into the content and form of the specific mental representations and ideas that make them possible after the war. This research thus focuses on discourses, the use of language in text and talk, to explore contemporary Sinhalese nationalism in more detail. Discourses are the practice through which ideologies are largely acquired, expressed and reproduced (van Dijk 2007: 115) and have been described as ‘the favoured vehicle of ideology’ (Fairclough 1989: 34). This research focuses on elite discourses that not only provide an insight into Sinhalese nationalism, but also demonstrate how political elites can shape the ideological space to facilitate their policies and actions.

This research examines elite-level discursive constructions of Sinhalese nationalism within three data sets: history textbooks, presidential rhetoric and documentary films. Elites hold a central part in the perpetuation of ideologies in general (van Dijk 1998), but in the case of Sri Lanka they have played a particularly significant role in the construction, perpetuation and dissemination of Sinhalese nationalism at crucial points in the country’s history (DeVotta 2004; Stokke 1998). The selected discourses are directly produced or approved by elites of the Rajapaksa regime as part of their official narratives and are an important part of the social and political processes manifesting and reproducing Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

To analyse the six textbooks, seventy speeches and three documentaries the research draws on previous studies that have explored similar data sets to investigate the construction of nationalism and national identity. These provide examples and specialised tools, namely story-line analysis and rhetorical political
analysis, for the examination of the distinct features of the three data sets within an overarching methodological framework borrowed from Wodak et al. (2009), the analytical dimensions of which are outlined in more detail in chapter three. The analysis of official discursive constructions of Sinhalese nationalism cannot provide a complete picture of this complex phenomenon, an undertaking that seems beyond feasibility in any case. It does, however, provide an important insight into the ideological strands that are continuously shaped and woven together through social interactions, including but not limited to language, by a large host of actors at different times and places, which in their entirety form Sinhalese nationalism.

From the literature reviewed in chapters two and three, a number of key assumptions underlying the analysis can be summarised.

First, nations and nationalism are modern, socially constructed phenomena. They are conditioned by, and in turn condition, social practices such as interactions, language use or societal structures. Discourses are particularly relevant in expressing and manifesting the mental representations underlying these social constructs.

Second, nationalist ideologies and identities are durable, but also diverse, constantly challenged from within and without, and may be reconstructed or transformed. If significant events, such as the end of a war, influence these processes this should also be visible in the discursive modes of expressing, (re)constructing and reproducing nationalism.

Third, in Sri Lanka the national space is contested. In the early twentieth century Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms emerged as distinct and opposing ideologies and political movements. While the former lays claim to the state and ‘Sri Lankan’ nationhood, the latter challenges Sinhalese dominance and seeks a higher measure of self-determination. They are related, but should be understood and analysed as two unique phenomena.

Fourth, Sinhalese nationalism needs to be studied within a framework that pays attention to its pre-modern, ethnic dimensions. Sinhalese identity, like other national identities, is not primordial or essential, but we need to analyse the processes through which they become perceived as such by their members and remain relevant in the present.
Fifth, while Sinhalese nationalist ideology is widely disseminated among the Sinhalese population, elites play a major role in expressing, perpetuating and potentially transforming nationalism, as well as mobilising it for their strategic goals through their privileged access to discourse.

Finally, a major feature of nationalist discourse is positive self-representation and negative other-representation, but it also expresses general values shared by the group, its political goals and strategies, for instance the protection of national unity in a Sinhalese Buddhist state.

These assumptions highlight the major concepts and tools, reflecting the specific historical experiences and cultural features of the Sri Lankan case, which inform this research and its investigation of the discursive construction of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism.

A Historic Moment for Sinhalese Nationalism

The six years since the end of the war have seen both change and continuity for Sri Lanka. On the one hand, the defeat of the LTTE has removed the immediate militant threat to the state and Sinhalese nationalism, including its position within the institutions of the state. It has ended the fighting, brought economic development to the former war-zones, and allowed some return to normalcy. On the other hand, the end of the war did not bring about a regime change or far reaching political reforms addressing minority grievances. With the memories of the victory still fresh in the minds of the population, Rajapaksa was able to consolidate his position and that of his Sri Lanka Freedom Party during the presidential and parliamentary elections held in January and April of 2010 respectively. The Rajapaksa regime celebrated the defeat of the LTTE, proclaiming a supreme victory and the end of communal disharmony. In the absence of domestic pressure there was no urgency for reform and reconciliation in order to deal with minority grievances. Thus, when the two-term limit on the office of the presidency was removed later that year, it seemed that Rajapaksa’s rule might last for a long time to come – until the surprising events of January 8, 2015, when Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president who had crushed the Tamil Tigers, was defeated in the presidential elections by Maithripala Sirisena, his largely unknown opponent.
Post-war Sinhalese nationalism has similarly been characterised by simultaneous signs of continuity and change. Comparing the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalist ideology before and after 2009, this research has found no radical transformation or reorganisation of Sinhalese nationalism in response to the defeat of Tamil militarism. Instead, the analysis demonstrates subtle signs of shifts that highlight the fluidity of nationalist ideology and its adaptability in the face of change. While post-war material manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism like the militarisation and ‘Sinhalisation’ of the country under Rajapaksa signify its continuous relevance, it is through discourses that we can trace the subtle ways in which the underlying ideological frames respond and adapt to the end of the war. They further provide insight into how Rajapaksa created the ideological space for nationalist policies despite the defeat of the separatist threat, legitimising certain courses of action while reducing the space for accommodating Tamil grievances.

This analysis reveals how the end of the war has facilitated the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism during the Rajapaksa period. Rajapaksa has returned Sinhalese nationalism to a position of strength, comparable to the 1950s when SWRD Bandaranaike’s introduced the Sinhala Only Act. The decade of Rajapaksa presidency has seen the return of Sinhalese nationalism into mainstream politics, enabling Rajapaksa to consolidate his power through widespread support among the Sinhalese population and tight control of critical voices from the opposition, media and abroad. The military defeat of the LTTE removed the immediate threat to Sinhalese nationalism, its ideological practices and organisational structures, enabling the government to advance its nation-building project, the ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka, to previously contested areas. In the short term the victory provided the momentum for the Rajapaksa government to reaffirm and restore the traditional belief sets of Sinhalese nationalism. This is evident in the post-war discourses that demonstrate how its ideological framework can be adapted and reinvigorated by constructing the present within existing nationalist narratives. They illustrate the continued mobilisation of Sinhalese symbolic resources like Buddhism and myths, as well as the construction of new ones, for instance the military victory that gains nationalist meaning through its integration into Sinhalese mytho-history.
This research argues that despite the defeat of its main antagonist, the LTTE, Sinhalese nationalism has not become obsolete in the immediate post-war period – on the contrary, its main protagonist, the Sinhalese-cum-Sri Lankan nation, has seen a revival under Rajapaksa. It explores how minority communities are openly invited into this victorious, resurgent nation, but this inclusion needs to be understood within the hierarchical logic of Sinhalese nationalism. The Tamils are differentiated from the LTTE ‘other’, but they are not addressed as equals and their grievances are silenced throughout post-war discourses. At the same time we can discern subtle shifts in the construction of the ‘other’ after the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers. While the logic and functions of ‘othering’ remain in place, it is realigned within the post-war context, replacing the LTTE with a more vague, external threat. Overall, in the short term Sinhalese nationalism has been able to adapt to the end of the war in ways that reinforce its rationales while consolidating unequal communal power relations with the help of the victory.

The rich empirical account of Sinhalese nationalism during the Rajapaksa period offered by this research adds to our understanding of contemporary political forces in Sri Lanka. It highlights the subtle ways in which Sinhalese nationalist ideology remains relevant through the incorporation and reconstruction of new elements, and can potentially continue to adversely affect community relations on the island. Yet, two major limitations of this research need to be acknowledged that require further investigations in the future. First, the analysis and its findings are limited to official discourses. We can assume that the past resonance between elite and mass nationalism has not been suddenly eroded, nonetheless more research is needed to examine how the end of the war has affected popular constructions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

Second, and potentially more crucial, 2015 saw a change in leadership that may move the country away again from the kind of nationalist mobilisation buttressed by Rajapaksa. The election of Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickremesinghe as president and prime minister respectively was a defeat for Rajapaksa’s nationalist project, but not Sinhalese nationalism in general. Rajapaksa’s loss at the ballot box cannot be attributed to a single factor. Overall, the widespread corruption and nepotism of his government, his unpopularity with minority communities, scant economic growth, and the authoritarian tendencies
and questionable human rights record of his regime eventually outweighed his singular achievement, the defeat of the Tamil Tigers. The way Rajapaksa and his government mobilised Sinhalese nationalism to consolidate their power at the detriment of democracy and the minority communities not only antagonised minorities, but also portions of the Sinhalese electorate, especially in urban centres.

It is important to remember, however, that while Rajapaksa’s regime played a major role in the resurgence of Sinhalese nationalism, it did not invent these belief sets but rather selected and mobilised existing ideological narratives and used the post-war momentum to entrench those through its discourses and politics. Without a similar in-depth study of the expressions and manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism under the new government we can only make tentative statements about how it mobilises nationalist narratives, but the new government seems committed to diverge from Rajapaksa’s nationalist rhetoric and politics. Yet, it still has to operate within the ideological practices and organisational structures perpetuating Sinhalese nationalism since independence. Furthermore, Sinhalese nationalism is not limited to elites and the past has shown how political actors had to address the expectations of large parts of the majority community that Sinhalese interests be prioritised. The current trend indicates a return of the more chauvinist strands of Sinhalese nationalism to the margins of politics, promoted by Rajapaksa’s supporters and extremist groups like the Sinha Le movement. At the same time mainstream politics have to face the challenges and the lingering effects of Rajapaksa’s Sinhalese nationalist narratives and the expectations and frustrations they created.

This research has examined a historical period that has seen the return of Sinhalese nationalism to the forefront of politics due to Rajapaksa’s style of leadership and the specific historical circumstances that enabled him to garner widespread support among the Sinhalese community for his nationalist project. The new government may not openly mobilise Sinhalese nationalism, but they are still constrained by the ideological space shaped by Rajapaksa’s triumphalism and the defeat of the LTTE, while facing the challenge of transforming the end of war into a true peace for all communities.
Chapter Outline

Following this brief introduction to the research project, chapter two provides an extensive discussion of the background of this research, defining nationalism and outlining its historical trajectory from its pre-modern roots to the end of the Rajapaksa period. It begins with an overview of the major approaches to theorising nations and nationalism, before situating the research within a constructionist account that pays particular attention to the peculiarities of the case of Sinhalese nationalism, especially its ethnic roots. These theoretical remarks are followed by a brief historical account of Sinhalese nationalism, highlighting the pre-modern origins of its major symbolic resources, Buddhism in particular, the importance of the colonial intervention and the role of nationalism in the deterioration of community relations. The chapter concludes with an overview of the war period and Rajapaksa’s presidency. This chapter is necessarily longer than other chapters, as it lays the groundwork of how to conceptualise Sinhalese nationalism as a way of thinking and interpreting the world that became intertwined with politics and the state after independence. It provides a concise account of the ideological dimensions of Sinhalese nationalism, drawn on frequently in the subsequent chapters, and emphasises the importance of Sinhalese nationalism for understanding the past and present events in Sri Lanka.

Building on the final sections of chapter two, chapter three situates this research within the challenges and opportunities presented by the end of the war, before detailing the methodological framework employed in the remainder of the thesis. It highlights how this research can contribute to our understanding of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism by providing an in-depth account of how the end of the war has affected Sinhalese nationalism through its discursive dimensions. The chapter begins with a crucial review of the emerging post-war literature as it moves from speculations to rather gloomy certainties during Rajapaksa’s second term. Having identified the gap this research seeks to address, it outlines its critical discourse analytical framework within which it studies Sinhalese nationalism through official discourses. The chapter concludes with remarks on the data sets, providing an account of the data collection and analysis process. It highlights the peculiarities of each data set and how these are addressed.
through appropriate methods to study the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism.

Chapters four to eight present the findings of the discourse analysis, detailing the content and strategies of Sinhalese nationalism during and after the war. The material is organised in a broadly chronological manner, beginning with the textbook analysis that provides an insight into Sinhalese nationalism during the final stages of the war and concluding with the documentary analysis, which establishes a distinctively post-war narrative. The speeches in between cover the entire research period before and after 2009. As the largest data set they are discussed in three chapters, organised thematically into the construction of nationhood, first the representation of the ‘them’ in chapter five, followed by the portrayal of ‘us’ in chapter six; and the ideological framework of Sinhalese nationalism explored in chapter seven.

Chapter four begins with the analysis of the history textbooks, demonstrating how their historical narratives reproduce a Sinhalese Buddhist mytho-history as official history of Sri Lanka. It examines how the use of labels and the selection of events and heroes construct the Sinhalese nation as the Sri Lankan nation. This exclusive conceptualisation of nationhood is supported by the story-lines that project both the modern nation and state back into ancient times, naturalising the link between nation, religion and territory in past and present. The chapter also investigates the limited representations of minority communities and how they are subtly linked to foreign invaders and threats, further excluding them from the nation. It concludes with a discussion of how the young readers are addressed as future citizens of Sri Lanka, including them into the nation-building project of the textbooks.

Chapter five provides the introduction to Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, first locating his nation-building project and the inherent tensions between his future and past oriented narratives. It then outlines his conception of a heterogeneous nation and the mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion. The main focus of chapter five is on the representation of ‘them’. It examines Rajapaksa’s differentiation of the Tamils and the LTTE, which allows the inclusion of the former into the Sri Lankan nation, while excluding the latter. Tracing the representations of these groups from 2005 to 2014 we highlight how the ‘terrorist other’ is realigned after its
defeat, keeping intact the unifying function of ‘othering’ while simultaneously facilitating the incorporation of the Tamil community into the national family permeated by the hierarchical logic of Sinhalese nationalism.

Having established who the nation is not, chapter six provides an in-depth account of the effects of the end of the war on the myth-symbol complex mobilised by Rajapaksa, exploring ‘us’, the ideal Sri Lankan nation addressed by his rhetoric. The chapter analyses how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric reproduces the historical narratives and golden ages of Sinhalese mytho-history also identified in the textbooks before and after the end of the war. It highlights how he frames contemporaneous post-war events, especially the victory, within these narratives, making the present into history. Other symbolic resources, especially the representation of war heroes, similarly highlight the continuation of ethnic mobilisation despite Rajapaksa’s explicit calls for a ‘new patriotism’. Overall, chapter six argues that there has been a noticeable increase in the manifestation and reproduction of Sinhalese-centric symbolic resources after the end of the war, contributing to the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism under Rajapaksa.

Chapter seven concludes the discussion of the speeches, examining different themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric that express and reproduce the traditional ideological framework within which the Sinhalese nation and Sri Lankan state are connected. His representation of national unity reiterates the crucial link between unity, strength and security as a core motif of Sinhalese nationalism. Within this narrative the victory and emerging post-war challenges serve to reaffirm and justify the unitary state. Following the defeat of the militant threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist state we can also observe how Rajapaksa utilises the post-war momentum to nationalise contested space. The material manifestations of a reinvigorated ‘Sinhalisation’ of the north and east are accompanied by Rajapaksa’s discursive encroachment of the ideological spaces previously inhabited by Tamil militarism and its symbols. Chapter seven also highlights the contemporary manifestations of the hierarchical logic of Sinhalese nationalism within Rajapaksa’s construction of a political and social hierarchy. It orders communities within a united, but hierarchical nation with the Sinhalese at the apex under the supreme leadership of Rajapaksa.
In chapter eight we analyse a distinct post-war discourse and investigate the official version of the final stages of the war constructed within three documentaries. These films address international criticism and allegations, providing a counter-narrative for audiences in Sri Lanka and abroad. They present a story of heroes, villains and victims that perpetuates the main themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, especially the representation of the LTTE, the realignment of the post-war ‘other’ and increasing resentment towards the international community. Through selective remembering and forgetting the documentaries construct a memory for the nation shaped by the interests and strategic needs of the Rajapaksa government, again demonstrating how traditional resources of the Sinhalese nationalist ideological framework can be used to frame the present, in turn reinvigorating the former.

The concluding chapter revisits the major arguments of the thesis, drawing together the identified continuities and changes within the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism from 2005 to 2015. It reviews the subtle ways in which the Rajapaksa government has been able to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, reinvigorating traditional symbolic resources of Sinhalese nationalism through triumphalism and the incorporation of post-war developments. It closes with a brief discussion of the major developments since the regime change and what they could potentially mean for the future of Sinhalese nationalism.
Chapter 2

Sinhalese Nationalism: From Myths and Legends to Decades of Conflict and War

This chapter provides an introduction to the study of nations and nationalism and an overview of Sinhalese nationalism in the past and present. It begins with a survey of the classical theories of the origins of nations and nationalism: primordialism, ethno-symbolism and modernism. It then argues in favour of a social constructionist framework and how through the incorporation of the ethno-symbolic toolkit we account for the interplay of modern and pre-modern forces in the construction of Sinhalese nationalism. In order to understand this complex ideology we need to pay due attention to the traditional, pre-modern symbolic resources that have been reinterpreted and mobilised by the colonisers and colonised alike as its modern core. Following this excursion into the broad field that is the study of nations and nationalism, this chapter then turns to the question of ‘when is the Sinhalese nation’. Over the decades a vast literature has been produced on Sinhalese nationalism, with contributions from historians, anthropologists and social and political scientists. Most of these accounts are located between the primordial and modernist, examining the interplay of traditional and modern forces during the British colonial period.

Trying to precisely date the formation of a coherent, fixed Sinhalese identity is a truly precarious undertaking as we will see, made particularly difficult by the staunch primordial beliefs displayed by most historical sources consulted to study the matter, particularly the Pāli Chronicles, and held by many Sinhalese themselves. While the existence of some loosely defined pre-modern communities, divided along language, religion, caste and class, is often taken for granted, most scholars focus on the social, economic and political processes accompanying the state-building project of the late colonial period in investigating how these communities became demarcated and institutionalised as rigid, exclusive ethnic groups (Little 1994; Warnapala 1994; Gunawardana 1990; Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Spencer 1990; Wilson 1988; Manogaran 1987; Tambiah 1986). In addition, the importance of pre-existing traditional resources, especially
Buddhism, has been emphasised. These traditions, practices, myths and legends of the past became imbued with new meaning through the intellectual frameworks of the colonial period as the basis of modern Sinhalese identity and nationalism (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014; Kapferer 2012; Roberts 1994).

This chapter presents a genealogy of Sinhalese nationalism, its core dimensions and part in the prolonged conflict and violence, which establishes the background to this empirical study of its state in the twenty-first century. While we emphasise the important role of pre-modern ethnic resources for modern Sinhalese nationalist ideology, we seek to escape the inevitability of primordialism. Instead, within a chronological overview from the origins of ethnic identities and nationalism to the end of the Rajapaksa period we engage with the different structural and ideological forces, driven by foreign and indigenous actors, that shaped modern Sinhalese nationalism through the colonial and early post-independence period. This chapter focuses on the literature contributing to our understanding of Sinhalese nationalism and thus does not engage in any detail with the literature on Tamil nationalism and on efforts in conflict resolution.²

Nations and Nationalism

In a world dominated by so-called nation-states, the study of nations and nationalism has emerged as an eclectic field trying to offer explanations of these pervasive phenomena. It is characterised by major debates about the origins of nations, whether they are objective or subjective phenomena, ethnic or civic. Traditionally, three major approaches to the study of nations and nationalism are distinguished: primordialism, modernism, and perennialism or ethno-symbolism. These are, of course, not homogeneous. Modernism, currently the largest and dominant paradigm, in particular, comprises a variety of arguments, definitions and explanations put forward over decades to explain the historical development of nations and nationalism in different parts of the globe.

Debating the Origins of Nations

The question ‘when is a nation?’, posed by Connor (1990), remains a, if not the, most controversial issue among scholars. It lies at the heart of the plethora of definitions and explanations offered by scholars to come to terms with nations and nationalism. The following sections provide a brief survey of the main arguments of the traditional approaches addressing this question, before proceeding to outline the social constructionist approach used by this research.

Primordialism

Primordialists like Geertz (1963), Shils (1957) or van den Berghe (1981) understand nations as a natural part of the human condition, pre-dating modernity and nationalism. They emphasise the essentialist or emotional character of nations, viewing them as natural, organic wholes (Conversi 2002: 285). Geertz (1963), who espouses a culturalist approach, highlights natural primordial attachments that stem from the ‘assumed givens’ of social existence, for instance race, culture, religion or kin connections, as the basis of ethnic communities. He argues that it was these primordial bonds that often became politically salient in modernising societies. Van den Berghe’s (1981) sociobiological account emphasises ethnic and racial ties as the basis of nationalism. He argues that ethnic groups are based on kinship and common descent, a basis of solidarity that has developed over a very long period of time and is rather durable.

Primordialists’ essentialist understanding of ethnic communities and nations as timeless, natural ‘givens’ has been criticised by modernists and ethno-symbolists alike, both discounting the idea of the nation as a natural unit. Yet, while the primordial argument is limited to a comparatively small circle of scholars, it is widely shared among the members of nations. The Sinhalese nation is a case in point for a deeply engrained, primordial self-understanding, most strikingly displayed by the results of the textbook analysis presented in chapter four. The idea of an ancient Sinhalese nation and state are at the core of dominant historical narratives of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism, regardless of historical or archaeological evidence to the contrary, and it is up to the analyst to distinguish perceptions from historical accuracy where possible.
Modernism

Where primordialists assume the naturalness of nations, modernists like Gellner (1983), Anderson (1983) or Hobsbawm (1990), to name only a few of the most prominent proponents of this vast and diverse approach, hold them to be intrinsic to the modern world. The emergence of the modern state system beginning in Europe after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 significantly reshaped realities in ways that necessitated novel forms of communities to meet the emerging challenges and opportunities. Modernists agree that nations and nationalism are historically novel, a sociological necessity of the modern world (Özkırımlı 2010: 72). They view the nation as a consequence of various modernisation processes and unlike primordialists they argue that most nations were created by nationalism, not the other way around. Their theories, however, prioritise different transformations in their explanations of these phenomena.

Some modernists emphasise social and cultural changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Anderson (1983), for instance, points to the weakening of dynasties and religious communities due to explorations of the non-European world, the Enlightenment, and the decline of Latin, which eroded the traditional bases of communal ties. At the same time, the emergence of print-capitalism and novel conceptions of time created new ways of constructing collective identities uniting people beyond their immediate, face-to-face communities. These ‘imagined communities’ became the dominant form of collective identity in the modern, centralised state.

Other modernists like Nairn (1977) or Hechter (1975) discuss economic transformations, highlighting particularly the uneven consequences of economic development for the emergence of nationalism. One of the most influential theories of nationalism, provided by Gellner (1983), has its starting point in the effects of industrialisation, emphasising the subsequent cultural and social changes. He argues that pre-modern societies lacked the cultural homogenisation characteristic of modern nations. The emergence of industrial societies from the late eighteenth century onwards, however, required new political and cultural forms to ensure further economic growth and progress. The diversity of feudal or agricultural societies was replaced with a common ‘high culture’, creating a homogeneous society, a nation, sustained and supervised by a centralised state.
A third major aspect emphasised by modernists are political transformations linked to the emergence of the modern bureaucratic state. Brass (1991), for example, emphasises the instrumental nature of nationality. He understands ethnic and national attachments as social and political constructions, often driven by elite competition and manipulation. He explains nationalism as a consequence of the politicisation of ethnic identities by elites in order to mobilise mass support within the modern state. As such elites can draw upon, manipulate or even invent cultural materials of the groups they wish to represent.

As we will see below, this strand of modernism stressing the modern bureaucratic state resonates with many explanations of the emergence of Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka, whether Nissan and Stirrat’s (1990) arguments about the role of the colonial state or an emphasis on the role of post-independence elite competition in the rise of Sinhalese nationalism (DeVotta 2004; Stokke 1998). Yet, while the colonial intervention is usually highlighted as the starting point of the transformation of group identities in Sri Lanka, many scholars assume the pre-existence of ethnic identities as the basis of the emerging nations and nationalisms, echoing major arguments of the following approaches.

**Perennialism and ethno-symbolism**

Perennialists like Hastings (1997) and Grosby (1994) occupy somewhat of a middle ground between primordialists and modernists. They do not assume nations to be natural, but they believe that analysts have to look back further than modernity as at least some nations are immemorial or perennial. Some perennialists stress the continuity of nations and their history, reaching back to the Middle Ages or even antiquity. Others highlight the recurrent character of nations, arguing that the nation as a type of cultural identity reappears in every period of history. While perennialists trace the origins of nations into the pre-modern area, they usually do not extend this claim to nationalism, which is understood to be a modern phenomenon (Smith 2010: 53ff.). One of the most prominent advocates of perennialism is Hastings (1997), who argues that modern nations grow out of certain ethnic groups. He highlights the English nation as a prototype, tracing the origins of its national consciousness back to the eleventh century.
Ethno-symbolism emerged as a critique of modernism and particularly the emphasis of its constructionist view on the modernity and novelty of nations and nationalism (Kellas 1998: 60). Similar to perennialists, ethno-symbolists stress the importance of pre-modern ethnicity for the rise of modern nations, but reject their stark ‘continuism’ (Özkırımlı 2010: 144). Smith, the main advocate of this approach, critiques the modernists’ focus on material factors as the main influence on the conditions in which nations and nationalism emerged, highlighting that these tell us little about their content (2009: 14f.). Ethno-symbolists seek to supplement the predominantly economic and political models of modernists with a historical perspective on the ethnic and cultural dimensions of nationhood. They draw attention to the role of myths, memories, symbols and traditions in order to explain the formation and persistence of ethnicity and nationalism. Smith refers to the double historicity of nations, ‘their embeddedness in very specific historical contexts and situations, and their rootedness in the memories and traditions of their members’ (Smith 2009: 30). While modernism accounts for the specific conditions of modernity that gave rise to most nations, ethno-symbolists believe that it is the latter, often neglected aspect that can explain the emotional power and persistence of contemporary nationalism (Smith 2009; 1999).

Intended as a critique of modernism, ethno-symbolism has in turn been criticised, especially for its generalising, at times even reductionist, treatment of the varied theories that make up modernism (Özkırımlı 2003: 342) as well as misreading constructionist approaches to the study of nationalism (Id.: 343). One of the most severe criticisms directed at both perennialists and ethno-symbolists is that of ‘retrospective nationalism’. Critics argue that they tend to project the features of modern nations and nationalism back onto earlier social formations. This and a general lack of terminological clarity, according to usually modernist critics, explains why it is not surprising that ethno-symbolists find modern nations in the ethnic and symbolic material subsequently shaped by nationalists as part of the nation-building process (Özkırımlı 2010: 155f.). Below the discussion of Sinhalese nationalism exemplifies how difficult it can be to avoid this trap when all we have to study a case historically are resources that have often been adulterated by the very phenomenon and subjects we seek to study.
A brief interlude: Voices from the East

A more general criticism of the often Eurocentric, universalist underpinnings of these classical theories of nations and nationalism comes from scholars from outside the West like Chatterjee (1986) and Nandy (1988). These authors question the widespread assumptions of Western scholarship that non-Western nationalism in Asia, Africa and Latin America is merely a copy of European nationalism, often explained as a ‘deviant’ form of nationalism in contrast to the normal, classical type in the West (Chatterjee 1986: 3). They emphasise the role of colonialism, yet argue that non-Western nationalist thought can also not be understood merely as the opposite of colonialism or Western nationalism. Chatterjee’s (1986) work on nationalist thought in India is a critique of the sociological determinism he ascribes to Western theorists like Anderson, Gellner and Nairn, and seeks to provide an analytical framework for the study of nationalism in non-Western colonial states. Chatterjee argues that nationalism in these countries adopted the Western goal of modernity, which, however, could only be reached in a post-colonial state. Non-Western nationalism was thus inherently anti-colonial, yet ridden by a deep contradictoriness, for while it challenged the colonial order and claims to domination it ‘also accepted the very intellectual premises of “modernity” on which colonial domination was based’ (Id.: 30). In their rejection of colonialism these national movements proclaimed new political possibilities that had to be clearly distinguished from Western theories. This was achieved by separating culture into a material sphere, such as technology, science and capitalism enabling the dominance of the West, and a spiritual sphere. To overcome domination and achieve modernity, colonised societies had to combine these, incorporating aspects of the material cultures into their cultures. This produced a distinct, yet not completely different or autonomous, non-Western nationalist thinking as ‘the various cultural forms of Western modernity were put through a nationalist sieve and only selectively adopted, and then combined with, the reconstituted elements of what was claimed to be indigenous tradition’ (Chatterjee 1998: 63).

Overall, Chatterjee argues that Western theories can be enriched by looking at non-Western nationalism in its own right instead of just derivates from Western frameworks of knowledge, as ‘the encounter between world-conquering Western
thought and the intellectual modes of non-Western cultures’ is a fascinating story that provides possibilities, room for innovation and creation overlooked by Western determinism (Chatterjee 1986: 41). The below brief outline of the origins of Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka also demonstrates the centrality of the colonial intervention in most accounts of the history of Sri Lanka and the protracted conflict. They emphasise the far-reaching effects of colonialism, particularly the political, structural and economic effects of British rule, and how Western frameworks of knowledge, especially historiography and theories of race, were internalised by the colonial subjects. Yet, many accounts also highlight the importance of indigenous cultural and religious resources in the attempt to define ‘us’ in opposition to the colonisers that would eventually divide the communities on the island.

Rethinking Nationalism: Towards a Constructionist Account

In the last two decades the attempts to produce grand theories of nationalism have come under scrutiny by constructionist approaches that favour partial theories to explain different nationalist practices (Özkırımlı 2003: 354). Scholars like Billig (1995), Calhoun (1997) and Özkırımlı (2005) question the feasibility and merit of providing universal, often single-factor explanations of nationalism. Instead, they highlight nationalism as a global phenomenon that takes many different shapes across the modern world and each case has to be understood within the unique context and historical processes that brought it about (Calhoun 1997: 30).

Following the tradition of Anderson’s infamous ‘imagined communities’ (1983) or Hobsbawm and Ranger’s ‘invention of tradition’ (1983), constructionist approaches question the objective basis of nations. They view meanings as constructed by social actors as they interact with the world they interpret (Özkırımlı 2005: 162). This is not to say that no objective criteria exist, but they receive their meaning through social processes, for instance the use of language (Ibid.), and need to be understood within a constructionist framework. Constructionists also move beyond the traditional focus on the origins of nations and the attempts of classical approaches to establish ‘grand narratives’. Instead, they do not take nations and nationalism for granted, but ask how they are reproduced by nationalist practices and representations (Özkırımlı 2010: 169f.).
They investigate the unique narratives of national identities and how these are reproduced by visible and hidden nationalist practices and representations.

Before discussing Sinhalese nationalism in particular, the following sections briefly outline the major features of nationalist ideology and how nations can be explained as modern social constructs.

Nationalism as ideology

The term nationalism is used differently by scholars and can denote doctrines or ideologies, movements, sentiments, or the processes of nation-building (Smith 1998: 187). Breuilly, for instance, defines nationalism as a ‘political movement seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments’ (1993: 2) and Gellner defines it as ‘primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (1983: 1). Constructionists, however, argue that nationalism should be understood not merely as a movement or doctrine, ‘but a more basic way of talking, thinking, and acting’ (Calhoun 1997: 11). They emphasise nationalism as a deeply embedded cognitive phenomenon, ‘a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us’ (Özkırımlı 2005: 30). They describe nationalism as an ideology (Sutherland 2012; Billig 1995) or discourse (Özkırımlı 2005; Calhoun 1997), though these conceptualisations show significant overlap.

Providing a thin definition of nationalism, Sutherland defines it as an ideology that prioritises the nation as its ‘nodal point’ (2012: 7). She highlights ideology as ‘a set of principles combined with a strategic plan of action for putting them into practice’ (Id. 6). In the most general sense these principles include mental representations, opinions, values, convictions, attitudes and evaluations shared by members of a group to make sense of the world (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 27), but nationalism places the national community at the core as its ‘nodal point’. She refers to Laclau and Mouffe’s idea of ‘a privileged discursive point, or a particularly meaningful and enduring concept from which others are derived’ (Sutherland 2012: 7). Nationalist ideology thus has no universal, fixed content, but depends on how the core principle, the prioritising of the nation, is interpreted within different contexts and experiences (Id.: 6). Calhoun makes a similar point
when he highlights that nationalisms can be quite different in content, but their form, the rhetoric of nationalism, is general (1997: 22). This can potentially provide a better framework than classical approaches to understand nationalism in non-Western, post-colonial contexts that cannot be understood completely separate from Western nationalist discourses, but at the same time seeks to distinguish itself from them.

Smith, who defines nationalism as ‘an ideological movement to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it to constitute an actual or potential “nation”’ (2009: 61), does not view nationalism as discursively constructed. Yet, he provides a brief summary of the main tenets of nationalist ideology that highlight how the world is imagined through the lens of nationalism:

1. the world is naturally divided into nations, each of which has its peculiar character and destiny;
2. the nation is the source of all political power, and loyalty to it overrides all other loyalties;
3. if they wish to be free, and to realise themselves, men must identify with and belong to a nation;
4. global freedom and peace are functions of the liberation and security of all nations;
5. nations can only be liberated and fulfilled in their own sovereign states.


These provide the basic propositions of nationalism that are in practice extended by secondary ideas and motifs of individual nations (Smith 1998: 188).

Constructionists highlight that the assumptions of nationalist ideology have been diffused internationally (Billig 1995: 9), providing a way to imagine national communities within the modern discursive space of the nation state (Özkırımlı 2005: 31). When constructing communities suitable for the modern state, nationalism draws on pre-existing cultural patterns but in the process changes previous forms of social organisation:

Nationalism thus draws on previous identities and traditions, and national identities reflect those traditions. But nationalism fundamentally transforms the pre-existing ethnic identities and gives new significance to cultural inheritances. (Calhoun 1997: 49)

Modern nations are intrinsically political communities that serve as the source of sovereignty and legitimacy of modern states. Nationalism needs boundaries in ways pre-modern ethnicity does not, as it claims ‘that certain similarities should
count as the definition of political community’, demanding internal homogeneity throughout a purative nation (Calhoun 1993: 229).

Thus, nationalist ideologies are sets of beliefs and mental representations that provide group members with a way of thinking about and experiencing themselves and a world that is divided into nations. They draw on political and cultural components, such as a homeland or religion, to strengthen the bond between members and create boundaries between nations (Özkırımlı 2005: 24f.). While nationalism is a major justification for forming and contesting so-called nation-states, its practices and habits moreover help to maintain them by continuously perpetuating its rationale, the national community (Billig 1995).

**Imagining national identities**

Unlike primordialists and ethno-symbolists like Smith, we understand the nation as social constructs. They are the ‘product of the political ideology of nationalism’ (Sutherland 2012: 33) as it divides the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ by presenting particular formulations of the nation as natural and authentic (Özkırımlı 2005: 164). National identities, like other collective identities such as race or class, are socially constructed, they are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983). They are constructed and reproduced discursively (Calhoun 1997), but also through everyday ideological habits like flags, maps, songs, currencies and memorials that continuously flag nationhood (Billig 1995). The processes of identification and differentiation revolve around the “we-ness” of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce’ (Cerulo 1997: 386). Group identities are also relational, as who ‘we’ are depends just as much on the things ‘we’ are not. They are established in relation to recognised differences that then become seemingly essential to their being: ‘Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty’ (Connolly 2002: 64).

Nations claim to share certain characteristics that define their ‘we-ness’, but they draw on different sets of characteristics than, for instance, religious or political groups and claim that national identities trump other individual or group identities (Calhoun 1993: 229). Depending on the specific historical, sociological and political context in which they emerged, nations mobilise different political
and cultural criteria to support their claims to uniqueness. Ethnicity offers one potential source of homogeneity and mutual obligation (Calhoun 1997: 23), and in the case of Sinhalese nationalism it became the traditional source of national identity as we shall see below. However, even seemingly primordial features of nationhood, such as the shared homeland or history that nations believe in, need to be studied as part of the imaginaries of nationalist ideologies. It is usually ‘not the characteristics themselves that count, but the claims that are made about them’ (Özkırımlı 2005: 28f.).

Unlike modernists, constructionists are usually more sympathetic to acknowledging the role of pre-modern cultural patterns in the construction of modern nations and nationalism, arguing that culture should not be underestimated (Calhoun 1997: 32). Constructionists do not study the historicity of nations like ethno-symbolists, but they acknowledge that in many cases the way nations make primordial claims to further their cause matters for the understanding of nationalism (Sutherland 2005: 31). After all, how these ‘markers of cultural and historical belonging can function as components of nationalist ideology’ (Id.: 32) is crucial to understand how nations and nationalism are constructed, reproduced or transformed by social practices.

**Locating Sinhalese Nationalism**

Much has been written on the origins and development of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalism, providing a rich background for this study of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism within its historical trajectory. Before discussing the features of Sinhalese nationalism in more depth, the following sections provide some preliminary remarks about its conceptualisation that highlights the importance of taking into account the ethnic roots of modern Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

**Between continuity and change**

Writings on Sri Lanka usually trace the origins of nations to the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Many scholars like Little (1994), Warnapala (1994) and Manogaran (1987) assume the existence of pre-modern Sinhalese and Tamil communities and focus on investigating the impact of the colonial period on these. Others, for instance Kapferer (2012) and Roberts (1994), more actively engage with the content of the pre-modern cultural and religious features that have, and
continue to, influence the formation of modern nations on the island. Rogers thus argues that most scholarship on Sri Lanka is characterised by ‘a primordialist bent’, as it ‘straddles the line between modernist and primordialist views’ (1994: 11). He points out that the precise meaning of Sinhalese, and for that matter also Tamil, identity before the late nineteenth century remains controversial, but it seems these labels did not have the same ‘[e]ssentialist ideas of shared substance and common origins’ associated with them as today (Id.: 17). Rogers points out that in pre-modern times ‘Sinhalese’ functioned mainly as a political and cultural label, stressing that differences of caste, language, religion or ethnicity lacked the meaning and rigidity of contemporary national identities that have incorporated these categories. The link between Buddhism and Sinhalese identity, for instance, was not as specific as it has become in the early twentieth century (Ibid.). These issues, however, are often not engaged with by scholars when using the labels ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Tamil’ in their modern meaning to refer to communities in the pre-colonial past.

This resonates with Chatterjee’s (1986) arguments about how across the colonised world the process of nation-building merged Western frames of knowledge and distinct, indigenous cultures in the struggle for modernity and against the colonial rulers. Scholars on Sri Lanka locate the transformation from formerly less fixed and exclusive communities into self-aware ethnic community with rather rigid boundaries and eventually nations during the British colonial period. They highlight not only structural and economic changes, but how contemporary European social and political categories were imported by the colonisers and internalised by the colonised in ways that made nationality the apparently only viable option (Nandy 2009: 8). Influenced by theories of race, the British conflated cultural and biological differences, establishing cultural traits such as religion, customs or language as markers of racial variations (Nissan and Stirrat 1987, cited in Brow 1990: 11). Aryan racial theory, popular in Europe at the time, helped to redefine previously loosely delineated linguistic groups in terms of physical characteristics, Tamil and Sinhalese identities thus acquiring a racial dimension by the end of the nineteenth century (Gunawardana 1990: 74). Modern national identities in Sri Lanka differ from their pre-modern ethnic
precursors, yet we cannot fully understand the former without reference to the latter.

The problem, however, is that any continuity or recurrence perceived may well be the result of the trap of retrospective nationalism, ‘of viewing the pre-modern past through the lens of modern nationalism’ (Smith 2009: 6). Most of the sources that tell us about the country’s community in the past have been influenced one way or another by the nationalist ideology we seek to study. The labels and categories we use to describe nations and their ethnic precedents, historical and archaeological evidence, as well as politics and popular views are themselves deeply permeated by the primordial claims of nationalist discourses. And yet, the accounts of Roberts (1994) and Kapferer (2012) in particular make a convincing case for distinct continuities, especially through the Buddhist ontology shared by the past and present, which strongly suggests that pre-existing symbolic resources shaped the Sinhalese nation that was to come.

Even though some apparently primordial resources may well have been invented or freed from their original meaning and significance, we should not dismiss these legacies of the past as mere fabrications supposed to validate the existence of the Sinhalese nation in the present, as many modernists often argue when confronted with pre-modern cultural patterns (Özkırımlı 2005: 35). Instead, ethno-symbolism, albeit at odds with social constructionist approaches, can further our understanding of this particular case. Above we have already outlined the major arguments of this approach in contrast to primordial and modernist positions, and we shall now briefly highlight how its conception of ethnicity can supplement a constructionist approach to analyse Sinhalese nationalism.

Smith, the main advocate of the ethno-symbolic approach, stresses the ‘need for long-term analysis of social and cultural patterns over the longue durée, i.e. analysis of persisting long-term structures and processes’ to understand nations and nationalism (Smith 2010: 61, original emphasis). Like constructionists, he highlights the importance of the ‘everyday’ (Ibid.) and acknowledges that nations are dynamic and some of their elements may be imagined. Yet, he rejects constructionist accounts that reduce nations to discursive formations. He argues that nations are ‘real communities’ with consequences and effects on people’s lives (Smith 2009: 42f.). But Smith’s criticism of constructionist approaches
overlooks that despite defining nations as social constructs they do not deny the very real consequences of the actions of individuals and groups based on their beliefs to be part of a nation (Özkırımlı 2005: 166).

Özkırımlı argues that Smith’s reservations arise from a lack of information about constructionism or are misrepresentations in order to exaggerate differences between the two approaches (2003: 342). Such criticism glosses over the shared ground of constructionism and ethno-symbolism, especially the focus on individual cases in their specificity, emphasising the need to understand nations within their historical and political contexts (Id.: 354). As long as we do not treat either approach as a universal theory of nationalism, Smith’s categorisation and conceptualisation of the ethnic basis of nationhood and nationalist ideology can be incorporated within a social constructionist framework. Especially in the case of Sri Lanka, where ethnicity has been a major source of identification and mobilisation, reproduced and ‘flagged’ by ethnic symbols and their discursively constructed meanings.

**The ethnic dimensions of nationhood**

This research is not primarily concerned with studying the origins of Sinhalese nationalism and therefore does not provide an in-depth account of the *longue durée* of the Sinhalese nation and its ethnic precursor. Nonetheless, the major processes that transformed loosely defined ethnic communities into nations are crucial to understand the selection, adaptation and (re)invention of existing material for the core dimensions of Sinhalese nationalism within the specific historical context. The next part of this chapter outlines these developments and highlights how it was mainly ethnic symbolic resources that became the defining criteria of nationhood, establishing distinct Sinhalese and Tamil nations instead of a shared Sri Lankan one.

Ethnic communities are generally distinguished from nations, though their relationship remains a topic of debate. For constructionists ethnic communities are not more ‘real’ than their national counter-parts, but their group identities are constructed from distinctively ethnic material, such as language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry or regionality (Nagel 1994: 152). Ethnic communities of the past operated in different discursive spaces, free from the economic, political and
social necessities and opportunities of modern states, thus differing in scope and content from their national counter-parts.

Smith similarly distinguishes between nations and ethnic groups, which he calls *ethnies* and defines as

>a named and self-defined human community whose members possess a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of common culture, including a link with a territory, and a measure of solidarity at least among the upper strata. (Smith 1986, cited in Smith 2009: 27)

For Smith the link between ethnicity, nation and nationalism lies in the politicisation of some *ethnies*, transforming them into nations with legal, territorial and political dimensions unique to modern states (Smith 2009: 29).

While modernists emphasise the material conditions of these developments, ethno-symbolism draws attention to the symbolic resources of modern nations. It examines how ethnic symbols, memories and traditions are selected and reinterpreted into national narratives and linked to the rites and ceremonies of public cultures of the modern state, transforming pre-modern *ethnie* into nations. They argue that many modern nations and nationalisms have to be understood with reference to the ethnic components that shaped their development and which continue to form an integral part of them, accounting for their persistence.

Borrowing the term from Armstrong (1982), Smith calls the symbolic boundary that distinguishes members of ethnic communities from outsiders the *myth-symbol complex* (1986: 14ff.). It depicts the nature of the distinctive myths and symbols, historical memories and central values shared by group members. What distinguishes ethnic from other cultural communities is their belief in a common ancestry, real or not (Smith 2009: 46), making ethnicity largely symbolic and mythic, carried in and by artefacts and activities like sacred texts, music, art and so on (Smith 1986: 16). Not unlike modernists or constructionists, Smith recognises that the sense of common ethnicity, the meaning conferred to it over generations, matters more than objective ethnic reality (Id.: 22).

Smith identifies four basic dimensions of nationhood that emerge out of the symbolic resources mobilised for nation-building. First, myths of ancestry and common descent that enhance the sense of collective belonging, establishing the ‘we-ness’ of the nation. Second, myths of communal election as the basis of the ‘choseness’ of the group again provide the bedrock of national cohesion and
differentiation. Third, the devotion to sacred homelands links the nation to a specific territory. Lastly, the ethno-history provides a national history of golden ages, heroes and sacrifice. These national histories are not necessarily factual, as ‘what counts is not what is but what is felt to be’ (Smith 2009: 100, original emphasis) and the functions they serve for collective pride and authenticity of the national present through the past. Golden ages, for instance, often present the ‘true’ nature of the nation, its character and virtues that should serve as a role model for present generation (Smith 2009: 91-97).

The specific content of these symbolic resources differs across nations given the varied ethnic heritages that can be mobilised, accounting for the diversity of nations and nationalism across the globe. In the case of Sinhalese nationalism, Buddhism has come to be the most important symbolic resources as we shall see below, defining nationhood and politics alike. And yet, Smith states that ‘there can never be a single “version” of the nation and its past’ (Smith 2009: 33), a sentiment constructionists would wholeheartedly agree with. Even where historical narratives become dominant or ‘official’ they are often challenged by other visions of national destiny or past. In India, for example, the official secular narrative of the Congress Party has been challenged by Aryan Hindu nationalism of religious organisations and parties (Ibid.).

Nations and nationalism are fluid and dynamic and can adapt their ethnic heritage to meet such internal conflicts and external crises through reinterpretation, revival and renewal, alteration and rejection (Smith 2009: 34). In the post-independence period, Sinhalese nationalism has seen many internal and external challenges. For decades the militant forms of Tamil nationalism, represented mainly by the LTTE, violently opposed Sinhalese rule in Sri Lanka. But among Sinhalese elites, too, conflicts over who best could represent and promote the nation were ripe, as we shall see below. More recently, the end of the war has provided a potential crisis and opportunity for Sinhalese nationalism, raising questions about the future of nationalism in Sri Lanka.

Before looking at the present, however, the remainder of this chapter provides an overview of Sinhalese nationalism, its origins, core features and importance for the country’s fate since its independence.
The Origins of Sinhalese Nationalism

Moving from general theories of nations and nationalism, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the specific case of Sinhalese nationalism, locating it within ‘the colonial and postcolonial situations of the emergence of the modern nation-state’ (Kapferer 2012: 91). The following sections highlight the main features of Sinhalese nationalist ideology and provide its historical trajectory from its pre-modern roots through the transformations during the colonial period and its role in the institutional decay of the post-colonial state, to the resurgence of nationalist politics under Rajapaksa.

We begin by first outlining the structural and ideological changes of the colonial period and how ethnic identities became institutionalised as part of the British state-building project. Then we provide a brief overview of the symbolic resources that were mobilised into distinct myth-symbol complexes during this period, highlighting the core features of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist cosmology.

The Colonial Intervention: Becoming ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Tamil’

Nearly four centuries of colonialism transformed the social, economic and political landscapes of Sri Lanka. The late colonial period under the British has been particularly consequential as it introduced far-reaching structural and social changes that were to have devastating consequences in the post-independence period. Two major transformations are discussed. First, the structural changes following the unification of the island and second, the impact of European racial ideas. Together these processes fixed ethnic identities and made them politically salient, providing form and content to increasing communal divisions and conflict within the emerging modern state.

Unification, centralisation and enumeration

Much of the ancient, pre-colonial history of Sri Lanka is clouded in mystery and controversy, where the boundaries between myths, legends and historical fact have become blurred. A clearer image begins to emerge from the sixteenth

3 The country’s official name was Ceylon until 1972, but it is here referred to as Sri Lanka through all historical periods.
century onwards, following the arrival of the first European colonisers in 1505. The Portuguese, and the Dutch who followed them in the seventeenth century, ruled large parts of the island, especially the coastal regions. Their main interests in Sri Lanka were its strategic location in the Indian Ocean and the cinnamon produced there. Neither the Portuguese nor Dutch were able to capture the Kingdom of Kandy in the Sri Lankan heartland and only introduced limited administrative changes (Guillebaud 1968: 517).4

In the late eighteenth century the British took over the coastal regions from the Dutch and in 1815 they were able to annex the interior Kingdom of Kandy, uniting the island under one political authority and opening it up for economic and political development (Id.: 523). Unlike their predecessors, the British colonial rulers envisaged a homogenous nation and uniform system of administration (Wilson 1988: 3), attempting ‘to unify the island of Sri Lanka by creating a single bounded territorial space out of the multiple political and sociocultural polities and communities that existed’ (Rampton 2012: 277). In the following decades the British enacted far-reaching administrative, economic and social reforms and had completed the unification of the island by the second half of the nineteenth century (Wilson 1988: 3). The result was a centralised unitary form of government along the lines of Western democracies, based on the Westminster model with universal suffrage and territorial representation.

In addition to extensive administrative changes, the British colonial period also changed the island’s population structure. It saw the influx of Europeans and Indian Tamils5 into the country and extensive infrastructure projects linking the pre-existing but geographically separated groups. These communities, however, continued to be self-conscious about their group identities due to the linguistic and religious differences (Manogaran 1987: 4) and ethnic categories gained political significance as they became formally instituted in administrative procedures, codification, political representation, and so on (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 27). Individuals began to be counted, and count themselves, as part of increasingly

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4 Maps illustrating the expansion of the different colonial periods can be found in Appendix A.
5 The descendents of Indian labourers, also referred to as estate or plantation Tamils, are located mainly in the central highlands and have remained separate from the Sri Lankan Tamils in the north and east, who trace their origins on the island back to the Jaffna Kingdom.
fixed and exclusive communal categories. Previously unimportant ethnic differences were institutionalised through censuses and surveys, leading to the fragmentation of society through enumeration (Krishna 1999: 50). Educational and cultural colonial policies further buttressed the politicisation of ethnic identities, reinforcing divisive tendencies (Warnapala 1994: 28). Structural changes determined by the development of a modern, bureaucratic state were crucial to the formation and institutionalisation of separate identities, but their content needs to be understood within the Western ideological background within which they emerged.

The making of national minds

British colonialism in Sri Lanka was deeply influenced by the dominant ideas about race and nationalism that spilled over from Europe. The belief that race, particularly linked to language, is the foremost determinant of social identity and a group’s worth became the basic premise guiding the modern formation of group identities (Little 1994: 15). Cultural and biological differences were conflated by the Western colonisers, interpreting the communities who displayed different languages, customs and religions as racially distinct (Brow 1990: 11). Subsequently the ‘Aryan Myth’ became the basis of the racial classification of Sinhalese as superior Aryans and Tamils as inferior Dravidians (Little 1994: 16; Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 29f.). The British state-building project was guided by this ideological context, emphasising ‘the ideal congruence of race, language, religion and political territory’ (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 22).

Separate Sinhalese and Tamil communities existed before the colonisation of Sri Lanka, divided by geographic, linguistic and religious cleavages. Yet, these groups were rather fluid and often other divides like caste or class differences cut across them (Rogers 1994; Tambiah 1986). During the British colonial period commonalities and differences were subsumed into the dominant ethnic divide of ‘Sinhalese-ness’ and ‘Tamil-ness’ (Warnapala 1994) as loose group identities were transformed and consolidated into fixed ethnic categories. The traditional religious and linguistic groups of the island were being given a racial dimension (Gunawardana 1990: 74), and the belief in a shared biological nature (race), common language, common religion and attachment to a certain territory became
exclusive rallying points for the respective communities (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 30).

The rediscovery of the past during this period played a major role in providing form and content to modern Sinhalese and Tamil identities. Traditionally, history in Sri Lanka had been transmitted through oral and written sources, but modern historiography, the process of writing history, significantly transformed how the past was approached. Colonial historians introduced a new understanding of history, one that sought ‘a monopoly on interpretations of the past’ unknown to traditional ideas about history in South Asia (Nandy 1997: 228). Thus, when constructing local histories, foreign and local historians used European categories and concerns to frame them (Nandy 2009: 8). Rogers (1990) and Gunawardana (1990) similarly point out how the translation of historical writings and the (re)discovery of archaeological sites in Sri Lanka was influenced by contemporary theories of race and nationalism. The result was a historical framework based on two assumptions. First, they believed that a great Sinhalese civilisation existed in ancient times that later went into decline. Second, they assumed the existence of two distinct, often antagonistic ethnic groups throughout the island’s long history. These beliefs were not challenged by Sri Lankan writers who joined in the process of writing the country’s history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Rogers 1990: 87).

By the late nineteenth century writers had ‘fashioned a version of history to conform with the dominant [racial] ideology of their society’ (Gunawardana 1990: 78), presenting the people of Sri Lanka as historically distinct and largely antagonistic ethnic groups naturally divided along racial lines (Little 1994: 15). These historical narratives traced modern ethnic groups and their relationships back to ancient times, providing them with meaning in the colonial present as they gained further importance in the emerging bureaucratic and bounded state (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 87). The Mahāvamsa became the ultimate source of an authentic, positivist history and significantly shaped the content of the emerging Sinhalese nationalism (Kemper 1991, cited in Rogers 1994: 12). The dual history it sets out for the Sinhalese people, to conquer and unite the island of Sri Lanka

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6 By positivism we mean the ‘belief that history can provide a definitive and objective account of the past’ (Rambukwella 2012:19).
for the preservation of Buddhism and the necessary expulsion of Tamil invaders from South India (Tambiah 1986: 70), received new vigour in the light of cultural revivalism of the early twentieth century.

The gradual transformation of the island into a modern, bureaucratic state and the importation of Western ideologies and historiography were key to the formation of modern national identities in Sri Lanka. The role of the colonial rulers, however, should not be overemphasised. After all, it was Sri Lankans who participated in and readapted colonial discourses and processes to bolster the national movement (Rogers 1994: 20). British colonial rule did not impose nationalism upon the country and its people, it was rather the result of the convergence of interactions between colonisers and colonised, foreign and indigenous material, and the unintended consequences of the state-building process initiated by the colonial rulers (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 39). Western ideologies of race and nationalism offered new frames of references and boundaries for group identities within the centralised state, but it was historiography, cultural revivalist movements and local elites that provided the content for these new categories. As a result of these processes, the colonial period saw the ‘transmutation of pre-existing but fluid differences into a harder, more discrete and rigidified form’ (Rampton 2012: 278) ready to be mobilised into national movements. The following sections thus look at the indigenous symbolic resources that became integral to modern Sinhalese nationhood and nationalism.

**The Buddhist Core of Sinhalese Nationalism**

Contemporary Sinhalese national identity cannot be understood detached from its ethnic heritage, the popular traditions and sentiments that ethno-symbolism draws attention to as the basis of modern nations. Buddhism, in particular, is a key element of Sinhalese identity and its link to contemporary Sinhalese nationalism is well established in the literature (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014; Kapferer 2012; Roberts 1994). The following sections first provide an overview of Buddhist ontology, its origins in Sri Lanka, the main elements of its cosmic order and how they are linked to pre-modern polities, traditions and historical writings. They then outline how these traditional symbolic resources were transformed into a
coherent nationalist ideology based on an inseparable link between nation, state and religion in the late colonial period.

*The cosmology of Buddhism*

Unlike Sinhalese nationalism, Buddhism is not a phenomenon of the twentieth century, but has existed in Sri Lanka for well over two thousand years. The literary and archaeological evidence suggests that Buddhism had been firmly established in the main areas of settlement by the first century BCE (de Silva 2005: 9). The *Mahāvamsa* traces its origins back another one hundred and fifty years to the rule of Asoka in India. After his conversion to Buddhism, Asoka reportedly sent a mission to Sri Lanka that converted Devanampiya Tissa, an influential ruler in Anuradhapura, whose patronage accelerated the spread of Buddhism among the people (Id.: 9-12). Whatever the historical accuracy of this account, it is clear that links with India played a central role in the development of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Yet, while the position of Buddhism in India has declined over the course of history, in Sri Lanka it flourished over the coming centuries.

Given the importance of Buddhism for Sinhalese identity and the respective nationalist ideology, a brief overview of the core elements of the Buddhist cosmic order and their relationship with modern Sinhalese nationalism is in order. While continuities in content and form between pre-modern and modern Buddhism exist, they are not the same. De Silva Wijeyeratne argues that pre-modern Buddhism was not a religion, but rather ‘a complex and diverse ontological ground that generated a diversity of meaning ... within the social’ (2014: 119). Buddhism was reimagined during the late colonial period, fixed into the structures of a religion with propositional statements and moral claims about what constitutes Buddhism (Abeysekara 2002, cited in de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 119). For many nations the world religions have served as a source of values for ‘us’ and value differentiation from ‘them’ (Armstrong 1982, cited in Smith 1998: 185). In Sri Lanka, the role of Buddhism and the *Mahāvamsa* is comparable to that of Christianity and the Bible in that they have provided a source for nations’ claims ‘to be a chosen people, a holy nation, with some special divine mission to fulfil’ (Hastings 1997: 196).

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7 It was mainly settlers from northern India who had settled on the island during that time and it is these Indo-Aryan settlers that modern Sinhalese claim as their ancestors.
The following sections focus specifically on the themes of Theravada Buddhism that have become incorporated into Sinhalese nationalist ideology and their contemporary connotations. For, as Kapferer highlights, ‘Sinhalese nationalism selects within the many possibilities of Buddhism in practice and realizes a particular logic, a logic made integral to Sinhalese nationalism and forceful to its process’ (2012: 6). The following overview of the main features of Buddhist ontology and its relationship to modern Sinhalese nationalism is based mainly on the seminal works of Kapferer (2012) and Roberts (1994), who have studied this link in depth, and the more recent work of de Silva Wijeyeratne (2014), who has expanded on their accounts.

Kapferer in particular provides a detailed analysis of the ontological grounding of Sinhalese nationalism. He describes a Buddhist cosmic order that is characterised by a dualistic nature, where the boundaries of existence are jointly defined by the Buddha, reason, and the demonic, non-reason (Kapferer 2012: 11). In this order the Buddha serves as an ‘all-knowing fountainhead’, occupying an overarching position at the apex, followed by the guardian deities of Sri Lanka and then the regional, lesser deities (Roberts 1994: 63f.). Roberts terms this order a ‘polytheistic centripetality’, wherein the worship of several gods can be divisive, threatening the break-up of the whole. These ‘fissiparous potentialities’ are counteracted by the holistic framework within which the order is understood, namely the attributes and teachings of the Buddha (Id.: 62).

The Buddhist cosmic order is characterised by a hierarchical structure that is constantly in flux, moving between its hierarchical unifying aspect, fragmentation and reordering (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 162). Forces may arise and challenge the ordering power of the Buddha (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 24), but ultimately these are encompassed by the ordering power of the Buddha that incorporates the fragmenting logic of the demonic, ensuring unity and the integrity of the parts in a hierarchical order (Kapferer 2012: 11; de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 162). This hierarchical logic of the cosmic order conditions Sinhalese Buddhist practices,

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8 Theravada is a school or branch of Buddhism based on the doctrines of the Pali Canon originating in India.
9 For Kapferer the cosmic logic depicted constitutes an ontology (2012: 79), thus these terms are used interchangeably here.
rituals and myths of state, especially those relating to kingship (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 24f.).

As the Buddha has achieved nibbana\(^{10}\) and cannot mediate affairs in this world (Roberts 1994: 59), kingship serves as the functional link between the cosmological order and this world, wielding the dhamma\(^{11}\) and ensuring order (Tambiah 1976, cited in de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 164). The cakkavatti, the ideal world ruler, replicates attributes of the Buddha’s encompassing power and should serve as ‘a model of Buddhist righteousness, etiquette and self-control’ (Roberts 1994: 60-64). Kapferer similarly points to the righteous Buddhist king as servant of the people (2012: 70). By acting in accordance with Buddhist principles his acts have positive karmic consequences for the welfare of every individual within the polity (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 19) and help to preserve unity and hierarchy in the face of the demonic threat of fragmentation. Thus, through its cosmic order Buddhism is inseparably linked to rightful rule in Sri Lanka, joining pre-colonial monarchies and the post-independent modern state through their shared ontology.

**The Asokan Persona**

The symbiosis of dhamma and cakkavatti is exemplified in the figure of Asoka, a Maurya king (274-232 BCE), and the representations of his reign in the Therāvada Buddhist tradition (Roberts 1994: 60). His story, like those of Vijaya and Dutugemunu, illustrates the core themes of transformation and hierarchy of Buddhist ontology (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 30). Asoka’s reign also saw the development of a set of cultural practices that became closely linked to the Buddhist polities in Sri Lanka and other parts of South Asia. These are signified by the Asokan Persona, an analytical construct that describes relationships in a hierarchical context. According to Roberts, the Asokan Persona

seeks to delineate the images and conceptions of authority which inform and underlie hierarchical relationships in Sinhala society. It argues that such conceptions were (are) called forth in mundane activities because they were (are) embodied, in the symbols (verbal and kinesic) of status and power, and in the mechanisms of social distancing. In other words, these conceptions can be regarded as a means of inter-personal communication and a language of negotiation. (Roberts 1994: 58)

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\(^{10}\) Nibbana, or nirvana, describes the attainment of enlightenment or transcendence, the ultimate goal of Buddhists.

\(^{11}\) Dhamma has several meanings, but can here best be understood as the teachings of the Buddha.
Informed by Buddhist ontology its rituals and practices constitute hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates, the dhamma and kingship, and kingship and laity (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 158).

This can best be understood when we look at the nature of pre-modern polities in the region. The Asokan empire was not a centralised state and its inherently fissiparous tendency could only be contained within the omnipotence and encompassing righteousness of Buddhism. Thus, ‘[o]utgoing Asokan Buddhism was not only a pacification policy, it was an ideological cement and a validation of the monarchical state’ (Roberts 1994: 62). At the same time relic worship emerged among Buddhists and rites, such as the cult of stupas12 or the veneration of relics of the Buddha in specific shrines, began to flourish under Asoka (Tambiah 1976, cited in Roberts 1994: 62). Rituals and practices of the Asokan Persona such as those provided a ‘symbolic glue’ for virtual unity and sovereignty in a highly decentralised state (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 59). One such action was the distribution of Buddha’s relics in 84,000 stupas across India. It represented a performance of virtual rather than actual control over the empire, illustrating how Asoka governed through ritual hegemony rather than actual political control of all aspects of the periphery (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 61).

De Silva Wijeyeratne (2014; 2007) highlights that the ways in which the Asokan notions of hierarchical power and ritual practices linked the cosmic order and this-worldly politics also deeply affected the kingdoms of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kandy in Sri Lanka. Like Asoka’s empire, the totalising claims of Buddhist kingship in pre-colonial Sri Lanka were virtual rather than actual as kings lacked the capacity to rule the whole island. Instead, Buddhist sovereignty was administratively devolved and the state resembled a ‘galactic polity’.13 The lack of actual sovereignty was masked by the public rites of the Asokan Persona, for instance forms of tributary overlordship or rituals of royal legitimation such as

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12 A stupa is a Buddhist place of worship.
13 The concept of ‘galactic polity’ is used to describe traditional kingdoms in South Asia that were arranged according to a galactic scheme, ‘wherein central domains were surrounded by satellite provinces, which were actually smaller replications of the former’ (Tambiah 1986: 96). These shifting polities were multi-centric and could easily incorporate minorities or migrants (Ibid.).
relic worship,\textsuperscript{14} which constructed a virtual unity of an actually decentralised state (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 60-63). Thus the hierarchical rituals of Buddhist kingship actualised the claims of a virtual cosmic sovereignty in an ideal Buddhist state, uniting kingship and the Sangha (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 158).\textsuperscript{15}

Unlike in India, an institutional relationship between the Sangha and society developed that influenced the social order far beyond the Asokan empire (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 158). The performative modes and rituals of Buddhist sovereignty as well as the close link between the Sangha and kingship remained part of the polities of the major Sri Lankan kingdoms until the fall of Kandy in 1815. The Asokan state was abolished and the British introduced new modes of governance, but the Sinhalese Buddhist rites of social hierarchy remained and continued to take place on all levels of society (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 69).

\textit{The transformation of Buddhism}

The structural and social changes introduced by the British interacted with these traditional sources of power and identity, rediscovering, reshaping and reinventing much of the country’s pre-colonial heritage. Two major processes that significantly shaped the emergence of nationalism were the cultural revivalist movements and the reinterpretation of myths and legends as positivist history. Both, although influenced by the colonial intervention, were driven mainly by indigenous leaders and resources and formed the basis of national mobilisation.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of strong cultural revivalist movements that, in conjunction with Western ideas of historiography and race, played a major role in reinterpreting indigenous traditional cultural and religious resources, as well as the political mobilisation of modern Sinhalese and Tamil identities.\textsuperscript{16} The Sinhalese cultural revival had its roots among anti-Western rural elites (Tambiah 1986: 69) and represented ‘a backlash against the

\textsuperscript{14} It is within this context that the Tooth Relic of the Buddha became a symbol of legitimate kingship (Roberts 1994: 67).
\textsuperscript{15} The Sangha or Maha Sangha is the community of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka.
\textsuperscript{16} The following sections focus exclusively on the origins of Sinhalese nationalism, but a similar national awakening took place among the Tamil community. Its collective identity was also shaped by colonial processes and a cultural revival that provided the Tamils with their own ‘local religious and cultural center and identity’ as a self-consciousness collective and movement (Tambiah 1986: 107), which would eventually challenge Sinhalese dominance through a militant counter-mobilisation.
denigration of Buddhism at the hands of Christian zealots as well as a reaction against Westernisation’ (Roberts 1994: 257). In the early twentieth century the institutions of the modern state, for instance universal franchise and majority politics, continued to erode traditional bases of leadership, power and community (Tambiah 1986: 68). In response, revivalist movements turned to the past in their search for new modes of cohesion and found them in modern readings of historical writings and traditional practices, both deeply permeated by Buddhism.

The cultural revival of the nineteenth century was mainly a renewal of Buddhism. It was meant to affirm Sinhalese Buddhist identity (Roberts 1994: 257) against Western ideas and symbols (Id.: 299), as well as to restore Buddhism to ‘its rightful historical place’ (Tambiah 1986: 69). The revival, however, also significantly transformed pre-modern Buddhism. De Silva Wijeyeratne highlights how under leaders such as Anagarika Dharmapala the movement promoted an ‘authentic’, ‘modernist Buddhism’ closely associated with modern readings of the Mahāvamsa. It sought to free Buddhism from the Hindu influences of the past and linked it to ideas about the Aryan origin of the Sinhalese (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 92f.), effectively linking religion and ethnicity in an exclusive identity. The result was the emergence of the ‘highly fetishized and reified’ Buddhism (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 157) that would become the state religion of post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Myths and legends
The Buddhist revival was closely related to the simultaneous writing of the country’s history by foreign and local writers as outlined above. Their historiography merged Western ideology and indigenous historical sources, transforming myths and legends permeated by Buddhist ontology into a positivist history. De Silva Wijeyeratne (2014) emphasises the importance of the vamsas, a large and diverse body of literature including court chronicles and devotional texts, in the formation of a modern Sinhalese historical consciousness. The most prominent of these are the Pāli Chronicles, the Dīpavamsa and Mahāvamsa, which became the principle source of Sinhalese mytho-history (Kemper 1991, cited in de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 198). The vamsas should not be seen as an ‘accurate representation of the past’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 13), but as texts
that reflect the concerns and considerations of various authors during specific historical periods (Berkwitz 2004, cited in de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 13)

The *Mahāvamsa*, compiled by the monk Mahanama in the sixth century from existing written and oral sources, was the most important of these sources (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 164). It is primarily a court chronicle, a non-canonical text that is nonetheless religious in character (Kapferer 2012: 48). It simultaneously provides a chronology of kingship on the island, beginning with Prince Vijaya, and an account of Buddhism, beginning with the life of the Buddha, which have merged into a coherent historical narrative. As a consequence of historiography its retelling of the legends of great heroes such as Asoka or Dutugemunu have now become historical ‘fact’ (Id.: 35). The myths and legends that were a part of folklore and reported in chronicles like the *Mahāvamsa* as well as their contemporary interpretations, however, are deeply influenced by the themes of Buddhist ontology. They incorporate and reproduce the cosmic logic of hierarchy (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 35f.) and its metaphors, unity, fragmentation and reordering, which gained nationalist significance in the early twentieth century (Id.: 116).

The myths of Vijaya and Dutugemunu are the most prominent examples of how Sinhalese ‘mytho-history’ has come to unite the themes of people, territory and religion (Tambiah 1986: 70). Both legends incorporate the ontological dynamics of fragmentation, reordering and unity, demonstrating how these heroes first attacked their fathers and laid waste to kingdoms before transforming into strong, Buddhist rulers (Kapferer 2012: 67). According to the *Mahāvamsa*, Vijaya was an Indian prince who was banished by his father and arrived in Sri Lanka with seven hundred followers in the fifth century BCE. The chronicles relate Vijaya’s transformation, ‘whereby Vijaya moves from being a demonic prince to being a benevolent and orderly king’ (Id.: 55). His transformation occurs at the same time as a new, original state order is created (Ibid.), thus establishing Vijaya as the founding father of the Sinhalese and his arrival as the beginning of history in Sri Lanka (De Silva 2005: 6).

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17 Comparable to the concept of ‘ethno-history’ in Smith’s ethno-symbolic terminology.
The *Mahāvamsa* further dates his arrival on the same day as the Buddha achieved *nibbana*. The Buddha’s last will is recorded as follows:

Vijaya, son of King Sihabahu, is come to Lanka from the country of Lala together with 700 followers. In Lanka, O Lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore, carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka. (Mahāvamsa, cited in De Silva 2005: 6)

The retelling of the legend constructs Sri Lanka as *dhammadipa*, island of the *dhamma*, and *Sihadipa*, island of the Sinhalese (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 164). It is the basis of the Sinhalese ‘conception of themselves as the chosen guardians of Buddhism and of Sri Lanka’ (De Silva 2005: 7) and firmly links the Sinhalese, righteous Buddhist rule and the island of Sri Lanka. The *Mahāvamsa* subsequently presents all kings of Sri Lanka as rulers of the entire island (Id.: 14), invoking the idea of a centralised ancient Sinhalese Buddhist state. Its narratives ‘establish a genealogy between the arrival of the *dhamma* on the island, the birth of Sinhalese Buddhist kingship and the north Indian *origins* of Buddhist kingship in the Asokan period’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 15, original emphasis).

The legend of Dutugemunu reiterates similar themes around three hundred years after Vijaya reportedly founded the polity. The core of the myth is Dutugemunu’s successful military campaign against the Hindu King Elara, who ruled in Anuradhapura at the time. Like Vijaya, Dutugemunu was a demonic son who transformed into the archetypical Sinhalese Buddhist king (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 166). The representations of his conquest of Elara in the *Mahāvamsa* are ‘a celebration of the restoration of a Buddhist king in Anuradhapura and the restoration of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony’ (Kapferer 2012: 57). Following Elara’s defeat in a duel, the hierarchy of the Buddhist cosmos is restored and Dutugemunu, whose subsequent services for Buddhism are also recorded in the *Mahāvamsa*, becomes a compassionate, righteous king (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2007: 166).

**Modern Sinhalese nationalist ideology**

Today the myths and legends as well as the Buddhist hierarchical ontology, recorded in the *vamsas* centuries ago, are at the heart of Sinhalese nationalism, shaping its content, form and providing its basis of legitimacy. It is important to emphasise, however, that they only took on a distinctive ideological meaning in the late colonial period. The ontology of the cosmic order in itself does not carry
Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist significance, but is ‘an ontology of the everyday’ that provides multiple possibilities and meanings (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 116). After independence, however, their meaning became fixed as part of modern Sinhalese nationalism that has derived its power and mass appeal partially from its ability to provide nationalist meaning to the everyday of the past and present:

The potency of modern Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is derived from its capacity to abstract out of its social and historical context myths and practices (some of which may be mythically driven) that, although laden with value and meaning, are not necessarily laden with nationalist import. (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 101)

There is thus nothing inevitably primordialist about these symbolic resources, it was rather the convergence of historiography, cultural revivalism and the needs of the modern state that transformed them into a coherent myth-symbol complex that provided rigid ethnic boundaries and a basis for nationalist mobilisation.

Figures like Vijaya and Dutugemunu, whose myths represent the struggle between evil and good, the fragmenting forces of the demonic eventually being encompassed by hierarchical unity, ‘are the creations of the logic of hierarchy ... quite apart from any basis in an empirical world’ (Kapferer 2012: 62), but their stories are now perceived as historical fact by many Sinhalese (Id.: 35). The myths, stories and religious metaphors the vamsas impart were reinvented as the basis of a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist mytho-history that inseparably links the Sinhalese, Buddhism and the island of Sri Lanka (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 23; Tambiah 1986: 70). Thus, despite much archaeological evidence to the contrary, there is a widespread belief among Sinhalese today that a timeless, centralised state and nation existed in ancient Sri Lanka (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 13f.), and this belief has become a fundamental feature of Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

From Independence to War

The developments of the colonial period were crucial for the formation of distinct ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Tamil’ identities, but it was the post-independence period that saw their mass mobilisation and politicisation into increasingly antagonistic national movements. The following sections provide an overview of the increasing inter-communal tensions from independence to the outbreak of large-scale separatist violence. They highlight how Sinhalese nationalism was facilitated by and in turn exacerbated the weaknesses of a post-independence
democratic state initiating the ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka. They then discuss the increasingly violent responses of Tamil nationalism to Sinhalese hegemony and institutional decay, leading to the further deterioration of community relations and eventually the outbreak of civil war.

**The Sinhalisation of Sri Lanka**

In 1948 Sri Lanka gained independence from the British. Power was transferred peacefully to Sri Lankan elites and a bureaucratic state set up by the British was left in place. Perera (1998) argues that the departure of the British left a vacuum in the island’s political, social and cultural spheres. Previously these spaces had been dominated by the British colonisers, their language, customs and religion. Following independence Sri Lankan elites moved into former colonial spaces, reinventing their identity and nationalising these spaces. This process of ‘indigenizing of colonial social and spatial structures’ (Perera 1998: 118), however, was not an inclusive Sri Lankan process. Instead, colonial symbols, particularly the English language and Christianity, were replaced by a Sinhalese nationalism that did not include all colonial subjects into its new nation (Perera 1999).

*The failure of an all-Ceylonese nationalism*

Between 1880 and 1920 Western-oriented Sinhalese and Tamil elites cooperated, for instance in the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), seeking to mobilise their respective communities collectively against the British. They were joined by the shared goal of independence and a common ‘other’, the British colonial master. Their attempts to build an overarching liberal and secular nationalism on the Western model, however, were short-lived. The perceived history and mythology did not provide a solidarity function between communities (Roberts 1994: 256), and in the face of the powerful cultural revivalist movements those Western-oriented elites were unable to mobilise an all-Sri Lankan or all-Ceylonese nationalist identification (Rampton 2012: 277f.; Sitrampalam 1999: 3; Tambiah 1986: 69). They failed to produce ‘an abstract, homogenous national space out of various forms of pre- and non-national place’ (Krishna 1999: 32) and instead the post-colonial state was soon nationalised by the majority.
A major obstacle to an all-Ceylonese nationalism was the cultural revival that had its roots in the late nineteenth century. Above we have already highlighted the role of the Buddhist revivalist movement in transforming Buddhism, but it also played a major role in mobilising modern national identities. With the help of rural elites and monks the Buddhist revivalist movement gained in organisational strength, its ‘resurgent and revivalist Buddhism’ providing a major source of Sinhalese solidarity, unity and political mobilisation (Tambiah 1986: 69). This was at first an affirmation against Western ideas and symbols (Roberts 1994: 299), but after independence Westernisation and colonial rule were eventually replaced by the Tamil community as the ‘traditional enemy of the Sinhalese’ (Warnapala 1994: 26).

The Buddhist revival had transformed Buddhism, rediscovering an allegedly ‘authentic’ Buddhism (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 92), a ‘Buddhism of slogans’ (Tambiah 1986: 58), which was subsequently mobilised to form an exclusive Sinhalese identity with racial connotations:

- to be a Sinhalese is to be automatically a Buddhist and an Aryan, and to be a Buddhist is to be able to make a claim – territorially and politically – over Sri Lanka (Id.: 58f.)

Tambiah highlights how the nationalist cause conflated language, race and religion as the basis of political and territorial demands within the post-independence state (Id.: 69). Aryan racist claims in particular became the bases of Sinhalese solidarity and homogenisation as well as giving the right to exclude those ‘others’ who do not speak Sinhala and do not adhere to Buddhism, especially the Dravidian Tamils (Id.: 59).

After all, by that time decades of historiography had provided a version of the past that did not provide a solidarity function between communities (Roberts 1994: 256). Instead, historical evidence was perceived to demonstrate the ancient animosity between Tamils and Sinhalese and the legends and myths of Sinhalese mytho-history enabled Sinhalese political and religious leaders to mobilise the masses in times of crisis and direct their anger against Tamils (Tambiah 1986: 70). The colonial ‘Mahāvamsa tradition’ buttressed an exclusive nationalism within large parts of the Sinhalese community directed against the Tamil community (Little 1994; Warnapala 1994; Tambiah 1986), and soon after independence the mild Sinhalese nationalism of the early century grew into an ever more assertive mass movement (Sitampalam 1999: 6). Without the British
as mediators and sufficient constitutional safeguards in place, the post-independence period offered the majority community the opportunity to establish Sinhalese hegemony over the Sri Lankan state.

The path to institutional decay: Elites, Sinhalese nationalism and the state

Cultural revivalism, nationalist mindsets and their politicisation were crucial for establishing the ideological space within which post-independence events need to be understood, but they alone cannot account for the shift from peace to one of the bloodiest civil wars in less than four decades. The developments of Sinhalese nationalism and the state after independence in 1948 are the focus of accounts leaning more towards instrumentalist and constructionist explanations of the conflict, like DeVotta (2005; 2004), Stokke (1998) and Rampton (2012). DeVotta and Stokke in particular draw attention to how the state became the site of a democratic struggle for hegemony and authenticity not only between, but within communities. Both highlight the role of Sinhalese elites who used ethnic, linguistic and religious resources to mobilise the Sinhalese masses.

Among the first democracies in Asia, the weaknesses of the democratic system in Sri Lanka became apparent soon after independence. The political parties mainly represented ethnic interests and in the absence of constitutional protection for the minorities, territorial representation and universal suffrage gave a natural advantage to the ethnic majority (Tambiah 1986: 67f.). The idea of representation of equal citizens was shifted to numerical proportionate representativeness of ethnic groups, meaning that economic and political power should closely match numerical proportions of the different communities in Sri Lanka (Krishna 1999: 51). In a democratic state without constitutional safeguards for minority rights this proved fatal, as Sinhalese nationalism was able to gradually homogenise national space as Sinhalese Buddhist (Rampton 2012: 279), a process aptly labelled the ‘Sinhalization of Sri Lanka’ (Warnapala 1994: 34; Manogaran 1987: 52).
After independence intra-Sinhalese rivalries led to vicious cycles of ethnic-outbidding\(^{18}\) that reinforced the divisive ethnic elements of Sinhalese nationalism as they more and more prioritised the interests of the majority at the expense of minority communities (DeVotta 2005: 141). The competition over power between Sinhalese elites was expressed as a ‘battle to take the high ground of nationalist authenticity’ (Rampton 2012: 283) whereby each politician or party sought to be more Sinhalese than their competitors. The ethnic issue thus became increasingly manipulated by politicians for their own advantage (Manogaran 1987: 44), whereby they sought to trump their competitors with ever more pro-Sinhalese proposals.

DeVotta (2004) stresses linguistic nationalism as the mechanism that triggered institutional decay and separatist conflict rather than the emphasis on the Buddhist dimension of Sinhalese nationalism in this chapter so far. He does not deny the importance of religion, but draws attention to the fact that in practice language was a more salient issue after independence. During the colonial period English had been the dominant language for higher education and government positions. After independence Tamil and Sinhalese elites alike sought to gradually replace English with their respective languages through the swabasha\(^{19}\) movement. Soon, however, these joined efforts were replaced by the Sinhala-only movement led by SWRD Bandaranaike and widely supported among rural Sinhalese elites and masses. In 1956 Bandaranaike’s Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) gained a landslide victory and in the same year the Official Language Act made Sinhala the only official language (DeVotta 2004: 42-60). That year marked the beginning of Sinhalese nationalist hegemony (Rampton 2012: 279), which subsequently became the ideological ground of state authorisation (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 119), and a turning point for community relations.

Other landmark policies that facilitated the goal of Sinhalese nationalism ‘to fashion a nation in its own image through monopolization of the state’ (Krishna 1999: 31) were the Ceylon Citizenship Act, disenfranchising the Indian Tamils in

\(^{18}\) DeVotta defines ethnic outbidding as an ‘auctionlike process whereby politicians create platforms and programs to “outbid” their opponents on the anti-minority stance adopted’ (2004: 25).

\(^{19}\) Literally translated swabasha means ‘self-language’.
1949, and the standardisation of marks, disadvantaging Tamil university admissions in 1971. Initially these policies were intended less as anti-Tamil than pro-Sinhalese measures, mostly the result of politicians trying to outbid ‘each other on who could provide the best deal for their community’ (DeVotta 2003: 115). They had a strong economic rationale, aimed at opening up important sectors of the economy to Sinhalese elites and large parts of the community who had previously been excluded due to a lack of English language education and lower Sinhalese shares of university admissions (DeVotta 2004: 43f.). Ideologically they were framed as measures to rectify the perceived injustices of the past suffered by the majority community. In effect, these policies strengthened the hold of the majority over the state and its resources while marginalising minority communities.

Two aspects are crucial to comprehending the instrumentalist dimension of Sinhalese nationalism and the conflict more generally. First, even though ethnic outbidding stresses the role of politicians, the role of other elites should not be underestimated. Rural elites closely associated to the cultural revivalist movements in particular played a crucial role since the beginning of the twentieth century. The ‘Five Great Forces’, namely ayurveda physicians, Buddhist clergy, farmers, teachers and workers, are often highlighted as driving forces of Sinhalese mass mobilisation. This rural elite emerged simultaneously to the Western-oriented Sinhalese and Tamil elites co-operating in Colombo, but in contrast spurned a Western style of life and instead sought to preserve traditional Sinhalese culture and customs as well as a restoration of Buddhism (Tambiah 1986: 68f.).

Second, Rampton highlights that stressing the role of elite competition in fuelling nationalism should not limit our understanding of it being a state-led project (2012: 280). On the contrary, apart from state apparatuses, Sinhalese nationalism was increasingly disseminated through political discourse, religious and labour movements, social associations and the temperance movement. This ‘consistent reproduction of Sinhala nationalist hegemony’ (Id.: 281) guaranteed its

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20 Sinhalese generally claimed persecution by foreigners over centuries (Wilson 1988: 32), but a major grievance was the over-proportionate number of Tamils in the civil and judicial service as well as third level education during the colonial and early independence period (DeVotta 2005: 148).
social diffusion far beyond elites across different actors and social strata who are in turn taking part in its rearticulation and reproduction. As a result, the process of ‘Sinhalisation’ spread across all spheres of the state as ‘governmentality was gradually nationalized by Sinhala Buddhist discourses that increasingly represented the social, cultural, political, and economic space and territory of Sri Lanka as Sinhala Buddhist’ (Id.: 279).

Overall, since the turn of the twentieth century elites played a major role in mobilising ethnic sentiments into mass national movements. After independence Sinhalese political elites in particular were able to activate the ideological frames shared widely among the Sinhalese community to legitimise their pro-Sinhalese policies. The political structure, bad leaders and existing grievances facilitated the rise of ethnic outbidding after independence (DeVotta 2005: 144) that flourished within the ideological space marked by Buddhist ontology and the colonial legacy of historiography. The communities, their relationship and political issues became interpreted within the seemingly primordial Sinhalese versus Tamil trope, setting the country on a path to communal conflict and civil war.

**From Tamil Counter-mobilisation to the Outbreak of War**

As Sinhalese politicians continuously spurred nationalism to mobilise the Sinhalese masses and win elections, Tamils came to believe that they could only protect their rights by clearly separating themselves from the majority (Nissan and Stirrat 1990: 33). Tamil nationalist ideology has thus been described as reactive or defensive (DeVotta 2007: 37; Wilson 2003: 177; Stokke 1998: 99), as it sought to mobilise the Tamil community against the increasing ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka. Others have cautioned to reduce the Tamil movement to such labels, pointing out the significant influence of the Hindu revivalist movement and the cultural and literary links to South India that provided form and content to Tamil nationalism beyond its opposition to Sinhalese nationalism (Cheran 2009: xiii-xvi).

Stokke argues that both nationalist movements evolved dialectically in the post-independence period. While their claims are irreconcilable, ‘the terms of discourse are largely agreed upon’ (1998: 85). This has led to a ‘mirror-image relationship between Tamil and Sinhalese nationalist ideologies’ (Ibid.), whereby both nationalisms are mobilised around the cultural-historical origins of their
respective nation, providing their own nationalist historiographies to support their claims or counter those of the other side (I.d.: 85f.). Tamil nationalism in particular challenges ‘the assumption that Sinhalese nationalism was interchangeable with broader Sri Lankan nationalism’ (Silva 1981, cited in Sitrampalam 2009: 8).21

Despite eroding community relations and rising tensions, Tamil nationalism had resisted Sinhalese dominance peacefully through protests and the political process until the 1970s. Since independence communal violence had flared occasionally,22 but in the late 1970s and early 1980s mob violence and riots directed against the Tamil community reached a new dimension as they became more organised and the police and army failed to intervene on behalf of the Tamils (Tambiah 1986: 20f.; 57). Meanwhile, the effect of pro-Sinhalese policies that disadvantaged the Tamils and an economic downturn provided fertile ground for Tamil elites to mobilise the community against the majority, further entrenching identities and antagonising the communities. From the late 1960s onwards the Tamil national movement became increasingly militarised when a younger generation took over and newly formed violent sub-groups, such as the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), became increasingly influential in the movement (Bandarage 2009: 63).

By then the political climate in the country had severely deteriorated and the relationship between communities was tense:

Deeply ignorant of their past, the young adults and youth of today, on both the Tamil and Sinhalese sides, educated in two different linguistic streams and exposed for over two decades to notions that Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu identities are mutually exclusive, have come to think and feel as two separate peoples, two ethnic species, locked in a man-made battle for survival. (Tambiah 1986: 102)

DeVotta describes a country that suffered from a deep culture of impunity, institutional decay and bad leadership. Within a state that was increasingly unable and unwilling to protect minority rights, Sinhalese nationalism had decreed ‘that the majority’s will be the will of all’ and used the institutions of the state to enforce it (DeVotta 2005: 149). Two new constitutions in 1972 and 1978 concluded the cultural, economic and political ‘Sinhalisation’ of the country: The

21 Maunaguru laments that the comparative lack of scholarly literature on Tamil nationalism ‘may be an unfortunate reflection of the marginalized status of Tamils in Sri Lanka’ (2009: 55), but for further readings on Tamil nationalism Wilson (2000), Hoole et al. (1990), Cheran (2009) or Stokke and Rynntveit (2000) offer useful starting points.
status of the Sinhala language was reaffirmed, Buddhism was made the foremost religion, the name of the country was changed, and a presidential system was established. As de Silva Wijeyeratne highlights, ‘[t]he 1978 Constitution marked the triumph of Sinhalese Buddhist linguistic nationalism’ (2014: 138), establishing ‘an increasingly ethno-majoritarian state that precipitated the drift in Tamil nationalism in a separatist direction’ (Id.: 140). Most importantly, the constitutions reasserted the unitary character of the Sri Lankan state, excluding the option of federalism for the northern and eastern parts of the country inhabited mainly by minority communities.  

In response, the Tamil political parties, now under a more radical leadership, committed to the Vaddukoddai Resolution and its separatist ideology in 1976, openly calling for the right of Tamil self-determination. In the same year, Velupillai Prabhakaran established the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam whose paramilitary tactics challenged the integrity of the Sri Lankan state in their devotion for Tamil Eelam. Jayewardene’s United National Party (UNP) won the 1977 elections and responded to the increasing violence with the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979. Its provisions, however, were disproportionate and counterproductive, and worsened the situation as they ‘progressively generated the very militancy and separatist sentiment that it was intended to stem and diminish’ (Tambiah 1986: 45f.). In July 1983 the worst anti-Tamil riots to date broke out in retaliation to an LTTE attack on Sinhalese soldiers. Subsequently the ‘Black July’ escalated into a civil war that lasted until the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009.

The Violent Consequences of Nationalist Mobilisation

The final part of this chapter provides a brief overview of the main developments since 1983. It first looks at the Tamil separatist threat and how it posed an ideological and military challenge to the Sinhalese Buddhist state and the majority’s claim to Sri Lankan nationhood. It then highlights how in a continuing climate of ethnic outbidding and nationalist extremism successive governments were unable to defeat the LTTE militarily and provide a political solution that

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23 For additional information on the geographical distribution of ethnic communities across the island and a map of the area claimed as Tamil Eelam see Appendix A.
would be acceptable to Tamils and Sinhalese, moderates and hard-liners alike. In 2005 Rajapaksa’s election as president signified the return of nationalist politics to mainstream politics as he led the country to the final confrontation with the Tigers, culminating in their defeat in May 2009. The chapter concludes with a brief review of Rajapaksa’s final years in office, highlighting how the opportunities of peace remained idle as he prioritised regime consolidation at the expense of constitutional reform and reconciliation, moving the country further towards authoritarianism.

The Civil War
Between July 1983 and May 2009 armed conflict held Sri Lanka in a tight grip, with only brief periods of respite. The war is often divided into four periods called Eelam War I to IV to separate high-intensity periods from usually brief cessations of violence. Fighting shifted between direct military confrontations and unpredictable guerrilla warfare, and over the course of twenty-six years caused enormous physical destruction, hundreds of thousands of displaced people, thousands of disappeared and missing, and left an estimated 86,000 dead (Höglund and Orjuela 2011: 20). The following is only a very brief outline of the war and its end, mainly focusing on the trajectory of nationalism during this period.24

The Tamil separatist threat
Following the anti-Tamil riots in July 1983 thousands of young Tamils fled to the north, swelling the ranks of the separatist movement. In August the Sixth Amendment to the constitution compelled all members of parliament to swear loyalty to the unitary state of Sri Lanka, which the Tamil politicians refused. Subsequently the Tamil movement embarked on a violent struggle for Eelam to protect the rights and identity of the Tamil people (Sitampalam 2009: 14). Communal violence escalated and soon reached the dimensions of full-blown civil war, fought between the Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which by then had eliminated or subsumed all other Tamil

24 For a more detailed and near complete account of the conflict and war see for example Bandarage (2009).
militant groups and would soon establish itself as the main representative of the Tamil community. This was a violent confrontation that rarely resembled conventional warfare, where both sides would face each other on the battlefield, but instead was characterised by a vicious cycle of guerrilla attacks and army retaliation:

By the mid-1980s, both the rebel groups and the military were massacring people with abandon. The rebels killed security personnel and innocent Sinhalese in the border areas, while the security forces retaliated by burning Tamils’ property, raping Tamil women, and often systematically killing civilians. It was difficult to distinguish between the rebels and civilians who were uninvolved, and no mercy was shown young Tamils by the military, which rounded them up by the dozen and imprisoned them under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. These prisoners were often tortured and then disappeared. (DeVotta 2004: 171)

The LTTE proved a formidable opponent to consecutive Sinhalese governments. At the height of its power during the 1990s and early 2000s it was described as one of the most sophisticated terrorist organisations in the world (Bandarage 2009: 197). It was a well-equipped and well-trained group with an extensive international network, which pioneered suicide attacks and commanded its own, albeit small, air force and navy. Under Prabhakaran’s leadership the Tigers attacked dozens of civilian and military targets, often employing suicide bombers, the Black Tigers. The Tigers also assassinated several high-ranking Sinhalese and Tamil politicians, including two heads of state.

At the turn of the twenty-first century the LTTE had managed to gain control over large areas in the northeast. As part of the Norwegian-facilitated peace process, a ceasefire agreement formalised these territorial arrangements, establishing a de facto dual state structure (Stokke 2006: 1022). Stokke highlights how in the LTTE-controlled areas the Tigers set up their own state administration in addition to local government institutions and officials, handling revenue collection, police and judiciary, including their own penal and civil codes, public services such as primary health care and pre-school education, and economic development initiatives. He argues that these state-building activities should be understood as part of the organisation’s political project to represent the Tamil nation. By providing a practical alternative to the unitary state model endorsed by

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25 Over the course of the war international perception of the LTTE shifted, with India proscribing it as a terrorist group in the early 1990s, following the assassination of Rajiv Ghandi, and the USA and many European countries following in the aftermath of 9/11. The latter was particularly consequential since it incapacitated the international financial network of the LTTE.
the Sinhalese government they served as a potential precursor for future power-sharing arrangements (Id.: 1026). This, however, ultimately never came to pass as the end of the war reaffirmed the unitary, centralised state.

Stokke’s account of the LTTE state-building strategies also stresses that they were largely authoritarian, centralised and technocratic in character, hinting at the ambivalent relationship between the LTTE and the Tamil people. Reminding us that the LTTE did not only wage its separatist war against security forces and Sinhalese civilians, but also opposing voices within the very Tamil community it claimed to represent (Hoole and Sritharan 2000).

Sinhalese responses between decisiveness and internal turmoil
For over two decades neither the LTTE nor the security forces were able to gain a decisive victory on the battlefield and negotiations were often short-lived and unsuccessful.\(^26\) The strength of Prabhakaran’s Tigers was a major reason that the conflict remained intractable for so long. Other factors that played a role were the persistent pressures of Sinhalese nationalism and the lack of consensus between the major Sinhalese parties as the minority issue remained a ripe object for ethnic outbidding (DeVotta 2004: 182).

By the time the war broke out in 1983, Sinhalese nationalist ideology was firmly established in politics and the hearts and minds of large parts of the Sinhalese community. Nationalism had become ‘a sine qua non of political survival articulated by all of the mainstream ... political actors’ (Brow 1996, cited in Rampton and Welikala 2011: 96, original emphasis) and electorates were accustomed to pro-Sinhalese policies. Overall, the state was seen as rightfully Sinhalese Buddhist, an instrument for the protection of the nation (Rampton and Welikala 2011: 97). In such a climate Tamil separatist demands were received with hostility and even moderate proposals for devolution of power to predominantly Tamil areas faced serious resistance (DeVotta 2004).

In 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga\textsuperscript{27} was elected as president on the promise of bringing peace to the country. She was the first Sri Lankan head of state to accept all major grievances of the Tamils and proposed far reaching constitutional reforms. These envisioned extensive devolution and decentralisation, granting autonomy for the Tamil areas and protection of minority rights (Bandarage 2009: 156f.), but the continued violence of the LTTE posed a major obstacle to her plans. Despite heightened military efforts under the ‘war for peace’ slogan, which framed the war as ‘being waged against the LTTE on behalf of all the people of Sri Lanka yearning for peace’ (Saravanamuttu 2000: 203f.), the government was unable to gain significant military successes to pressure the LTTE into serious negotiations.

Another obstacle was the fierce political opposition Kumaratunga faced from within the Sinhalese community. While the LTTE rejected the draft constitution as not going far enough, extremist Buddhist monks and Sinhalese nationalists, including members of her own party, opposed it as going too far and compromising the unitary state (Chadda 2004: 103; DeVotta 2004: 182f.). Kumaratunga was thus never able to garner the required two-thirds majority in parliament to implement her proposed constitutional changes. In the late 1990s her government invited Norway to facilitate a peace process, but when Ranil Wickremesinghe, newly elected prime minister and leader of the opposition party, renewed negotiations with the LTTE supported by Norway, Kumaratunga did not participate and eventually dissolved parliament in 2004 to undermine her Sinhalese opponents. As a consequence, in 2004 Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected prime minister, soon followed by a political turn towards a military solution to the conflict.

Rampton and Welikala (2011) argue that the 1990s saw a relative eclipse of Sinhalese nationalist rhetoric with the two major parties dropping the rhetoric of explicit Sinhalese mobilisation in order to secure a peace settlement. Minor parties, such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the monk-led Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), however, took up the baton and instead of a demise of Sinhalese nationalism it saw a renewed political ascendency (Rampton and

\textsuperscript{27} Kumaratunga is the daughter of SWRD and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, both previous prime ministers who actively promoted Sinhalese nationalism.}
Welikala 2011: 99f.). This was not least possible because of continued widespread popular support for Sinhalese nationalist mobilisation, opposing any actions that may threaten the unitary character of Sri Lanka (DeVotta 2005: 156), such as the ‘liberal peace’ model represented by the Western influenced peace process (Rampton and Welikala 2011: 103). As a result, in the 2005 presidential elections Mahinda Rajapaksa defeated Ranil Wickremesinghe by a small margin. Rajapaksa was supported by the ultra-nationalist JVP and JHU and his nationalist programme appealed to the majority in the Sinhalese Buddhist countryside. Wickremesinghe had been driving the Norwegian-facilitated peace process and was supported in the more cosmopolitan urban areas and by the minorities (de Silva 2006: 119). Ironically, observers have pointed out that it may have been the boycott of Tamil voters, enforced by the LTTE in the northeast, that cost Wickremesinghe the victory (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 223) and brought to power hard-liner Rajapaksa who would defeat the Tigers within four years.

Rise of the new Dutugemunu?

The election of Rajapaksa as president was the resounding return of Sinhalese nationalism to mainstream politics after it had persevered in the political culture and infrastructure of the country for over a decade. Rajapaksa had returned the SLFP to its Sinhala Buddhist core in order to receive support from the JVP and JHU (de Silva 2006: 118) and his United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) took on the mantle of nationalist authenticity (Rampton 2012: 283). Rajapaksa’s government has been described as ‘the zenith of sustained nationalist mobilization’, as he afresh embraced the nationalist rhetoric eschewed by mainstream parties in the previous decade, reversed the peace process and resisted international involvement (Rampton and Welikala 2011: 93).

Rajapaksa marked a clear turn from Kumaratunga, his predecessor as president and head of the SLFP, and her policies. Instead of a carrot and stick approach that combined military and political approaches, Rajapaksa was firmly committed to the protection of the unitary character of the state and became increasingly committed to a military solution to the conflict.28 He denied the claim

28 Given the resurgence of Sinhalese nationalism and the SLFP’s military and political successes, in October 2007 the major opposition party, the UNP, also redefined its position on the national
to an exclusive Tamil homeland and only marginally invested in the faltering peace process (de Silva 2006: 118). Although the ceasefire agreement officially remained in place until January 2008, Rajapaksa took a hard stance against the LTTE and military operations were accelerated in early 2006 to force a final military confrontation (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 185).

This course, albeit coming at the high cost of rising inflation, staggering government expenditure and growing casualties in the war zones, was widely supported by the southern (read Sinhalese) population (Wickramasinghe 2009b: 64). After all, by that time the struggle between the LTTE and the government had lasted for over twenty years and the war and its ideology had impacted all parts of life in Sri Lanka. De Mel, for instance, highlights the pervasive effects of militarisation by the time the Rajapaksa administration took office. She argues that militarisation, a process whereby people and institutions become increasingly controlled by the military (de Mel 2007: 12), has led to the spread of an ideology of militarism across Sri Lankan institutions. This ideology has, and continues to, mediate ‘aggressive, hypermasculinist, militant solutions to conflict, and justifies violence and terror’ (Id.: 12) in Sri Lanka. As such it helped to justify, legitimise and sustain war and may remain embedded in institutions and people’s minds even after war is officially over.

Even today militarisation in Sri Lanka is not limited to its most visible markers, especially the dominant presence of armed military personnel on the streets or the soaring defence budget at the expense of education, public health care and welfare services, but also inhabits ordinary and daily routines. In her book de Mel thus studies popular culture, such as advertising, theatre, literature, and memory as sites of the entrenchment and potential subversion of militarism. She points out that militarism is underwritten by other ideologies (2007: 26) and while she does not discuss nationalism specifically, the below chapters demonstrate how militarist tropes form an important part of Sinhalese nationalist ideology in the analysed discourses.

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issue, giving up federalism in favour of maximum devolution within a unitary state (Wickramasinghe 2008: 196).

29 In February 2007 a survey revealed that fifty-nine percent of Sinhalese wanted a military solution to the conflict (Economist 2007).
Following Rajapaksa’s election, his government was able to mobilise and build on existing militarised institutions and cultures of violence to bolster the increasing military operations. Rajapaksa not only took a hard stance against the LTTE, but his regime also exerted pressure on critics in the media, civil society and judiciary (Goodhand 2013: 65). Observers have pointed out that after 2005 the country was sliding towards increasing nepotism and authoritarianism (DeVotta 2011; Wickramasinghe 2009b), with the war against the LTTE being the ultimate rationale:

By claiming that terrorism is the gravest threat facing Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa’s government has given itself a license to use undemocratic, often brutal methods to govern, with the quiet approval of a war-weary Sinhalese majority community. (Wickramasinghe 2009b: 65)

The government’s military strategy soon proved successful. The unprecedented firm commitment to a military solution and armament of the military forces, internal splits within the LTTE and the changing international climate after the attacks on 9/11 in the USA were central factors that enabled the decisive victory over the Tamil Tigers. In July 2007 the LTTE was driven out of the Eastern Province and from April 2008 onwards the army intensified its operations against the remaining LTTE strongholds in the north. In May 2009 government troops overran the last LTTE-held areas and confirmation of Prabhakaran’s death sealed the end of the war.

On May 19, Rajapaksa addressed parliament, and the country, in his ‘Victory Speech’, declaring peace and the end of separatism and communalism:

I declare open this fourth session of Parliament at a time the people of our country, as well as the entire world are celebrating a great victory. I address this session of Parliament at the historic occasion when the hopes and expectations of the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslims, Burgher, Malay and all people of our country for several decades, to see a Sri Lanka that is free of murderous terrorism, have been realized.... Hon. Speaker, we have removed the word "minorities" from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are the Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any others, minorities. There are only two peoples in this country. One is the people that love this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth. Those who do not love the country are now a lesser group. (VarS 2009c)

In January 2007 the merger of the northern and eastern provinces into the North Eastern Province, a result of the Indo-Lanka Accord, was officially voided, de-merging the predominantly Tamil-speaking areas again.

Appendix B includes a comprehensive overview of all analysed speeches and their in-text references.
Even though the war was eventually ended through a military victory, it was widely celebrated and initially provided hope for a new era of community relations.

The Transition from War to Peace

The end of the war shifted the focus of much of the literature away from the accounts of community relations, the war and peace efforts to the central question of how to create a stable peace. The resettlement of thousands of internally displaced people, rehabilitation of former LTTE cadres and rebuilding of the former war zones were pressing issues, and so was the need to address the root causes and consequences of the civil war and provide a political solution to Tamil grievances (Keerawella 2013; Arambewela and Arambewela 2010; Marshall 2010; Price 2010; Feith 2010). For as Höglund and Orjuela point out, the root causes of the conflict remained largely unresolved and the prolonged armed conflict had added new grievances for minority communities (2011: 20).

While the end of the war and Rajapaksa’s immediate responses sparked hope for change following the ‘golden opportunity’ the defeat of the LTTE presented (Lunn et al. 2009), optimism soon faltered and observers described the immediate post-war Sri Lanka as ‘a divided nation, with the Sinhalese majority jubilant at their victory and the Tamil minority suppressed, shattered and leaderless’ (Feith 2010: 351). And indeed, Rajapaksa and his government did little to address the underlying issues of the conflict, to seek accountability and justice for alleged atrocities of the war, or to enact far-reaching constitutional reforms. Instead, the regime consolidated its power in the aftermath of the asymmetrical end to the war that led to an illiberal ‘victor’s peace’ (Höglund and Orjuela 2011).

Regime consolidation

In November 2009 Rajapaksa called for early presidential elections in order to benefit from his regime’s enormous popularity following the military victory (Uyangoda 2011: 132). In the January 2010 elections he won a comfortable majority over retired General Sarath Fonseka, who had spearheaded the military campaigns against the LTTE. Three months later Rajapaksa’s UPFA also won the absolute majority in parliament, making coalition arrangements with minority parties unnecessary (Uyangoda 2011: 132f.). This trend of regime consolidation
continued with UPFA victories in most local elections until Rajapaksa’s defeat in the January 2015 presidential elections.32

Instead of using the momentum of these victories and his government’s majority to address the remaining grievances of the Tamil community, Rajapaksa prioritised the consolidation of his own power and that of his family. The militarisation of public life in Sri Lanka continued with high military spending despite the end of the war and ever more pervasive military involvement in the country’s political and economic affairs. In place of constitutional reforms that would address minority grievances through devolution of powers, the Eighteenth Amendment in 2010 actually strengthened presidential powers and removed the restrictions on two terms for a president. Power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of Rajapaksa and his close family. The three Rajapaksa brothers Mahinda, Chamal and Gotabhaya, for instance, controlled between sixty and seventy per cent of the country’s budget between them through their dozens of portfolios (DeVotta 2014: 154). The country’s authoritarian turn further involved a silencing of critical voices in the opposition and media.33

With the defeat of the LTTE and Rajapaksa’s continued buttressing of Sinhalese nationalism, dialogues about a political solution for long-term conflict resolution and reconciliation lost momentum and vanished from the political agenda. Instead, the government emphasised economic recovery and infrastructure development in the former war-zones to ensure national security and peace (Uyangoda 2011; 2010). Economic development and rapid integration of the north and east were ‘seen as a means of consolidating the unitary state and preventing the re-emergence of Tamil militancy’, basically a shortcut to security without a political settlement (Goodhand 2012: 133). Instead of demilitarisation in the aftermath of the war the high levels of militarisation continued (Höglund and Orjuela 2011: 28). The north in particular remained a highly securitised area and the presence of the military was so overwhelming and pervasive that observers

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32 The major exception were the provincial council elections in the Northern Province in 2013, where the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) dominated the polls.
33 Among the most prominent examples were the imprisonment of Fonseka following his defeat in the 2010 elections and the impeachment and dismissal of the Supreme Court Chief Justice Bandaranayake, who did not support a bill that sought to concentrate even more powers in the presidency, in 2013.
called it an ‘army of occupation physically and psychologically’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 16).

Goodhand points out that the military was involved in civilian tasks like administration, relief assistance and development and that its continued presence became a major concern of the minority communities, who feared a continuation of state-sponsored ‘Sinhalisation’ of predominantly Tamil-speaking areas (Goodhand 2012: 133ff.). Since the end of the war these activities included the changing of names of streets and villages, building of Buddha statues, military monuments and museums, as well as renewed settling of Sinhalese in the north to change the population balance (International Crisis Group 2012: 17-20). The lack of meaningful engagement with Tamil grievances and the government’s post-war strategies of regime consolidation, especially securitised development led Goodhand to remark in 2013 that ‘the resolution of the Tamil question appears to be more distant than ever’ (2013: 72).

The limits of triumphalism
For much of his second term in office Mahinda Rajapaksa seemed invincible. His regime benefited from the country’s post-war economic growth, could effectively silence most critical voices, had a majority in parliament and a strong electoral vote base, and the opposition was too weak to mount a serious, organised challenge (Goodhand 2013: 66f.). International pressure on the government, however, had been increasing steadily since the final stages of the war and fissures in the ‘oppressive stability’ that characterised the Rajapaksa regime became apparent from 2012 onwards (Wickramasinghe 2014: 205).

International criticism of the government’s accelerating military operations began to mount in 2007 as large numbers of internally displaced people fled from the war zones to the east and claims about human rights violations were voiced. The government responded with an ‘aggressively defensive diplomatic policy’ towards the West (Uyangoda 2010: 108). It compared its struggle to the ‘war on terror’ waged by the U.S. administration and its allies (Wickramasinghe 2008:

34 The settlement of Sinhalese farmers in the pre-dominantly Tamil-speaking areas of the north and east through colonisation and irrigation schemes began in the 1930s and was intensified in the 1950s, seeking to restore a Sinhalese Buddhist majority in the dry zone (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 111).
and as pressure from the West increased, Rajapaksa turned to countries like China, Pakistan and Iran, which provided military and economic support without moral strings attached (Uyangoda 2010: 105). While the end of the war was welcomed by international actors, concerns by the UN, USA, Australia and other Western countries have since been expressed ever more urgently. But Rajapaksa and his government strongly objected to external interference in their affairs and international efforts had little actual effect in Sri Lanka.

Rajapaksa instead emphasised indigenous mechanisms such as the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). It was appointed in May 2010 to investigate the political and humanitarian incidents between 2002 and 2009 and to make recommendations on how to prevent the recurrence of such in the future (Uyangoda 2011: 136). The report it presented in late 2011 avoided the question of accountability, but made recommendations on key issues such as the devolution of power and demilitarisation of the north and east. Following the 2012 resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the government responded with a National Action Plan to implement the recommendations of the LLRC report, but it continued to sidestep central issues (Goodhand 2013: 71). Even now, seven years after the end of the war, tensions between Sri Lanka and the international community persist and foreign involvement is a highly disputed topic as issues of accountability remain unresolved. There have been no independent investigations into allegations of human rights violations and justice remains elusive for many victims and their families.

In addition to international pressure, the Rajapaksa regime also faced increasing domestic criticism. Rajapaksa had never been popular with minorities, but from 2012 onwards discontent about corruption, repression and the uneven effects of economic liberalisation began to rise to the surface in the Sinhalese south, too (Goodhand 2013: 72). The government had depended heavily on economic growth for popular support (Goodhand 2012: 131), but as it began to slow and the costs of living rose, so did popular discontent. Since 2011 it had to face several protests and strikes, mainly expressing people’s unhappiness about the rising cost of living and the absence of the expected post-war economic peace dividend (International Crisis Group 2013: 21), but also lawyer protests following the dismissal of the chief justice in 2013. Many protests were put down with
force, but incidents like the army shooting dead at least three Sinhalese protesters in a suburb of Colombo in August 2013 increasingly agitated potential voters (Id.: 22f.)

As a result of economic and social pressures the UPFA faced a decline in popularity in local elections in the south and west in 2014. Rajapaksa thus called for early presidential elections again, hoping to secure re-election before a further decline in voter support. In January 2015, however, voters rejected Rajapaksa, whose regime was associated with a culture of impunity, clientalism, nepotism and corruption, in favour of Maithripala Sirisena, who united Sinhalese and minority opposition against Rajapaksa, promising far-reaching reforms.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of nations and nationalism in general, and Sinhalese nationalist ideology in particular. It has highlighted the main benefits of a social constructionist approach to understanding Sinhalese nationalism as an ideology that has grown in influence since the early twentieth century. The origins of nationalism in Sri Lanka can be found in the late colonial period, when the political, social and structural processes accompanying the state-building process interacted with traditional communal practices. Within a Western intellectual framework of racism and historiography, previously fluid identities were transformed into fixed, exclusive ethnicities available for nationalist mobilisation in the twentieth century.

We have outlined the core features, the myth-symbol complex that came to define modern Sinhalese nationalist ideology, particularly its mytho-history, which traces the Sinhalese nation and state back over two thousand years, and the hierarchical nature of Buddhist cosmology, defining the nation and its relationship to other groups. The chapter has then explained the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils as a consequence of the assertive, elite-driven ‘Sinhalisation’ of the Sri Lankan state, its institutions, and the country’s social and economic spheres and subsequent Tamil counter-mobilisation. While the military conflict had come to an end, the events following the defeat of the Tamil Tigers indicate that nationalist politics remained the order of day under the Rajapaksa government and the root causes of the grievances have yet to be addressed. This research thus
investigates how the end of the war has affected Sinhalese nationalism, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of the immediate post-war period, and demonstrates how the discursive reproductions of nationalist ideology provide insights into its persistent post-war material manifestations.
Chapter 3

The Study of Sinhalese Nationalist Ideology

This chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological tools utilised by this research to study the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism between 2005 and 2015. Through a multidisciplinary approach we examine the trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism during Mahinda Rajapaksa’s presidency to identify the effects of the end of the war in May 2009. This research is embedded within a critical discourse analytical framework, in which nationalism is understood as an ideology that is manifested and reproduced through social practices. This research studies Sinhalese nationalism through the use of language, namely discourses. Given the important role of elites in shaping and driving Sinhalese nationalism in the past and present, its focus is on official discourses produced by the previous government and how their manifestations of nationalist ideology are linked to post-war politics.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, it stresses the need for contemporary empirical research to foster our understanding of post-war Sinhalese nationalism, an area that still has many gaps in the current literature. Second, it highlights how the research question is addressed through a critical discourse analytical approach. It outlines the main tenets of critical discourse analysis and highlights the analytical toolkit provided by the discourse-historical approach that allows us to study Sinhalese nationalism through different data sets within its historical context. Last, the data selection, collection and analysis process is discussed, introducing the three data sets, history textbooks, political speeches and documentary films, and the main methods used to analyse the discursive manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism throughout them.

Post-war Sinhalese Nationalism: Identifying the Gap

In the immediate aftermath of May 2009, inquiries into the state of nationalism took a backseat. The defeat of the LTTE, which had forcefully established itself as the sole voice of the Tamil community, was a serious blow to Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. This gap has slowly been filled by new and old forces, with the
Tamil National Alliance emerging as the main representative domestically. The Sinhalese, on the contrary, celebrated their victory and yet speculations about the future of Sinhalese nationalism soon emerged, ranging from expectations of post-war entrenchment over potential transformations, to its demise. The following sections locate this research within the major speculations about the future of Sinhalese nationalism that were proposed shortly after the end of the war. They also indicate how these expectations have since been re-evaluated in light of the events of Rajapaksa’s second term in office.

**Locating Grounds for Speculation**

The end of nearly three decades of armed conflict provided opportunities and challenges alike to the country, its leaders and people, as well as the ideological frames used to make sense of their realities. While it marked a clear break from the violent past, many things remained the same. The end of the war for once did not bring a new government into power, but rather reaffirmed existing political and territorial arrangements. Uyangoda (2010) argued that following the victory, the government led by nationalists like Rajapaksa and his family had no inclinations to address the political aspects of the conflict through state reform. Therefore he predicted that nationalist policies would remain unchanged and indeed unchallenged as Sinhalese elites prioritise the consolidation of the regime over ethnic reconciliation and a political solution (Uyangoda 2011: 131). The persisting culture of impunity, where ethnic nationalism trumps democratic concerns of good governance and proposals for regional autonomy, was further stressed as a factor that may promote the post-war entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism (Bopage 2010).

DeVotta, who has written extensively on the role of ethnic outbidding and institutional decay following independence (2005; 2003), argued that these destructive trends were not reversed during the civil war. On the contrary, he stressed that Rajapaksa had moved the country further away from democracy towards soft-authoritarianism, promoting Sinhalese Buddhist ethnocentrism (DeVotta 2011; 2010). He predicted that this course may continue and even thought it possible that the country might morph into a dictatorship under
Rajapaksa (DeVotta 2010: 36). This never happened, but in the short term the victory over the LTTE did not challenge the position of Sinhalese elites in the state. Instead, triumphalism and peace provided an opportunity for Sinhalese nationalism to become entrenched even more in Sri Lankan politics giving rise to rather gloomy accounts of scholars like Uyangoda or DeVotta.

Despite these evident obstacles, other authors pointed out potential grounds for transformations within Sinhalese nationalism after the end of the war. Wickramasinghe (2009a), for instance, analysed Rajapaksa’s ‘Victory Speech’ and identified signs of a ‘new patriotism’. In this speech the former president claimed that a new, civic nation was to emerge, in which citizens or patriots would be ethnically undifferentiated. Instead of ethnicity, race or religion, he argued, the love for the country would be the unifying criteria of this ‘new patriotism’. The new ‘others’ would be ‘those of cosmopolitan tastes and lifestyles, Westerners, and local intellectuals of any … ethnicity who profess ideas that deviate from the norm’ (Wickramasinghe 2009a: 1052). Even then Wickramasinghe was sceptical of this ‘new patriotism’, pointing out that it may be merely a new ‘vindication of the perverse logic of the nation-state’ that lacks the capacity to reshape the institutions of the state or to abolish its cultural exclusiveness (Id.: 1049). She argued that for a post-national patriotism to be shared by all, the state must be free of cultural, religious and ethnic symbols. Rajapaksa’s vision, however, promoted a love of country based on colonial interpretations of the Sinhalese people, thus realigning rather than reimagining post-war Sinhalese nationalism (Wickramasinghe 2009a).

Roberts (2009b) also suggested possible scenarios for Sri Lanka’s post-war future shortly after the May events. He stressed, on the one hand, the centralisation of power and the continuation of the cultural practices of the Asokan Persona as obstacles to reforms and change. On the other hand he pointed out the need for Sri Lanka to ‘recognize that its patriotic identity “Sri Lankan” must be built upon a confederative principle that recognises the existence of several communities as well as three nations within the entity Lanka (Ceylon)’

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35 Despite a reported attempt to incite a coup during the election night (Colombo Telegraph 2015; Mallawarachi and Aneez 2015), Rajapaksa conceded defeat and peacefully vacated the office in January 2015.
(Roberts 2009b: para. 29). He highlighted that this would require long-term ideological work that may begin in the post-war period. One potential explanation for why and how this may happen was provided by Kadirgamar.

Writing very close to the end of the war, Kadirgamar (2009) put forward a very radical thesis. He speculated that the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, and Tamil nationalism as a whole, may be the beginning of the unravelling of nationalist politics in Sri Lanka. Without its rationale, the militant Tamil ‘other’, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism may become obsolete and may potentially be replaced by a new, third force, possibly from the realm of social and political movements, bridging the decade old ethnic divide (Kadirgamar 2009). Picking up Kadirgamar’s arguments Goodhand asked whether ‘in its moment of triumph Sinhala nationalism may be at its most vulnerable’ (Goodhand 2010: 359) – an intriguing, and given the above discussed accounts rather counter-intuitive, question that sparked this research.

**The Emerging Post-war Realities**

The final sections of chapter two provided a brief outline of the events between the end of the war and Rajapaksa’s loss of the presidential elections in early 2015. They portrayed a country that saw the continuation of nationalist policies, particularly the enduring militarisation of the north and a further shift towards soft authoritarianism under Rajapaksa, at the expense of meaningful reform and reconciliation. It thus became increasingly clear to many observers that the end of the war had not heralded the end of nationalism under Rajapaksa.

Wickramasinghe (2013) draws on her earlier discussion of a potentially unifying, civic ‘new patriotism’ that, however, has become a nation state ideology far from appealing to minorities. This vision instead merges nation and state, and the love for country it promotes continues to be based on a Sinhalese-centric reading of history. Minorities thus, while part of the state, are ‘present as mere shadows and not constitutive elements of a common political culture’ (Wickramasinghe 2013: 92). She highlights how the post-war state reinterprets, reinvents and rediscovers sites of heritage as patriotic “signatures of the visible” (Appadurai 2008, cited in Wickramasinghe 2013: 96) for its national imagination. The reinvigorated ‘Sinhalisation’ of heritage sites in the north and east is
highlighted as one example of how the Rajapaksa government continues to flag Sinhala-Buddhist nationhood in the post-war period. Instead of truly searching for a superordinate national identity, a ‘civic patriotism’, which may be acceptable to all communities in Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa has been perpetuating traditional Sinhalese nationalism (Wickramasinghe 2013).

DeVotta (2014) reiterates his previous arguments, pointing out further evidence for continued political and institutional decay and democratic regression. He argues that Rajapaksa’s post-war consolidation of his power at the expense of good governance, party politics and reconciliation even exceeded discouraging expectations of regime entrenchment (DeVotta 2014: 15). This supports Rampton and Welikala’s depictions of Rajapaksa and his government as the main protagonists of authentic Sinhalese nationalism in contemporary Sri Lanka (2011: 104). De Silva Wijeyeratne (2014) similarly argues that this position was reaffirmed by the military victory that established Rajapaksa as quasi mythical ‘cakkavatti king, the embodiment of Buddhist righteousness’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 187). The defeat of the LTTE removed any challenge to the unitary state, its ethnical hierarchy and Sinhalese nationalism’s dominant position within it. He provides an in-depth account of the ontological ground of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and its transformations from pre-colonial time to present, arguing that under Rajapaksa it lacks the symbolic capital needed to become more inclusive. Instead, after the war Sinhalese nationalism continues in the post-independence vein:

Rajapakse’s victory over the LTTE in 2009 did not announce the possibility of reconciliation with the Tamils, but rather the apotheosis of the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist revolution initiated in 1956. (Id.: 155)

This research looks beyond the political manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism before and after the end of the war. It investigates its discursive reproductions within official discourses from the Rajapaksa government, which can enable, justify and legitimise the continuation of nationalist politics despite the defeat of the militant threat. This research highlights how the end of the war and subsequent events have strengthened the ontological ground of Sinhalese nationalism. The military victory not only reaffirmed the political and territorial status quo, it also provided an opportunity for nationalists to reinvigorate the myth-symbol complex by constructing the present within Sinhalese centric
mytho-history. As Wickramasinghe (2013) suspected, the analysed discourses highlight how narratives like the ‘new patriotism’ and open invitations directed at minority communities are not indications of a more inclusive nationalism. Instead, they reinforce the hierarchical political and social order formulated by Sinhalese nationalism, as they ask the minority communities to join the Sinhalese within a Sri Lankan nation and state naturally dominated by the majority community.

At the same time the identified shifts and continuities within the discursive constructions of Sinhalese nationalism provided the ideological space for post-war politics under Rajapaksa. The consolidation of power and further shifts towards soft-authoritarianism observed by Uyangoda (2011) and DeVotta (2014) were buttressed by triumphalism and Rajapaksa’s performances as a new Dutugemunu. Similarly the continued militarisation, ongoing ‘Sinhalisation’ of northern and eastern landscapes, limited space for dissent, and shifts in foreign policy can be understood through the government’s construction of the post-war situation within available Sinhalese nationalist frames.

Before presenting these findings in more depth the following sections discuss how we study Sinhalese nationalism utilising the theories and methods of critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The following sections position this research within critical discourse analysis, henceforth CDA, and more specifically within the discourse-historical approach. These approaches fall within the larger field of discourse analysis, which can best be described as a heterogeneous, multi-disciplinary methodology or theoretical perspective (Nikander 2008: 414). In general, discourse analytical approaches share a social constructionist epistemology that views language as a crucial part in the construction of ‘the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world’ (Id.: 413). These approaches thus analyse forms of text and talk in various contexts to investigate the actions and meanings constructed in and through them (Id.: 415).

In the following we discuss the main objectives of CDA research agendas and define ideology and discourse, the core concepts this research utilises. The study of language use is a pertinent way to examine the core dimensions of Sinhalese
nationalism and how they are reproduced within shifting contexts. For discourses both express ideologies, making their content manifest within linguistic forms, and play a major role in constructing, reconstructing and transforming them. The discussion is concluded with some remarks on the relationship of the researcher to this investigation of Sinhalese nationalism.

**Utilising Critical Discourse Analysis**

The CDA network formed in the early 1990s, and Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak, who were among the founding members, continue to be its most prominent proponents. It emerged from a linguistic tradition, but has also been influenced by cultural studies and the works of Foucault, Giddens, Bourdieu and Habermas, among others, are frequently referenced as theoretical background to studies in CDA (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000: 452). The paradigm of CDA can best be described as heterogeneous, including a variety of research issues, theoretical and methodological approaches. Recognising, and indeed encouraging, such diversity, CDA should be understood as a research programme instead of a fixed theory or method (Wodak and Meyer 2016: 5).

Despite this diversity, the proponents of CDA have shared goals beyond their common rootedness in the linguistic field:

> Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. (van Dijk 2001: 352)

CDA approaches are problem-oriented and critical. They study specific social issues like racism or sexism, and aim to uncover often hidden structures of power and inequality in language use (Wodak et al. 2009: 8) in order to create knowledge that may change these. Weiss and Wodak point out that ‘language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it’ (2003: 14) and it is these processes that CDA seeks to uncover. Often critical discourse analysts choose to position themselves with those who suffer from inequalities when pointing out the actors and mechanisms that reproduce and hide inequalities.

36 In the most recent edition of their book *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Wodak and Meyer 2016) the editors use Critical Discourse Studies instead of Critical Discourse Analysis to emphasise this point further.
The discourse-historical approach

As a consequence of diverging research agendas and theories applied by critical discourse analysts, different approaches or schools have crystallised within CDA that utilise diverging theoretical frameworks and methodologies (Hidalgo Tenorio 2011: 189). This research draws mainly on the discourse-historical approach (henceforth DHA) developed by Wodak and her Viennese colleagues (2009). It studies how discourses are used by those in power to maintain their domination with a special focus on jointly studying the textual and contextual levels of analysis (Hidalgo Tenorio 2011: 191). DHA is only one of a number of approaches within CDA that propose different theoretical and methodological procedures depending on their research agendas. Fairclough’s (2016) dialectical-relational approach, for instance, uses a Marxist framework and studies semiosis, Fairclough’s preferred term for discourse, and its dialectical relationship to other social elements within the social process. Van Dijk’s (2016) sociocognitive approach emphasises how the relations between society and discourse are cognitively mediated.

Unlike the deductive approaches from Fairclough and van Dijk that have a closed theoretical framework, DHA is among the more inductively oriented approaches that ‘attempt to discover new insights through in-depth case studies’ (Wodak and Meyer 2016: 18). The DHA is interdisciplinary, combining historical, political and sociological analyses, focuses on specific social problems, and takes the historical context of texts and discourses into account (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 31f.). Given the reciprocal relationship between discourse and social reality, all CDA approaches study discourse within its context. The DHA moreover highlights discourse as a historically embedded phenomenon and places particular emphasis on exploring the relationship between discourse as social practice and political and institutional structures (Wodak et al. 2009).

The DHA moves beyond critical observations that some CDA work treats context as narrative and backgrounding, uncritically accepting particular representations of social reality and history as ‘background facts’ in their analyses (Blommaert 2000: 456). Instead, Reisigl and Wodak (2016) emphasise the multi-dimensional understanding of context of the DHA: the immediate linguistic context (the embeddedness of linguistic features in the text); the relationships
between texts (intertextuality) and between discourses (interdiscursivity) in the past and present; how they relate to extra-linguistic variables; and finally the broader socio-political and historical context (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 30f.). Focusing on these levels and their relationships enables the researcher to not only analyse individual texts or discourses, but how they may change in relationship to socio-political change (Id.: 28). Its emphasis on a historical analysis as well as its analytical toolkit, discussed in more detail below, make DHA an appropriate framework for this investigation of Sinhalese national identity and nationalism.

**Discourse, power and ideology**

The ways in which CDA researchers use key concepts such as discourse, power and ideology are diverse. For the purpose of this research we understand discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of “social practice” ... [that] is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, cited in Wodak and Meyer 2016: 6)

The DHA distinguishes between discourses as ‘social practice’ and texts, those ‘concrete oral utterances or written documents’ whose linguistic features we study (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, cited in Weiss and Wodak 2003: 13). CDA implies a dialectical relationship between texts or specific discursive acts and their situational, institutional and social contexts. These contexts shape and in turn are shaped through discourses enacted by social actors. The constitutive nature of discourse is varied, they can produce and construct social conditions, restore or legitimise a social status quo, maintain or reproduce it, or contribute to its transformation or even destruction (Wodak et al. 2009: 8).

Discourses influence political and social reality, including the formation of groups and their relationships, and may be part of the production and reproduction of often obscured structures of dominance, political control and power between groups (Wodak et al. 2009: 8). CDA is thus usually interested in unmasking social domination, ‘that is, the power abuse of one group over others’, for instance by a social class, an ethnic majority, etc. (Wodak and Meyer 2016: 9). Power as an asymmetric relationship (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 26) involves control of one group over other groups. It can be exercised either through action, that is physically controlling the actions of others, or cognition, that is influencing their minds. The latter is often more effective and less visible as powerful groups may
be able to change the minds of others through persuasion or manipulation (van Dijk 1993: 254).

Critical discourse analysts are usually interested in the latter, less visible forms of ‘ideological power, the power to project one’s practices as universal and “common sense”’ (Fairclough 1989: 33). Fairclough, for instance, argues that ‘[i]deology is the key mechanism of rule by consent’ (Id.: 34) because it allows a dominant group to sustain unequal group relations by projecting its practices as universal. As these practices become institutionalised, they legitimise existing power relations that are constantly reproduced as social actors draw on them without thinking. Discourse is essential for this ‘ideological power’. It is not the only but a crucial social practice through which ideologies are reproduced (van Dijk 1998) and has been described as ‘the favoured vehicle of ideology’ (Fairclough 1989: 34). It shapes and perpetuates institutional practices that seem ‘common sense’, but actually originate within dominant groups (Id.: 33) and is thus essential for managing the minds of others in order to exercise power through cognition or consent (van Dijk 1993: 254).

**Nationalism as ideology**

This research investigates how Sinhalese nationalism has been affected by the end of the war, a significant turning point and historical change in the context within which it operates. It establishes a trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism, comparing its discursive construction in official discourses before and after May 2009, examining how the changing extra-linguistic context may lead to or be represented by shifts within the dominant nationalist ideology through discourses. In chapter two we have already provided a definition of nationalism as an ideology that prioritises the nation. It provides a way of seeing and interpreting the world as naturally divided into different nations that want to attain and maintain unity, autonomy and identity (Smith 2009: 61). In the following chapters we study Sinhalese nationalism within official spoken and written language, for ‘if we want to know what ideologies actually look like, how they work, and how they are created, changed and reproduced, we need to look closely at their discursive manifestations’ (van Dijk 1998: 6, original emphasis).
The link between discourse and ideology is so close that they are frequently equated (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 27). This is also apparent in the different definitions of nationalism put forward by social constructionist accounts. Özkırımlı, for instance, defines nationalism as a discourse, but then immediately points out that his definition is close to conceptions of ideology (2005: 30). Similarly Calhoun’s understanding of nationalism as not merely a doctrine, ‘but a more basic way of talking, thinking, and acting’ (1997: 11) demonstrates how the ideological dimension, a shared set of beliefs, and the discursive practices expressing and reproducing these may be conflated. In the following, Sinhalese nationalism as an ideology is treated as analytically separate from the social practices that condition it and in turn are conditioned by it.

This research studies the reproduction of Sinhalese nationalism through discourses, but it should be kept in mind that these are only one of the multitude of social practices that construct and reconstruct ideologies or group identities:

The national identity of individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a national collectivity is manifested, *inter alia*, in their social practices, one of which is discursive practice. The respective national identity is shaped by state, political, institutional, media and everyday social practices, and the material and social conditions which emerge as their results, to which the individual is subjected. The discursive practice as a special form of social practice plays a central part both in the formation and in the expression of national identity. (Wodak et al. 2009: 29, original emphasis)

Furthermore, critics of CDA have pointed out that besides the use of language the perceptions and interpretations of the reader and audience matter, too (Breeze 2011: 512). This is a valid limitation that also applies to this research, which explores the dominant form of Sinhalese nationalism produced by the elites in power, that seeks to provide a version of reality in their interest. And while this research looks at how these interpretations are positioned within the given context and counter-narratives, it cannot directly discern the mass reception of this version of nationalist ideology or provide an exhaustive study of counter-narratives. It does, however, present an extensive insight into the Sinhalese nationalist ideology that helped Rajapaksa shape the country and its politics during his ten years as president.

**A Critical Position**

One commonality of CDA approaches is their goal to produce ‘critical’ research. This includes a focus on unmasking the linguistic manifestations of power that are
largely invisible, providing critical knowledge and potentially allying themselves with those dominated to offer practical impetuses to transform power relations. Critics have pointed out that boundaries between social research and political activism may become blurred within CDA research (Wodak and Meyer 2016). A reflective position of the researcher is thus crucial to produce transparent research.

This research is not explicitly about power in Sri Lanka, yet the outline of the country’s recent history in chapter two has highlighted that it is impossible to study Sinhalese nationalism without addressing the unequal relationship between the island’s main ethnic communities. Over decades the close link between Sinhalese nationalism and politics has created a hierarchical political, social and economic order that has adversely affected communal relationships in Sri Lanka. With the war over it is crucial that we inquire into the present state of this order and its ideological foundations in the Buddhist cosmic order. The goal of this research is not to accuse and thus feed into the emotive and volatile Sri Lankan context. It instead presents an account of the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism that is as dispassionate as possible in order to raise awareness and encourage Sinhalese to question their ‘common sense’ assumptions about themselves and other communities on the island, as well as the potentially divisive consequences they may have.

Certain limitations of the role of the researcher, however, need to be highlighted. CDA assumes that researchers cannot be neutral or objective, as they are embedded within the social structures they study. Their work is driven by political, economic or social motives and it is part of the ‘critical’ approach of CDA that researchers openly engage with these issues, making their own position, interests and values as transparent as possible (Wodak and Meyer 2016: 7; Wodak et al. 2009: 8). This is particularly important as CDA procedure is usually a hermeneutic process that involves the interpretation of text in order to grasp and produce meaning relations (Meyer 2001: 16). It is the researcher who engages with the text and their position will influence their interpretations:

What one ‘sees’ in a text, what one regards as worth describing, and what one chooses to emphasize in a description, are all dependent on how one interprets the text. (Fairclough 1989: 27)
Therefore, before proceeding to discuss how the research was conducted, the following section aims to make the position of this researcher as transparent as possible.

**The matter of the ‘I’**

The most important aspect of my relationship to this research is my position as a Western, non-Sri Lankan researcher. I speak neither Sinhala nor Tamil and did not grow up within the discourses, institutions and social practices that I study in this research. Apart from two months of fieldwork conducted in Sri Lanka in 2012 I have studied the country and its people from an ideological and spatial distance.

Not being immersed in the ideological space that I am studying has the advantage that I do not share the sets of beliefs and values of many Sinhalese people in Sri Lanka that may bias me in favour of certain ethnic interpretations or blind me to the very foundations of this ‘common sense’. At the same time I remain distanced from the Tamil position, too, further helping me to retain a neutral position when discussing the conflict. Yet, even as an ‘outsider’ I can only claim limited neutrality or objectivity. As Kapferer observes, Westerners cannot fully remain outside the ideological world and its interpretations when studying nationalism in Sri Lanka (Kapferer 2012: 37). And while I do not share the emotive bonds to the country’s history with its people, in navigating the controversies emerging from myths and legends I often found it difficult not to fall into the trap of discovering the ‘true’ story. My embeddedness within theoretical positions, most notably a Western-centric approach to nationalism, also needs to be recognised. It has decisively shaped how I conducted this research.

The distance between me, the researcher, and Sinhalese nationalism, my object of study, has also presented challenges that need to be engaged with. First, because the researcher holds a key role in the interpretation of discourse, the ideological distance between myself and Sinhalese nationalism can potentially widen the gap between my interpretations and those immersed in them, namely Sinhalese, but also Tamil and Muslim, people. My interpretations may lack subtle nuances because as a foreigner I cannot be familiar with all cultural characteristics of norms and rules of discourse that play a part in how language use is interpreted
and mediated by social actors (van Dijk 2001: 21). Second, I do not speak either of the two main languages in Sri Lanka, Sinhala and Tamil, thus I do not have direct access to discourses in local, non-English languages. Without the resources to have large amounts of data translated, this effectively limits the selection to texts produced in English language or where translations are available. It also again distances me from Sinhalese nationalism as many discourses where its ideological power is reproduced are not directly accessible to me.

These limitations, arising from a non-native position, faced by me and other Western researchers who have and continue to study Sri Lanka should be acknowledged and taken seriously. They do not, however, preclude meaningful research conducted by ‘outsiders’, as long as they are addressed during the data selection and analysis process. In the case of Sri Lanka, English, a remnant of British colonialism, remains an official language alongside Sinhala and Tamil, aiding the data selection and collection process. Most government agencies provide their websites and core documents in all three languages, allowing access to translations. We also find a number of major English-speaking newspapers on the island and I was able to converse with many Sri Lankans without the need for an interpreter during my fieldwork, aiding my understanding of the country and its people. The data analysis is necessarily selective as not all themes are relevant for Sinhalese nationalism. In order to identify those most relevant I relied on the findings of the literature review that highlights dominant themes of Sinhalese nationalism. Theorising nationalism within a constructionist framework also helps to ‘justify, theoretically, why certain interpretations and readings of discursive events seem more valid than others’ (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 25).

Overall, I have tried to approach the study of Sinhalese nationalism with an open mind, continuously questioning what seems too sure and true, and addressing challenges and limitations through a rigorous methodological and theoretical framework. At the same time I have tried to maintain a position as an outsider who is ideologically, emotionally and spatially removed from the subject to avoid charges of partisanship faced by many researchers on topics related to the conflict in Sri Lanka. All the while trying to do justice to the people whose lives are affected by the object of this research.
Exploring Nationalism with Official Discourses

Having discussed the methodological and theoretical aspects that inform this research, the remainder of this chapter outlines the data analysis process. It begins with an introduction to the data, including remarks on data selection, collection and analysis. It then provides a more detailed overview of the three data sets, history textbooks, presidential rhetoric and documentary films, and how they were analysed within a DHA framework utilising story-line analysis and rhetorical analysis. Through these methods we can analyse the themes and strategies across the data sets that allow us to discern subtle shifts and transformations as well as continuities in the discursive reproduction of Sinhalese nationalism within these official discourses.

An Introduction to the Data

The symbols and practices of Sinhalese nationalism are omnipresent in the public and private spheres of present-day Sri Lanka, visible in the country’s official flag and anthem as well as everyday symbols, like food, dress and music. Previous studies have explored various sites where Sinhalese national identity and nationalism have been manifested and reproduced, including public policies like housing projects and settlement schemes (Brow 1988), local rituals and rites of the state (Kapferer 2012; Roberts 1994), historical sites (Dewasiri 2013; Wickramasinghe 2013) and popular culture, for instance media and theatre (de Mel 2007). Kapferer (2012) in particular demonstrates how different practices and their discourses are permeated by similar ontological tropes, jointly reproducing dominant dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, but also providing sites of contestation and dissent.

This research is similarly interested in how Sinhalese nationalism is expressed and reproduced through social practices, but to investigate the effects of the end of the war it requires a methodology that first allows us to analyse content and form of nationalist ideologies in depth, and second can discern potential short-term ideological shifts within a comparatively immediate period of time within a wider historical context. This research thus focuses on discourses which express general ideological accounts more explicitly than other social practices (van Dijk 2007: 138). They articulate, enact and reproduce ideologies as well as challenge and
transform them and often provide the legitimation and justification for other ideological representations, for instance nationalist politics. Language use can also respond to and reflect changes in the social and political context more immediately than other practices, allowing us to establish a short-term trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism.

Even within discourses there is a wide variety of texts and talk that can potentially be used to study nationalist ideology. This research selected naturally occurring data available in English, which means it works with documents that were not produced specifically for this research but are everyday representations of Sinhalese nationalism not influenced by the researcher. These texts, especially the history textbooks and presidential rhetoric, are distributed widely and importantly they do not just represent the views of individual authors, but claim to represent the nation as a whole. They explicitly formulate core dimensions of nationalist ideology, presenting ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the past and present, producing the values and goals of the nation, and stressing commonalities over differences.

Unlike textbooks and speeches the documentary films are somewhat irregular as they are not a standard element of Sri Lankan official discourses. They are nonetheless of interest to this research, as they provide a unique insight into the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism shortly after the end of the war. They were specifically produced to examine the end of the war, investigated by this research as a potential turning point for Sinhalese nationalism, and provide an official narrative to the nation and the world amidst growing international criticism of the government’s conduct during the final stages of the war.

The corpus, consisting of six history textbooks, seventy speeches and three documentary films, furthermore allows us to establish a trajectory of the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism before and after 2009. The textbooks present a baseline, allowing us to analyse nationalist ideology in the two years before the end of the war. This is expanded by the investigation of twenty-seven speeches delivered between 2005 and early 2009 that similarly provide an insight into Sinhalese nationalism before the defeat of the Tamil Tigers. The analysis of forty-two post-war speeches then enables us to compare how themes and strategies of the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism have shifted or remained the same within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric after May 2009.
The documentaries, which were produced after and in response to the end of the war, then allow us to trace the themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric through other official discourses. As the speeches are by far the largest data set and allow the most direct comparison of material before and after the end of the war, their discussion is the most extensive and divided thematically over three chapters. The first two discuss the construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ respectively, the third examines the politics of nationhood.

The role of official discourses
This research focuses on elite constructions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology that have been and continue to be closely linked to politics in Sri Lanka. All texts studied are part of official discourses that were either directly produced or endorsed by the government. Such a top-down focus, however, does not discount the role of mass dissemination and consumption of nationalist ideologies (Sutherland 2012: 27). Van Dijk (1998) highlights that ideologies are both top-down and bottom-up. On the one hand, elites are usually in a position to construct and distribute their ideologies because they ‘control the means of ideological reproduction’ (van Dijk 1998: 180), first and foremost the access to discourse. On the other hand, ideas have to be shared and carried by a larger group of people, they have to resonate with the wider public to become a successful ideology.

The role of elites in driving Sinhalese nationalist ideology is well established (e.g. DeVotta 2005; Stokke 1998), but much of its potency is derived from the gradual hegemonisation of the social field and its diverse apparatuses (Rampton 2011: 254). Rampton argues that aspects of the Sinhalese nationalist imaginary, especially the link between nation, state and religion, have come to be shared by elites and non-elites jointly driving Sinhalese nationalism (Ibid.). Thus, while Sinhalese elites are in a privileged position to disseminate their preferred ideologies, these necessarily also reflect common themes of nationalist ideology shared more widely by the Sinhalese. The analysed texts are produced by elites, yet they interact with their wider audiences. The textbooks, for instance, are the product of the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Higher Education, led by political and academic elites. They are written for schoolchildren, the future citizens of the country, and mediated by
teachers who are also experiencing and participating in the discursive construction and reproduction of Sinhalese nationalism. These texts are only a small part of official discourses that interact and intersect with a large number of other discourses, social institutions and actors that in their entirety reproduce Sinhalese nationalist narratives.

This research cannot study Sinhalese nationalism in its entirety, if such an undertaking is even possible. We can discern common, dominant narratives that allow us to distinguish ‘Sinhalese’ nationalism from other ideologies, for instance its emphasis on Buddhism, Sinhalese language and culture, or recurring historical motifs, as the previous chapter demonstrated. These can tell us much about the modes of inclusion and exclusion before and after the end of the war, yet many of these are contested from within and outside of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. Elites in Sri Lanka are, after all, not limited to the Rajapaksa regime or even to Sinhalese elites, and conflicts between Sinhalese elites in the past and present highlight the fact that conflicting narratives may challenge the ruling elite’s construction of Sinhalese nationalism. Various actors mobilise and interpret these dimensions differently in different times and places, depending on their own strategic purposes and frames of reference. Ideologies, like nationalism, are also not static, they can respond to conflicts and challenges.

Any research that sets out to study Sinhalese nationalism is also faced with constraints on time, funds, and so on, and has to make choices about which aspects of the phenomenon to study. This research focuses on official discourses to identify core elements of the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism by Rajapaksa and his government, those Sinhalese elites who largely controlled access to discourse and the resources and apparatuses of the state between 2005 and 2015. It explores how their responses to the changing circumstances may indicate continuities or transformations in the underlying nationalist ideology and sheds light on its continuing relationship with politics that has had detrimental effects on the country in the past decades.

The data sets
Following the eclectic and multidisciplinary research design common to most studies in CDA, and particularly the discourse-historical approach, this research
combines various theories, data and methods as well as paying particular attention to the context in order to investigate its object of study.\textsuperscript{37} The three data sets, textbooks, speeches and documentaries, differ at times quite substantially in their format, presentation, audience and purpose, but they all contribute to the construction of meaning as they encourage certain interpretations of social reality within their readers or audiences (Wodak et al. 2009: 9). While analysed individually, these texts need to be understood as interrelated parts of a larger mosaic, a more extensive communicative process (Sauer 1997: 36) and attention needs to be paid to their intertextuality and interdiscursivity. While the subsequent chapters discuss the findings for all discourses separately, they highlight links between them in order to extrapolate the shared discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism.

This research works with data produced within the research period, 2005 to 2015. Below we discuss each set in more detail and highlight their potential for the study of nationalism as well as tested methodologies to analyse them. In general, texts selected for this research occurred naturally. They were not specifically produced for this research and are available to diverse audiences in the same form that they have been studied. Instead of relying on translations specifically for this research, only discourses available in English were selected. This has limited the range of potential data sets and insights into Sinhala discourses, but it allowed the researcher to scan and select texts without the need for continuous assistance by Sinhala speakers, which proved more feasible. Furthermore, textbooks and speeches are direct translations of the respective Sinhala texts, significantly reflecting their content and issues.

The analysis of six history textbooks establishes the starting point for the investigation of the trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism. These secondary level books are the most recent editions, published between 2007 and 2009. No new editions have been produced by the Rajapaksa regime after the war and there is little indication that the new government is planning significant changes within history textbooks or the history curriculum at large in the near future. In light of

\textsuperscript{37} This principle of triangulation is applied by Wodak and her colleagues (Reisigl and Wodak 2016; Wodak et al. 2009) mainly to add validity to the research and findings by minimising the risk of bias (Meyer 2001: 29).
the controversial nature of history in Sri Lanka, history textbooks are particularly interesting as they construct an official, albeit contested, historical narrative of the nation. They offer relevant insights into rather stable pre-2009 constructions of Sinhalese nationhood, establishing themes and strategies as a baseline for the subsequent analysis of the speeches and documentaries.

The rhetorical analysis focuses on seventy speeches of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Since the executive presidency was established in 1978, the presidents of Sri Lanka have played an important role in the country’s politics. Under Rajapaksa, the powers of the office were significantly expanded and as the president who was finally able to end the war, he was celebrated and gained immense popularity in the immediate aftermath of the victory. The rhetorical analysis facilitates the direct comparison of Rajapaksa’s discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism before and after 2009 within one data set. The speaker and many occasions remain the same, and the nature of rhetoric allows us to analyse the subtle, short-term shifts in direct response to the changing context. Through the speeches new contents can be introduced, while old ones are omitted or transformed to reflect shifting elements of nationalist ideology within a new context.

Lastly, the three analysed documentary films were produced after 2009 as part of an intensifying controversy about human rights violations allegedly committed by the government of Sri Lanka during the final stages of the war. They provide a unique post-war discourse that, although mainly a response to specific charges, provides insights into the emerging narratives of the war and immediate post-war period, and especially the place assigned to the Tamil community within them. The documentaries represent an extensive engagement with the end of the war, seeking to establish an official version for the historical record. The documentaries demonstrate how current events are justified and reconstructed within established national narratives, potentially perpetuating them. They also provide an opportunity to examine whether and how the themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric reappear in other official discourses.
**Working with the data**

As is typical for CDA studies, this research works with existing data. It focuses on the analysis of written and spoken texts, as well as supporting visuals like images or video footage. The textbooks and documentaries in particular are multimodal discourses using visual language in addition to written and spoken language that need to be studied in their entirety (Fairclough 1989: 27f.). Therefore, when the documentaries were transcribed by the researcher, special note was made of the images and video footage depicted, the speakers and other visual aspects. The documentaries had to be transcribed to work with them, the textbooks and speeches were available as texts. They were not modified during the analysis and write-up of the research, leaving spelling and grammar mistakes to ensure that meaning is not inadvertently changed by the researcher.

To study the trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism within the official discourses produced by Rajapaksa and his government the timeframe for the analysis was set from 2005 to 2015, Rajapaksa’s period of office. The data collection process began during fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2012, where, with the help of local academics and researchers, suitable and accessible data sets were refined. The history textbooks were acquired in the bookshop of the Ministry of Education in Colombo in July 2012. The collection of speeches also began during this visit, but continued alongside the preliminary data analysis until the end of 2014 to continuously up-date the selection. The speeches and documentaries were collected from online sources, mainly from the websites of different government agencies.

The qualitative analysis of the material was facilitated by Weft QDA, an open-source tool for the textual analysis of documents. Transcripts of the speeches and documentaries were imported from word documents into Weft QDA, where the material was coded according to thematic categories that were largely devised from the literature and textbook analysis and constantly refined for the speeches and documentaries. Relevant means and forms of realisation of the texts were also highlighted during this stage. The textbook analysis was conducted with the actual

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38 No data from 2015 is included though, as Rajapaksa lost the presidential election on January 8, 2015.

39 References for all data sets are included in Appendix B.
textbook corpus and only relevant sections were transcribed to be processed with Weft QDA.

The analytical framework
To analyse the discursive construction of nationalism across these texts, this research applies different methods within a DHA framework developed by Wodak and her colleagues (Wodak et al. 2009). In their work they study the construction of national identity in Austria in different discourses, including political speeches and interviews. They distinguish three interwoven dimensions of analysis also applied for this research: contents, strategies, and means and forms of realisation.

First, contents relate to the thematic areas of the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism. Following from the theoretical framework we conceptualise two overarching themes of Sinhalese nationalist ideology to structure the individual data sets. First, the construction of Sinhalese national identity. In this theme we study how boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are constructed from ethnic criteria, especially religion, myths of descent, sacred homelands and ethno-history. It explores the main beliefs about who is included in the nation, and who not, about its rightful place and its relationship to other groups. Second, the politics of nationhood or what is often referred to more generally as nationalism. This theme focuses particularly on the relationship between the nation and the state and other ideas related to the nation and its political mobilisation, such as national unity or the role of authoritarianism. We examine potential shifts within these dimensions after the end of the war and how the victory and peace enter the themes of official discourses, at times challenging existing themes, but mostly reaffirming traditional dimensions of Sinhalese national identity and nationalism. Despite the differences of the data sets, the identified thematic areas are very similar across them, indicating potential hegemonic elements of Sinhalese nationalism.

The second dimension highlighted by Wodak et al. are strategies, the more or less conscious methods that serve certain intentions or objectives, which find their realisation in discursive acts (2009: 32). Through strategies the available cultural resources, the thematic areas and their manifold narratives, can be mobilised, invented or reinvented for political goals, thus shaping the discursive construction
of particular nationalist ideologies. Wodak et al. distinguish four interwoven macro-strategies that are also salient throughout our data sets. First, constructive strategies aim to establish ideological dimensions, for instance national identity through unification and identification of ‘us’ and differentiation of ‘them’. Second, strategies of perpetuation seek to maintain and reproduce existing ideological dimensions. A special subgroup within this category are strategies of justification that seek to defend ‘tainted’ aspects of nationalism or its past. Third are strategies of transformation that challenge established ideological dimensions and their components and aim to transform them into alternatives as conceptualised by the producers of specific texts. Fourth, destructive strategies seek to dismantle existing constructs, often without providing new models to replace the old ones (Wodak et al. 2009: 33).

The various data sets differ in the dominant strategies they employ. The textbooks are rather stable forms of discourse and mainly use strategies of construction and perpetuation to construct knowledge, the official historical narrative of the nation, for their specific audiences, young schoolchildren. Speeches more directly interact with their immediate context and target varied audiences and occasions. They respond to contemporary challenges and due to their deliberative and persuasive character they include a larger variety of strategies. It is within Rajapaksa’s speeches particularly that we should expect to find an increase in strategies of transformation and dismantling in the post-war period if the military victory provided a momentum of change. Lastly, the documentary films predominantly use strategies of construction and justification to construct the end of the war within existing nationalist narratives in their response to national and international critics.

The third and final aspect of Wodak et al.’s framework are the means and forms of realisation. These are largely linguistic, including rhetorical devices such as metaphors, euphemisms, hyperboles and rhetorical questions. Given the multimodal nature of the data sets, however, other means and forms of realisation are also important for the discursive construction of nationalism, such as images or video footage used to support verbal communications. They mediate between the content and strategies of the texts that we explore in order to study Sinhalese nationalism. The linguistic representation of groups through active and passive
voice, for instance, can be a central means to differentiate ‘us’ and ‘them’ in order to construct a unified national identity.

Like the strategies used, the means and forms of realisation differ across the data sets, reiterating the need to use suitable methods to be able to explore Sinhalese nationalism within the peculiarities of these different texts. The following sections thus discuss in more detail how the textbooks, speeches and documentaries were analysed.

**History Textbooks**

Textbooks are an important part of the socialising process, reflecting the culture of which they are a part, providing knowledge, cultivating attitudes and transmitting values (Xochellis et al. 2001a: 11). History, in particular, is a subject that ‘tells us how we got to be who we are’ (Cole 2013: 206) and is often employed by countries ‘to form the national consciousness and national identity of the younger generation’ (Xochellis et al. 2001b: 44). Textbooks are thus an excellent source to study the discursive construction of nationalism in the ways their historical narratives incorporate certain dimensions of nationhood and exclude others. Due to their close relationship to the state, textbooks are susceptible to exploitation for ideological purposes (Ibid.) as means of ideological orientation and control by elites (Janmaat 2007: 308; Angelopoulos 2001: 255). The (selective) reading of the national past provided by textbooks may reflect and reproduce hegemonic nationalist ideologies. This is particularly salient where they are published by the state, as is the case in Sri Lanka, where the state has long held a monopoly over the production and distribution of textbooks.

After independence the Sri Lankan education system was reorganised from missionary schools into a predominantly state owned and managed public education system. It provides free education from kindergarten to university level, but also reflects the divisions characterising the country’s politics and society. Following the 1956 Sinhala Only Act *swabasha* education was introduced in the 1960s, meaning that schools teach in either of the two indigenous languages, Sinhala or Tamil. Even though in urban centres such as Colombo and Kandy trilingual schools teaching in English and both national languages exist, the
system continues to reinforce segregation by language from primary to higher education, including teacher training, until present day (Perera et al. 2004: 396).

Since 1980 the government provides a standard textbook for each subject from grades one to thirteen to all schools for free with little competition from private publishers. These standard textbooks have long been a controversial issue between the communities, as there is ‘a kind of obsession with history’ in Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2013: 94). In the 1990s reports pointed out a number of problems: schoolbooks were slow to incorporate curriculum changes, contained many grammatical and spelling errors, mono-ethnic and mono-religious bias, factual and contextual errors (Perera et al. 2004; Wickrema and Colenso 2003). From 1997 onwards educational reforms were enacted to address these issues and further the goal of national cohesion (Perera et al. 2004).40 As a result, a new curriculum and a textbook evaluation system were introduced with the goal of improving the content and production process of textbooks. It is against this background that the analysed textbooks need to be understood.

The corpus

This research analysed six history textbooks consecutively spanning Grades 7 to 11 for schoolchildren between the ages of ten and sixteen.41 They are the newest editions published in English by the Ministry of Education between 2007 and 2009, based on the latest curriculum from 2007 following Rajapaksa’s election in 2005. Following the directives of the ministry, they are written by researchers from the National Institute of Education and commissioned authors and should conform to the syllabus (Wickramasinghe 2013: 94). The standard history textbooks are available in three languages with the Sinhala editions being the most widely distributed and the English editions making up the smallest part. As a result of past reforms, authors of the Tamil editions are now able to include specific concerns and issues, for instance background information about Tamil customs and historical figures. The Tamil and Sinhala versions thus differ, while the English books are close translations from the Sinhala editions with only minor

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40 Major landmarks were the National Curriculum Policy and Process document in 2007 and the Multiple Book Option Programme in 2003.
41 The textbook for Grade 6 was not available and is therefore not included in the analysis.
changes, for instance the spelling of names, but the content and structure remain the same.42

The analysed textbooks are editions with a comparatively limited distribution, used mainly in urban, mostly Colombo, schools teaching in all three official languages. As close translations from the Sinhala versions, however, we can expect a high correspondence of content of the English editions to those in Sinhala with the widest distribution. A recent study of different textbooks in Sinhala and English by Perera (2009), for instance, highlights how they continue to include mono-ethnic and mono-religious bias despite education reforms, issues similar to those raised by this research. It should also be noted that while textbooks are an excellent source to study the discursive construction of an ideal-type nation and its core beliefs, they need to be understood within the students’ broader learning experience. Textbooks have a prevalent role as the central component of the teaching-learning process in Sri Lanka (Sørensen 2008: 430), but how their messages are mediated by readers and teachers remains a largely unexplored aspect in the Sri Lankan context.

**Story-line analysis**

Textbooks are special forms of written text, therefore the analysis draws on elements of textbook analysis in order to identify the contents, strategies, and means and forms of realisation relevant for the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism. A story-line analysis is utilised in order to study the ideological core dimensions of national identity and nationalism. Sleeter and Grant have developed this approach which focuses on analysing actors within the story-lines of textbooks. It investigates whose story is told, which group is active and resolving problems, how other groups appear, the extent to which these groups cause problems, and who the reader should sympathise with or learns most about (Sleeter and Grant 2011: 188f.). Analysing textbooks this way draws attention to the construction of national identity as well as its core ideological dimensions.

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42 Information on the content and distribution process of different language editions was provided to the researcher through personal correspondence by staff of the Educational Publications Department in January 2015.
The textbooks present who the nation is and who it is not by selecting historical narratives, including events and persons, and detailing traditions and cultural elements, while excluding others. They can construct or reproduce dominant narratives of nationhood as the official, state sanctioned version of history, presenting the ‘true’ essence of the nation. They do so mainly through text, for instance by labelling groups, using active or passive voices to characterise them or instances of reported speech. A linguistic tool unique to the textbooks are student activities that directly address the readers. They pose questions or tasks to the schoolchildren and actively include them in their discursive construction of the nation. The textbooks also use other forms of visualisation, for instance different formatting can draw attention to certain sentences or passages, and images, pictures and maps are included frequently to illustrate the texts. Such means and forms of realisation can be just as important to their messages as linguistic ones.

**Political Speeches**

Political speeches are a another kind of official discourse that can express, perpetuate and potentially transform nationalist ideology. Produced for a different purpose and a larger variety of audiences and occasions than textbooks, speeches are more immediate social actions that establish or sustain meaning (Martin 2014; Ensink 1997). They both represent ideas and shape the process by which ideas are created or maintained (Finlayson 2007: 557). They can be ‘tools and weapons of ideological debate’ (Skinner 2002, cited in Finlayson 2013: 313) as speakers seek to define or redefine situations and narratives. Speeches are linked closely to the context and specific strategic purposes for which they seek to construct, reproduce, transform or deconstruct meanings. Analysing speeches thus allows insights into the ideological position of the speaker and the ideological context within which they operate and situate their argument.

Speeches not only reflect and perpetuate ideologies, they also contribute to politics as they are related to the decision-making process (Sauer 1997: 63). Speakers can use different occasions to justify their policies, attack those of their opponents or attempt to persuade the audience and potential opponents of their point of view in order to make policies possible (Reisigl 2008: 246). Speeches can
thus play a role in mediating between nationalist ideology and politics, as a tool to justify and legitimate nationalist policies. They also contribute to identity politics. Speeches ‘aim to express common values of a political “in-group”’ (Ibid.) and in the case of speeches delivered by heads of state this group is usually the nation (Ensink 1997: 10). By representing and addressing the nation speakers can include and exclude individuals and groups from the nation. They do so by reproducing existing ideological modes of inclusion and exclusion, but rhetoric can also shift and modify existing meanings and discursive practices (Sauer 1997: 65).

Although the room for innovation is limited by structure and expectations of rhetoric, Sauer highlights in his analysis of a speech by former Dutch Queen Beatrix that speakers can subtly shift the focus of existing discussions, set a different tone or introduce new subjects (Id.: 41). Political speeches are thus an excellent medium to analyse potential shifts within the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism after 2009.

**The corpus**

As part of this research, seventy speeches were analysed. Twenty-seven of those were delivered before and forty-three after the end of the war. These speeches differ significantly in length, topic, function, audiences and with respect to their occasion, but all were delivered by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa between November 2005 and January 2015. The majority was delivered in Sri Lanka to domestic audiences, but fifteen speeches given abroad have also been included to investigate whether the construction of nationalism differs if foreign audiences are addressed.

The classical tradition of rhetoric distinguishes three ideal typical genres of speeches: the judicial, the deliberative and the epideictic. In modern practice these genres often overlap and the forms, types and functions of speeches have changed considerably since Aristotle developed his rhetorical genre theory (Reisigl 2008: 244). It is nonetheless useful to keep in mind how the genres express ideas differently according to their social function, occasion and place of delivery. Speeches from the epideictic genre, usually given at social occasions like commemorations, are concerned with the contemplation of political values and consent (Id.: 244), oriented to the present and the feelings of the audience, often
rehearsing common values (Finlayson 2007: 556). Deliberative speeches are frequently presented in front of political assemblies, for instance the parliament or international fora. They are concerned mostly with the future, presenting differing views on political decisions (Reisigl 2008: 244) and trying to convince or deter from certain courses of action (Finlayson 2007: 556). Lastly, the judicial or forensic genre is usually found in courts and is concerned with prosecution or defence in order to secure justice (Ibid.).

The speeches selected for this research fall mostly within the epideictic and to a lesser extent the deliberative genre, representing a wide variety of recurring and unique occasions. The selection includes annual addresses on Independence Day and to the United Nations General Assembly as well as speeches marking special occasions such as the end of the war, the opening of a national exhibition and the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Annual epideictic speeches have been found to be particularly useful for the analysis of Sinhalese nationalism, as they seek to (re)construct political values and consent throughout a changing context yet within a comparatively stable setting. No speeches from the judicial genre are included, but elements of the genre are interspersed throughout the speeches, particularly evident in Rajapaksa’s attempts to defend or justify the past.

Authors & translators
Official transcripts in English were collected for all speeches, mainly from the website of the former president. The respective authors and interpreters of the speeches are unknown, but it is very unlikely that Rajapaksa wrote and/or translated them himself. Instead, depending on the occasion speeches were provided by the president’s media division or ministries such as that for foreign affairs. For this research the question of authorship is sidelined and like Wodak et al. we do not distinguish between the speaker and author of the text, assuming

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43 A complete overview can be found in the Appendix B.
44 In December 2011 it was reported that staff members of British public affairs firm Bell Pottinger claimed to have written Rajapaksa’s speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2010. These allegations were denied by the government, although it reportedly confirmed later that it had paid the company for lobbying on behalf of Sri Lanka in Europe, following increasing criticism after the end of the war, including the Channel 4 documentary (BBC 2011; Newman and Wright 2011). It is not possible to independently verify these claims, but we should at least consider external influences in the production of the speeches.
that ‘the person who delivers the speech is always solely responsible for its content’ (2009: 71). More important than authorship is the issue of translation arising from analysing English transcripts of speeches delivered in Sinhala. The problem of equivalence, the level of similarity between a source and target text, has long been a central issue in the field of translation studies (Schäffner 2004). Due to differences in the grammatical systems of languages target texts are necessarily adjusted in the target language. Additionally texts need to be adapted for the target audience which may lead to shifts in meaning within the target text (Blum-Kulka 2010).

In the case of the textbooks, the English editions are produced by the same department, within the same context and for the same audience. Their content continues to be determined by the curriculum and there is no need to adapt the texts for a different target audience, thus it can be assumed that the content remains substantially the same. A similar argument can be made for the translated speeches provided by the office of the president alongside Sinhala and Tamil transcripts. Like the production process of textbooks and speeches, their ‘translation is embedded in institutional practices, which in turn are determined by institutional policies and ideologies’ (Schäffner 2004: 120). During the process of translation linguistic elements of the speeches are changed, such as syntax or individual words in order to make them suitable for the target language. This means that some nuance will inevitably be lost when analysing translations, especially within the means and forms of realisation. General themes and strategies, however, can still be explored as these limitations have to be acknowledged but do not lessen the benefits of these sources for this research.

**Audiences**

An important aspect of rhetorical analysis is how arguments may be adapted for different audiences, especially if we are interested in how Rajapaksa constructs a Sri Lankan nation that has been contested since independence. It raises the question of how he may address or acknowledge this, for instance by presenting slightly different versions of the nation to different audiences. Exploring this issue, however, is difficult for several reasons. First, due to the mass media and modern communications technologies audiences have grown considerably in size
and diversity. Some of Rajapaksa’s speeches can be found on online video portals and social networking sites, and many more were in full or part reproduced in the national media. Thus, the indirect audiences of the speeches include many more individuals and groups than those present during the speech. Audiences and their engagement with speeches become ever more complex and diverse, posing challenges for the speaker’s ability of persuasion as it becomes increasingly difficult to target specific audiences and their expectations, which can lead to contradictions or intentional vagueness.

Second, we can clearly distinguish between speeches for domestic and international audiences, the latter also including those delivered in Sri Lanka but addressing primarily foreign audiences. And while we found some differences between speeches for these two audiences within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, for instance more appeals to logos internationally and to pathos nationally, as well as some themes that are absent in either category as they are specific to certain occasions, overall there are no significant differences within the relevant themes across these audiences. A more pertinent distinction would be that of domestic audiences according to ethnicity to see if Rajapaksa’s constructions of national identity differ when addressing different communities. Such a comparative analysis cannot be done systematically within this research as the exact ethnic composition of audiences is usually unknown, except for speeches delivered to very limited audiences like in parliament or at the all-party conference.

One way to distinguish domestic audiences would be by location, as the general settlement patterns of ethnic communities across Sri Lanka may at least provide an indication of the majority of the audience. Yet, of all analysed speeches delivered in Sri Lanka only one was given within the areas predominantly settled by minorities, namely the north and east. Apart from Rajapaksa’s Independence Day speech given in Trincomalee, a major port city in the Eastern Province, all speeches were delivered in the predominantly Sinhalese south, the vast majority in Colombo. Even the ‘New Dawn in the East’ was celebrated there in July 2007. The corpus of speeches for this research does not contain all speeches delivered by Rajapaksa during his decade as president. From media reports we know he visited cities in the north and east and delivered
addresses there, but there were no full transcripts available to include those into this analysis.

Third, Rajapaksa delivered speeches primarily in Sinhala, with the exception of those intended for foreign audiences that were given in English. Thus, non-Sinhala speaking members of the minority communities have to rely on translations from government websites or media reports if they wish to access Rajapaksa’s speeches. A noteworthy exception are short parts delivered in Tamil included in some post-war speeches. On four separate occasions (VarS 2009c; IndD 2010; IndD 2013; VicD 2009) Rajapaksa directly addressed the Tamil-speaking people, an important gesture that offers a limited insight into how he may have adapted his rhetoric specifically for minority communities. These sections are too short and sparse for a comprehensive analysis, but they do include some of the most explicit appeals to Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’. They perpetuate Rajapaksa’s larger narratives and highlight how he actively sought to include minority communities into his construction of the Sri Lankan nation. While the language of delivery restricted the accessibility of Rajapaksa’s speeches, the nation he addressed and claimed to represent was explicitly inclusive. It is this ideal national audience, whether it existed in reality or not, which Rajapaksa both constructed and addressed that is of particular interest for this research.

**Rhetorical political analysis**

For the analysis of the speeches the CDA approach is supplemented with tools of rhetorical political analysis to fully comprehend their unique features. Rhetoric, the study of the practice of speech and persuasion (Martin 2014: 1), explores how ideas are fashioned into arguments in order to persuade the audience at specific moments and locations (Id.: 9). Ideologies are manifested in these speech acts, as they condition the thinking of speakers and their choices of arguments. At the same time speech acts interact with the context, responding to events or challenges, and seeking to persuade those who do not yet think within the

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45 The effects are mitigated to an extent in Colombo, which has a large Tamil and Muslim population and most have at least a basic comprehension of Sinhala.

46 Appendix C provides a detailed discussion of one speech to illustrate the practical application of the methodological framework and particularly the rhetorical political analysis.
ideology in question (Finlayson 2012: 75). Basically, rhetorical acts seek to persuade audiences to view the matter at hand through the ideological frames presented by the arguments of the speaker. Rhetorical analysis offers the tools to investigate the ‘concrete modes of address and argumentation’ that allow us to understand how meaning is constructed through language (Id.: 12, original emphasis). Investigating the content and structure of Rajapaksa’s arguments and how he seeks to persuade audiences of them allows an insight into the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalist ideology that is both expressed through and affected by speeches.

This analysis again includes examining the linguistic means and forms of realisation, especially rhetorical devices used to (re)define situations, for instance Rajapaksa’s frequent euphemisms to frame military operations during the final stages of the war as ‘humanitarian’ or ‘rescue’ operations. Furthermore, the content and strategies of the speeches depend especially on the persuasive force of the arguments through three classic modes of persuasive appeal: logos, ethos and pathos. Appeals to logos seek to provide rational arguments in their attempt to convince the audience that certain conclusions follow naturally from premises through logical justifications. Appeals to ethos draw their persuasive force from the authority and character of the speaker. Last, appeals to pathos aim to shape the emotions of the audience to increase the persuasive effect (Martin 2014: 59-65; Finlayson 2012: 759ff.). Which appeal the speaker will select depends on the occasion and issue at hand, but often all three are used together to varying degrees.

Importantly, persuasion takes place at the level of premises, not conclusions:

political actors do not try to get an audience to agree to conclusions to a shared premise but to share a premise, to draw on a stock of common possible conceptions, elevate one above the others and on this basis ‘naturally’ conclude something. (Finlayson 2013: 318)

Finlayson describes this as ‘the way in which ideologies may seek to “invent” common sense’ (2012: 763), echoing our earlier discussions of the relationship between ideology, power and discourse, whereby he specifically looks at rhetoric as a vehicle of ideology, instead of discourses in general. Martin similarly points out that the audience needs to accept the presented premise to reach the same conclusion as the speaker (2014: 59). This is done through the persuasive appeals chosen by the speaker, but even within appeals to logos not all steps of the
argumentative structure are necessarily visible. Premises might be missing, hidden or implied, logical steps to reach certain conclusions are not demonstrated, or conclusions suppressed (Id.: 61). Such enthymemes leave parts of the arguments unexpressed, drawing on ‘notions possessed by everybody’ (Finlayson 2013: 318). The enthymeme is powerful because it is a form of reasoning that invites listeners silently to acknowledge the truth of a claim, to make the logical connections themselves, and so become subtly complicit with the speaker’s reasoning (Martin 2014: 61).

The audience thus becomes a participant in the process of ideological reasoning, aligning premises and conclusions through common sense (Finlayson 2012: 762f.).

The analysis of Rajapaksa’s speeches uses the available tools of rhetorical political analysis to investigate the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism before and after the end of the war. Through the style and argumentative structure of the speeches we can analyse how Rajapaksa’s persuasive speech may perpetuate or transform the ideological context within which it takes place. One aspect of rhetoric that cannot be analysed within the scope of this research is that of delivery. The performance of speech and paralinguistic tools, such as body and voice, available to the speaker are also important to the persuasive effect and reception of the speech (Martin 2014: 83), but cannot be examined through the available transcripts. Thus, the discussion of the speeches focuses only on the analysis of their linguistic dimension.

**Documentary Films**

At first glance documentary films are not an obvious source for the study of nationalism. They do not feature the nation as explicitly as textbooks, which present the official national history, or presidential rhetoric, which claims to represent the nation. Yet, as part of the mass media documentaries, and films in general, can play an important part in the discursive construction of nationalist ideology. The social impact of audio-visual narratives, its power to transmit cultural values to a wide audience and its role in the construction of individual and group identities, thus has become a growing field of enquiry for critical discourse analysts (Lawless 2014).
Ashuri describes television as a ‘significant site of a nation’s culture’ (2005: 423) as it offers cultural representations of the nation to the public. Documentary creators in particular interpret the nation’s past, offering a coherent narrative framework, based on shared memories, values and symbolic resources that are reproduced as they are presented (Id.: 424). Lawless (2014: 80) further highlights how representations of individuals and groups within the language and images of films may reinforce or deconstruct existing preconceptions of the audience and establish ‘us’ and ‘them’. Their stories present events, in the case of documentaries actual, non-fictional ones that can form part of the remembering and forgetting of the nation. Documentary films can actively produce, preserve and retell a shared memory to frame the nation through their stories (Ashuri 2005: 424ff.). What is essential is less the actual events portrayed and the level of accuracy, but the version of reality the films construct for their viewers. It is this narrative, its heroes and villains, that provides a glimpse of their discursive construction of post-war Sinhalese nationalism.

As opposed to the speeches, which fall within the deliberative and epideictic genres of rhetoric, the documentaries are concerned less with the present or future than with the immediate past. Their narratives provide a defence, a justification of the recent actions and events of the final stages of the war, countering other ‘forensic’ investigations of that period. Through the representation of actors and events the documentary films seek to shape a desired official memory for the nation and beyond. They do not explicitly mention or address the nation, yet their actors are familiar elements of the ‘Sri Lankan’ nation and their representations throughout the films allow us to analyse who is included or excluded from ‘us’ as well as the relationship between these groups. The documentaries also provide a unique insight into the construction of Sinhalese nationalism after 2009, as they are not only located within the post-war period, but represent a direct response to and engagement with the end of the war.

The corpus
Between August 2011 and March 2012 four documentaries were produced as a response to international criticism against the government of Sri Lanka: Lies Agreed Upon, Freedom Speaks, Ruthless and Shadows of Terror. Three of those
were produced by the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, while Freedom Speaks was produced by a group of filmmakers under the direction of a young filmmaker, Suneth Malinga Lokuhewa. Although produced independently, this documentary is very similar in content, structure and material to the government films and acknowledges unspecified support received from the ministry in its end credits. As it is presented on the ministry’s website along the other films it is here analysed as part of the government’s official discourse on framing the end of the war using the documentary medium. The final film, Shadows of Terror, presents a slightly cut version of Lies Agreed Upon and some additional material from Ruthless. It does not include any new, original material and is therefore not discussed separately in this analysis.

The documentary films are between thirty minutes and one hour long and include a narrator, images, video footage and interviews. They use a ‘voice-of-authority’ commentary, a widely used technique that can effectively introduce new characters and summarise facts (Ashuri 2005: 433). Instead of using only narrative voice-overs, the films put faces on their narrators. Minoli Ratnayake presents the government documentaries, while Dushan Vaas narrates ‘Freedom Speaks’. The films are similar in content and setup, as they were all produced within the same context as part of the government’s campaign against the claims made by Channel 4 and the UN report. Lies Agreed Upon and Shadows of Terror were released as immediate responses to the two Channel 4 videos and the former directly addresses the claims made by Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields.

All three documentaries are produced in English to make them easily accessible for primarily international audiences, including foreign governments and publics as well as the widespread Tamil diaspora. The narrators and some witnesses speak English and English subtitles are provided by the film makers for the interview footage in Tamil. The government documentaries were screened in parliaments around the world and special screenings were offered to UN members to provide the government’s perspective in response to a Channel 4 documentary and international reactions. They were also screened on national TV, accessible to English-speaking members of all communities, and Sinhala and Tamil versions are available online, too. The Tamil witness accounts are subtitled, making it possible for Tamil speaking communities to compare the witnesses’ comments
and their translations, thus precluding possible accusations of distortions of their accounts.

**Analysing documentaries**

The analysis of the documentary films again investigates the material within the framework of Wodak et al., focusing on the content, strategies and forms of realisation. We apply the framework developed by Ashuri (2005) to study the construction of national consciousness in a co-produced television documentary, which is based on narrative theory and is similar to the story-line analysis applied for the textbooks. Her categorisation identifies conventions for portraying the nation and its narrative in audio-visual narratives, highlighting five elements: the actors, their roles, place, story and language (Id.: 431). The analysis of the documentary films investigates who is acting and viewing, who the heroes and villains are, and how they are represented. It examines which events and places are depicted or left out as well as the language used, asking who is speaking, what is said, or not, and how.

The analysis focuses on both linguistic and visual means to capture the complexity of the audio-visual narratives of the documentaries through a multimodal approach. The films tell their stories mainly through the narration of the presenters and interviews with Tamil witnesses. Thus, for the most part the images show the speakers in studio settings, but additional video footage and images from the war period are included to support the presented arguments. Exploring the documentaries shows how ‘us’, the nation, is constructed during a period of change and challenges, and how this post-war nation can make sense of recent events within available national narratives and reinvigorating them in turn.

**Conclusion**

As a precursor to the following chapters, which present the findings of the analysis of textbooks, speeches and documentaries, this chapter has outlined the benefits of a CDA approach to the study of Sinhalese nationalism within official discourses. In light of post-war events and speculations it has highlighted the need for a more in-depth understanding of how the defeat of the LTTE has affected Sinhalese nationalist ideology. Under Rajapaksa opportunities for reconciliation and political reforms were spurned in favour of the regime’s consolidation of
power. This was supported by Sinhalese nationalism, which continues to play a major role in Sri Lankan politics, providing the ideological space for policies, encounters and conversations. Through official discourses elites seek to shape the way the post-war period is perceived, they can define the terms of engagement and what is included or excluded from the agenda.

This chapter has argued that language use, among other social practices, plays an important part in expressing and reproducing ideologies, and has outlined the tools used to analyse the official discourses selected for this research. It has also pointed out the critical stance taken by this research that does not seek to accuse, but to question and engage with the way Sinhalese nationalism may continue to provide the basis for unequal power relations between communities in Sri Lanka despite the end of the war.
Chapter 4

Nation and Nationalism in History Textbooks

As a starting point for studying the trajectory of Sinhalese nationalism between 2005 and 2015, this chapter discusses the discursive construction of its core dimensions in a current set of history textbooks. Textbooks are a powerful tool for the construction of a national consciousness and identity. They reflect the culture from which they emerge and are thus an excellent source for the study of nationalism in a given society. The analysed textbooks provide a rather stable construction of Sinhalese nationalism within official discourses during the final stages of the war and they are still used in schools today, reproducing dominant themes also identified within the wider literature as highlighted in chapter two. Overall, the present editions continue to construct historical narratives that do not engage with the controversies about the past in Sri Lanka, but chronicle the rise and fall of the glorious Sinhalese nation criticised in past editions:

History as a subject that interprets the past rather than glorifies it, is unrecognisable in these textbooks, which offer children a narrative of the glorious days before invaders from India and colonial powers shattered the equilibrium of society ushering in modernity. (Wickramasinghe 2013: 94)

Employing a story-line analysis, this chapter highlights how the textbooks construct a version of history that presents an exclusive interpretation of nationhood and sovereignty. They establish the Sinhalese majority as the Sri Lankan nation, whose superior qualities place them as the sole rightful rulers of the island. Subsequently, the protection of this nation from internal and external ‘others’ emerges as a core theme throughout the textbooks. Drawing on controversial chronicles, the historical narratives of the textbooks reproduce the link between the Sinhalese nation, Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state central to an exclusive Sinhalese nationalist ideology. They furthermore incorporate the readers into their construction of Sinhalese nationalism by encouraging their participation in an authoritarian patriotism.

47 For other studies that have extensively demonstrated the potential of textbooks to study national identities and nationalism, see for instance Provenzo (2011), Janmaat (2007), Abens (2009), Cikar (2001), Konstantinidou (2001), Stojanovic (2001) and Xochellis et al. (2001).
The analysis begins with a discussion of the construction of national identity through identification and differentiation in positive representations of ‘us’ and negative representation of ‘others’. These sections highlight the construction of the Sinhalese as the sole nation of Sri Lanka through the language and story-lines of the textbooks. They also examine the ethnic construction of nationhood within a selective historical narrative that accentuates Buddhism. The portrayal of ‘others’ as a constant threat to the nation strengthens its exclusive identity and emphasises the need for a unitary Sinhalese Buddhist state discussed in the next section. Here we highlight how the textbooks establish the legitimacy of Sinhalese Buddhist rule and link the protection of the nation and state to national unity through overarching antithetic narratives. The chapter concludes with an examination of how the representations of historical figures and student activities perpetuate an authoritarian framework within which schoolchildren are educated as future citizens of the country.

**The Nation**

The first part of this chapter discusses the discursive construction of national identity within the history textbooks. The nation is at the heart of every nationalism and ‘is crucial in bringing together the diverse strands inherent in each manifestation of nationalist ideology to form a more or less coherent world-view’ (Sutherland 2005: 7). Thus any discussion of Sinhalese nationalism needs to begin with an examination of who the nation is it promotes, who is included or excluded, what criteria unify its members against outsiders and how it can be mobilised.

Three aspects illustrate how the Sinhalese lay claim to the elusive Sri Lankan nation at large. First, we argue that the language of the textbooks conflates the concepts of nation and ethnic group, constructing the majority community as the nation of Sri Lanka. This is reiterated by the coverage of events and heroes that shows little concern for cultural and religious diversity, sidelining minority communities and focusing nearly exclusively on the Sinhalese. Second, we discuss how the historical narratives of the textbooks support this Sinhalese-dominated construction of nationhood by reproducing a mytho-history that presents myths and legends of the *Mahāvamsa* as official history. The analysed
heroes and traditional symbolic resources, most importantly Buddhism, presented as the national heritage, illustrate how the textbooks reflect and promote core ideological dimensions of an exclusive Sinhalese nationalism. Third, the depictions of ‘them’, both internal and external non-nationals who pose a threat to the nation and state, are examined. The negative representations of ‘others’ reinforce the boundaries between the Sinhalese nation and minority communities and unify it against the omnipresent threat of fragmentation and disorder.

**The Sinhalese as the Nation of Sri Lanka**

When studying Sinhalese nationalism it seems obvious who the nation in question is: the Sinhalese, the majority community in Sri Lanka speaking Sinhala and professing Buddhism. Language and religion are widely acknowledged as markers of the different communities by scholars, bureaucrats, politicians and members of the communities themselves. The history textbooks, however, provide the history of the country and its people as a whole. As ‘texts of national identity’ (Konstantinidou 2001: 316) they depict an ideal nation, who is included and excluded from it, how it should behave, and what its core ideas and values are. Within the context of Sri Lanka where the state itself has been contested for decades we need to ask who the nation is that these standard history textbooks construct. Analysing the linguistic features and content of the textbooks it becomes clear that instead of an inclusive construction of the nation, they conflate ‘Sri Lankan’ and ‘Sinhalese’. They establish the Sinhalese as the nation of Sri Lanka, frequently perpetuating the belief shared by many among the majority community ‘that Sri Lanka is a nation exclusively for the Sinhalese Buddhists’ (DeVotta 2007: 32).

**Naming the nation**

Throughout the history textbooks the terms ‘Sinhalese’, ‘Buddhists’ and ‘Sri Lankans’ are frequently used interchangeably for rulers, people and the nation in general. In chapter three of the Grade 7 book, for instance, the labels ‘Sinhala kings’, ‘Sri Lankan rulers’ or just ‘Sinhalese’ are used in turn without any
This conflation of labels can be observed within and between chapters and textbooks, suggesting that the ethnic denotation ‘Sinhalese’ is virtually the same as the national category ‘Sri Lankan’. This is heightened by the absence of clear definitions or explanations of these terms in the textbooks.

The following quote illustrates how within a few sentences religious, ethnic and national labels are subtly equated:

Anagarika Dharmapala rescued Buddhagaya, the highly venerated holy place of the Buddhists. Sri Lankans must be grateful to Anagarika Dharmapala his hardwork resulted it belonging to Buddhist. Therefore Sri Lankans have the opportunity to worship this great place where Prince Siddhartha attained Buddhahood. (History 9 2009: 70)

This section discusses Dharmapala, a leader of the Buddhist revivalist movement, who promoted the return to an ‘authentic’ Buddhism and racial unity (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 92ff.). The quote implies that ‘Sri Lankans’ should be thankful for the ability to worship as ‘Buddhists’, yet not all Sri Lankans are Buddhists, thus subtly equating the Sinhalese community with the Sri Lankan nation. Linguistically and contextually there is no distinction drawn between national (‘Sri Lankan’), religious (‘Buddhist’) and ethnic (‘Sinhalese’) labels, even though these three concepts may refer to different groups with intersecting but not necessarily congruent membership criteria. The use of labels allows the Sinhalese majority to monopolise the national identity of Sri Lanka.

The implied sameness of the ‘Sri Lankans’ and ‘Sinhalese’ is further reiterated through the strong semantic associations between ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘nation’. While the reader will not find phrases such as ‘Tamil nation’ within the textbooks, in different stories the ‘Sinhalese nation’ or the ‘Sinhala nation’ appears as the main actor instead of the ‘Sri Lankan nation’ these labels represent. In one of them King Rajasinha II is reported to have desired to ‘become “Trisinhaladhishward”’, the emperor of the three Sinhale’ after 1630 (History Grade 8 2008: 7). By using ‘three Sinhale’ instead of Sri Lanka, a linguistic

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48 To assist the reader to locate quotes within the relevant textbooks and grades, the referencing of textbooks deviates from the norm, citing book titles instead of author names for better clarity. The full references can be found in Appendix B.

49 As highlighted in chapter three, quotes have not been changed and show spelling and grammatical errors from the originals.

50 The ‘three Sinhale’ or ‘Tri Sinhale’ is a term used by medieval state documents to denote the entire island divided into three kingdoms (Sivasundaram 2007: 936).
connection is also invoked between the majority community, the nation, and the state, a link discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Dissecting who the nation represents is crucial, as the textbooks do not only support certain constructions of national identity by representing the nation, but they also address its youngest members. The readers of the textbooks, the young citizens, are frequently directly addressed by the textbooks and included in their ideal nation. The textbooks use ‘us’ or ‘we’ to connect the reader to the nation on many occasions, for instance ‘we as Sri Lankans’ (History 9 2009: 125), ‘the culture of our nation’ (Id.: 73), 'we, including school children, the youth, the learned, the elders, the politicians and all the others’ (Ibid.). The readers are encouraged to identify with the nation, its heroes and values, as well as to participate in its activities. The textbooks invoke a bond between the members of the nation and create a sense of solidarity between the reader and the ideal nation. It is text passages like the following poem though that demonstrate how it is actually the majority community, the Sinhalese, who are addressed:

As long as I remember the brave Sinhala nation,
As long as I have my great royal blood,
I'll never shed tears
So, Goodbye my honoured Mother Lanka (History 9 2009: 15)

Selective story-lines

Besides labelling, history and memory are important building blocks of national identity and solidarity (Smith 1999: 9f.). The history curriculum can serve as a ‘memory agent’ that helps to crystallise the nation’s collective memory (Podeh 2000, cited in Al-Haj 2005: 53). The selection of events, personalities and narratives to be included or excluded from the historical narrative of the textbooks are crucial in determining what is admitted into the collective memory of the ideal nation, how events and actors are characterised, justified or judged within the textbooks. They should not, however, be read as accurate representations of the past. They rather offer a certain interpretation of historical ‘facts’ considered as important enough to teach students.

Before discussing the content of the story-lines in more depth, we should point out the dominance of the Sinhalese in the overall coverage of the textbooks. It is the Sinhalese community who is the main focus of their historical narratives, while minorities often receive only brief references compared to the extensive
coverage of Sinhalese heroes and customs. The last chapter in the Grade 7 textbook, for instance, offers a brief overview of some of the ‘principal’ kingdoms following the downfall of Polonnaruwa as well as the ‘provincial kingdom’ in Jaffna (History Grade 7 2007: 119). In the introductory paragraph the Tamil kingdom is immediately distinguished from the Sinhalese kingdoms through this linguistic depiction implying its inferiority. The four Sinhalese kingdoms together receive coverage of six pages followed by seven pages about the lifestyle of the people in these kingdoms. By contrast, the Tamil kingdom receives one page on the second last page of the book, presenting it as a mere afterthought (History Grade 7 2007: 120-134). Similarly the Grade 9 textbook presents a short overview of the three main religions in Sri Lanka: nine pages are devoted to Buddhism, one and two thirds to Hinduism, and Islam receives less than a page (History 9 2009: 62-73).

The textbooks provide a history that is driven by heroes (Wickramasinghe 2013: 95), dominated by Sinhalese actors with markedly few Tamil or Muslim heroes. Most of the outstanding individuals through which the textbooks tell history are identified as Sinhalese, such as the great kings Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I or politicians like D.B. Jayatillake and SWRD Bandaranaike. The above discussed labelling and the selection of main heroes places the majority community in the most active role. The textbooks do not entirely overlook other communities on the island, as Tamils and to a lesser extend Muslims appear as actors at different times, yet they are sidelined and their role throughout history is minimised. It is the Sinhalese community who deal with problems and who we learn most about throughout the textbooks.

Even national problems, such as the independence struggle, are owned by the Sinhalese. The fight against the colonisers is portrayed not as a ‘Sri Lankan’ struggle, but as a fight for ‘the independence of the Sinhalese nation’ (History 9 2009: 27). Similarly it is the Sinhalese leaders of the independence movements who ‘worked closely with the Sinhalese population to gain independence’ (Id.: 81) who are emphasised in the depictions of events presented by the textbooks. Throughout the textbooks large parts of the history of Sri Lanka are constructed as purely Sinhalese, establishing a dominant role for the Sinhalese as the most suitable community to control the fortunes of the country. This Sinhalese-centric
ideal of ‘Sri Lankan’ identity is furthermore perpetuated by the content of historical narratives drawing on ethnic symbols and myths associated exclusively with the majority community.

**Ethnic Dimensions of Nationhood**

The construction of the Sinhalese as the Sri Lankan nation is not only evident in the language and coverage of the textbooks, but also more subtly in the ethnic heritage they naturalise as the foundation of the nation. All nations and nationalisms ‘are cultural, in one way or another’ (Özkırımlı 2005: 27), but constructing nationhood mainly from ethnic dimensions such as religion, culture or selective myths can lead to a high degree of cultural distinctiveness (Smith 1971: 254). While this provides an important basis for solidarity within the nation, it also creates durable exclusive boundaries and can lead to conflict with other groups with opposing claims to the same history or territory (Smith 1999: 9).

In the following we discuss the specific myth-symbol complex, the myths, memories and symbols that shape national identity (Smith 1986: 57), constructed throughout the textbooks to examine their ideal nation and how groups are included and excluded through the selective mobilisation of symbolic resources. We examine the positivist history constructed by the textbooks from disputed sources and controversial myths, as well as the central link between the nation and Buddhism that significantly shapes the historical narratives of the textbooks. These are based nearly exclusively on Sinhalese heritage, naturalising the majority community as the Sri Lankan nation, while marginalising minority communities. Their narratives can potentially perpetuate a chauvinistic mindset that holds ‘all things Sinhalese are more virtuous and noble than anything promoted elsewhere’ (DeVotta 2007: 32) by constructing the Sinhalese as the ‘chosen people’ with a special link to the island’s territory.

**The ancient nation**

Chapter two provided a brief discussion of the contested nature of history in Sri Lanka. Thus, while the history textbooks offer an official version of history, it is not a consensus history. The story-line analysis reveals that the textbooks follow the tradition of past editions that have been criticised for their reliance on questionable sources, particularly the *Mahāvamsa*, and perpetuation of a selective
and Sinhalese-centric version of history. Their narratives select events and heroes to construct the shared memories of the nation which the members should commit to (Renan 1996), establishing a sense of continuity that asks readers to identify with a particular version of the nation in the past and present. This official memory is shaped by the legacy of historiography of the late colonial period, where historical sources and history in general were interpreted through the lens of modern theories of racism and nationalism, crafting a history of an ancient Sinhalese civilisation and of primordial antagonisms between the communities on the island (Gunawardana 1990; Rogers 1990).

The story-lines portray a modern nation that is traced back to ancient times, establishing it as a natural and timeless entity. Importantly, it is a distinctively Sinhalese nation whose memory is presented. The textbooks include direct time references to indicate a long history of Sri Lanka as a unitary country under Sinhalese rule, for instance the ancient Anuradhapura Kingdom ‘remained the capital city of Sri Lanka for a long period of about 1400 years’ (History Grade 7 2007: 59) and Sri Lanka is claimed to have existed ‘as an independent land … with a history of more than two thousand years’ (History 9 2009: 16) before the British took over the whole island in 1815. Phrases such as ‘according to tradition’ (History Grade 7 2007: 88), ‘from the ancient days’ (History Grade 8 2008: 22) or ‘traditional society’ (History 9 2009: 58) are spread throughout the history textbooks to characterise the nation and its culture.

It is within this framework that the reader learns about simultaneously existing kingdoms in Kotte, Kandy and Jaffna in the early sixteenth century. They are described as ‘administrative centres’ (History Grade 8 2008: 57) implying that they are part of a bigger unit, and indeed the ruler of the Kingdom of Kotte ‘was recognized as the supreme ruler of Sri Lanka’ (History Grade 8 2008: 58). Therefore even after the downfall of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa the sense of the island as a whole remains, despite several divisions. The textbooks do not engage with the geographical, political and societal fragmentations in the country’s past and what those meant for ‘the nation’. Instead, they are presented within a continuous Sinhalese Buddhist national memory. The textbooks

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51 For a recent study of a large set of Sri Lankan textbooks see Perera (2009).
reproduce a primordial view of the state and nation, both having evolved long before the arrival of modernity on the island. The role of the British in crafting the modern state is neglected, instead they are presented as foreign oppressors who destroyed the ancient hydraulic civilisation and suppressed the nation for over a century as discussed below.

The beginning of history

The question of who was first on the island of Sri Lanka is one of the most controversial issues surrounding the history of the country with important political implications. The Grade 10 history textbook offers a clear answer to the question: The Aryans, meaning the Sinhalese, were the first to arrive in Sri Lanka around the fifth and sixth centuries BCE (History Grade 10 2007: 27). The textbook acknowledges the presence of people, namely ‘pre-historic men’, before the arrival of Vijaya and his followers, but this ‘pre-historic period’ is covered only very briefly and is said to have ended with the establishment of Aryan settlements (Id.: 23ff.). It thus explicitly supports the widespread nationalistic view that there was no civilisation in Sri Lanka until the Sinhalese arrived (Soysa 2009: 3): 'The history of Sri Lanka begins after the arrival of Prince Vijaya with 700 followers' (History Grade 10 2007: 26).

The Vijayan myth, the mythomoteur of Sinhalese identity (DeVotta 2007: 6), is established as the undisputable starting point of history not only for the Sinhalese but Sri Lanka as a country, a political unit, perpetuating nationalists’ claims that the Sinhalese are the original people of the island (Manogaran 1987: 2). The story related by the textbook (History Grade 10 2007: 26) briefly explains how Vijaya overpowered the original Yakka tribe and established Aryan settlements before other communities arrived, who in turn are portrayed as aggressive invaders:

The Aryans were the first to arrive in Sri Lanka to establish their settlements. … In later years Sri Lanka experienced a number of South Indian invasions. These invasions resulted in many Indian races settling in the country increasing its population. (Id.: 50)

52 During the kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa the construction of large tanks and canals allowed paddy cultivation in the dry, northern areas of the island making them inhabitable. This society based on irrigation systems is referred to as the Sinhalese hydraulic civilisation.

53 Smith calls a group’s constitutive myth the mythomoteur, one of the most important aspects of the myth-symbol complex (1986: 15).
The story of how Vijaya and his people were able to overpower the original inhabitants to claim the land and protect it against invaders serves to justify their territorial claims in the present. Those communities who arrived later, especially South Indians, however, are represented without any legitimate claim to the island.

According to Smith, myths often play a crucial role in providing a nation with a shared identity and purpose:

In the shape of ancient heroes, they give us our standards of collective morality; in the promise of new modes of solidarity and fraternity, they provide cures for our homelessness and alienation; in the return to primordial origins of kinship, they seem to minister to our need for security. ... By ‘replacing’ us as links in an unbroken chain of generations, the myths of descent disclose our national destinies. (Smith 1999: 88)

The Vijayan myth can fulfil these functions of unity and solidarity, setting it above its surroundings and establishing its mission (Id.: 15f.), but only among those who share it, noticeably Aryans who trace their descent to northern parts of India (History Grade 10 2007: 27). What is presented within the official historical narratives of the textbooks is not an all-Sri Lankan myth, but the mythical story of the origins of the majority community interspersed with racial connotations. The textbooks use racial categories to distinguish between supposedly natural, biological units: the ‘Aryans’, the Sinhalese, and the ‘Dravidians, whom the Tamils belong to.54 This not only constructs an impenetrable boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, it also reproduces a ‘natural’ hierarchical order of society with the superior Sinhalese at the apex and minority communities in subordinate positions.

This chapter in the Grade 10 textbook is a striking example of how the history textbooks gloss over major historical controversies, in this case the disputed origins of the different communities in Sri Lanka. It establishes the mythical Sinhalese narrative of Vijaya as seemingly undisputable historical fact, even though the events surrounding the arrival of the Aryans are established ‘according to legends’ (History Grade 10 2007: 27) and the Mahāvamsa, whose interpretations and translations itself are highly controversial as we have seen in chapter two. The Grade 10 book mixes history, which by its own professed

54 The categories ‘Aryan’ and ‘Dravidian’ usually refer to linguistic groups, but in Sri Lanka they have come to be used in a racial sense (Perera 2009: 11; Tambiah 1986: 74).
standards should provide ‘a critical analysis of the past of a nation’ (*History Grade 10* 2007: 1), with stories about how ‘God Upulvan blessed the prince [Vijaya]’, and how he and his soldiers were captured by the ‘magic power’ of a princess (Id.: 26).

The textbooks reflect the Sinhalese ‘Mahavamsa mentality’ (Vanniasingham 1988: 126), which embraces the events of the *Mahāvamsa* as sacred and undisputable history (DeVotta 2007: 6). They reproduce the Sinhalese mytho-history (Tambiah 1986: 70) set out in this chronicle and other *vamsa* texts, explicitly and uncritically drawing on and incorporating folk history into the official narratives they present as historical fact. The result is a Sinhalese-dominated version of history, based on modern reinterpretations of myths and legends shaped by historiography. This is also evident in the close link constructed between the nation and religion, a core theme of both the *vamsas* and the textbooks.

*Buddhism and the nation*

Throughout the textbooks, religion emerges as an essential aspect of Sri Lankan culture. They include several overviews of the three main religions prevalent in the country – Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam – and are filled with references to the role of religion in the lives of both rulers and ordinary people in Sri Lanka. The following poem in the Grade 9 textbook illustrates how religion and the nation are constructed as inseparable, and religion is presented as a core value that must be protected:

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Nation is like a golden palace,
Religion brings light,
If you can protect both,
You will be a great one, my son! (History 9 2009: 74)
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The textbooks do not deny the existence of other religions in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, yet they receive comparatively little attention and are presented as geographically limited to the north and possessing limited influence (*History Grade 7* 2007: 68). Buddhism, by contrast, is depicted as the basis of the advanced ‘Buddhist civilization’ (*History Grade 10* 2007: 28) and as ‘the state religion of [the] Sinhala people’ (Id.: 44) since the third century BCE; it is presented as a logical consequence of this that ‘the majority of the Sri Lankans became Buddhist’ (Id.: 44).
It is noteworthy that the Grade 10 book does not explicitly link the arrival of Vijaya to the demise of the Buddha, a central narrative of the previously discussed dhammadipa and Sihadipa concepts that view Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese and the dhamma. Neither does it mention the alleged three visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka, which are frequently used to substantiate nationalist claims that Buddha himself ‘ennobled [Sri Lanka] to preserve and propagate Buddhism’ (DeVotta 2007: 23), or Asoka’s reported role in promoting Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It merely points out that Buddhism, introduced by Venerable Mahinda Thero (History Grade 10 2007: 44) ‘laid the foundations to the cultural history of Sri Lanka’ (Id.: 50). Nonetheless, there is an abundance of examples throughout the textbooks that reproduce the centrality of Buddhism to the Sinhalese nation frequently promoted by Sinhalese nationalism.

The history textbooks frequently establish Buddhism as the source of what are desirable characteristics of individuals, of what is ethically good and morally defensible. Their narratives present Buddhism as superior and a measure of just rule based on the principles laid down by the Buddha (Id.: 40), echoing the ontological ground of Sinhalese nationalism. Buddhism has been pointed out as the main source of Sinhalese identity (Austin and Gupta 1988: 3) and throughout the textbooks it emerges as a dominant theme, a central source of the core ideas and values of the Sinhalese nation, separating it from and lifting it above all non-Buddhists. An example that demonstrates how Buddhism is subtly established as superior is the following tree metaphor, comparing Buddhist and non-Buddhist rulers:

‘Like attempting to plant poisonous trees in a place where there had been wish conferring trees earlier, (kap ruk) non Buddhists should not be placed in power in Sri Lanka to which the Kalinga dynasty was the rightful heir’ (Galpotha stone inscription of king Nissankamalla) (History Grade 7 2007: 93)

This depiction of Buddhist rulers as ‘wish conferring trees’ as opposed to ‘poisonous trees’ representing non-Buddhist rulers constructs a striking image of

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55 According to the curriculum and Teacher’s Guide for Grade 6, the early settlements in Sri Lanka, the arrival of Vijaya and Buddhism, as well as the reigns of other important kings of the Anuradhapura period, such as Dutugemunu, are covered more extensively in the Grade 6 textbook (National Institute of Education 2014: xvi-xx). This was not available for analysis, but may include these aspects given the dominance of themes from the Mahāvamsa ascertained in the analysed textbooks.
the Sinhalese Buddhists as superior, implying that their rule is good for Sri Lanka, while the rule of others is poisonous and detrimental to the country.

Similarly biographies of ancient kings often praise the great kings for their service to Buddhism, while presenting the disastrous consequences of anti-Buddhist politics or disrespect for Buddhist monks, the Bikkhus, for other rulers. King Nissankamalla, for instance, is said to have ‘done a great service to develop Buddhism in Sri Lanka’ (History Grade 10 2007: 34) and D.B. Jayatillake ‘will forever be remembered in Sri Lankan history for his service to the Buddhist revival’ (History 9 2009: 81). Even some of the Tamil kings are pointed out to have rendered service to Buddhism: ‘Though King Kirthi Sri Rajasinhga was a Hindu, he did a great service to uplift Buddhism’ (History Grade 8 2008: 11). The promotion of Buddhism is established as a core principle for Sri Lanka’s past rulers:

The king vowed to protect Buddhism and the Buddha Sasana. … It was the duty of the king to help and provide the necessary facilities to construct temples and other Buddhist institutions. Following these principles, king Devanampiyatissa, king Dutugemunu, king Vijayabahu and King Parakramabahu did an excellent service towards Buddhism. (History Grade 10 2007: 39)

Adherence to Buddhism is essential not only for the fortune of the country, but also of individuals as is implied in stories such as that of King Rajasinha, who turned from Buddhism with disastrous consequences:

King Rajasinha I was embittered by the failure of his [military] effort, which he carried out with great dedication and untold hardships. His anger made him resort to a violent course of action. He embraced Saivism56 and embarked on an anti-Buddhist policy. He indiscriminately eliminated everyone whom he thought was opposed to him. On his return after his defeat at the hands of King Wimaladharmasuriya I at Pethangoda Gardens, a sharp bamboo thorn pierced his foot and caused his death. (History Grade 8 2008: 70)

This passage is presented in a way that the reader may easily understand that the king’s unfortunate demise was the punishment for his turn from Buddhism to Hinduism. Including sections like that in the story-lines of the textbooks perpetuates the importance of Buddhist values and beliefs for the nation. This responsibility, however, is not limited to the rulers of the past and present, but the readers are also encouraged to participate in the present and future reproduction of Buddhism.

56 Saivism is a branch of Hinduism, the religion of most Tamils in Sri Lanka, which reveres the god Shiva.
Stories like that of King Rajasinha I imply a warning to the young reader of what happens if they fail to uphold the Buddhist faith, while the many successful role models demonstrate the importance and benefits of a life according to Buddhist principles. Stories and portrayals of heroes are often prescriptive. They not only construct a version of history, but they also instruct the reader how they ought to think and act as a national subject (Hein and Selden 1998: 4). A more explicit link between Buddhism, the Sinhalese nation and the reader is drawn by direct prompts such as this:

Try to do something great every day with love and respect for your religion and the country. Give up greed for false vision. Always try to uphold the Sinhalese nation and Buddhism. (History 9 2009: 67)

This student activity explicitly asks the reader to be an active member of the nation, while reinforcing the apparently natural link between religion and the nation.

Overall, the story-lines of the textbooks reproduce the link between Buddhism and the Sinhalese nation derived from interpretations of history based on the Mahāvamsa that has become constitutive of Sinhalese nationalism. Throughout the textbooks Buddhism is presented as a mark of virtuousness, rightfulness and morality that places individual kings and the Sinhalese as a whole above non-Buddhists. The belief in a natural, immemorial link between Buddhism and Sri Lanka is also essential for the understanding of the political aspirations of Sinhalese nationalism, as will be discussed below. It provides the main goals of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, as well as equipping the political movement with an unquestionable sacred authority (Soysa 2009: 4). Perpetuating religion as a central symbolic resource of the nation’s myth-symbol complex the textbooks also reproduce the Buddhist ontological ground of modern Sinhalese nationalism discussed in chapter two, providing for a hierarchical order of society that can encompass non-Buddhists in a subordinate position. The intertwinement of Buddhism and the nation throughout the historical narratives of the textbook reproduces such an order, also manifest in their representations of ‘them’, the non-Sinhalese, non-Buddhist actors of the textbooks.
Threats to the Nation from Near and Far

So far this chapter has focused on how the history textbooks construct national identity by presenting the shared beliefs, values and traditions of the people. This national ‘us’ is appropriated by the Sinhalese and potentially excludes other groups, especially non-Buddhists. Collective identities, however, are not only based on internal similarities establishing the group’s distinctive ‘we-ness’, but also on how it differentiates itself from outsiders through boundaries (Cerulo 1997: 395). The following sections thus focus on how the ideal nation, its self-perceptions and boundaries are constructed through depictions of internal and external ‘others’ and their interactions with the nation.

While history textbooks naturally focus on the history of the respective country and its people, they also feature its relationship to other groups and nations, as no nation exists in isolation. In a study of the ethnic ‘other’ in Ukrainian history textbooks, Janmaat (2007) found that states with nationalising programmes usually include negative portrayals of the ethnic ‘other’. In the case of ethnic conflicts these negative images seem almost inescapable (Janmaat 2007: 308f.). He points out different functions negative stereotyping of the ‘other’ may serve for the construction of national identity in these cases: setting boundaries and constructing a moral superiority of the nation, stressing hostility of the ‘others’ to strengthen internal cohesion, justifying a liberation struggle and the establishment of an independent state, and providing a scapegoat to assign blame to (Ibid.).

The depictions of both internal and external ‘others’ in the Sri Lankan textbooks serve similar functions. Unification, identification and internal cohesion in particular are created by the construction of threats to the nation from ‘others’, primarily South Indians and European colonisers. The following sections discuss internal and external threats presented by the textbooks, focusing in particular on the representations of the Tamils who have traditionally been pitted against the Sinhalese by nationalist narratives. Chapter two has outlined that despite modern reinterpretations of myths and memories presenting the Sinhalese and Tamils as millennia-long antagonists (DeVotta 2007: 36), the conflict between the two communities had its roots in the political, economic and social developments of the twentieth century. The textbooks, however, draw heavily on the narratives and
themes of the *Mahāvamsa* and the portrayals of Tamils, albeit limited and infrequent, implicitly and explicitly construct an overall negative image of the community as invaders, as immoral and unable rulers, who pose a threat to the national order, thus reproducing narratives of an ethnically divided history.

*Traitors and foreigners: Portraying Tamils throughout history*

At the outset it should be noted that although written against the background of over two decades of civil war, the history textbooks contain very little explicit negative ethnic stereotyping. This may be the consequence of more stringent control mechanisms for the avoidance of bias in textbooks introduced in recent years and may be mainly an effect of the exclusion of material. The textbooks do not cover any of the most recent history of the country, glossing over the civil war and its actors entirely. Their story-lines do not include a coherent history of Sri Lankan minorities, their stories, culture and religion, as well as their relationship to the Sinhalese majority, thus they provide only limited material for the analysis of explicit portrayals of Tamils. Yet, images of the Tamils are often concealed in depictions of South Indians and their relationship with Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese.

The close relationship between Tamils and South Indians is not stated explicitly in the textbooks, but Tamil Nadu in South India is widely accepted as the origin of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The ties of loyalty and kinship between Sri Lankan Tamils and the larger Hindu civilisation of South India are usually taken as a given (Manogaran 1987: 2; Warnapala 1994: 27), and are constantly perpetuated by scholars, journalists, politicians, and other opinion formers to the extent that it has attained the status of common knowledge among the people of India and Sri Lanka. In practice these links are visible for instance in the tiger adopted by the LTTE, which was the old Chola symbol (Tambiah 1986: 78). Therefore, even though only a few passages in the textbooks directly link South Indians to the Tamils, it is likely that readers will associate negative portrayals of

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57 The Cholas were a major South Indian Tamil dynasty, whose invasions feature frequently in the textbooks and reportedly caused the downfall of the Anuradhapuran kingdom (*History Grade 7 2007*: 60).
South Indians with the Sri Lankan Tamil community, making these passages important for this analysis.

Throughout the textbooks, it becomes evident that minority communities have a place in the history of the country that is separate from that of the majority. They are not part of the Sinhalese-centric historical narrative and usually appear as foreigners, outsiders, or even invaders. As discussed above, the textbooks establish the arrival of the Sinhalese in the Vijayan myth as the beginning of Sri Lankan history. In this view, they were the first community to arrive in Sri Lanka, giving them a special status as ‘natives’. The textbooks also briefly discuss settlements of other communities, yet these are depicted as following much later and for different reasons. Some arrived with invading forces: ‘These [South Indian] invasions resulted in many Indian races settling in the country [and] increasing its population’ (History Grade 10 2007: 50). Others were brought to Sri Lanka, such as ‘Tamil soldiers who had settled down in Sri Lanka when they were got down by Sinhala kings’ (History Grade 7 2007: 59) or Indian Tamils during the British colonial period to work on tea plantations (History Grade 11: Part I 2007: 51). Another wave of ‘Tamil and Muslim communities settled in different parts of the island’, seeking refuge from the ‘Muslim invasions of South India’ in the thirteenth century (History Grade 10 2007: 57).

All these depictions share a tendency to establish Tamils and Muslims as strangers who arrived in Sri Lanka after it had been populated by the Sinhalese. The effects were mixed, the textbooks point out that ‘the culture of the country became complex’ as a consequence of the immigration of foreign, non-Sinhalese communities (Id.: 46). While the influxes of Tamils and Muslims are described as ‘unwelcome external influences’ (Id.: 57) in the Grade 10 textbook, the Grade 7 book highlights that ‘Sri Lanka’s culture was enriched through South Indian influence’ (History Grade 7 2007: 74). Not all arrivals of foreigners are depicted in a negative light, but importantly the textbooks do not report the integration of these communities into the existing Sri Lankan nation. They remain different and are largely unrecognised as part of the nation or the history of the country. Instead, negative stories about South Indians and Tamils reiterate their foreignness and establish them as threats to the ‘natives’. This historical narrative
can support contemporary claims that Tamils are strangers, not fellow citizens (Vanniasingham 1988: 119).

In the Grade 7 textbook, Tamils are explicitly linked to treacherous and violent behaviour on two occasions. The first instance establishes Tamils as unreliable and with shifting loyalties, speaking of ‘[t]he assistance given to the South Indian invaders against the Sinhala kings, by the Tamil soldiers who had settled down in Sri Lanka when they were got down by Sinhala kings to establish their authority’ (History Grade 7 2007: 59). The account implies that while the Tamils to which it refers were originally brought to Sri Lanka by Sinhalese rulers to support them, they later betrayed the Sinhalese and supported the Indian invaders. Only a few pages later they are again linked to South Indian invasions and are explicitly depicted as violent: “[S]even Tamils including Pulahattha invaded the Anuradhapura Kingdom. Two of them returned to India … the remaining leaders … exercised power in Sri Lanka for 14 years and 7 months each one killing his predecessor’ (Id.: 72). The image of treacherous Tamils is strengthened by their characterisation as invaders and by their depiction as cruel killers of their fellow men. Those sections that explicitly link the Tamils to negative traits are rare, but their effect is reinforced by depictions of South Indians as cruel and harmful to Sri Lanka and her people.

One outstanding example is the presentation of Magha of Kalinga, an Indian invader who is depicted as especially cruel:

Magha blinded king Parakrama Pandya. … He plundered the wealth of the leading persons of the country and distributed that wealth among his soldiers. He also demolished Chaityas, Temples and Pirivenas and burnt their books and valuables. He set fire to homes and farms of the ordinary people and also destroyed tanks and anicuts. … His invasion destroyed human resources including the leaders, ordinary people and the Bhikkhus as well as physical resources such as Chaityas, temples, tanks, anicuts and books. (Id.: 99f.)

This account of Magha’s invasion of Sri Lanka in 1215 is an illustration of extreme violence and cruelty. The textbook describes the invasion as a display of ‘the nature of a terrible war’ (Id.: 99) and vividly depicts its disastrous consequences for the Sinhalese. The story of Magha’s destructive rule, a ‘convenient anti-south Indian trope that the Cūlavamsa often repeats’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 21), is another example of how the textbooks present events from the vamsa literature as historical fact.
Such radical depictions, however, are exceptional. Most of the time negative images are much more subtle, for example, the portrayal of King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. He was a member of the Nayakkar dynasty from South India, a Hindu (History Grade 8 2008: 9) and Tamil, who turned from ‘a calm and quiet person’ into ‘a brutal ruler’ due to his alcohol addiction (History 9 2009: 15). He is presented as a tragic yet weak ruler who lost the support of the people as a consequence of his change in behaviour:

This addiction to alcohol made the king’s behaviour erratic and harsh. He became more vicious and gave severe punishments to the people. The nobles and the people became disheartened with him. (Id.: 14)

The portrayal of King Wickrama Rajasinghe is important as it is not only the most detailed presentation of a non-Sinhalese ruler in Sri Lanka that occurs in any of the textbooks, but its subject was also the last king of an independent Sinhalese kingdom. Thus, much of the blame for the loss of the nation’s independence lies, in this narrative, with a weak and, more importantly, non-Sinhalese ruler, with the British colonisers also playing a role as we shall see below.

Most negative depictions of Tamils are found in stories relating to South Indians, subtly presenting them as aliens who pose a threat to Sinhalese identity because their loyalties lie with South India rather than Sri Lanka (Warnapala 1994: 26f.). The relationship between South India and Sri Lanka is again not presented as universally negative, as both countries ‘maintained cordial relationships from ancient times’ (History Grade 7 2007: 74). Yet it is the depictions of frequent invasions from South Indians and their role in some of the most traumatic periods of history for the Sinhalese that prevail, leading to an overall negative narration of the relationship between not only Sri Lanka and South India, but also between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The history textbooks present similar themes as the Pāli Chronicles and the representations of the Tamils and South Indians in particular demonstrates how their version of the past subtly reproduces the Buddhist cosmic order of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism. Tamils and South Indians are presented as a threat to the Sinhalese order, they are demonic forces that lead to fragmentation as in the case of Magha’s destructiveness that led to the downfall of the Kingdom of Polonnaruwa ending the hydraulic civilisation of the Sinhalese (Id.: 99). Order can only be restored and ensured under Sinhalese Buddhist leadership.
In other examples the textbooks use adjectives such as ‘cruel’ or ‘brutal’ as well as implicit negative depictions to describe the Tamils in several of the rare instances in which they feature at all. Those images are intensified by the depiction of the Tamils as a threat to the Sinhalese, not only through their association with ‘aggressive’ South Indians, but also in stories of the Jaffna Kingdom within Sri Lanka. Compared to the lengthy depictions of Sinhalese kingdoms, for instance those of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kandy, the reader learns very little about the Jaffna Kingdom and its people. Its emergence in the north is mentioned only to simultaneously establish it as a threat to the Sinhalese in the south:

By this time [1302] a Tamil kingdom had emerged in Jaffna. According to the ‘Naranbedda’ rock inscription King Parakramabahu IV had to face several invasions from Jaffna. But he had faced all of them successfully. … His greatest political achievement was the conquest of Jaffna around 1450 A.D. (History Grade 10 2007: 54f.)

While King Parakramabahu IV was able to successfully avert all aggression from Jaffna and even managed to conquer it, this triumph was short-lived and his successors again ‘had to be prepared for any possible attack from the North’ (History 9 2009: 122). Apart from these sections on the emergence of Jaffna and its contentious relation to the south of the island, the reader only learns about the fall of the kingdom with its capture by the Portuguese. Even in this brief depiction, the ‘internal conflicts’ within the Tamil Kingdom and the negative portrayal of its ruler’s ‘treacherous activities’ stand out (History Grade 8 2008: 74), again subtly evoking a negative image of Tamils.

We need to take care not to over-interpret such comparatively sporadic depictions of individuals or border conflicts, which were not uncommon in the past. Yet it is not these representations in themselves that are noteworthy, but the manner in which they are placed throughout the textbooks as part of a Sinhalese-centric historical narrative, providing a one-sided image to the reader. The history textbooks perpetuate primordial views of antagonistic community relations in the past, potentially having adverse effects on community relations in the present. The superiority of the Sinhalese over non-Buddhists is reinforced through the limited representations of minority communities, strengthening the internal cohesion of ‘us’, the Sinhalese nation, in light of internal and external threats. The inherent link between South Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils serves as a reminder of the
overall majority of Tamils in the geographical area. It buttresses the siege mentality of the Sinhalese that observers have termed the minority complex of a majority (Tambiah 1986: 92). It is particularly the small size of the island and its proximity to India that are at the heart of this. The idea that the Sinhalese nation is surrounded by ‘others’ who, as legends, the chronicles and the stories of the history textbooks constantly remind the nation, have in the past posed a menace to the Sinhalese and its great civilisations (Manogaran 1987: 2) is a prominent theme of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism. The reinterpretations of the relationship between Sri Lanka and South India within traditional chronicles substantiates fear from the big neighbour (Tambiah 1986: 93), a trend also visible in the textbooks and furthermore augmented by representations of European colonial powers.

*European colonisers and the downfall of the nation*

South Indians are not the only threat presented by the textbooks. A more modern one appears with the arrival of the Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards. The depictions reiterate similar themes as those of South Indians, albeit this ‘other’ is presented in a more explicitly negative light compared to the often subtle and implicit depictions of Tamils. In chapter two we emphasised the important role of the colonial period for the formation of nationalism in Sri Lanka. Like in many colonial societies, imported Western theories merged with traditional structures and ideas, providing form and content for the colonised people’s national movements that usually started out as anti-colonial projects (Nandy 2009). Sinhalese nationalism similarly originated within the late colonial period and was initially a response to and against colonialism, but in the decades after independence it moved beyond anti-colonial tropes and found a new ‘other’ in the Tamil community (Tambiah 1986: 59).

However, over sixty years after independence a subtle enmity towards the European colonisers is still very much present in the official history presented by the textbooks, depicting a primarily negative image of particularly the British intervention in Sri Lanka. The textbooks’ version of history reiterates the threat posed by Europeans to national identity, providing a fertile ground for continuing...

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58 The Sinhalese are a majority in Sri Lanka, but due to the sizeable Tamil population in South India they are outnumbered in the greater region.
nationalist beliefs that the Sinhalese were persecuted by foreign rulers over centuries (Wilson 1988: 32). They emphasise the destructive effects of colonialism, the destruction of the country’s ancient glory and subjugation of the nation, glossing over the economic, political and social benefits of modernisation during this period. The analysis of the textbooks reveals how anti-colonial tropes persist within historical narratives making them available for contemporary nationalist mobilisation and adaptation. As we will see in chapter five such historical narratives are also reproduced within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric and can provide the ideological basis of a marked anti-Western turn discernible in his post-war speeches.

The stories of European colonisers mainly highlight the adverse effects of foreign rule on the country and its population. A section reporting the effects of liquor sold by the British, for instance, points out how it ‘destroyed the unity, peace, and personal health of the people’ (History 9 2009: 73). The changes in the political and economic system are claimed to have led to ‘a society that valued competition instead of unity and peace, wealth or money instead of cooperation unlike what had been prevalent in the traditional society’ (Id.: 58). The colonisers are presented as troublemakers whose manipulative and aggressive behaviour disturbed the peace in Sri Lanka (History Grade 10 2007: 79f.), and as greedy and treacherous (History Grade 8 2008: 82) conquerors of the country. The language used to describe ‘white imperialism’ (History 9 2009: 26) constructs a clear division between ‘us’, the indigenous people, and ‘them’, the ‘foreigners’ who introduced their ‘alien system’ with little respect for the ‘customs and languages of the local people’ (Id.: 4).

The portrayal of the European colonial powers, their influence and coverage, is comparable to the representations of South Indians throughout the textbooks. Although the nation falls victim to foreign domination, in contrast to the Europeans the Sinhalese are presented in a positive light, the textbooks highlight their moral superiority and how they were eventually able to overcome the challenges posed by colonialism. The story-lines present the Europeans as the intruders, while the Sinhalese are depicted as fighters who managed to decisively

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59 The Burghers, the descendents of the Europeans who stayed in Sri Lanka, are largely absent from the story-lines like other minority communities.
defeat the Portuguese and Dutch on several occasions (History Grade 8 2008: 5; History Grade 10 2007: 80). One story, for instance, highlights the cleverness and resourcefulness of the Sinhalese in a humorous way. It tells the reader about a Portuguese emissary being tricked by the Sinhalese king. The emissary was taken on a three-day journey to a palace, which he later learnt was only a short distance away. The proverb that came into use after these events, ‘as the Portuguese went to Kotte’ (History Grade 8 2008: 62), serves as a small triumph of the morally superior Sinhalese over the militarily superior foreigners, representing indigenous ingenuity in the light of foreign conquest.

The colonial period, particularly British rule after 1815, is an important part of the historical narratives of the textbooks, covered most extensively in the Grade 9 textbook. Overall the textbooks emphasise mainly the negative effects of colonialism and how it interrupted the progress of the nation. The modern, unified state, for instance, is not seen as a result of the political and territorial centralisation during the British colonial period, but its origins are traced further into the country’s pre-modern, pre-colonial past. Colonialism is presented as a disruptive interlude between the golden ages of the nation and the modern, independent state. The story-lines of the textbooks reproduce anti-colonial sentiments and more generally perpetuate the insecurity of the nation given the threat of subjugation and destruction.

In chapter two we discussed how within the Buddhist cosmic order the self, nation and state are linked, and their integrity depends on the ordering power of the Buddha. Within this framework it can be understood why the colonial powers, like other non-Buddhists, do not only pose a threat to the country and its resources, but to the very identity of the Sinhalese nation that can only be protected in its own sovereign state. The downfall of the kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and especially the conquest of Kandy have become traumas in Sinhalese memory. These events are synonymous with the subjugation of the Sinhalese nation and the decline of its culture and society. This is exemplified by the portrayal of the British conquest of Kandy, finalised by the Kandyan Convention in 1815, as

an important turning point in the history of Sri Lanka. It signified the end of an independent land and the subjugation of people with a history of more than two thousand
years. This Convention heralded the ending of the last existing independent Sinhalese kingdom. (History 9 2009: 16)

The majority’s minority complex, justified by the omnipresent threat posed by non-Buddhist ‘others’ and historical precedents of foreign destruction and domination, is an integral part of Sinhalese identity reproduced within the narratives of the history textbooks. The remainder of this chapter focuses on how, based on the identified construction of nationhood, the textbooks reproduce a strong link between the nation, state and religion, and seek to incorporate the reader into this nationalist project.

The Politics of Nationhood in the Past and Present

The first part of this chapter has focused on the discursive construction of national identity within history textbooks. It has highlighted how they establish the Sinhalese community as the Sri Lankan nation as well as the ethnic character of this nation based on the majority’s symbolic resources. The nation as the core of nationalism is crucial to understand the latter, yet nationalism is not only a set of shared representations of group members but also has a political force (Smith 1971: 176). National movements politicise ‘a feeling of national belonging’ (Sutherland 2012: 7), they aspire national sovereignty, the right of a nation to control the political arrangements governing it (Yack 2012: 122), independence and the maintenance of national unity and integration (Smith 1971: 192). All these goals are usually interwoven and closely related to a specific territory that the members of a nation believe to be theirs (Barrington 1997: 713). Some nationalisms, like Tamil nationalism, demand an independent state, while many others, like Sinhalese nationalism, are linked to an existing state.

While state and nation are separate, ‘the nation has become the key means for states to legitimise their power over people and place’ (Sutherland 2012: 9) and especially a justification for where borders are drawn or contested (Id.: 10). Sinhalese nationalism strives for hegemony over the Sri Lankan state (Sitrampalam 2009; Stokke 1998), wanting to preserve Sinhalese majoritarian central rule in a unitary state (Saravanamuttu 2000: 198; Sriskandarajah 1998: 329). The textbooks reproduce nationalist narratives that intrinsically link the integrity of the state and the nation. They perpetuate a popular theme of Sinhalese nationalist discourses that views the state as the ‘custodian of Sinhalese Buddhist
culture and the order of society’ and any attack on the state is an attack on the Sinhalese and vice versa (Kapferer 2012: 100).

The following sections first discuss how the textbooks naturalise Sinhalese claims to the modern Sri Lankan state through similar narratives that establish the myth-symbol complex underlying national identity, presenting Sinhalese Buddhist rule as the sole legitimate form of rule in Sri Lanka. The portrayals of rulers and traditional sources of power offer striking examples of the construction of a supposedly natural link between the Sinhalese nation, the Sri Lankan state and Buddhism. The individual narratives of the story-lines and their heroes furthermore construct a version of history that contrasts unity and disunity, order and fragmentation or destruction, and independence and foreign domination, in which a united nation under Sinhalese Buddhist rule is the only safeguard against omnipresent threats. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of how the textbooks construct an authoritarian patriotism whereby the individual is subordinated to the whole, that is the state or nation. Through role models and student activities the young readers are encouraged to participate in the textbook’s nation-building project, potentially creating future citizens on the basis of an exclusive ethnic Sinhalese nationalism.

**Nation, State and Religion**

Above we have discussed how the perpetuation of symbolic resources establishes the Sinhalese as the Sri Lankan nation and reproduces claims that the entirety of the island belongs to the Sinhalese Buddhists (Soysa 2009: 3; Sriskandarajah 1998: 331). Buddhism in particular is not only a crucial dimension of Sinhalese identity, but it is also constructed as the source of legitimate political rule over Sri Lanka. Buddhist writings gave rise to the idea of a unitary model of government ruled by the Sinhalese as the ‘chosen people’ (Sitampalam 2009: 3) that needs to be defended at any cost. One important narrative perpetuating this theme throughout the textbooks is the representation of rightful Sinhalese Buddhist rule through the depictions of ancient and modern rulers in Sri Lanka, delegitimising any non-Buddhist claims to power. The depiction of the Tooth Relic is especially noteworthy here.
Throughout the textbooks this sacred relic, believed to be a canine tooth of the Buddha, is ascribed a special role as a central symbol of Sinhalese nationalism appearing repeatedly in the story-lines of the Grade 7 to 10 textbooks. Characterised as the ‘symbol of royalty’ (History Grade 8 2008: 68; History Grade 10 2007: 32) the Tooth Relic directly links legitimate rule and Buddhism. In several stories the process of obtaining the throne is linked to the successful acquisition of the Tooth Relic, for example Wijayabahu III ‘established his sovereignty by being the guardian of the sacred Tooth Relic’ (History Grade 7 2007: 121) or similarly Parakramabahu I ‘finally acquired the Sacred Tooth relic and became the chief monarch of the country’ (Id.: 88). These depictions perpetuate the basic argument made in the textbooks deducted ‘from the past’ and ‘tradition’ (Ibid.; History 9 2009: 17) that ‘the person who possessed the Tooth Relic would become the heir to the throne’ (History 9 2009: 17).

In chapter two we have pointed out that the veneration of relics from the Buddha was an important social practice perpetuating virtual unity and sovereignty. As ‘palladium of the kings of the Sinhala people for many centuries’ (Roberts 1994: 51) the Tooth Relic also presents a direct link between the nation, state and religion. By presenting this Buddhist symbol as the prerequisite of rightful sovereignty of the country, the textbooks reproduce an intrinsic link between Buddhism and legitimate political power, implying that the only acceptable political arrangements of government depend on Buddhist leadership. A claim supported even more clearly by statements such as one ascribed to King Nissankamalla who reportedly ‘declared that none other than a Buddhist had any right to the throne of this country’ in the late 12th century (History Grade 7 2007: 94). Throughout the textbooks the Sinhalese Buddhists’ right to rule is constructed as an institutionalised religious right that is justified by, and in turn perpetuates, the superiority of the Sinhalese Buddhists.

The protection of the nation and state is another central theme of the textbooks within which the two are closely linked. ‘Others’, both foreign nations and minority communities on the island, are generally depicted as a threat to Sri Lanka, its territory and people. Sinhalese nationalist discourses link security to majoritarianism and domination (DeVotta 2007: 47), as only a strong, united nation within a unitary state can stand against internal and external threats. The
previous sections have argued that the representations of South Indian Tamils and Europeans throughout the textbooks reproduce the Sinhalese ‘pathology of insecurity’ (Saravanamuttu 2000: 196) or minority complex. Within Buddhist ontology the protection of the nation, state and person are virtually the same, creating an inseparable link between the Sinhalese nation and the Sri Lankan state.

This is reiterated by the overarching antithetic story-lines of the textbooks that link themes of national unity, security and strong Buddhist rule. On the one hand, they picture a free, united and prosperous country before the arrival of the Europeans. These narratives combine the themes of independence, strong rulers, unity and prosperity. They describe ‘period[s] where peace and prosperity prevailed’ (History Grade 7 2007: 125f.), highlight ‘a united, prosperous land’ under Vijayabahu I (Id.: 81) in the eleventh century and report of Parakramabahu VI who ruled as ‘emperor of the whole island’ in the fifteenth century, whose ‘period was the last prosperous era of Sri Lanka’ (History Grade 10 2007: 55). It is the context that then explains how strong rulers were able to preserve unity and peace as a prerequisite to develop the country’s economy, particularly its irrigation systems and tanks, thus bringing and securing prosperity.

On the other hand, the textbooks depict a land and people deteriorating and being exploited under foreign rule. Foreign invasions and domination are directly linked to the downfall of the great ancient Sinhalese hydraulic civilisation posing a threat to the very identity of the nation itself. The invasion of Kalinga Magha, for instance, is described as having caused widespread destruction of human and physical resources in Polonnaruwa, as well as ‘the culture, core values and technology that established the identity of the nation’ (History Grade 7 2007: 100). The summary of the story emphasises the disastrous consequences of disunity within Sri Lanka:

The fall of Polonnaruwa clearly shows that the absence of unity and struggle for power among the leaders of the country would pave the way for foreign domination and the destruction of the entire nation. (Id.: 101)

Portrayals of European colonisers similarly reiterate a relationship between disunity, weak non-Sinhalese rulers and domination, exemplified particularly by the story of King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, the last ruler of an independent kingdom in Kandy (History Grade 8 2008: 12f.; History 9 2009: 14f.). The king,
from the Tamil Nayakkar dynasty, deteriorated in character and undermined the traditional administrative structure depending on the Bhikkus, chieftains and public:

Therefore King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha lost the loyalty of the people which was the most important factor in the independence and protection of the Kandyan Kingdom. (History Grade 8 2008: 13)

These are examples of an overarching theme of the textbooks that establishes antithetic narratives, linking national unity, independence and prosperity under Sinhalese Buddhist rule on one hand, and disunity, foreign domination and deterioration of the nation on the other hand. At the same time this highlights how the textbooks not only construct an ancient nation, but also the image of a united Sri Lanka for nearly as long. The Grade 10 book names Devanampiya Tissa as the first king following local leaders like Vijaya:

The historical era of Sri Lanka starts with king Devanampiyatissa. The history of the country can be studied chronologically from this era onwards. (History Grade 10 2007: 30)

As a reminder, chapter two outlined that according to the Mahāvamsa Devanampiya Tissa was the first Buddhist ruler, converted by Asokan missionaries. The textbook only briefly mentions his rule but indicates the ‘patronage and the guidance of King Asoka’ (Id.: 29) in the transition from local leadership to kingship in the third century BCE (Id.: 30).

Overall, the story-lines of the textbooks naturalise the link between Sinhalese Buddhist rule and the Sri Lankan state. Unity and sovereignty guarantee the promotion and protection of the nation in a historical narrative that presents myths and legends as fact, as historical precedents that legitimise the current political realities in the past and present. Textbooks, however, do not only represent the nation and its beliefs, they can also be a participatory practice encouraging the readers to take part in their nation-building project.

Educating Citizens

Textbooks do not merely select knowledge, they also represent the standards, ideas and values considered as norms for future citizens (Benito 2009: 38) and promote patriotism and national cohesion (Al-Haj 2005: 49). Similarly, the analysed history textbooks serve as ideological apparatuses in the education and mobilisation of future Sri Lankan citizens (Perera 2009: 5). The publishers
demonstrate their awareness of the significance of the textbooks in the prefaces, forewords and messages introducing them to the readers:

This is a gift to you from the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, produced specially for you so that you may be a worthy citizen of the country. *(History Grade 8 2008: v)*

The mission of education is to provide for the future and to ensure that the younger generation can grow up as citizens able to face the challenges of the future with confidence. *(History 9 2009: vii)*

Similar quotes from members of the Educational Publications Department are included in all textbooks, calling on the young readers to use them as guidelines for good citizenship and how to serve the Sinhalese nation:

By making this textbook your trustworthy companion, you will be able to enter the path of becoming a patriotic citizen beneficial to the country and undoubtedly, Sri Lanka will prosper because of you. *(History Grade 10 2007: viii)*

[It] is your duty to make maximum use of this book in order to improve your knowledge and skills and be a worthwhile citizen of the country. *(History Grade 7 2007: v)*

In countries tormented by internal conflicts or civil war the official history that is taught frequently supports patriotism of the majority community while side-lining minorities and as a consequence may further fuel conflict (Al-Haj 2005: 50f.). The ethnocentric historical narrative in the Sri Lankan history textbooks discussed so far is a case in point.

Over the last decades a shift in Sri Lankan politics towards soft-authoritarianism has been observed, whereby the ethnocentrism of Sinhalese nationalism and its quest for dominance are increasingly undermining the liberal and democratic institutions of the island (DeVotta 2011: 131). The cosmic order underlying Sinhalese nationalism and many social practices described by the Asokan Persona can potentially strengthen soft-authoritarianism because within this logic the person is encompassed by the hierarchical order of the state (Kapferer 2012: 7). Lummis distinguishes between a democratic patriotism that unites people in the love of their country and an authoritarian patriotism that demands ‘a resigning of one’s will, right of choice, and need to understand to the authority’ (Lummis 1996, cited in Westheimer 2006: 610). An authoritarian system can benefit from the latter as it discourages dissent and asks for ‘unquestioning loyalty to a cause determined by a centralized leader’ (Westheimer 2006: 610). Authoritarian patriotism is based on the idea that one’s country is inherently superior to others (Ibid.), an idea frequently perpetuated by the reproduction of ethnocentric, chauvinist Sinhalese nationalist narratives discussed
above. They furthermore construct an authoritarian patriotism through the selection and representation of strong role models and the use of student activities.

In Sri Lanka iconic representations of religious and political rulers have a long tradition within the hierarchical logic of the Asokan Persona (Roberts 1994: 57). The veneration of leaders such as the Buddha and Asoka offers a model for the life of monks, rulers and people alike, validating the strong, centralised state (Roberts 1994: 62). The heroes of the textbooks fulfil this function for the young readers, intensified by student activities explicitly asking the readers to respect and honour the presented ‘heroes’. Often student activities include very precise prompts and orders to the readers, asking them to identify with specific role models, usually Sinhalese Buddhists, and the nation as a whole. Most of those can be found in the Grade 7 and 9 textbooks in chapters that offer lengthy biographies of various national heroes. One activity, for example, asks the students to ‘write an account, describing how Vijayabahu’s life could be of use in making your life a success’ (History Grade 7 2007: 77). Other activities are even more explicit about the duties and responsibilities of the schoolchildren towards the nation:

‘Safeguard your country. Safeguard your nation. Safeguard your religion. … This is your responsibility.’ Write an essay or compose a few stanzas (verses) on this theme. (Id.: 81)

For you: it has to be understood that the responsibility of safeguarding the country, the nation and the religion will fall on you the younger generation in the future. Accordingly, with a deep love for the country, let us protect our heritage. (Id.: 83)

These student activities ask the readers to actively participate in the national project and indirectly reiterate the constant threat posed to the country. At the same time students are prompted to honour and revere the outstanding leaders of the country and to show pride in the nation: ‘We who are receiving free education must revere him [C.W.W. Kannangara] and pay our respect’ (History 9 2009: 87). Respect and devotion for the leaders of the nation are constructed as desirable and even necessary traits for all students and Sri Lankans, reinforcing hierarchical relationships.

This is reiterated by the historical narratives of the textbooks that are dominated by the depiction of national heroes, most of them Sinhalese as identified by labels or their connection to Buddhism. Through the portrayals of role models textbooks ‘define attitudes, social mores and expectations, values, and behaviour patterns that are appropriate to the “ideal citizen”’ (Martin 1975: 244). These examples for young Sri Lankan readers are leaders who represent
archetypical nationals and personify core values of the nation: Buddhism, strength, pride in the nation, and other heroic traits such as courage and determination. The readers are encouraged to take these figures as examples for their actions, linking them to the nation in the past and present, and teaching them about what is right and morally good. The depictions of ‘great’ kings and politicians frequently receive quite substantial attention in lengthy biographies. They are praised for their strength, bravery, pride and their services to the country and nation are emphasised, as this section about King Vijayabahu I exemplifies:

In this manner, from the time of his childhood, with firm determination and indomitable courage, directing the battles in a highly organised manner, king Vijayabahu was able to defeat the enemies and liberate the land from foreign domination. Vijayabahu I was an able commander, warrior and a hero who saved the country. (History Grade 7 2007: 80)

Weak rulers, on the other hand, are usually associated with the country’s misfortune. They are portrayed as susceptible to foreign influences (History Grade 8 2008: 91), their reign often leads to chaos and political turmoil (Id.: 22; History Grade 11: Part I 2007: 8), insecurity and even foreign conquest if the ruler loses the loyalty of his people (History Grade 7 2007: 72; 99; History 9 2009: 15).

In later periods politicians and occasionally Buddhist monks are presented as role models to the reader, including A. Wickramasinghe, ‘an anti-imperialistic, humanistic and patriotic national hero who has done an indelible service for the Sri Lankans’ (History 9 2009: 89) and D.S. Senanayake, ‘Father of the Nation’ (Id.: 91). The textbooks present a variety of historical figures, mostly Sinhalese, but also some Tamils and Muslims, for instance the Nayakkar dynasty who ruled Kandy after the last king of Sinhala royal lineag(e died in 1739 (History Grade 8 2008: 9) or P. Arunachalam, P. Ramanathan and T.B. Jayah. These three leaders, Tamils and a Muslim respectively, are presented along seven Sinhalese leaders in a section on ‘outstanding personalities’ active prior to independence (History 9 2009: 79–92). Ramanathan, for instance, ‘deserves the respect of the nation’ as he ‘supported anti-imperialistic activities […] and] worked closely with the Sinhalese population to gain independence’ (Id.: 82). This is quite different to the portrayals of the 1818 and 1848 independence struggles in the same textbook, which were presented as exclusively Sinhalese events (Id.: 18–30).
Yet, later the textbook includes biographies of post-independence leaders (Id.: 117–124) which again portray exclusively Sinhalese figures. For instance the Bandaranaikes, central driving forces of post-independence Sinhalese nationalism. SWRD Bandaranaike is pointed out as an ‘exceptional figure’ whose ‘leadership resulted in a transformation of Sri Lankan politics’ (Id.: 122). The textbook does not explicitly mention his 1956 Sinhala Only Act or its destructive impact on community relations, but depicts Bandaranaike as a man who valued traditional culture and Buddhism. His widow Sirimavo is even commended for her ‘nationalization policies’, including enforcing Sinhala as the official language, which ‘served the people’ (Ibid.). This again shows how these national leaders represent and serve specifically the Sinhalese majority, and the state becomes the natural instrument for promoting and nurturing the Sinhalese nation.

Overall examples of non-Sinhalese figures are comparatively rare throughout the story-lines and like representations of the minorities’ cultures they usually remain at the margins of history. Most heroes of history appeal specifically to the majority community and perpetuate a Sinhalese-centric historical narrative. The textbooks’ focus on strong, Sinhalese Buddhist leadership presents it as the best guarantee of unity, which in turn is closely linked to freedom, sovereignty and prosperity of Sri Lanka. Thus authoritarianism is implicitly legitimised as a suitable strategy to obtain the nation’s goals as well as justifying the need to assimilate differences to prevent internal dissent that could make the country vulnerable to outside threats. The textbooks do not encourage critical engagement with the heroes of the past, instead they assign the readers a passive role and naturalise a society that places its faith in its leaders within a hierarchical and centralised model of power.

Through the overarching story-lines of the textbooks, and student activities in particular, readers are constantly reminded of the necessity to protect their nation and their responsibilities as its members. As such the textbooks as authoritative sources of official history are in a privileged position, often without direct competition in the classroom, to promote their version of Sinhalese nationalism. Depending on how they are mediated by readers and teachers they may contribute to socialise schoolchildren into authoritarianism as a potential resource of the
Sinhalese national movement and as active participants in the hegemonic reproduction of nationalist ideas.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the core dimensions of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism within a current set of Sri Lankan history textbooks. Analysing their story-lines it has outlined their official version of history based on disputed sources like the *Mahāvamsa*, reproducing the trinity of nation, territory and religion central to Sinhalese nationalist ideology. Drawing on primarily Sinhalese symbolic resources, the myths, symbols and heroes admitted into the textbooks construct a conception of nationhood that claims to encompass ‘Sri Lankans’ but is mostly limited to the majority community.

The dominance of the Sinhalese, their beliefs, traditions, culture and above all their religion presents a limited historical narrative that largely neglects the minority communities sharing the island. Going beyond ethnocentric representations the textbooks continuously construct a superior nation: The Sinhalese are portrayed as the natural rulers of Sri Lanka, morally superior to other communities and outsiders, and overall a divine nation. At the same time the nation is seen as surrounded by hostile outsiders and foreigners, non-Buddhists who are an ever present threat to its identity.

The protection of the nation is at the heart of Sinhalese nationalism – a goal that can only be secured in a unitary state destined to be ruled by Sinhalese Buddhists. The narratives of the textbooks naturalise a link between the Sri Lankan state and Buddhism, establishing the Sinhalese as the undisputed rulers of the island and legitimising the current political realities in Sri Lanka. They may also play a part in educating patriotic citizens through their perpetuation of authoritarian patriotism. The textbooks’ ‘ideal citizen’ respects the rulers of the country, is obedient and unquestioning, and will serve their religion and nation. The textbooks naturalise the hierarchical social order based on Buddhist ontology that has traditionally perpetuated social practices of the Asokan Persona and may facilitate authoritarian strands of Sinhalese nationalism in the present.

This chapter has highlighted that despite education reforms and more stringent control mechanisms introduced in the last decade, current history
textbooks continue to depict a Sinhalese-dominated version of history as detected by previous studies (Perera 2009; Siriwardena 1992). Having analysed English editions it has also demonstrated how ethnocentrism persists within translated textbooks despite the potential of English to act as a link language between the communities. Instead, the textbooks refer to disputed sources, presenting legends and stories such as the Vijayan myth of descent as the official history of the country. They are a striking example of how traditional or folk knowledge is perpetuated as common knowledge at the expense of a critical engagement with alternative readings of history:

[T]extbooks provide a fairly accurate reflection of the manner in which history as critical assessment about the past has been superseded by a version of history that conveys a flat, uncontested and unproblematised story of the past. (Wickramasinghe 2013: 94)

The analysis of history textbooks has highlighted the core dimensions of Sinhalese nationalism and how they continue to be affected by the positivist historiography of the nineteenth century that fashioned a modern, Sinhalese dominated history of the island and nation. While the textbooks gloss over the country’s recent troubled past, the following chapters demonstrate how these historical narratives continue to be mobilised by presidential rhetoric to make sense of the present and unite a resurgent nation.
Chapter 5

Speaking of the Nation: ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ Caught Between the Nationalist Past and Patriotic Present

The following three chapters discuss the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. They investigate its main themes and strategies before and after 2009, roughly dividing the material into two parts. First, chapters five and six analyse the core dimension of nationalist ideology, the nation, followed by chapter seven that examines different aspects of the politics of nationhood, especially the link between nation, territory and religion.

This chapter opens the discussion of Rajapaksa’s construction of nationhood by outlining a dualism that permeates his rhetoric. On the one hand, he uses a language that explicitly rejects ethnic nationalism, communalism and racism, instead promoting an inclusive Sri Lankan nation united by an overarching love for the country. On the other hand, he reproduces, often implicitly, core elements of Sinhalese nationalist ideology that do not construct a new nation, but rather promote the revival of the ancient Sinhalese-dominated nation. Following this overview of Rajapaksa’s core themes, the chapter turns to his conceptualisation of nationhood and demonstrates how linguistically he can move between these two themes by drawing different boundaries for the nation. Finally, we discuss the construction of the LTTE and Tamils before and after 2009. These two are clearly distinguished by Rajapaksa’s rhetoric and while the former is presented as the united nation’s ‘other’, the latter are incorporated into the Sri Lankan nation as fellow victims. This section also discusses the realignment of the terrorist threat after the defeat of the LTTE into a somewhat elusive international menace. It highlights how Rajapaksa resorts to narratives of past threats in order to construct a continuing threat to the nation and simultaneously delegitimise international criticism.

Overall, this chapter provides an introduction to the discursive construction of nationalism within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, focusing particularly on how he establishes the boundaries of the Sri Lankan nation through representations of ‘them’. It also provides a first insight into how Rajapaksa adjusts his post-war
rhetoric within existing nationalist frames which subsequently allows him to largely continue similar arguments and political goals after 2009.

Situating Rajapaksa's Nation-building Project

Following the end of the war, the future of Sinhalese nationalism was uncertain in the face of new opportunities and challenges. Post-war predictions discussed in chapter three ranged from a potential for Sinhalese nationalism to transform through the post-war momentum to the entrenchment of a victorious, exclusive nationalist ideology. Hopes that Sinhalese nationalist ideology may become more inclusive towards minority communities were fuelled by Rajapaksa’s first speech after the end of the war, often referred to as ‘Victory Speech’. Wickramasinghe (2009a) points to Rajapaksa’s proclamations of a ‘new patriotism’ that does not know any minorities as a potential fresh start for the country and its communities in the aftermath of the defeat of the LTTE. This ‘new patriotism’ rhetoric and a more general rhetoric of change, however, were not new to Rajapaksa’s post-war speeches, but tropes he mobilised regularly since taking office in late 2005.

The following sections discuss two omnipresent themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric that provide the context for the subsequent in-depth discussions. On the one hand, Rajapaksa’s explicit rhetoric of change, and particularly his ‘new patriotism’, provide a potential for change. It actively calls for new policies, new attitudes and ideas in its vision of a unified, strong nation that addresses all communities in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, the former president’s rhetoric displays an implicit revivalism that qualifies his vision not as a totally new nation, but the renewal of an ancient, Sinhalese-dominated nation. These may appear contradictory at first glance, but in the course of this rhetorical analysis it will become clear how the apparent tension between a deeply ingrained nationalist ‘common sense’ and contemporary needs for inclusiveness are reconciled within the traditional narratives of Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

Proclaiming a New Patriotism

A beneficial starting point for the analysis of possible changes within the construction of nationalism is to look at the transformative potential explicit within Rajapaksa's speeches. A rhetoric of change can encourage audiences to
embrace change, to accept and be more perceptive to shifting context and contents. It also draws our attention to themes, contents or assumptions Rajapaksa might seek to shift or transform.

Rajapaksa began his first term as president with a generally forward directed rhetoric, promising the nation a brighter future. Following his election his speeches convey an initial euphoria:

I want to steer the country along a new path. I am a new leader. I will lead a new Government, a new Cabinet of Ministers, a new policy, a new Sri Lanka, a new citizenry. (VarS 2005a)

He presents himself and his government as a new force, a break with the previous government as 'the nation expects a new future, and a future of change' (IndD 2009). Rajapaksa’s victory in the 2005 presidential election did present a turning point in politics, moving from the leadership of moderates like Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe to Rajapaksa’s hard-line coalition of ultra-nationalist parties. It is other nationalist governments and heads of state of the past Rajapaksa draws parallels to, for instance SWRD Bandaranaike (VarS 2007a), rather than his immediate predecessors.

The focal point of his rhetoric of change is the goal of a ‘new Sri Lanka’, a vision that captures a spirit of new opportunities and possibilities. The concept was introduced in Rajapaksa’s first election manifesto and subsequently became an important theme throughout the speeches of his first term in office. The idea of a ‘new Sri Lanka’ is mainly linked to economic development and peace, but as an ideal vision for the future it also provides a canvas for more profound changes in attitudes and ideas. It is a memorable slogan that can act as a floating signifier carrying social, political or economic connotations. As a vision it is particularly powerful because Rajapaksa does not merely call for political or social reforms, but he urges the nation to change with the shifting circumstances:

In order to overcome all subjugation and build a new free and independent country our thinking and aspirations should be new. Our goals should be new and the manner in which we work should also be new. (IndD 2006)

Embracing all the victories we have achieved, we should step forward as a resurgent nation. This progress will be expedited by forging a political tradition that is based on new thinking. With regard to unity among communities we should act with new vision. It is my belief that the development of the country now moving in new direction could be expedited by such vision and thinking. (VarS 2012a)

Such a rhetoric provides room for possible ideological shifts as it emphasises the necessity for change and directly involves the nation at large: 'We should be ready
to change as it is necessary to meet these new challenges' (IndD 2009). It may be used to redefine dimensions of nationalist ideology or even construct new ones by including new goals or activities for the nation or redefining national identity in a peaceful context.

Rajapaksa's rhetoric of change gains momentum during the final stages of the war and although the phrase 'new Sri Lanka' disappears from Rajapaksa's speeches after 2009, he continues to call for fresh attitudes, thinking and visions within a shifting context from war to peace:

> The people of our country must change their attitudes about future progress of the country, similar to the manner in which they began to think afresh about achieving victory over the forces of terror. There is the need for an enormous attitudinal change from children to adults to achieve national development. (IndD 2011)

We should thus be attentive to ways in which Rajapaksa's rhetoric may seek to shape this 'new thinking' of the nation as it may indicate subtle ideological shifts with the introduction of new ideas, the redefining of some or exclusion of others. It is against the backdrop of such a rhetoric of change within a shifting context that Rajapaksa presents a changing nation, emerging united and strong after the end of the war as part of his 'new patriotism' rhetoric.

From 2007 onwards an element enters Rajapaksa's rhetoric that may significantly change the construction of the Sri Lankan nation: the 'patriotic fervor' of the people (IndD 2008). In a country where the existing state has been contested for decades, Rajapaksa distances himself from communal slogans and declares patriotism, the love for the country, as the growing bond between the diverse members of the nation. This ‘new patriotism’ is explicitly addressed at all ethnic communities as members of the Sri Lankan nation. While Rajapaksa does not use the terms 'patriotism' or 'patriotic' very often, he increasingly employs a language that highlights the symbols of the state and love for the country as markers of membership. This rhetoric reaches a height shortly after the end of the war when he calls for the people 'to love and protect this country, that is now being brought together under a single National Flag' (VicD 2009).

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60 While Rajapaksa continues to refer to his election manifesto, the Mahinda Chintana – Towards a New Sri Lanka, only one post-war speech (VarS 2013b) explicitly mentions the idea of a 'new Sri Lanka'.
Rajapaksa actively rejects the divisive potential of language, religion or race and instead emphasises the unifying potential of patriotism:

One country, one people, one law. That is our way, the only way. Thus, there is no racism, separatism or terrorism. Never forget the motherland; never betray it. We consider no one in our country as a minority person. All those who love the country are children of Mother Lanka. (IndD 2012)

No longer are the Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any others, minorities. There are only two peoples in this country. One is the people that love this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth. Those who do not love the country are now a lesser group. (VarS 2009c)

Following the defeat of the separatist threat, Rajapaksa boldly rejects the predominant way of thinking about communities in Sri Lanka in terms of majority and minority groups, and instead offers a different defining membership criteria of the Sri Lankan nation. His ‘new patriotism’ constructs the distinction between ‘those who love this country and those who have hatred towards it’ (IndD 2014) as superseding communal ethnic identities.

While this rhetoric could potentially become a powerful focal point for transforming the way people think and talk about national identity in Sri Lanka, the following chapters highlight its problematic nature. The inclusive potential of Rajapaksa’s explicit proclamations of a ‘new patriotism’ proposing an ethnically undifferentiated nation is limited primarily by the Sinhalese-centric myth-symbol complex he simultaneously reproduces and mobilises as the basis of Sri Lankan nationhood. This ranges from the cultural foundations of national identity to the ethnically laden symbols of the state that should unite all communities as one. At the same time the second term of the Rajapaksa government was marked by a lack of significant efforts at reconciliation and a Sinhalese triumphalism blind to the different needs of all communities in Sri Lanka, alienating minorities rather than promoting a fresh sense of national unity. This chapter demonstrates how even after the end of the war Rajapaksa rhetoric does not escape the particularistic, ethnic legacy of Sinhalese nationalism when promoting a civic nation (Wickramasinghe 2013: 93).

**Innuendos of Resurgence**

Rajapaksa's explicit construction of patriotism as the basis of a resurgent nation is addressed at all communities in Sri Lanka, actively rejecting the minority/majority dichotomy of the past. Within a larger transformative rhetoric and the transition
from war to peace, which may provide potential momentum for far-reaching changes, Rajapaksa could use it to push the boundaries of the nation slowly but steadily towards a 'new' Sri Lankan nation. Yet, a closer look at the cultural resources mobilised by Rajapaksa indicates that his inclusive rhetoric is not at all challenging the exclusive, Sinhalese-dominated core of his ‘Sri Lankan’ nation. Instead, the more subtle, less explicit revivalist discourse that coexists with Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’ in particular is a major obstacle to a more inclusive post-war conception of nationhood.

While Rajapaksa's 'new Sri Lanka' envisions a future where a united nation lives peacefully in a developed country, this nation in itself is not new, but like his 'new' Sri Lanka and 'new' patriotism embedded in a wider rhetoric of national revival. An in-depth analysis of his rhetoric demonstrates that Rajapaksa does not attempt to shift or reinvent the elements of nationhood, instead he continuously draws on a traditional historic core of the nation. His proclamations of and appeals to national unity are often linked to the past as the nation faces 'this great battle for national revival' (VarS 2009c) after the war:

There must be a good understanding of the people of our country to build national unity. Our national heritage shows the way to national unity. It is needless to remind you that examples from our past show a path towards national unity. (VarS 2014a)

Here and in other speeches Rajapaksa’s language is clearly directed backward, talking of 'building anew, the foundations of a unified and vibrant nation' (UNGA 2011) or a 'nation-wide agenda of renewal' (UNGA 2010). Instead of looking for alternative, ‘new’ sources of national identity he highlights '[o]ur national heritage' and 'examples from our past' (VarS 2014a) as guidelines for the future. Although Rajapaksa often speaks of new challenges in the post-war period and the need for continued unity and change, he also highlights the need to rebuild the old and traditional to meet those:

We now face the immense challenge of restoring all that was lost to the nation, except the lives of those lost, in the thirty years of terrorism. The history of the world has shown that it needs a great deal of time to rebuild a nation that has faced such devastation. (IndD 2011)

Rajapaksa's contemporary national community is a continuation of the ancient Sri Lankan nation. And while it may be infused with the 'new' spirit and strength of patriotism these are still linked to the history and traditions of the country:

Friends, We are all aware that there have been betrayals and subjugations throughout our history. This reminds us of many infamous names. At the same time are we also reminded
today of the bravery, national pride and patriotism that was seen in our great kings such as Dutugemunu, Gajaba and Vijayabahu. (IndD 2009)

Thus, at the heart of Rajapaksa's post-war discourse is not a 'new', but a 'resurgent nation' (VarS 2012a) that all communities are invited to join. Yet, the underlying cultural, religious and symbolic resources that we will explore in more depth in the following chapter may not appeal to all communities as they reproduce the problematic conflation of the Sinhalese majority as the Sri Lankan nation.

Conceptualising Nationhood

Chapters two and three established the theoretical underpinnings of this research, including definitions of key terms such as nation. Before discussing the discursive construction of the different dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideologies within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, however, it is worth briefly outlining how he conceptualises the nation and the language he uses to describe it. The nation is, after all, a pivotal theme throughout Rajapaksa’s speeches, appearing frequently in explicit linguistic markers of nationhood, such as 'our nation', 'our people' or 'national', and more implicitly in references to national symbols, culture, and so on.

Rajapaksa, of course, never provides a clear definition or explanation of the nation during his speeches. Yet, his conception of nationhood is implicit in the language he uses to describe ‘our nation’ and the ways in which he talks both to and about the nation. What emerges is an understanding of the nation as a sovereign, named, territorially bounded political community closely linked to the state. For Rajapaksa, the nation is a very real phenomenon that he can interact with and whose actions have consequences. Similar to the textbooks, Rajapaksa talks of the ‘Sri Lankan’, not Sinhalese, nation. And while it is questionable whether the Sri Lankan nation exists, Rajapaksa talks as if it does. For him, it is a group of people sharing definite criteria that distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’.

The criteria Rajapaksa draws on to construct nationhood throughout the speeches, however, are complex and heterogeneous. On the one hand, he emphasises civic dimensions, linking the nation closely to the modern Sri Lankan state, its territory and symbols. This construction of nationhood is potentially inclusive, as it mobilises a love for the country that should supersede individual or group identities. On the other hand, the reproduction of symbolic resources and a national memory shaped by the culture, traditions and myths of the majority
community provides a rather exclusive construction of the Sri Lankan nation. Oftentimes these ethnic and civic elements are entangled, as Rajapaksa seeks to construct a homogeneous nation from a heterogeneous society. Before examining the discursive construction of these dimensions in detail, the following sections briefly outline some of the different ways Rajapaksa talks about the nation and its parts. We highlight the ways in which he can shift between different dimensions of nationhood by silencing or emphasising them respectively through implicit and explicit connotations.

The Role of Ethnicity

A major aspect that complicates Rajapaksa’s conceptualisation of nationhood is that despite speaking of and to the Sri Lankan nation, he acknowledges the existence of different ethnic communities. He assumes familiarity of both national and international audiences with the ethnic makeup of Sri Lanka and rarely specifies the 'multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country' (UNGA 2006) or society (VarS 2010b; BudS 2010). Ethnic groups are at times associated with racial, religious or linguistic differences, yet not in a systematic way that would allow a clear definition of ethnicity, especially as these differences are presented in addition to ethnicity rather than as defining characteristics of it as scholars often would, for instance ‘all peoples of Sri Lanka irrespective of their place of origin, ethnicity and religion’ (VarS 2006a). This makes it very difficult to conceptualise the relationship between the nation and ethnic communities within Rajapaksa's rhetoric.

This is also evident in his narrative of the national family, a language of kinship and descent that calls on the loyalty of ‘brothers’ that should override any allegiance to smaller groups (Calhoun 1997: 37f.). Rajapaksa frequently uses the family metaphor to actively extend claims to common ancestry to the nation at large by portraying members of different ethnic communities as brothers and sisters (VarS 2006d; VarS 2007b; VarS 2006a; VarS 2008c) or children of Mother Lanka (IndD 2009; BudS 2008; VarS 2007b; IndD 2010). Such representations

61 Smith’s definition of an ethnic community as ‘a shared human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity’ (1996: 447), for example, includes claims to race, religion and language as part of what constitutes an ethnic group.
appear quite counter-intuitive given the differences between Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims simultaneously acknowledged throughout his speeches. After all, close families usually do not consist of members from different races, with different languages or religions. Through the family metaphor Rajapaksa naturalises ties between members of the nation above other potentially divisive criteria. This allows him to negate or at least significantly downplay the differences between ethnic communities when talking of the nation as the 'brotherhood of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslims' (VarS 2006c), as national identity should supersede ethnicity.

There is, however, a limit to the inclusive potential of the family metaphor. In one instance Rajapaksa links the family to patriotism as a criteria for membership: 'All those who love the country are children of Mother Lanka' (IndD 2010). This indicates the potentially fluid nature of Rajapaksa’s discursive construction of the nation’s boundaries, as simply being born into the national family or being an official citizen of Sri Lanka does not guarantee membership. Instead, individuals or groups may be excluded from the national family if they do not fulfil their responsibilities as defined by Rajapaksa.

The Nation, People and Citizens

In this and the following chapters we discuss how Rajapaksa's rhetoric constantly shifts between the different dimensions of nationhood. He draws sometimes more, sometimes less inclusive boundaries of the Sri Lankan nation when mobilising different elements of national identity. He also moves between explicitly emphasising ethnic differences to unite the fragmented nation, and a rhetoric that glosses over differences by avoiding ethnic labels altogether or highlighting dominant family bonds. Given his complex and often fluid conceptualisation of nationhood it can at times be difficult to distinguish who precisely he includes in the Sri Lankan nation. Terms like 'us', 'our' or 'those people' are vague and shifting signifiers that need to be interpreted within the context they are used in. Rajapaksa uses terms like ‘nation’ or ‘people’ as rhetorical device, assuming them to be ‘a sort of composite individual with the attributes of a single person ...., and the capacity to “act as one”’ (Fairclough 1989: 87), even though they are composed of very diverse groups and individuals.
Words like 'citizens' or 'people' are particularly interesting for this analysis, as they may stand for the nation or its parts, allowing Rajapaksa to navigate between or draw attention to the various facets of his conception of nationhood. While 'nation' and 'people' denote separate concepts, they are closely linked within Rajapaksa's rhetoric. The latter is often used synonymous to the nation, but it can also be used to exclude groups from the national community. The following example demonstrates the subtle differentiation between the nation and different conceptions of ‘people’:

Friends
If anyone were to ask me what the secret of the victory is, I would extend my hands and show our beloved people, who include these mothers, fathers, wives who gave their closest and dearest for this battle. Our entire nation owes an immense debt of gratitude to these mothers, fathers and wives. They sacrificed their children and loved ones for the nation, to save the lives of others.

In order to defeat racist terrorism the people of the country have a mature knowledge of the threat before them. The fortune of a nation lies in such knowledge and maturity. As much as the Government, the people too had a good awareness of who the enemy was. Some mothers offered the treasured golden necklace they had inherited through generations for the security forces. While doing so, some mothers of our country also prepared meals to be sent to the displaced people from the North. Where else can one find a people who have sent their children to the forces to battle an enemy, and at the same time, send humanitarian assistance to the people in the areas where their sons are fighting? (VicD 2009)

Throughout this quote from his 2009 Victory Day speech Rajapaksa shifts effortlessly between 'nation' and 'people'. They are used synonymously, though with important nuances. Rajapaksa includes two kinds of people in the ‘entire nation’ who faced a common, unknown enemy everyone would understand to be the LTTE. First, ‘our beloved people, who include these mothers, fathers, wives who gave their closest and dearest for this battle’ and second, ‘the displaced people from the North’.

Rajapaksa does not use ethnic labels here, but both groups are linked to the Sinhalese and Tamils respectively. He explicitly refers to the north, the part of the island nearly exclusively Tamil, thus implicitly characterising this group of people as Tamil. A similar implicit connection can be made for the first group, where he points out mothers, fathers and wives of the predominantly Sinhalese military personnel. Both groups are constructed as part of the nation, although with very different experiences. This example highlights how Rajapaksa can talk of ethnic groups, characterise them and establish relationships between them and the nation.
at large through different connotations of ‘people’ without actually using ethnic labels.

While ‘people’ is used frequently throughout the speeches, ‘citizen’ is used much less. It similarly represents the nation but usually draws attention to instances where Rajapaksa emphasises civic elements of nationhood, such as equality or freedom:

We should look towards the future as a people with a proud and glorious history. Do not strain to demonstrate subjugation and servitude. Rather, strive to demonstrate your freedom and non-servitude, to rise with dignity of a citizen who equally loves the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and all others who makeup our nation. (IndD 2009)

All citizens will be equal before the law and no citizens will be discriminated on account of ethnicity, caste, religion, sex, political beliefs or place of birth. (VarS 2005b)

Overall, these examples demonstrate that to analyse how Rajapaksa constructs his ideal nation we need to look beyond explicit linguistic markers of nationhood. Those can be useful drawing attention to the parts of his speeches where he actively addresses the nation, but inclusion and exclusion are often constructed more implicitly by associating different dimensions of nationhood with initially blank terms like ‘people’. They also highlight how communities and their relationships can be depicted without explicitly being named, allowing Rajapaksa to reconstruct narratives of an exclusive nationalist ideology while eschewing an explicitly ethnic or nationalist language.

Expelling the Tamil from the Tiger

Unlike the textbooks, which constructed a rather consistent national identity based on historical narratives, Rajapaksa’s speeches are not primarily about constructing a coherent version of the nation. It is rather through their engagement with current political issues and special occasions that they construct and reproduce dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. One image that emerges rather clear is that of the nation’s ‘other’, of who is excluded from Rajapaksa’s ideal Sri Lankan nation.

Traditionally, the conflict and its actors, their relationship and respective nationalisms, are framed within a Sinhalese versus Tamil dichotomy. Within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, however, we find a Sri Lankan president, a Sinhalese Buddhist, declaring himself the leader of a united nation that no longer knows ethnicity. Instead of an ethnic conflict he presents an epic struggle between the
demonic and good, between terrorism and the nation. Within the security paradigm of Sinhalese nationalism the LTTE provides a unifying force for Rajapaksa’s Sri Lankan nation before the end of the war, as all communities are equally victims of terrorism. As such, the LTTE is clearly separated from the Tamil community, the latter being constructed as innocent victims who are being liberated and included into the nation. After the defeat of the LTTE, Rajapaksa realigns the security threat to include a distinctive international dimension in the face of changing realities.

The Terrorist Threat before 2009

The textbooks did not cover the most recent history of Sri Lanka, including the conflict and civil war, and thus the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were completely absent from their narratives. Within Rajapaksa's domestic and international speeches, however, they are a core feature, especially before their defeat in May 2009. At times Rajapaksa even directly or indirectly addresses the LTTE as part of the wider audience, for instance to invite them to the negotiation table. But generally Rajapaksa takes an unequivocal stance towards the LTTE, delegitimising their motives and claims by presenting them as a brutal terrorist outfit that threatens the fragmentation not only of the state, but the very nation itself. A threat that persists despite the group’s military defeat in 2009.

Depicting the LTTE

The LTTE was officially proscribed as a terrorist organisation by India in 1992 and by Sri Lanka in 1998, followed by Western countries in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the USA in 2001. Although Sri Lanka lifted the ban on the LTTE prior to the Norwegian facilitated peace talks in 2002, from the outset Rajapaksa adopted an unambiguous rhetoric across all audiences and occasions, clearly labelling the LTTE as a terrorist group: ‘the LTTE terrorists’ (VarS 2006c; VarS 2007a), 'the sinister LTTE terrorism' (BudS 2014), ‘the LTTE’s inflexible terrorism’ (VarS 2006d), ‘an illegal and armed terrorist group’ (UNGA 2008), ‘the LTTE only believe in the language of terror’ (VarS 2009b), ‘LTTE carried out brutal terrorist attacks’ (BudS 2008), 'this destructive terrorist organization' (VarS 2009c). These examples demonstrate Rajapaksa’s unambiguous stance towards the Tamil Tigers, a destructive, ‘ruthless terrorist outfit which resorts to
the most hateful forms of terror’ (VarS 2006b), from his inception as president in 2005 well into the post-war period.

Rajapaksa further depicts the LTTE as a racist organisation (IndD 2009; VicD 2009), whose thinking and goals he likens to fascism (VarS 2006d; IndD 2009). In his speech at the 2006 summit of the Non-Aligned Movement Rajapaksa depicts terrorism as ‘the most de-humanizing and politically de-stabilizing phenomenon of our time’ (VarS 2006b). He frequently establishes the LTTE as a part of this phenomenon and even describes it as the worst and most powerful terrorist organisation in the world (IndD 2009; VarS 2010a). For this he frequently uses hyperbole to characterise the LTTE, its 'savage military strategies' (VarS 2009c) and the 'beastly terrorism' (VarS 2006d) that has caused 'streams of blood and shattered limbs' (VarS 2006a) and 'kill[ed] the Sinhala people by the thousands' (IndD 2008). In domestic speeches Rajapaksa often appeals to pathos to substantiate this terrorist threat, invoking reminders of specific 'massacres' or 'savage' terrorist attacks, for instance Katunayake in 2001 (VarS 2007a; VarS 2006c), or Kebetigollawa and Dambulla in 2006:

Without any reasonable cause, and against all norms of civilization, a bus was bombed at Kebetigollawa killing and injuring a large number of innocent civilians, in a tragedy that shook the very earth. (VarS 2006d)

Most people in Sri Lanka would be familiar with these examples and might even have been personally affected.

Additionally, Rajapaksa often emphasises the 'innocence' of the victims as opposed to the brutal, savage terrorists, again reinforcing the cruelty of the tactics of the LTTE: ‘innocent people were collectively massacred’ (IndD 2009), ‘killing and injuring a large number of innocent civilians’ (VarS 2006d), and so on. Occasionally he singles out mothers or children as victims, for example ‘today even the innocent children who know nothing of race, ethnicity or caste are being attacked by terrorists’ (WarH 2008) or ‘the massacre of innocent civilians including mothers and infants’ (BudS 2008), to add to the horror. He employs a language that should raise emotions in the audience, especially grief and anger, but also fear of the omnipresent threat that could hit any Sri Lankan. Through such appeals to pathos Rajapaksa adds an emotive aspect to his arguments about the LTTE to sustain them.
A common enemy

The prominent presence of the LTTE within Rajapaksa's rhetoric, particularly in the speeches between 2005 and 2009, is a reflection of the events and politics that were largely dominated by the ongoing conflict, but the common enemy also serves important strategic functions. First, the LTTE is presented as a powerful terrorist threat that holds the country in its grip, threatening the very existence of both nation and state. Rajapaksa highlights how terrorism has 'brought immeasurable, humiliation, damage and discredit to the nation' (VarS 2006d), how it has 'wrapped our entire nation in fear' (IndD 2009) and ultimately how 'this honoured motherland of ours was made a graveyard in the eyes of the world' (VarS 2006d). Like his predecessors Rajapaksa mobilises strong anti-LTTE narratives that on the one hand delegitimise the organisation’s goals and claims, and on the other hand provide a contemporary rationalisation of deeper rooted anxieties and fears, the previously highlighted minority complex of the Sinhalese majority (Korf 2006: 284).

Second, this terrorist ‘other’ also serves a unifying function within Rajapaksa’s dichotomous representations of ‘us’, the innocent victims of terror, and ‘them’, the LTTE terrorists. Especially in the period after 2006, when the intensity of the militant threat was increasing, the anti-LTTE rhetoric provided a powerful trope for Rajapaksa to appeal to the nation, to mobilise it against the common terrorist threat, regardless of ethnic, religious or linguistic differences, as well as to delegitimise dissent and justify his policies. We will return to this point in more depth in chapter seven, but to highlight one example:

I ask this of all political parties, all media, and all people’s organizations. You decide whether you should be with a handful of terrorists or with the common man who is in the majority. You must clearly choose between these two sides. No one can represent both these sides at any one time. (VarS 2006d)

Third, and essential for Rajapaksa’s construction of a patriotic, united nation, he clearly separates the LTTE from the Tamil community. The LTTE is located outside his heterogeneous conception of nationhood, presented as a counterpart, an enemy to it. The LTTE is presented as a purely terrorist organisation without any ethnically motivated grievances or demands. Below we discuss further how Rajapaksa separates the Tamils from the LTTE and its terrorist project and the importance of this for Rajapaksa’s construction of national identity. But overall,
such characterisations of the LTTE allow Rajapaksa to move from nationhood based on ethnic ‘othering’ to a potentially inclusive nationalism or patriotism united by a common enemy, terrorism.

**Realigning the Threat after 2009**

Given this centrality of the LTTE to Rajapaksa's rhetoric both in terms of political goals and strategies and as the main 'other' to the Sri Lankan nation, its military defeat in May 2009 posed a significant challenge to this narrative. Despite their defeat, the LTTE did not disappear from Rajapaksa's rhetoric or the political stage after the end of the war. Hyndman, for instance, highlights the performative modes of securitisation that the Rajapaksa government used to ‘constantly reproduce[26] fear through representations of future risks’ (2015: 13), while others raise concerns about the continued militarisation of the country despite the end of the war (e.g. Stone 2014; Höglund and Orjuela 2011). Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric illustrates the ideological space within which these become viable, evident in the dualism that on the one hand reassures Sri Lankans and the world in a most decisive language that terrorism in Sri Lanka has been defeated, while simultaneously acknowledging a remaining, albeit somewhat transformed, threat. Readjusting the ‘other’ in this way allows Rajapaksa to continue to appeal to a terrorist threat and serves largely the same functions as before the war.

**Defeated but not gone: The remaining terrorist threat**

Following the end of the war in May 2009, Rajapaksa’s speeches continue to include references to the LTTE, especially in his yearly Victory Day speeches, although their frequency does decrease compared to the speeches before 2009. His characterisations of the Tigers continue along the lines of his previous rhetoric, using the same language to describe it as ‘ruthless and powerful’ (VicD 2009; VicD 2011; VicD 2013; VicD 2014), ‘cruel’ (VicD 2011), ‘brutal’ (UNGA 2010) or ‘savage’ (VarS 2009d). Often these depictions are included in retrospect of the recent years when LTTE violence posed a threat to the country. Such reminders are placed within the framework of an unequivocal 'victory over terrorism' (VarS 2009d; VicD 2011), most decisively displayed by the images of the killed Prabhakaran, naked and desecrated. Yet, while Rajapaksa emphasises that the LTTE does not pose a military threat to the country and its people any more, the
‘defeat of the most ruthless terrorism in the world’ (VicD 2011) is not as conclusive as it may seem at first.

Since the end of the war victory monuments have been erected throughout the country and the Rajapaksa government has opened up the final conflict zone in the north to ‘war tourism’, making former battlefields and LTTE bunkers accessible to domestic and foreign tourists (Hyndman 2015). These sites should not be understood merely as sites of triumphalism, but they also serve as a reminder of the omnipresent threat of the possible resurgence of Tiger violence to justify the continuing post-war securitisation and militarisation of the country (Id.: 14). The following quote demonstrates how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric perpetuates such by pointing out existing LTTE remnants despite the large-scale defeat of terrorism:

We have today destroyed the world’s most ruthless terrorists without leaving any of their leaders. Friends, Terrorists have nothing today. Some may still be hidden behind masks, we know about them. Today, the terrorists have no large camps to which they can forcibly take away the children of Tamil mothers for military training. Artillery, heavy weapons and tanks do not speak for the terrorists anymore. Aircraft and runways have been blown to smithereens. Oil storage complexes, weapons factories, administrative centres of terror have been uprooted from the motherland. Naval forces and ships can rest on the sea bed. The days when they were able to build marine fortresses and harbours are over. The courts of the tigers have been swept out our motherland forever. (WarH 2009)

This excerpt from a speech delivered only a few days after the official end of the war at a war heroes celebration exemplifies how Rajapaksa moves between a new dualism, emphasising the defeat but not total destruction of the LTTE.

He highlights the defeat of the leadership and military capacity of the LTTE, assuring the physical safety of the country, for instance proclaiming in 2010 that ‘with the elimination of terrorism there is security and stability in every part of the country’ (VarS 2010c), or stating in 2012 that ‘terrorism has firmly been consigned to the past in Sri Lanka’ (VarS 2012c). These proclamations of the liberation of the north and the defeat of terrorism in Sri Lanka are important to Rajapaksa's post-war rhetoric, as they also serve as reminders to domestic and foreign audiences that Rajapaksa was the president who defeated the LTTE. Managing this seemingly impossible task where his predecessors failed provided Rajapaksa with a source of ethos unprecedented in Sri Lanka's recent history.

At the same time, however, Rajapaksa’s rhetoric illustrates how the military defeat of the Tigers did not mean the end of Sinhalese fears and anxieties, which, quite to the contrary, were subtly stoked by the actions and rhetoric of the
Rajapaksa regime. The post-war speeches clearly demonstrate how the newly gained peace and national unity are framed against the background of a remaining threat. The above quote illustrates this remaining threat as Rajapaksa acknowledges remnant terrorists who ‘have nothing today’ and remain hidden. Rajapaksa’s speeches do not include details on how his government dealt with former Tigers through detention, rehabilitation and re-education programmes or the continued high militarisation of the north. Instead, he draws attention to the international dimension of the post-war threat, locating it outside of Sri Lanka so as not to contradict his assurances of a complete victory.

The international dimension of insecurity

Even before the end of the war Rajapaksa constructed the LTTE as an international phenomenon, pointing out its international network and depicting it as part of international terrorism at large. Only a few days before the end of the war he addressed the diplomatic community in Colombo, reminding them that 'the LTTE has an extensive international network spread among many of your countries’ (VarS 2009b). In other speeches he links the LTTE to international terrorism (WarH 2008) or points out funding the LTTE received from overseas (VarS 2007c). After the military defeat of the LTTE Rajapaksa takes up this international dimension again and locates much of the continuing threat within its former international network. In his 2012 Victory Day address he clearly stated:

It is no secret that those who conscripted children to war, and other war criminals who are leaders of the LTTE, are acting with freedom in foreign countries. Just as much as their work their demands also remain the same; they seek the same ends through different means. (VicD 2012)

While immediately after the end of the war Rajapaksa presented the remaining threat as leaderless and mostly powerless terrorists, three years later they have become a real force again, although without the same military capacity they possessed before.

The new methods of 'them' instead are false propaganda and defamation. Rajapaksa frequently warns audiences of the 'distorted facts spread by the global network of the LTTE' (BudS 2011) on domestic and international occasions:

You are aware that the residues of the LTTE conduct vicious propaganda intended to generate funds for de-stabilizing Sri Lanka. A very visible manifestation of these efforts is the elections being held in many countries for a so-called Transnational Eelam Government. You must be aware of the destructive aims faced by us. We, for our part,
have been pointing out to the concerned authorities the sinister nature of these attempts. (VarS 2010b)

After the war Rajapaksa presents an 'other' that, although not exactly the same as the LTTE, is not truly new either. He uses a similar language to highlight its 'vicious' and 'destructive' character and it consists of former terrorists or supporters within the LTTE's international network who continue to work towards separatist aims. While this post-war 'other' does not have the same military means at its disposal, the separatist aims it works towards through false propaganda and misinformation continue to threaten Sri Lanka and the nation.

Through this reframing of the LTTE terrorist threat, Rajapaksa implicitly extends the definition of terrorism beyond brutal, savage attacks that he focused on during the final stages of the war. It now also includes those who challenge him, his government and the country through mere words. Critics, especially from the sizeable Tamil diaspora, can be equated to separatists and separatists are like terrorists threatening the country and nation:

We see the use of information provided by those who are committed to separatism and those who defeated by the people to level charges of war crimes and other alleged offences against Sri Lanka as a grave offence. I see the attempts level charges of war crimes against us in Geneva today as the triumph of those who are not in favour of peace. This seeks to drive fear into people and nations committed to peace and working to safeguard a country's independence and freedom. ..... We categorically state here that we are not ready, under any circumstances, to deprive our country of the freedom we have won. We Sri Lankans who were born in this country, were brought up in this country, and live in this country, have every desire to protect the peace and unity of our country much more than any others from outside. We have to recall the bitter memories of the past when baseless allegations are levelled against us. (IndD 2014)

This quote particularly highlights how this revised threat Rajapaksa constructs continues to serve a unifying function for the nation. By expanding the threat to include non-militant strategies and giving it a distinct international component Rajapaksa not only responds to current events but also reproduces a salient theme of insecurity. He draws on the widespread Sinhalese mindset of a besieged minority, locating the post-war threat to the nation in a different guise outside the country.

Although mobilising traditional narratives also visible in the anti-colonial sentiments of the textbooks, Rajapaksa's internationalisation of the terrorist threat can best be understood within the shifting international climate from initial relief about the end of the war to growing concern and disappointment with the lack of progress and reconciliation. After 2010 international pressure on the Rajapaksa
regime from NGOs, Western countries and UN institutions was growing, as allegations of human rights violations during the final stages of the war and increasingly its aftermath were mounting. Between 2012 and 2014 the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted three resolutions asking, among other things, for objective national and international investigations into these allegations and further implementations of the recommendations from the LLRC to ensure accountability and reconciliation. The government under Rajapaksa rejected international accusations, did not comply with the UN resolutions, and denied cooperation and access to international investigators. It became increasingly hostile towards the UN and Western countries advocating their concept of post-conflict reconciliation based on the Western liberal peace model, and as a response emphasised its own approach that is ‘about forgetting the past and moving forwards, not returning to the past, either for collective therapy or retribution’ (Uyangoda 2012: 26).

Rajapaksa’s post-war speeches similarly reject such allegations and requests, partially by linking them to false propaganda and misinformation campaigns of the Tamil diaspora which he delegitimises as part of the international network of the LTTE remnants. Addressing international audiences Rajapaksa argues for homegrown solutions on the basis of the country's traditions and its guaranteed sovereignty. In domestic speeches Rajapaksa strongly opposes international involvement and in his 2013 Victory Day speech he even warned the nation from what has the appearance of a global conspiracy against Sri Lanka:

The armed racist terrorism that existed for several years was used to control our country in the way that external forces wanted to. Foreign forces and pressures, foreign invasions are not new to us. In the four years since this great humanitarian victory there were many strategies tried out by these forces to rule our Motherland. These included the Arab Spring, grease demons,\(^\text{62}\) the independent of the Judiciary, media freedom and human rights. There were attempts to make us file answers to such charges almost every six months. It is these sinister aims that are put forward as the protection of human rights and democracy. However, what is hidden below this is the expectation to break up this country. Today we have a Sri Lankan nation that is sufficiently matured to understand this. Through the entirety of the past four years we had to struggle with these forces. It will be so in the future too. We will not allow a single inch of the land that you won by the sacrifice of your life to be taken away. There will be no room for separation. (VicD 2013)

\(^{62}\) Grease devils or demons refers to reports about naked or semi-naked men, usually members of or supported by the security forces, smeared in grease who allegedly sexually assaulted woman across the country (Goodhand 2012: 133f.).
This excerpt is quite a forceful assertion against international involvement in Sri Lankan affairs. Rajapaksa conlates the international dimension of the terrorist threat and those international actors speaking out against Sri Lanka through channels such as the UNHRC. He presents them as threatening 'foreign forces' that actively seek to 'rule our Motherland'.

In response to domestic and foreign pressures Rajapaksa adopts a more forceful language to condemn international involvement, drawing on Sinhalese fears and insecurities, and mobilising historical narratives that blame foreign invasions for the downfall of the great ancient civilisation. Through allusions to the country’s history of foreign invasions he subtly invokes fears of renewed colonialism by foreign powers, a fear perpetually fuelled by reminders to the nation’s ‘subjugation’ in the past and present threats. In another speech, for instance, he reminds the audience on Independence Day that ‘[t]he invaders always came to our country shedding oceans of crocodile tears’ (IndD 2014). Rajapaksa’s arguments against international involvement gain momentum through their resonance with these traditional narratives of ‘the threat of the foreign in the Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 178), allowing Rajapaksa to connect the past threats of colonialism and the present actions of Western actors in particular, presenting a continuing danger to nation and country.

Linking the remnants of terrorism and international critics allows Rajapaksa to delegitimise the latter, their allegations and criticism of his government and its policies. It also assures that the unifying function of the LTTE in his rhetoric prior to the end of the war remains intact, although the ‘other’ is adjusted to fit the shifting context. This, however, does not tarnish the regime’s victory over terrorism, as the militant threat within Sri Lanka has been defeated. Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric thus continues to work within the same framework of insecurity prominent before 2009. He constructs a persisting threat to nation and state as a rationale for his arguments for national unity and policies. A threat that is still explicitly separate from the Tamil community.

**Representing the Tamils**

Rajapaksa’s representation of the LTTE, and the conflict at large, as a terrorist rather than an ethnic issue raises the question of how the Tamils are portrayed
within his rhetoric. And even though Rajapaksa emphasises a nation that does not know minorities or majorities, the Tamil community features frequently throughout his speeches and is central to Rajapaksa’s construction of an overarching Sri Lankan nation. By separating it from the Tamil Tigers, the nation’s ‘other’, and abstaining from explicit negative representations of the Tamils he is able to include them into his envisioned nation. His portrayal of a victimised, traumatised community, however, strengthens underlying themes of a hierarchical order that understands inclusion as depending on the acceptance of Sinhalese Buddhist majority principles. At the same time Rajapaksa’s construction of Tamils also silences their grievances, an important strategic move of Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric and politics.

**Ethnic geographies**

The presence of distinguishable ethnic communities in Sri Lanka is a given, an underlying presupposition within Rajapaksa's rhetoric, representing the reality of a multi-cultural country. He regularly refers to the different communities across his speeches, acknowledging differences in language and religion. Often such explicit recognition of ethnic diversity is directly linked to calls for national unity, reminding all groups that they are part of something bigger, for instance through the family metaphor: ‘all the children of our motherland - Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and of all other communities, spread throughout our land’ (IndD 2009). But apart from such honourable mentions minority communities are largely absent within his speeches. Muslims, Burghers or Malay are rarely mentioned and if so usually in lists like the above without further information about these groups or their interests. Instead, Rajapaksa emphasises the nation which supersedes any differences in language, religion, and so on. The Tamil community is the major exception as it features frequently throughout the speeches, mainly because of its role in the civil war.

Many representations of the Tamils, and at times of the Sinhalese, too, are not identified by ethnic labels. Instead, one major dimension of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is the territorialisation of the two communities. Instead of ethnic labels he frequently uses geographic euphemisms to depict Sinhalese Tamils. He frequently connects ethnicity and territory implicitly in phrases like 'the children of the south
and those of the north' (IndD 2007), but in his Independence Day speech in 2007 Rajapaksa explicitly links them when he talks about 'the Sinhala people in the South' and 'innocent people of the North' (IndD 2007). Rajapaksa can use these geographic dimensions as presuppositions that domestic audiences would be familiar with because of the well-established traditional settlement patterns of ethnic communities across Sri Lanka. The northern areas, particularly Jaffna, are dominantly Tamil, the southern and central parts mainly Sinhalese,\(^63\) and the east features roughly equal shares of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. Thirty years of civil war, including ethnic cleansing driving Muslims from the north, emigration of Tamils and large numbers of internally displaced people during the final stages, as well as settlement schemes of consecutive governments have affected the distribution of the population. Yet, the north-south divide in particular remains intact and the separatist claims of the LTTE for an independent state in the north and east have additionally fixed territorial images.

Using a geographic instead of an ethnic distinction allows Rajapaksa to avoid labels associated with ethnic interpretations of the conflict, while at the same time being able depict group relations or characterise communities in a certain way. He uses it mainly to refer to the Tamils, 'the people of the North', and to distinguish them as a separate group within the nation: ‘the people of/in] the North and East’ (VarS 2007b; VarS 2007d; IndD 2008; VarS 2006a; IndD 2011; BudS 2012; VicD 2013), ‘innocent civilians in the North and East’ (BudS 2008), ‘the innocent people of the North and East’ (WarH 2007), ‘the liberated people of the North’ (VicD 2010), 'northern people' (BudS 2012; BudS 2014; VicD 2013) or less specific ‘the innocent people in the affected areas’ (BudS 2014), 'the people in those areas' (VarS 2010b; VicD 2011), ‘the ones affected’ (VarS 2006a), ‘the people there’ (VarS 2008c) or ‘such people’ (BudS 2008). This list of examples is not exhaustive, but it illustrates the manner in which Rajapaksa uses geographic labels to refer to the Tamils across a wide range of speeches.

The geographic distinction does not replace the ethnic label, as there are still many direct references to the Tamil community throughout the speeches, and Rajapaksa’s representation of the Tamils does not differ between ethnic and

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\(^63\) Colombo is the major exception with minority communities making up about half of the population.
geographic signifiers. We thus need to be aware of the link to not miss subtle characterisations of the Tamils where they are not explicitly identified through labels. Rajapaksa's use of the territorial dimension is rather interesting as it reinforces the association of ethnic groups with certain territories. This is usually a link Rajapaksa dismisses when he tries to construct the whole island as the homeland of the Sri Lankan nation, rejecting traditional homelands as discussed in depth in chapter seven. This contradiction indicates how difficult it is for Rajapaksa to move beyond conventional ethnic narratives that have become ‘common sense’ while trying to shift to a language that emphasises a Sri Lankan nation that unites all communities.

**Of liberators and liberated**

Rajapaksa sought to construct a sharp distinction between the Tamil Tigers and the Tamil community to include the latter into the Sri Lankan nation represented by him and his government. This was a rather ambitious goal, particularly given the longstanding claims of the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people and their interests. Even after the defeat of the LTTE the elections for the northern provincial council in 2013 clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of Tamils now looks to Tamil parties for political representation, despite the TNA’s controversial relationship with the LTTE in the past. It should also be noted that during the decades of conflict an explicit anti-LTTE ideology has come to disguise hostilities towards Tamils (DeVotta 2007: 37) rather than replacing traditional Sinhalese versus Tamil narratives. Rajapaksa’s election brought a return towards more hard-line nationalist positions rejecting any ethnic base of the conflict, instead framing the issue as a terrorist problem or the national question. This frame essentially enabled the Rajapaksa government to gloss over grievances of minority communities and focus its post-war efforts on reconstruction and economic development instead of efforts to address minority grievances and reconciliation.

The representations of Tamils throughout the speeches stand in stark contrast to those of the LTTE, which ‘has put the Tamil community to their lowest position in history’ leaving it ‘in a tragic and helpless state’ (VarS 2009c). The LTTE is presented as the perpetrator, a brutal, ruthless terrorist outfit threatening
the very existence of the nation and state. The Tamils, on the contrary, are depicted as innocent victims of this terror. In his analysis of Rajapaksa’s Victory Speech Schubert (2013) identifies the LTTE as the perpetrators and three types of victims: the collective body, the LTTE and the Sinhalese. He argues that the separation of victims may subvert the unifying potential of collective victimisation, as the Tamils are not included in the mobilisation of historical narratives of foreign subjugation of the Sinhalese Buddhist nation that establish the Sinhalese as the ‘real’ victims (Id.: 11-16). By defining Tamils as passive victims of the LTTE Rajapaksa seeks to establish a counter-narrative to Tamil discourses of victimhood, which view the community as a long-standing victim of state persecution, reinforced by the experiences of continued military occupation and repression after 2009 (Seoighe 2016: 359). Within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric the Tamil community instead is portrayed as a victim of the LTTE, who has now been liberated by the forces of the state.

During the final stages of the war Rajapaksa frequently highlights how the Tamils in the north and east were oppressed by the LTTE, deprived of their rights, freedom and economic progress for decades. Adjectives frequently used to describe them are 'innocent', 'impoverished' or 'affected'. They are presented as 'hostages' (UNGA 2008) who 'were subject to the inhuman acts of terror and harassment for over 25 years' (BudS 2008). These depictions not only reinforce the separation between the LTTE and Tamils, but Rajapaksa also implicitly establishes a relationship between the Tamils and the nation. The following quotes provide striking examples of how he presents the Tamils as passive victims of the LTTE who need to be rescued by ‘us’, the government and the Sinhalese:

We must liberate the innocent people living in Kilinochchi and Mulativu mortally scared of the firearms of the terrorists. We should assist them. They have had enough sufferings. We must improve the livelihood of these innocent people by developing schools, hospitals and electricity and transport facilities in those areas. The people in those areas will act with patience till we affect these measures on a priority basis. Our security forces are engaged in operations in such areas to liberate such people in the name of humanity. I appeal to such innocent people to join hands with the forces. (BudS 2008)

It is only by joining with us that the innocent Tamil people of the North can be liberated from terrorist intimidation and the misdeeds of violence; and the North could be emancipated. (IndD 2007)

Improving the lives of Sri Lankans all over the country is our ambition. Improving the lives of the impoverished in the North and the East is a priority. Having suffered much over these two decades of a war imposed on them by the LTTE, we must create a safe, stable and meaningful environment that enables the impoverished in the North and the
East to participate in economic activity, which will give them the capacity to progress towards their life ambitions. (VarS 2006a)

The category of the victim is not neutral, as ‘this victim is expected to be innocent and blameless – a non-participant in conflict or violence, who is perceived as being acted upon and victimized by external forces outside his or her control’ (Seoighe 2016: 356). Rajapaksa presents an image of innocent Tamil victims, a people in need of liberation. By giving them no agency in the ongoing events at all Rajapaksa can gloss over issues of Tamil support for the LTTE, as Tamils are merely childlike victims. This further delegitimises the LTTE, who claimed to represent the Tamils and perpetuates a clear separation of Tamils and LTTE. Unlike the terrorist threat that needs to be defeated, the Tamils can be included into Rajapaksa’s construct of the Sri Lankan nation as victims of the LTTE, dissociated from the terrorists and their separatist demands.

The representations of the Tamils as a community in distress also imply a relationship to other parts of the nation, namely the 'us' who should liberate them. Schubert argues that by separating Tamil and Sinhalese victims there is also a place for two victors in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric (2013: 14), although it seems rather a differentiation between active liberators and passive liberated who may participate in the victory celebrations even though they had no active part in achieving it. According to Rajapaksa it is the government, its soldiers and generally the people of the south who must 'do justice by the innocent Tamil people' (IndD 2007) as they cannot gain freedom from oppression on their own. Depicting liberators and liberated constructs a relationship between ethnic communities, as Rajapaksa reiterates a Sinhalese-centric 'us' besides the Tamil victims: ‘Their hearts are now with us who liberated from the slavery they had been forced into’ (VarS 2009c). The liberators are the people of the south, their soldiers, and Rajapaksa and his government who are Sinhalese. In the following quote Rajapaksa explicitly points out how the Tamils came to the Sinhalese for help:

When we defeated terrorism and won freedom for the people in the South, we said that it was our responsibility to make it a greater victory for the people in the North. Nobody came forward to give the freedom to the people of the North that they enjoy today. When their human rights were violated there was nobody to restore them. Only we were concerned about it. ... Where did these people come in search of their freedom? They came to the midst of Sinhala community. Places such as Kollupitiya, Bambalapitiya, Wellawatta, Modara and Mattakkuliya in and along the suburbs were full of the people who came in search of peace.

If we did not eradicate terrorism in 2009, children in the North could not have attended school or enter the universities as freely as they do today. But today people in the North
 Just like representations of the LTTE continue in the same vein after the war as before, reviews of the past like this reminder of the victory over the LTTE in Rajapaksa's 2014 Independence Day speech continue to highlight the helplessness of the ‘innocent Tamils’.

In Rajapaksa's post-war rhetoric the Tamils, even though not physically oppressed by the LTTE anymore, are kept in a passive state and are only slowly emancipated. This development is presented as a result of the actions of the Rajapaksa regime, as a Sinhalese achievement: ‘[t]he north and east won by war heroes are fast becoming prosperous, in place of the hardships that prevailed’ (VicD 2011); ‘the service we have done in three years to the Tamil people of the North, whose freedom we have restored’ (VicD 2012) or ‘I was able to grant them democracy’ (IndD 2010). Arguments such as these continue to construct the relationship between liberators and liberated beyond the end of the war, as they remind the Tamil community, and the nation at large, of how the north and east were rescued by the Rajapaksa government and are now slowly catching up under its tutelage. Rajapaksa provides a sense of superiority to the winners of war, but this triumphalism only marginally includes the Tamils.

The construction of the Tamils as a distinct group within the nation has major consequences for Rajapaksa's discursive construction of nationalism at large. The Tamils are not only different from the LTTE, they are also frequently presented as separate from 'us', usually the Sinhalese. Even though Rajapaksa's rhetoric does not include explicit negative representations of the Tamils and openly invites them to join the victorious nation, they are addressed as a weak group that is only slowly emerging from decades of immaturity. While the LTTE has been defeated militarily, the Tamils are incorporated within the nation through assimilation following their liberation. Rajapaksa does not present the Sinhalese and Tamils as antagonists, but his rhetoric subtly reconstructs existing power relations. The victimisation of the Tamil community legitimises a natural hierarchical order of the nation that includes different communities, but not as equals. Instead, the narrative of the liberated perpetuates the superiority of the liberators, the Sinhalese Buddhists, within the envisioned hierarchical social and political order of Sri Lanka.
Rajapaksa’s privileged access to official discourses and the media allowed him to control the representations of the Tamils and politicise them as victims in ways that did not benefit the victims (Seoighe 2016: 357) as they, their issues and grievances, were silenced within a dominant Sinhalese Buddhist triumphalism. Challenging these narratives was difficult, especially shortly after the war, a time when the Tamil community and its leadership had to reorganise itself after the defeat of the LTTE that had forcefully established itself as sole representative for decades, going so far as to eliminate moderate Tamil leaders. Perpetuating popular sentiments of an anti-LTTE Sinhalese ideology also set the rules for Tamil opposition that needs to be careful to avoid framing its claims in any way that may link it to the separatist terrorist threat as the case of Rajapaksa’s subtle responses to criticism from the Tamil diaspora demonstrate.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the underlying dualism of Rajapaksa’s construction of the Sri Lankan nation simultaneously appealing to a ‘new patriotism’ and revivalist narratives. We have highlighted how he conceptualises it as a diverse, heterogeneous community that is united in a higher purpose, patriotism, and a common enemy, the LTTE. The chapter has illustrated the inclusive potential of this ‘other’, who is framed within Sinhalese narratives of historical fears and anxieties as a ruthless terrorist threat that has to be defeated at any cost. By presenting the Tamils as victims of LTTE terror, Rajapaksa separates them from the group’s separatist goals and actions, instead including the Tamil community within the Sri Lankan nation. Despite the military defeat of the LTTE in 2009 Rajapaksa’s rhetoric keeps its threat, a strategic rhetorical device and potential unifying force of the nation, alive by internationalising it. Amidst increasingly tense relationships to the West Rajapaksa subtly links remnants of the terrorist threat and foreign actors on the basis of traditional narratives of colonial threats of subjugation, resenting any kind of foreign involvement in Sri Lanka’s affairs.

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric of liberators and liberated, boosted by the victory, indicates how despite inclusive appeals for a victorious nation it remains a Sinhalese-centric idea and Tamil incorporation is dependent on the acceptance of a hierarchical social and political order. Through the portrayal of the LTTE as the
unambiguous ‘other’ of the nation and the Tamils as a special part within it, Rajapaksa reproduced a Sinhalese Buddhist ideological space before and after the war that made it possible for the government to evade Tamil grievances. It also allowed him to continue to perpetuate Sinhalese hegemony in the Sri Lankan nation and state, buttressed by Sinhalese triumphalism at the expense of the Tamil victims and liberated who remain marginalised.

Even though throughout the speeches Rajapaksa’s ideal nation is embedded in an inclusive, forward-directed rhetoric of a ‘new Sri Lanka’, its historicity is continuously reproduced by a revivalist rhetoric that gains in importance after the end of the war. The following two chapters investigate Rajapaksa’s construction of ‘us’ in more depth, examining the kind of nation Rajapaksa seeks to revive and how this may further constrain his proclaimed vision of an ethnically undifferentiated national family.
Chapter 6

What is ‘Sri Lankan’? Tracing the Myth-symbol Complex in Rajapaksa’s Rhetoric

The previous chapter has outlined the main features of Rajapaksa’s conceptualisation of nationhood and introduced the major themes of ‘new patriotism’ and an ethnic revivalism underlying his rhetoric. It has examined the discursive construction of ‘them’ before and after 2009, and outlined the main features of Rajapaksa’s proclamations of a patriotism that should unite everyone who loves the country as one Sri Lankan nation regardless of ethnicity, religion or language. The discussion has also examined in detail how Rajapaksa’s construction of the LTTE as ‘other’ separate from the Tamils as ‘victim’ is facilitating this vision of a national family.

This chapter moves on to ask who Rajapaksa’s ideal ‘Sri Lankan’ nation is. It looks at the more intricate set of cultural and symbolic resources mobilised as the basis of his envisioned nation, the myth-symbol complex implicit and explicit within his rhetoric. We ask which shared values and traditions provide a sense of solidarity among its members beyond Rajapaksa’s emphasis on patriotism. Given the multi-cultural character of the people of Sri Lanka he has a wide variety of cultural and historical resources at his disposal to choose from, but a closer investigation finds that Rajapaksa’s Sri Lankan nation is truly Sinhalese at heart.

Examining three core dimensions, namely historical narratives, religion and the post-war cult of the hero, this chapter highlights how Rajapaksa conflates the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan nation. It argues that Rajapaksa embeds his rhetoric within Sinhalese ideological frames that draw on symbolic resources of the majority to make sense of the national past and present. A major aspect central to understanding the post-war trajectory of Rajapaksa’s construction of Sinhalese nationalism is how Sinhalese-dominated historical narratives are not limited to representations of the past, but are also used to interpret and frame post-war events and actors. These provide potential future myths for an ethnic rather than an inclusive nation, buttressing a triumphant Sinhalese nationalism.
This chapter proceeds in four parts. First, it outlines the core elements of the Sinhalese myth-history reproduced by Rajapaksa as the history of the Sri Lankan nation. Second, it examines Rajapaksa’s framing of the war and victory with an emphasis on how the latter is presented as a continuation of established historical narratives. Third, Rajapaksa’s emphasis on Buddhism as the nation’s main religion is briefly discussed, a point that chapter seven will return to when discussing the relationship between Buddhism and the state. Finally, the chapter investigates how Rajapaksa’s veneration of a special kind of war hero fuels Sinhalese post-war triumphalism at the expense of the Tamil minority.

Contemporary Rhetoric and the History of the Nation

The chapter begins with a central aspect of the myth-symbol complex of any nation, its history. The continuity of national values and traditions found within historical narratives, whether real or imagined, is a powerful mobilising tool of nationalism as it links the members in the present and past. The nation of the past, with its golden ages and heroes, provides members of the modern nation with frames of reference for interpreting their experiences (Smith 2009: 37) and helps to fix the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The following sections investigate the historical events and heroes Rajapaksa incorporates into his speeches that provide insights into the content and mechanisms of the discursive construction of his ideal nation.

The following discussion highlights how Rajapaksa reproduces historical narratives akin to the textbooks, highlighting the ancient roots of the modern nation and state. The myths and legends he presents as history, however, reproduce the Mahāvamsa tradition of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, demonstrating how Rajapaksa implicitly conflates the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan nation in the past and present. Rajapaksa presents a seemingly unambiguous history of the nation, whose heroes and stories he can mobilise for different occasions and purposes, such as to appeal to the nation, commemorate it or justify his actions. This part also highlights the role of idolised golden ages, examining how Rajapaksa’s discourses on rural development are closely linked to narratives of national revival. This is particularly evident in the promotion of the village as a
relic of the traditional Sinhalese Buddhist civilisation and Rajapaksa’s declared intentions to reawaken its past glory physically and spiritually.

**Searching for the Origins of the Nation**

Rajapaksa's rhetoric does not need to provide a systematic retelling of the nation's history, he can thus be more selective in choosing historical references than, for instance, the textbooks. He does presuppose the existence of a very old nation with 'ancient values' (VarS 2005b) and a culture deeply rooted in national heritage and traditions, but neither provides a clear beginning for the nation he promotes nor detailed characterisations of it in the past. The previous chapter discussed Rajapaksa's use of the family metaphor to advocate his ambition of an inclusive, multi-ethnic nation. Describing it as a family with one mother and all members as her children, as brothers and sisters, invokes the image of blood ties based on a common ancestry, negating ethnic or racial distinctions. Given the importance of particular readings of history for Sinhalese claims to Sri Lankan nationhood it is crucial to examine who Rajapaksa understands this ancient nation to be. As he does not provide a clear, explicit account of the nation's origins or history, it is difficult to clearly identify the past nation he seeks to mobilise through the family metaphor in the present. Most clues are found in the subtle references to historical ‘facts’ and the ways Rajapaksa reproduces Sinhalese historical narratives in his arguments.

Celebrating Independence Day every February, for instance, could provide a modern, civic origin of a Sri Lankan nation. Rajapaksa's nation, however, is clearly an older phenomenon that he frequently and assertively traces back in time: ‘The fact that we as a nation lay claim to a civilization that is unique to us needs no restatement’ (IndD 2006). He presents ancient roots for the contemporary nation by highlighting for example how ‘[w]e in Sri Lanka are proud of our long history’ (VarS 2013b) or an ‘ancient Sri Lanka’ (VarS 2013b) as a precursor to the modern state. Less explicitly, the ancientness of the Sri Lankan nation is also perpetuated by stories like the following:

Sri Lanka is a country that believed in the 'Dandu Monara' said to have flown thousands of years ago. We saw a depiction of the 'Dandu Monara' at the performance of the Ravana story today. We are a nation that had an awareness of flying machines long before others. (VarS 2013a)
Interestingly the Dandu Monara, a vehicle that supposedly allowed travelling through air, and the story of Ravana are an important narrative from the Hindu canon not mentioned by the Mahāvamsa. For some Sinhalese nationalists this story exemplifies how Sri Lanka used to be the centre of the world with Ravana ruling far beyond Sri Lanka thanks to his air vessel (Edirisinghe 2012). Rajapaksa’s reference again highlights how close together myth and fact lie in Sri Lankan history and illustrates persisting Indian influences despite attempts of revivalists to purify history and Buddhism at the turn of the twentieth century (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 90-93).

Without a clear myth of origin it is difficult to define the boundaries Rajapaksa attributes to and the communities he includes in this seemingly eternal nation. It is clear that this nation pre-dates the colonial period as Rajapaksa’s reminder of a 'nation that inherits a proud history of 2500 years' (IndD 2011) demonstrates. This would place the beginning of the nation roughly with the arrival of Vijaya in the sixth century BCE, the core myth of origin of the Sinhalese people explained in more detail in chapter two. But Rajapaksa neither mentions this myth nor the origins of the Tamils or other minorities in any of the analysed speeches.

By presenting the modern Sri Lankan nation as an ancient unit Rajapaksa provides a sense of continuity to his ideal national community extending into the present. He does not characterise or define this ancient community closer, for instance through a clear myth of origin, thus projecting his modern ideas back into the past. The ancient Sri Lankan nation could well include all communities and support Rajapaksa’s image of a national family, but if we look at how this presupposed common ancestry is embedded within his broader use of historical narratives a clearer, less inclusive image of this ancient unit emerges.

**Rajapaksa’s Mytho-history**

Initially, in his speeches between 2005 and 2009, Rajapaksa does not refer much to historical events or persons. Major exceptions are his Independence Day speeches and of course his engagement with the ongoing war. But overall his references to 'our history' (IndD 2006) do not provide much detailed historical information and importantly do not engage with the controversies surrounding the
construction of history or the distinctive, mutually exclusive historical narratives existing within the country's respective communities (Dewasiri 2013: 1). His rhetoric reproduces an apparently unambiguous positivist history of the nation, a common truth shared by his audiences and, indeed, every Sri Lankan. After the end of the war historical references increase noticeably and the selected myths and heroes demonstrate how Rajapaksa reconstructs a distinctively ethnic, namely Sinhalese, historical narrative as the history of the Sri Lankan nation.

At a 2013 Commonwealth conference Rajapaksa begins his explanation of the history of local government in Sri Lanka with the following words:

The Great Chronicle, the Mahawamsa, describing the life and times of our people, traces back the local government systems to the reign of King Pandukabhaya in the 4th Century BC, during which period, Anuradhapura was established as the first capital of Sri Lanka. (VarS 2013b)

For this foreign audience less familiar with Sri Lanka and her history he establishes the highly controversial Mahāvamsa as a source of knowledge about the 'life and times' of the Sri Lankan people. In his national speeches he explicitly refers to 'our Chronicles' (IndD 2013) only once, but many of the historical events or heroes he cites are taken from these sources and presented as factual history. To highlight some examples of Rajapaksa's use of a mytho-history:

Friends, We are all aware that there have been betrayals and subjugations throughout our history. This reminds us of many infamous names. At the same time are we also reminded today of the bravery, national pride and patriotism that was seen in our great kings such as Dutugemunu, Gajaba and Vijayabahu. Our forces have protected the great heroism and dignity of the past and handed it to the future. (IndD 2009)

This quote from the 2013 Independence Day speech is a good example of how Rajapaksa constructs historical continuity by linking the heroes of the present to those of the past. He singles out three rulers from a long list of ancient kings. First, Dutugemunu who defeated Elara and subsequently ruled the whole of Sri Lanka. Second, Gajaba or Gajabahu, renowned for his services to Buddhism and successful retaliatory invasions of South India as well as namesake to a contemporary army regiment and a navy ship. Last, Vijayabahu who reunited Sri Lanka after driving South Indian invaders from the island. These three represent examples of the archetypical Sinhalese king who firmly ruled the country, nourished Buddhism and protected his nation against outsiders. Rajapaksa links their 'heroism and dignity' to the present Sri Lankan nation, yet they only represent the majority ethnic community. Furthermore, he does not engage with
the controversial nature of these heroes and events, especially Dutugemunu, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Another illustrative quote is from Rajapaksa's second swearing-in ceremony:

I have never called the land of my birth, ‘small Sri Lanka’ or ‘small Island’. This is a land with a great history of many centuries, where the Kalawewa, Ruwanweliseya, Sigiriya, Yoda Ela, Lovamahapaya stand; a land where the Buddha has trod thrice. (VarS 2010d)

In this instance Rajapaksa again directly links the present glory of Sri Lanka to its past, all places being distinctive symbolic resources with special significance to the majority community: Sigiriya, famous seat of an ancient king and later a Buddhist monastery; ancient irrigation constructions Kalawewa and Yoda Ela; Ruwanweliseya, a stupa built by King Dutugemunu; and Lovamahapaya, where the Sangha used to meet. The quote concludes with a reference to the three visits of the Buddha to Sri Lanka reported by the *Mahāvamsa*. The latter are disputed events among Sri Lankan historians, but within Rajapaksa's rhetoric myth and historical fact become one again.

Many Sinhalese believe that Gautama Buddha himself came to the island and chose the Sinhalese to establish a Sinhalese-Buddhist society in Sri Lanka (Manogaran 1987: 2). The story of the Buddha's visits is central to Sinhalese identity as part of the group's election myth, reiterating the importance of Buddhism that sets them apart from their surroundings as chosen people (Smith 1999: 16). Within this logic the destiny of the Sinhalese is inseparably linked to the territory of Sri Lanka as a stronghold of Theravada Buddhism in a largely non-Buddhist world through the concepts of *Sihadipa* and *dhammadipa*. The conflation of Buddhists and Sinhalese raises the question of how non-Buddhists can be a part of the 'Sri Lankan' nation if they do not share in its national destiny, the preservation of Buddhism.

A crucial symbolic resource of Rajapaksa’s nation that is embedded within Rajapaksa’s historical narratives is the homeland. Sri Lanka, both as a political unit and a national idea, provides a central unifier for the island nation. As ‘motherland’ Rajapaksa explicitly constructs the modern state as the country of all communities, of the Sri Lankan nation who is united in their love for this country. When looking at how the homeland is linked to core myths and symbols of Rajapaksa’s mytho-history, however, it becomes clear how he draws on Sinhalese narratives that present the majority’s claims to a homeland disputed by minorities.
Usually the homeland of the nation and derived territorial claims are directly linked to its myth of descent (Smith 1999: 58), and while Rajapaksa does not explicitly engage with the origins of the various communities, the modern national community and geographically defined Sri Lankan territory are both embedded in claims of a national history of over two thousand years.

He draws on the myths and heroes from the *Mahāvamsa* that establish and naturalise a continuous historic link between the nation and the island. The story of Dutugemunu, for instance, unites the themes of people, territory and religion in the past, which are crucial to Sinhalese ideology today (Tambiah 1986: 70). He is celebrated as the great king who, by defeating Elara, his Tamil rival, united Sri Lanka under Sinhalese rule for the first time. Second only to the Vijayan myth, the story of Dutugemunu is central to Sinhalese identity and highlights how the territorialisation of memories can create the idea of a people linked to a specific homeland (Smith 2009: 50). He reproduces historical narratives that establish a natural link between the nation and its ultimate sacred landscape, the island of Sri Lanka, through Sinhalese resources. By presenting Dutugemunu as a hero not just of the Sinhalese but his Sri Lankan nation on several occasions, Rajapaksa legitimises his role as one of the great kings of the country and conflates Sinhalese territorial claims with those of the Sri Lankan nation.

Overall Rajapaksa’s rhetorical references demonstrate how he reproduces Sinhalese-centric narratives from the *Mahāvamsa* that emphasise Sinhalese heroes and symbols, perpetuate a Buddhist ontology, and legitimise territorial claims to the island for the Sinhalese majority. The selective historical narratives he mobilises conflate the Sinhalese community and the Sri Lankan nation, as Rajapaksa presents Sinhalese narratives and claims as that of the nation at large. Instead of supporting the overarching collective identity promoted by Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’, these selective and disputed narratives present Sri Lanka as a basically Sinhalese space, and place Sinhalese Buddhists above other communities. This not only limits Rajapaksa’s ideal nation, it also serves as a premise for his uncompromising assertions of a necessarily unitary Sri Lankan state discussed in more detail in chapter seven.
Reviving the Golden Ages

The origins of Rajapaksa’s nation can only be inferred from the larger historical narratives his rhetoric reproduces, but the influence of the *Mahāvamsa* tradition raises questions of how inclusive Rajapaksa’s ideal nation can truly be. This issue becomes even more evident in the explicit revivalism of his rhetoric that seems at odds with his simultaneous promotion of a ‘new patriotism’. The revival of the village as a surviving relic of Sri Lanka’s golden ages is a core theme of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric before and after 2009 where the tensions between an ethnic ideal of nationhood and a vision of a Sri Lankan nation superseding ethnicity are particularly noticeable.

Golden ages are a common feature of national narratives. They serve as a source of collective pride and authenticity for the nation, revealing its virtues and innate qualities, and a return to golden ages often seeks to re-establish the 'true' nature of the past nation in the present (Smith 2009: 95-97). Yet, within the Sinhalese-dominated historical narrative of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, the golden ages he reproduces celebrate a particular nation, one united especially by the memory of traditional village life. The village represents a potent cultural artefact of the golden ages that, like the nation, although declined has the potential to be reawakened. The majority of the Sinhalese continue to live in villages until present day and Rajapaksa constructs the village as a living reminder of the time before colonial subjugation, when it stood free and strong, promoting a national revival that seeks to revive the ancient true and ideal form of the nation.

**Development, history and heritage**

The golden ages Rajapaksa refers to are the centuries before the colonisation of the whole island by the British in 1815, and particularly the hydraulic civilisation that lasted until the thirteenth century. Again, based mainly on accounts from the *Mahāvamsa*, the beginnings of the hydraulic civilisation are traced back to the arrival of Vijaya and his followers who brought knowledge of irrigation systems to the island (Seneviratna 1987). It was the ability to build large tanks and irrigation systems that made paddy cultivation possible even in the unfavourable conditions of the first settlement areas in the northern dry zone, enabling the emergence of the kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. The tank thus
became a central element of the traditional village. Rajapaksa's rhetoric contains frequent references to elements of the ancient hydraulic civilisation supporting his view of Sri Lanka as a ‘country that was famous for its irrigation and reservoir construction’ (IndD 2008).

The veneration of the ancient Sinhalese hydraulic civilisation is a central theme of Sinhalese nationalist ideology and it is thus not surprising that development discourses in Sri Lanka have been enmeshed with nationalist underpinnings for decades (Wickramasinghe 2013: 93). At the turn of the twentieth century rural development and regeneration was a core mission of revivalists like Dharmapala (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 105) and most leading post-independence politicians also emphasised the reincarnation of Sri Lanka’s golden age, their rural bias reiterating the ‘peasant character’ of Sinhalese nationalism and politics (Brow 1988: 316). Wickramasinghe argues that the purpose of heritage, a cultural practice that simultaneously produces the present and reproduces the past, in Sri Lankan politics has changed over the past century:

> While the patriotic modernists of the early-20th century defined their ancient past as heritage in order to created pride in the nation in the making, and the liberal developmental state of the late-1970s used heritage to strengthen their claim to moral authority to transform an agrarian society into a market-oriented export processing zone, the post-civil war state of the 21st century is using heritage for a purely political purpose, that of depoliticising its citizenry and muting any possible dissent. (Wickramasinghe 2013: 94)

She highlights that history and heritage have become gradually merged and many individual and institutional actors and sites are involved in reconstructing heritage, including the education system from primary schools to universities, popular culture and public performances (Id.).

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is one site where selective historical narratives are reproduced, reconstructing Sinhalese heritage as past and present foundation of the Sri Lankan nation. Like his predecessors he continues to emphasise rural development, a strategy not limited to physical improvements, but also promoting a cultural and spiritual revival of the countryside. Development is a pertinent theme of Rajapaksa's rhetoric before and after the end of the war and is directly linked to the country’s hydraulic traditions:

> In keeping with the exhortation of our former kings that not a drop of water should flow to the sea without first serving the people, we are today harnessing the water in all our great reservoirs for the task of development. All reservoirs must be used without letting them idle. This will lead to the filling up of our barns, providing drinking water to the
people. When we have enough food for our bodies, our minds will be filled with the comfort of freedom. (VarS 2010d)

The last sentence in particular points to a link Rajapaksa presents between development, the nation and peace. Through rural development of its physical infrastructure the village will prosper, reviving its traditional values and in turn strengthen the nation. Reproducing a popular theme of Sinhalese nationalist ideology he links the village to a strong, united nation which in turn is the best way to ensure long-term peace and stability in the country:

> every plant we grow and nurture in our villages under the theme ‘Let us grow to build the country’ is a gigantic step to nurture the country’s independence and freedom (IndD 2008).

The improvement of living standards, infrastructure and education as well as increased production and self-sufficiency of the country through the use of indigenous natural resources, such as traditional paddy lands for food production, were core elements of Rajapaksa's plans for rural development. Given the socialist underpinnings of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLF) Rajapaksa headed until 2015 and the solid political support he enjoyed among the Sinhalese rural masses (Thiranagama 2012, cited in Roberts 2012) such a focus on rural development is not surprising. Yet, Rajapaksa explicitly establishes progress of rural areas and specifically villages as a prerequisite to strengthening and developing the country and nation at large (VarS 2005b; VarS 2007a; IndD 2008; BudS 2010; VarS 2013a; VarS 2013b), launching several programmes, for instance *Gama Neguma*, focusing on the development of rural areas following his election in 2005.

**Rajapaksa’s national ideal in the village**

Besides being a salient political issue, the village is also closely linked to the resurgent nation and their fates are closely interwoven throughout Rajapaksa's rhetoric. The ‘Sinhalese nation as a nation of villages’ (Brow 1988: 311) is not a new theme of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, but it stands in striking contrast to Rajapaksa’s proposed civic ‘new patriotism’ of an ethnically undifferentiated nation. He presents an essentially Sinhalese Buddhist village as a role model for

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64 The *Gama Neguma* Programme, which translates as ‘Village Upliftment’, was launched in 2006. It aims to develop the physical, economic and cultural environments of villages by involving villagers through participatory approaches (Food and Agricultural Organization 2012: 14).
the Sri Lankan nation, often using it as a synecdoche that stands as a part for the whole, its attributes and values characterising the ideal nation at large. Rajapaksa reproduces the village as authentic heritage of the Sinhalese nation in the past and present. His arguments for strengthening and reawakening the village, both its physical and spiritual elements, simultaneously represent claims for the resurgence of the Sri Lankan nation. For Rajapaksa, the revival of rural areas is not limited to housing or infrastructure, but he also proposes a 'cultural revival' (BudS 2011), a 'rural re-awakening' (UNGA 2007) or ‘rural empowerment’ (UNGA 2008). This aspect emphasises the need to restore traditional values embodied by the villages throughout the country. Rajapaksa, for instance, argues that his vision of a 'new Sri Lanka' includes exporting the values of the village to the cities (VarS 2013a; VarS 2013b; BudS 2014).

Throughout his rhetoric he idealises and romanticises the ‘beauty and simplicity of village life’ (VarS 2006b) and ‘the ethical values of the village’ (VarS 2007a) as opposed to the decay resulting from urbanisation:

Such migration to the towns deprives us of the respect and the freedom we enjoy in the village. The Buddha has preached Pathiroopa Desa Vasocha (domicile in a suitable locality). To us the city is not a suitable place to live in. What happened was to leave the respectability of the village to be confined in to a concrete jungle. This is what happened in the name of urbanization. (VarS 2013a)

Rajapaksa links the decline of the village and urbanisation to the nation's loss of respect and freedom under colonial rule, which destroyed the traditional way of life, including the village:

We are a nation that has faced massive invasions in our history. We were able to rise again because our agrarian-economy was strong in the past. We had our irrigation tanks and canals. We know that it was the English who were able to totally subjugate the country. After the revolt of 1818 the tanks and all irrigation facilities in Wellassa were destroyed. The people faced great destruction at that time with curfews and martial law, the killing of youth and letting the village decline in importance. The abundance of the village was destroyed. It was not possible for the village to rise after that. (VarS 2012b)

This quote demonstrates how Rajapaksa presents the same factors that are responsible for the fall of the nation as the reasons for the decline of the village. With the end of the war it is the pre-colonial traditional village from Sinhalese narratives of golden ages that Rajapaksa seeks to revive as the basis of the modern nation. Its ancient core and values should become the 'new' source for collective solidarity: ‘We must revive and build the ethical values of the village that prevailed before we became subject to imperialism' (VarS 2007a).

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Although Rajapaksa never explicitly characterises the village or the nation of the golden ages as specifically 'Sinhalese', within the broader mytho-history that serves as the context of and in turn is being reproduced by his speeches, his subtle depictions clearly establish the village as a stronghold of traditional Sinhalese life. Rural life in the past, its irrigation agriculture and the paddy farmer, is a popular narrative of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. Nationalists venerate the hydraulic kingdoms of the glorious ancient past and cherish the village as the embodiment of the traditional triad of tank, paddy field and stupa (Rampton and Welikala 2001: 94). This ideal of rural life is a ‘retrospective reimagining of the village’ rather than an accurate representation of the harsh realities (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 115), but it has come to represent a time when the great Sinhalese kings ruled in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, and when Buddhism and the nation stood strong before the arrival of European colonisers.

Rajapaksa situates his rhetoric of the village, and national revival in general, within this context, promoting his development programmes as a way to revive this ancient glory of both the village and the nation: ‘It is necessary to provide water for cultivation. The village has to be given electricity. The temple needs assistance’ (VarS 2007a). This quote demonstrates how Rajapaksa's development goals and strategies include the traditional triad that characterised the historic villages, 'water' or tank, 'cultivation' or paddy field, and the 'temple' or stupa, which he then links to pre-colonial 'ethical values of the village' (VarS 2007a). His rhetoric is not limited to emphasising policies reviving modern rural areas in the image of the traditional Sinhalese village, but it is also promoting a modern nation in the image of the past. Through such a process of reappropriation Rajapaksa seeks to recover the pristine ethos of the past to reconstruct a modern nation in the image of the past ethnie (Smith 1999: 12) by linking it to the golden ages. Rajapaksa's rhetoric of a national revival diverges from his explicitly inclusive appeals to 'new patriotism'. It reconstructs nationalist narratives that cherish modern rural life as 'a reincarnation of the ancient, indigenous and Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka’s golden age’ (Wickramasinghe 2013: 93), presenting this idealised image of the Sinhalese Buddhist nation as the foundation of his vision of a united, resurgent Sri Lankan nation. An image that has
traditionally not been very inclusive or appealing to minority communities, especially given Rajapaksa’s wider historical narrative it is placed in.

While Rajapaksa explicitly addresses all communities as members of the national family, he reproduces underlying myths and legends of Dutugemunu and the golden ages of the hydraulic civilisation whose exclusive potential is well established (Kapferer 2012). The ethnic and cultural diversity he recognises in the present is absent in his vision of the past, which instead naturalises an ancient Sinhalese nation, glossing over the role and place of minority communities, their heroes, symbols and traditions. This does not explicitly exclude minorities in the past or present, but it also does not actively include them in the construction of Sri Lankan nationhood that lacks a shared basis. Instead, Rajapaksa actively draws on the Mahāvamsa as an undisputed source of national history, even though its myths and their interpretations have given rise to some of the most exclusive elements of Sinhalese identity and nationalism (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014; Kapferer 2012; Tambiah 1986). Placing his rhetoric in such a selective historical narrative provides a continuity for the majority community rather than supporting the inclusive nation he explicitly promotes, as it strengthens the bonds between those who share these historical narratives, excluding others.

Making the Present into History

The historicity of Rajapaksa's rhetoric is not limited to reappropriating historical resources, but it is also part of the process of shaping the national memory of present and future generations. His speeches are discursive acts that attempt to construct or reconstruct the speakers' desired versions of reality (Wodak et al. 2009). They provide an interpretation of current events that, if successful, can become a dominant discourse shaping official history and serving as resource for the (re)construction of nationhood as well as its politics. Most national myths emerge from periods of rapid economic or social change, cultural clashes or military confrontations as a strategy to adapt to rapid changes (Smith 1999: 83). The end of the war presented such a moment of uncertainty, a decisive historical event that has been and is likely to continue to be interpreted and reinterpreted by different actors for different purposes for a long time to come.
Rajapaksa's speeches provide us with an insight into his official version of the civil war and its end, how he establishes a national narrative that seeks ‘to consolidate memory into a “usable past” in the service of nation building’ (Nesiah 2005, cited in Seoighe 2016: 359). The following sections highlight how Rajapaksa frames contemporary events within existing Sinhalese narratives instead of constructing new, inclusive ones. We begin by analysing his representations of the war, reiterating previous arguments that his framing of a non-ethnic conflict allows him to marginalise minorities and their grievances. Defining the war as a ‘humanitarian operation’ also constructs a righteous government facing the demonic forces of LTTE terrorism. Based on Rajapaksa’s depictions of the war the remaining sections then discuss his representations of the victory, highlighting the dichotomy of his proclamations of a patriotic victory of all communities and Sinhalese triumphalism. Framing the victory as a continuation of mytho-historical narratives is a striking example of how contemporary events may be constructed as future symbolic resources for the nation, albeit Rajapaksa’s version encourages a selective national memory that again places the Sinhalese at the core of his ideal nation.

**Conflict and War: Ethical, not Ethnic**

The civil war, which lasted from 1983 until 2009, is omnipresent within Rajapaksa's speeches. This is naturally a reflection of the context in which these speeches were given, which was increasingly dominated by violent confrontations between the Sri Lankan military forces and the Tamil Tigers between 2006 and early 2009. The depiction of the war, its actors and purpose furthermore serves Rajapaksa's political ends, as he can draw on them to legitimise or justify his policies as well as to delegitimise any dissent.

Rajapaksa's framing of the war is closely linked to that of the LTTE discussed in the previous chapter. The most important aspect is that it is presented as a purely terrorist issue not based on long-lasting ethnic grievances as the LTTE, minorities and international observers usually postulate. This position is clearly summarised in a statement to an international audience in 2007: 'There is no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka - as some media mistakenly highlight. Sri Lanka’s security forces are fighting a terrorist group, not a particular community' (VarS
Throughout all the analysed speeches this is the only time Rajapaksa uses the term 'ethnic conflict'. He rejects an ethnic interpretation, both regarding the actors and the underlying causes, and instead frames the war as a conflict between the Sri Lankan government and a terrorist organisation. At the same time Rajapaksa conflates the civil war and its underlying conflict.65 The conflict is presented as contemporaneous to the war and his use of the terms 'conflict' and 'war' presents them as interchangeable to the audience. This allows Rajapaksa to argue that both have the same solution and no additional strategies are necessary to address the underlying causes of the conflict once the war is brought to an end through military means.

Denying the ethnic base of the conflict is a common strategy of the Sinhalese majority and during the Rajapaksa regime the rhetoric of the ‘national question’ was widely used among the main Sinhalese political parties (Wickramasinghe 2008: 196). To this general framing of the conflict Rajapaksa adds a particular euphemism to describe the intensified military campaigns after July 2006 in his speeches from 2007 onwards. He presents the war as a 'humanitarian operation', 'humanitarian mission' or 'rescue operation' with the main aim of 'liberating' the affected areas in the north and east from LTTE terrorism. Such depictions downplay the military efforts and especially their quite destructive consequences in the north in the face of growing national and international criticism. They also carry a moral connotation that further adds to Rajapaksa's overarching representation of the 'good us' against the 'evil them'. While the means of the LTTE are brutal and destructive, the government engages in a 'war to save the country' (WarH 2008) whereby the military operations are only a necessary means to defeat terrorism.

This is reinforced by Rajapaksa frequently emphasising the efforts of the government to support the people in the war zones despite and in addition to the military operations carried out by its troops:

Where conflict rages, it is the army that supplies food to the people to overcome hunger; when the innocent people of the North and East fall sick it is the army that helps to treat them. The army looks to their welfare activities as well. Our war heroes sometimes lay

65 The war lasted from 1983 to 2009, while the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the late colonial and early independence period.
down their lives not really in armed combat, but also when engaged in humanitarian activities to protect the lives of innocent people. (WarH 2007)

We also need to acknowledge the role of the armed forces who engaged in a heroic task to rescue more than 200,000 innocent civilians who were kept hostage by the LTTE. The manner of rescuing the hostages would indeed be an example to others engaged in military operations. It may also be one of the greatest rescue operations in the world. (VarS 2009b)

Both examples, the first from the speech on the 2007 War Heroes Day and the second presented to an international audience in Colombo in 2009, demonstrate how Rajapaksa frames the ongoing war not in military terms, but instead uses a positively connotated language of 'rescuing' or 'liberating' with 'humanitarian' motives. It also reaffirms the previously highlighted relationship between the rescuers or liberators, the government troops, and the liberated, the Tamils. Rajapaksa’s representations of the civil war as a terrorist confrontation, not a divider of the nation, are central to his arguments about how the nation is brought together, reunited by the successful humanitarian operations under his leadership.

**Framing the Victory**

Rajapaksa’s depictions of the end of the war follow from his constructions of the war, allowing him to evade pressing post-war issues, such as the need for political reforms or reconciliation. After the defeat of LTTE terrorism, the main obstacle to Rajapaksa's 'new Sri Lanka', a peaceful, united country and nation, he effortlessly shifts to a peacetime rhetoric proclaiming a ‘glorious’ (VicD 2009; VicD 2010), ‘great’ (VicD 2010; VicD 2013; VarS 2009c) and ‘overwhelming’ (IndD 2010) victory. The defeat of the LTTE is presented as a 'signal victory over terrorism' (VarS 2009d) and he highlights that this major turning point in Sri Lankan history has ushered into a period of peace for a happy, reunited national family.

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric does not engage with the question of how a ‘humanitarian operation’ can be won or with the fact that this 'victory' and its celebrations are not shared in as enthusiastically by most Tamils. And while Rajapaksa presents the end of the war as an unambiguous victory of the nation over terrorism, it does not serve as an inclusive narrative but rather perpetuates Sinhalese triumphalism.
A patriotic victory and its limits

On 19 May 2009, one day after the death of Prabhakaran, during the opening of parliament Rajapaksa presented his first post-war speech, often referred to as the 'Victory Speech'. It includes the following statement:

Hon. Speaker, we have removed the word 'minorities' from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are the Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any others, minorities. There are only two peoples in this country. One is the people that love this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth. Those who do not love the country are now a lesser group.

Hon. Speaker, this small group questions as to whose victory this is. Our answer to that is that this is not a victory by President Mahinda Rajapaksa alone. The people are gathering around the National Flag. What we have done is to make the people of this country line up behind the National Flag. Therefore, this victory belongs to the people so lined up behind the National Flag. It belongs to the mothers, fathers and wives who gave their children and husbands to the armed forces; to the people who thought not of their stomachs but of their country. The bloodshed by those people have enriched the soil of our land. (VarS 2009c)

Rajapaksa clearly defines agency of the victory, constructing it as a victory of the nation, precisely all the people 'lined up behind the National Flag'. Membership in Rajapaksa’s victorious nation transcends ethnicity or race, as love for the country becomes the main criterion. Everyone sharing into its symbols, here specifically the flag, and supporting the Rajapaksa regime is part of it, while those lacking patriotism and voicing criticism are not only excluded, but relegated as 'a lesser group'. His speech was generally well received and the inclusion of a few sentences in Tamil at the beginning in particular was seen as a hopeful sign for peace and reconciliation. Within these lines he reiterates his promotion of a national family to the Tamil speaking communities, including them into the victory over the LTTE:

Friends, (In Tamil)
This is our country
This is our motherland
We should live in this country as children of one mother
No differences of race, caste and religion should prevail here
... The victory we have gained by defeating LTTE is the victory of this nation, and the victory of all people living of this country. ...
Let us all get together and build up this nation. (Tamil ends) (VarS 2009c)

Rajapaksa’s claim that there are no longer any minorities echoes a similar statement from the speech celebrating the LTTE defeat in the East in 2007:

Majority – minority? I do not like this interpretation. We are the Sri Lankan Nation. It is the Tamil and Muslim people in the East who together that paved the way for the National Flag to be hoisted at Thoppigala. (VarS 2007b)

Rajapaksa frames the victory in support of his 'new patriotism', as it stresses his definition of the boundary of the nation on the basis of civic elements that all
communities may potentially share in. He glosses over the hardships endured by Tamil civilians in the conflict zones and concerns that have since been raised about strategies employed by the government troops during the final stages of the war and in its aftermath that have further strained communal relationships. Instead, he emphasises how the victory was shared by everyone: 'the cry of victory raised by the entire nation waving the national flag throughout the country one year ago’ (VicD 2010). While the contribution of the war heroes to the military defeat of the LTTE is often singled out, Rajapaksa provides every community, represented by their religions in the following quote, with a stake in the victory:

> We achieved this victory through the contribution of Tri Forces, Police, Civil Defence Force, Intelligence Services, Buddhist monks who went to camp by camp, chanting pirit to bless soldiers, the Catholic priests, Muslim and Hindu priests and civilians who offered prayers and blessings at their places of worship. (VicD 2014)

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric of a 'victory for all who live in the country' (VicD 2009) presents the end of the war as an inclusive moment for his post-war nation-building project, as all communities should be united in their triumph over terrorism. Unlike most of the historical narratives his rhetoric reproduces, this explicit framing of the end of the war may provide an inclusive narrative and could potentially serve as a civic myth of origin for the post-war nation. It provides a story of the victory of those loving their country over terrorism, of the rebirth of a stronger, united nation after having defeated a grave threat. And by linking it directly to symbols of the state instead of ethnicity it can potentially be shared by every Sri Lankan who places the country first.

This explicitly inclusive rhetoric, however, is limited by Rajapaksa’s arguments about the war as a ‘humanitarian operation’ that mask the true extent of the military operations and their consequences, and reiterate the relationship between the liberators and liberated in this victory. His narrative of liberation subtly constructs a relationship between the liberators and liberated, who correspond to the Sinhalese and Tamils respectively. The previous chapter has pointed out how even before the end of the war Rajapaksa's rhetoric engaged in an ambiguous construction of victimhood, also pointed out by Schubert (2013). His analysis of the construction of identities of victims, perpetrators and victors in Rajapaksa's immediate post-war discourses highlights this dichotomy.
On the one hand, Rajapaksa utilises a ‘narration of wholeness and unity through a collective victimisation’ (Schubert 2013: 13) that unites all Sri Lankans as collective victims of the LTTE. On the other hand, Rajapaksa attempts to purposefully construct Tamils as a special category of victims differentiated both from the LTTE and the collective nation of Sri Lanka (Id.: 14). The victimisation of the Tamils in the face of the Tigers’ terrorist threat allows for their inclusion into the nation, but the same narrative also subtly differentiates between communities, highlighting different experiences and roles of Tamils and Sinhalese. While they do not directly contradict Rajapaksa’s proclamations of a national victory, they subtly perpetuate underlying differences between communities that do not quite fit his proclamations of a shared victory of a united nation and a hierarchical ordering of the nation.

After the defeat of the LTTE, Rajapaksa emphasised a ‘victor’s peace’ in stark contrast to the ‘peace of the “vanquished”’ articulated by Tamil voices like the TNA (Uyangoda 2012: 24). Annual celebrations of the victory, the erection of war monuments across the country, war tourism, and a triumphant rhetoric of the government are only some of the manifestations of the military victory that created very different experiences for Sinhalese and Tamils in the immediate post-war period. The end of the war, and the continued militarisation and repression in the north and east since, have ‘taken [their] place in the historical narrative of Tamil victimization by the majoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist state’ (Seoighe 2016: 359), one countered and suppressed by Rajapaksa’s official version of events. Even though many Tamils in the north suffered under the authoritarian rule of the LTTE for decades, after its defeat memories of its positive features, of its defiance and opposition to a discriminating state, may remain fresh among the Tamil community (de Silva 2006: 238f.). This may be potentially fuelled by the words and actions of Rajapaksa and his successors, providing a further obstacle to reconciliation between Sinhalese and Tamils.

**Historicity of the victory**

Another aspect of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric that undermines his explicit calls for a nation of patriots is his construction of the victory within a distinctively Sinhalese-centric narrative. The 2009 defeat of the separatist threat is unique in
the recent history of Sri Lanka, yet Rajapaksa's post-war rhetoric embeds it within the continuity of the nation's history. A narrative, as we have discussed above, which is clearly dominated by Sinhalese heroes, achievements and motifs.

In the beginning of his Victory Speech Rajapaksa presents the defeat of the LTTE within a long line of successes of the nation:

[It is necessary on this historic occasion to inquire as to how it was possible to obtain the proud victory we have achieved today by defeating the world’s most ruthless terrorist organization.

We are a country with a long history where we saw the reign of 182 kings who ruled with pride and honour that extended more than 2,500 years. This is a country where kings such as Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatuse and Vijayabahu defeated enemy invasions and ensured our freedom.

As much as Mother Lanka fought against invaders such as Datiya, Pitiya, Panayamara, Pilayamara, Siva and Elara in the past, we have the experience of having fought the Portuguese, Dutch and British who established empires in the world. As much as the great kings such as Mayadune, Rajasinghe I and Vimadharmsur, it is necessary to also recall the great heroes such as Keppetipola and Puran Appu who fought with such valour against imperialism.

In looking at this unconquerable history there is a common factor we can see. It is the inability of any external enemy to subdue this country as long as those to whom this is the motherland stand united. That is the truth. Another common factor we can see is the inability to establish any savage or dictatorial regime on this land.

In the history of my motherland, the people have always risen undefeated against any arbitrary, savage or brutal rule.

I must express my gratitude here to those heroes of our past who have given us the strength and courage to fight against savage invaders and enemies not only today, but in the future too. (VarS 2009c)

This quote, followed by an overview of the conflict with the LTTE and its eventual defeat, is an excellent example of how Rajapaksa subtly frames the present as the continuation of the ancient past. He presumes a nation united by over 2,500 years of history, by common heroes and enemies. Whether South Indian invaders, European colonisers or most recently the terrorist threat, all were eventually defeated by a strong, united nation. Importantly, Rajapaksa also perpetuates a historical narrative in which it was the great Sinhalese rulers like Dutugemunu, his brother Valagamba, as well as Vijayabahu and Dhatuse who defeated these threats to the country. Besides the Kandyans Datiya and Pitiya from South India, Rajapaksa also singles out Panayamara and Pilayamara.

According to the Mahāvamsa they were two of five Tamil rulers who interrupted Sinhalese rule in the Anuradhapura Kingdom. It reports how Pilayamara violently deposed Panayamara and was then murdered by Dathiaka, the last of the five Tamil rulers. Rajapaksa also mentions Elara, the most important Tamil ruler of Anuradhapura, who was defeated by Dutugemunu in a legendary battle.
While Rajapaksa’s speeches before the end of the war include only one reference to Dutugemunu (IndD 2009), there are several in his post-war speeches (IndD 2011; IndD 2014; VarS 2009c; VicD 2009; VicD 2010). In the above quote he implicitly links the modern conflict between the LTTE and the government and the ancient fight between the two kings. Another noteworthy example of how Dutugemunu is linked to the present is included in Rajapaksa's address at the National Unity Convention in Colombo in 2014:

I remember, how those who some time ago said they wanted to build peace in this country wanted to erase the name of King Dutugemunu from our history books as they considered him to be a racist. We can say without fear that King Dutugemunu fought the war that most respected human rights in world history respecting human rights. He respectfully treated the vanquished King Elara and even respected his grave. ... As we have the history of the nation in our hearts, we have pardoned tens of thousands of terrorists. We have handed over the child soldiers to their parents. We do these things to build peace and national harmony as we have that feeling in our heart. These things cannot be done falsehood. (VarS 2014a)

Here he marginally refers to controversies surrounding the legend of Dutugemunu and its contemporary interpretations, but those are in the past and Rajapaksa's post-war rhetoric can continue to venerate Dutugemunu and other Sinhalese heroes, instead of engaging with their divisive potential.

Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric more actively remembers historical events and persons than before 2009, and importantly encourages the present to be remembered in the same way. What is vital are not the actual historical figures of Dutugemunu and Elara or their fight that the legend is based on, but the modern interpretations. Sinhalese nationalists in particular often emphasise the conflict not as a power struggle between two monarchs, but a war between the rightful Sinhalese ruler of the island and Tamil invaders, perpetuating the idea of an age-long confrontation between the Sinhalese and Tamils (Tambiah 1986: 7). Rajapaksa does not provide a detailed account of his reading of the conflict that may support or contradict such interpretations, but he rejects allegations that it is racist.

At the same time, however, he reproduces interpretations of the Dutugemunu myth that understand it as a precursor to the modern conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils. In the first quote from the Victory Speech highlighted above he does present the characters in a broader narrative of the nation versus invaders, whereby Dutugemunu is represented along the national heroes while Elara is
mentioned in line with foreign threats. A similar connotation can be found in the following quote:

The effort of the terrorists to change our hearts through the pursuit of terror for thirty years did not meet with success. Our children were deprived of their right to learn the history of our nation. The name of King Dutugemunu was demeaned even worse than during the reign of King Elara. Many were the efforts made to make us forget that we are a people who in the past had defeated the most powerful invaders. (VicD 2010)

Rajapaksa highlights the Dutugemunu myth as a natural part of the nation’s history, not engaging with the different meanings of the same story for the different communities he seeks to unite as one nation.

Rajapaksa's comparison of the present defeat of the LTTE to Dutugemunu's mythical victory also invokes a comparison between him and Dutugemunu, reiterated by poster campaigns and popular media, strengthening his authority as the Sri Lankan president who was able to free the country from terrorism. Framing the present victory against the background of the story of Dutugemunu and Elara that carries the connotation of an 'epoch-making confrontation between the Sinhalese and Tamils' as presented by the Mahāvamsa (de Silva 2005: 16) links it to a divisive core myth of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. While this interpretation certainly appeals to large sections of the majority community it undermines the inclusive potential of Rajapaksa’s narrative of a shared, patriotic victory. Instead of a fresh start for the nation, the present is framed as a continuation of a Sinhalese-centric history.

Through the language used by Rajapaksa to frame the war and victory he defines them in ways that reproduce existing power relations between the communities in Sri Lanka. Silencing ethnic grievances of the minorities through narratives of terrorism and the ‘national question’ naturalises the ‘victor’s peace’, while also delegitimising any criticism and dissent. Rajapaksa can draw on these frames to justify his policies as necessary and inevitable in order to safeguard the country. At the same time, his representations of the war and its end within existing historical narratives provide a striking example of how the two core themes of his construction of nationalist ideology, ‘new patriotism’ and ethnic revivalism, coexist within the explicit and implicit rhetorical dimensions of the same theme. This highlights the complexity of Rajapaksa’s construction of nationhood that consists of both proclamations of an inclusive, ethnically undifferentiated nation and the underlying Sinhalese-centric representations of the
core features of this nation. Within the logic of Sinhalese nationalism these two aspects, however, are not contradictory, as the nation is understood as diverse but hierarchical, naturally dominated by the majority community and its culture – a conceptualisation of Sri Lankan nationhood contested by minority communities.

One Religion for a Multi-religious Nation

So far this chapter has focused on the role of historical narratives of the ancient and recent past for Rajapaksa’s construction of the Sri Lankan nation. Another traditional value he frequently recalls as a basis of its modern collective identity is religion. References to religion are not usually linked to specific political strategies or goals, instead they appear to be ‘natural’ comments or anecdotes illustrating different arguments. As such they demonstrate an important aspect of the ideological space within which Rajapaksa acts and constructs his arguments, namely the unquestioned dominance of Buddhism that is so natural within Sinhalese discourses that it serves as ‘common sense’. And while Rajapaksa explicitly recognises the multi-religious character of Sri Lanka’s communities, he reproduces Buddhism as the main religion of the nation.

References to religion range from generic remarks about religion to more specific depictions of the major religious beliefs in Sri Lanka. Rajapaksa frequently highlights the importance of religion, for instance when he points out that ‘our value-based society [is] nurtured with religion, culture and traditions’ (BudS 2013) or how ‘family, religion and culture are well connected in the Sri Lankan value system’ (BudS 2012). The village, as highlighted above, is similarly linked to religion in the past and present when he reminds the nation that ‘[w]e should not forget the historical bond between the temple and the village’ (BudS 2011). In other places he emphasises the role of religion within the multi-religious context of Sri Lanka, acknowledging the different traditions co-existing within the country: ‘our great traditional values and heritage moulded by the four great religions practised in our country – i.e. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam’ (VarS 2006a), ‘[w]e who are schooled in the Buddhist tradition of loving kindness and compassion, and nurtured in the Hindu, Islam and Christian traditions’ (VarS 2009c) or ‘[t]he culture of our lives has been nourished by the
teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions that flourish in our land’ (IndD 2006).

Explicitly recognising the religious diversity of Sri Lanka's society fits within Rajapaksa's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic conception of nationhood, whereby membership can transcend such differences as long as individuals put their love for the country first. Yet, these direct acknowledgements of the three major religions do not stop Rajapaksa from distinguishing Buddhism as the religion of the nation. This becomes evident in the way he represents the religions, for instance when Buddhism is frequently singled out even when several religions are mentioned:

> It is based on the great Buddhist traditions that do not preach hatred towards any race or person, and also on the core values of other religions, that we fought against the most ruthless, most cruel terrorist organization in the world. (VicD 2011)

Addressing domestic and foreign audiences Rajapaksa reproduces dominant themes of Sinhalese nationalist ideology when he highlights the importance of Buddhism for the nation, for instance when stating that 'the civilization of this country is built on the bedrock of the Buddhist values of compassion and tolerance’ (VarS 2009d), ‘my country has been influenced by the core Buddhist values of non-violence, loving kindness, compassion, equanimity and mindfulness’ (UNGA 2006) or ‘we [the government of Sri Lanka] have gained inspiration from the words of Gautama the Buddha’ (UNGA 2014).

Similar to the textbooks Rajapaksa presents Buddhist teachings as valuable guidelines for his government, the Sri Lankan nation and even the world, reiterating the importance of Buddhism. This can happen subtly as in the following quote: ‘The Buddhist teaching on punctuality is equally applicable to statecraft and public policy. Therefore we will have to take firm and responsible decisions in building a disciplined society’ (VarS 2005a). Or rather explicit as in these appeals to national audiences:

> Uthanavato satimato – sucihammassa nisammakarino
> Sammatassaca dhammavivino – appamattassa yasobhivaddhati
> -Dhammapada
> (The fame of him who strives after perfection, is mindful is pure indeed, considerate, is restrained, righteous and heedful spreads far and wide.)
> I call on you to follow these words of the Buddha. (VarS 2010d)
> Friends,
> The words of the Buddha show the path we should take and how we should solve problems.
> Akkodhena jine kodham – asadhumsadhuna jine
> Jine kadariyam danena – saccena alikavadinam
(Let an angry man be conquered by love; an evil man by goodness. Let a miser be won over by liberality; and a liar by truthfulness)

Let this thought guide all in making the freedom of our motherland meaningful! (IndD 2012)

These are two examples where Rajapaksa directly appeals to his audiences and his envisioned nation at large to follow the teachings of the Buddha. In other speeches he presents moral stories from the Buddha (IndD 2013; IndD 2014) with a similar purpose.

Both implicitly and explicitly Rajapaksa reconstructs Buddhist traditions as norms and values for the nation, presenting the country as basically Buddhist in past and present. His rhetoric reflects and in turn perpetuates the central role of Buddhism within Sinhalese nationalism as a basis for coherent identity, solidarity as well as political mobilisation well established within the literature (e.g. Kapferer 2012; DeVotta 2007; Warnapala 1994; Austin and Gupta 1988; Tambiah 1986). Yet, his rhetoric does not differentiate between the Sinhalese community and the Sri Lankan nation, instead Buddhism is presented as a dominant value for every Sri Lankan regardless of it not being shared by all communities.

As explicit historical references increased after 2009, so did mentions of Buddhism, especially cited words of the Buddha or stories provided as role models for the audience. Even though Rajapaksa occasionally acknowledges religious diversity, without similar references to other religions, neither in frequency nor detail, his rhetoric presents a one-sided account. His religious references are often subtle and may not be exclusive or offensive to non-Buddhists. They demonstrate, however, how Rajapaksa’s construction of religion, another important cultural resource in his construction of nationhood, is again dominated by Sinhalese narratives reinforcing their dominance within a supposedly Sri Lankan nation.

Rajapaksa’s Cult of the Hero

The remainder of this chapter discusses a symbolic resource that enters Rajapaksa’s rhetoric in the final stages of the war and intensifies in the post-war period. It is a theme that significantly shapes the remembering and forgetting of Rajapaksa’s resurgent nation, namely the Ranaviru or war hero. This hero represents his ideal nation and serves as a constant reminder of the sacrifices necessary for peace, thus cementing the nation’s new mission, the protection of
the victory. Rajapaksa’s veneration of war heroes is part of his construction of a patriotic victory, yet it falls short of providing a unifying symbolic resource for all communities as it is embedded within Sinhalese historical narratives. It represents the celebration of the Sinhalese liberators, while Tamils as victims do not share this same experience of the war and its aftermath. Rajapaksa also silences counter-narratives, alternative heroes of the Tamils as he presents ‘our’ heroes as true patriots while ‘their’ heroes were terrorists whose memory is forcefully dismantled and removed from his nationalist discourses.

Memorising the Heroes of War

With the intensifying military efforts and the introduction of commemorations for fallen soldiers from June 2007 onwards, war heroes and their families appear as both explicit audience and content of many speeches thereafter. Representations of the soldiers and their sacrifices become an important rhetorical tool for Rajapaksa that allows him to support various arguments through appeals to pathos on behalf of the war heroes. Through phrases like ‘what these mothers of our War Heroes and our people ask is that’ (WarH 2008) or ‘[t]o make the sacrifice made by war heroes more meaningful, we have to' (VicD 2011) Rajapaksa seeks to support his claims or policies by linking them to the inherent authority of the war heroes. He appeals to the emotions of a nation that has been affected by civil war for more than two decades, arguing that all past sacrifices are in vain if the country does not follow his path now to protect the hard-won peace.

Through the portrayals of war heroes Rajapaksa also seeks to give sense to the costly war so that the country can come to terms with it. In doing so he again reproduces dominant themes of Sinhalese nationalism, in this case specifically linking the war heroes to security, territory and national unity. He provides meaning to their deaths by linking their sacrifice to the protection of the nation and its country:

Our national flag fluttered on that occasion in the last breath of those heroes who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the land. Each day, as the sun rises I remember these heroes of war who laid down their lives for the country. (VicD 2010)

The bloodshed by those people have enriched the soil of our land. (VarS 2009c)

As long as we remember that those who sacrificed their lives now rest in the soil of our land, I declare with pride that our people shall not leave room for anyone to divide this motherland of ours. (VicD 2010)
These quotes demonstrate how Rajapaksa explicitly connects the war heroes to the territory of the nation. These national landscapes become more meaningful, even sacred, through the sacrifices of the war heroes whose blood was mixed with the land they defended against the LTTE, both literally and figuratively.

Smith (2009: 97f.) points out that destiny through sacrifice is one of, if not the, most potent cultural resources of nations. He highlights how a nation can be mobilised to fulfil a destiny that their compatriots died for often in mythical battles of the past. Similar to embedding the present nation within historical narratives, for instance of golden ages, the ‘intricate link between the dead, the living and the unborn ... is pivotal to nationalism’s claim to continuity and regeneration’ (Özkırımlı 2005: 185). In most states we find commemorations of the often anonymous heroes of their pasts, for instance in memorials or memorial services. These rites and symbols can work as constitutive sites of collective memory, showing gratitude to those who made sacrifices for the state and nation, and giving meaning to the death of patriots (Özkırımlı 2005: 186).

Following the end of the war, the former government erected several memorial sites throughout Sri Lanka, including major ones in the north at Elephant Pass and near the final battlefield in Mullivaikkal. These memorials are dedicated to the fallen soldiers at large, but they are far from unequivocal symbols of the nation, as they often include Sinhalese symbols like the lion. Rajapaksa's rhetoric, however, glosses over ambiguities and instead attempts to mobilise all communities by constructing recently fallen soldiers and veterans as a leitmotif of his envisioned Sri Lankan nation. After the end of the war Rajapaksa presents the fallen soldiers and veterans as a powerful symbol of his resurgent nation and its past ordeal:

We must bear in mind that thousands of heroes like this sacrificed their lives for the country to obtain this great victory. Many lakhs66 more offered their blood, sweat and tears and lost their eyes and limbs for this land. I am pleased to state that we have elevated all of you as high as the national flag flies to give you the honor you deserve. (VicD 2013)

He emphasises how they sacrificed their lives to protect the nation and country and appeals to the nation to make these sacrifices meaningful by preserving the peace in a united country achieved by them. Like his framing of the victory, these

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66 A lakh equals one hundred thousand.
war heroes become a cultural resource for the contemporary nation, yet they are also placed within a larger historical narrative. These modern heroes follow in the footsteps of their ancient predecessors, those past heroes who have similarly fought and died for their country:

At the same time are we also reminded today of the bravery, national pride and patriotism that was seen in our great kings such as Dutugemunu, Gajaba and Vijayabahu. Our forces have protected the great heroism and dignity of the past and handed it to the future. (IndD 2009)

Heroic Troops,
We had a past full of valor, heroism and courage. But we have such qualities in which we can take pride, today. In the future when there is a need for the Sri Lankan nation to launch an incomparable battle to protect this land, they will recall with pride and take courage from the heroism displayed by you today. Even if you die you will not lie in a grave but in our hearts that love our land. (VicD 2010)

Hon. Speaker, all this time what we had to tell the world was about our great, heroic and glorious history. But, today we have brought about such greatness and heroism to present day Sri Lanka. Till now we gained strength to rise as a nation from the past built by our heroic ancestors. Today, as much as we have added a new pride and honour to that past, we have created an era of new strength for the future of our nation. In the future when our nation has to engage in a glorious and invincible struggle the achievements of this era will be recalled. (VarS 2009c)

The latter quote from Rajapaksa's victory speech does not mention the heroes of war specifically, but it demonstrates the overall embedding of contemporary events and actors within his national historical narrative. Just like the heroes and golden ages of the past are an inspiration for Rajapaksa’s construction of the present nation, so are its contemporary heroes and achievements for present and future generations.

The representations of war heroes as symbols of sacrifice in Rajapaksa's rhetoric are not only a resource to mobilise the nation or strengthen its collective identity. They, like the great heroes of the past, serve as role models who, similarly to golden ages, embody 'the innate virtue and “true essence” of the nation' (Smith 2009: 69). By emphasising the actions and sacrifices of the soldiers and their families, Rajapaksa encourages the nation to embrace patriotism and to emulate these heroes who have given all for the motherland. He establishes the veneration of these heroes, the soldiers who fought the LTTE terrorists, as an essential building bloc of his post-war nation-building project. This is evident far beyond his speeches in accompanying local and national events celebrating the war heroes and their families as well as special schemes for veterans and their families.
Rajapaksa’s modern cult of the hero is an excellent example for de Mel’s arguments about the intersection of memory, public performances and militarism in Sri Lanka: ‘Collective memory thereby becomes a key site on which a martial ideal is forged through the honouring of the dead as a duty to remember’ (de Mel 2007: 20). She argues that the public management of historical memory plays a major role in the process of militarisation, uniting people and monuments in war heroes trying to reinforce state hegemony (Id.: 17f.). The idealisation of the military, buttressed by Sinhalese triumphalism, provides fertile ground for continued militarisation of the post-war state, where the military plays a crucial role in people’s lives, especially in the north and east (Keerawella 2013: 15). And although ‘performatives of memory’ are unstable and contested (de Mel 2007: 20f.), the end of the war provided an unprecedented boost to Rajapaksa’s version of heroism and enabled his government to dismantle and suppress major counter-narratives.

**Forgetting the Non-heroes**

Above we have already briefly pointed out how Rajapaksa sought to establish Sinhalese Buddhist post-war discourses in opposition to Tamil narratives of victimisation and defeat. This is particularly evident in the cult of the war hero that was staged by his government as part of the ‘national victory’, but failed to offer an inclusive post-war vision. The following sections highlight that Rajapaksa’s war heroes are not an inclusive symbol representing all communities and discuss how instead of a collective remembrance his government sought to control and dismantle non-official remembering of the war and its dead.

When discussing the war heroes of the Sri Lankan armed forces it is crucial to remember that since the 1980s they have not reflected the multi-ethnic character of the country (Ross and Savada 1988). Nearly all enlisted personnel of the army, navy and air force are Sinhalese, establishing a one-sided image of war heroes. Rajapaksa does not engage with this problematic issue when presenting an ‘ethnicized Sinhala army’ (de Mel 2007: 32) as 'our' heroes. The minorities are not represented by these war heroes and their experiences, yet Rajapaksa directly addresses them with his venerations. In the Tamil part of his Victory Speech, for instance, he reminds the Tamils that '[o]ur heroic forces have sacrificed their lives
to protect Tamil civilians' (VarS 2009c). Similar statements are included in other speeches in which Rajapaksa highlights the services of the army to the Tamil people in the war zones, for instance:

> Our war heroes sometimes lay down their lives not really in armed combat, but also when engaged in humanitarian activities to protect the lives of innocent people. ... It is our soldiers that take food, drink and essential drugs for the people of the North. (WarH 2007)

This quote reflects a reality for many Tamils who were entrapped in a desperate state in the northern war zones during the final stages of the war. Within Rajapaksa’s larger narrative of liberators and liberated these Tamils are not included as war heroes but victims who did not have an active part in the defeat of the Tamil Tigers.

Many Tamils, however, did not experience the military in such a positive way as friend and helper, though allegations of misconduct of army personnel and security forces during the final stages of the war remain largely unrecognised. Despite the end of the war the north in particular remains a highly militarised area under the tight control of the army and state security forces that have taken over large areas of land. While they are involved in all kinds of development work, including local administration, infrastructure projects and tourism, their relationship to the largely Tamil population remains strained (International Crisis Group 2013). Rajapaksa’s rhetoric ignored these pressing issues, instead presenting an unambiguous image of the military troops in an attempt to create an ideological space justifying and legitimising them as a benevolent army as opposed to an ‘army of occupation’ perceived by many Tamils (International Crisis Group 2012: 16):

> Our armed forces comprise those who went to battle carrying a gun in one hand, the Declaration of Human Rights the other, as well as taking food for the liberated people of the North and full of human kindness in their hearts. (VicD 2010)

The soldiers depicted by Rajapaksa are beyond reproach, infallible heroes of the entire nation who emulate the heroic deeds of the past. They present a focal point for Rajapaksa’s construction of post-war national identity as well as reminding all communities of their current mission, the protection of peace and freedom in a united country.

While Colombo was celebrating its war heroes, 'those brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives to liberate the country from terrorists' (BudS 2011), the Tamils instituted a time of mourning (Höglund and Orjuela 2011: 30f.), but were...
severely constrained in their remembering as public commemorations were mostly banned in the north and east, the army bulldozed Tiger cemeteries, and the memory of the Tamil Tigers was publicly desecrated, as the images of the naked and besmeared body of Prabhakaran strikingly demonstrate. These actions were in stark contrast to Rajapaksa’s explicit promises to follow the traditions of the great ancient kings to respect one's enemy after defeat, for instance:

> [W]e are a country with unique precedents. According to the tradition established by kings such as Dutugemunu, we should respect even the enemy that has surrendered or been killed in combat. That is a quality of greatness that is found not only with the Government, but also with the people of this country. (VarS 2009c)
>
> We can say without fear that King Dutugemunu fought the war that most respected human rights in world history respecting human rights. He respectfully treated the vanquished King Elara and even respected his grave. (VarS 2014a)

The actions of Rajapaksa’s government, however, showed little respect for the Tamil community, and while staging Rajapaksa’s cult of the hero in the south, Tamil sites in the north and east that held importance not only for the Tamil Tigers were destroyed. During the war LTTE cemeteries had offered cadres and supporters a place to bond with those who had sacrificed their life for the cause, Eelam, and served as sites for celebrating the annual Heroes’ Day (Roberts 2005). Just like Rajapaksa’s rhetoric only allows for one kind of hero, for one kind of patriotic victory, his government cannot allow these sites to remain. As symbolic centres of Tamil Eelam these cemeteries, the Tului Ilaam, are an important part of the Tamil nation-building project (Natali 2008) and thus represent a challenge to Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. The ‘true’ heroes of the nation cannot have any symbolic rivals, especially not their very antagonists, fallen Tigers. Such symbols may in the future provide focal points for renewed Tamil mobilisation and may even lead to a resurgence of violence if the Sri Lankan government does not promote reconciliation and political reforms.

Within Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric the Ranavirus are a dominant and important theme that is presented as a symbol for the entire nation, but in effect it is rather limited in its representativeness. It perpetuates Rajapaksa’s post-war narratives that construct a Sinhalese Buddhist reading of the post-war situation, not accommodating alternative narratives, but rather ignoring or suppressing them

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completely. Like the victory, the war heroes do not represent all communities, but instead perpetuate Sinhalese triumphalism and the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism in Rajapaksa’s post-war Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the myth-symbol complex, the major symbolic and cultural resources defining Rajapaksa’s ideal Sri Lankan nation, throughout his rhetoric. It has demonstrated the distinctively ethnic character of his construction of Sri Lankan nationhood, as many symbolic resources Rajapaksa reproduces originate within the Sinhalese Buddhist ideological space, emphasising Buddhism and historical narratives based on the Mahāvamsa. Most of these elements are not explicitly exclusive or offensive to non-Sinhalese communities, but we have highlighted some potential effects of Sinhalese triumphalism for post-war reconciliation and similarly the interpretations of certain myths, especially the story of Dutugemunu, have traditionally reinforced ideas of an ancient antagonism between Sinhalese and Tamils.

Rajapaksa does not openly contradict or question such readings, or engage with the controversies surrounding history in Sri Lanka even though promoting the revival of an ancient Sinhalese nation does not support his explicit calls for a nation embracing the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of Sri Lanka’s society. By promoting these cultural resources he subtly reinforces a Sinhalese collective identity rather than an inclusive, patriotic national identity, yet nonetheless presenting it as 'Sri Lankan'. Minority communities are not excluded from this nation, as long as they are loyal to the motherland, but there are few signs that they are swayed by Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. In fact, the 2015 election saw an overwhelming majority of minority votes for Rajapaksa’s victorious opponent.

The analysis of Rajapaksa’s speeches before and after 2009 has revealed that after the end of the war his rhetoric of ethnic revivalism gains in importance as historical and religious references increase. The framing of the victory and war heroes buttresses Sinhalese triumphalism, a central aspect of Rajapaksa’s discursive construction of post-war Sinhalese nationalism responding to the ‘need to redefine in the post-war context the raison d’être of the Sinhala-Buddhist claims vis-à-vis Tamil nationalist claims’ (Dewasiri 2013: 4). His construction of
a ‘victor’s peace’ facilitates the political space for Sinhalese elites to consolidate their power as the victor determines the terms and conditions for reconciliation and any potential political settlement with the Tamil community (Uyangoda 2012: 24).

This increased mobilisation of potentially divisive symbolic resources and romanticising of the past for present inspiration may only be a short-term response to the end of the war, a reaction in times of crisis as predicted by Smith (2009: 35). As Rajapaksa was not re-elected as president in early 2015 we will not be able to observe his mid- to long-term responses, but he leaves a legacy of potentially divisive narratives that may have shaped the current memory of large parts of the Sinhalese community and are available for mobilisation by political and religious elites alike in the future. Furthermore, many visible manifestations of Sinhalese triumphalism persist, like the large war memorials surrounded by the Sinhalese lion that serve as constant reminders of the war, its winners, losers and victims.
Chapter 7

The Politics of Nationhood: Unity and Hierarchy in Nation and State

The previous two chapters have focused on Rajapaksa’s construction of the nation, highlighting that his explicitly inclusive conceptualisation of the Sri Lankan nation is dominated by the Sinhalese majority. This chapter focuses on the discursive construction of other core dimensions of nationalist ideology, especially the hierarchical order of the nation and its politics, and how it is linked to the unitary state. It demonstrates how Rajapaksa’s nationalist narratives reproduce the core metaphors of Sinhalese Buddhist ontology: unity, fragmentation and encompassment. His rhetoric reproduces the link between the Sinhalese nation, Sri Lankan state and Buddhism as the basis of his ‘Sri Lankan’ nationalism.

In the last chapter we argued that Rajapaksa’s rhetoric draws frequently and explicitly on Sinhalese ethnic dimensions as the myth-symbol complex of the Sri Lankan nation. The end of the war provided an opportunity for Rajapaksa to entrench Sinhalese dominance, confirming the unitary state as stronghold of the nation. While physical and cultural spaces of the nation remain contested, Rajapaksa’s rhetoric buttresses attempts by the majority community to shape these in their image. Within the Sinhalese historical narratives that Rajapaksa interprets the defeat of the LTTE also enables him to strengthen the hierarchical and authoritarian dimensions of the nation and its politics.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. First, the recurrent theme of unity and security is examined within the trajectory of the nation from ebb to glory presented by Rajapaksa. Second, we discuss how his post-war nation-building project includes nationalising the whole territory of the state, including areas claimed as traditional homelands by the minorities. This process can best be understood as an attempted ‘Sinhalisation’ of contested space in order to further entrench the unitary state and its power relations. Third, the chapter outlines how Rajapaksa reconstructs a political and social hierarchy that places the Sinhalese at the apex of the nation by reproducing traditional religious and modern democratic
narratives that naturalise the rule of the many. Fourth, closely linked to the hierarchical order of the discursive construction of nationalism is Rajapaksa’s reconstruction of the authoritarian dimension of Sinhalese Buddhism. Spurred by triumphalism and drawing on traditional cultural practices and narratives he establishes himself as the supreme leader of the country, equal to the mythical heroes of the past, legitimising an increasing shift towards authoritarian politics under his regime.

The State of the Nation

The first sections investigate the trajectory of the nation, and particularly its unity, presented by Rajapaksa, demonstrating a noticeable shift concurrent to the government’s military successes in the north and east. At the outset, national unity is presented as a memory of the past, a necessity to face contemporary challenges, but whose current absence is directly linked to the inability of previous governments to deal with the militant threat. Between 2007 and 2009 we can observe a rhetorical revival of national unity as Rajapaksa emphasises how all communities are coming together for a last push against the separatist threat. Finally, after May 2009 he shifts from presenting his aspirations for national unity to declarations of a united, strong nation. Similar to the textbooks, Rajapaksa’s rhetoric embeds the theme of national unity within the nation’s historical trajectory, linking unity, strength and security of the nation. This theme provides an important strategic tool to unify and mobilise the nation against a common threat and under the leadership of Rajapaksa, while excluding and delegitimising those not sharing into his nation-building project.

A Desolate Nation

In 2005 Sri Lanka was in limbo. The country was still recovering from the devastating 2004 tsunami and although the official ceasefire agreement remained in place since 2002, the future of the Norwegian-facilitated negotiations was unclear. No substantial progress had been made and ceasefire violations, especially by the LTTE, were increasing. While the Tigers controlled considerable parts of the northeast, the Sinhalese leaders in the south disagreed about the way forward. Rajapaksa entered the stage as a hard-liner, backed by the ultra-
nationalist forces of politics. He promised a new Sri Lanka, a 'new era of peace and stability' (VarS 2009a), as soon as the LTTE and its 'beastly terrorism' (VarS 2006d) had been removed. One of the core arguments of his rhetoric, however, continuously highlights that this terrorist problem cannot be defeated on the battlefield alone, but above all the task requires national unity.

During Rajapaksa's first two years in office, he emphasises a weak, divided nation in the early twenty-first century. Looking back in his Independence Day speech in 2007 he laments that when he took office in 2005 the nation's dignity 'had reached the lowest ebb' (IndD 2007). He does not dwell on explanations of how it became fragmented, but hints at historical causes dating back as early as the entire territory of Sri Lanka becoming a British colony: ‘After our fall in 1815, we were unable to revive that lost national pride and dignity’ (VarS 2009c) and even after independence in 1948 ‘we failed to lead our society, handed to us with divisions, into the proper path of unity and progress’ (IndD 2009). These narratives are similar to those constructed within the textbooks, constructing disunity, weakness and foreign invasion as causing the downfall of the Sri Lankan nation in the past. It is within such an ideological space, drawing on popular Sinhalese historical narratives, that Rajapaksa can realign the ‘other’ after 2009, increasingly externalising the threat to the nation as discussed in chapter five. Such a rhetorical shift represents not only a response to changing realities, but also a return to traditional external enemy images after the defeat of the LTTE, which posed an internal threat of a ‘separatist, racist and terrorist politics […] that] sought to divide our motherland’ (IndD 2009) and held the nation hostage for nearly three decades.

Rajapaksa’s initial presidential rhetoric portrays the image of a country and nation in a desolate state, besieged by the looming terrorist threat. Promising to overcome these pressing challenges he offers a vision of a new, better country as the rallying point not only of the Rajapaksa regime and its supporters, but everyone who loves the country and the nation: 'You are aware that the first condition to build a new Sri Lanka is the unifying of this country' (VarS 2006c). He calls to his audiences and the nation that 'we should stand united to achieve the noble objectives of the Sri Lankan nation' (IndD 2007). He again points to history to remind the nation that 'on every occasion when we were united we emerged
victorious' (IndD 2006) and that it can regain this past strength if it unites again. Rajapaksa presents national unity as a necessary prerequisite for a free and peaceful country and indirectly blames its lack for failures to defeat the LTTE in the past.

Such an emphasis on national unity reconstructs the basic link between unity, strength and security. It is an appeal to all who wish to be part of the nation to join Rajapaksa in his quest, while critics become potential enemies of the nation. Rajapaksa's appeals to national unity are precise rallying cries for unity under his leadership, whereby the strength of the nation does not merely depend on a national unity in spirit, but on the practical support of everyone for Rajapaksa as the vanguard of a new, brighter future. Dissent, especially political, is delegitimised as it may weaken the nation and its capacity to achieve its goals and aspirations.

Rajapaksa’s initial characterisations of the nation are also important to understand it conceptually. For while he postulates the fragmentation, discord and weakness of the nation at the outset, the continued existence of the nation as an overarching idea is never in question. Decades of conflict and civil war have reinforced old divisions or led to new ones, whether between ethnic communities or political parties, yet Rajapaksa’s rhetoric highlights that these conflicts did not demolish the Sri Lankan nation. Even the ultimate separatist terrorist threat that 'has torn brother from brother and sister from sister' (VarS 2006a) has not destroyed the motherland or the underlying bonds of the national family. This depiction is crucial for Rajapaksa’s construction of the nation as it again highlights that his conceptualisation of the Sri Lankan nation is historically rooted. It is not about constructing a new nation, but reviving the historical unit that existed before but has been weakened over the last decades. Despite patriotic proclamations Rajapaksa’s narrative of national unity is tied up within his Sinhalese-centric conception of nationhood, a notion that is not challenged by the end of the war at all.

A Resurgent Nation

The government's military successes, culminating in the expulsion of the LTTE from the East in 2007, are accompanied by a noticeable shift within Rajapaksa's
rhetoric. While his initial speeches emphasise the fragmented state of the nation and calls for all Sri Lankans to come together, from 2007 onwards Rajapaksa increasingly moves to proclamations of a new spirit of patriotism and a revived sense of national unity. This shift is particularly evident in the course of the annual Independence Day speeches between 2006 and 2009.

In Rajapaksa's first Independence Day speech in 2006, at a time when he depicts a fragmented and weak nation, he appeals to its members to reclaim its strength and unity:

On this important occasion I wish to once again place before you the need to forge the bonds of a united society that has come together to build a New Sri Lanka. It is we who can bring the real glory to our National Flag that flutters in the air and the National Anthem whose strains we hear in the wind. (IndD 2006)

A plea repeated the following February, again reminding the people to overcome narrow divisions and join hands as one nation:

You will recall a very special appeal I made to you on the last Independence Day Celebrations. It was that we should stand united to achieve the noble objectives of the Sri Lankan nation. … On this historic occasion, I again appeal to all democratic forces to place the motherland before one's family, race, religion or political party in the national agenda. (IndD 2007)

Throughout 2006 fighting between the LTTE and military forces in the north and east had intensified and only a few months after the second speech, in the summer of 2007, the military drove the Tamil Tigers out of the Eastern Province. At the celebrations of this success in Colombo, Rajapaksa expresses his belief that ‘the New Dawn in the East … would cause the historic brotherhood among the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims to sprout fresh shoots and thrive’ (VarS 2007b) and renews his appeals to national unity: ‘I call upon you with deep emotion and responsibility to resolve to live together in unity and fraternity among all races and religions’ (VarS 2007b). Again, the nation is presented as an overarching ideal, the bond that holds together all people of Sri Lanka irrespective of ethnic or religious divides. Even racial differences are no obstacle to fraternity within the national family that should emerge strengthened as the hold of the LTTE on the country weakens.

In his subsequent third Independence Day speech in 2008, instead of calling for unity he announces a ‘new patriotism’ among the members of the nation:

On this historic day we witness the proud commemoration of the 60th anniversary of freedom of a great nation. I say with gratitude that we achieved this dignity and greatness as the Sri Lankan nation, not only through the sacrifices of today’s heroes, but also due to the immense sacrifices of our forefathers throughout history. … During the last two years
we have as a nation brought forth a very important and decisive factor to enrich the substance of freedom. It is an indicator that has so far never been used to measure a country’s well-being or development. ... This is none other than the patriotism, and love for the country that has emerged among our people today. Our challenge today is to be true to the nation and maintain this patriotic fervor of our people, without letting it to be subjugated by political party differences, and political interests. (IndD 2008)

This quote highlights how Rajapaksa begins to assume a new found Sri Lankan national unity, here based on a regained patriotism. Rajapaksa presents a shift in national dignity from its 'lowest ebb' in 2005 (IndD 2007) to a new 'greatness' in 2008. In the following year, only three months before the final defeat of the LTTE, Rajapaksa decisively reiterates his belief in a strong nation:

Today, there is a new vibrancy in our National Flag. There is a new resonance in our National Anthem. The National Flag that our heroic troops took to the north flutters in the hands of the people of the north. Our entire nation is now united in the shade of the National Flag, conscious of the need to achieve victory over the new challenges before us. They love their country more than at any other time in our history. ... More than anything else I have faith in the spirit and pride of the Sri Lankan nation. … We move towards an era of national reawakening and commit our service to it because, of this trust in our nation. (IndD 2009)

Thus just over three years after taking office and declaring a new, united Sri Lanka as one of his main goals, Rajapaksa proclaims that the Sri Lankan nation has risen to glory again and will successfully meet all future challenges. A certainty also expressed abroad, for instance at the UN General Assembly in September 2008: ‘We will march towards a richer freedom and lasting unity that await us as a nation’ (UNGA 2008).

Initially Rajapaksa constructs national unity as a prerequisite to defeat terrorism, but we can observe a shift in his rhetoric, depicting the concurrent rise of the nation and military successes over the LTTE, throughout his speeches between 2005 and 2009. This realignment again suggests a link between the strength of the nation and its capacity to achieve its goals, protect its country and people, although the precise nature of the link between national unity and the military successes throughout the country is not specified. In the textbook analysis we found the construction of a causal link between unity/disunity and strength/weakness of the nation in the face of threats and a similar link is implicit in Rajapaksa's earlier calls for national unity to defeat the LTTE and reminders that in the past it was victorious when it was united (IndD 2006). When his rhetoric shifts to increasing proclamations of unity this causality is not clearly established, as military successes and resurgent unity are presented as
simultaneous rather than consecutive. A strong link nonetheless remains and the theme resurfaces more clearly again after the end of the war.

**A Victorious Nation**

Following the military defeat of the LTTE in the north, Rajapaksa delivered his Victory Speech to parliament on May 19, 2009. Reiterating his previous arguments about a resurgent nation he declares that ‘having defeated the most ruthless terrorists who made the world helpless, we rise today as invincible citizens; as a nation with a great and imposing personality’ (VarS 2009c). The unity of the nation is now presented as a given and remains a central aspect of Rajapaksa's rhetoric. He establishes it as a necessity to meet future challenges, especially to protect the peace: ‘The best way to meet our future challenges is to strengthen national unity’ (VicD 2011). At the same time, as the LTTE and the war were the two main factors keeping the communities apart, the defeat of the LTTE has created the perfect conditions for national harmony.

In May 2009 Rajapaksa states that ‘[t]his is the time for unity’ (WarH 2009) and subsequently he uses many different occasions and audiences to declare to the people of Sri Lanka that the nation stands stronger than before as the communities are coming together with the end of the war:

You must be feeling that there has been a great cohesion between the communities today. We cannot waste this opportunity of goodwill among the communities. (VarS 2010a)

Whether in cities or towns or in the rural heartland, Sri Lankans without any difference, sing the national anthem with a new spirit in their voice (VarS 2011a)

Today in Colombo and the South the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim people live together. In the East the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim people live together. The best example of this is Trincomalee. In Ampara too all three communities live in harmony. In building of the Velgama Raja Maha Viharaya here in Trincomalee, at a certain era the Tamil Hindus also contributed as much as the Sinhala Buddhists. (IndD 2013)

We showed our national unity at its highest yesterday, when we won the World T20 Trophy. There were no differences among Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, or religious differences, in the celebrations. Those from all regions, the North, South, East, West and the Hill Country joined hands in a great show of national unity, and feeling for one’s Motherland. (VarS 2014a)

These quotes not only highlight Rajapaksa’s proclamations of post-war national unity, but also demonstrate how he advocates a heterogeneous nation that unites Sri Lankans across ethnic divides. Within his post-war rhetoric his vision of a new

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68 In 2014 the Sri Lankan team won the international championship of Twenty20 cricket.
Sri Lanka, 'a peaceful Sri Lanka where the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people can live as brothers' (VarS 2005b), has become reality.

Rajapaksa constructs the image of a post-war country that has returned to normalcy after the end of war and its society has moved beyond divisions and 'communal disharmony' (VicD 2011) as well as 'the narrow thinking of the past' (VicD 2012). His rhetoric emphasises 'great cohesion' between and 'goodwill' among the communities (VarS 2010a) as they are presented as coming together. Such a shift from fragmentation to resurgence is made possible by Rajapaksa's arguments about the LTTE and his framing of the war as a terrorist problem. The height of national unity after the end of the war reaffirms these positions and continues to reject an ethnic interpretation of the conflict as well as remaining ethnic grievances. Instead, he constructs a striking image of a happy national family reuniting after being kept apart by the effects of terrorism, projecting this success to the people of Sri Lanka and the rest of the world.

Overall, national unity in its shifting context from ebb to glory within less than five years is a central aspect of Rajapaksa's rhetoric. He continuously presents the dangers of disunity, the benefits of unity and the persisting threats to the nation that require all Sri Lankans to come together. He uses calls for national unity to mobilise the people, to rally the diverse population behind a national ideal and his leadership, placing himself at the apex of the reunited nation. The underlying idea that national unity provides strength to the nation is particularly potent in Rajapaksa's rhetoric during the civil war, but it remains salient as he continues to present threats to the nation and the country. In the immediate post-war period Rajapaksa's assertive proclamations of a united Sri Lankan nation further allow him to gloss over ethnic grievances and urgent questions of reconciliation.

Linking national unity to the security of the nation further allows Rajapaksa to delegitimise any dissent, whether on a political or ethnic base, as a potential threat to the nation that may lead to the fragmentation, weakening and even destruction of the nation. Such a centrality of national unity is not unique to nationalism in Sri Lanka. In fact, the promotion of national unity and identity is a defining criterion of nationalism (Smith 2009: 61). Having highlighted the Sinhalese core of Rajapaksa’s ideal Sri Lankan nation, however, the promotion of a historical
national unity, reaffirmed by the defeat of the LTTE, that is established as a prerequisite for lasting peace may further alienate minorities, while buttressing an exclusive conceptualisation of nationhood.

The Unitary Nature of the State

The Sri Lankan state and its symbols are a key element of Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’. His construction of a united, ethnically undifferentiated nation promotes love for the country as the ultimate unifying force that can transcend any other personal or group identities. The past two chapters have already pointed out limits of this vision, as Rajapaksa frequently draws on selective symbolic resources that present the Sinhalese majority as the Sri Lankan nation. The following sections examine in more depth the construction of the very state that Rajapaksa requests all communities to put above everything else. They look at how Rajapaksa legitimises the unitary state, rejects the idea of traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking communities and (re)constructs national space as Sri Lankan, which truly means the ‘Sinhalisation’ of symbolic and physical landscapes. We also investigate more closely the symbols of the state Rajapaksa mobilises for his ‘new patriotism’, highlighting how these again conflate Sinhalese and Sri Lankan nationalism.

The Importance of the State

Sri Lanka has been a united political and economic space since 1815 and after independence in 1948 the colonial arrangements of governance remained in place. The 1978 Constitution reaffirmed the unitary character of Sri Lanka and established a presidential system that endowed the office of the president with significant powers. This constitution, albeit amended nineteen times, is still in place as of summer 2016 and so are the territorial arrangements it consolidated.69 In the past four decades decentralisation has been a salient political issue and varying degrees of devolution of powers have been discussed and attempted over the years as a response to Tamil demands for greater autonomy, most notably the

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69 The current government is in the process of formulating a new constitution, but details are rather vague as of yet.
District Development Councils and the Thirteenth Amendment. These efforts, however, were limited and the Sri Lankan state remains under the control of a central government with only very limited powers devolved to district level.

The protection of the unitary Sri Lankan state spanning the whole island was one of Rajapaksa’s core positions, also frequently expressed throughout his speeches. To highlight only a few of his assertions demonstrating his uncompromising stance between 2005 and 2009, when the state was under threat from the LTTE:

- I pledge to defend by all means the country you entrusted to me. (VarS 2005a)
- This commitment of ours is to go forward as a single, unitary state. (IndD 2008)
- The Government has also made it clear that the elected Government cannot and will not permit undermining of the territorial integrity of the sovereign UN Member State of Sri Lanka and the division of its territory. We are clear in this message. (UNGA 2008)
- [A] solution to the national problem must exclude any division of the country. (VarS 2006a)
- The creation of a Government infrastructure that will safeguard Sri Lanka’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, unitary nature of the State and the people’s national identity with the participation of all sections of our society as positive shareholders in a pluralistic system for the maximum devolution of power within an undivided sovereign democratic republic. (VarS 2005b)

In the last quote Rajapaksa mentions devolution, expressing his willingness to introduce ‘a pluralistic system for the maximum devolution of power’ within an undivided state. These concepts have specific meanings within the Sri Lankan context as a solution to a non-ethnic, terrorist problem. Rajapaksa, like many Sinhalese, talks of the ‘national question’ or national problem instead of an ethnic conflict. This euphemism is used frequently by Sinhalese politicians to refute ethnic grievances and particularly to reject Tamil demands for a separate homeland. Within Sinhalese Buddhist ideology decentralisation is interpreted through Buddhist myths and historiography and has come to be seen ‘as a phenomenon that would inevitably lead to the fragmentation of the Sinhalese Buddhist nation’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 155). Thus the very notion of federalism is rejected as a possible solution to the conflict and virtually absent from Sinhalese discourses, as it is seen as a stepping stone to secessionism that threatens the rule of the majority. Instead a ‘maximum devolution within a unitary

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70 The Thirteenth Amendment was the result of the Indo-Lanka Accord in 1987 and provided for the devolution of power through the establishment of Provincial Councils.
state’ is proposed (Wickramasinghe 2008: 196) like in the above quote, although this usually remains a vague position and practical applications have been very limited.

Securing control over the Sri Lankan state has been a major goal of the Sinhalese nationalist movement since independence. Besides the tangible benefits of controlling the state, its territory and resources, the ability to shape it according to the expectations of the majority community was a major driving force behind the initial post-independence Sinhalese mobilisation. Underneath these practical issues, however, another essential logic is at play that explains the ferocity with which the Sinhalese have held on to the notion of a unitary state in the face of separatist violence: the trinity of the nation, state and Buddhism that is at the heart of Sinhalese nationalist ideology (Tambiah 1986: 70). Chapter two has discussed this relationship in more depth and the last chapter has demonstrated how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric reconstructs core myths and legends from the vamsa literature that perpetuate this link.

Rajapaksa supports his uncompromising stance on a unitary state by mobilising Sinhalese Buddhist narratives that highlight the unity of the state, ranging from the first capital of Sri Lanka to reminders of the achievements of Dutugemunu. These historical narratives naturalise the unitary character of the modern state through the past, legitimise the apparently ancient Sinhalese claim to the state, and perpetuate the Buddhist ontological order. Within this a separate state for the Tamils or any other minority would pose a universal threat as ‘the fragmentation of the state is also the fragmentation of the nation and is also the fragmentation of the person’ (Kapferer 2012: 7).

A less dominant theme of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric supports his claims to an undivided country and unitary state by referencing their legality. He invokes the irrevocable principle of sovereignty as enshrined in the country’s constitution and guaranteed by international law. Rajapaksa reminds international audiences that Sri Lanka is a sovereign UN member state and he will not allow it to be divided (UNGA 2008). In other places he emphasises that the national question should have a ‘political and constitutional solution’ (IndD 2008) and the latter naturally excludes any division of the country as ‘the principle of the unitary State ... has been established in our Constitution’ (VarS 2009c). Thus, Rajapaksa’s arguments
extend to those audiences that may not share the underlying historical and cultural narratives, ensuring the legitimacy and legality of his claims to international audiences and also minorities.

Patriotism and the Contested State

Over the last four decades the majority’s claim to the whole island of Sri Lanka has faced separatist challenges from the Tamil community, most forcefully expressed by the LTTE. The Tamil demand for a separate state, Tamil Eelam, is limited to the areas of the north and east that are either predominantly inhabited by Tamils (the Northern Province) or have mixed settlement patterns without a clear majority (the Eastern Province). Chapter two has already provided a brief outline of the conflict and has pointed out how Tamil territorial claims were a direct response to pro-Sinhalese policies enacted after independence, most importantly the Sinhala Only Act in 1956. Following the 1972 Constitution, which renamed the country Sri Lanka from Ceylon and made Buddhism the foremost religion, initially peaceful calls for regional autonomy in the northern and eastern areas were replaced by separatist demands enshrined in the 1976 Vaddukoddai Resolution. The most vociferous proponent of Tamil separatism was the LTTE, but even after its defeat Tamil demands for a separate state continue to be voiced. Diaspora organisations like the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam, formed after the war, in particular keep the idea of an independent Tamil state alive.

Tamil separatist demands pose a twofold challenge for Sinhalese governments. First, aspirations to Tamil Eelam challenge the existing Sri Lankan state as a political and territorial unit ruled by the Sinhalese majority. Not feeling adequately included and represented by the political process in the post-independent state the Tamil community demanded a separate state to safeguard Tamil interests (Cheran 2009: xxviii). Even though the defeat of the Tamil Tigers has largely removed the physical threat to the existing state, without political reforms and reconciliation minority communities will continue to feel alienated by majority politics. Second, Tamil claims for an independent homeland also

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71 For a map of the area claimed as Tamil Eelam see Appendix A.
question the community’s place within the Sri Lankan nation (Sitampalam 2009: 8). They present a challenge to underlying Sinhalese narratives that seek to naturalise and legitimise the majority’s territorial claims and its dominant position in the state and nation. These have excluded the minorities in the past, and Rajapaksa’s construction of nationhood in general and his representation of the Tamils in particular demonstrate how minorities may continue to be marginalised despite the end of the war. Tamil nationalism thus promotes a distinct, independent Tamil nation with a separate culture and homeland as the basis for demands for a sovereign state on the island of Sri Lanka (Cheran 2009; Stokke and Rynotveit 2000).

It is against the background of these conflicting narratives of traditional homelands that Rajapaksa’s efforts to construct the whole island as the motherland of the entire Sri Lankan nation need to be understood. By rejecting alternative claims to parts of the country’s territory he seeks to not only further support the irrevocable unitary nature of the state, but also strengthen his arguments about a strong and united Sri Lankan nation. Rajapaksa’s rhetoric does not leave room for minority challenges to the united state:

Instead of the concepts of traditional homelands and self-determination that allow an ethnic group to breakaway from the Republic of Sri Lanka, steps will be taken to ensure for all communities, including Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and Malay the freedom to exercise all the rights enshrined in the Constitution - including the right to live in any part of Sri Lanka on the grounds that the entire territory is the homeland of all communities. (VarS 2005b)

The idea of one homeland for the entire national family, the Sri Lankan nation, is an important part of Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’. He constructs the state, the motherland, as the first and foremost object of solidarity for all members of the nation, irrespective of their religion, language or race:

I value my motherland first, second and third. This should be so to you and to the entire nation. It is only our beloved motherland that we should all cherish and value. (VarS 2009c)

By linking all ethnic communities to the Sri Lankan state he not only offers the love for the country as a source of unity, but also reaffirms its unitary character: ‘This country is one that belongs to all Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and other peoples to whom this is home. We cannot solve this problem by dividing this country’ (IndD 2006).
Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’ furthermore constructs state symbols, for instance the flag, as signifiers of national unity:

The people are gathering around the National Flag. What we have done is to make the people of this country line up behind the National Flag. Therefore, this victory belongs to the people so lined up behind the National Flag. (VarS 2009c)

Remember that when this National Flag flutters in the wind it also carries the last breaths of our heroes of war. I ask of you that as long as we breathe we must remember these heroes. (WarH 2009)

This flag flutters with pride not only in the south. It is also seen on the houses of the Tamil people in the North, in the homes of the Muslims in Trincomalee, and the homes of the Adivasis, too. (WarH 2009)

These quotes demonstrate how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric establishes a clear link between the nation and the Sri Lankan flag. He represents it as a symbol of a shared national consciousness, identity and territorial unity. The first quote also again highlights how the nation should not simply unite behind a symbol, but its leading representative, the president of the country and nation, too: Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Rajapaksa’s efforts to construct the present state as foremost unifying force for his vision of a Sri Lankan nation silence alternative concepts of homelands and gloss over the fact that minorities have not only not felt represented by the post-independent state, but many have seen it as an instrument of injustice and oppression (de Silva 2010: 239). The state and its official symbols, whether the flag or the national anthem often sung in Sinhala only, are not free from ethnic meaning and have been disputed in the past, a fact Rajapaksa marginally recognises in his speech celebrating the War Heroes Day in 2009:

There was a time when permission was needed from the LTTE to raise the National Flag in Trincomalee. The LTTE wanted their flag too raised. Wherever there is no right to hoist the National Flag, there is no freedom. Today, both in the south and north, and even where the LTTE had fortresses, it is the same flag that flies. Today, the National Flag on the three wheeler in Dondra flutters in Jaffna, too. The flag that is raised at the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy flutters in Putumathalan, too. We must be proud of this freedom we have obtained after 30 years. We should rejoice in it. If not you cannot be a child of Mother Lanka. (WarH 2009)

Rajapaksa’s quote reminds of a time when the LTTE was using its own banner, displaying a Tiger, while the official Sri Lankan flag displays a lion, representing

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72 Adivasis is a different term for Veddhas, the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka.

73 In December 2010 the cabinet under Rajapaksa discussed a ban on the Tamil translation of the anthem at official and state functions, as one country should have only a single anthem. This led to an unofficial ban of the Tamil version and gave new life to the controversies around the two versions of the Sri Lankan anthem (Roberts 2010).
the Sinhalese. Yet, only days after the end of the war Rajapaksa represents post-war national unity as a given because the terrorist threat and the war have ended. He establishes the Sri Lankan ‘lion flag’ (VicD 2009) as symbol for the nation, despite its underlying meaning making it a symbol of the Sinhalese community. Even more so, flying this particular flag is linked to freedom which in turn is linked to Sinhalese nationalism and disputing the flag or the unitary state it represents implicitly challenges the freedom of the nation and country.

Even though the Sri Lankan state is contested, Rajapaksa presents it as homeland to his resurgent, united nation. He presents it as a shared civic foundation for an inclusive Sri Lankan nation, glossing over the problematic nature of the modern state and its symbols. After the end of the war Rajapaksa proclaims that the island’s various ethnic communities now stand united by their all-encompassing love for the very state and its symbols that had been challenged for decades – an argument possible because of Rajapaksa’s framing of the national question, the war and its actors.

**Defining National Landscapes**

From his inception as president Rajapaksa took an assertive stance against separatist demands of the LTTE, declaring the protection of the unitary state as one of his major goals. After defeating the Tamil Tigers his government sought to reintegrate the areas formerly held by the LTTE economically, politically and ideologically into the state. Reconstruction and development of the north and east were as much part of this process as holding local elections. Another crucial aspect of his post-war rhetoric is the ‘Sinhalisation’ of these areas, rejecting alternative concepts of homelands of the minorities and including them into Sinhalese Buddhist national space.

The defeat of the LTTE decisively ended the militant threat to the state but not the ideological contestations of Sinhalese Buddhist rule, thus since 2009 ‘the importance of non-military battle-fronts has gained momentum’ (Keerawella 2013: 11). This conflict includes opposing narratives of the end of the war as either a ‘victor’s peace’ or ‘peace of the vanquished’ (Uyangoda 2012: 24).

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74 Images of both flags and a short description of their symbolisms can be found in Appendix A.
discussed in chapter six, which shape political demands and the framework for reconciliation, justice and accountability. It is further evident in the struggle over historical narratives that are mobilised to contest and define space. Dewasiri argues that after the end of the war the Rajapaksa regime sought to rename and redefine the territory in the north and east held by the military to reintegrate it into the state, buttressed by historical claims of it having been ‘an integral part of a pre-colonial Sinhala-Buddhist order’ (2013: 5f.). By nationalising the traditional homelands of Tamil-speaking minorities, claims to a separate Tamil Eelam are rejected and delegitimised as the areas are included into the Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary.

Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric includes subtle efforts to include the ‘liberated areas’ into his Sri Lankan, albeit predominantly Sinhalese, narrative of the homeland. One example is offered in his 2013 Independence Day speech, the only analysed speech delivered outside traditionally Sinhalese areas in the southern and central provinces. In 2013 Independence Day celebrations were held in Trincomalee, an important port city in the Eastern Province. It is one of the largest cities in the areas claimed as Tamil Eelam and has long been a cultural centre for Tamils and Muslims. Trincomalee district is shared by Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese, yet Rajapaksa opened his speech with the following lines:

Friends,
We celebrate this 65th anniversary of Independence with great freedom and the immense pride derived from it. I offer my respectful salute to all who sacrificed their lives and shed blood and sweat for Sri Lanka’s freedom and independence.

Friends,
You are aware that the city of Trincomalee that we are gathered in today is an area with a very important history. For thousands of years Sri Lanka was important to the world because of the Trincomalee Harbour located here. In the past this port was called the Port of Gokanna-titta.
As stated in our Chronicles it was in this area that the two merchant brothers – Thapassu and Bhalluka – set ashore with the hair relics of the Buddha. During the Kandyan period, when we had been deprived of higher ordination of the Sangha, the monks who brought higher ordination from the ancient land of Siam, also arrived at Trincomalee. (IndD 2013)

The last two paragraphs of his opening statements are particularly interesting, as they include Trincomalee within his narrative of a historically united and culturally harmonious country. By directly linking it to Buddhism, however, he presents it as a location with particular relevance to the religion in the past, including the area into the Sinhalese Buddhist state.
Later in the speech Rajapaksa directly acknowledges the multi-ethnic setup of the city, highlighting it as an example of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims living together peacefully, warning of the dangers of religious differences in Sinhala and also a short Tamil part of his speech. These appeals to unity are interesting in light of another statement in the speech that briefly reminds the audience of fighting that took place in the area:

You will recall what the LTTE Tigers subsequently did to gain control of this port and city that had become a nerve centre in the Indian Ocean. The Buddha statue at Trincomalee was protected with barbed wire fencing around it. There was no peace or freedom even for the sacred statue. (IndD 2013)

This quote hints at territorial challenges by referring to a controversial Buddha statue that gained national attention only months before Rajapaksa took office.

The statue was erected under cover of night by Sinhalese groups in May 2005, which was followed by Tamil outrage in the region. It led to heightened community tensions and became a political issue that involved major parties and even then president Chandrika Kumaratunga (University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) 2008). Despite the protests the statue remained in place and survived the war, and Rajapaksa does not question the validity of this ‘sacred statue’. Instead, his earlier reference to Trincomalee as the arrival point of the hair relic of the Buddha implicitly naturalises its presence. His rhetoric legitimises the ongoing encroachment of the state into Tamil areas, restoring their symbolic and physical presence to these regions (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 148). Establishing sacred sites has in the past and present played an ‘expressive role in establishing the spiritual unity of the island while they simultaneously enabled its political unification’ (Kemper 1991, cited in de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 148).

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric seeks to reconstruct Trincomalee, a city within the acclaimed traditional Tamil homeland, as ‘Sri Lankan’ by linking it to Sinhalese Buddhist cultural resources. This is part of his wider attempt to include the areas in the north and east as part of the united motherland. This is also evident in the following quote that refers to economic development in these regions:

[W]e are implementing this Jathika Saviya in a manner that will bring the entire country together. After nearly 20 years this program will bring life to villages in the North and East too. 12,000 villages that were not well treated all these years will have a new life. In the next year we will give such life to 12,000 more villages through the Jathika Saviya. We expect to wipe out all difficult or uncongenial villages from our map through development. (VarS 2007a)
In early 2007, despite the ongoing war effort in the north and east, Rajapaksa declares the development of villages part of his village development programme, *Jathika Saviya*. Even more so, he promises ‘to wipe out all difficult or uncongenial villages from our map’, referring to these predominantly Tamil villages in the north and east.

At the surface, Rajapaksa is referring to economic development, to wipe out underdevelopment and poverty in these regions, but following this section the topic of the speech shifts to the fight against the LTTE, linking the quote to Rajapaksa’s arguments about using development to wipe out the roots of the LTTE in the north and east respectively: ‘Friends, it is the same principle we apply to both developing the village and eliminating terrorism’ (VarS 2007a). The previous chapter has discussed how rural development and nationalist narratives are closely linked within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. The village in particular is reproduced as a modern representation of the ideal nation of the golden ages clearly biased towards Sinhalese Buddhists. Thus within Rajapaksa’s wider attempts to construct the country as a united space for the nation his promise to wipe out ‘difficult or uncongenial’ villages carries the connotation of removing ‘non-national’, that is non-Sinhalese, villages from the map.

Rajapaksa’s representations of national space again highlight how his rhetoric of a ‘new patriotism’ needs to be understood within his underlying, commonsensical assumption of the nation as naturally dominated by the majority. While explicitly acknowledging ethnic and religious differences, he does not embrace minority cultures and symbols within his construction of the Sri Lankan nation and homeland. Instead, he promotes Sinhalese Buddhist values and at times even seeks to remove non-Sinhalese features or reconstruct them within Sinhalese narratives, potentially at the expense of minorities. Presenting the post-war country as a united homeland for all communities can potentially provide an inclusive symbolic resource that brings people of all regions together as the united nation of the country. Yet, if nationalising of minority space becomes characterised by what may possibly be termed Sinhalese chauvinism its divisive potential in the near future may be much greater. Indeed, the above mentioned Buddha statue and the removal of Tiger cemeteries are not the only controversial changes to the landscape in the north and east.
The ‘Sinhalisation’ of space was a subtle theme in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, but provided an ideological space for the physical manifestations of the ‘victor’s peace’ that have become evident within the contested areas themselves. Since the end of the war stupas and Buddhist statues have been sprouting throughout predominantly Tamil villages, and memorials to the war and the fallen soldiers have been erected, often including the Sinhalese lion, a visible reminder of the ‘Sinhalisation’ of previously Tiger-held areas. War tourism has transformed former LTTE bunkers and battlefields into tourist sites that serve as constant reminders of the remaining threat and Sinhalese triumph over the Tamil Tigers (Hyndman 2015). Settlement schemes that locate Sinhalese people in Tamil-dominated areas to change the population structure have continued and historic sites have been reappropriated as places of Buddhist significance in attempts to rediscover and invest historical landscapes with new meanings as part of a ‘glorious national heritage’ (Wickramasinghe 2013: 97).

Such actions are not limited to the Sinhalese or areas in the north and east. Wickramasinghe points out that since the end of the war Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims alike are testing the limits of reclaiming their own heritage, at times articulating opposing claims to the same site. She argues this is part of the post-war situation where power relations are being redefined (Id.: 97), a contest over the post-war physical and cultural spaces of Sri Lanka in which Rajapaksa and his government had the advantage of privileged access to discourses and the instruments of the state.

The Order of Things

The following sections examine the social and political hierarchy underlying the nationalist discourse constructed by Rajapaksa, tracing the contemporary discursive modes of the Buddhist cosmic order. We first investigate the family metaphor, which Rajapaksa uses as a linguistic tool to construct and naturalise the Sri Lankan nation as a united, but not equal national family. Then, the centrality of Buddhism within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is discussed. We focus on how the reproduction of Buddhist cosmology sets Buddhists apart and above non-Buddhists, albeit allowing for inclusion of the latter within a hierarchical order. Finally, we analyse Rajapaksa’s use of democratic discourses that legitimise the
traditional ethnic hierarchy within a modern pluralistic political system ruled by the majority.

The National Family: Unity in Hierarchy

Chapter five has already highlighted Rajapaksa’s conceptualisation of the nation and the role of the family metaphor within it. By likening the nation to a family certain relationships between its members can be implied by transferring characteristics of the family to the nation. While Rajapaksa’s family rhetoric has a distinctively inclusive character on the surface, it reconstructs the family as a model for a natural social order that serves as an example for his ideal nation. Although an inclusive order in which members of all ethnic communities are ‘brothers and sisters’, it is not a nation of equals. Collins (2001; 1998) highlights that using the rhetoric of family can function to construct and mask power relations and to naturalise hierarchies. Within the image of the family the contradictory relationship between equality and hierarchy is reconciled, because the unity of families is organised around hierarchies and exclusion (McClintock 1995, cited in Collins 1998: 64). Family is a fundamental principle of social organisation (Collins 2001: 5) and can thus be used to naturalise hierarchies within society, for instance of class, gender or ethnicity. Just as each member of the family knows their place and is socialised into a set of ‘family values’ so are individuals in the national hierarchy (Collins 1998: 64).

Within families older siblings may have more power than younger ones and parents are clear figures of authority. Rajapaksa’s ‘brotherhood’ of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims does not appeal to a union of equals, his representations of group relations rather carry the connotation of the Sinhalese as a benevolent older sibling to the helpless Tamil child. On the one hand, chapter five has discussed his rhetorical construction of the Tamils as innocent and helpless victims with little agency. The framing of the military operations with the aim to ‘free another group of our own brothers and sisters from the cruel grip of terror’ (VarS 2008c) similarly reiterates an image of weakness and helplessness of some members of the national family. Chapter six, on the other hand, has highlighted how Rajapaksa reconstructs and naturalises the special status of the Sinhalese by
perpetuating Sinhalese Buddhist narratives. It is ‘Mother Lanka’ who dominates this national family.

Rajapaksa’s family metaphor furthermore reproduces the Sinhalese Buddhist logic of order within a united nation. It reproduces a hierarchical relationship between the communities that allows the incorporation of minority communities within a nation dominated by the majority. As the family image calls for a ‘hierarchy within unity’ (McClintock 1995, cited in Collins 1998: 64) it can serve as a model for nationalism that claims ‘unity of interests that supersedes the special interests affiliated with class, ethnic, racial or gender groups’ (Collins 2001: 19). Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’ is a case in point, as its conception of a united, ethnically undifferentiated identity addresses different communities who should be joined by their overarching love for the country. Through the family metaphor Rajapaksa’s rhetoric naturalises unequal group relations within this proposed Sri Lankan nation, where the good of the family at large stands above the interests of its smaller parts.

**Buddhists, First Among Equals**

The importance of Buddhism for Rajapaksa’s construction of Sri Lankan national identity has been discussed in more detail in chapter six. There, we highlighted how his emphasis of Buddhism presents an ethnically biased version of nationhood in the past and present through the frequency and content of religious references. But Buddhism is not only constructed as a core value of Rajapaksa’s ideal nation, its perpetuation as the foremost religion is furthermore particularly relevant to explain the hierarchical order at play within Sinhalese nationalism in general and its discursive construction within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric.

The second chapter of the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka is solely devoted to declaring the role of Buddhism in the country:

> The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e). (Constitution 1978: Ch II, Article 9)
Articles in the following chapter guarantee basic freedoms for all religions, yet Buddhism is granted a special place making it the *de facto* state religion. The dominance of Buddhism within the Sri Lankan state and its institutions has been a major grievance of minority communities since it was enshrined in the country’s constitution in the 1970s. The entanglement of religion and politics is also evident in the political activism of Buddhist monks since the late 1930s. De Silva Wijeyeratne (2014: 105-109) highlights how the close relationship between the Sangha and kingship in the past was revived after independence. Political and social activism of monks has increased in the last decades and although controversial, Buddhist monks have become more actively involved in the country’s politics seeking to further promote and protect Buddhism. In 2004 the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU, National Heritage Party), led by Buddhist monks, was formed and the ultra-nationalist party supported Rajapaksa’s rise to power the following year. More recently a radical break-away fraction from the JHU, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS, Buddhist Strength Army), entered the stage and its campaigns for Buddhist supremacy have increased since 2012.

Rajapaksa himself is an open advocate of Buddhism, declaring in his first speech in office: ‘I am a Buddhist’ (VarS 2005a). In his second speech he explicitly reinforces the fundamental link between Buddhism, a core dimension of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, and politics:

> Our Government will give full protection to religious freedom. The Government will meet all its responsibilities towards all religions will safeguarding the special place accorded to Buddhism under the Constitution. (VarS 2005b)

Rajapaksa’s narratives do not challenge the role of Buddhism in Sri Lankan politics and society, but he also does not support more extreme positions on the issue. The referenced article of the constitution that declares Buddhism the *de facto* religion of the state is controversial among Sinhalese nationalists. For more extreme voices it does not go far enough in privileging Buddhism, while others believe that the simultaneous patronage of Buddhism and guarantees of secular, liberal rights for other religions counterbalance each other (Schonthal 2012: 202). Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is situated within and reproduces the latter, less extreme positions.

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75 Article 10 guarantees all individuals the freedom of religion, thought and conscience, while article 14(1e) allows them to practice their religions or beliefs in public and private (Constitution 1978: Ch III).
position. He frequently acknowledges the religious diversity of the country and its society, promising all communities freedom and protection:

During my reign of office adherents of all religions could freely hold their religious beliefs and conduct their religious affairs freely in temples, churches, mosques and kovils. There will be no state interference in religion. (VarS 2005a)

The special place of Buddhism as ‘first among equals’ (Schonthal 2012: 202), however, remains beyond reproach and is frequently reproduced explicitly and implicitly throughout Rajapaksa’s rhetoric.

One example of how Rajapaksa very subtly supports Sinhalese nationalist claims for a Buddhist Sri Lankan state is the following from a speech delivered in Indonesia:

The village temple, as the central focus not only of spiritual faith, but of the educational process and cultural pursuits, served as the pivot of social organization. Our ethical beliefs relating to governance derived primarily from the dasa raja dharma, or the fundamental moral norms of governance, laid down by Gautama the Buddha in the Dhammapada. (VarS 2011b)

The quote reiterates the already discussed link Rajapaksa reconstructs between religion, the traditional village and Buddhist cultural resources. Here he also subtly establishes the Dasa Raja Dharma, loosely translated as the ten royal qualities or virtues, which sets out the basic ethics for rulers of the country based on Buddhist principles, as guiding principle of the Sri Lankan government.

The close link between Buddhism and the state is also evident in formal aspects of Rajapaksa’s speeches, for instance addresses and conclusions. While the precise addresses used are adopted for the relevant audiences and occasions of the speech, where specific titles are used the order remains unchanged across all addresses analysed between 2009 and 2014. In these cases the Sangha and its representatives are addressed first and foremost. The opening of Rajapaksa’s 2008 Independence Day speech provides an example:

Most Venerable Members of the Maha Sangha
Respected members of the clergy of other religions
Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Speaker
Hon. Chief Justice
Hon. Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Ministers and Members of Parliament
Your Excellencies from the Diplomatic Missions
Commanders of the Armed Forces and the Inspector General of Police
Members of the armed forces and the police
Distinguished guests
My dear brothers and sisters (IndD 2006)

The specific titles occasionally change slightly in similar domestic speeches, but their order remains the same. Kumaratunga and Sirisena, his predecessor and
successor respectively, adhere to similar conventions in their speeches, indicating that this is a standard convention of addressing audiences. They also use Rajapaksa’s closing line that wishes domestic and foreign audiences the blessing of the Triple Gem. The framing of opening and ending lines demonstrates how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, and potentially Sri Lankan presidential rhetoric in general, reflects and reiterates the institutionalisation of Buddhism, which holds a separate and foremost place above other religious as well as political dignitaries.

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is not challenging the post-independence fusion of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and the state, instead it reinforces existing power structures and especially the centrality of Buddhism, and establishes himself as a champion of the dominant religion. This has allowed him to mobilise and maintain support from religious elites like the JHU, while at the same time openly supporting a more moderate position that recognises and guarantees the religious diversity within Sri Lanka to strengthen his claim to represent a united, heterogeneous nation that can transcend differences under his leadership and a ‘new patriotism’. Rajapaksa reconstructs Sinhalese nationalist narratives that support the coexistence of religions while Buddhism is lifted above the others. This has become a fundamental ordering principle not only within the religious, but also the political and civic spheres of the country.

The ‘natural’ order of things Rajapaksa’s rhetoric reproduces is based on the ontologically grounded hierarchy in which the order of the parts depends on their relationship to the Buddha. Non-Buddhist peoples can be included in this order and within the state, but they are naturally subordinated to the Sinhalese (Kapferer 2012: 7) and should remain in their ‘proper’ place (Uyangoda 1994, cited in Krishna 1999: 54). Within this ideological space it becomes clear how Rajapaksa can argue for religious coexistence while perpetuating the superiority of Buddhism as well as a united but hierarchically ordered national family. The hierarchical logic of Buddhist cosmology allows Rajapaksa to reconcile his narratives apparently contradictory narratives of ‘new patriotism’ and ethnic revivalism, actively inviting minority communities to join the ‘Sri Lankan’ nation and state that are naturally dominated by the Sinhalese community.

This also illustrates how his rhetoric, and other discourses like the history textbooks, can easily conflate Sinhalese and Sri Lankan nationalism, as for many
Sinhalese these two are very much the same. DeVotta has very aptly summarised these sentiments:

Mahinda Rajapaksa and other Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists subscribe to an ideology which claims that Sri Lanka is the designated sanctuary of Theravada Buddhism, that Sinhalese Buddhists are the chosen custodians to preserve and propagate this legacy, that all others who live on the island do so thanks purely to Sinhalese Buddhist sufferance, and that only traitors would seek to undermine Sinhalese Buddhist dominance. (DeVotta 2011: 135)

The ‘Sinhala Mindset’, as Roberts describes it, is ‘a way of seeing the world that enables a PART to equate itself with the WHOLE and thus to subsume the whole’ (2009a: para. 1) while at the same time denying the existence of a Tamil nation and nationalism (Roberts 2008: 6). It is this conflation of Sinhalese with Sri Lankans that has become the basic rationale of Sinhalese nationalism, rooted in the unity of nation, state and religion, which designates ‘others’ who do not accept Sinhalese dominance as traitors to the nation.

The Will of the Many

Buddhism, its cosmic order and the related myths and legends are a major rationale for Sinhalese dominance above non-Buddhist communities in the country, but this apparently natural ethnic hierarchy is furthermore enshrined by democratic principles. When Sri Lanka gained independence it was a Westminster style democracy, and without sufficient safeguards for the minority communities the Buddhist ontological ground became ‘mediated through the logic of number’ (de Silva Wijeyeratne 2014: 110). Democratic principles enshrined the hierarchical logic of Sinhalese nationalism, and majoritarian politics soon proved a potent tool for the Sinhalese majority to fashion a state after its own liking, marginalising the minority communities and eventually leading to conflict and civil war. The result was what DeVotta calls an ethnocracy, ‘a situation where power is wielded by and for the dominant ethnic group in a polyethnic state’ (2011: 143). Rajapaksa’s rhetoric similarly demonstrates how the ‘majority rules’ principle is used to add contemporary legitimisation to the traditional religious source of the hierarchical order that forms a core part of Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

In his speeches Rajapaksa often embeds his arguments within a democratic narrative as an unquestionable source of legitimacy for national and international
audiences. He establishes himself as vindicator of the people’s wishes and aspirations, directly linking himself and his policies to ‘the majority opinion’:

Our main objective of the election was to ensure the victory of a policy. Today the majority of the people has endorsed that policy by exercising universal suffrage, a necessary feature of the sovereignty of the people. (VarS 2005a)

We have not abandoned the Mahinda Chinthana76 that was endorsed by the people. We shall not abandon it. Therefore, we say that we shall continue to defend the majority opinion of the people of this country. (IndD 2008)

He claims to enact changes that ‘appropriately reflect aspirations of our people’ (UNGA 2006) and to act according to ‘public opinion’ (UNGA 2013). Even where Rajapaksa does not explicitly mention a majority, within a democratic narrative it is accepted that public opinion or ‘the will of the people’ usually does not reflect everyone. Chapter fives has discussed how closely related the concepts ‘people’ and ‘nation’ are within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, which enables him to present the majority opinion as that of the nation: ‘During the Presidential election the overwhelming majority of the people said that the country should not be divided. Today it is the common national aspiration of the people’ (VarS 2005a). While minority interests should ideally be protected and represented appropriately, in practice it is usually the interests of the majority that are decisive. And it is such a ‘majority consensus’ (BudS 2008) that Rajapaksa claims to base his policies on. Representing the majority of people in Sri Lanka allows Rajapaksa to legitimately gloss over the interests of smaller groups in favour of the, usually ethnic, majority, making the conflation of the majority and the nation politically consequential.

Rajapaksa seeks to legitimise Sinhalese hegemony within his narratives and politics as an expression of the will of the people, a democratic principle that is difficult to challenge, even by Western critics of his regime. Yet, as the Sinhalese currently make up three quarters of the Sri Lankan population, the democratic idea of the rule of the majority further supports the ethnic hierarchy of Sinhalese nationalist ideology reproduced by Rajapaksa’s discourse. Rajapaksa also glosses over the fact that the majority that has elected him and his regime does not represent the minority communities. In both presidential elections in 2005 and 2010 he did not gain large numbers of votes from the minorities and neither did

76 Mahinda Chinthana – Towards a New Sri Lanka was Rajapaksa’s election manifesto for the 2005 presidential election.
his party in the 2013 provincial council election. Rajapaksa nonetheless includes the following statement in his Budget Speech that emphasises the endorsement of the majority for his government:

Our Government is encouraged that a substantial majority of our people continue to place their confidence in "Mahinda Chintana- Vision for the Future" which, is designed to create a proud future for their children. We were further encouraged by the fact that in the North, an overwhelming majority of people have placed their confidence in the democratic process which was denied to them by the LTTE for 25 long years, and proceeded to use the opportunity to elect its Provincial Council for the first time. (BudS 2013)

Elections were held in the Central, North Western and, for the first time in over two decades, in the Northern Province. Rajapaksa’s coalition, the UPFA, won decisively in the first two provinces, gaining over sixty percent of the popular votes, but in the Northern Province it received only eighteen percent of the votes, while over seventy-eight percent voted for the TNA (Wickramasinghe 2014: 199f.). These results highlight the divergence of minority and majority votes as well as Rajapaksa’s unpopularity among minorities who did not feel their interests adequately represented by Rajapaksa and his government and largely voted for his opponent in the 2015 presidential election. Within a democratic narrative, however, this does not affect Rajapaksa’s rhetoric as he emphasises the ‘will of the many’, not of all, and does not engage with the problematic issue of the ethnic dimensions of the ‘many’ and ‘few’ in the Sri Lankan context.

The Authoritarian Dimension of Nationalism

Throughout the preceding discussion of different aspects of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric we have hinted at an underlying authoritarian dimension. The authority of the state, the government and Rajapaksa as president in particular, are presumed beyond reproach within Rajapaksa’s discursive construction of nationalism. Linguistically this is particularly evident in how he frequently uses appeals to ethos to support many of his arguments. The following examples demonstrate how Rajapaksa constructs his own authority as president as rationale for his audiences to take his point of view or to follow his calls to actions:

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77 In the 2005 election most Estate Tamils supported his opponent, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE enforced a boycott in the north and east that prevented many Tamils from voting, though many of them would have likely supported Wickremesinghe (de Silva 2006: 119). In the 2010 presidential election most Tamils and Muslims again voted mainly for Rajapaksa’s opponent, Sarath Fonseka (Uyangoda 2011: 132).

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But as the Head of State who has ensured a difficult victory in our motherland, I say that these difficulties are not permanent. (IndD 2008)

In 2005, I was elected by my people on a promise to rid my country of the menace of terrorism. I say that Sri Lanka is now at peace, peace that was only a dream a few years ago. (UNGA 2010)

It is my belief that what went wrong for us in history is the lack of attention paid to the villages that are around us here today. (VarS 2012b)

Yet, authoritarianism is also a part of the nationalist ideological narratives Rajapaksa expresses and reproduces through his rhetoric, making these appeals possible and providing a particular vision of nationhood.

The following sections highlight how Rajapaksa establishes himself as the leader of the nation by mobilising narratives and practices of the Asokan Persona, the basis of hierarchical relationships and authoritarianism in Sri Lanka. Fashioning himself simultaneously as a man of the people and a victorious leader presents him as the modern instalment of the ideal Sinhalese Buddhist king, reproducing the hierarchical order of Sinhalese nationalism and serving Rajapaksa’s arguments and political goals.

**A President Of the People, For the People**

The main basis of Rajapaksa’s authority naturally stems from his position as president, the highest elected representative of the people in Sri Lanka. This office bestows on him an inherent legitimacy and respect that he can appeal to in order to support his positions. Yet, from his first speech in office onwards Rajapaksa highlights that his true authority comes from the sovereignty of the people he presents: ‘I am not the master but the trustee of the country’ (VarS 2005a). He refers to himself as a ‘temporary trustee’ (Rajapaksa 2005: 2), a ‘custodian’ of Sri Lanka. Although the leader of country and nation, Rajapaksa emphasises that he was appointed to rule the country in the name of the people and frequently points to the mandate given to him by the people through elections (VarS 2006c; VarS 2006d; IndD 2010; VarS 2010d; VicD 2014; BudS 2010). In addition to being an elected representative of the nation, he also declares himself a man of the people:

I am not a prince born with a golden spoon in the mouth. Like most of you I am a leader that grew from the ordinary people. Therefore I do not need new advisors to understand the problems of the people. I can understand them well. … I will not build any barriers that make me inaccessible to the people. My Presidential house and office are open to the people. (VarS 2005a)
He calls himself a ‘friend’ of the people and addresses them as ‘my fellow citizens’, presenting himself as one of their own. Rajapaksa appeals particularly to rural Sinhalese Buddhist audiences and electorates, establishing himself as a traditional Buddhist, ‘a man with my feet firmly set on ground and having my ears tuned to the earth’ (VarS 2006c). His rhetoric is supported visually by the traditional dress, a white sarong and tunic as well as his brown shawl, he often wears. Ranil Wickremesinghe, one of his long-standing main opponents, is usually seen in Western style suits, while Maithripala Sirisena, who defeated Rajapaksa in the 2015 presidential election, often wears the traditional garb.

At the same time Rajapaksa presents himself as a strong, unyielding champion of the people’s aspirations. He often uses a firm, assertive language to express his commitment and determination to his goals and course of action, for instance: ‘I will take whatever measures necessary’ (VarS 2006a), ‘I have already demonstrated that I am a leader who is not ready to kneel’ (VarS 2006d) or ‘I must on behalf of the nation’ (WarH 2009). Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is supported by strong modality forms, especially his omnipresent use of the determined ‘I will’: ‘I will not allow’, ‘I will not hesitate’, ‘I will act’, ‘I will not be shaken’, and so forth. Overall, Rajapaksa fashions himself simultaneously as ‘the leader, servant and friend’ (VarS 2006d) of the nation.

Rajapaksa’s self-representation frames him very much in line with the Buddhist ideal king who is good and righteous because he upholds Buddhist principles and ‘acts in concert with and in the interests of the people’ (Kapferer 2012: 70). Rajapaksa continuously reminds the people that he is a firm representative of the people, a leader who never loses touch with them, their needs and interests, and ultimately represents and enforces their wishes. Grounding his authority within the nation, including yet not limited to his electorate, can be a powerful strategy to legitimise his government and simultaneously delegitimise

78 The shawl’s colour has been compared to that of kurakkan, a type of maze cultivated by many Sri Lankan paddy farmers, hinting at Rajapaksa’s rural heritage.
79 Kapferer also argues that this ideal king reconciles hierarchy and democracy within the Buddhist conception of kingship, because even though it proscribes a hierarchical order with a strong ruler at the apex the king is also the servant of the people and a promoter and protector of Buddhism (2012: 70).
any dissent. As the government and its goals are easily conflated with the nation, any criticism of the former can be deflected as an attack on the latter.

**A President of Ancient Glory**

With the military successes and especially the victory in 2009 another source of personal authority becomes dominant in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric as he fashions himself as victorious leader. He emphasises his role in the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, a feat none of his predecessors was able to achieve for nearly three decades. In his second swearing-in ceremony in November 2010 and many speeches following it, Rajapaksa reminds the audiences of the enormous tasks accomplished by him and his government:

> You are well aware that you now stand on our motherland that is much greater than what was handed over to me five years ago. There can be no greater satisfaction to a leader than the humble joy of being able to address one’s people after building a much better country than before, and successfully carrying out the responsibility handed over to me by the citizens of this country. ... Today, I take over this country with more courage, strength and confidence than in 2005. (VarS 2010d)

The military defeat of the LTTE provides Rajapaksa with a new, unprecedented source of authority. It makes him the president who first ‘liberated’ the east and eventually defeated the ‘the most ruthless terrorists of the world’ (IndD 2008), a fact he frequently reminds his audiences of in his post-war speeches. Rajapaksa presents the victory as an incredible feat and simultaneously a promise to meet any future challenge: ‘How can it be difficult for us who were able to defeat separatist terrorism that many said was invincible, to build this new future in our motherland’ (IndD 2009)? This trope also becomes important for international audiences, as international criticism of Rajapaksa and his regime is mounting in the years following the end of the war. Highlighting the incredible accomplishment achieved by him to these audiences is supposed to serve as a shield against criticism as it demonstrates that Rajapaksa is well able to solve post-war challenges without foreign intervention.

In the domestic context the defeat of the LTTE puts him on equal footing only with mythical Dutugemunu, the great Sinhalese king who was able to defeat King Elara and unite the country. De Silva Wijeyeratne argues that ‘Rajapakse’s campaign against the LTTE occupied the same ontological ground as Dutthagāmanī’s campaign against Elāra in the popular Buddhist imaginary’ (2014: 188) and these mytho-historical associations intensified after 2009 as
Rajapaksa’s defeat of the LTTE regenerated the unitary, encompassing state analogous to Dutugemunu’s legendary unification of Sri Lanka under Sinhalese rule (Id.: 187f.). Rajapaksa, whose mobilisation of myths and legends has been discussed in depth in chapter six, actively constructs himself and the victory within such tropes as he subtly invokes comparisons between himself and the ancient king, also encouraged by actions like garlanding a Dutugemunu statue only a few days after the victory (Roberts 2009b).

In his 2011 Independence Day speech, for instance, he addresses the nation from the same place Dutugemunu set out from, locating himself within the same symbolic space:

Friends,

King Dutugemunu commenced his journey to unite this motherland with blessings from this sacred land of the deity of Kataragama. Many of the successful freedom struggles in our history commenced with blessings from this sacred land of Kataragama. It is with similar blessings that I, as the leader of a mature democratic nation, take on with responsibility and confidence, the task of this era -- to align you in the forefront of a rising nation of Asia.

At this decisive time in our country, I trust that you will be with me in carrying out this task, sharing with me the love for our motherland. (IndD 2011)

On the same occasion one year earlier, Rajapaksa’s speech contained an analogous section similarly placing himself within the historicity of the location of the speech:

I did not ask you to crown me. However, please remember that I have placed the crown of freedom, prosperity and heroism on the heads of you and your children. ...

It was on this historic place that Veera Keppetipola sacrificed his life without any fear, for the freedom of the nation. I believe that the leaders who ruled this nation should have a heart which will not betray the country similar to that of Veera Keppetipola.

Now I am addressing you from the place where the child hero, Madduma Bandara, son of Keppetipola’s sister, sacrificed his life without display of any fear. Please remember that the hearts of your sons and daughters too are filled with unlimited love for the motherland similar to that of Madduma Bandara. Your sons and daughters have unlimited love for me for the same reason.

I feel I am the world’s luckiest leader of state to earn the love and affection of such a heroic and talented generation of children. (IndD 2010)

The first two sentences of the latter quote also demonstrate how Rajapaksa unites the two main sources of his authority, a man of the people and victorious leader, after 2009. Like his predecessors he establishes himself as the modern version of ideal kingship, but within a distinctively ‘populist authoritarianism’ (Roberts 2012). Roberts characterises the rule of the Rajapaksa regime as simultaneously authoritarian, perpetuating hierarchy and the overconcentration of power, and populist, as it seeks the approval of the masses through elections and occasional referendums (Id.). This is also evident in his depictions of the victory that not only
crowned him, but he in turn crowned the nation. By bestowing his heroism onto the people he re-establishes himself as one of them, but also reiterates the ideal of a leader who acts as the servant of the people. In 1985 then-president J.R. Jayewardene used a similar symbolism declaring that ‘[p]eople are the kings in a democracy’, but final authority lies with the government (Roberts 1994: 116).

The decade of Rajapaksa’s presidency saw a noticeable shift towards soft-authoritarian politics. The Eighteenth amendment to the constitution that removed the presidential term limits, increasing nepotism that allocated many of the most influential and prestigious political positions to Rajapaksa’s relatives, and the intimidation of the media are some of the most pronounced examples of the decay of democracy during his two terms of office (DeVotta 2011). While the north was held under tight military control, in the south Rajapaksa’s politics and his regime’s culture of impunity opened up the ideological space for ultra-nationalist forces like the BBS and Sinha Le movement, which translates as lion’s blood, to emerge and grow in strength. These are grassroots movements that want to ensure the dominant position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and have been linked particularly to cases of anti-Muslim violence that have sharply increased since the end of the war (Stewart 2014: 245). Stewart argues that this development represents an extension of past racism and anti-Tamil activities, and the perceived threat of Islam may become the new focus of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists: ‘Now that the Tamil rebellion has been destroyed, nationalist groups are turning their attention to new perceived “threats” such as Muslims’ (Id. 257). Even though support for these groups from the Rajapaksa camp has been alleged (Gunasekara 2016; Kalansooriya 2016), nothing in the analysed discourses indicates that the Muslims replace Tamils within the traditional Sinhalese versus Tamil tropes, but within the logic of non-Buddhist ‘othering’ this is possible and may become an even more salient issue in the future.

Rajapaksa of course did not ‘invent’ authoritarian politics in Sri Lanka and was not the first to establish himself in line with the great ancient kings by drawing heavily on the cultural practices of the Asokan Persona.80 The end of the

80 Roberts (1994) highlights plenty of examples of how previous leaders like the Bandaranaiikes, Jayewardene or Premadasa drew on practices of the Asokan Persona and also discusses Rajapaksa’s contemporary ‘populist authoritarianism’ (2012). One should remember, however,
war, however, provided a boost to his popularity across the Sinhalese masses unprecedented in modern times and provided him the opportunity to further buttress his authority. Over the course of this and the last two chapters several ways in which Rajapaksa conceptualises political authority within the symbolic resources of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism have been highlighted. His rhetoric frequently expresses and reproduces aspects of the Buddhist cosmic order that naturalise the ethnic hierarchy and political order within the post-independence state, recalling the past in the present. The modern state, for instance, is understood within the same Buddhist ontology as Sinhalese monarchy (Roberts 1994), linking the president to the monarchical ideal of the past and providing the head of a state with an ‘aura of sacredness’ as he embodies the apex of the Asokan Persona (Roberts 2009b: para. 15).

Furthermore, Rajapaksa’s rhetoric is not the only way in which he reproduces cultural practices of the Asokan Persona, he also publicly participates in everyday social practices, for instance his traditional dress code and participation in Buddhist rites, with the same effect. De Silva Wijeyeratne argues that within the Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary ‘Rajapakse had achieved the status of a cakkavatti king, the embodiment of Buddhist righteousness’ (2014: 187, original emphasis) and by firmly locating himself within the tropes of encompassment of the demonic forces of the LTTE and the regeneration of the Sinhalese Buddhist state his rhetoric perpetuates this vision of Rajapaksa as a twenty-first century Dutugemunu (Ibid.).

Rajapaksa’s reconstruction of authoritarian dimensions of Sinhalese nationalism and politics further highlights the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalist ideology within his post-war rhetoric. Establishing himself within the tradition of strong leadership also enables him to deflect dissent and criticism and adds momentum to his promotion of ‘new patriotism’. Within his hierarchical conception of nationhood the limitation of individual or group freedoms, where they contradict or do not serve the greater good or national necessity, is

that his (1994) and Kapferer’s (2012) arguments extend their conceptualisations of hierarchy far beyond the political realm. They highlight how these practices are shared widely among all levels of society and are deeply entrenched in the everyday, making it so much easier for political leaders to draw on these widespread cultural resources.
naturalised as a legitimate political tool to ensure the unity, strength, safety and peace of the nation. Thus even after the end of the war and the defeat of the militant threat the Prevention of Terrorism Act remained in place and instead of engaging with the real causes of the conflict and minority grievances Rajapaksa buttressed Sinhalese nationalism and triumphalism to strengthen his own power, although eventually the shadows of his authoritarian rule would outweigh his popularity at the 2015 election, when Sirisena won on the basis of a good governance campaign (Seoighe 2016: 368).

Conclusion

This chapter has concluded the rhetorical analysis with a discussion of how Rajapaksa’s simultaneous construction of inclusive and exclusive dimensions of nationhood is linked to and in turn supported by different aspects of nationalist ideology not directly related to the construction of national identity. It has demonstrated how Rajapaksa’s rhetoric reproduces the core theme of Sinhalese nationalism, the link between the nation, state and religion, based upon Buddhist ontology. National unity, the unitary state and a hierarchical social order are legitimised through modern and traditional resources, naturalising existing power relations in the country. The end of the war removed the immediate separatist threat and the opportunity was used by the Rajapaksa regime to reaffirm the status quo, but contestations and challenges over cultural and symbolic spaces remain.

Rajapaksa’s rhetoric demonstrates an increased concern with nationalising these contested spaces, yet instead of extending his vision of a united, civic nation, his responses to post-war challenges seek to secure his own political power and Sinhalese dominance in Sri Lanka. Despite the end of the war Rajapaksa continues to mobilise Sinhalese nationalist ideology instead of engaging with the problematic nature of an ethnic revival or using the post-war momentum to search for truly inclusive symbolic resources. His rhetoric reconstructs deeply ingrained ‘truths’ about how Sri Lanka’s polity and society should look further. Rajapaksa’s rhetoric also demonstrates how Sinhalese nationalism is strengthened as contemporary developments are discursively reconstructed within existing Sinhalese ‘common sense’ narratives transforming them into exclusive ethnic symbolic resources. The next chapter looks at
documentaries as another striking example of how official discourses display an entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism in the immediate post-war period by constructing a limited narrative of the war as official memory.
Chapter 8

Documenting the War: A Memory for the Nation and Beyond

This chapter analyses three Sri Lankan documentaries produced between 2011 and 2012. These films were part of the government’s media campaign against increasing international pressure and criticism, from the UN and others, concerning the government’s conduct during the final stages of the war and its aftermath. They reject foreigners’ charges made about the war, especially those voiced by a British documentary in 2011 that claimed to provide ‘footage [that] represents devastating evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and a powerful case of bringing those guilty of these crimes to justice’ (*Killing Fields* 2011). The documentaries partially attempt to refute claims made in this film by providing their own evidence denying the validity of Channel 4’s claims. At large, however, they focus on constructing a counter-narrative of the end of the war, its events and actors, for the nation and the world.

Their stories provide an official historical narrative of recent events that frames the Rajapaksa regime and its actions in a favourable light, justifying and legitimising a controversial period in the country’s recent history. As such, they participate in the discursive construction of post-war Sinhalese nationalism, albeit by focusing exclusively on the final stages of the war as opposed to the wide variety of themes provided by the other data sets. In this chapter we explore this counter-narrative and how it presents a memory for the nation through selective remembering and forgetting that defines the end of the war from the perspective of Rajapaksa and his government.

The counter-narratives of the films highlight how existing narratives of Sinhalese nationalism are reproduced, while the events of the recent past are framed in ways that can support the consolidation of Rajapaksa’s government and Sinhalese dominance in general. The representations of the main actors during the war, the army, LTTE and Tamils, in particular reproduce nationalist narratives of national insecurity and hierarchy. Similar to a dominant theme in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric they represent a confrontation between the ruthless terrorists and the good
government and its troops, with the Tamil victims caught in between. This framing of the war should unite all communities within the Sri Lankan nation against a shared ‘other’ that remains a threat even after the military defeat of the LTTE. At the same time it allows for the continued silencing of minority grievances after the end of the war, entrenching existing community relations in a unitary state.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the context within which the documentaries were produced and how they respond to allegations against the government of Sri Lanka voiced by international actors. The second part analyses the counter-narrative constructed by the documentaries, investigating the films’ main plot elements, especially the protagonists, their relationship and role in the depicted events. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how the documentaries construct an official, Sinhalese dominated version of the country’s most recent history that is framed within and in turn reproduces Sinhalese nationalism, instead of encouraging change or transformations in the post-war period.

**Presenting Authentic Counter-narratives**

The three analysed documentary films, *Lies Agreed Upon, Freedom Speaks* and *Ruthless*, all present a clear message to their audiences: the claims and allegations made against the Sri Lankan government and security forces are false. The films’ denials include both explicit attempts to refute claims made by Channel 4 through the provision of different evidence and witnesses, and more implicit rejections of criticism through the stories told by witnesses. The material presented by the films, their stories and protagonists, are determined by the overarching purpose to reject criticism and exonerate the government from any wrongdoings. Yet, at the same time these documentaries are part of the government’s ideological project of constructing its official version of the war. They are shaped by Sinhalese nationalism, using existing ideological frames to make sense of present circumstances and in turn expressing, reproducing and potentially transforming nationalist narratives. They are particularly helpful in identifying the post-war construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, a core aspect of national identity and thus pertinent for this research.
Before examining the discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism in the content, strategies and language of the documentaries, the following sections briefly locate the films within the immediate post-war context. They discuss the main controversies over the final stages of the war and how the documentaries respond to international allegations, particularly by constructing a counter-narrative that relies strongly on Tamil witnesses.

**The Issue of Accountability after the War**

Shortly after the end of the war, in May 2009, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon visited Sri Lanka. He was flown over the former no-fire zones, visited camps for internally displaced people in the northeast and talked to President Rajapaksa. His trip was welcomed by the Sri Lankan government as it allowed them to show a victorious nation to the world. Yet, it did not have the desired pacifying effect on Ban, who subsequently appointed a special panel of experts to advise him on the progress of the accountability process promised by the Sri Lankan government in response to allegations of human rights violations. In March 2011, they published their report that called for further independent national and international investigations as it found credible allegations, which if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law was committed both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. (Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts 2011: ii)

The Sri Lankan government did not welcome this inquiry and rejected its findings, arguing that ‘the report is based on patently biased material which is presented without any verification’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011: para. 2). It instead set up its own domestic investigation, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, which largely cleared the government and its security forces from allegations of deliberate human rights violations in its 2011 report. Into this already tense situation entered Channel 4 in June 2011, screening their documentary *Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields*, which sought to substantiate the findings of the UN report as emphasised by the presenter’s opening statement:

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81 As the government’s military campaigns advanced further into the northern Tiger-held areas the government declared several no-fire zones promising safe areas for civilians, but in practice fighting regularly spilled over into these zones.
The UN recently published a report which found credible evidence that both the government and Tamil Tiger rebels committed serious war crimes. The report called for an international inquiry. So far that call has been rejected. But for the last two years Channel 4 has been compiling our own dossier of video evidence and eye witness accounts. We believe this footage represents devastating evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and a powerful case of bringing those guilty of these crimes to justice. (Killing Fields 2011)

The documentary provided vivid images of the final stages of the war to bolster allegations of human rights violations committed by the Sri Lankan government. The film received wide international attention as it was screened by international human rights groups, within Western parliaments, the UN and EU, lending support to existing critical voices. In March 2012 Channel 4 followed up on the first film and responses to it with a second documentary, Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished.

The government of Sri Lanka again denied all allegations and responded with its own media campaign spearheaded by the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development. The ministry launched a website, ‘No Fire Zone’, dedicated to collecting material supporting the government’s version of the final stages of the war. It contains videos, news, general reports about the end of the war and specific documents responding to Channel 4’s allegations. Among the available material are four documentaries that present the official version of the war, the ‘humanitarian operation’, perpetuated by the Rajapaksa regime. Three of these films are discussed in more detail below as major contributions of the Sri Lankan government in what became an expanded controversy about the truth of claims made and authenticity of evidence presented between 2011 and 2013. It spanned several documentary films by Channel 4 and the government, international media coverage, publications like Engage Sri Lanka’s Corrupted Journalism and the rebuttal The Uncorrupted Truth from the director of the Channel 4 documentary, as well as receiving mention in various reports.

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82 It should be clearly stated at this point that this analysis does not systematically engage with the factual correctness of statements made by either Channel 4 or the Sri Lankan documentaries. While these disputes address important issues, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to find the ‘truth’ about alleged war crimes and human rights violations.

83 The book was widely distributed to journalists and diplomats in the UK and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Colombo in 2013. Authorship is accredited only to the organisation, members remaining anonymous, and it is unclear who funded it.
Refuting Allegations

The material presented by the government documentaries, their narratives and structure, are to varying degrees determined by the context, audience and purpose for which they were produced. *Lies Agreed Upon*, the first government documentary, in particular presents a direct response to *Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields*. Its content is thus largely dominated by its attempts to refute claims and allegations made by the British film and often directly refers to the material presented by Jon Snow, host of the Channel 4 documentary. *Lies Agreed Upon* aims to provide a systematic rebuttal of points raised in the British documentary to counter its specific allegations made against the government and army. The counter-evidence it presents to disprove these claims include its own statistics, video footage and eyewitness accounts that contradict or discredit Channel 4’s main witnesses and their statements.

Using ‘voice-of-authority’ commentary (Ashuri 2005: 433), the Sri Lankan documentaries present two narrators, Minoli Ratnayake (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011; *Ruthless* 2012) and Dushan Vaas (*Freedom Speaks* 2011) respectively, to introduce actors and stories, and to state and summarise facts. Ratnayake’s opening statement, for instance, clearly sets the scene by positioning the government’s film against the ‘deliberate lies’ presented by Channel 4:

> ‘This film contains very disturbing images’, says Jon Snow in the dramatic opening of Channel 4’s *Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields*. Yes, we agree, disturbing indeed. Doctored footage and deliberate lies are presented as authentic. Numbers are pulled from thin air and presented as fact. Sources are not mentioned, faces hidden, voices distorted. Just like the truth: unmentioned, hidden, distorted. Channel 4 does not claim ownership of any footage, facts or figures, faces or names. Yet, to an uninformed audience, Channel 4’s *Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields* could appear to be a great story. It is said that the trust of the innocent is the liar’s most useful tool. Thus the Channel 4 production begs review. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

In a calm and factual manner Ratnayake effectively states the main purpose of the film and subsequently introduces and explains the witnesses and evidence provided by the government documentary to refute and discredit the material presented by Channel 4. Her voice of reason and authority, presented in flawless English, may appeal particularly to foreign audiences. It is supported by witnesses who provide more emotional though no less assertive statements countering Channel 4 claims in particular and international allegations in general:

> I deny and strongly condemn foreign people quoting us as requesting the ICRC to refrain from giving coordinates. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)
I came across newspaper reports on Channel 4, and I can ascertain that no such thing at any scale had occurred as I was there till the end of the war in Mullaittivu. (Id.)

Rumours of rape and sexual harassments are false as we have never witnessed such as some foreigners say. ... We don’t care what others may say but they (Army) have gained our respect. (Id.)

I strongly condemn some false reports stating that the Army or other men engaged in raping and sexually abusing Tamil women. We are hurt and shamed on hearing these false allegations as such things had never occurred. I condemn such false claims. (Id.)

I totally refute claims against the Sri Lankan Government as being responsible for killing and other crimes. We never witnessed such cruelty and there was no room for such incidents. Hence, we firmly assure that we never experienced such incidents mentally or physically. (Id.)

These statements highlight how the government documentary presents its own narrative as the true, authentic story of the war told by those who were present, as opposed to the allegedly unmentioned, hidden and distorted sources presented by foreigners.

As Ratnayake states, ‘[i]t was not a war without witnesses’ (Lies Agreed Upon 2011), and it is such eyewitness accounts all three documentaries draw heavily on. Regularly their accounts include phrases like ‘I saw how’, ‘we witnessed what really happened’ or ‘we bear witness to’ to remind the viewer that these are the civilians international critics are talking about. Having such witnesses tell most of the story seeks to legitimise the Sri Lankan narratives as opposed to foreign versions of the stories that rely mostly on disguised witnesses. Interviews as a dominant part is not unique to the Sri Lankan documentaries, most documentary films, including the Channel 4 films, use interviews to support their arguments. What is notable about the three Sri Lankan documentaries, however, is that all witnesses are clearly identified as Tamils. Even though the Sri Lankan army and government are important protagonists of the films, none of their representatives are interviewed and the audience learns about them mainly through the stories of Tamil witnesses.

Unlike the textbooks and speeches that largely marginalise minority communities, the documentaries put the Tamils into the spotlight. While the documentaries are similarly produced or supported by government agencies, to the audience they present mainly Tamil faces, elevating the members of the Tamil community from their usually passive role in other official discourses to the spotlight. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent their accounts are authentic and not moderated, edited or coached by the filmmakers, but presenting these Tamils
as the main witnesses of the war is a strong form of realisation utilised by the documentaries to infuse their messages with added credibility and legitimacy. Yet, what at first glance appears to be an unequivocal opportunity for Tamil people to share their stories and perspectives further marginalises them within official discourses. As demonstrated below, although being the active voice in the documentaries they are silenced as their narratives are mediated and edited as part of the dominant Sinhalese discourse.

**Constructing Counter-narratives**

*Lies Agreed Upon* engages most directly with the claims made by Channel 4, but it also introduces new material, expanding its narrative beyond the themes of the Channel 4 documentary to provide a broader counter-narrative rejecting allegations of misconduct and human rights violations. *Ruthless* and *Freedom Speaks* are more general responses to international criticism and their narratives and structure are freer than those of the first film, depicting independent events. While the British documentaries focus mainly on the behaviour of the government and its troops, the Sri Lankan films divert attention to the atrocities committed by the LTTE that necessitated a decisive response. The common counter-narrative constructed by the three Sri Lankan films resonates with many of Rajapaksa’s core arguments, especially the main focus on the LTTE as a ruthless terrorist organisation that had to be stopped at any cost as central theme of their counter-narrative of the war. As such, their rather one-sided account mirrors both Channel 4 documentaries that focus nearly exclusively on the actions of the Sri Lankan government, containing little information on the LTTE.

The documentaries directly reject international criticism by shifting the focus onto the ‘real’ perpetrators, but their narrative also implicitly justifies the government’s hard line stance towards the LTTE and its unwillingness to enter into a ceasefire with the Tigers in the final weeks of the war. Any wrongdoings the government may have committed should be understood in light of the acts of terror committed by the LTTE, a perceived omission in the Channel 4 film the Sri Lankan documentaries seek to redress. Like Rajapaksa, they present the conflict as a confrontation between the good ‘us’, the government and army, and the evil ‘them’, the LTTE terrorists. They also highlight how the government provided
assistance and relief to the war affected areas, reiterating Rajapaksa’s framing of the war as a ‘humanitarian operation’ as opposed to the dirty war alleged by Channel 4 and other international critics.

The Sri Lankan documentary films claim to present a more authentic counter-narrative told by witnesses who are all named and openly show their faces. Altogether, fifty four Tamil witnesses, including doctors, ex-LTTE cadres and their families, teachers and religious dignitaries, have their say in the three documentaries and ‘tell their tales of horror’ (Lies Agreed Upon 2011). Some only make brief statements, while others relate their experiences more extensively. They are presented as victims and eyewitnesses of the events in the no-fire zones during the final weeks of the war and their accounts should carry more weight than the claims made by foreigners who have no first-hand experiences of these events. These Tamils represent the true victims foreigners talk about, whose credibility is beyond reproach. The witness accounts from Channel 4, on the other hand, cannot be verified as they are made anonymous by the filmmakers or are apparently discredited by evidence presented in the Sri Lankan films as part of their counter-narratives.84

A Story of the War

The documentaries do not only provide a direct response to international criticism, but also present a contemporary engagement with the end of the war and its immediate aftermath that can potentially shape post-war historical narratives of the recent past. They construct an official version of the recent past, trying to shape how the audience understands and makes sense of what happened. Like the speeches they also constitute an act, seeking to persuade their audience of their version of the war. As such they draw on and add to available ideological resources, reproducing and reconstructing narratives of Sinhalese nationalism by offering their interpretations of actors and events. It is this version of the war that tells the Sri Lankan nation who they are, their present state, and what they should remember and forget of the final months of the war. In many ways the

84 Vanny Kumar, a central witness in Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields, for instance, has been discredited as an alleged member of the Tamil Youth Organisation and trained LTTE cadre within Sri Lankan narratives (Lies Agreed Upon 2011; Engage Sri Lanka 2013).
documentaries overlap with Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, constructing a similar image of the war and its protagonists, supporting his official narrative of the successful ‘humanitarian operation’ and potentially aiding the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism in the immediate post-war period.

The remainder of this chapter investigates the main protagonists presented by the documentaries and their relationship. It points out how the documentary films reproduce the dominant image of the war as a confrontation between the ruthless terrorist ‘other’, the LTTE, facing the good ‘us’, the heroic government forces. In their attempt to discredit international criticism the films also establish a connection between the international community and the LTTE similar to Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. They reiterate the victimisation of the Tamil community that can potentially provide contemporary support for the hierarchical dimension of Sinhalese nationalism as it includes Tamils as helpless victims at the tutelage of their Sinhalese liberators. We conclude with a discussion of how the documentaries’ representations of the immediate post-war period as a ‘happy end’ can help the majority community to continue to gloss over contemporary issues and protect the political status quo.

**The Villain: The LTTE and Its Remnants**

The LTTE is one of the key protagonists within all three documentary films, but unlike the government and the Tamils it does not have a voice of its own. Instead, it is characterised through its depictions in images and video footage as well as the stories told by the narrators and witnesses. While the LTTE barely features in the Channel 4 films, it has a prominent place in the Sri Lankan documentaries. Presenting the ruthless, brutal terrorist organisation redirects the attention of international audiences to the ‘real’ perpetrator, the LTTE, and it constructs a positive image of the government tainted by international allegations that seem to gloss over the atrocities committed by the Tamil Tigers. The three documentaries address this presumed imbalance in international coverage by focusing on the LTTE and clearly presenting it as a brutal terrorist force that had disastrous consequences for the country. They also caution against supporting the remnants of the Tigers through active support or continuing to spread misinformation. At
the same time the representations of the LTTE throughout the documentaries also serve as a reminder to the people of Sri Lanka of this past and present enemy.

Framing terrorists

The language used to describe the LTTE throughout the documentaries is similar to that of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. Typical characterisations include ‘ruthless terror outfit’ (*Freedom Speaks* 2011), ‘deadly outfit that operated suicide boats’ (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011), ‘their reign of terror’ (Id.), ‘clutches of the LTTE terror’ (*Freedom Speaks* 2011), ‘these war criminals’ (*Freedom Speaks* 2011) or ‘horrifying incidents of LTTE ruthlessness’ (*Ruthless* 2012). These portray the LTTE as a cruel and brutal terrorist outfit culminating in Ratnayake’s description of it as ‘the principle agent of death, dismemberment, displacement, and destruction’ (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011). Utilising the visual component of the documentary format such descriptions of the LTTE and its members are occasionally supported by suitable images and video footage. *Lies Agreed Upon*, for instance, shows vivid images of the victims of LTTE attacks across the country throughout the war. Other video footage includes suicide attacks (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011), the LTTE training or setting up guns (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011; *Freedom Speaks* 2011), and places destroyed by the LTTE (*Ruthless* 2012).

Compared to the Channel 4 documentaries that tell their stories mainly through video footage, however, the Sri Lankan films unfold theirs largely through witness accounts. As Vaas highlights, it is their ‘personal accounts [that] unfold the untold crimes against humanity that bear sheer witnesses of a bloody terror cause’ (*Freedom Speaks* 2011). They did not witness killing fields or human rights violations by the government, instead they have much to say about the ruthlessness of the LTTE, the true culprits of the war according to the Sri Lankan films. While the British documentaries largely gloss over the LTTE to focus particularly on the alleged misconduct of the Sri Lankan government, the Sri Lankan documentaries reply by shifting attention to the cruelty and brutality of the Tamil Tigers. The destructiveness of the LTTE is not doubted by international critics, but has no direct bearing on whether or not the Sri Lankan government violated international law, for instance by deliberately targeting civilians or abusing surrendered LTTE cadres. The Sri Lankan documentaries, however, seek
to avert unwanted international attention from the government to the Tamil Tigers, reminding their audience and the world who the real perpetrators were. They construct the LTTE as a shield that should deflect criticism from the government to the Tigers. And although all three films are very clear that the government and its troops conducted the military operations in a most honourable and humanitarian manner, the dominant focus on the LTTE carries the implicit argument that the terrorists had to be defeated at any cost and by any means necessary. They thus implicitly justify potentially tough calls, though not acknowledging that any of those happened.

While the narrators’ explicit language establishes a clear image of the LTTE, it is the eyewitness accounts that truly flesh out the cruelty of the Tamil Tigers, reporting stories of forced recruitment experienced by the witnesses or their relatives and depicting the destruction and harm caused by the LTTE. Statements like the following buttress the overall message of the documentaries highlighting the cruelty and ruthlessness of the Tigers: ‘They (LTTE) were brutal in hacking and shooting civilians including women, men and children and later used to film these killings for propaganda purposes portraying the military as offenders’ (Lies Agreed Upon 2011). This witness account not only highlights the brutality of the LTTE, but also hints at their treacherousness. Reporting how the LTTE dressed up in army uniforms when killing civilians and filming these instances echoes a major claim of the Sri Lankan government questioning the authenticity of footage presented by the Channel 4 documentaries (Engage Sri Lanka 2013: 159f.).

Negative representations of the LTTE are further heightened by emphasising women, children and other vulnerable groups such as disabled, injured and elderly, as victims of LTTE terror. Most witness accounts report of LTTE violence towards civilians and many specifically highlight attacks on the most vulnerable. For example, one man recalls witnessing how the ‘LTTE brutally assaulted an elderly woman’ (Lies Agreed Upon 2011), another reports that a ‘mother was shot at by the LTTE who was valiantly obstructing the LTTE from

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85 Much of the most shocking footage stems from mobile phones or small hand-held cameras and the Sri Lankan government has challenged the authenticity of this material, sparking a dispute involving a UN Special Rapporteur and expert reports presented by both sides proving and disproving its authenticity respectively (Macrae 2014: 44f.; Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011: 148-150).
taking her child away’ (Ruthless 2012) and one talks of his own fears as the LTTE ‘used to take even elderly by force for labour’ (Id.). The selected events and stories, too, depict particularly horrendous attacks. Ruthless, for instance, centres around two stories, one of them the occurrence of ‘two chillingly brutal acts of mass murder’ (Id.) that reportedly took place two days before the end of the war. The documentary details how two busses full of ‘disabled cadre which included women and forcibly recruited children’ (Id.) were exploded by Tamil Tigers in Mullivaikkal.

Freedom Speaks focuses particularly on the ‘children of terror’ (Freedom Speaks 2011), those under-aged Tamil boys and girls who were forcibly abducted and put into combat by the LTTE. The story of what presenter Vaas calls the ‘baby brigade’ is a powerful one, as it shows how the LTTE deliberately targeted one of the most vulnerable groups of society, children. The key witnesses of this film are female ex-child combatants who report about their abductions after Vaas sets the scene:

Childhood is the period of our lives we cherish most. It is the time we live a carefree life showered with love and affection, while being under our parents' constant attention. It is the time one wants to remember most. These sweet memories are what we carry in our hearts till our death. I still remember the fond memories of my childhood. The toys I loved to play with, the things I loved to do, the places I visited and the school I've been to. Nobody has the right to deny a child its strides. How would you feel if it was your child? These children were forcefully recruited and given weapon and cyanide capsule, instead of toys and sweets. (Freedom Speaks 2011)

This quote exemplifies how the film seeks to appeal directly to the emotions of all audiences by emphasising children as victims of the LTTE. It asks the viewer to put themselves in the position of affected parents, to relate to the horrors and cruelty of LTTE terror, drawing them into the documentary’s narrative.

The responsibility by warring factions to protect citizens is expected by international norms and law, yet one major allegation against the Rajapaksa regime is that they did not do enough to ensure the protection of civilians. Channel 4, especially in its second documentary (War Crimes Unpunished 2012), goes so far as to insinuate that this was not just neglect but likely deliberate. The Sri Lankan documentaries in turn refute such claims within their representations of the government forces discussed below and by again deflecting criticism by showing how the LTTE had little more regard for Tamil civilians than as human shields who were shot at if they tried to flee: ‘They said they are protectors of
Tamils, but at last they have started to fire and they killed a lot of civilians, I saw them’ (Lies Agreed Upon 2011). The special emphasis of children and women as victims of the LTTE further reinforces the filmmakers’ desired characterisation of the LTTE as a particularly cruel, ruthless and brutal terrorist organisation.

Attacking civilians is in itself deplorable, but by mobilising gendered frames of conflict that see women and children as particularly vulnerable, a strategy also previously identified in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, the documentaries emphasise the detestableness of the LTTE and its crimes against humanity. The films present the LTTE in clear violation of international norms, framing the victims in a language that appeals particularly to their foreign audience whose understanding of civilians in conflict zones has come to be framed by gender essentialism (Carpenter 2005: 296). They seek to redirect international attention from the government to the LTTE as main perpetrator of war crimes and human rights violations. At the same time the focus on the LTTE and its atrocities reminds domestic audiences of the threat it posed to the country in a similar fashion as Hyndman’s (2015) discussion of war tourism sites highlights, simultaneously remembering the victory achieved by the government and reminding the nation of a potentially remaining threat to peace and stability after 2009.

The international terror network

Given the context in which the documentaries were produced and their intention to refute serious international criticism, the international community is in itself a part of the films. Similar to the LTTE, it does not appear as an active protagonist, but it is openly addressed by the documentaries, especially Lies Agreed Upon and Freedom Speaks, and is even attributed a role in the conflict itself. Alleging the ignorance and potential complicity of the international community the documentaries seek to discredit international critics, but also echo Rajapaksa’s arguments about a continuing post-war threat.

In his opening statement Vaas is alluding to the ‘many internal and external causes’ (Freedom Speaks 2011) that led to the rise of the LTTE. He leaves these causes largely unexplained, yet hints that the world’s lack of understanding played a part in the prolonged conflict:

While the internal causes are being addressed in a broad reconciliation process now on the way, the external causes continue to exist, disturbing the reconciliation. One such
external cause that had vastly contributed to the terrorism in Sri Lanka is the global ignorance of Sri Lanka’s conflict. This is exactly what this documentary attempts to address. (Freedom Speaks 2011)

He continues to outline how the world’s failure to see and treat the LTTE as the terrorist organisation that it was prevented Sri Lanka from dealing swiftly with the threat. Instead, he argues that it was misunderstood as a liberation movement ‘allowing the LTTE to destroy three generations of Tamil people’ (Freedom Speaks 2011). The presenter does not provide more detail, but he lays blame on the international community for not acting decisively against terrorism in Sri Lanka, which ultimately contributed to the prolonged war.86

The following witness statement from a former LTTE combatant directly addresses the international community, hinting at their link to the international network of the LTTE:

I request the international community not to defy the government and also not to engage in the financing of further terror activities or efforts to create a ‘Transnational Government’. I urge those to engage in fruitful effort that could boost the development taking place here. (Lies Agreed Upon 2011)

In Lies Agreed Upon, Ratnayake is even more forward, insinuating complicity of Channel 4 with the LTTE:

Those who handled the LTTE’s global fundraising network are directly responsible for putting weapons in the hands of terrorists. They are not guilt free except perhaps in the eyes of Channel 4. But they would do well to unravel the unholy relationship between Nediyavan of Tamil Eelam People Alliance of Norway, Suren Surendiran of the British Tamil Forum, the not-so-good Reverend Father Emmanual of the Global Tamil Forum in the UK and the LTTE’s long time legal aid Rudrakumaran of the so-called trans-national government of Tamil Eelam. One thing is clear. Those who funded, gave moral support, attended to logistics, including the procurement of arms and ammunition, and who cannot use the LTTE tag because it is a banned terrorist organisation in the countries that they are resident, have reinvented themselves and now operate under different names and guises for the same destructive cause. Channel 4 is either ignorant and naive or, more likely, complicit. (Lies Agreed Upon 2011)

The documentaries discredit Channel 4 in particular and international actors in general by presenting them as ignorant of the ‘true’ causes of the conflict and potentially even complicit to the extended international network of the LTTE. With these allegations they delegitimise any international assessment of the present situation and subsequent accusations made by Channel 4, the UN and others. Such narratives display a rising scepticism, and at times outward hostility,

86 Examples that may come to mind are particularly India’s support for the LTTE in the early 1980s or the ability of the LTTE to maintain extensive financial networks in Western countries, for instance Canada and the UK, until it was proscribed as a terrorist organisation as part of the international ‘war on terror’.
especially towards Western actors, that is not surprising given the increasing pressure on the country and popular historical narratives of foreign threat and domination also present in the history textbooks and Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. While these arguments are unlikely to sway international audiences, they mobilise popular themes of Sinhalese nationalism and may thus resonate with large parts of the domestic audience.

The construction of an international dimension of LTTE terror within the documentaries echoes Rajapaksa’s arguments about a continuing international threat closely linked to the LTTE. Ratnayake’s concluding statement in *Ruthless* exemplifies this continuation of a post-war threat despite the defeat of the LTTE:

> The LTTE’s military might is no more. Yet, its international network continues to operate under various guises and remains active. Those who supported and continue to support the LTTE with money, weapons, propaganda and other logistical support are just as responsible for these heinous crimes against humanity committed by the LTTE. (*Ruthless* 2012)

Like Rajapaksa the documentaries highlight that the supporters of the LTTE continue their operations abroad, presumably with similar separatist goals. Thus, the LTTE, albeit not recognisable by its uniforms and cyanide capsules anymore, continues to pose a threat to nation and country. These often elusive international LTTE remnants pose a less tangible threat, but can nonetheless fulfil similar functions as an ‘other’ against whom the nation can be mobilised.

The LTTE had been a major actor in Sri Lanka since the 1970s and during twenty-six years of civil war it has become a defining element, the central ‘other’, of Sinhalese nationalism. Thus its defeat was predicted as a challenge and opportunity for nationalism in Sri Lanka (Kadirgamar 2009). Rajapaksa’s rhetoric and the documentaries, however, highlight how the ‘other’ can be readjusted after the military defeat. By keeping the memory of the LTTE and its atrocities alive and linking it to a persisting international network, narratives of the major separatist threat to the nation are realigned in the aftermath of war. The international threat constructed by the Rajapaksa regime is not new, but it has different faces and strategies than LTTE terrorism that can nonetheless serve similar functions for Sinhalese nationalism as a unifying force for a nation that remains insecure even after the end of the war.
The Hero: The Army

The documentaries tell the grand story of the final stages of the war and the people involved, and every good story needs a hero who will confront the villain. This hero can be easily identified throughout the films: the government forces, specifically the army, who carried out the major ground operations in the LTTE-held areas. The army is a main protagonist within the documentaries as it bore the brunt of international criticism. The government troops face allegations of gross misconduct, even human rights violations, as footage from Channel 4 shows men in army uniforms shooting tied and blindfolded LTTE cadres as well as the presumed consequences of intentional army shelling of hospitals. Representations of the army, who like the LTTE do not appear in an active role, counter these allegations by presenting an alternative narrative of the army and its activities during the final stage of the war. It presents them as the main driving forces of the humanitarian operation, and as representatives of the government the portrayal of the army reinforces the image of the ‘good’ government.

The true heroes

Perpetuating the official construction of the war as a ‘humanitarian operation’, the documentary films frequently emphasise how the Sri Lankan army rescued civilians and hostages from the LTTE. The presenters introduce the army as friend and helper of the civilian population and surrendering LTTE cadres in the no-fire zones and beyond:

By now the fleeing civilians had unwavering faith on the security forces to save them from this murderous group. The security forces did not fail them. They rescued these people risking their own lives. (Freedom Speaks 2011)

Over 11,000 LTTE cadre and their families surrendered to the army. None were harmed. (Lies Agreed Upon 2011)

Likewise the witness accounts in Lies Agreed Upon and Freedom Speaks are abound with stories about how these Tamils experienced nothing but kindness and goodwill from the army:

Rumours of rape and sexual harassments are false as we have never witnessed such as some foreigners say. I have six grownup girls and none of us, even my villagers ever came across such during our stay inside the IDP centers or outside. This I can assure. We had no problem with the Army of any sort and it will be an utter lie if we were to say such things. We feel affection towards the Army who were disciplined and the way they spoke with our elderly, children and even us was friendly. We don't care what others may say but they (Army) have gained our respect. They never behaved in any disgusting manner. (Lies Agreed Upon 2011)
Earlier, I had heard that the Army treated surrendeees cruelly and it was with grave fear that I surrendered. Because of such stories we feared to surrender but we had no alternative. After surrendering to the Army, we lost the fear psychosis and the way they (Army) treated us was so generous. (Id.)

Army treats us with utmost humanity. They didn't act with bias. It is noteworthy to mention the humanitarian assistance extended by the government security forces towards providing medical assistance to the wounded and getting the civilians to safety. I know it, because I also came from such a background. Nobody can deny this fact. (Freedom Speaks 2011)

[T]he army didn’t fire a single shot, they took us in. Seeing the plight of our children they took us to a safe place and gave us their food and water. Army personnel even fed my child. (Id.)

Even though I am a former LTTE cadre I don’t face any problems from the Army. (Id.)

These examples of the portrayal of the army throughout the documentaries contradict allegations of misconduct and mistreatment of civilians, refugees and LTTE cadres who surrendered to the army.

The films present an antithetical narrative: where the LTTE is presented as particularly cruel and vicious, attacking even the most vulnerable, the soldiers are depicted as helpers, rescuers and liberators who looked after children and the elderly. The army is depicted as the military and moral counterpart to the Tigers. Any alleged wrongdoings are dismissed by the eyewitnesses who report their experiences and supporting video footage that shows soldiers helping civilians in the conflict zones. Some witnesses acknowledge initial fears and reservations, but these are debunked as misperceptions from hearing ‘stories’ (Freedom Speaks 2011), potentially as the result of LTTE propaganda as one of the following quote highlights. Their actual experiences, however, were quite different as this former LTTE cadre’s account of her time in a rehabilitation centre illustrates:

When we were with the LTTE, they often confused us with what was going on we didn't know who was right, and who was wrong. In such a scenario, the security forces rescued us from the LTTE. They looked after us well. The LTTE had painted a different picture of the security forces on us. They said the Army was dangerous. They said that the Army will harm us and sexually abuse us if we were ever got caught. But when we were in the hands of the Army, we realized that what we had been told by the LTTE was nothing but a barefaced lie. (Freedom Speaks 2011)

Earlier, we lived in fear of the Army as we were taught by our parents and others. When we came in we were filled with fear not knowing what would happen to us. We including the injured and elderly came in starving and due to the way they treated us we lost the fear of them. (Lies Agreed Upon 2011)

The documentaries provide a clear message to national and international critics who have raised concerns about the conduct of the security forces in the final stages of the war and its immediate aftermath. It is also a message from Tamils for other Tamils within Sri Lanka and the sizeable diaspora across the world, who
may be similarly misinformed or deceived by LTTE propaganda. The first-hand experiences of these witnesses, Tamil civilians and former LTTE cadres alike, contradict allegations of misconduct and instead present a positive image of the army that is more in line with the celebrated war heroes.

**Liberators and liberated revisited**

The witness accounts not only serve to mend the tainted image of the Sri Lankan security forces, they also present a relationship between the Tamil victims and Sinhalese rescuers. The following quotes, for instance, demonstrate how a positive relationship is constructed between the army and civilians that can implicitly be extended to the communities at large:

From that day we have never come across any difficulty from either the Army or the Police. They treated us like brothers and sisters. The officer at Poontotam treats us like his children. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

[T]he security forces rescued us from the LTTE. ... They have treated us well. Still they are looking after us as their own brothers and sisters. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

We only knew what the LTTE had told us about the Army But after arriving here only we got to know what the truth was. The Army and Sinhalese people treated us well: Never looked at us as enemies or prisoners. We were always treated as friends. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

In these statements witnesses also invoke references to a family in a similar way that Rajapaksa constructs his heterogeneous national family. The last statement in particular is noteworthy as it includes one of only two references to the ethnic label ‘Sinhalese’ in all three documentaries. ⁸⁷

While the witnesses are clearly identified as Tamils by the presenters, the army is not explicitly characterised as Sinhalese. Yet, we have argued in the previous chapters that the security forces represent the majority community, even though this link is not officially acknowledged by either Rajapaksa or the documentary films. As has been pointed out above, apart from the two narrators all individuals having a say in the three documentaries are Tamils. Thus, the positive image of the army is mainly constructed through the testimony of non-Sinhalese, supported by video footage and the narrators. Their accounts reproduce Rajapaksa’s narrative of liberators and liberated, supporting the official version of

⁸⁷ The second instance also appears in *Lies Agreed Upon* when one witness talks more generally of ‘Sinhalese and Tamil villages’.

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the government of a successful rescue operation through personal, emotional stories from the war.

The representations of the army emphasise the heroics of the Sinhalese soldiers, the liberators and rescuers of the Tamil people in the north and east, as a central aspect of the films’ version of the end of the war. They support the Rajapaksa government’s ‘cult of the heroes’, though instead of emphasising the fallen soldiers, the Ranaviruses, and their sacrifices the documentaries present some of their actual deeds through the eyes of those who know best, the witnesses of war. The documentaries focus on contradicting accusations of misconduct by presenting examples of how the army actually helped and provided for people affected by the war. They lack the veneration of war heroes explicit in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, instead establishing a very personal and emotional link between the Tamil civilians and their rescuers that should be remembered by everyone. The documentary films construct a unifying national narrative, highlighting how the army looked after its Tamil ‘brothers and sisters’, treated them well and rescued them from the clutches of the LTTE to welcome them into the government-controlled areas, namely the Sri Lankan state. As such the three documentaries reproduce the government’s official narrative that could serve as a memory to unite the nation. Although their roles were different, all communities overcame their common enemy, the LTTE, and both Sinhalese and Tamils are joined through the actions and sacrifices of the soldiers who fought to free the civilians from the areas under LTTE control.

The Damsel in Distress: The Innocent Tamil People

Besides the obvious hero and villain of the documentary plots the Tamils appear as a third group, clearly distinct from both the LTTE and the army. They are presented as the main victim to an extent that to members of the audience not familiar with the conflict they may seem to be the only victims of the war. This impression is reinforced as the documentaries largely avoid ethnic labels, for instance when depicting previous LTTE attacks, and focus on the events during the final weeks of the war in the no-fire zones, inhabited nearly exclusively by Tamils. Thus, the language, actors and images of the documentaries are
dominated by the particular victimhood of the Tamil people. Vaas’ stated purpose of *Freedom Speaks* reiterates this:

>This is not about what LTTE did to the government or security forces, but crimes perpetrated against the very Tamil community who was steered towards a stronghold liberation in the name of Eelam. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

All three documentary films present Tamils as the main active protagonists besides the presenters guiding through the programme, as their stories are told mainly by Tamil eyewitnesses. Thus, the documentaries present an image not only of the final stages of the war, but also of the Tamil community to national and international audiences, including Sinhalese, Tamils and foreigners alike.

*The true victims of LTTE terror*

The main characterisation of the Tamils as they are portrayed throughout the documentary films is that of innocent civilians and victims of the LTTE. Within the version of the war constructed by the documentaries, their own statements reiterate the narrative of special victimhood identified in the analysis of Rajapaksa’s speeches. The documentary films construct the Tamils as different from both the perpetrators and rescuers, separating them not only from the Sinhalese army but also the Tamil militants. While the relationship constructed between the Tamils and the army discussed above is rather clear, the connection to the latter is more complicated because of former LTTE cadres and the Tamil Tigers having represented Tamil grievances.

This link is not recognised by Sinhalese nationalists, and Rajapaksa in particular rejects any ethnic basis of LTTE militancy. The documentaries similarly dismiss the Tigers’ claims to represent the Tamil people and their grievances. They, and especially *Freedom Speaks*, set out to show the world how the LTTE really treated those they claimed to fight for:

>Now we are going to see how the so-called liberators of Tamil people paid scant regard to the lives of the very people they were supposed to liberate. How they took the lives of their own brethren. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

The second sentence is a noticeable slip in the dominant narratives as it establishes a link between the LTTE and the Tamils as brothers. This is of course an impossible connection, for the Tamils are explicitly included in the national family as brothers and sister of the Sinhalese and if they are also brothers of the LTTE this would in turn establish an unimaginable connection between the
Sinhalese and LTTE. As an isolated instance in what is otherwise a carefully crafted narrative that clearly separates the LTTE from Tamils and any ethnic affiliation between the two, this phrase, however, underscores the cruelty of the LTTE as a group that killed their own. This comment from the narrator of *Freedom Speaks* may well indicate how the LTTE and Tamil threat remain associated despite explicit attempts by official discourses to define the LTTE not ethnically, but as a terrorist group that is unrelated to minority grievances. It allows the inclusion of the innocent Tamils into the national ‘us’, united by the terrorist ‘other’ in the post-war nation-building project of the Rajapaksa regime.

The separation between the LTTE and the Tamils is further reinforced by the language of the documentaries that constructs the LTTE not only as a terrorist threat, but specifically as oppressor of the Tamil people. They highlight stories of how the Tigers forced Tamil people to do their bidding, abducted innocent children and even used Tamil civilians as human shields. To point out some examples of how the Tamil witnesses recall their life under the LTTE:

> We had to do whatever we were instructed by the LTTE. We must do as told. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

> We had to tell, we had to do. (Id.)

> We lived in fear earlier as our children would get abducted (LTTE). (Id.)

> The people lived in great dismay and sorrow. (*Ruthless* 2012)

> It was terrifying when they beat up parents for keeping the children distanced from their (LTTE) grasp. (Id.)

> The LTTE started shooting at us. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

> These people started to fire people. They said they are protectors of Tamils, but at last they have started to fire and they killed a lot of civilians, I saw them. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

In the last quote a Tamil doctor confirms the presenters’ claims that the LTTE did not protect or represent the Tamil people, quite to the contrary as Vaas highlights:

> Wanting to retain their human shields at any cost they not only shot at the civilians but also used suicide bombing to discourage them from saving their lives. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

Depictions of the Tamil community as victim of the LTTE focus on the atrocities of the final stages of the war, but are not limited to this period as some of the statements recounting their life in the LTTE-controlled areas present an image of oppression lasting for a long time before that. The narratives constructed by the documentaries clearly distinguish the large majority of Tamils from the separatist
claims of the LTTE. They further delegitimise the idea of a separate Tamil Eelam as the goal of only a small number of militants, who do not represent the Tamils.

*The stories of forced recruits*

The separation of Tamils and LTTE as well as the brutality of the latter are reinforced by the inclusion of former LTTE cadres as witnesses who tell their stories of how they were forced into the LTTE. Their testimonies attest to the Tigers’ ruthless recruitment practices and raise the question of who the ‘real’ terrorists were. All three films include former LTTE combatants among their witnesses to varying degrees. In *Lies Agreed Upon* eleven of the twenty-nine witnesses are labelled as ‘Former LTTE combatants’, but only two are fully identified by name and the position they held within the LTTE. The others are anonymous ‘cadres who surrendered’ (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011), including former cadres who report that they were ‘taken by force’ by the LTTE. In *Freedom Speaks* half of the witnesses are ex-LTTE cadres who were all ‘abducted’ against their will by the LTTE. In the third film, *Ruthless*, only one of the witnesses is identified as an ‘ex-LTTE combatant’ by Ratnayake, while the label calls him an ‘Ex-LTTE Witness’. Three other young men who were abducted from a church only days before the end of the war, presumably to be forced into training with the LTTE, are called ‘Child Witness’ or ‘Child Victim’.

The vast majority of the former LTTE cadres who are shown in the documentaries claim to have been forcibly recruited by the LTTE. They report how they were taken and trained to fight in the war against their will, usually at a young age. It is impossible to verify these statements and distinguish voluntary from forced recruits, but their effect, the message to the audience, is reinforcing the cruelty of the LTTE. Child recruitment had been a common practice of the LTTE to swell its ranks since the late 1980s (Human Rights Watch 2004) and the witness accounts of the documentaries provide emotional insights into this illegal method. Presenting former LTTE cadres as involuntary participants in the war constructs an image of a potentially large number of those fighting on the side of the Tigers as children and young adults not truly committed to the separatist cause. The documentaries do not present or give a voice to ‘hardcore LTTE’ cadres. They instead portray mainly former Tamil Tigers who are a special kind of
victim, innocent Tamils forced to join the LTTE. The framing of the LTTE and its atrocities does not account for such a distinction between different kinds of perpetrators, but for the reintegration of former cadres into society it is a beneficial trope.  

The rehabilitation of large numbers of ex-combatants, designated ‘rehabilitees’, was a major undertaking of the Rajapaksa regime:

To disengage, de-radicalize, rehabilitate and reintegrate the misguided men/women and children, who were radicalized by the protracted armed conflict, into the community following a center and community based comprehensive rehabilitation process to be useful citizens and productive members to the country. (Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation 2013: Introduction - Mission)

Following May 2009 thousands underwent schooling or vocational and technical training in twenty-four centres, and by 2013 over 11,600 had been rehabilitated and reintegrated into society (Id.). The ‘rehabilitees’ were released back to their families, often accompanied by public ceremonies marking their reintegration. Orchestrated as part of the government’s media campaign, the largest function took place at Temple Trees in September 2011 with over 1,800 ex-combatants ‘passing out’ (Roberts 2011).

The documentaries provide a striking example of how the stories of these ex-cadres and their presentation are carefully controlled by the government and used for its own purposes, depicting an image of happy, reintegrated ex-combatants that do not necessarily represent the true experiences of many of them (Id.). They present a limited selection of former LTTE-cadres, mainly females and young people who were forcibly recruited. Their stories echo Rajapaksa’s narrative of the ‘good’ government and army who saved them from the ‘terrible’ LTTE. Although these witnesses are former Tigers, they are presented as Tamils first and foremost. Their accounts focus on what the LTTE did to them, not what they did as its members. Thus even though they are both Tamils and former LTTE-cadres, the clear distinction between the LTTE and the innocent Tamils constructed by the documentaries remains intact. Those large numbers of ex-combatants assure

88 Based on official figures Roberts estimates that between 2009 and 2010 between 11,800 and 13,000 Tigers were in government custody as ‘Tigers-in-rehabilitation’, of whom 15-20 percent were estimated ‘hardline LTTE’. These figures do not account for killed cadres and potentially thousands who avoided detention and fled abroad, including another estimated five hundred ‘hardcore LTTE’ (Roberts 2011).

89 Temple Trees is the official residence of the prime minister, but more recently was used by Rajapaksa and some previous presidents as residence.
the world of the authenticity of official narratives and also represent victims instead of perpetrators who can and want to be (re)integrated into the national family promoted by Rajapaksa and his government.

Overall, for the post-war nation-building project the portrayal of the Tamils, both the innocent civilians and the rehabilitated Tigers, in the documentaries is similar to that in Rajapaksa’s speeches, although he did not reference ex-combatants. The representations of the Tamil community and its relationship to the army and the LTTE may potentially provide a unifying impetus for the nation as a whole, as they can be included within the national ‘us’ as opposed to the terrorist ‘them’. The documentaries do not reproduce anti-Tamil sentiments such as disputed historical narratives. Instead, they construct a version of the present and recent past that portrays the Tamils as victims, not perpetrators. While for international audiences Tamil witnesses support the government’s counter-narrative of the final stages of the war, for domestic audiences their stories support the post-war nation-building project. Their stories address Tamil audiences, reminding them of their suffering under the LTTE and how the government and its troops provided for them.

The narratives of the documentaries invite Tamils into the victorious nation, as the presented ‘authentic’ experiences of Tamil witnesses counter potential fears, suspicions and reservations Tamil people may have following the events of the final stages of the war and especially the ‘unauthentic’ rumours and false allegations made against the government and army. At the same time Sinhalese audiences are presented with images of innocent, victimised Tamils who had nothing to do with the LTTE terror faced by the country for decades. Instead of an ethnic ‘other’ the Tamils are constructed as a fellow victim. The representation of protagonists and their relationships in the selected stories and witness accounts of the documentaries reproduce Rajapaksa’s narrative of a resurgent, united nation that has overcome the common enemy, the LTTE. Yet, there are clear limits to this vision.

We have argued before that an over-emphasis on victimhood can adversely affect the inclusiveness of the ideal of a truly Sri Lankan post-war nation. All communities in Sri Lanka were affected by the LTTE and the violent conflict over the last three decades and the documentaries rightly point to the particular plight
of the Tamil people in the north during the final stages of the war. Reproducing Rajapaksa’s narrative of liberators and liberated, however, perpetuates the traditional hierarchical conception of nationhood of Sinhalese nationalist ideology. It does not present Tamils and Sinhalese as eternal enemies, but reproduces a contemporary relationship of inequality between these communities. This is heightened by the silencing of Tamils through the documentaries. Even though they are the active, highly visible protagonists in the documentaries, their grievances are largely invisible. The witness accounts support the particular narratives of the filmmakers, presenting a certain image of the end of the war and the main actors involved. The stories and experiences of the Tamil witnesses do not express any complaints or reflect post-war issues in the north and east as they gloss over pressing concerns in support of the Rajapaksa government’s slogan that everything is well after the end of the war.

**The Happy End: A Perfect Image of Peace**

Produced two to three years after the end of the war, the three documentary films focus more on the final stages of the war than its immediate aftermath. This is to be expected as their main purpose is to refute international criticism of alleged war crimes during that period. The decades of conflict and war before and the years since are largely glossed over, but those few glimpses of the peace provided by the documentaries reinforce the simplified official version of the war. Their message is clear: With the war over and the LTTE defeated, peace and normalcy have returned to the affected areas, there are no major ethnic grievances remaining and all the people want is to return to their normal lives.

Vaas summarises the meaning of peace, in this case specifically for the ex-child soldiers who had been forcibly recruited by the Tamil Tigers:

> Had they not been rescued and rehabilitated they wouldn't have had a chance to live a normal life. Many more girls like Danusia would have perished in their futile effort trying to attain the impossible, glorified, by suicide and cyanide. ... With the dawn of peace, these children got their lives back. ... Transitions from uncertainty, relief from agony and belief in oneself in a world of opportunities are no more an intangible reality. *(Freedom Speaks 2011)*

He presents the end of the war as a turning point, a moment of opportunity for Danusia and other Tamils alike. Similarly the witnesses in *Lies Agreed Upon* and *Freedom Speaks* describe their situation in a very positive language, emphasising the return to normalcy:
Now the war is over and normalcy has returned to our lives. (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011)

With the end of war and return to normalcy I was able to do the Advance Level Examination in 2010. I am very happy that I could continue with my studies. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

We are extremely happy that the war is over. We are able to fulfil all our needs now. We are at liberty to go anywhere we wish and buy anything we wish. (Id.)

Actually, we experienced much hardship during the war. But, now peace has dawned, students are free to move around and go anywhere they wish. We would all be happy and live in peace if this situation continues. (Id.)

The witness accounts support the image of the end of the war heralding into a ‘happy end’ for all. They do not tell the audience more about the actual conditions of Tamils in the north and east at the time the documentaries were filmed. Some of the interviews in *Lies Agreed Upon*, for instance, were conducted in camps for internally displaced people or rehabilitation centres for former LTTE-cadres offering conditions far from the presented normalcy.

By emphasising positive experiences of the Tamil witnesses, especially the end of their life in fear and oppression, the documentaries gloss over continuing minority grievances that are absent from the witness accounts. The documentaries do not engage with post-war challenges remaining in 2012, such as still high numbers of displaced people or the securitisation of large parts of the north and east. By constructing an image of post-war normalcy, not broaching remaining grievances and issues, the documentaries reinforce official narratives that the defeat of the LTTE would be the panacea for the country and its communities. Such an image of the end of the war and subsequent peace is possible because of the simplified representations of the conflict as a terrorist problem.

Many Sinhalese nationalists have long rejected interpretations of the war as an ethnic conflict (DeVotta 2007: 37). Framing the conflict and war as a terrorist instead of an ethnic issue glosses over their underlying long-term causes and presents the defeat of the Tamil Tigers as the removal of their root cause. The war is not presented as a long-standing issue that needs to be processed, but as a problem that has been solved. As the analysis of Rajapaksa’s speeches has highlighted, this frame can be used to silence remaining minority grievances or questions of communal reconciliation in favour of an ‘everything is fine’ rhetoric. A narrative supported by the documentaries whose witnesses ensure their audiences that ‘[w]e now have a good future’ (*Lies Agreed Upon* 2011).
Yet, we have highlighted that an elusive external threat remains part of the post-war discourses of the Rajapaksa government. The following statement of one narrator provides a subtle reminder that peace and stability need to be protected against potential threats:.

This is the common expectation of all the people in the North and East. They want to start life anew. They crave for a new beginning. If someone is trying to disturb this process by churning up the racial sentiments and to turn them back to life of death and misery they are only trying to repeat the same mistake. (*Freedom Speaks* 2011)

Vaas does not specify that ‘someone’, but within the narratives of the documentaries, which not only reject international criticism but actually link it to the remaining international network of the LTTE and its strategies, there is little doubt that it is these foreign forces that he refers to. This statement again presents a message to the international community to not get involved in Sri Lankan affairs, as this may serve the interests of those still pursuing separatist goals and jeopardise the country’s newfound peace and tranquillity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the official version of the end of the war, its events and protagonists, constructed by three documentary films. While they were produced for a specific purpose, to reject international criticism, this discussion has highlighted how the films frame the recent past and the present by drawing on familiar narratives of Sinhalese nationalist ideology akin to dominant themes in Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. They construct an image of the war, seeking to shape the national remembering and forgetting. They present the end of the war as a fresh start, a new future especially for the Tamil people, but instead of transformative narratives the documentaries emphasise stability and normalcy and continue to gloss over ethnicity and its social, economic and political implications.

Two to three years after the defeat of the Tamil Tigers the documentaries present a unique official discourse with a special purpose that demonstrates how the recent past and current events are framed within existing ideological dimensions that are more Sinhalese than Sri Lankan. They include potentially unifying narratives, especially by reconstructing the separation between innocent Tamils and the LTTE terrorists, but by and large they continue to emphasise the insecurity of the nation even after the end of the war and reinforce existing community relations. They do not present Tamils and Sinhalese as enemies or
reproduce historical narratives that carry those connotations, but the theme of liberators and liberated is prevalent throughout the documentaries and can further perpetuate the naturalised traditional hierarchical order underlying Sinhalese nationalism and Sri Lankan politics.

The image of the immediate post-war period presented by the documentaries focuses on the happy end, the defeat of terrorism and return to normalcy, glossing over minority grievances and post-war issues. Against the background of rising tensions between Sri Lanka and international actors the films subtly link potentially remaining threats to international actors, reproducing traditional nationalist dimensions of insecurity. The films reproduce a scepticism and animosity towards the international community similar to that identified within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, reminiscent of historical narratives of foreign domination. Within this ideological space the documentaries construct a link between international actors and the international network of the LTTE to delegitimise international critics. It also implicitly constructs them as a threat not only to Rajapaksa and the government they attack, but also the nation and its achievements.

At a time when Rajapaksa and his government ignored several resolutions of the UNHRC, obstructed foreign investigations and limited access of international observers to the country, these films do not just try to clear Sri Lanka from allegations of war crimes and human rights violations, but also express open hostility towards the international community. Furthermore, the documentaries provide a striking example of how official discourses can support the entrenchment of post-war Sinhalese nationalism by constructing the war itself as a contemporary symbolic resource for a nationalist ideology that remains largely stable in its core dimensions by being able to embed the present, or rather certain interpretations of it, in its narratives.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

This research has provided a current, in-depth account of Sinhalese nationalism during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa. Setting out to investigate the effects of the end of the war, it has demonstrated the role of official discourses as crucial sites of the construction, reproduction and transformation of nationalist ideology. This research has offered a rich empirical account of contemporary Sinhalese nationalism, a case that provides compelling insights into how nationalist ideology can be adapted and reconstructed to respond to challenges and opportunities within a changing context to remain relevant for members of the nation. Exploring the core dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology before and after the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, we have highlighted the continued importance of cultural and ethnic resources to understand modern nations. Smith’s ethno-symbolism has proven particularly useful within this constructionist framework to examine the ways in which the symbolic resources of the past, whether real or imagined, can be mobilised and reappropriated in the present to provide a basis of solidarity and unity for the nation.

Analysing history textbooks, presidential rhetoric and documentary films produced between 2005 and 2014, this research has established a short-term trajectory that demonstrates the major effects of the end of the war on Rajapaksa’s discursive construction of Sinhalese nationalism. It has highlighted the resurgence of nationalist rhetoric and politics under Rajapaksa after 2005 and how the removal of the physical threat to Sinhalese nationalism has seen Sinhalese elites seeking to consolidate the majority community’s hold on Sri Lankan nationalism and the state. Post-war triumphalism facilitated, and in turn was buttressed by, a more explicit and forceful mobilisation of Sinhalese symbolic resources, both old and new, as part of the attempts of the Rajapaksa government to propel the ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka’s ideological and physical landscapes. This research has illustrated how, in the short-term, Rajapaksa and his government used the momentum of the military victory to entrench Sinhalese hegemony in post-war Sri Lanka at the expense of political reform, reconciliation and accountability.
The Triumph of Sinhalese Nationalism

Within a critical discourse analytical framework we analysed the mental representations of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, its contents, strategies and means of realisation in official discourses during and after the war. The analysis built on the extensive literature on Sinhalese nationalism that provides a rich account of the traditional symbolic resources available for mobilisation by Rajapaksa and his predecessors. Chapter two outlined the failure of an all-Ceylonese nationalism and the subsequent rise of Sinhalese nationalism that transformed from an anti-colonial to an anti-Tamil movement and ideology. The role of Buddhist ontology and mytho-history in particular have been highlighted as core dimensions of Sinhalese national identity and the basis of non-Buddhist ‘othering’. While Buddhism, the vamsa chronicles and the Sinhala language pre-date colonialism, Sinhalese nationalism is a modern phenomenon. It is the result of the colonial intervention and how pre-modern symbolic resources came to be reinterpreted during the British period, redefining group identities and conflating the modern Sinhalese nation with pre-modern communities on the island (Rogers 1994). The trap of retrospective nationalism is omnipresent, thus Sinhalese nationalism provides a striking example for why the question of the origins of nations has been so hotly debated for decades.

The analysis of current history textbooks demonstrated how contemporary official discourses continue to reproduce Western historiography, providing a history of the rise and downfall of a glorious ancient civilisation, and projecting modern groups and their relationships back in time. Drawing on controversial sources like the Mahāvamsa they reproduce exclusionary historical narratives that present the Sinhalese as the Sri Lankan nation in the past and present by linking the nation, state and religion. The textbook analysis also highlighted that the more recent history of the conflict and war is not part of current history lessons, providing no opportunity for the young readers to engage with this crucial period of the country’s past. Rajapaksa’s speeches and the documentary films, however, engage actively with these events and frame those into official narratives that should serve as memories for the nation and beyond.

Analysing the speeches and documentaries demonstrated how they also reproduce official historical narratives, drawing on and mobilising traditional
nationalist symbolic resources like religion and myths. They further provide immediate responses to changes in context, responding to the challenges and opportunities posed by the transition from violent conflict to a stable, albeit somewhat uneasy peace. The end of the war meant the defeat of the militant threat to Sinhalese nationalism and the state posed by the LTTE, a dominant contemporary narrative within the traditional security paradigm of Sinhalese nationalism. At the same time it proved to be a symbolic resource in itself, open for interpretation by different actors, including the Rajapaksa government seeking to provide an official memory for the nation. How Sinhalese nationalism would respond to these changes was a matter of speculation when this research commenced in late 2010, but since a clearer image has emerged and this research has highlighted the entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalism in the immediate post-war period under Rajapaksa.

The ‘new patriotism’ that Wickramasinghe (2009a) pointed out as a potential source for reluctant optimism was indeed identified as a dominant theme across Rajapaksa’s rhetoric before and after 2009, but its limitations and shortcomings were revealed. Rajapaksa’s ‘new patriotism’ was explicitly constructed as inclusive of all people in Sri Lanka, as it sought to unite all communities in a love for the country that transcends differences of ethnicity, religion or language. Explicit appeals to a ‘Sri Lankan’ nation were evident across all analysed discourses, but the symbolic resources mobilised as part of its myth-symbol complex revealed that this nation is truly based on the Sinhalese. The conflation of ‘Sinhalese’ and ‘Sri Lankan’ was not dismantled after the end of the war, but this research found that it continued and was even reinvigorated by the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers.

Exploring different dimensions of Sinhalese nationalism, particularly its myth-symbol complex, we found a marked increase in the post-war mobilisation of potentially exclusive symbolic resources and that contemporary events were reinterpreted within existing nationalist narratives as symbolic resources for the present and future nation. References to Buddhism and myth-historical events and heroes increased within Rajapaksa’s post-war rhetoric and the latter also provided narratives within which he was able to realign the former terrorist ‘other’ to retain the unifying functions of a threat to the nation. The victory similarly was
constructed as an extension of the nation’s history, and likened to the battles of the past it shares the same ontological ground as Dutugemunu’s mythical defeat over Elara within Rajapaksa’s post-war Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary. Although presented as a victory of the entire nation, the defeat of the LTTE through the war heroes of the Sri Lankan military forces as depicted by Rajapaksa and the documentaries represents a moment of triumph for the Sinhalese community. Its triumphalism gave rise to a ‘victor’s peace’ that dominated the ideological space of Sinhalese nationalism under Rajapaksa and determined the political settlements, too.

This research has illustrated Rajapaksa’s efforts to ‘nationalise’ contested space, both cultural and territorial, in the absence of a military challenge to Sinhalese rule. His post-war nationalising project, however, did not promote a Sri Lankan nationalism that shows equal respect and appreciation to all communities on the island, but instead was the continuation of previous efforts of the ‘Sinhalisation’ of Sri Lanka. This research revealed how official discourses provided the ideological space within which what Roberts termed the ‘cancerous problem ... namely, the conflation of “Sinhalese” with “Ceylonese”; or “Sinhala” with “Sri Lankan”’ (Roberts 2014: para. 14) could thrive. We focused particularly on the discursive sites of ‘Sinhalisation’, for instance how Rajapaksa sought to reconstruct traditional homelands of the minorities within the Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary, but also pointed out physical manifestations of Sinhalese nationalism after the war, such as the erection of war memorials and Buddhist statues throughout the north and east.

Post-war Sri Lanka under Rajapaksa and his government was a country marked by the signs of continuously high levels of militarisation and authoritarianism that left little room for dissent, internally cracking down on journalists and supposed LTTE supporters, and opposing foreign involvement on the international stage. Albeit decisively ending decades of violence between the Tamil Tigers and the government forces and returning a large measure of normalcy to the north and east as well as economic development and reconstruction, the major legacy of the Rajapaksa period was the absence of reconciliation and accountability after the war. This research investigated the nationalist narratives that were mobilised by Rajapaksa to justify and legitimise
his politics, helping to create the ideological space for his politics of continued ‘Sinhalisation’. The lack of reconciliation in particular can be explained by scrutinising a rhetoric that rejected ethnic interpretations of the conflict silencing Tamil grievances, presented the will of the many as the will of the nation, and perpetuated a hierarchical order of the national and political space.

The analysed post-war discourses actively invited minority communities, and explicitly the Tamils, into the victorious ‘Sri Lankan’ nation, while simultaneously reproducing a Sinhalese myth-symbol complex that places the majority at the heart of this very nation. This apparent contradiction is resolved by the ontological logic of Sinhalese nationalism that naturalises a hierarchical nation dominated by Sinhalese Buddhists. Through the metaphors of unity, fragmentation and reordering non-Buddhists can be incorporated into the national community, albeit subordinate to the Sinhalese and their interests. The rhetoric of a ‘new patriotism’ thus promoted a unity in hierarchy that perpetuates Sinhalese hegemony at the expense of minority interests. The result was a post-war country in which reconciliation was ‘conditioned on the recognition of the Sri Lankan government as the victor and the Sinhalese armed forces as heroes’ (Höglund and Orjuela 2011: 31), thwarting constitutional reform and meaningful steps towards justice and accountability.

This research has answered Goodhand’s tentative question of whether ‘in its moment of triumph Sinhala nationalism may be at its most vulnerable’ (2010: 359), highlighting that Kadirgamar’s (2009) predictions of the potential demise of Sinhalese nationalism with the defeat of its major enemy, the LTTE, proved inaccurate for two main reasons. First, the shifting narratives of the speeches and documentaries demonstrate how the terrorist ‘other’ was realigned within existing narratives of foreign domination to provide a post-war ‘other’. Second, the defeat of the Tamil Tigers did not challenge the underlying logic of Sinhalese nationalism, namely the ontologically grounded link between nation, state and religion that establishes the Sinhalese majority as the Sri Lankan nation. This Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary pre-dated Rajapaksa’s decade as president, but his election saw the reinvigoration of Sinhalese nationalism and its return to the political mainstream, not least fuelled by the end of the war. Rajapaksa’s fervent rhetoric and his policies entrenched Sinhalese hegemony in the Sri Lankan state.
and nation, leaving a legacy that may put a strain on community relations for many years to come.

Where To? Sri Lanka after Rajapaksa

In November 2014, reportedly following the advice of his astrologer, Rajapaksa again called for early presidential elections, to be held in January 2015, two years ahead of schedule. This time, however, his strategy failed and he lost by less than five-hundred thousand votes to the common opposition candidate, Maithripala Sirisena. Compared to Rajapaksa, who was still benefiting from the popularity of his victory over the LTTE, Sirisena was an unknown name (Chandran 2015). Until his candidacy was announced in November 2014 Sirisena was the secretary-general of the SLFP and Minister of Health under Rajapaksa. With the support of Ranil Wickremesinghe’s UNP Sirisena was able to unite a wide front of parties and civic groups against Rajapaksa, including former president Kumaratunga, the TNA, the JHU, Fonseka’s Democratic Party and several members of parliament from Rajapaksa’s UPFA coalition who defected alongside Sirisena, among his outspoken supporters.

Sirisena won the election on the basis of a radical 100-day reform programme that promised far-reaching constitutional reforms to address issues of good governance, abolish the executive presidency and foster reconciliation. His agenda appealed to minority communities who had been alienated by Rajapaksa and the urban Sinhalese vote, but crucially Sirisena was also able to tap into Rajapaksa’s rural Sinhalese voter base (Srinivasan 2015), offering a viable alternative to those Sinhalese voters dissatisfied with the Rajapaksas’ style of governance. Sirisena’s success has thus been interpreted as a resounding victory of democracy, of the people of Sri Lanka rejecting the corruption, nepotism and impunity the Rajapaksa government came to embody (Hoole 2016; Chandran 2015). The election of Sirisena and Wickremesinghe, who was sworn in as prime minister, hardly heralded the end of Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka and despite a new leadership many senior ministers and officials remain as part of the

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90 In a somewhat satirical fashion many reports about Rajapaksa’s defeat allude to the role of his astrologer’s counsel in the decision to call early elections, hinting at the superstition of the former president. The astrologer was discharged shortly after the election (Hindustan Times 2015).
new government. Yet, Rajapaksa’s defeat was a clear repudiation of the ‘populist authoritarian and dynastic’ politics of his regime (Welikala 2015).

The situation was complicated when in the parliamentary elections in August 2015 neither Sirisena’s UPFA nor Wickremesinghe’s coalition, the United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG), were able to win a majority in parliament. They subsequently formed a coalition, misleadingly called ‘national unity government’, for two years, placing the TNA and JVP in opposition under the official leadership of Rajavarothiam Sampanthan. This may effectively curb ethnic outbidding in the short-term and provide Sirisena and Wickremesinghe with the necessary two-thirds majority to enact constitutional change, but some observers have questioned how the UNP can implement its campaign promises of good governance working with large parts of the previous government it had opposed during both 2015 elections (Keethaponcalan 2015). Furthermore, the potentially disruptive influence of actors like Buddhist extremist groups or the Joint Opposition should not be underestimated.91

Today, sixteen months after the election of Sirisena had brought another ‘golden opportunity’ for Sri Lanka, change and reforms have not moved as fast as promised. Wickremesinghe and Sirisena’s first hundred days in office did not see the abolition of the presidential system. The Nineteenth Amendment, however, was a crucial step back towards democracy as it repealed Rajapaksa’s Eighteenth Amendment and reinstated checks and balances on the executive presidency (Welikala 2016). The government has rekindled relationships with Western countries and India, and it has co-sponsored the most recent UNHRC Resolution in October 2015. Legislation to institute transitional justice mechanisms is currently being prepared, but remains a controversial topic, especially the Special Court on Accountability. It was envisioned to involve foreign judges, but in the past months Wickremesinghe and Sirisena have clearly stated that no foreign judges would be part of a war crimes probe to appease Sinhalese nationalists (Perera 2016).

91 The Joint Opposition consists of fifty-two members of parliament who are part of the UPFA but not the government. The group consists mainly of Rajapaksa supporters and is currently not officially recognised or represented as opposition under the agreement of the two major parties.
The Sirisena government has made some noteworthy steps towards the Tamil community, for instance in first renaming the Victory Day to Remembrance Day in 2015 and then cancelling the victory parade in 2016, and lifting the unofficial ban on singing the anthem in two languages and having it sung in Sinhala and Tamil on Independence Day in 2016. Nonetheless, the resettlement of displaced Tamils and high army presence in the North remain salient issues (Ahamed 2016; Ferdinando 2016; Sampanthan 2016) and major obstacles to reconciliation. The biggest project of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe partnership is the planned new constitution. In January 2016 Sirisena has reaffirmed his dedication to a new constitution that would address the root causes of the conflict by decentralising power. The constitutional reform process is on the way, inviting opinions and suggestions from the people of Sri Lanka, and a constitutional draft is expected to be placed in front of parliament in early 2017. Details are not yet known, but in a statement that remarkably echoes Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, Wickremesinghe has assured that the new constitution would not dilute ‘the foremost place given to Buddhism and the unitary nature of the country’ assuring that ‘[t]he new constitution will be based on the aspirations of the people’ (Fonseka 2016).

Overall, the track record of Sirisena’s first months in office is mixed and as the reform process is stuttering and optimism dwindling, observers are concerned about another window of opportunity closing (International Crisis Group 2016). Institutional constraints, increasingly strained relationships between the UNP and SLFP, and continuing pressure from nationalist margins, including the still sizeable camp supporting Rajapaksa, are major obstacles for the ambitious reform programme of the post-Rajapaksa government. The Rajapaksa family and its staunchest supporters have been ousted from power, some facing criminal charges, but the 2015 elections did not bring an end to Sinhalese nationalism and its influence in politics. As Hoole aptly summarises:

The issues around which the change was mooted were centred on corruption, state accountability, and freedom of expression untrammelled by fear and intimidation... What transpired on 8th January was an opportunity for change, not a revolution. We still have to contend with the same state structures, the same administration and practically the same MPs. The minorities, who are more sensitive and expected to see benign change towards efficiency and professionalism, frequently encounter the same obstacles. (Hoole 2016)

The current leaders of Sri Lanka do not engage in the same nationalist rhetoric as their predecessor, but they remain limited by the ideological practices and
in institutional constraints shaped by Sinhalese nationalism over decades, and the more recent legacies of the Rajapaksa period that facilitated the post-war entrenchment of Sinhalese nationalist ideology.

This research cannot draw comprehensive conclusions about Sinhalese nationalism beyond the defeat of Mahinda Rajapaksa, but it has demonstrated that in the short-term his presidency has augmented Sinhalese nationalism and its hold on politics. We have highlighted how Rajapaksa reinvigorated the core dimensions of Sinhalese nationalist ideology, reproducing traditional narratives and shaping new ones from the military victory. This created the ideological and political space for the ‘Sinhalisation’ of contested space after the war, the remnants of which continue to be potent reminders of Sinhalese nationalism and the Sinhalese victory. Rajapaksa buttressed the deeply ingrained Sinhalese Buddhist mindset that conflates the majority with the nation, using the momentum of the victory to entrench it further in the institutions of the country and many minds of the Sinhalese community.

The current government seems committed to reforms and has begun to reverse some of Rajapaksa’s policies, but given the historical role of Sinhalese nationalism and post-war triumphalism it faces the tremendous challenge of painstakingly dismantling the legacies of colonialism and Rajapaksa’s presidency alike. More research is needed into the ideological predispositions of the current government, but against the background of the findings of this research it is likely that its scope for reforms will be limited not only by the extremist Sinhalese Buddhist forces gaining ground in the margins of society, but also by the ideological and political constraints presented by the enduring hegemony of Sinhalese nationalism, which reaches from the institutions of the state to the most ‘banal’ aspects of everyday life.
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Note: Full references for the textbooks, speeches and documentaries are included in Appendix B.


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Appendix A: Maps and Images

Map of Sri Lanka

Colonial Expansion

This map illustrates the different phases of colonial expansion from the Portuguese to the British. It highlights how colonised areas slowly expanded inland from the coastal regions under the Portuguese and Dutch, until only the Kandyan Kingdom in the centre remained independent during early British rule. In 1815 the British defeated Kandy and united the entire island under their control.
Ethnic Distribution Across Sri Lanka

Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sri_lanka.html
This map shows the area claimed as Tamil Eelam and the areas controlled by the LTTE in 2006, before the military offensives of the Rajapaksa government drove the LTTE out of the east in 2007 and defeated them in the north in 2009.
After independence Sri Lanka’s first prime minister, D.S. Senanayake, appointed a committee to assist the government in designing a new flag. The following provides a brief official explanation of the symbolism of the Sri Lankan flag:

The design approved by the committee in February 1950 retained the symbol of the lion with the sword and the bo-leaves from the civil standard of the last king of Sri Lanka, with the inclusion of two vertical stripes green and orange in colour. The significance of each symbol of the national flag is as follows:

- The lion in the flag represents the Sinhala race.
- The sword of the lion represents the sovereignty of the country.
- Curly hair on the lion's head indicates religious observance, wisdom and meditation.
- The beard denotes purity of words.
- The handle of the sword highlights the elements of water, fire, air and earth.
- The nose indicates intelligence.
- The two front paws purport to purity in handling wealth.
- The vertical stripe of orange represent the minority Tamil race and the green vertical stripe the minority Muslim race.
- The four virtues of kindness: KINDNESS, FRIENDLINESS, HAPPINESS, EQUANIMITY are also represented in the flag.
- The border round the flag, which is yellow in colour, represents other minor races.
- The bo-leaves at the four corners of the flag represent Buddhism and its influence on the nation. They also stand for the four virtues - Kindness, Friendliness, Happiness and Equanimity.
- The maroon coloured portion of the flag manifests the other minor religions.

(Lanka Mission 2015)
The flag of the aspired state Tamil Eelam was adapted from the LTTE emblem in 1990, prominently featuring the Tiger, the former Chola symbol that should represent the martial history of the Dravidian civilisation. An LTTE guidebook on its use further specifies the symbolism of the flag:

Yellow signifies that Tamils' aspiration to freely govern themselves in their own homeland is a fundamental political and human right. The color expresses the righteousness of Tamil struggle and reinforces Tamil Nation's will to uphold moral highground during its path towards freedom.

Red represents the realization that freedom is not complete by establishment of a separate state of Tamileelam. We should abolish distinctions of caste and class. Egalitarianism should become our spiritual principle. Gender equality should permeate Tamil society. The revolutionary changes necessary to spread social justice represented by these principles are reflected by this color.

Black reminds that march towards freedom is wrought with dangers, death and destruction. That it's filled with pain and misery. Black signifies determination and resoluteness vital to withstand the adversities and build the new nation of Tamileelam. To provide security and to defend the borders.

White demands purity, honesty and selflessness from the leaders and citizens of Tamileelam. (Tamil Nation 2005)
Appendix B: Data Sets

The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of the data sets analysed for this research. It should be noted again that all quotes in the text were taken directly from the material and unless clearly marked were not changed, leaving spelling and grammar mistakes and inconsistencies, for instance capitalisation of words, as they were in the original.

History Textbooks

The corpus consisted of six history textbooks for Grades 7 to 11, published between 2007 and 2009. With the exception of the Grade 10 book, which was written by one author, they were composed by a board of authors, including active and retired teachers, consultants from the Ministry of Education and university lecturers, under the guidance and supervision by the Commissioner General of Educational Publications. They were acquired in the bookshop located next to of the Ministry of Education during my fieldwork in Colombo in July 2012. The Grade 6 textbook was not available in English and had to be excluded from the analysis.

Following are the full references of the textbooks that are referenced by their title throughout the text to make it easier for the reader to distinguish the relevant grades:


Political Speeches

The corpus consisted of sixty-nine speeches delivered by Mahinda Rajapaksa between 2005 and 2014. They were mostly collected from the former president’s website, which provided official English transcripts of some of Rajapaksa’s speeches at http://www.president.gov.lk/sinhala/speeches.htm. Following Sirisena’s election in January 2015 the domain was taken over by the new president and all the old content was removed. The Budget Speeches were collected from the website of the Ministry of Finance at http://www.treasury.gov.lk/web/guest/budget-speeches, but again the content of the website was changed after the election of the new government. The full texts of some speeches were published in online newspapers and can still be found online in their archives, but to allow full access to all speeches as they were analysed the entire corpus is included on the attached CD.

The following presents a list of all analysed speeches organised chronologically by occasion, including the in-text reference used for every speech.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IndD 2006</td>
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<td>IndD 2011</td>
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<td>IndD 2012</td>
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<td>Address at the Celebrations of the 65th Anniversary of Independence</td>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
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<td>IndD 2014</td>
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<td>Kegalle</td>
<td>4 February 2014</td>
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### War Heroes Day and Victory Day Speeches

<table>
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<td>Kandy</td>
<td>7 June 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WarH 2008</td>
<td>Address at the National War Heroes Day Celebrations</td>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</td>
<td>7 June 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>WarH 2009</td>
<td>Address at the National War Heroes Day Celebrations</td>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</td>
<td>22 May 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>VicD 2009</td>
<td>Address at the Victory Day Parade</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>3 June 2009</td>
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<td>VicD 2010</td>
<td>Address at the Victory Day Parade</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>18 June 2010</td>
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<td>VicD 2011</td>
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<td>26 May 2011</td>
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### Speeches at United Nations General Assembly

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<td>UNGA 2010</td>
<td>Speech at the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>Speech at the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>Speech at the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>UNGA 2014</td>
<td>Speech at the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly</td>
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**Budget Speeches**

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<td>Budget Speech 2009</td>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</td>
<td>6 November 2008</td>
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<td>BudS 2014</td>
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**Various Speeches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VarS 2005a</th>
<th>Speech at the Swearing-in Ceremony</th>
<th>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</th>
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<tr>
<td>VarS 2005b</td>
<td>Statement at the Opening of the New Session of Parliament</td>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</td>
<td>25 November 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>VarS 2006a</td>
<td>Address at Joint Meeting of All Party Representative Committee and Panel of Experts</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>11 July 2006</td>
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<td>VarS 2006b</td>
<td>Speech at the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement</td>
<td>Havana, Cuba</td>
<td>16 September 2006</td>
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<td>VarS 2006c</td>
<td>Speech at “Deyata Kirula” (Crowning the People) Exhibition</td>
<td>Weerawila</td>
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<td>VarS 2006d</td>
<td>Address to the Nation</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>6 December 2006</td>
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<td>VarS 2007a</td>
<td>Speech at the Inauguration of the Jathika Saviya – Gama Neguma Programme</td>
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<td>29 March 2007</td>
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<td>VarS 2007b</td>
<td>Address at the “Neganahira Navodaya” (New Dawn in the East) Celebration</td>
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<td>VarS 2007c</td>
<td>Address to the World Affairs Council</td>
<td>Los Angeles, USA</td>
<td>28 September 2007</td>
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<td>VarS 2007d</td>
<td>Address at the Opening of the Thulhiriya Textile Export Complex</td>
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<td>Speech during a Visit to Turkey</td>
<td>Ankara, Turkey</td>
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<td>VarS 2008b</td>
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<td>Colombo</td>
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<td>VarS 2008c</td>
<td>Address to All Party Conference</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>11 October 2008</td>
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<td>VarS 2009a</td>
<td>Special Message to the Navy</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>9 March 2009</td>
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<td>VarS 2009b</td>
<td>Address to the Diplomatic Community</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>7 May 2009</td>
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<td>Address at the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament</td>
<td>Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte</td>
<td>19 May 2009</td>
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<td>VarS 2009d</td>
<td>Keynote Address to the 8th Asia Cooperation Dialogue</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
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<td>Speech at the Launch of Forward Vision of Mahinda Chinthana</td>
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<td>VarS 2010c</td>
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<td>Colombo</td>
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<td>VarS 2012b</td>
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<td>VarS 2012c</td>
<td>Address at Banquet</td>
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<td>VarS 2012d</td>
<td>Address at Sri Lanka Exposition</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>28 March 2012</td>
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<td>VarS 2012e</td>
<td>Speech at the University of Vocational Technology</td>
<td>Rathmalana</td>
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<td>VarS 2012f</td>
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<td>VarS 2014d</td>
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Documentary Films

The analysis included four documentaries produced between 2011 and 2012, available online on the website of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development. As Shadows of Terror presents merely a shortened version of the other two government films it was excluded from the discussion.

Filmography:


Ministry of Defence and Urban Development (2012b) Ruthless [video online], available: Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpPBJr4Pq5A; Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1_wNjJFWg; Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIN_jhhG0UM [accessed 13 September 2016].

All Sri Lankan documentaries were originally available online on the website of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development at http://www.defence.lk/nfz.asp. While the website still exists, the links to the videos have become inactive in 2016. As of September 2016 the films are still available on You Tube.
Appendix C: Sample Speech Analysis

To illustrate the practical application of the methodological framework described in chapter three, and employed in chapters four to eight, the following section describes in detail the procedure by which a single speech was analysed, demonstrating how the relevant material was selected and interpreted by identifying the main themes, strategies and linguistic features. Individual speeches were coded using WeftQDA in the first instance, and later the codings of all speeches were combined for the data analysis and discussion. The following example demonstrates how a critical discourse analytical approach can be employed, specifically by drawing on the framework developed by Wodak et al. (2009) as part of the DHA. The exercise also reveals the importance of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, since one speech provides only a very limited insight into the underlying ideological framework.

The Speech

The speech analysed here was delivered on June 7, 2008 at the National War Heroes Day celebrations in the capital, Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte (WI-2). It is an epideictic speech that commemorates and honours the Ranavirus, Sri Lanka’s war heroes. This was an annual occasion between 2007 and 2009, the direct precursor of the Victory Day celebrations that replaced it from 2010 onwards, and which were held each May. As such the speech is representative of the majority of analysed speeches that were presented at similar occasions. It includes recurring themes that are common throughout Rajapaksa’s speeches and the language employed is typical for his rhetoric. It is slightly shorter than comparable speeches delivered, for instance on Independence Day, making it an ideal case study.

The Context

This speech was delivered in June 2008, less than a year after the government troops drove the LTTE out of the east and before the LTTE was completely defeated in the north in 2009. The official ceasefire agreement had ended in January and a large military ground offensive was launched in April 2008. In response the Tamil Tigers targeted civilians in southern areas, killing dozens in their attacks. At the same time defence costs were soaring, and the country was feeling the effects of the global economic downturn as inflation was high and the cost of living rose. Yet, despite the adverse effects of the war, also including large numbers of internally displaced people and growing international criticism about the government’s human rights record in the West, the vast majority of Sinhalese supported the war against the LTTE (Wickramasinghe 2009:64).

It was against this background that Rajapaksa addressed his audience, reminding them of the necessity to support the military efforts of the government. The exact size and composition of the audience are unknown, but occasions like these were usually marked by a large presence of active and retired military personnel and their families. Furthermore, the speech is not merely addressed to the people present during its delivery. Mass media and modern communication networks allow for the dispersion of speeches, whether in their entirety or of selected parts, far beyond their immediate audiences. Thus, when Rajapaksa calls
upon ‘you’ in (80-82) he includes a much larger audience in his message than those present, speaking to the nation at large.

The Topic

The expressed primary purpose of the speech is to celebrate and honour the war heroes and their sacrifices, as befits the occasion it was delivered at. The armed forces are the central topic of Rajapaksa’s speech, as he highlights their importance in the past and present and reminds the audience why they, their services and sacrifices, should be honoured. Within the speech these ‘Heroes of War’ are a crucial participant in the ongoing military operations against terrorism, and they appear frequently throughout Rajapaksa’s rhetoric as a symbol to the Sri Lankan nation. While praising the armed forces, he simultaneously attacks terrorism and its supporters in Sri Lanka and abroad.

Rajapaksa uses the occasion to define the current situation with a primary focus on the ongoing war. He addresses current issues, such as heightened insecurity and economic problems, within the overarching frame of the confrontation between democracy and terrorism. He also represents different actors explicitly and implicitly, defining their roles and relationships. Thus, the speech that at the outset is a tribute to the war heroes is also a vindication of Rajapaksa and his government, requesting direct and extended audiences to support the government in its fight against the LTTE and its supporters.

Coding the Speech

For every speech the analysis began with a first reading of the entire speech, then a preliminary examination was done on paper paragraph by paragraph. This included taking notes, highlighting the main themes and arguments of the speech, marking linguistic means and, where applicable, noticeable or distinct features. After this the relevant parts of the speech were coded by thematic contents into WeftQDA. For the sample speech material was copied into the following codes, square brackets marking minor elements of the arguments of the speech that are part of larger themes of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric:

- framing of the war
- rejection of ethnic conflict
- democracy versus terrorism
- representation of ‘us’
- government
  [- Rajapaksa’s successes and leadership qualities]
- war heroes
- representation of ‘them’
- LTTE
- critics and dissidents
  [- international actors/foreign threats]
  [- unitary state]
At the time when this speech was analysed these codings had already been established for other speeches, partially developed from the theoretical framework described in chapter two, and amended with the themes emerging during the analytical process. Linguistic features that were not part of the coded material were coded in a separate category compiling general linguistic aspects of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. In addition to the coded material notes were kept, summarising the main points of each speech and recording noticeable features about the speech, occasion and context. After this process was completed for all speeches, the codings of individual speeches were integrated, gathering all the relevant material for each theme into one file to work with further. At this stage the major themes and strategies of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric were identified as well as how these changed between 2009 and 2014.

The Arguments

In the following sections we discuss the main arguments of Rajapaksa’s speech on the National War Heroes Day in 2008. First, Rajapaksa’s framing of the war is discussed. His construction of the conflict as a terrorist instead of an ethnic issue is a major frame of reference throughout his rhetoric, with important implications for the characterisation of the actors involved and the available strategies to address the situation. Second, the representations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ throughout this speech are discussed. This includes characterisations of the government, the war heroes, the LTTE and critics that are presented within the framework of terrorism versus democracy. Last, we briefly highlight the explicit appeals Rajapaksa presents after appraising the current state of the country, showing how he conflates the interests of his government and the nation.

Overall, looking merely at this speech we would find little evidence for ethnic nationalism within Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, as this speech instead exemplifies his explicit ‘new patriotism’. At this occasion he draws on patriotic symbols like civic values, the love for the country and war heroes, instead of ethnic resources to frame the situation and mobilise the nation. It is only when we look at a larger sample of his rhetoric within the shifting context that a more complete picture of the kind of nationalism discursively constructed by Rajapaksa emerges.

The following presents a summary of the argument schema, square brackets marking implicit premises:

0. The country is at war.
1. We need to urgently defeat terrorism.
   1.1 Terrorism is bad. (8-9; 13-16; 70-9; 90-1)
      1.1.1 [Prabhakaran’s LTTE is a terrorist organisation.]
      1.1.2 [The LTTE is a part of international terrorism.]
      1.1.3 The separatist threat has many different faces. (65-79)
         1.1.3.1 [Not only explicit terrorists face a threat to the nation.]
   1.2 [There can only be a military solution.]
2. You should support the government and its military operations.
   2.1 The government stands for democracy and freedom. (2-11; 38-41; 106-9)
      2.1.1 [Democracy is good.]
2.1.2 Accusations against the government are false claims and lies. (38-44; 54-64)

2.2 [Rajapaksa is a strong, capable leader.]

2.3 The government represents the war heroes and their families. (46-57; 106-9)
   2.3.1 The nation should respect these heroes. (100-1; 102-5)
   2.3.1.1 [Those who do not are not part of the nation.]
   2.3.2 Their sacrifices must not be in vain. (2-9; 87-101)

2.4 The government represents the will of the nation. (34-5; 38-9; 80-6)
   2.4.1 [The nation wants peace.]
   2.4.1.1 [The nation does not support terrorism.]
   2.4.2 Those who hate the country are against peace. (59-61)
   2.3.2.1 [They are not part of the nation.]
   2.4.3 [Those who do not support the fight against terrorism, support terrorism.]
   2.4.3.1 [They are not part of the nation.]

Conclusion:
3. Every true Sri Lankan must support Rajapaksa and his government.

**Defining the Situation**

A central aspect of Rajapaksa’s speech is his attempt to define the current situation within which he then allocates blame and praise. If the audience accepts his definition of the state of affairs, his characterisations of actors follow as apparently natural and inevitable. In 2008 the country was back at war and Rajapaksa does not need to spend much time setting the scene. The military conflict between the government troops and the LTTE was an undeniable fact of life for the domestic audience and so were the attacks against civilians and economic problems, which Rajapaksa only mentions in passing (65-7; 87-90). Within the context of the ongoing conflict these are presented as mere temporary hardships that can best be overcome by defeating the terrorist threat.

Rajapaksa’s provides only a snapshot of the conflict, focusing on the current situation at the time the speech was delivered. He does not provide background information on the history, causes or actors of the conflict. He does not even have to name one of the main actors, the LTTE, as it is clear that references to ‘the terrorists’ mean the Tamil Tigers. Rajapaksa’s framing of the ongoing conflict is crucial, as he presents it as a terrorist conflict instead of an ethnic conflict. In (57-8) he refers to the war as ‘the battle against terrorism, against Eelam; this battle to develop the country’, highlighting the military and separatist aspect. He sidelines any ethnic grievances that a military solution may not address, instead linking the war to development. This is a theme not developed further in this speech, but in other speeches (e.g. VarS 2007a; VarS 2007d; BudS 2007; VarS 2009c; IndD 2014; VarS 2013a; VicD 2011) he establishes the link between terrorism and underdevelopment more clearly, providing a non-ethnic rationale for the protracted conflict.
Furthermore, Rajapaksa presents it not merely as a conflict between the government troops and the LTTE, but frames it as an essential confrontation between democracy and terrorism. Within the first two paragraphs of his speech he explicitly links terrorism in Sri Lanka to ‘international terrorism’ (14-5) and although he does not explicitly refer to the ‘war on terror’ he locates the conflict in Sri Lanka within this rhetoric. Here and in other speeches he applies its framing of ‘us’, the civilised, versus ‘them’, the rogue terrorists (Reese and Lewis 2009: 779) to Sri Lanka. In (8-9), for instance, he establishes the underlying antithesis when describing the situation: ‘a country that was about to be subjugated by terrorism and the law of the jungle, in place of democracy’. Drawing on the existing rhetoric of the ‘war on terror’ allows him on the one hand to counter criticism from the West. It adds legitimacy to Sri Lanka’s military offensives against the LTTE, recognised as a terrorist organisation by many Western countries, by likening it to the offensives launched by the USA and its allies. On the other hand, it also includes a normative dimension that legitimates an oversimplified black-and-white interpretation of the situation and its actors. The roles of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ are pre-determined and beyond reproach, irregardless of motives, grievances, and so on. The prolonged conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese is thus reduced to the conflict between the government that represents core values of the civilised world, especially democracy, freedom and peace, and the LTTE terrorists, who threaten these. This framing of ‘us’ and ‘them’, however, is not limited to those actors actively engaged in military confrontations. Rajapaksa uses it as a carte blanche to delegitimise anyone who does not support the government’s campaign against the LTTE.

For this purpose he uses the category of ‘those who hate the country’ (38), which includes those generally agreed to be terrorists and a less specified group of individuals and organisations who support terrorism in various ways. As such this category remains rather malleable in this speech and his wider rhetoric, allowing Rajapaksa to include different actors depending on his situational strategic needs. In this speech, it includes the unnamed terrorists, the LTTE, and a not clearly defined group of critics within and outside Sri Lanka. This latter group and their specific concerns remains rather vague as Rajapaksa merely refers to ‘many’ (22), ‘some even in this parliament’ (30), ‘international forces’ (54) or ‘various forces’ (59). These are linked to terrorism not by military means, but because of their ‘false charges and allegations’ (44), ‘interests or pressures’ (63), or simply the lack of support for the government (21-31) and its armed forces (36-47) support a major goal of separatist terrorism, namely to weaken the government.

Us and Them

Rajapaksa’s definition of the situation as a confrontation between democracy and terrorism provides the basis for his ideological squaring, whereby he emphasises the good things about ‘us’ and the bad ones about ‘them’, and de-emphasises the bad qualities of ‘us’ and the good qualities of ‘them’ (van Dijk 2006: 734). He divides actors into those supporting the government in its opposition to terrorism and those supporting terrorism, with no grey area. Throughout the speech ‘we’, ‘our’ and ‘us’ are shifting signifiers that always includes Rajapaksa and the government, but can be extended to include the audience and the nation at large, too, as Rajapaksa is speaking as the representative of the country. The war heroes
remain a separate actor throughout the speech, not directly included in the linguistic ‘us’, but as a symbol they represent the most virtuous reflection of ‘our’ core values in direct opposition to terrorists, making them the most visible representation of ‘us’ in the speech.

Celebrating and praising ‘us’ in general and the armed forces in particular is the major theme of the speech. The positive self-representation of ‘us’ is mainly derived from the contrast between ‘us’ and the terrorists, whom Rajapaksa, the government, the armed forces and the nation in general stand in opposition to. Rajapaksa furthermore uses the opportunity to show his government in a positive light by presenting it as a firm, decisive and successful government. He also qualifies the war by using the euphemism ‘humanitarian operation’ (21). He highlights that ‘[o]ur War Heroes are not only engaged in battling terrorism, they are also engaged in a great operation to ensure and provide the human rights and the necessities of the people’ (17-20). In the subsequent paragraph (21-31) he uses terms like ‘free’ and ‘liberate’ to describe the successes of the military operations, shifting the focus away from the high cost of the war and alleged human rights violations emphasised by critics. Rajapaksa’s framing of the war downplays its negative effects and deflects criticism of the government by emphasising its concerns for innocent victims over its aggressive military strategies.

This representation of ‘us’ is in stark contrast to ‘them’ who includes those terrorists who heinously attack ‘innocent children’ (65). In comparison to many of his other speeches, however, in this speech Rajapaksa’s representation of the LTTE is not characterised by the same explicit language vividly depicting the cruel and brutal character of the LTTE. In this speech terrorism is not emphasised in particular, the only explicit mention to the LTTE being a reference to its leader, Prabhakaran (28). Rajapaksa only briefly hints at ‘the menace of terrorism’ (91) and the brutal tactics of the LTTE (65-67), then immediately shifts to their goals of entrapping and overthrowing the government (68-79). He outlines how they seek to provoke and create trouble to delay the advances of the armed forces not only through terrorist attacks, but also using ‘human rights and various other means to psychologically weaken us’ (76f.). By de-emphasising their terrorist strategies and instead highlighting these other tactics Rajapaksa establishes an implicit link between LTTE terrorists and those individuals and groups supporting it directly or indirectly by weakening the government through criticism or dissent. ‘They’ are thus not narrowly defined by the category of terrorism, but also by the goals, purposes and intentions that remain vague enough for him to include individuals and groups who are not terrorists but similarly ‘hate the country’ (38).

It is these actors that Rajapaksa subtly blames throughout the speech, harshly condemning the potentially harmful effects their actions have. Those who have doubted and criticised the government and the armed forces in the past are presented as ‘opposed to the war to save the country’ (34) and not interested in real peace but rather ‘seek to profit from the slogan of peace’ (61). These actors and interests who remain unnamed are framed not merely as opponents of Rajapaksa and his government, but as enemies of the nation at large. Within the ongoing confrontation between terrorism and democracy, represented by the LTTE and the Rajapaksa government respectively, anyone not supporting the latter may be framed by Rajapaksa as supporting the former. Ironically, however, while constructing himself as champion of democracy and peace his rhetoric is markedly authoritarian. In this speech Rajapaksa presents war as the only viable
option and dissent or criticism is not appreciated as an expression of democratic values, but can instead be framed as a betrayal of the nation and its declared goal of peace.

This speech also highlights how ‘us’ and ‘them’ are constructed independently from ethnicity, but are instead based on Rajapaksa’s conception of patriotism. The most visible representatives of the nation throughout this speech are the war heroes who at first sight are a common symbol for a united nation and country. The potential issues with presenting the armed forces as the heroes of all communities are discussed in chapter ---, but within this speech Rajapaksa generally emphasises the country and democratic values as a commonality of ‘us’. ‘They’ are also no specific ethnic or religious group but all ‘those who hate the country’ (38), a distinction Rajapaksa’s continues to use after the end of the war.

A Concluding Appeal

Following his definition of the situation Rajapaksa concludes his speech with a call for action addressed at the audience, political parties, various organisations and the nation at large. After spending most of his speech appraising the current state of affairs, presenting a conflict reaching far beyond the military confrontations on the battlefield, carried out on the political battlefield, too, and involving many more foes than can be seen, in (80) his rhetoric shifts to the future. This change is signified by a direct appeal, ‘I call upon you’ (80), followed by explicit requests that implicitly ask every member of the nation to take a side in the conflict.

The following quote highlights how Rajapaksa draws together his arguments into an appeal that warns of the consequences of not supporting his government:

80 I call upon you to look at the great commitment and sacrifice of our
81 troops, and calmly and courageously extend all your support to the
82 security forces, the police and the government. I ask all political parties
83 including the opposition, and various other organizations not to betray the
84 victory we have won as a nation. If anyone tries to destroy this, it would
85 amount to destroying a great mansion built upon the aspirations of the
86 people.

Having established the armed forces and his government as the rightful champions against those hating the country, in (80) he appeals to ‘you’, the nation at large, to support them. In (82) he then firmly asks political parties and various organisations, including those potential critics and dissidents he has reprimanded earlier, not for support for the government, but to not betray the successes of the nation. This section makes it very clear that those standing against his government are outside the nation, working against ‘the aspirations of the people’ (85-6) Rajapaksa and his government represent. Although he does not explicitly refer to national unity in this speech, it is a clear message especially in this paragraph that highlights the necessity of standing together.

The remainder of the speech reinforces Rajapaksa’s urgent call for support with emotional references to the war heroes and their families, to mothers, wives and children whose sacrifices should not be in vain. He links his appeals to their wishes and sacrifices stating decisively that ‘we must all have a monument to them in our own hearts’ (103). After all, which true Sri Lankan would stand against the symbol of freedom, democracy and the nation?
Means and Forms of Realisation

Finally, through the linguistic means and forms of realisation we examine how arguments are constructed through specific linguistic choices, for instance the words and phrases or literary devices used. This speech is a typical representation of the common linguistic features of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric. His often plain, straightforward language, his direct addresses and prompts to the audience, and the repetition of similar words and phrases throughout are typical for the speeches analysed. Public speeches delivered to audiences in Sri Lanka in particular are frequently characterised by their informality, Rajapaksa addressing the audience as ‘friends’, counting himself as one of ‘us’. Yet, this speech also highlights how ‘us’ and ‘we’ are shifting signifiers within and across speeches, potentially denoting the nation as a whole or parts thereof.

This sample speech further demonstrates how the choice of words and phrases can support his arguments. Wordings like ‘assure you’ (108), ‘we are not ready’ (90-1) or ‘we pledge’ (107), for instance, can convey confidence and certainty to the audience, while other phrases help to obscure issues or actors, for example vague terms like ‘those’, ‘they’ or ‘some’ or phrases like ‘it is said’ (33) that remain unspecified and thus conceal agency and issues. Similarly literary devices help Rajapaksa to develop his arguments and to make his rhetoric more accessible to the audience across his speeches. He frequently includes, for instance, antithesis (‘the law of the jungle, in place of democracy’ (9)), hyperboles (‘the war to save the country’ (34)), euphemisms (‘humanitarian operation’ (21)), metaphors (‘the theatres of war’ (42)), and repetition and parallelism of words and phrases.

The style and tone of this speech are also typical for Rajapaksa’s rhetoric and highlight how he usually mixes persuasive appeals to logos, ethos and pathos to give force to his arguments. Pathos often prevails as he calls upon the emotions of his audience or seeks to trigger certain emotive responses to his arguments. The sacrifices of the war heroes and their families are at the core of his argument in this speech that seeks support for himself and his government. They provide a powerful motif to arouse both positive and negative emotions, especially within domestic audience. Rajapaksa reminds of the pain, suffering, fear and loss experienced by many Sri Lankans embodied by the war heroes, but at the same time the war heroes should also entice hope and a sense of pride within the nation for its heroes and their achievements. Rajapaksa’s concluding appeal to unity seeks to bring together a large number of people on the basis of their individual emotional responses to the speech, whether it is pain, anger or defiance, he provides them with a focal point for these emotions: his government’s fight against the LTTE.

Rajapaksa’s appeals to pathos are powerful, dominant in this and many of his other speeches, but we also find additional appeals to ethos and logos. His frequent and firm assurances of his commitment and strength in particular should convince the audience of his credibility as a leader who deserves their trust and support. The portrayals of the Tamil Tigers in this speech appeal to reason rather than emotion, as Rajapaksa characterises terrorism in opposition to democracy and through a subtle link to popular international discourses of international terrorism. This establishes the destructive force of terrorism, justifying opposition
to it, instead of his often more evocative language of beastly, ruthless terrorism that appeals to pathos.

Overall this sample analysis has provided an insight into a speech typical of Rajapaksa’s themes, tone and style. It has demonstrated how the methodological framework, especially the rhetorical political analysis, was applied to study the discursive construction of nationalism within official discourses. Discussing the major themes and strategies of Rajapaksa’s rhetoric, however, has also highlighted the relevance of Fairclough’s statement that ‘A single text on its own is quite insignificant’ (1989: 54), for one speech can only provide a very partial and limited insight into a phenomenon as complex as nationalist ideology. It is only across several texts that we can analyse how themes are constructed repeatedly and in relationship to other, potentially opposing, themes, and how they are developed and begin to detect a clearer picture of it.

Sample Speech

Address at the National War Heroes Day Celebrations, Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte, 7 June 2008 (WarH 2008)

1 Today we celebrate National War Heroes Day near the parliamentary complex at historic Sri Jayawardenapura. We considered it important to have this memorial to our War Heroes located near our supreme legislature because of the service rendered by our War Heroes to safeguard parliamentary democracy and the rights of the people. The importance of having this memorial near the legislature is understood when one realizes the service of our War Heroes to safeguard justice and fair play in a country that was about to be subjugated by terrorism and the law of the jungle, in place of democracy. Now, the representatives of the people will also have the opportunity to pay their respects to the heroes who are protecting democracy before they enter the shrine of democracy.

2 The time is not very far when our War Heroes will be honoured not only in our country but throughout the world. Our War Heroes are fighting with sacrifice of their lives to mark a full stop in Sri Lanka to international terrorism. Wherever in the world terrorism is defeated militarily it is a defeat for international terrorism. There was a time when no one thought our War Heroes will be able to give this example to the world. Our War Heroes are not only engaged in battling terrorism, they are also engaged in a great operation to ensure and provide the human rights and the necessities of the people.

3 When the first humanitarian operation to free Mavil Aru was launched, many said that our troops will not be able to free the area from terrorists without blasting the anicut. Having won at Mavil Aru when they proceeded to Sampur, we were told that even if Sampur is captured, we will not be able to fully govern it, because of the lack of support from the people of the area. Having liberated Sampur when our troops moved to free Vakarai, we were told that because of the fall of an important fortress of the terrorists, Prabhakaran will teach us a very good lesson. When
Vakarai was won and our troops moved to clear Thoppigala, there were
some even in this parliament who said that our troops were stranded in
the jungle of Thoppigala.

Now, when we have liberated Thoppigala and also held provincial
elections in the east, it is said that the eastern election was corrupt. They
are opposed to the war to save the country and to the election that
expresses the will of the people.

Friends, it is possible, if necessary, for us to use the armed forces
to erect fences and barricades to protect the country, but how can we
fence or barricade the mouths of those who hate the country? We are
politicians and representatives of the people. We are able to reply to
these allegations. We have a right to issue statements in response to
these charges in parliament, in accordance with the rules and privileges.
But at the theatres of war at Jaffna or Muhamalai, the troops who come
forward ready to sacrifice their lives facing up to enemy bullets, and their
officers, have no opportunity to respond to false charges and allegations.
Often they do not even have the chance to have their meals in the midst
of battle. I have often been told that much pain of mind is caused by these
charges to the troops who are ready to sacrifice their lives.

When we began we had to make a great commitment to build the
morale of our troops. It is not possible to win a war with weapons alone.
For this it is necessary for the soldier who goes into battle to have trust
and confidence in his leadership. In order to build their morale we had to
resolve many problems affecting them, such as service conditions,
weapons training, suitable housing, and education for their children.

By facing up to the international forces that were attempting to
make us withdraw the steps we had taken against terrorism, and by
replying to the false charges they made, we showed that we were not
ready to betray our troops. From the time it began, the battle against
terrorism, against Eelam; this battle to develop the country, has been
pulled back to serve the interest of various forces. This was due diverse
pressures such as international opinion or the interest of those in this
country who seek to profit from the slogan of peace. But we have not
made our troops take a single step forward for political reasons and also
they have not taken any step back due to any such interests or pressures,
and will not do so in the future too.

Friends, today even the innocent children who know nothing of
race, ethnicity or caste are being attacked by terrorists. The unarmed and
innocent civilians are attacked. This is what we saw in the past few days.
They are trying to get us entrapped. They are trying to provoke the
people, fan communalism and benefit by it. That is their present
necessity. The terrorists have plenty of time to plot how they can delay
the day our troops move into Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. That is their great
need. We have the need to give the Tami people in Kilinochchi and
Mullaitivu their democratic rights, as we did for the people in the East. But because the terrorists do not want that, they seek to create trouble in other areas and gain time to their advantage. It is to gain time that they seek to overthrow the government, use human rights and various other means to psychologically weaken us, and seek to defeat us by cutting off aid. All this is done to gain time for their purposes. But we do not have the time. We have to finish this battle against terrorism soon.

I call upon you to look at the great commitment and sacrifice of our troops, and calmly and courageously extend all your support to the security forces, the police and the government. I ask all political parties including the opposition, and various other organizations not to betray the victory we have won as a nation. If anyone tries to destroy this, it would amount to destroying a great mansion built upon the aspirations of the people.

Today, when faced with increased costs of goods, a high cost of living, being killed by mines and bombs, what these mothers of our War Heroes and our people ask is that we free the country, and create the conditions for all to live in a society without fear and mistrust. We are not ready to hand the menace of terrorism to the next generation. We look at these mothers who have given their children to the armed forces; the wives who have sent their husbands to the forces and give them all strength and encouragement, the children of our War Heroes, and we know that they have sacrificed their lives for the freedom of this country, to safeguard democracy in the country.

These mothers deserve not only honour from the entire country for the great sacrifice they made when they gave their children to save the country. Their children too deserve an entire country for their great sacrifice, So, I ask you not to criticize these Heroes of War and fool around with the children of these mothers.

As much as we have built this monument in granite for our Heroes of War, we must all have a monument to them in our own hearts, which will also be a monument to the mothers of these Heroes of War. I am certain that our people will always have these heroes in their hearts and minds.

As we remember and honour our Heroes of War, on behalf of the country and the nation, we pledge to complete the task of safeguarding democracy and restoring peace for which they sacrificed their lives and assure you all that the day is not far when we shall accomplish this.