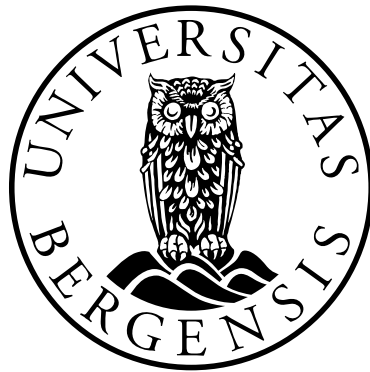# The Anti-Conversion Bill

Political Buddhism, 'Unethical Conversions' and Religious
Freedom in Sri Lanka

Michael Hertzberg

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Allegations that missionaries and aid workers are active in inducing conversions by means of aggressive external pressure have led to discussion of anti-conversion legislation in many countries, and the region of South Asia has emerged as the nexus of argumentative repository for such laws. In simplified terms, Christians claim that anti-conversion legislation violates the rights to proselytisation, and thus limits their religious freedom to manifest their religion, while Buddhist nationalists claim that aggressive and enticing missionary efforts violate the targets' right to maintain their religion. The study of anti-conversion legislation involves a variety of issues including religious pluralism, politicised religion and the politics of religious freedom. The issue of (anti)conversion throws light on the dynamics between religious groups, how religious groups are regulated by the state apparatus and how to understand proselytisation within international human rights instruments.

This thesis is not about religious conversions as such, but about how acts of conversion are interpreted and circumscribed by various encounters with the 'political'. 'The political' should here be understood in a Schmittian sense of a friend-enemy distinction, and not as politics in a narrow sense of party politics. My aim is to answer the following questions: How is conversion understood not only as a shift of religious allegiance, but also of political allegiance? What role do the issue of conversion have in electoral mobilization? How can we understand how the issue of proselytisation is negotiated within national and international legal instruments? The anti-conversion bill has spurred different and various encounters both within and between religious communities in Sri Lanka, and these encounters have taken place in different forums, both nationally and internationally.

One can argue that anti-conversion laws originate from a threefold objective. First, the dislike of religious gifts in particular and proselytisation in general has made anti-conversion laws a potent tool for religio-political mobilisation, especially for 'religious nationalists'. Second, such laws can be an effective regulatory mechanism against religious minorities. Third, most anti-conversion laws make a tacit assumption of state patronage, privileging the majority's religion. Hence, the

issue of anti-conversion laws elucidate a potent dynamic between religious nationalists, minorities and the state, and can be seen as an adjudicator of how religious pluralism is negotiated within a given nation-state. Moreover, anti-conversion laws challenge our understanding of religious freedom, not as something you either have or do not have, but in which ways practices are protected under the fold of human rights instruments.

By taking a micro-historical approach to the policy process of the anti-conversion bill, my focus has been to reveal how agency, affiliations and networks coalesce into political repertoires. An important aspect here is how these political repertoires evolve and develop in a particular context, with an aim to either support or oppose a given legislation. Taking place amidst a long-ranging civil war, the legal proposal in Sri Lanka has been through political turmoil, challenged various legal definitions both nationally and internationally, led to discussions and monitoring of religious freedom. However, this is not a commission report designed to document 'unethical' conversions or to measure the levels of 'religious freedom' in Sri Lanka today, but rather an analysis of why and how these encounters over proselytisation and 'unethical' conversions have taken place in Sri Lanka.

Anti-conversion legislation criminalises proselytisation by 'force, fraud and allurement'. While the terms 'force' and 'fraud' are already covered in the penal codes, the vital term here is that of allurement. Buddhist nationalists claim that evangelicals deliberately target vulnerable people for conversion, and that they engage in these processes either by direct bribery and allurement or more subtle forms of gaining the trust, usually of 'poor villagers'. Moreover, while it is precisely the practice of what is termed enticing and alluring conduct that religious nationalists find provocative in terms of proselytisation, it is the same terms that pose difficulties for explicating a clear legal formula for anti-conversion legislation that would find international consent, under the aegis of human rights instruments. Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur of freedom of religion or belief, noted that it was especially the notions of "inducement or allurement" that are the source of contention of how anti-conversion legislature is seen as explicated in "broad and vague terms".

It was the Buddhist nationalist party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), consisting solely of Buddhist monks, which submitted the anti-conversion bill in May 2004. However, when doing so, they side-lined another initiative by a Hindu-Buddhist committee that already had begun working on a draft of their own. The result was that the other religious communities on the island, even those earlier in support an anti-conversion law, perceived the submitted anti-conversion bill by Jathika Hela Urumaya as an oppressive mechanism of Buddhist nationalism. In the eyes of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists the official state patronage promised in Article 9 in the constitution, which guarantees Buddhism the 'foremost place', should be formalised and substantialised through the anti-conversion bill, as the practice of 'unethical' conversions are seen to bring an immediate danger to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. While the Sri Lankan state has been reluctant to enact anti-conversion laws, both Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians have been adamant in their activism to enact and oppose the bill.

By approaching anti-conversion legislation as a political repertoire wielded by religious nationalists, we see how the tensions surrounding religious pluralism are responded to and negotiated by the state. In short, anti-conversion laws challenge religious pluralism and notions of religious freedom, and are often, but not necessarily oppressive. The politics of conversion is often framed in the binary logic between religious pluralism and government regulations. (Anti) conversion can be understood in international, national and local dimensions, and a study dedicated to the policy process of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka spans over all these dimensions, throwing light on how religious diversity has been negotiated in Sri Lanka both by the state and by the religious actors themselves.

Contents

1. Introduction

Allegations that missionaries and aid workers are active in inducing conversions by the means of aggressive external pressure have led to discussion of anti-conversion legislation in many countries, and the region of South Asia in general, in particular India, has emerged as the nexus of argumentative repository for such laws. In simplified terms, Christians claim that anti-conversion legislation violates the rights to proselytisation, and thus limit their religious freedom to manifest their religion, while Buddhist nationalists claim that aggressive and enticing missionary efforts violate the targets' right to maintain their religion. The study of anti-conversion legislation involves a variety of issues including religious pluralism, politicised religion and the politics of religious freedom. The issue of (anti)conversion throws light on the dynamics between religious groups, how religious groups are regulated by the state apparatus and how to understand proselytisation within international human rights instruments.

There are compelling reasons for why a study on (anti) conversion in Sri Lanka may shed new light on these issues. Buddhism, in contrast to Hinduism, is itself a proselytising religion, which beckons attention not merely to proselytism as a phenomenon, but to the distinction between 'improper' and 'proper' proselytism. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been thriving in Sri Lanka for several decades, but while Buddhist nationalist groups have been at the forefront of drafting and demanding anti-conversion legislation, other minority groups have also been involved in the process of drafting legislation in Sri Lanka. In addition, political contexts such as the long-running civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil tigers (LTTE) (1983 – 2009) and the momentous Boxing Day tsunami in 2004 have facilitated an influx of foreign Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to the country. This NGOisation was already politicised in Sri Lanka since the 1990s, and the allegations of 'unethical' conversions have added an extra dimension to these tensions, especially concerning faith-based organisations (see Hertzberg 2015). However, in contrast to India, anti-conversion legislation was never enacted in Sri

Lanka, but was pending in different government commissions from 2004 until the dissolution of parliament in 2010. This makes the policy process of the bill in Sri Lanka all the more interesting as it involves adamant Buddhist nationalists, a reluctant state apparatus and international resistance against the bill in constant negotiation over the possibility of regulating proselytisation.

The issue of anti-conversion legislation cuts across issues relating to how religious diversity is negotiated. The anthropologist Das suggests that religious diversity can be understood along four scales; theological reflection, statecraft, mediation between and within religious communities and the process of subject formation (Das 2013). Proselytisation and (anti) conversion are phenomena that relate to all these aspects. However, this thesis focuses less on theological reflections upon conversion and the individual convert, and more on the elements of statecraft and mediation between and within religious communities. In a recent collaborative ethnography, Spencer et.al. observe how various religious communities in the east of Sri Lanka have come to a tacit agreement of non-proselytising, yet that this has been challenged by the arrival of evangelical churches that see proselytising as 'axiomatic activities' (Spencer et.al. 2015: 158). Community-wise conversion is often a contested practice, and occasionally such dislike of conversion transforms into a demand for anti-conversion legislation, which seeks to regulate conversions induced by 'force, fraud or allurement'.

The politics of regulating religion has become increasingly complex, and demands attention to the various modalities of regulating religion along local, national and international contexts. The anti-conversion bill has been negotiated between various religious communities in Sri Lanka with regards to the constitution and its validity in relation to international human rights standards. Thus, political repertoires, how actors forward their political agenda, are increasingly dependent upon legal competence, as I witnessed during an interview with a group of Buddhist nationalists in their process of re-working a major report from Sinhala to English on documented evidences of 'unethical' conversions. A note was scribbled in the draft margins: 'Put in more legal jargon here.' The note was clearly directed to the former Chief Justice who acted as an advisor for the project. Buddhist nationalists, but also

other involved religious communities, have either acquired or consulted legal advisors in their pursuit of either implementing or resisting the bill. Feener (2013) notes how religious pluralism is increasingly couched in the framework of legal and administrative management of populations, which reveals the complex nuances in terms of secularism and official state religions. As Feener observes (2013) "proselytization is enabled by, and simultaneously tests the limits of, religious pluralism" (Feener 2013: 11).

By approaching anti-conversion legislation as a political repertoire wielded by religious nationalists, we see how the tensions surrounding religious pluralism is responded to and negotiated by the state. The politics of conversion is often framed in the binary logic between religious pluralism and government regulations. Mayer observes that the most common line of conflict does not contest proselytism per se, but rather articulates the resistance against the notion of 'improper' proselytism (Mayer 2008). However, as we shall see, proselytism is not only a thorn in the flesh for various states (Hackett 2008), secular and otherwise, but it also challenges how to understand the notion of freedom of religion in various international human rights instruments (Danchin 2008, Taylor 2005, Stahnke 2001). While political parties considered as 'religious nationalists' have initiated most anti-conversion legislations, various states in South Asia have had, mildly speaking, complex, contrasting and confusing responses to these initiatives. Kong and Nair argue:

> The existence of religious structures and institutions is closely tied to the role of political authorities. In fact, the role of political authorities in supporting/ discouraging religion(s) is a significant factor in the flourishing of a religion, as political agendas are pivotal in resolving tensions among different religious groups, allowing freedom of religious expression and the existence of religiously plural societies, and permitting the development of religious infrastructures that may be pivotal for the survival of religious groups. (Kong and Nair 2014: 74)

Conversion and proselytisation are contested practices that are often met with regulations and restrictions. Kong and Nair (2014) argue that the spatial distribution of religious groups either shifts through conversion, immigration or reproduction, where religious conversion is a matter of prestige and loyalty, and often accused of being induced by socio-economic motivations. The allegedly 'unethical' conversions

involve a set of interrelated concerns, ranging from religio-political identity and perceived cultural condescension to an arena contesting the notions of freedom of religion and acceptable religious conduct vis-à-vis proselytisation. Rambo and Farhadian argue that "[n]ew ways of interpreting conversions are warranted because conversion encompasses religious, political, psychological, social, and cultural domains" (Rambo and Farhadian 2014: 2). A study on (anti) conversion invites us to re-imagine how conversion is understood by the communities affected by proselytisation.

This thesis, however, is not about religious conversions per se, but on how acts of conversion are conceived by various encounters with the 'political', ranging from how conversion is understood as a shift of political allegiance to their role in electoral mobilisation and the various 'encounters' around conversions both in national and international legal instruments. The 'political' is here understood through the Schmittian/Mouffian sense of enmity/agonism as a source of political division. Thus, the implications of these encounters are that conversions are not derived strictly from their religious meanings, but conversions can also be seen as acts of political resistance, located between tensions of individual conscience and political authority (van der Veer 1996: 11). At another level, allegations of 'unethical' conversions, and the subsequent legislation to curtail these phenomena, have led to religio-political mobilisation and demands for state patronage for the protection of Buddhism, challenging the Sri Lankan state to negotiate the 'privileged' position of Buddhism in comparison with other religious communities in the island. However, we should not simply see 'conversions' within the sphere of religion and politics, but also related to a wider sense of the 'political'. By expanding our field of interest, we see how conversions and proselytism are negotiated in the realm of 'religious freedom' through international human rights instruments, and other geopolitical actors. Steigenga observes that tensions surrounding proselytism and conversion, as well as the "links between religious organizations and geopolitical actors have become major topics for debate for policymakers, NGO activists, and religious leaders" (Steigenga 2014: 408).

By taking a micro-levelled approach to the policy process of the anti-conversion bill, we see that this process has spurred different and various encounters both within and between religious communities in Sri Lanka. It has been through political turmoil, challenged various legal definitions both nationally and internationally, led to discussions and monitoring of religious freedom, and the bill proposal in many ways reveals how religious pluralism can be understood in the context of official, formal and informal state patronage in contemporary Sri Lanka. However, this is not a commission report into the evidences of either 'unethical' conversions or a measurement of 'religious freedom' or the degree of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka today, but rather an analysis of why and how these encounters over proselytisation and 'unethical' conversions have taken place in Sri Lanka, and how to understand the unfolding political repertoires that have been wielded by particular actors over the period 2001–2011. My argument is not only that religio-political mobilisation, especially Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, has been prominent in this period, but also that the techniques and repertoires have been rich and evolving throughout the conflict over 'unethical' conversions, involving a set of legal disputes, human rights issues, political violence, monitoring efforts and bureaucratic endeavours, drawing on both formal and informal patronage networks. While the Sri Lankan state has been reluctant to enact anti-conversion laws, both Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians have been adamant in their activism to enact and oppose the bill. (Anti) conversion can be understood in international, national and local dimensions, and this study dedicated to the policy process of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka spans over all these dimensions, throwing light on how religious diversity has been negotiated in Sri Lanka both by the state and by the religious actors themselves.

The anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka

The influx of Christianity has a long history in Sri Lanka, with a complex and often conflictual relationship with other religious groups. Nevertheless, my argument is that the conflict over 'unethical' conversions is of recent origin, and mostly involving a

set of new actors on the political scene. K.M. de Silva noted already in 1998 how the allegations of aggressive proselytisation led to demands of legislative action:

> There is one significant difference between the charismatic churches and all the other Christian groups in Sri Lanka. All the others have accepted the necessity for a more limited role for the Christian community than in pre-independence times and have long since given up proselytization. The charismatic churches refuse to do this. In engaging in subtle and sometimes aggressive proselytization, they come up against protests of the vocal spokesmen for the Buddhists who in turn demand action from the state – in form of legislation – against it. (…) For the charismatic churches the path ahead is a stormy one if they ignore that policy of self-restraint, since it will bring them into confrontation with Buddhist activists. (de Silva 1998: 117-118)

The analysis by K.M. de Silva highlights two groups, charismatic churches and Buddhist activists, and these two groups have been the main protagonists in the anti-conversion dispute in Sri Lanka. But as we will see throughout the thesis, a variety of other religious actors have also been implicated during the process, notably Hindu and Catholic lawyers, looking for a compromise solution.

The anti-conversion bill was first proposed in 2004 by *Jathika Hela Urumaya*, a newly emergent political party consisting solely of Buddhist monks, and it sought to regulate 'unethical conversions', that is conversion by force, fraud or allurement, which they accused in particular evangelical Christians of conducting in Sri Lanka. Evangelical Christians, on the other hand, experienced the bill proposal as a wider attempt of curtailing evangelical activity in the country, and threatening their religious freedom to proselytise. On one level, the bill proposal challenged the standards of acceptable religious conduct, especially in terms of proselytism, but this particular negotiation nevertheless triggered international repercussions in how to define 'freedom of religion'. While evangelical and Christian organisations perceive that their religious right to do missionary work is jeopardised by such regulative efforts, Buddhists claim their religious freedom is threatened by coercive missionaries who exploit vulnerable persons and situations for inducing salvation. However, more issues are at stake, and Buddhist nationalists demand state protection of Buddhism in the face of 'aggressive missionaries':

The current conflict over conversion in Sri Lanka is closely tied to disputes over the *identity* of the state. Debates over religious and national identities, human rights, cultural sovereignty, and the "foremost place" granted to Buddhism in the country's constitution frame the politics of conversion in Sri Lanka. (Berkwitz 2008b: 199)

The conflict over 'unethical conversions' is not only a conflict over the individual's right to change one's religion, rather the anti-conversion bill is cast by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists as a protective measure for the Sinhala-Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka. While Buddhism is already guaranteed 'the foremost place' within the constitution, the nationalists ask the state to translate this phrase into an active stance of protecting Buddhism in the country. The debate on 'unethical conversions' also triggers several nationalist narratives in how they assert that there should be an intimate link between '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (country, nation, religion), a slogan that has been used to designate the commodification of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists claim that Christian evangelists deliberately target the Sri Lankan countryside and the poor villages, first entering through the guise as benevolent NGOs to gain the trust of the local community as those are most prone to give in to the 'allurements' and 'bribery' offered for conversion. The villages are called 'the core of the nation,' and Sinhala-Buddhists fear that the social texture of their culture is in danger by the exploitive activities of the Christian missionaries/NGOs.

On the other hand, Christians in Sri Lanka feel that the anti-conversion bill can be a powerful instrument to wield as an exclusionary measure against religious minorities in the country, and warns that the bill can fall into misuse if it is passed. To prove the exclusionary intentions of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists they have documented and reported numerous incidents of violence against Christians, and claim that the anti-conversion bill would simply be a legal form of religious discrimination. While the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists almost exclusively have mobilised within the context of the nation-state, the Christian opposition towards the anti-conversion bill has been international in its reach. Through the use of various international Christian networks, the Christians in Sri Lanka have been able to receive international support both from other states, particularly the U.S., and various

international pressure groups. Thus, the government of Sri Lanka has been forced to mediate between these two forces; the national pressure from the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists against the international pressure mounted from various Christian pressure organisations.

Situated in the midst of a bitter civil war between the Sri Lankan government (GoSL) and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), the political party of Jathika Hela Urumaya was in vehement opposition to the Norwegian-led peace facilitation. The peace negotiations broke down in 2003, and with the sudden death of a popular monk in December 2003, allegedly killed in a Christian conspiracy, Jathika Hela Urumaya emerged to front the opposition towards further negotiations (and to end the war by military means) and bring forth an anti-conversion bill for the protection of Buddhism on the island. With the escalation of the civil war, the government needed the support of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists to continue the warfare, yet by passing the anti-conversion bill, the government would face international criticism. Thus, the anti-conversion bill provides a very good case to study the relations between political Buddhism, religious minorities and the state in Sri Lanka.

The role of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been paradoxically portrayed as ranging between, on the one hand, hegemonic dominance of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists in relation to the Sri Lankan state to, on the other hand, that of utter political desperation as mere 'stage-props' for popular politicians (see Seneviratne 1999). Hence, a central question is how we can interpret the degree of political influence of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists; are they merely powerful politicians' instruments as a form of political paraphernalia, or do they have an extraordinary capacity to be decisive in certain political issues at stake? How far does the influence of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists reach? What repercussions will this influence have for the religious minorities in Sri Lanka?

Research questions

In this thesis I will focus upon the political mobilisation around the anti-conversion bill and the subsequent 'unethical conversions'-debate and analyse how given actors

have chosen to wield their support or opposition. Thus, my key orientation has been to follow the various political formations that have either arisen to or involved themselves in this debate, be they Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or secular-minded. How have they been affiliated with the debate, and how have they positioned themselves in relation to other actors? Which political repertoire have they enacted to promote their views and influence the political process? The research questions that guide this study are:

- How has the political mobilisation among different stakeholders, in relation to the anti-conversion bill, unfolded through the means of different institutions/groups, their affiliations and repertoires, and how has this affected the policy process of the legal proposal?

- How can we understand the 'unethical conversion' debate in relation to the polyvalent meanings the different groups invest in the concept 'religious freedom'? How and why do Buddhist interests use the concept of religious freedom in favour of regulating aggressive proselytisation, while Christian groups evoke religious freedom to resist the very same regulations?

- In what ways does the anti-conversion bill challenge the relations between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka, and how does this affect the religious communities in the country?

When addressing the debate surrounding the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, both rhetoric and social action is an interwoven part of the contextual parameters that demand explanation. How the particular actors are able to frame and narrate the given events by their rhetorical ability may be decisive in how the issue at hand is understood in a wider context, especially within legal trajectories. This thesis aims to articulate how given actors have acted and responded in certain ways at certain times in order to navigate their political objectives to the best of their ability given the contextual opportunities and limitations.

My title *The Anti-Conversion Bill: Political Buddhism, 'Unethical Conversions' and Religious Freedom in Sri Lanka* hinges on particular interests. Firstly it is the anti-conversion bill which has been the focal point in generating whom to speak to, which actors to include, and to concentrate on the given period 2001–2011. While my study includes a wide variety of different actors, both from various religious as well as non-religious organisations, I have decided to highlight

the role of political Buddhism in particular. This is due to the fact that it was a Buddhist political party that launched the bill in parliament in 2004, but also because the issue of 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill should be seen as a demand for state protection of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. By putting 'unethical conversions' in inverted commas, I allude to how both the evidential status of such conversion is contested, but nevertheless informs how to approach the matter. I am tempted to put 'religious freedom' in inverted commas as well, as my thesis has no ambitions of providing a general assessment of the situation of religious freedom in Sri Lanka, but rather elucidate how the concept has been used as a rhetorical tool in garnering support both for and against the bill proposal. Jelen and Wilcox (2002a) suggest that the nexus between religion and politics is most distinctly observable when social and political functions of religion are challenged. With the anti-conversion bill we see how religious pluralism is negotiated in the state of Sri Lanka when Buddhist nationalists demand state patronage, while evangelical Christians stir international attention against the bill, claiming that their religious freedom is under threat.

Anti-conversion bill and 'unethical conversions'

The study of the anti-conversion legislation and the wider discourse surrounding the alleged 'unethical conversions' taking place in Sri Lanka are intimately connected, but they should not be seen as the same thing. Anti-conversion legislation is but one attempt to solve the problem of 'unethical conversions,' in addition to other attempts such as interreligious councils, NGO regulation, restricted access for missionaries, regulations upon places of worship and other various means of addressing the interaction and regulation between various religious groups in Sri Lanka. Several of my informants, both Buddhist and Christian, said that the complaints of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka go back to 1977, when President J.R. Jayawardene liberalised the economy in the country, yet others would narrate the relations between Christians (in an all-encompassing term) back to the arrival of Portuguese in 1505, and the subsequent colonisation of Sri Lanka.

The first scholarly address of the tension around 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka, at least to my knowledge, is Sasanka Perera's essay "Politics of Religious Competition: Evangelization in Contemporary Sri Lanka" (Perera 1995). This essay was followed up by another article on the same topic, but broader and more expanded in 1998: "New Evangelical Movements and Conflict in South Asia: Sri Lanka and Nepal in Perspective". Perera analysed the conflict around 'unethical conversions' in terms of increased religious competition and new actors, greater visibility and aggressiveness among evangelical agents. He also noted how the role of conspiracies has fertile ground in countries with socio-economic instability. After this, the interest in the relations between Christians and Buddhists in Sri Lanka was kept on standby, until Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) proposed the anti-conversion bill: *Prohibition of Forcible Conversions* in May 2004.

With the formation of JHU, and the subsequent bill proposal in 2004, the interest in the relations and dynamics between Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka has sharply increased, both in academia and in general. The Sri Lankan journal *Dialogue*, published by The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, devoted an entire number to the discussion of "The Religious Conversion Debate" in 2005/2006, even though the contributions were more philological than ethnographical in nature. Deegalle (2004) examined the decision of the political monks in JHU to enter the parliamentary elections, and identified both how these monks have been dependent upon an organisational heritage, as well as how the current situation in 2003/2004, especially with the death of Ven. Soma, compelled the monks to emerge politically (see also Deegalle 2006b). One of the most important factors in this decision to form a party was to launch anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. Owens (2006a and 2006b) has probed into the legal technicalities of the proposed anti-conversion legislation and examined the various proposals, and argued how certain 'incorporation cases' can be seen as preconditions for the anti-conversion proposals. Matthews (2007) and Berkwitz (2008b) have both addressed how the politics of conversion has led to an intense mobilisation both from Buddhist nationalists nationally and various Christian groups both within Sri Lanka, as well as through international networks. They argue that while the government needed the support

from the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists to end the war against LTTE, they could ill-afford to displease the U.S. and the rest of the international community by passing the bill, and thus the government tried to avoid taking a stance on the bill altogether. Two interrelated questions that have been posed are whether 'unethical conversions' really are a problem, and whether anti-conversion legislation is the right remedy. These two interrelated questions have political potency in Sri Lanka, and several actors have entered the discourse to articulate their views on the matter.

Recently, several scholars have broadened the academic studies of religion in Sri Lanka. Orlando Woods' PhD dissertation, *Evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Growth* (2012), looks into the dynamics of evangelical expansion in Sri Lanka. Neena Mahadev examines into the anti-conversion bill and the ethics of religious attraction (2013), and Oshan Fernando (2014) has written an essay on the identity formation among evangelical Christians in the south of Sri Lanka. Benjamin Schonthal has written historically on the topic of religious freedom and the constitution, and probed the development of various legal formulations in relation to religion in Sri Lanka, and which implications these formulations present in the contemporary situation (Schonthal 2014a and 2014b). All of these works inform the present thesis, yet my focus differs from theirs in that my key emphasis is on the policy process of the anti-conversion bill, which enables me to look at the various alliances and political repertoires that have been enacted by different political and religious groups during the period 2001–2011. My main emphasis has been put on political Buddhism, not only because the actual bill was proposed by Jathika Hela Urumaya, but also because the process of the anti-conversion bill reveals formations and alliances between various religious groups in the island. Moreover the anti-conversion bill is an ideal case to study the links between political Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state.

I will argue that anti-conversion legislature originate from a threefold objective. First, the dislike of religious gifts in particular and proselytisation in general has made anti-conversion legislature a potent tool for religio-political mobilisation, especially for 'religious nationalists'. Second, such laws can be an effective regulatory mechanism against religious minorities. Third, most anti-

conversion legislations make a tacit assumption of state patronage, privileging the majority religion. Hence, the issue of anti-conversion legislature elucidates a potent dynamic between religious nationalists, minorities and the state, and can be seen as an adjudicator of how religious pluralism is negotiated within a given nation-state. In India, Osuri (2013), Fernandes (2011) and Jenkins (2008) argue that Hindu nationalists' primary motivation behind anti-conversion legislature is not to find a balance between the rights and boundaries of proselytisation, but that the mechanisms of anti-conversion legislation are intended as an arbiter of religious identity where Hindu identity shall have supremacy within the Indian nation-state. Hence, in order to understand the background and context for the emergence of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka, elaboration upon the dynamics of political Buddhism is needed. While the issue of anti-conversion legislation throws light on questions of legal mechanisms and religious pluralism in official state-religion relations, the analysis of (anti) conversion should also go beyond the legal sphere in how Buddhist nationalists engage in various patronage relations with state actors and bureaucratic offices that enable them to wield exclusionary violence, attain impunity and encourage restrictive regulations upon religious minorities.

Political Buddhism

Abeysekara identifies the question of religion and politics in Sri Lanka as both a disciplinary and a native Sinhala Buddhist discourse. On one hand, he is interested in how academic disciplines construct the relation of Buddhism and politics as a 'problem', and how it is tacitly asserted that religion and politics should rely on their supposed original (Western) separation. On the other hand, he identifies the native discourse of Buddhism and politics in the debate between politicians, among them Jayawardene, and monks in the 1940s, and a later debate on the role of the monk in the 1980s, as instances where the politicians called for an apolitical Buddhism (Abeysekara 2004).

Abeysekara argues that most scholars, instead of probing these discourses analytically, "uncritically reproduced one authoritative ideological discourse among

others" (Abeysekara 2004: 70). From this native discourse, scholars have adapted and constructed Buddhism as something inherently apolitical, and based their treaties upon certain values of Buddhism (non-violence, peace, inclusion, righteousness and tolerance) as the true exemplars of 'real' Buddhism (Abeysekara 2004: 80). The only way to save Buddhism is to depoliticise it, in other words, reform it. "Only then can Buddhism do its work of creating a 'truly' 'inclusive' Buddhist society in Sri Lanka" (Abeysekara 2004: 77). There is, among scholars, an "image of a supposed apolitical (and hence authentic) canonical Buddhism" that serves as a moral high ground, and that can be recovered by the process of reform (Abeysekara 2004: 75). Abeysekara asserts:

> My point is not that Buddhism and politics are inseparable, and vice versa, but that the emergence and submergence of questions about what should and should not constitute the identity of Buddhism or politics are made possible by particular shifting debates, and the theorization of them can never make them available for canonization. (Abeysekara 2004: 80)

Abeysekara's critique considers how there is a mixture of normative and descriptive elements in the evaluation of the relationship between Buddhist monks and politics in Sri Lanka. When scholars leave the descriptive analytical field of observing, and begin to voice their opinion on how matters should be, they are participating in another discourse. The problem arises when the scholar participates in these two different discourses, the analytical and the normative, interchangeably, without distinguishing between them. Abeyesekara notes that scholars argue, and tacitly assert, that religion and politics should be separated. He traces this attitude both to the original separation of religion and state in Europe, and to a tendency among scholars to favour one side, those who see Buddhism as apolitical, of the native discourse in Sri Lanka concerning political monks. The effect is that political monks, and political Buddhism, are seen as a problem. In light of this, Imtiyaz is one of those who argue that the role of political Buddhism seems to be one of the most urgent problems in Sri Lanka: "Sri Lanka's political class and politicians need to adopt progressive steps to de-politicize Buddhism from politics" (Imtiyaz 2010: 170). Consequently, Imtiyaz equates political Buddhism with what he terms Sinhalese-Buddhist extremism, whose

'alleged' main agenda is to create a dominant Sinhalese-Buddhist state in relation to ethnic and religious minorities (Imtiyaz 2010: 164). The question that thus arises is whether these scholars are against political Buddhism as a political practice, or whether they are merely antagonistic of the agenda of the political monks. It is thus reasonable to ask whether it is specifically political Buddhism that provokes different scholars, or if it rather is their political demands?[1]

Another way of approaching Buddhism and politics is through the binary composition of political Buddhism vs. Buddhist politics. Schalk distinguishes between political Buddhism and Buddhist politics, explaining that the first one seeks to operationalise/instrumentalise Buddhist values for political aims, while the latter aims at introducing Buddhist values in society (Schalk 2007: 139). While Schalk does not equate political Buddhism with Sinhalese-Buddhist extremism, as the ultimate aims may vary, he sees political Buddhism as "controversial because it subordinates Buddhist values to political values" (Schalk 2007: 139). Even though Schalk identifies several forms of political Buddhism, his attention is drawn towards one specific type: Sinhala-Buddhist ethno nationalism, which includes JHU, and promotes ethnic homogenisation and defends the integrity of the unitary state (Schalk 2007: 139). However, the monks in Jathika Hela Urumaya were not the first monks to enter parliament in Sri Lanka. This happened for the first time when Ven. Baddegama Samhita was elected as an individual candidate in 2001. Ven. Baddegama Samhita, who was considered a 'peace monk' supporting reconciliation in the civil war, did not generate any academic interest, even though he, as a monk, was a political pioneer.[2] As political monks are able to espouse different political ideologies, they all need to negotiate the legitimacy of their role as political subjects.[3] While Schalk elaborates lucidly upon the concept of political Buddhism, it is harder to understand what is

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[1] For example, the mass mobilization of monks in political demonstrations in Burma in 1988 and 2007 is generally not seen as problematic, but rather as 'the last hope for democratic opposition'. This attitude can however be explained by the rebellious monks in Burma that de-legitimize the military regime, whereas the militant-minded monks in Sri Lanka legitimate the 'illegitimate' civil war against the LTTE.
[2] He was, however, mentioned in Seneviratne (1999) before he was elected.
[3] How political monks are seen in different national contexts, for example in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, differs considerably.

meant by Buddhist politics, and how such a concept avoids falling into the trap of constructing 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Buddhism.

My understanding of political Buddhism evolves from a fourfold concern; subject formation, institutions, affiliations and ideology. With the notion of subject formation I like to emphasise the implications it has for certain Buddhist actors, both individually and in groups, to engage politically. Rather than labelling them as 'authentic' or 'inauthentic,' Buddhist political actors, in particular Buddhist monks, need to cross a threshold of societal norms in order to engage in politics (see Hertzberg 2014b, 2010). On an individual level this is seen by the controversies monks stir if they run for political office. There are various ways to legitimate the entry into politics for monks, where one strategy is to frame the entry as a temporary exception. The most common form of Buddhist political engagement is through activist and interest groups, often created ad hoc, external to the political establishment. Hence, the decision by Jathika Hela Urumaya to contest elections is unprecedented in the Buddhist world, in terms of a group of Buddhist monks seeking political office together. Seemingly, we have moved from the category 'subject formation' into 'institutions,' and these two categories are often interlinked in various ways.[4] Different ways of forming organisations and other political templates are discussed further in chapter 5. The sangha, the Buddhist clergy, very rarely make any direct political statements, but often mediate their demands through different interest organisations. With the category 'affiliations' I both allude to how Buddhist monks both engage in networks of Buddhist temples, but also how individual monks and Buddhist-political groups often are part of wider patrimonial networks, both in the respective area of interest, but also as mediators toward bureaucracy and politicians. Political Buddhism has by scholars usually been described through the ideology of similar minded Buddhist actors, where the category of 'ideology' has brought them together at a common template of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

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[4] Heslop (2014) notes how the head monk in Dambulla is the leader of every organization he participates in, due to the fact that lay people cannot have a leading position over monks.

A dominant approach to explaining the ideological foundations of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is to contrast the 'peaceful and nonviolent' tradition of Buddhism on the one hand with the virulent strains of violent and chauvinistic Buddhist nationalism/ extremism/ fundamentalism on the other. My opinion is that such an analytical approach runs a high risk of ending up in an authentic/inauthentic dilemma sketched out by Abeysekara (2004). However, some of these approaches are also developed on the often fluctuating basis of political Buddhism, where Buddhist-political organisations come and go, while the ideological foundations persist. In a publication from 1998 Holt acknowledges how he fails to identify 'Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists' from the present institutional affiliations, and he therefore continues to define political Buddhism by how these 'Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists'[5] intimately link their version of Buddhism to political ideology (Holt 1998: 189). The emergence of Buddhist-political activism is closely linked to patronage relations between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka, and ideological sentiments are often built upon this assumption that Sri Lanka should be a Buddhist country. It is my opinion that these ideological sentiments are better understood if they are derived from their societal and political context, and not from the soteriological tradition of Buddhism.

The issue of subject formation is also better understood from an angle of societal and political contexts, and not through an idealised image of what monkhood entails. In her book *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar* (2011), Juliane Schober takes a decisive stance against the mundane/sacred divide of understanding political monks and rather explores how 'Buddhist conceptions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of political power in social, economic, and political realm' (Schober 2011: 11). Thus, there is no need to portray political monks as paradoxical figures because of their political involvement. Yet the distinction between *lokuttara* and *laukika* do have a normative element to it, which often enter

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[5] Bartholomeusz and de Silva (1998: 2) argues that we can speak of Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism, as it shares many common characteristics with other fundamentalist movements, such as ethno-religious identity, the notion of sacred land (dhammadipa) and the position of 'mythohistory' (Mahavamsa) The term 'fundamentalism' may have comparative advantages, but as my project is not of a comparative nature, I will myself abstain from using it.

the discourses and debates around the legitimacy of the political monks. According to the monastic law (*vinaya*) there is a sharp distinction between mundane affairs (*laukika*) and other-worldly nirvana-seeking efforts (*lokuttara*). This divide has often been the point of departure of exploration into the dynamics of monks and politics, and how to conceptualise political Buddhism as a phenomenon. This distinction is important to keep in mind when explaining the political behaviour of Buddhist monks, it is not a necessity that this cleavage should be supported, by adopting native discourses, or reproduced uncritically by scholars.

While Holt observed in 1998 that there were no clear organisations or institutions to label as Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalists at that time, different Buddhist-political formations have emerged in Sri Lanka historically. These political emergences did not only provide opportunities for political monks, but have also been decisive in how Buddhist-political mobilisation has been formed in Sri Lanka the last decade. Some of the earliest works on political Buddhism, Heinz Bechert's *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* (1966), Urmila Phadnis' *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka* (1976) and D. E. Smith's *Religion and Politics in Burma* (1965), base their key understanding of political Buddhism as articulated through the notions of institutional history (or lack thereof), affiliations and the political repertoires of Buddhist actors, be they individuals, organisations or institutions. They also cover perhaps the most important formative period of political Buddhism, namely the 1940s–1960s, when the basic rights of Buddhist monks were articulated. Perspectives on the institutional side of political Buddhism have not been neglected in Sri Lanka, but they have usually been an undercurrent in how to explain Buddhist political mobilisation. The organisational formations of various nationalists groups in the 1980s have received attention from various scholars (Schalk 1988, Amunugama 2003, Matthews 1988, Manor 1994, Matthews 1996, Abeysekara 2004). The formation of Jathika Hela Urumaya in 2004 has also elicited widespread interest (Deegalle 2004, Deegalle 2006, DeVotta 2007, Devotta and Stone 2008, Imtiyaz 2010).

Some of my informants linked the period 2001–2011 to what they called a 'saffronisation of politics' in Sri Lanka. Their argument was that the relations and

affiliations between the state and the *sangha* (monkhood), the politicians and the monks, were stronger than ever. These affiliations, the patronage networks, both enable and disable certain actors from various forms of behaviour, and they are important for the unfolding of various political repertoires among religious actors in Sri Lanka. My emphasis on political repertoires as a key analytical tool for understanding the processes surrounding the anti-conversion bill is due to how the notion of political repertoires cuts across the entire span of subject formation, institutions, affiliations and ideology. By taking the anti-conversion bill as a focal point to view the nature of religio-political mobilisation in Sri Lanka, this enables me to identify a set of given actors, both Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and Christian pressure groups, as well as various other entities that have had interests in the matter. My main focus is upon institutions/organisations, their affiliations and their political repertoires. This allows me to see both how certain organisations develop a distinct form of political behaviour in relation to the anti-conversion bill, and how such political repertoires can be both imitated and countered by other organisations. The thesis is broadly divided into two parts. The first will analyse various forms of religio-political formations and political mobilisation. The second part pays greater emphasis on 'religious freedom' and how distinct political repertoires have been developed in relation to the policy process surrounding the anti-conversion bill.

The politics of religious freedom

This PhD-project arises from a larger project on *Regulating Religion: Secularism and Religious Freedom in the Global Era*, led by Kari Telle (CMI). One of the major ambitions of the project is to go beyond the familiar pieties of seeing 'religious freedom' as a marker of liberal tolerance and to examine how 'religious freedom' is produced and negotiated in contingent encounters between legal regimes and religio-political activists. Thus, this project is situated within an emergent scholarship where religious freedom is not by virtue attached to neutrality and universality, but understood as "context bound and inseparable from contingencies of politics, power, and history" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 1). Further, this contextual approach

places emphasis on the political roles of religion and the respective societal position and political influence within a given nation-state.

Rather than ascribing an either-or attitude of the religious market structure vs. the ideational foundations, my basic supposition is that political repertoires arise from a complex melange of societal position and influence, norms and rules of a religious tradition and international standards of 'morality, legality and legitimacy'. A look at the religious market structure, what Jelen and Wilcox name 'the one, the few and the many' (Jelen and Wilcox 2002b: 314) informs my basic presupposition that Buddhism, the dominant religion in Sri Lanka, is an active part in securing regulations on proselytism through the state apparatus. Moreover, Gill argues that the market structure explains the will to regulate religious minorities, and that approaches on ideational foundations should be informed by an interest-based reading of how religious pluralism is negotiated in a particular nation-state:

> Spiritual monopolies that have a captured market prefer to keep the barriers to entry in the religious marketplace high. Although rhetorically in favour of freedom of conscience, they will seek laws that require minority religions to gain the government's official permission to proselytize, restrict visas on foreign missionaries, impose zoning and impose media restriction on alternative faiths, and so on. (Gill 2008: 44)

The laws and rules regulating religious communities are the products of negotiations between religious leaders, activists, bureaucrats and politicians. They are contingent products shaped in history, embedded in path dependency, and may not only take form as restrictions but also as endorsements of particular religious groups and practices. Proselytisation and conversion emerge as particularly potent topics within this scheme of regulation, as any regulations of the subject often compromise either proselytisation efforts or the targets of proselytisation (Feener & Finucane 2013). Moreover, Feener and Finucane argue that state apparatuses have numerous ways to regulate practices of proselytisation, and anti-conversion laws are but one such mechanism applied to regulate certain religious behaviours. My emphasis on the analytical concept of political repertoires is precisely to see how religio-political actors are both enabled and disabled by certain ideological foundations, their position

in a nation-state, and how they wield their interests through various networks of influence.

One problem with regulations on proselytism is that such mechanisms face various restraints in face of the formulations articulated in Article 18 of the ICCPR,[6] which guarantees the right to manifestation of belief. While anti-conversion legislation seeks to legislate upon 'improper' conversions through the notions of 'force, fraud and/or allurement', Christian complaint is that such laws violate and infringe upon the freedom of belief enjoyed through the international mechanisms of human rights. Mahmood and Danchin claim that the concept of freedom of religion is embedded in a conceptual architecture where religious practices are pending between inviolability and regulation that serve to "generate the distinctive antinomies and contradictions that arise in struggles over its meaning, justification and realization" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 4). One such contradiction is the issue of proselytisation, where the international human rights mechanisms are generally silent on the issue of proselytism, which opens for whether the practice of porselytisation enjoys legal 'immunity' or falls under the scope of legitimate regulation. However, Mahmood and Danchin also observe how religious freedom can be rhetorically re-described to function as a technology of state governance, in that laws and regulations can be framed in such ways as to protect majority religious groups in relation to minority groups.

The notion of religious freedom can be used by state apparatuses to justify oppressive mechanisms against religious practices, but in the case of Sri Lanka we have seen that the state abandoned the idea of regulating proselytisation after international pressure on the issue of religious freedom. Hence, we need to be sensitive to how the concept of 'religious freedom' engages in different modalities of power and is connected to salient discourses of morality, legality and legitimacy. The

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[6] Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): 1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice. 3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

religious market structure *ideally* indicates that Sri Lanka should be favourable to regulate upon proselytisation, as Buddhist nationalists, the dominant religion, are adamant to push forth such legislation. Despite the fact that dominant forces are in favour of the bill, we see that the government in Sri Lanka has been reluctant to pass the bill, due to the international pressure on the issue. As this thesis will show, evangelical Christians have been able to use religious freedom as a rhetorical device to gain international attention to their own grievances, by portraying themselves as a 'persecuted minority', victim of oppressive laws and political violence. Considering how religious freedom may be viewed as a "fractious, polyvalent concept unfolding through divergent histories in differing political orders" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 1), this thesis will explore how 'religious freedom' is produced and negotiated in contingent encounters between legal regimes and religio-political activists, engages in different modalities of power that can be untapped in various ways.

This study of (anti) conversion in Sri Lanka probes into the boundaries of religious pluralism, the limits of Buddhist nationalism and how the concept of religious freedom engages in different modalities of power. Buddhist nationalists have wagered specific demands from the Sri Lankan state, that the state should substantialise their commitments entailed in Article 9 of the constitution, guaranteeing Buddhism 'the foremost place'. On one hand the anti-conversion bill shows how Buddhist nationalists are willing to form a political template of their own, as they did with the emergence of the Buddhist party Jathika Hela Urumaya. However, on the other hand the policy process of the bill reveals the limitations of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, in that their demands are not met by the state despite favourable circumstances. Evangelical Christians have been able to voice their cause through discourses of morality, legality and legitimacy and received substantial international backing for their opposition against the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka. In a peculiar fashion Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians have ended up in a mutual regulative stalemate: where Buddhist nationalists regulate evangelical churches through informal patronage networks and bureaucratic measures, evangelical Christians have developed fine-tuned monitoring mechanisms that bring international attention to Christian grievances. However, while both parties

have invested considerable energy into supporting and opposing the legislation, neither party has shown commitment to actually discuss the ramifications of proselytisation within the bounds of political freedom more generally.

Summary of the thesis

The first four chapters deal with introduction (Chapter 1), methodological approaches (Chapter 2), a historical introduction to religion and the state in Sri Lanka (Chapter 3) and the theoretical foundations for the thesis and the concepts employed (Chapter 4). This thesis follows a binary structure of composition; the first part (chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8) will predominantly deal with religio-political mobilisation and the emergent claim-making by Buddhist nationalists, while the second part (chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12) will go into depth on how different political repertoires unfold in the nexus between contentious politics, the state and the potent idiom of religious freedom.

The first chapter on religio-political mobilization, 'The Anti-Conversion Bill and Political Alliances' (Chapter 5), elaborates on the various (religio-)political groups that have involved themselves in the issues of anti-conversion legislation, and discusses how various alliances have taken form, both as a consolidation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, but also how various Christian fractions, especially the Catholics and evangelicals, have faced danger of fragmentation. 'Narratives of Conversion: Subversion, Conviction and Political Allegiance' (Chapter 6), deals with different ways to understand conversions in Sri Lanka. While Buddhists romanticise 'intellectual' conversions, evangelicals argue that conversion only happens by a 'change of heart,' which renders the allegations of 'unethical' conversions into absurdity, as evangelicals do not believe that conversions can be induced. At the end the chapter looks into the relations between religious conversions and political allegiance and argues how conversions can be seen as a form of mutiny. Matters of political allegiance are further elaborated in Chapter 7, 'Conversions and Conspiracies: Nationalism at the End of Time', where we follow how the identity of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is based upon the commodification of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (country, nation, religion), and how political mobilisation is imperative in

times of crisis. The last chapter of the religio-political mobilisation part, 'The Foremost Place of Article 9: Buddhist Nationalism and State Patronage', discusses how the demand for an anti-conversion bill can be seen in relation to the privileges given to Buddhism in Article 9 of the constitution, and how Buddhist nationalists demand a formalisation of the official state patronage guaranteed in the constitution.

The second part of the thesis is structured around political repertoires and the potent idiom of religious freedom. Divided after different forms of political repertoires, this part will go into depth in how the anti-conversion bill (and the wider debate on 'unethical' conversions) can be seen through the enactment of different political repertoires. The first chapter in this part, chapter 9, 'The Aporias of Proselytism: Freedom of Religion and the Anti-Conversion Bill in Sri Lanka', probes the aporias in the international human rights instruments on proselytisation, and discusses how anti-conversion legislation may bridge a gap in how to legislate 'improper' proselytism. While bringing in other examples from India, I here follow the political process of the bill and argue how, and in what ways, it failed in Sri Lanka. While the development of a legal proposition can be seen as a form of political repertoire, the enactment of political violence against Christian churches is another form of repertoire available to Buddhist nationalists. This issue is elaborated in Chapter 10, 'Buddhist Strongholds, Exclusionary Violence and Patronage Politics in Sri Lanka'. However, the combination of a 'discriminatory' legal proposal along with incidents of exclusionary violence enabled evangelical churches to gain widespread international support for their struggle in Sri Lanka. Chapter 11 goes deeper into the importance of monitoring and documenting 'facts' of religious freedom. The last chapter, 'Political Repertoires and Religious Freedom', observes how the anti-conversion legislation has been encompassed by various other laws and bureaucratic endeavors, and discusses how the various political repertoires can be understood in relation to religious freedom. At last, the conclusion revisits the various findings in the thesis, and brings together the main arguments.

2. Methodological Reflections

A main focus in this thesis is to study the various encounters that have been generated by the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka. By this, I do not only mean encounters between religious groups, but also how the issue of the anti-conversion bill and the discourse on 'unethical' conversions have involved different encounters with non-religious institutions, such as courtrooms, human rights instruments, bureaucracy, etc. This chapter will discuss the various sources of material that have been used throughout the thesis, and how the focus on encounters entails particular methodological reflections.

Material collected and methodological approach

The methodological approach in this project is threefold: (1) qualitative interviews and participant observation among activists in Sri Lanka, (2) analysis of legal documents and reports and (3) discourse analysis of 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill in the political/policy process. This threefold approach seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the different aspects of the controversy surrounding conversions in Sri Lanka, and thus bring a more coherent understanding of the conversion issue within the frames of agency, legal procedures and public reasoning.

The first methodological approach entailed qualitative interviews and participant observation among key actors in Sri Lanka. The first challenge was to identify who the key actors in the policy process around the anti-conversion bill actually were. While some actors were easily visible through their active media participation, there were numerous other agents of importance that I could not identify from their public appearance alone. By means of the 'snowball-effect,' in that I always asked my informants which other persons or organisations I should contact. I was able to get a grip on the various views on which organisations and persons who were most actively involved with the policy process of the anti-

conversion bill. I expected initially that this could cause an imbalance in which informants I approached during my interviews, but I was surprised to the extent that most of my informants suggested, and even requested, that I should speak to agents that had contrary views to themselves, and who represented other sides, agendas and organisations. Nevertheless, I operated with an extensive list of my own as a checklist to ensure that my informants in total were representative of a coherent view on the issue. What I requested of information enabled me to evaluate different approaches, and the views of different communities/segments, in how they portrayed the anti-conversion bill and its policy process in Sri Lanka.

A second approach has been to analyse the different legal measures taken in the controversy. This is not limited to the specific bills submitted, but also includes the various reports written on the subject, either directly dealing with the legislative process or reports dealing with fact-finding missions on political violence and improper conversions. During my fieldwork I became aware that the two bills are commonly referred to as "the anti-conversion bill," namely the private member's bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita and a bill developed by Minister W.J.M. Lokubandara, which is sometimes referred to as 'the government bill'. Various other draft proposals have existed, and in the period 2003–2004 several versions of such proposals where circulated in Sri Lanka. I have tried to identify key actors in these legal and political processes, to be able to understand how the particular legal formulation came to be, and why it was this particular formulation that was brought before the parliament in 2004. In addition, the debate on 'unethical conversions' has been guided by various reports, both from the Buddhist side, various Christian interest organisations, as well as other interest formations both of an international and national format.

The first reported allegations of 'unethical conversions' came in a chapter in the Buddha Sasana Commission report,[7] which released its findings in 2002.[8] The next one was initiated by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 2006, *Report of The*

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[7] This chapter from the Buddha Sasana Commission report has been translated into English by an unknown source, but I have interviewed members of this commission about their findings in the report.
[8] Allegations of unethical conduct were also mounted in the NGO commission in the 1990s, but this report has never been made public.

Commission Appointed To Inquire And Report On The Conversion Of Buddhists In Sri Lanka to Other Religions by Immoral and Fraudulent Means, and provides extensive documentation of various claims on how 'unethical conversions' have taken place in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese version was published in 2009, and was translated into English in 2012. I have used the English version. Christian interest organisations, especially Christian monitoring organisations, have followed the discrimination and violence against Christians in Sri Lanka closely, and both reported on a day-to-day basis, but also published several incident rapports on the 'persecution' of Christians in Sri Lanka.[9] The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Asma Jahangir caught interest in the case, and visited Sri Lanka in 2005, and released a report from her visit (Jahangir 2005). A small ecumenical organisation called the Oslo Coalition on freedom of religion or belief also took keen notice of the case, and has tried to facilitate reconciliation meeting between various stakeholders around the 'unethical conversion' debate. While not directly related to the anti-conversion bill, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) decided to investigate attacks on places of worship in Sri Lanka, and the concerns of the various religious communities in a national report in 2013.

A third approach was to make a discourse analysis of how the debate on 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill have been embedded in the political process. While traditional media outlets, especially national newspapers,[10] have been imperative for understanding the unfolding political process of the anti-conversion bill, various pieces of 'grey literature' distributed through various community publication channels have given me an enhanced opportunity to understand the communities themselves and narrate the situation and events at hand. I have interviewed several editors of such community publications, and also made efforts to attain copies of the coverage[11] of issues relating to conversion and the anti-

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[9] See Christian Solidarity Worldwide (2010, 2006 and 2004), Ekanayake (1998) and Jubilee Campaign (2005).
[10] *The Daily News*, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Island* are the most prominent. These have reported on the issue occasionally, but it is the Sunday Leader, a Sunday-only newspaper, that has been most consistent in its coverage of issues relating to conversion.
[11] I can note three community newspapers of particular relevance: *The Buddhist Times*, *Direction* (an evangelical magazine) and *Messenger* (published by the Catholic Church). In addition there are several publications in Sinhala.

conversion bill, as well as violent incidents between religious groups. In reading these publications primarily intended for 'insiders' of a particular belonging, I have been interested in how certain narrative tropes have developed and in how particular agents understand conversion and engage in the debate around anti-conversion legislation.

I have in many circumstances presented my project as a micro-levelled examination of a legal proposal that never was enacted. In some aspects my project is indeed minuscule in its focus, yet the close focus on a particular process reveals how agency, affiliations and networks coalesce into political repertoires. The nature and form of these political repertoires do not only contribute to a deeper understanding of ideology, nationalism and religious pluralism, but reveals how these issues are negotiated within a specific nation-state, articulating an interest-based understanding of religion-state relations. Working on the colonial encounter between Buddhists and Christians, Blackburn discusses how a micro-level examination can contribute to specific forms of knowledge about agency regarding local and translocal networks of affiliation and patronage:

> This micro-level examination necessarily connects to wider social processes, including those related to economy and period-specific forms of social capital. The individual's conception of promise and danger, as well as plausible and desirable actions to be taken in social spaces, are shaped by period-specific possibilities for institutional development, including the flow of capital and the available local and translocal networks of affiliation and patronage. (Blackburn 2010: 203)

In the encounter between Buddhists and Christians in colonial Sri Lanka Blackburn does not highlight this encounter as one between two hegemonic religions, but rather how specific agents, especially Hikkaduve Sumangala, an important historical character in Sri Lanka (see Chapter 3), drew upon networks and affiliations, both traditional and novel, to counter specific challenges posed by increased missionary activity in Sri Lanka. While agency is embedded within period-specific forms of social capital, the very same agency is tantamount in articulating and enacting various forms of political repertoires in creative and novel ways by capitalising on existing networks of affiliation and patronage. Such affiliations and networks are also capable of developing institutional templates and engaging new forms of alliances. By putting

the anti-conversion bill as the focal point of attention for a micro-levelled analysis, the emphasis is not only on explicating the various forms of behaviour, seen as political repertoires, but also identifying why, when and how such repertoires are unfolded along local and translocal affiliations and networks.

Rather than putting a specific religious tradition or practice under scrutiny, my PhD-project has as its main ambition to inquire into the different religio-political encounters taking place in the wake of the anti-conversion bill. Thus, it is the political process of the anti-conversion bill, along with the public discourse on 'unethical conversions,' that have been the central aspects in deriving informants and material, as well as for deciding which events and processes I will discuss and analyse more thoroughly. While the civil war is an important political context to the development of political Buddhism in Sri Lanka, this thesis will mainly put its emphasis on the interstices between religio-political mobilisation and religious freedom. Hence, the focus on religio-political encounters in the wake of the anti-conversion bill not only discusses why conversions have become a potent political topic in Sri Lanka, but also how the anti-conversion bill has been articulated to protect and solidify religious freedom in Sri Lanka (protection from unethical conversions). However, these encounters cannot be limited to how conversions are negotiated in a strict legal sense, both in relation to national law and international human rights instruments; rather they must be understood in a wider political context. As such, a wider scope of the conflict of 'unethical' conversions in Sri Lanka needs to take into consideration the many episodes of political violence between and against religious groups, how monitoring breaches of 'religious freedom' can be turned into a political tool, and how other laws and legal instruments inform how this conflict is structured. I have termed these different processes 'political repertoires' precisely because the enactment of various political behaviours draws upon 'available local and translocal networks of affiliation and patronage' (Blackburn 2010).

The approach in this PhD-thesis challenges mainstream disciplinary concerns. It does not follow a particular religious tradition or practice as is common in the study of religions. Rather, it follows how a contested religious practice, 'unethical' conversions, has attained political saliency for particular religio-political groups,

which have to negotiate their concerns through a complexity of non-religious institutions. How to study these encounters? Despite dealing with issues of ethnography, political science, legal studies and history, I cannot claim to wield the disciplinary connoisseurship required to satisfy each of these scholarly traditions. I am fully aware that many scholars will find this thesis somewhat eclectic as it includes a wide range of different issues, approached by various methods. The main focus was not a particular location, nor a period in time, but a policy process around a proposal that never was enacted. Two overarching questions guide my approach; why and how did the proposal arise? And why and how did it fail? Nevertheless, my attempt has been to discuss religious nationalism and religious pluralism in a coherent and encompassing scope from one particular issue, the anti-conversion bill, with special emphasis on the practical negotiations of encounters, alliances and political repertoires. Religious traditions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of political power in social, legal, and political realm, and this thesis attempts to unravel how some of these encounters take form.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork material which this thesis is based on has been collected during five trips to Sri Lanka between 2011 and 2013. The first trip was in April-May 2011 and lasted four weeks. I went back in August 2011, and stayed six weeks in a hostel for monks just outside Kandy, before my family arrived in September and stayed until the middle of January 2012. My family also joined me for six weeks during the summer in 2012 (June-July), and I went twice to Sri Lanka in 2013, for a total of six weeks. I have conducted more than 60 formal interviews, all of them in English. In addition, numerous informal interviews have been a source of contextual knowledge. Apart from interviewing key actors in the political process of the anti-conversion bill, I also collected written material, especially various reports and legal documents, and archival material from the public discourse.

The main part of the fieldwork was conducted in the autumn 2011 (August 2011 – January 2012). Most of my informants were cordial and generous with their time, and provided information both orally and by sharing documents they had in

their possession. Most informants gave the impression that the anti-conversion bill was a finished chapter, something my Christian informants stated with relief, while some Buddhist informants showed resentment over the issue. Some of the more ideological-minded Buddhist nationalists often ended our interview by stating that "Christians are no longer a threat – we have shifted our focus to the Muslims now." While this shift of attention has spurred a new direction of political Buddhism, as organisations such as Bodu Balasena, Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana have initiated a confrontational mode against Muslim minorities, it is only briefly a topic in this thesis. However, the political atmosphere around conversions suddenly went from low-key to high-pitch when Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of the Catholic Church issued a statement in November 2011 urging the government of Sri Lanka to take harder action against the evangelical churches. This abruptly refuelled the old antagonisms that had been flaring some years back.

As I conducted my interviews in the autumn 2011 I became aware that the timing of my fieldwork gave me both a set of limitations as well as some advantages. While some of the data that possibly would have been available to me at an earlier stage was lost or forgotten, the fact that the bill by most was considered to be 'dead' or 'in limbo' gave the informants an opportunity to put the whole process of the bill into a broader perspective. By the time of the reawakening of the anti-evangelical sentiment by Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith in November in 2011, I could still see some traces of the dynamics of how certain groups had engaged with the issue in the previous years.[12] As this statement had profound impact upon how the different churches related to each other, it opened a room for many of the Christian leaders to discuss the internal dynamics among Christians in Sri Lanka.

During my stay in the summer 2012 I was able to meet with a recently established organisation, Bodu Balasena, which since has become the new prominent group of vocal Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. While this is a new formation with

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[12] At the time the statement became publicly known I was staying at the temple of one of the major stakeholders of the anti-conversion bill on the Buddhist side, and observed how he tried to initiate a meeting between Buddhist and Catholic lawyers to resume the negotiations they had over a bill proposal in 2007. No such meeting took place after Cardinal Ranjith's statement though.

political ambitions of its own, most of the members were also involved with the political party Jathika Hela Urumaya in 2004. As many of my informants were involved with the Bodu Balasena, and other nationalist groups, such as Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana, I also spent considerable time with these organisations during my trips in 2013. Some of the members stated the continuity from Jathika Hela Urumaya, but most claimed that they had failed to deliver on their promises (the anti-conversion bill being the most prominent issue) and these new actors now had to take over.

Collecting narratives: Fieldwork in Sri Lanka 2011 – 2013

"Are you from an NGO?" Anyone even faintly familiar with the political context in Sri Lanka knows that this particular question is not a fruitful starting point for a relationship of trust with Buddhist nationalists. Several scholars have claimed that Buddhist nationalists have been especially adamant in their hostility against the NGO community (Spencer and Amarasriya 2012, Orjuela 2008). During my stay in May 2011 I visited one of the larger Buddhist organisations in Sri Lanka, merely in order to enrol as a volunteer to help with the organising of the Sambuddhatva Jayanthi the 17th of May. To do this I first had to form a letter of request, and when I returned with this I was put in a lone chair in the hallway to wait for an audience with the leader of the organisation to approve my presence. In Sri Lanka NGOs are looked upon with suspicion, as a form of western imposition in how the NGOs positioned themselves in relation to the civil war. "No, I was certainly not from a NGO." One of my first experiences was that without a sound reference for your visit, people would be highly suspicious of the purpose of my visit.

The salience of 'gate openers' should not be underestimated in Sri Lanka. 'Gate openers' provide you with a link of trust with your informants. While I had developed a list over important persons I would like to meet during my stay in Sri Lanka, I experienced that my best way of working with my informants was to have them to put me in contact with another. It went slowly at first, but after meeting with two particular persons, they introduced me to several other interesting figures, and

thus the threshold of group familiarity was crossed; It had a snowball-effect. Apart from giving an added sense of trust and familiarity with my informants, this way of working through the different segments that had been involved with the anti-conversion bill also gave me invaluable information into different networks. Informal bonds were revealed to me, and it also gave me an insight into how the different organisations worked with different challenges.

However, this was not an easy path from the outside to inside of these networks. The entry into these circles was the hard part, and I was not supposed to enter into only one network and tradition, but several. I had the political segment of Buddhists, different groupings of Buddhist aid organisations, Hindu organisations, Catholic informants, evangelical churches, protestant churches, individual churches and also different independent individuals with specific knowledge about my topic. With some of these groupings I spent months to attain an audience, but when I first got one informant, it was easier to arrange more of them. It was particularly challenging to find informants within the Catholic Church to speak to me. Only after a meticulous process of explicating precisely my aims with an interview did they agree to meet me. With one Catholic informant I was told to wait in an office, where I discovered, to my great surprise, two archive drawers marked 'The anti-conversion bill'. However, when my informant finally arrived, he denied altogether that his organisation had ever had material on the anti-conversion bill in their archives. My impression of the Catholic reluctance to discuss the anti-conversion bill is that while Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians had already developed a specific position on the issue of anti-conversion legislation, the clergy in the Catholic Church were more varied in their response to the legislation and subsequently more reluctant to state their opinions. While every field trip poses its own set of challenges, I am deeply grateful for the tremendous help I have received from many of my informants. Several people have given me their whole archives for me to photocopy, they have sent their junior assistants to guide me into the Supreme Court in search of documents, and been really helpful in many other ways, not least in the giving of their time to make this thesis realisable.

Issues of identity

Iselin Frydenlund has written on how she as a Norwegian faced difficulties in relation to her informants in Sri Lanka, and was sometimes called *sudhu kotiya* (white tiger) and was even refused entry to a particular temple ground (Frydenlund 2005b, 2011). While I did have some similar experiences, I found them less frequent than when I visited the country in April 2009, the last month of the civil war. Most often the tone of the interview was polite, but issues of identities were important for my informants, and I was often asked why I had come: 'Who are you to come here and study the politics of conversion?' Usually I would answer that Sri Lanka and Buddhism had caught my attention through the news in Norway, and that this had caused me to follow my interests in that direction. I was not myself religious, albeit a personal friend of mine from an evangelical church in Norway had conducted my marriage ceremony.

That I had been a student of Sinhala and Pali language was something that did get recognition. My ability to speak and read Sinhala, albeit in a very limited fashion, was unanimously taken to be a good thing and seen as a sign of dedication. During my period as a student in Sri Lanka, I aquainted several Buddhist monks, with whom I made several trips around the island. While not always directly related to my fieldwork on the anti-conversion bill, it enabled me to see how monks were perceived in daily business, and how their 'enchanted status' in certain times gave them various privileges. I also brought my family with me to Sri Lanka, and this was an impetus to get to know the village where we lived even better, and to acquaint some Sinhalese families. The fact that my four year old son had learnt some phrases of Sinhala at one time evoked an ironic response: when my son had by Sinhala ordered himself another juice in Sinhala in a restaurant, the manager came to us and asked if we were missionaries. Certainly, no other foreigners would bother to teach Sinhala to their children.

Ethical considerations

Two major considerations have informed my approach towards ethical aspects regarding my fieldwork: the sensitive nature of the topic of the anti-conversion bill, and the fact that most of my informants were public figures, or at least resourceful persons. My first consideration beckoned me to be careful with my collected material and to provide full anonymity to anyone who requested this. However, on the other hand, the fact that the majority of my informants were educated and resourceful people, often with a public presence, made them well acquainted with the interview-situation. Further, I will discuss some actions and considerations I had in the field, and how these interplay with ethical considerations.

I gave all my informants a short letter of information about my project, a 'Declaration of Consent' which I developed in relation to my application to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Some of my informants wanted to keep this letter for later contact, and I have accommodated this request. By providing such a letter, it was easier for my informants to trust who I was, and come with questions and comments concerning my project. I knew that my topic was sensitive, and that it could stir certain responses if it was wrongly interpreted. There are several scholars who have written on the topic of political Buddhism that are seen to be very provocative. One of my former informants from my master study in 2009 asked if he could have a copy of my master thesis. This was one of the monks from the upper segment of the JHU-leadership. I am not afraid to give a copy of this work to anyone in Sri Lanka, and I certainly do not have anything to hide in it, yet there is always the possibility that things are understood in a different manner than expected. The eventual consequences of insulting a key informant would not be particularly fruitful. However, I decided that there was more to win than lose in doing so. However, when I came to deliver it personally, the monk had gone for an errand, and it was his secretary who received me. It was my first meeting with the secretary, and once again I had to explain my project. Western researchers are often seen with some scepticism in Sri Lanka, especially concerning the topic of political Buddhism, and I was no exception. He went through my master's thesis with a suspicious eye. The next hour we went through my writings – the most controversial parts – where he commented

and discussed them. The moment was quite tense, but he seemed at last to be content with how I had portrayed important events.

I did not use a tape recorder while conducting my interviews. I have one or two interviews on tape, but I experienced that my informants felt more at ease if I only took regular notes. After I had worked through the interview notes, and put it into a certain form, I sent it back to my informants for approval (that is, for those who not had decided remain anonymous). It felt natural to do it this way, and several people have also requested to be informed about the parts where their comments are used. Some were visibly nervous during the interview, and requested it to remain fully anonymous so that nothing could be traced back to them. In most interviews, however, the informants willingly shared their stories and perceptions, their material and evidences, in an attempt to persuade me to view the issue of (anti) conversion from their position.

Narrating the anti-conversion bill and 'unethical conversions'

> In fact, rhetorical complaints of evangelical expansion by Buddhists, and similarly rhetorical complaints of harassment by evangelical activists have, to a certain extent, blurred the distinction between what actually happens on the ground and what fears and suspicions have been created in the minds of individuals. This situation has made research into this particular dynamic extremely difficult and time-consuming. (Perera 1998: 52).

The field of 'unethical conversions' is wrought with stories, rumours, anecdotal evidence and reciprocal complaints of harassment and unethical conduct. As could be expected, actors from the field report on their concerns and worries, and hoped that I (the scholar) somehow would transform their agenda through a validating apparatus called science into a solid fact called truth. However, my aim in this thesis is not to reveal the dark secrets of 'unethical conversions' and to what extent they happen or not, but rather look into the many narratives and processes the debate has initiated, and how this has transformed into a political issue in Sri Lanka. Thus, I do not aim to compete with the evidential attempts of providing examples of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka. I am more interested in why they were initiated, when, by

whom, and for what purposes. While these commissions deal with evidence, my own attempt is rather to dissect the many discourses and narratives that are knotted around the issue of conversion in present day Sri Lanka, and from there try to bring forth an understanding of how different actors understand the dynamics of conversion and evangelical activity.

Moreover, a specific methodological concern in the project has been to use narrative methods in both the qualitative interviews as well as in interpreting the various legal documents. By putting narration as the focal point of the study, I have seen how the informants create a sequential storyline, with specific characters that interplay in the plot and the different elements they put into the setting (Riessman 2008). A focus on the different narratives among the actors will give a broader outline of their motivations in the conflict, their main antagonisation and the expectation of their mobilisation:

> Narratives provide a very rich basis from which to explain political identities; critically, what an individual or a community chooses to tell about themselves is intricately tied to how they construct their political identities. But, as Whitebrook (2001) argues, political identity is never a fixed term, and interpretations are always open to re-interpretations. Moreover, different people and different communities do not necessarily hear stories in the same way as the stories' narrators. (Andrews 2007: 11)

While the notion of the 'political' in itself is without substance, certain narratives that relate the given enmity provide the intensity of an association or disassociation at hand (Schmitt 1996). Political identities are often forged in contrast to oppositional identities, but by way of narration these enmity lines are not fixed, but are under constant negotiation. However, a particular process of antagonisation often leads to a commodification of identities, and the boundaries of political identities are drawn sharper around the given cleavage. The ability to produce certain forms of narratives is thus inextricably linked to relations of power and it is precondition of a narrative repertoire. Tamboukou observes:

> A genealogical analysis of narratives will thus pose the question of which kinds of practices, linked to which kinds of external conditions determine the discursive

> production of narratives under investigation. What is at stake here is the way power intervenes in creating conditions of possibility for specific narratives to emerge as dominant and for others to be marginalized (Tamboukou 2008: 90)

As Tamboukou observes, narratives are closely linked to power and can frame people into dominant and marginalised positions. Nevertheless, by means of narrative skills, some actors are able to subvert given power relations of dominance and marginalisation to their own advantage. Thus, the shifting configurations of power dynamics also imbue the world of narratives, and how given actors are constantly needed to explaining and narrating the sequence of events. Also, in the way that power is not monolithic, the ability to produce various narratives is dependent upon a set of preconditions; given power relations, sequences of events, narrative competence. Production of narratives is part of a political repertoire, and there are different arenas where one would need different forms of narratives to gain influence. As such, we should be attentive to the "performative work of narratives" (Tamboukou 2008: 73) in that different narratives may produce different processes and different results. Subsequently, narratives are not one particular thing, but various according to the task at hand, in what the particular narrative aims to achieve. As we shall see in chapter 11, 'Monitoring Religious Freedom,' evangelical churches were able to invert their marginal position in Sri Lanka to construe a narrative of a 'persecuted minority,' which gave them added impetus to draw on international backing from various political sources.

Riessman argues that 'narrative competence' in particular situations can be decisive for the outcome of a particular case. However, narrative competence varies depending on the situation and goal at hand, and the notion of a repertoire of narrative competence both highlights the strengths and the hindrances of how given actors adopt narrative strategies. At certain institutions a very rigid form of storytelling is required (schools, hospitals, court of law, legislation), and there is an inviolable need to conform to these standards in order to not be misunderstood (Riessman 2008: 77). In other situations a break of expectation, *peripeteia*, may stir further interest in the matter, but in some institutions all that matters is conformity to the given standards of style, vocabulary and structure. Thus, "constructing a story about it is not

straightforward, but invariably mediated and regulated by controlling vocabularies" (Riessman 2008: 3). However, the degrees of narrative competence should be read into the different domains of narrative capacity; some actors are adept in legal jargon, others in framing issues into political potency, and some are able to subvert their initially 'marginalised' position into attaining more political influence.

The narrative perspective can be useful when assessing the political mobilisation of various groups in relation to the anti-conversion legislation, and how certain issues, such as the idea of 'unethical conversions,' have been able to acquire such potency, but also how both Buddhist and Christian pressure groups argue, in the legal sphere, of their right to 'freedom of religion'. Thus, I link how the various groups use their narrative competence as one part of their political repertoire, which can create various ways for them to facilitate their political mobilisation. How various groups perceive conversions in Sri Lanka is folded into different narratives of what an act of conversion entails, and the political implications of conversions are often derived from the links between religious and national identity. I will also look at how narrative competence has been directly at play both in the creation and the opposition to the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, especially through the notion of 'freedom of religion'. This is directly relevant when discussing the legal validity of the formulations in the actual bills, as well as in how narrative frameworks are able to draw a wider picture on how religious freedom is to be understood in Sri Lanka.

3.   Buddhism and the State in Sri Lanka

My chapter title stems from the fact that an exposition of the relations between religion and the state is *principally* an account of the connection between Buddhism and polity. This is not to deny the fact that Sri Lanka, here also using the name to denote the island historically, has been a multi-religious society. The title is merely an allusion to how Buddhism was granted the 'foremost place' in the 1972 constitution, and how the royal patronage of Buddhism is a central narrative for understanding the intimacy between Buddhism and the polity in Sri Lanka. The chapter begins by discussing the Kandyan Convention signed in 1815 between the king of Kandy and the British, where 'the religion of the Boodhoo' was declared 'inviolable'. From here I will discuss the royal patronage bestowed upon the Buddha Sasana in the Anuradhapura period, before looking at kingship and conversions with the arrival of Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Central historical epochs, especially the Buddhist revival from 1860s, will be covered before looking into the momentous election in 1956, when Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism emerged as an influential factor in Sri Lankan politics. Few, if any contemporary processes can be understood isolated from the civil war (1983–2009), and I will discuss how Sinhala-Buddhist pressure groups have been a major obstacle to any peace process, and how Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil nationalism have had competing state formation projects in contemporary Sri Lanka. As this chapter is intended as a prelude to a debate on the anti-conversion bill, I place special emphasis on religious encounters, conversions and political allegiance.

Facts one should know

Sri Lanka is located at the Indian coast, just south of the tip of India. According to the last nationwide census in 2012, the population was defined as 74,9% Sinhalese,

11,2% Sri Lanka Tamils, 4,2% Indian Tamils, 9,2% Sri Lankan Moors (Muslims) and 0,5% others.[13] Of a population of total 20,263,723, this includes 15,173,820 Sinhalese, 2,270,924 Sri Lanka Tamils, 842,323 Indian Tamils, 1,869,820 Sri Lanka Moor, 37,061 Burghers, 40,189 Malay and 29,586 Other. Of these: 70,2% were Buddhist, 12,6% Saiva Hindu, 9,7% Muslims, 6,1% Roman Catholics and 1,3% Other Christians.[14] As per religion 14,222,844 Buddhists, 2,554,606 Hindus, 1,967,227 Muslims, 1,237,038 Roman Catholics, 272,568 Other Christians and 9,440 Other. The following districts have more than 1,0% Other Christians: Colombo (2,8%), Gampaha (1,9%), Nuwara Eliya (2,0%), Jaffna (3,3%), Mannar (4,7%), Vavuniya (4,6%), Mullaitivu (3,5%), Kilinochchi (5,4%), Batticaloa (4,1%), Trincomalee (1,9%) and Puttalam (1,6%). Other Christians include both Protestant denominations (Anglicans, Methodists, Presbytarians, etc.), but also a wide array of evangelical churches. While Frydenlund (2005a) reports a total of 30,000 monks in Sri Lanka, both de Silva (2006) and DeVotta (2007) operate with 37,000. The *sangha* is not one unitary organisation, but consists of three main fraternities: Siyam Nikaya (18,000 monks), Amarapura Nikaya (12,000 monks) and Ramanna Nikaya (between 6,000-8,000 monks). While the different fraternities can be understood in relation to caste, they cannot be strictly derived from it (de Silva 2006).

Kandyan convention (1815) and state patronage of Buddhism

Most of the interviews I conducted began with a historical introduction of how to understand the relations between religion, most often Buddhism, and the state in Sri Lanka. One of my informants, a professor in Buddhist studies, informed me that I would not be able to understand the debate around the anti-conversion bill without a fair notion of the historical state-religion relations in Sri Lanka:

> The king protects Buddhism. Sangha expects patronage from the state. All the way from 1815 have there been an expectation that the state should protect Buddhism.

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[13] http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/cph2011Pub/pop42.pdf
[14] http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/cph2011Pub/pop43.pdf

This is also in the minds of the monks. It is hard to think about the state without Buddhism.

In India Nehru and other elites imposed the notion of secularism upon India. Do not forget the violence amidst the partition of India and Pakistan. Now BJP has come to power, yet India has a different history from Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the religious resurgence came in 1956 with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. Buddhist nationalism came much earlier. In 1972 Buddhism was declared the foremost religion. While the state protects Buddhism, it also guarantees protection to other religions as well. Legal scholars in Sri Lanka have been struggling to find out how to interpret this. (Interview, 14th October, 2011)

My informant observes here how Buddhism and the state have had close relations historically, and how it in the present faces difficulties in negotiating these intimate relations into legal formulas. He further claimed that Sri Lanka was "not a Buddhist country in the administrative sense, but historically and culturally" (Interview 14.10.2011). In this trajectory, he mentions three important watersheds of this relationship in the modern period; 1815, 1956 and 1972. My first emphasis will be on the event of 1815, when the British brought the Kandyan kingdom, and thus the whole of the island, under one unitary political rule.[15] Another informant, a highly influential Buddhist lay leader running a prominent development organisation, stated:

Then the British were able to sign an agreement – this is a most important thing – The Kandyan Convention of 1815. In that convention they called it inviolable that Buddhism should be preserved. The British got the condition that Buddhism has to be preserved and given protection. The 5 conditions, this was the fifth, the religion of the Boodho was inviolable. (Interview 25th of September, 2011)

The signatory of the Kandyan Convention, which was signed 2nd of March 1815,[16] read: "The Religion of Boodho professed by the Chiefs and Inhabitants of these Provinces is declared inviolable, and its Rites, Ministers and places of Worship are to

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[15] Terms like 'unitary state' are particularly loaded in Sri Lanka. Schalk argues in an article on the key concepts 'unity' and 'sovereignty' can be related to the concept of *ekachatta* found in the Mahavamsa tradition. *Ekachatta* (pali) means 'one umbrella,' and can be seen as a metaphor for the unification of the country, especially under 'Buddhist' rule (see Schalk 1988: 64).
[16] Jathika Hela Urumaya initiated their political party with a procession on March 2nd, to allude to this signatory (see Frydenlund 2011).

be maintained and protected" (as quoted in Evers n.d.: 324). Evers argues that this formulation made the British the legal successor not only of the political aspects, but of the religious aspects, the protection of Buddhism, as well. The British colonial administrators were trapped in a paradox where they were 'linked to the ideal of spreading Protestantism' on the one hand, while protecting and maintaining the Buddhist order on the other, which posed a never-ending problem (Evers n.d). Malalgoda argues that "there was no immediate withdrawal of state patronage to Buddhism after the cession of the kingdom to the British in 1815; but in stages the withdrawal was made all the same" (Malalgoda 1976: 258). Already in the 1920s the first petitions came from Buddhist interests requesting the British colonial administrators to take legal action against a series of missionary tracts and pamphlets which carried words of denigration against the Buddhist tradition. The Buddhist voices urged the government to prohibit offensive publications, especially since Buddhists did not issue any such offensive tracts themselves. The British government was often negligent towards the demands of the Buddhists, but was all the same nervous that they should honor the Kandyan convention so as to not stir rebellious sentiments among the population, as a rebellion had taken place in the province of Uva in 1817 (Malalgoda 1976). However, missionary tracts attacking various aspects of Buddhism were continuously released.

Harris observes how some of the missionary recollections reveal how the Buddhist clergy entered in encounters with missionaries with an expectation of courteous intelligent conversation, yet that the Christian antagonism against heathenism, including the motivation to learn of Buddhist precepts only to undermine them, condoned disappointment among the Buddhist clergy (Harris 2006: 196). Missionary antagonism was not only directed at Buddhism per se, but especially against the provisions endorsed by the Kandyan convention. It was in particular the word 'inviolable' that caused resentment, as it was seen as a hindrance to promoting efforts of conversion in Kandy. In the 1830s many of the traditional services of the state towards Buddhism were ended, not lest due to aggressive campaigning from Christian missionaries. Provisions to the Asgiriya and Malvatte chapters, two significant temples in Kandy, were stopped, and the government no longer forced

tenants in temple lands to partake in religious festivals. As a result of such moves, temples and clergy had to take legal action to enforce many of its enjoyed rights, a process that was not only expensive, but also made the monks widely unpopular (Malalgoda 1976: 115-122). Thus, the provision guaranteed in Article 5 of the Kandyan convention soon became one of expectation, frustration and disappointment in the encounter with the British colonial administrators.

Before we turn to the Buddhist responses against missionary efforts from 1850s and onwards, we need to shift our attention to the historical relations between Buddhism and royal patronage, and how the influx of missionary efforts and 'alien' political rule challenged the historical relations between Buddhism and political power in Sri Lanka. Malalgoda argues on the consequences of these shifts:

> An important consequence of the transfer of political power into alien hands, as far as Buddhism in Ceylon was concerned, was the loss of the state patronage which it had enjoyed for centuries, and which, as we have seen earlier, was a necessary condition for the proper functioning of its central institutions. Under the Portuguese and Dutch, the strength of the state machinery was not merely withdrawn from Buddhism; it was actively used against Buddhism on the side of Christianity. (Malalgoda 1976: 28)

Malalgoda argues here how the loss of state patronage severely affected the vitality of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, especially under colonial administrators, as they not only withdrew their support, but often actively opposed the Buddhist tradition. The intricate relations between Buddhism and the state have been an ongoing source of conflict since ancient times, and it is a conflict that has seen different manifestations throughout different historical epochs. To understand how the proposed anti-conversion bill can be seen as one such encounter in the wider picture of Buddhism and the state, we need to look into the various moments of the island's history.

Anuradhapura era

Relations between Buddhism and political power in Sri Lanka go back to the conversion of the king Devanampiya Tissa (250–210AD), who had the base of his reign in Anuradhapura. While de Silva (2005) claims that Buddhist presence probably

arrived in Sri Lanka earlier, the momentous conversion of Devanampiya Tissa came about when a missionary envoy was sent by King Aśoka, of the Mauryan empire, to spread the tenets of Buddhism. It was Mahinda, the son of Aśoka, who arrived in Anuradhapura[17] and convinced Devanampiya Tissa to embrace Buddhism, and later a kinswoman named Sanghamitta arrived to establish a line of Buddhist nuns along with a sapling of the Bo tree,[18] under which the Buddha had allegedly attained enlightenment. The conversion of Devanampiya Tissa can be read on three levels; the influx of Buddhism to Sri Lanka by missionary efforts, a linkage to the legendary King Aśoka and the concepts of *cakravartin* (the wheel-turning emperor), and the establishment of state patronage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. King Aśoka is often labelled as a perfect ideal of a *cakravartin*,[19] which is often translated as wheel-turning emperor or universal monarch, connected to the term *dharmavijaya*, what Seneviratna calls "the concept of conquering the world by righteousness without the use of weapons" (Seneviratna 1994: 79). Albeit a track record of excessive violence, some estimates say he was responsible for over 100,000 victims, King Aśoka regretted his violent deeds and found solace among the sangha and their tenets of Buddhism, and changed his rule accordingly. However, Seneviratna (1994) argues that King Aśoka continued his expansionist ambitions, but substituted his way of conquest from force of arms to that of *dhamma*. Hence, the conversion of Devanampiya Tissa by the means of *dhamma* did not only bring state sponsored Buddhism to Sri Lanka, but also subordinated Devanampiya Tissa under Mauryan influence, linking the line of Buddhist kingship to King Aśoka.[20]

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[17] The city of Anuradhapura has been cast as the 'sacred city', as it was the first capital of Buddhist kingdoms in Sri Lanka, as well as the home of several important buildings and historical sites, and it has the last 100 years been subject to a revival as a pilgrimage destination, not least due to its ideological position in the heartland of the Sinhala Buddhist nation (Nissan 1989).

[18] In 1985 this particular Bo tree was attacked by (allegedly) LTTE soldiers, an act which Elizabeth Nissan claims has a resonance of an attack upon the "whole construction of the island as continuously and inviolably Sinhala Buddhist" (Nissan 1989: 65).

[19] The concept and myth of the *cakravartin* is explored in Digha Nikaya's "Cakkavatti Sihananda Sutta" (Rhys Davids 1995) where the 'wheel-turning' king Dalhanemi is marked by 32 auspicious marks. Through his reign of dhamma all suffering and wrongdoing are absent, but when his successor is not able to fulfil the ideals of the *cakravartin* the kingdom resumes into chaos due to the imperfect rule (see Strong 1993).

[20] The two most important texts on Aśoka, *Aśokavadana* and *Mahāvaṃsa*, differ in the portrayals of King Aśoka. While *Aśokavadana* portrays King Aśoka as being dark and paradoxical, the *Mahāvaṃsa* brings more

The conversion of Devanampiya Tissa is seen as the advent of state-Buddhism relations in Sri Lanka. Gombrich comments that this relationship was based upon complementarity, the *Sasana* and the kingship mutually supported each other, and that the Sangha was treated with 'immense deference' (Gombrich 1988: 160). Also de Silva observes how the bonds of the sangha and the royal authority were formed in mutual association, and he notes the formal obligations that were expected from the royal authority:

> Of the formal obligations of the ruler to the established religion, three were of special importance. First of all, there was a provision, by the state and its citizens, of the wherewithal for the maintenance of the sangha. Second, part of the state's economic resources were used for the construction of religious edifices and monuments, with the architectural and sculptural embellishments associated with these […]And third, it was the king's duty to protect the established religion. (de Silva 2005: 60)

While the ideal state-Buddhism relation was inextricably linked, the king's protection of Buddhism also entailed the responsibility for purifying the sangha in times of corruption and indiscipline. Gethin, however, warns against simplified comparison of ancient ties to the official state religion by modern standards (Gethin 2007: 75). Nevertheless, the historical relations between Buddhism and the state have been widely discussed in contemporary Sri Lanka, especially through the historical Vamsic chronicles,[21] as is why Kemper (1991) names his book *The Presence of the Past*. While *Mahavamsa*, the main text of the Vamsic chronicles, had been at one time almost forgotten, it was rediscovered in colonial times and proved to be a potent tool for religio-national revivalism. The subject-matter of the *Mahavamsa* is to follow the line of kings in Sri Lanka, explicating how they have nurtured the close ties between the state and the sangha. Various scholars place the work along the pendulum between myth and history, depending on their background and political intentions. K. M de Silva claims that it is "too bold in its outlines and too simple in its narration"

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focus to the historical lineage of Aśoka (bright and glorious) and how the Buddhist tradition survives in its most pristine form in Sri Lanka (Strong 1993: 24).

[21] The Vamsic chronicles referred to a set of historical chronicles with similar subject-matter: Mahavamsa, Dipavamsa and Culavamsa.

(de Silva 2005: 14), despite the fact that it has obvious historical relevance for the period it covers.[22] Kemper notes that *Mahavamsa* works on three levels simultaneously; historical, moral and political (1991: 85).

Perhaps the most discussed episode, both in the Sri Lankan public and in the scholarly realm, of the *Mahavamsa* is where the Buddhist king Dutthagamini defeats king Elara for the restoration of Buddhism.[23] Kemper notes how this event is given resonance in the present situation: "as the leader of a specifically Sinhala Buddhist army, who acted to restore the island to Sinhala Buddhist hands, for Buddhist goals" (Kemper 1991: 130). This resonance is particularly prevalent in Walpola Rahula's work *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* [1946],[24] a work which sought to redefine monkhood as one accommodative of political monks: "from this time the patriotism and the religion of the Sinhalese became inseperately linked (Rahula 2006: 21). Walpola Rahula, not only an active participant in the debate concerning political monks but also a famous scholar monk, observes in his *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* how several sources allude to the inviolable bonds between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka, and quotes a passage from *Pujavaliya*, a Sinhalese prose work from the 13th century:

> This Island of Laṅkā belongs to the Buddha himself ; it is like a treasury filled with the Three Gems. Therefore the residence of wrong-believers in this island will never be permanent, just as the residence of the Yakṣas of old was not permanent. Even if a non-Buddhist ruled Ceylon by force a while, it is a particular power of the Buddha that is line will not be established. Therefore, as Laṅkā is suitable only for Buddhist kings, it is certain that their lines, too, will be established. (as quoted in Rahula 1993[1956]: 63)[25]

This quote brings to the scene a set of the key figures of Sinhala Buddhist sentiments: foreign domination, race, religious responsibility and the unification of the island as a

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[22] Liyanagamage observes that most of the *Mahavamsa* was written within the confines of a renowned temple, Mahavihara, which made disputes surrounding that particular temple especially troublesome in the historical narratives. Liyanagamage himself discusses a dispute involving king Mahasena and the Mahavihara (Liyanagamage 2008).
[23] This episode is also widely discussed within the idiom of Buddhist legitimation of violence.
[24] The book appeared in its Sinhalese version, *Bhikṣuvagē Urumaya* in 1946, and is a milestone work in the conceptualization of the legitimacy of political monks (see Hertzberg 2011, Seneviratne 1999).
[25] Walpola Rahula's reference is to Pjv. P. 656.[Pūjāvaliya, (Jinālaṅkāra Press, Colombo 1926.]

spiritual goal (Kemper 1991). While historically the foreign invasions had come from South India, or from the many conflicts and disputes among the many regional rulers within the confines of the island itself, the relations between kingship and the sangha got a wholly new challenge with the influx of the Portuguese in 1505, and especially with the British takeover of the whole island under one rule in 1815. With the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505, the island was divided among four regional powers, located roughly at Jaffna, Kandy, Sītāvaka (Sabaragamuwa) and Kotte (close to Colombo).

Kingship, conversion and colonialism in Sri Lanka

With the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505/1506, the age-long rivalry between local and regional forces in Sri Lanka and South India got a new actor on the political scene:

> For those with purely commercial and maritime ambitions, religion could remain a secondary consideration, but when the Portuguese decided to stay on in any locale they would initiate a campaign of proselytizing, on the assumption that those converted would serve as their supporters. Many groups accepted conversion to align themselves with governing powers, either to enhance their fortunes or for survival – having no other option. (Mendonça 2010: 136)

The Portuguese kings had already from 1455 and onwards received special privileges from the popes to expand their empire along with missionary enterprise. By a number of Papal Bulls the Portuguese were granted ecclesiastical rights and privileges, which became known as *Padroado Real* ('Royal Patronage') (Mendonça 2010). The Portuguese settled mainly in South India and Sri Lanka, with Goa as their main powerbase in South Asia. While the Portuguese engaged in extensive proselytising over large areas, Mendonça argues that "conversion policies could only be rigorously enforced in their own territories" (Mendonça 2010: 145), which basically meant a few small nodes of Christianity along the coast of South India and Sri Lanka.

> Many fixed opinions on the subject of "mission" imply, conversely, either a glorification or critique of the Portuguese approach, but it becomes apparent that conversion, instead of being an exercise of purely spiritual and altruistic motivation, was determined by a complex mélange of social, economic and political interests, supported by measures for dealing with resistance to conversion. Portuguese religious activity was largely determined by political ideology and expediency. (Mendonça 2010: 146)

A common line of critique against the Portuguese missionary efforts was targeted against their 'conversion methods.' C. Gaston Perera[26] (2010) ridicules how the Portuguese elites allegedly portrayed an ideal of intellectual conversion as the legitimate basis for change of religion, in addition to the conversion that is 'divinely contrived'. Nevertheless, Perera reveals how missionaries were facing difficulties with the natives, and turned to 'bribery and blandishment' of small gifts to win the confidence of the locals. Hence, one father complains that locals convert "only when they are compelled and obliged by some particular interest" (as quoted by Perera 2010: 170). Another frustration among the Portuguese was the ease with which their converts were sliding back to former religious practices. The Portuguese period has recently received extensive attention in Sri Lanka, with several publications[27] in a few years, directly because of the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese arrival, but many of these publications have also directly targeted the methods of conversion, a subject which indirectly has repercussions for the contemporary debate on 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka. During my fieldwork it was common for my Buddhist nationalist informants to begin their narrative with the arrival of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka. I wish to stress here that we should not immediately accept to trace the contemporary dispute of 'unethical conversions' back to the Portuguese era, despite the thematic similarities. K. M. de Silva observes in 1998 how the aggressive proselytisation among charismatic churches has led to demands for legislation against these practices, yet that the other Christian communities have accepted a more limited

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[26] C. Gaston Perera is a local amateur historian from Sri Lanka with a special interest for the Portuguese period and the colonial era. He has published several books on historical issues.
[27] I am here referring to Susantha Goonatilake's *A 16th Century Clash of Civilizations: Portuguese Presence in Sri Lanka* (2010) and C. Gaston Perera's *The Portuguese Missionary in 16th and 17th Century Ceylon: The Spiritual Conquest* (2009). The ICES publication *The Portuguese in the Orient* (2010) is directly related to a seminar arranged on the commemorative occasion of the 500th anniversary.

role in Sri Lankan society (de Silva 1998: 117-118). Charismatic churches are new to the scene, and we should not conflate the present discourse on 'unethical conversions'[28] with the colonial discourse on Portuguese conversion methods, even though if this is in the interest of the Buddhist nationalists. History should be treated with care, and the Portuguese era should not be treated as direct historical link to the present debate, but rather as an argumentative repository from which to arouse a certain set of feelings.

Amidst the debate on the Portuguese conversion methods, Alan Strathern published a book, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka* (2010 [2007]), which discusses various conversion narratives around kingship in Sri Lanka after the arrival of the Portuguese. I will discuss three kings' relations to conversion; two that were resistant (king Cankili (1519 – 1561) and king Bhuvanekabahu (1521 – 1551) and one whom actually converted to Catholicism, king Dharmapala (1551 – 1597) in 1557. The Portuguese missionary efforts in Sri Lanka went from a dozen opportunistic individuals to whole communities along the coast, but a massacre at Mannar would send shock waves beyond both Goa and Lisbon. King Cankili of the Jaffna kingdom massacred 600 Christian converts at Mannar in 1544. Their change of religion was not only perceived as a religious shift, but a complete change of loyalty from the domain of king Cankili to that of the Portuguese rulers. A change of religion was also about property rights, and also entailed a change of jurisdiction, from paying tribute to one king instead of another. King Bhuvanekabāhu of Kotte experienced similar difficulties with conversion, as it entailed not only a change of a person's religious activities, but also his traditional obligations to the king. Hence, conversion was one means of evading such obligations, and religious conversions challenged the authority of the local king. Thus, the first conversions were not discussed along the lines of caste or status, but the responsibilities of the subject, and under whose jurisdiction he came under (see Strathern 2010: 99-102).

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[28] Harris (2006) noted the first complaints about 'unethical conversions' in the 1980s, and many of my informants pinpoint 1977 as a decisive year, simultaneously with the liberalization of the economy under the rule of J.R. Jayawardene.

King Bhuvanekabahu of Kotte had close relations with the Portuguese rulers, but had nevertheless a staunch resistance against Christianity. His son was willing to convert to Christianity in order to claim the throne by Portuguese assistance, yet Bhuvanekabahu assassinated his son before these plans were implemented. The Portuguese missionary mentality was that if they could convert the ruler, his people would follow his path. It was a top-down conversion strategy. Bhuvanekabāhu and his Kotte kingdom were embedded in conflicts between the Portuguese rulers in nearby Colombo, but also with the king Mayadunne of Sitavaka, and these conflicts had to be navigated. King Bhuvanekabahu was accused of religious persecution of Christians by the Portuguese due to his stripping of property from the converts and for allowing his population to tear down Christian buildings erected without permission: "What was new was the radical and comprehensive conception of religious conversion, which could easily be interpreted as a sloughing off of all former identities and loyalties" (Strathern 2010: 111).

> Conversion was seen to be most successful as a process of de-socialization and re-socialization that required the daily company of other Christians. In one sense this proceeds from the monotheistic conception of religious adherence as involving a total transformation of the self, a creation of a new identity, and what else but European trappings could be used as visible markers and proclamations of that identity? (Strathern 2010: 121)

While Bhuvanekabahu was the local king with most extensive relations with the Portuguese rulers, he was still the king most opposed to conversion. In addition to the temporal complexities of indigenous law, which complicated and made conversions highly contested, kingship was also bound by the narratives of Buddhist patronage. In the heartland of Buddhism foreign elites could be kings, as long as they embraced and patronised Buddhism. The narrative ran that any un-Buddhist king would be driven out by the people. Thus, certain kings were being baptised in secret, while keeping their Buddhist façade so as not to challenge the sensibilities of their people. Hence, the conversion of king Dharmapala in 1557 was a political disaster, as he lost his powerbase in Kotte due to his conversion, and his minions fled to the nearby kingdom of Sitavaka. The bhikkhus of Kotte revolted, and 30 of them were killed in

the aftermath, but the incident gave evidence of the unpopularity of elite conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, especially concerning a king. It was no better that the *Dalada Maligava* temple[29] was transformed into a church, and king Mayadunne was able to adopt religious patronage to the needs of the hour, and emerged as a hero of national and spiritual resistance to the decadence of king Dharmapala.[30] Thus, the loss of religious legitimacy of king Dharmapala severely cut his political legitimacy, and made his people and elite turn against him. The sentiments of the people were an important consideration for kings before announcing their conversion. However, with the downfall of the other kingdoms in Sri Lanka in the 1590s, Dharmapala regained some of his ascendancy, as he was the only one who still could allude to the lineage of kings and the *cakravarti*-title. In the tumultuous years of the 1590s many elites ended up siding with the Portuguese, or as Strathern notes "[p]olitical marginality lies behind the most important conversions: these are men either already stripped of power or with little option but to acquiesce in a new status quo" (Strathern 2010: 209).

From 1602 onwards the Dutch were able to gain more and more influence along the Sri Lankan coast, and in 1658 they captured Jaffna, the last Portuguese stronghold on the island. While the Portuguese had been ruthless in their introduction of Roman Catholicism, the Dutch continued with active proselytising, but with less success. Up until the sixteenth century, religious amity had been the norm in Buddhist traditions, and when the Catholics met harassment and persecution from the Dutch, they fled to the Kandyan kingdom for solace, a historical episode that many of my Buddhist informants related with pride. Nevertheless, the Buddhism in the Kandyan kingdom was facing serious challenges, and the monastic lineage came to an abrupt halt in 1697, from which the last higher ordination ceremonies (*upasampada*) were held until monks from Siam were imported in 1753 to re-establish a proper monastic lineage. While the monastic roles are that between a

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[29] Sri Dalada Maligawa, or the temple of the tooth, is an important and historical temple situated in Kandy.
[30] Strathern notes how Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was framed as a betrayer of the Sinhala nation during the peace negotiations with the LTTE, and subsequently was compared with king Dharmapāla (Strathern 2010: 4).

monk (*bhikkhu)*, and a novice (*samanera)*, this period saw the emergence of a new category of 'unwholesome' monks, *ganninanses*, a category of monks who performed the functions of proper monks, but which in general were less able to maintain the standards of the tradition (Malalgoda 1976). Thus, while Kandy was the heir to the tradition of royal patronage and Buddhism, the order of monks was in decline and struggling to maintain the vitality of the monastic lineage. When the British overtook the Kandyan kingdom in 1815, the Kandyan Convention attested both to the end of the traditional royal patronage of Buddhism, and to a new future where the 'religion of the Boodho' was to be protected and maintained by new forms of political establishments. This was a formulation that was to become vested with expectation, frustration and disappointment. With the British takeover of Kandy in 1815, it was also the first time in several centuries that the whole island was united under a single political rule. However, Buddhist discontent had started to grow, and from the 1860s and onward this discontent was especially directed against Christian missionaries. Hikkaduve Sumangala, one of the most prominent monks in this period, lamented the lack of royal patronage for Buddhism:

> Further, despite the fact that the Buddha-śāsana, which was established on this island at the time of a dharmic king named Devānampiyatissa two hundred and thirty-six years after the Buddha, has become weak periodically in the reigns of non-Buddhist kings, again and again it has returned to its natural state because of the assistance of dharmic kings. And now the rule of the non-Buddhist English is underway. Therefore, the Buddha-śāsana has become weak and sluggish. (as quoted in Blackburn 2010: 106-107)

In Buddhist imaginaries the intimate relations between Buddhism and the state are a precondition for Buddhism to flourish. Historical kings are recollected, Devanampiyatissa and Dutthagamini in particular, in the way they were able to unite the country under one umbrella. These imaginaries gained ground under the rule of the non-Buddhist English, and many scholars have highlighted the period 1860 – 1915 as critical for the 'Buddhist Revival'.

The 'Buddhist Revival' 1860 – 1915

This period has been under intense scrutiny by a plethora of different scholars. While their focus has been on several different processes, many of them have identified 'a sea of change' from the 'traditional' practices to the 'modern' ways of thought. Some have identified the period as one of Buddhist revivalism (Bond 1988), while others have highlighted aspects of an emerging 'protestant Buddhism' (Malalgoda 1976, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1990). We can discern three interrelated processes that have received focus in this period: (1) Antagonistic encounters with Christian missionaries and western thinkers (2) A return to historical sensibility and scriptural sources, (3) The development of cultural organisations and interest groups. These trends amounted to cultural opposition, yet they did not breed into political formations, in the sense of an independence movement, as occurred in India. However, while this period has often been identified as the historical nesting place of the 'Sinhala-Buddhist' identity, Blackburn warns of projecting such terms anachronistically for understanding the rationale and repertoires wielded by important actors in this period:

> In studies of colonial-period Lankan Buddhism it is common to map British colonial and postcolonial taxonomies of ethnicity and religion onto the social orientations of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lankans, interpreting their activities as undertaken in the service of "Sinhala" and/or "Buddhist" identities. This anachronistic move is easily made, given the deceptive naturalness with which these categories have come to dominate Sri Lankan social reflection and political discourse in a postcolonial era characterized by increasingly marked communalism. (Blackburn 2010: 209)

Blackburn claims that these categories of 'Sinhala' and 'Buddhist' cannot be automatically projected into a rereading of history, rather historians should be sensitive to "a shifting congeries of collectives operating at different levels of classification and self-description, both narrower and wider than those of 'Sinhala' and 'Buddhist'" (Blackburn 2010: 209-210). Even though some of these terms were first articulated during this period, their meaning needs to be identified within their distinct areas of use. However, it is generally agreed that there is a marked change in the relations between Christian missionaries and Buddhist interests from the 1850s to

the 1860s. Malalgoda notes that 1,500,000 tracts and pamphlets were distributed by Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka in the period 1849-1861, something that brought few converts, but which increasingly provoked Buddhist actors (Malalgoda 1976: 205). Thus, it is not a coincidence that the first printing press was acquired by Buddhists in 1855 and the second in 1862, to counter the magnanimous printing activity by Christian missionaries, which led to intense rivalry between the fractions in publishing responses to each other. One of the more groundbreaking publications was the Christian missionary Gogerly's publication *Kristiyāni Prajñapti* (The Evidences and Doctrines of the Christian Religion) in 1849 on the evidences and doctrines of the two religions, evidently in favour of Christianity (Harris 2006). What was remarkable about Gogerly's treatise was his use of original pali-scriptures to refute the Buddhist positions. Blackburn has shown how the monk Hikkaduve Sumangala had considerable authority in the Pelmadulla Vinaya project, which was an expensive editorial project on the pali-texts of *tipitaka* (*Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma*) which brought together scholar-monks from all over Sri Lanka to issue an authoritative version of the pali-scriptures. The project was not merely a response to Gogerly, but also drew upon imaginaries of the historical compilations of the scriptures (back to king Aśoka) as well as it was an event that was "gesturing eloquently to the status, wealth and power of its patrons" (Blackburn 2010: 6).

Blackburn argues in her micro-levelled narrative on Hikkaduve Sumangala that his actions and words should be seen in its locative pluralism, that is both the plural contexts but also of the shifting collectives of belonging he was interacting with. Thus, the actions of Hikkaduve should be seen as marked, but not encompassed by colonialism, so that he retains his agency and local and translocal networks of affiliation and patronage, but also enabling him to partake in colonial structures of interaction. By placing Hikkaduve within a context of increasing Christian antagonism, where he emerged as one of the leading figures, only reveals one form of his commitment for the vitality of the Buddha-śasana in Sri Lanka. While Hikkaduve was active in publishing tracts to counter Christian publications, he also participated in a series of public debates that took place in Sri Lanka from 1864 to the famous Panadura debate in 1873. These debates happened in the low-country centres of

Baddegama, Varagoda and Panadura, and Bond calls them "the flowering of the Buddhist revival" (Bond 1988: 47). Malalgoda notes that 5,000 and 10,000 people attended the two days of public debate in Panadura, and that Buddhists had no doubts of their victory in the debate, of which the monk Mohottivatte Gunananda was the main speaker (Malalgoda 1976: 226). Harris notes that the Panadura debate "gave back dignity and identity to the Buddhist spectators" (Harris 2006: 203). The debate also aroused attention in other parts of the world, and the event was noted by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, whom immediately initiated correspondence with the main actors in the debate, and himself came to Sri Lanka in 1880, with his co-founder Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

The Theosophical Society had an esoteric orientation in wisdom and universal brotherhood, and worked to subsume different religious aspirations under one umbrella of religious unity, albeit having a staunch anti-Christian rhetoric. Colonel Olcott was immediately received as a hero in Sri Lanka and seen as another confident trophy of Buddhist ascendancy in the face of the Christian missionaries of their colonisers. Hence, a Buddhist branch was initiated under the Theosophical Society, and this branch was again subdivided into one clerical division and one lay division, of which the lay division was the most active. While the relations between Colonel Olcott and his clerical companions, most notably Hikkaduve were cordial in the beginning, Olcott's book *Buddhist Catechism* (1885), made evident how different their conceptions of 'true' Buddhism really were. Nevertheless, Colonel Olcott emerged as a broker between Buddhist interests and the government after Buddhist-Catholic disturbances in Kotahena 1883. The Kotahena riots took place when a Buddhist pinkama procession took place outside a Catholic Cathedral, St. Lucia, and was attacked by some Catholics. Tempers had been running high for some time, but the monk Mohottivatte's temple had been able to attain permission for their procession, while the Catholics did not. However, after the melee by Buddhist and Catholics, none of the Catholic instigators were brought to trial, which caused Buddhist resentment. Gould (2012) argues that these disturbances where conflicts

over control, and extension, of sacred space,[31] especially in how different groups were able to draw patronage from municipal authorities.

While the relationship between Hikkaduve and Colonel Olcott became frail and strained,[32] another person emerged on the public scene; Anagarika Dharmapala. Initially his name was Don David Hevavitarana, and he was the son of one of Hikkaduve's most important patrons, Don Karolis Hevavitarana. Seneviratne argues that Anagarika Dharmapala has a very special place in Sinhalese consciousness:

> It is not possible to talk meaningfully about any area of social and cultural life and particularly about aspects of social change in contemporary Sri Lanka without discussing the reformer Anagarika Dharmapala. (…) To talk about the political and social developments in Sri Lanka since his time up to now without reference to his work is to ignore the spring of these developments. No major Sinhala thinker or writer after him escaped his influence, directly or indirectly. (Seneviratne 1999: 28)

Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) is by many recognised as the progenitor of the consolidation of an exclusive *Sinhala-Buddhist* identity. He was the editor of the newspaper Sinhala Bauddhya from 1906 to 1915, and wrote a famous column 'Facts one should know'. He also wrote a famous pamphlet in 1912 titled: 'A Message to Young Men of Ceylon'. Being the son of an important lay patron of Hikkaduve, he had been present at many of the groundbreaking events that had formed the new Buddhist confidence in Sri Lanka. As such, Dharmapala found inspiration in the *Mahavamsa* and its stress on the righteous rulers of Buddhism, who rule according to Buddhist rules and principles. Hence, he turned to *Mahavamsa* to envisage a new future for Sri Lanka, independent of the colonial oppressors. Dharmapala wanted to renew the battles of Dutthagamini, this time to throw out the British: "Enter into the realms of our King Dutugemunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of that great king who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from

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[31] There was also a riot in Anuradhapura in 1903, where Buddhist contested government building at a sacred site. The triggering event was the death of a pilgrim, which sparked Buddhist resentment and violence. While Hikkaduve had moderately voiced his complaints to the government about the building of an Anglican Church, in contrast to the more vociferous appearance of Harischandra, he still used his patronage relations to secure many of the rioters release from prison after the event (Blackburn 2010: 129-133).

[32] Especially so after Colonel Olcott in 1905 argued of the 'inauthenticity' of the tooth relic at Dalada Maligava (Blackburn 2010: 140).

oblivion" (Dharmapala in Guruge 1965: 510). The nationalist stance in Dharmapala was imbued in his text 'A Message to Young Men of Ceylon': "Remember we have a duty to perform to our nation, to our religion, to our country and to our national literature" (Dharmapala in Guruge 1965: 585). This was an extended version of the slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (country, nation, religion), which had become a famous nationalist slogan which has had resonances up until the present period (Hertzberg 2011).

While Dharmapala sought to restore the Buddhist heritage to its former glory, he also envisaged a critical role for the monkhood in this nationalistic project. The monks were no longer only to orient themselves to the other-worldly sphere (*lokuttara*), but also engage themselves in the this-worldly sphere (*laukika*) by doing social work. Thus, he tried to mobilise this segment into social action, but Dharmapala did nothing more than supply the public with unrealised blueprints and fiery speeches that intended to kindle the mobilisation among his audience. Dharmapala's immediate influence among the elites was meager (Little 1994: 24), and when Dharmapala uttered his famous slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' this was at his own time nothing more than a battlecry, which only later came to make deep resonance within Sri Lankan society. Wickremeratne observes that: "In Collective Identities: Nationalism and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka (1979), Michael Roberts might well have pointed out that between 1900–1948, one would have to look really hard to discover Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism emerging as an independent political force with a distinct template of its own" (Wickremeratne 2006: 118). Sri Lanka never had a movement of independence similar to that in India, yet the British were nervous that such a movement was about to emerge.[33] However, the Gampola riots in 1915 were first interpreted by the British as a national uprising by the Buddhist Temperance movement against the political rule in the country.

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[33] Victor Ivan, newspaper editor of Ravaya, and a public figure in Sri Lanka notes how an election process under the British in 1911 mostly followed trajectories of caste, and not ethnicity and religion. The leaders of the *Goyigama* caste (both superior in status and in numbers) calculated that their candidate alone could not win over the candidate of the other caste-alliance, consisting of three major castes along the coast, *Karawa*, *Durawa* and *Salagama*. Hence, in order to win the election, the *Goyigama* caste supported a Tamil candidate, Ponnambalam Ramanathan. Religious difference was still not a decisive factor in these election disputes (Ivan 2009: 141-144).

The riots in 1915 happened the 29th of May, during the annual Vesak celebrations in Gampola, and subsequently spread to various parts of the country in a nation-wide riot. The end result was 25 deaths in the actual rioting, and 83 sentenced to death by the British in the aftermath (Kannangara 1984). As Kannangara (1984) notes, it was the first major riot to take place in Sri Lanka, and it caught the British administrators by surprise. The precursor to the conflict was a dispute over the use of music at a Buddhist *perehera* (procession), which passed in front of a mosque, much to the complaint of a company of Muslim devotees. The issue had already been taken to the courts, and the Muslims had received a favourable verdict at the Supreme Court that there should be restrictions upon the music in the procession, especially in vicinity of the mosque, despite Buddhist allusions to Article 5 of the Kandyan Convention. The British initially suspected the emergent Buddhist Temperance movement to be behind the riots, and arrested them in numbers, before admitting that no apparent conspiracy was behind the instigation (Kannangara 1984). Ali (1981) argues that while economic issues were a factor, the outbreak of the riot could also be read as a confrontation between two emerging revivalisms; one Muslim revivalism, drawing upon pan-Islamism and isolation, and the other Buddhist revivalism espousing narrow ethno-religious nationalism. Rogers (1987) observes that while Sri Lanka in general was peaceful and collective violence was rare, in the pre-independence era, much protest was channeled into religious revival, either as a source of conflict or as the arena where it was played out. Even though cultural nationalism lost its political impetus the decades after the 1915 riot, some elite politicians still retained their links with Sinhala-Buddhist interests, which would come into full play in the post-independence era, especially in 1956.

What also played out before independence was a discussion on the role of 'political monks' in Sri Lanka. One of the most debated issues was a short statement by Vidyalankara Pirivena, a Buddhist education centre, which argued that political monks should be acknowledged in society:

> We cannot forget that from the earliest days the Sinhala monks, while leading the lives of bhikkhus, were in the forefront of movements for the progress of their nation, their country, and their religion. Even today bhikkhus by being engaged actively in

education, rural reconstruction, anti-crime campaigns, relief work, temperance work, social work and other such activities, are taking part in politics, whether they are aware of it or not. We do not believe it is wrong for bhikkhus to participate in these activities (…) We should not follow their [The British] example, and should not attempt to withdraw from society. Such conduct would assuredly be a deplorable act of injustice, committed against our nation, our country and our religion. (Rahula 2006: 132-133, Appendix II)

The statement of *The Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena* passed on February 1946 and was a response to an earlier statement by the coming premier (president) D.S. Senanayake,[34] where he asserted that Buddhist monks should not interfere in political matters (Phadnis 1976: 163). *The Vidyalankara Declaration* is a short statement that allows the monks to engage in politics, or activities concerning the welfare of the people, as long as it does not hinder the religious life of a *bhikkhu* (monk). The monks from Vidyalankara Pirivena blamed the British for severing the ties between the political authorities and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and their statement unleashed a debate on the role of Buddhist monks with regards to political participation (Phadnis 1976: 164). *The Declaration* was controversial from its beginning, and both politicians and the press espoused an intense hostility towards the statement. The word *dussela* (unvirtuous) was used to discredit the Vidyalankara monks, and the term often appeared in the press and in various pamphlets, and "national newspapers emphasised the need to eradicate the influence of a 'small coterie of political bhikkhus'" (Warnapala 1978: 75). Some, including D.S. Senanayake and J.R. Jayawardene, even tried to have the statement withdrawn, and wanted a personal meeting concerning the declaration. The controversy grew to national proportions, and the newspapers were full of declarations of either opposition or support (Seneviratne 1999: 139-140). The argument posed by the Vidyalankara monks was that the vocation of monkhood should not be delimited to ritual and preaching alone, but also include the wider role of active participation in social work. However, this position was controversial, and several other monks wrote counter-works in opposition (Seneviratne 1999).

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[34] D.S. Senanayake (1884–1952) was the first Prime Minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and founded the United National Party (UNP) in 1946.

The most prominent figure of the Vidyalankara tradition was Walpola Rahula (1907–1997), a famous scholar monk who has probably influenced the monkhood more than any other figure in the last century with his work *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (*Bhiksuvage Urumaya* in the Sinhala edition (1946)). The *Heritage* was originally a lecture that came to be written down, and it was a collaborative work among several monks. The book is not an isolated phenomenon, but plays an important part in the family of a larger cluster of similar texts. The main objective of the text is to identify the intimate relations between the righteous king and the Buddhist religion, which is seen as inseparably linked. However, when the British arrived in Sri Lanka they tried to sever this intimate link (Rahula 2006: 81). Under king Dutthagamini, the *bhikkhus* had leading roles, and they engaged themselves as much in service of the country as that of religion (Rahula 2006: 22). The *bhikkhus* also acted as custodians of the Sinhala nation: "On every occasion when both the nation and religion were in danger, Buddhist monks came forward to save and protect them" (Rahula 2006: 65). Thus, the monks perceive themselves as guardians of the island, responsible for the country, nation and religion, and for the preservation of these intertwining concepts:

> A number of *bhikkhus* who have considered it their duty and heritage to once again liberate their country, nation and religion, have appealed to the people of Ceylon to take up the challenge of the work in consonance with the needs of the modern world and international requirements. This is the natural process of history which cannot be stopped. (Rahula 2006: 97)

As such, the role of the monks is precisely to foster and protect the inseparable link between '*rata, jatiya, agama*', and which also proves the relation that the *bhikkhu* should be present in the contemporary world of politics. *The Declaration* paved the way for a new role for the monks, allowing them to engage themselves in politics, an argument which *The Heritage* elaborated on more thoroughly, especially by alluding to the monks' commitment for '*rata, jatiya, agama*'. The last chapter of *The Heritage* is called "The Revival", and seeks to empower the monks to take back their original role in society which was lost to them under colonial times; they are the guardians of the nation and religion. A minor but important nuance on how political monks are

conceptualised can be found within Rahula's historical writings. In many ways, the ideal relation between a king and a monk is that the monks are acting as advisors to the king, not necessarily as wielding direct political authority themselves. However, Rahula (1993) narrates how monks have violated the laws of succession and supported their own favourite candidate, and thus intervened directly into political matters. As Rahula notes: "This interference was, however, exceptional and was greatly resented by the legitimate king" (Rahula 1993: 69f.). From this we are left with three different chains of argumentation when it comes to political monks; first, they are entitled to be political subjects like ordinary citizens. Second, they can act as advisors to the polity (either on the inside or on the outside of political establishment). Third, they can intervene directly into politics claiming that the interference is of an exceptional measure.[35]

A challenge in addressing post-independence politics in Sri Lanka is locating the role of cultural nationalism.[36] Agents of cultural nationalism have never explicated a political template of their own, or in other words produced a coherent political movement based on cultural nationalism themselves. On the other hand, there has been a plethora of organisations, both small and large, espousing cultural nationalism, yet their political significance has relied upon being brokered by the larger political parties. The main political parties have usually kept rhetoric of cultural nationalism, and co-opted the substantial agenda of the cultural nationalists at opportune moments, what Uyangoda have labelled as a process of ethnic outbidding (Uyangoda 2007). Hence, whenever organisations espousing cultural nationalism have been successful in their mobilisation, they have not used this to consolidate persistent political movement, like the RSS in India, instead their agenda has been co-opted by the main political sphere. Thus, the impetus of these cultural nationalism

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[35] A more detailed discussion of the variances of political monks can be found in Hertzberg (2014), and below in the chapter "The Foremost Place of Article 9".

[36] Some prefer 'linguistic nationalism', for example K.M. de Silva. On the one hand this is more precise (in terms of the Sinhala-Only bill as the driver of the conflict), as the Catholics, which are both Sinhala and Tamil, have been divided along ethnic/linguistic lines. When I prefer the term 'cultural nationalism' it is due to the associative power this term has to the repository of nationalist sentiments from the 'Sinhala-Buddhist' culture. Roberts argues that the phrase 'cultural nationalism' also encompasses other dimensions than that of language, such as 'tradition', 'civilisation', 'history' and 'Sinhalese race'(Roberts 2001).

organisations need to be carefully addressed within political contextualisation. With this in mind the next part will put an added emphasis on Buddhist-political organisations, often ephemeral in nature, and how their political impetus have been brokered in the political establishment in Sri Lanka.

Independence: 1956 and the ascension of Sinhala-Buddhist dominance

The post-independence political scene in Sri Lanka has been dominated by two large political parties, United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), and these parties have again been dominated by highly influential political families. Uyangoda notes that "political families are hubs of political bargaining and mediation. They connect arteries of political power at a societal level. By being hubs of political power, the continuing reproduction of political families make the social dispersal of power less and less democratic" (Uyangoda 2010: 55). While UNP has at certain junctures been more willing to appeal to and accommodate multi-ethnic and multi-religious demands, in general these two parties have engaged in a mutual ethnic outbidding, a process that has seriously affected the relations of the state towards its various minorities, the Tamil minorities in particular.[37] As Spencer (2008) observes, it is the institutions of liberal democracy which have been the vanguard in promoting and producing nationalist sentiments in Sri Lanka. His concern is to locate the political nexus of 'identity politics' in Sri Lanka:

> I doubt that any serious analyst would claim that the 'stuff' of cultural nationalism in Sri Lanka was simply made up in the political crucible of 1930s mass politicking. Some of it was quite old, some quite new, and quite a bit was borrowed from elsewhere. (Spencer 2008: 614)

The question is not to find the origins of these identities, but inquire into how 'identity politics' was transmuted into mass politics, and how markers of ethnicity and religion became prominent markers of political allegiance. History has a role to

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[37] Sørbø et. al. (2011) claim that the dynamics between these two ruling parties is a major factor in explaining the outbreak of the civil war.

play here, but mostly as an argumentative repository for particular agents, and not as an agent in itself. Sri Lanka's pre-independence history did not necessitate the civil war, but can be seen as a consequence of ill-founded political judgments based on narrow cultural nationalisms. In Sri Lanka, mass electoral politics have hinged on exclusive nationalisms, which have accentuated a distinct political dynamic of varying political parties making populist demands along these lines of fragmentation.

Rogers (1987) asserts that at independence ethnic polarisation between Sinhalese and Ceylon/Sri Lanka Tamils did not seem an inevitable issue, yet that the upsurge of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the 1950s alienated Tamils from the Sri Lankan polity. Since independence Indian Tamils were denied rights of citizenship as well as voting rights, and have since been one of the most marginalised communities in Sri Lanka. In terms of intra-state disputes, the first election in 1948 was quite uneventful, and was won by UNP which cast itself as a secular western-liberal party with multi-ethnic portfolio, and which was closely associated with the Christian elites which had been dominating before the independence. However, it was to take another 8 years before a wave of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was able to gain electoral momentum in 1956, and bring their preferred candidate S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike to power with his MEP coalition. In just a few years, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism had become a major source of mobilisation, and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike had been able both to identify and exploit this change of political scenery in Sri Lanka. Initially a Christian, he had reconverted to Buddhism, and is commonly referred to as one of the Donoughmore Buddhists.[38] The landslide victory of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and his SLFP cannot be solely attributed to religio-nationalist mobilisation, but it was still an important factor for his victory, and it also marked the beginning of fluctuating engagement from Buddhist monks to intervene in political decision-making.

The influence of Buddhist pressure groups reached its momentum in 1956, when thousands of monks organised themselves in favour of the MEP coalition, in which SLFP and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike were at the forefront. The most notable

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[38] Spencer notes that some elite politicians shed their Christian upbringing in the 1930s, with the implementation of the Donoughmore Constitution, and that these elites became known as the 'Donoughmore Buddhists' (Spencer 2008: 614).

group among the bhikkhus was Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP), and Phadnis (1976) notes that its appeal was more widespread than that suggested by their membership. It is estimated that between 3,000 – 12,000 monks participated in the election campaign in favour of MEP and SLFP, and that they contributed in several ways in the landslide victory of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1956. One of the main reasons for the emergence of Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna was the *Betrayal of Buddhism* report, which was finally published in 1956, the year of Buddha Jayanthi, which stated that Buddhism had been cut off from the polity during colonial administration and that Christian schools had enjoyed special privileges and immunities. The remedies suggested by the report were to enrich national heritage and foster a generation with an intimate awareness of this Buddhist heritage. The report captured the imagination of Buddhist monks and Buddhist organisations, and it was quoted heavily during the election campaign in 1956 (Tambiah 1992).

It was the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) which initiated the *Betrayal of Buddhism* report, and they had already in 1951 issued a letter to the UNP expressing their disappointment with the present efforts of UNP in maintaining and protecting Buddhism in the country (Phadnis 1976: 121). The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress was founded in 1918, and has as its main objectives the promotion of Buddhist values and the interest of Buddhism. ACBC was at the forefront of waging demands of a greater Buddhist agenda by the UNP, and especially on the need for a commission to "enquire into the state of Buddhism in the island" (Phadnis 1976: 121). UNP reluctantly acceded to this demand and appointed a commission to enquire into the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, yet the Buddhist interest groups were not convinced of their sincerity in promoting the Buddhist heritage in the country. However, ACBC had in 1946 taken a critical stance towards the idea of the political monk, which was debated in the aftermath of the Vidyalankara Declaration in 1946 and the subsequent book by Walpola Rahula, *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, which argued that political activities were allowed for Buddhist monks. The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress kept its stance that Buddhist monks should avoid politics, yet some of the Vidyalankara monks was associated with the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, and in the section "The Present state of the Bhikkhu" in the *Betrayal of*

Buddhism report, the issue of political monks was not mentioned. Rather than using direct political pressure, we see here that the ACBC initiates different tactics in achieving their political goals. By launching a commission report, the findings and the public occasion of its release beckons the attention to a problem that needs to be solved: How can we protect the Buddhist heritage?

The formation of Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP), a major political pressure group consisting of political monks (Imtiyaz 2010), came with the ripples of the *Betrayal of Buddhism*-report, and they offered their support to whoever would support their demands, a list of 'Ten Principles' (Seneviratne 1999: 161). The UNP had suddenly become the enemy of the monks, as it was not willing to meet their demands, namely to implement the Buddhist commission report, and this was taken as a confirmation that the UNP did not care for the Buddhist heritage. Instead, the political monks in EBP found an ally in S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (and his SLFP) who was willing to give Buddhism its due place, even though he rejected making it a state religion. The Buddha Jayanthi event added fuel to the sentiments of the monks and the slogan of the posters ran: 'rescue your country, your race and your religion from the dangers of evil', where UNP was the target of antagonism, portrayed as a risk for the Buddhist heritage. Phadnis notes that EBP was anti-west, anti-Catholic and anti-UNP (Phadnis 1976: 186). Another pressure group that could match the ferocity, yet not the numbers or reach, of the EBP was the Buddhist activists in Sinhala Jatika Sangamaya (SJS).

Both the monks in EBP and in SJS were ardent defenders of the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage and were at the forefront of promoting the language issue of making Sinhala the sole official language of Sri Lanka (often termed the Sinhala-only bill), to the great dismay of the Tamil-speaking minorities. The reasoning behind this proposal was that the Sinhala language was threatened, not only by the influence of English as an official language after the colonial period, but also by Tamils who had a numerical superior community of Tamils residing in Tamil Nadu in India, yet Sinhala only was to be found in Sri Lanka. The *bhikkhus* saw themselves as the custodians of the Sinhalese-Buddhist heritage, and their intimate relations with fostering the Sinhalese language enabled the monks to communicate the crisis of the language

issue more effectively than anyone else (Phadnis 1976). While the landslide victory of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike needs to be explained by several factors, and not only by Buddhist pressure groups alone, it was the year 1956 in which these Buddhist pressure groups had proven their political potential. Phadnis argues that the controversy concerning the political involvement of monks was put to rest after this, and their presence was tacitly accepted in the sphere of politics (Phadnis 1976: 203). As such, participation of the bhikkhus in political matters identified them as an emergent sphere of power, and the UNP quickly realised the necessity and potential of having support from the monks. Imtiyaz argues: "The 1956 election, which successfully mobilized the extremist Sinhala-Buddhists, radically changed the shape of the island's politics for years to come: the major Sinhala parties, including the left parties, switched to religio-ethnic symbolic politics, sandwiching religious emotion with ethnic hostile politics as a way to garner popular Sinhalese support" (Imtiyaz 2010: 157).

When the Sinhala-only bill was passed in 1956, Tamils across the country rallied in protest, and the issue led to serious anti-Tamil riots in 1956 and 1958. Bandaranaike's most important challenge after his election was to find a way to please his voter base with a language act, as well as to placate the Tamil opinion after this Sinhala-only act. While the Buddhist demands for a department of Buddhist cultural affairs and the promotion of two education centres (Vidyodaya pirivena and Vidyalankara pirivena) into university status were easily accommodated, two issues were more difficult to settle in amity; Tamil language recognition and the paddy land act. In order to accommodate the demands of the Tamil-speaking community, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, the Federal Party, and the leader of the protest movement against the language act secured an agreement in 1957 that Tamil should be recognised as an official language for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, that a certain degree of local autonomy in administrative functions should be given, and that the ongoing irrigation schemes should not alter the demographic majority of indigenous Tamils in these areas. The most vehement opposition to this agreement came from the Buddhist pressure groups of EBP (fronted by Mapitigama Buddharakkhita and Talpavila Seelavamsa) and SJS

(fronted by Baddegama Wimalawamsa and Devamottawa Amaravamsa), as well as other political parties (most notably the UNP) and even the *sangha* hierarchy of the Asgiriya and Malwatte chapters expressed their concern. The momentum of the campaign reached a climax with a sit-in demonstration by a group of *bhikkhus*, led by Ven. Wimalavamsa, and Bandaranaike finally succumbed to the pressure and withdrew from the agreement (Dharmadasa n.d.).

The other issue that posed a problem for Bandaranaike in relation to the Buddhist pressure groups was the paddy land act of 1957, which was fronted by the Marxist cabinet colleague Philip Gunawardene, in order to give tenant farmers a greater sense of cultivation rights, and especially to prevent exploitation from absentee landlords. However, large temples themselves control large areas, and many *viharadhipathis* (temple-chiefs) looked upon this new act as an infringement of their rights as landlords and as a threat to their maintenance of land for institutional purposes. Again, the sangha hierarchy of Asgiriya and Malwatte issued their concerns, but also several individual monks in EBP, most prominently Mapitigama Buddharakkhita, who himself was a significant landowner, critically opposed the act. However, many monks were not affected by the proposal, and saw the initiative as a progressive measure to safeguard the interest of poor tenant farmers. EBP was divided over the issue, and seceded over the issue, where the new 'progressive' fraction named itself Lanka Sangha Sabha. Buddharakkhita, the now leading figure of EBP, continued his role within the political circles of the government (within an executive committee), and was able to oust two Marxist ministers (Philip Gunawardene and William Silva) in 1959. An additional shock after the assassination of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in September 1959 was that he was not only shot by a Buddhist monk, but that his assassination was master-minded by Buddharakkhita himself. This led to an abrupt halt for political activities of Buddhist monks, and in the two elections held in 1960 there was a complete absence of political activities from Buddhist monks (Dharmadasa n.d.).

The events surrounding the 1956 election was the first time political monks mobilised on a massive scale to pursue their own interests in the polity, and an estimate of 3,000 to 12,000 monks are said to have contributed to SLFP's election

campaign. *The Betrayal of Buddhism*-report gave the impression that the Buddhist heritage was under threat, and that the awareness of the Sinhala language, which the monks had fostered in their Sinhalese literature and only spoken in Sri Lanka, a little teardrop below the vast population of India, added to the concern. When Bandaranaike was willing to support these demands, to restore Buddhism to its due place and implement the Sinhala-Only language policy, the EBP willingly lent its voice to promote his candidature. The monks did rise to the needs of the hour, and it was a necessity to remove the UNP and restore Buddhist heritage, and the event of the *Buddha Jayanthi* added importance to this necessity. The UNP were seen as Christian elites who were persistent in their negligence of the Buddhist heritage. The 1956 upsurge sought to redress the old power-relations that had existed since pre-colonial times, especially when it came to issues of language and religion.

The Catholic community in Sri Lanka had been anxious before independence, but it was not before 1956 that the substantial changes were about to happen. With the fall of UNP, especially with the landslide victory of SLFP, many of the Christian politicians and elites were disentangled from their political positions. Hence, the political influence of Catholics changed abruptly, and UNP also sought to accommodate more populist demands along the Sinhala-Buddhist nexus. The Catholics were by Buddhists seen as being over-privileged and holding way too many offices and bureaucratic positions than their numbers should imply. After *The Betrayal of Buddhism*-report Catholics felt further antagonised, and both Buddhist and Catholic interests countered the report with written replies, as well as holding rallies against the report (Stirrat 1992). Foreign missionaries were either expelled or taxed. However, their worst defeat came with the nationalisation of the schools in the 1960s, a move that dislocated the Catholic community from their main source of influence in the Sri Lankan society – education. This move gave the government 90% of Catholic schools, and the Catholics faced a major decline of their political and societal influence (Arasaratnam 1991). These processes led Catholics to refurbish their ambitions and re-negotiate their boundaries in Sri Lanka, and predominantly manage and curtail their own community, without provoking Buddhist interests. Stirrat observes how Catholics have increasingly been both tempted and forced to re-

align along ethnic boundaries, especially during the 'ethnic troubles', a term with which the civil war has often been labelled (Stirrat 1992).

Even if the Catholic community was in many ways dethroned from their privileged position in Sri Lanka, the position of the Tamil community was even further alienated from the political centre of Sinhala-Buddhist dominance. While the Tamil community during the first decades after 1956 tried to voice their grievances through non-violent political campaigns, Tamil militant groups and demands of secessionism increased during the 1970s. After a political rebellion in the south by Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in 1971, the government implemented several policies (on recruitment and university quotas) that put Tamils in particular at a disadvantage (Rogers 1987). While Tamil nationalism was rising in the 1970s, Buddhist activism had a dormant period. When Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the widow of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was elected President in 1970, she fulfilled her promises of Buddhist ascendancy. In the 1972 constitution Buddhism was designated 'the foremost place', a formulation that was also retained in the next constitution in 1978. While some Buddhist interests demanded to become 'state religion', K.M. de Silva argues that this formulation proved flexible enough to cope with the pressure from Buddhist activist without making it a state religion. Subsequently, K.M. de Silva further observes how Buddhist activism 'was a shadow of the vibrant force' it had earlier mounted, probably due to the fact that most of their demands were actually settled in their favour (de Silva 1993). With the election of President J.R. Jayawardene and his UNP in a landslide victory in 1977, the executive powers of the president were greatly expanded, and the political situation in the northern areas, where most of the Tamils were settled, further deteriorated. The Jaffna library was set on fire in 1981, allegedly by government forces and/or the police, but it was after an ambush by the LTTE that killed 13 government soldiers in 1983 that the disturbances escalated into a full-scale war. This event was turned into a politicised funeral of the soldiers in Colombo, which ignited furious anti-Tamil riots in many parts of the country, a dark chapter in Sri Lanka's history which today is referred to as 'Black

July'.[39] Animosities between government forces and Tamil militant groups increased the following years, despite attempted peace talks, and in 1987 an intervention was made by the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF), something that infuriated both militant Tamils in the north and Sinhala-nationalist sentiments in the south. At this time, Buddhist monks awoke from the political slumber, and again mobilised on behalf of *rata, jatiya, agama* (country, nation, religion).

A number of new Buddhist pressure groups and Buddhist monks arose in the wake of the ethnic troubles and the subsequent Indian intervention in the aftermath of the Indo-Lanka Accord in 1987. The Indo- Sri Lankan Peace Accord was an agreement that aimed at ending Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka by devolving substantial powers to the regional provinces, a process which would grant a relative autonomy to the Tamils in the north and the east (Amunugama 1991: 115). While this was a period that led to an upsurge of a plethora of new pressure groups, both with and without religious backing, some of these organisations were of greater importance than others. Matthews (1988) identifies this 'mushrooming' of new Sinhala patriotic groups, which he calls *deshapremi* groups due to their common stand on 'cultural nationalism', as divided by the personal ambitions of charismatic leadership. While the collective political importance of all these groups is undisputed, their organisational fragmentation hinders them to act conjointly as a consolidated nationalist movement (Matthews 1988). Both Matthews (1988) and Schalk (1988) offer extensive lists of emergent and operative pressure groups, and Amunugama argues that all political parties established their own support organisations backed by various *bhikkhus* (Amunugama 1991).

In particular two organisations took the lead in the opposition against the Indo-Lanka Accord; *Mavbima Surakime Vyaparaya* (MSV) and Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The *Mavbima Surakime Vyaparaya* (MSV), or 'Campaign for the Protection of the motherland', was an umbrella organisation that fronted the interests of a number of political groups and other Buddhist organisations politically in the

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[39] I was in Sri Lanka in July 2013, and tried to find any commemoration of the event, but the event was barely discussed, except for a lengthy article in one of the national newspapers. Perera (2008) refer to such forgetting of collective violence as 'structural amnesia'.

public and was founded in July 1986. The rationale behind the MSV was that Buddhist pressure groups had before acted independently without wielding much political influence, and that by facilitating a greater coalition of Buddhist pressure groups, the MSV could co-opt the role of representing the 'the voice of united Buddhists' (Amunugama 1991: 118). Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was a revolutionary Marxist-nationalist group which had formerly led armed uprisings against the government in 1971, and which had also created a bloody insurgency in the years 1987-89. In 1994 they reemerged as a political party, and formed the UPFA coalition together with SLFP and JHU from 2005 to 2010.

The MSV was a coalition of political organisations, Buddhist lay organisations, sangha associations – the MSV even received endorsements from the Mahanayakes – and they presented themselves as the voice of Buddhist opinion (Amunugama 1991). Schalk notes how the various membership organisations of MSV had a steady increase from 20 to 40 organisations in a short span of time (Schalk 1988). While Tamils claimed the north and east of the island as 'traditional homeland', the MSV opposed this claim, and argued that Buddhist ruins and pilgrimage sites proved that the whole of the island was part of the Sinhala Buddhist patrimony, and that Sri Lanka was the *dhammadvipa* (Amunugama 1991: 118). As such, the devolution of the country was perceived as a threat to the tight connection between Buddhism and the state, and it challenged the monks' concepts of 'unity' and 'sovereignty' (Schalk 1988: 74). However, the Jayawardene's government did not give in to the *bhikkhu* agitation, and he signed the Indo-Lankan Accord despite the vocal opposition from Buddhist segments (de Silva 1993: 340).

The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was also vociferous in its opposition towards the Indo-Lankan Accord, and after the signature of the agreement was secured, the JVP launched an insurrection, adopting the battlecry 'Motherland above all' as their slogan (Amunugama 1991). Some of the issues JVP opposed were the Indo-Lankan Accord, the failure to curb terrorism and the open market economy. Buddhist monks claimed that the government was too lenient on terrorism and that it had lost its Buddhist identity. The political *bhikkhus* in JVP were seen as a non-formal grouping outside the hierarchical sangha, and the new image of the political

monk was one who sacrificed his 'religious duties' (bana, meditation and sleep) and life for the protection of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (Country, nation, religion) (Abeysekara 2002: 212). Thousands of young monks were demonstrating against the Indo-Lankan Accord, and more than a hundred were arrested by the police for the violation of law and order. The JVP accused the Jayawardene government (and even some orthodox monks) as traitorous, and launched a massive campaign to liberate the (Buddhist) country (from the government) with guerilla means (Abeysekara 2002: 218-223).

> Since the mid-1980s, as though demonstrating the seriousness of its purpose, the JVP assassinated many Sinhalese – politicians, security personel, intellectuals, supporters of political parties, and other citizens – who opposed the JVP and who, by definition, had become traitors. In midst of such practices, young Buddhist monks came to form a crucial part of the JVP cadre. (Abeysekara 2002: 224)

While some *bhikkhus* had ties to the circles of leadership in the JVP, most of them conducted other tasks for the group, such as making posters, organising rallies and demonstrations and some even hid weapons in their temples. During the militant government campaign against JVP, around hundred monks were killed. A great number of monks were also arrested for their affiliation to a 'criminal' 'terrorist' organisation, and those who were found guilty had to undertake rehabilitation to regain their proper monastic identity (Abeysekara 2002).

Buddhist activist group dynamics in Sri Lanka

There is a widespread agreement that the 1980s witnessed a tremendous upsurge of new patriotic pressure groups and Buddhist interest organisations, many of them relating especially to the 'ethnic troubles' in the country, and the ongoing devolution proposals. Those who have written about the Buddhist pressure group dynamics have related the experiences of the 1980s back to the political mobilisation of such pressure groups in the 1950s, and noted that the emergence and mushrooming of such Buddhist pressure groups occur in a cyclical pattern (Matthews 1988). While the sheer number of Buddhist pressure groups was low in the 1950s, the numbers and varieties of different Buddhist pressure groups or related interest groups exploded

after the outbreak of the civil war in 1983, and especially in relation to any attempts of mediating a peace treaty between the government and the LTTE. Matthews (1996) notes already in 1996 how Buddhist activists had taken up the role as chief saboteurs of any attempt of negotiation a peace plan or a devolution proposal in response to the 'ethnic troubles'. Thus, we see that these Buddhist pressure groups often arise in times of political instability, led by a feeling of insecurity and anxiety of the future prospects of the country. Schalk argues:

> It should be pointed out that organizations like the MSV grow up, flourish for a short time and fade away. (…) Nevertheless, the point is that in the present situation of conflict and contingency, there will always be new organizations of the 'sons of the soil' growing up, led by some charismatic monks and prestigious laymen. There is a permanency and continuity in the ideology of the 'sons of the soil' behind these organizations. It would therefore be misleading to overestimate one special organization by pinpointing for example the MSV only, and it would also be misleading to underestimate it by focusing on the shortlivedness of such an organization. (Schalk 1988: 77)

Schalk argues that the contingency of these organisations of 'the sons of the soil' will lead to a cyclical emergence of another set of organisations, with like-minded ideology, led by prestigious laypersons or charismatic monks. These organisations have been characterised as "loosely structured, ad hoc in nature and highly personalised in character" (Phadnis 1976: 273). The rapid emergences of numerous Buddhist pressure groups at the same time make them compete over the same resources; followers and activists, media attention, economic support. In addition, an added task will be to distinguish themselves in the broader flora of like-minded groups and ideologies. Matthews argues that this dynamic of many, but fragmented groups, makes the 'movement' impotent, and that they often end up with different charismatic figures who compete with other luminaries to stand in the limelight alone (Matthews 1988: 630). Often these *deshapremi* groups are ideologically fickle, and change their political directions wherever the wind blows. It is as such an organisational problem, that the temporal horizons of these groups often are unstable and contingent, and that their lack of experience in the political realm makes them unrealistic in their ambitions of what they can feasibly achieve. Newer organisations

are seen as more impatient and reactionary, and expect immediate result, while older organisations have a different scope when they assert political demands.

This cluster of groups is given many names, from *deshapremi* groups (Matthews 1988) to 'sons of the soil'-groups (Amunugama 1991, Schalk 1988) and it should be thought of "loosely as a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement" (Matthews 1988: 622). Through the ideologies and activities of these groups, we can assert a continuity of 'religious-national identity' (Matthews 1996). Schalk, however, denotes the idea of a 'united Buddhist front' as mere polemical fiction, and that the existence of a plethora of such groups, with their own specific agendas, attests to the difficulties of an independent nationalist movement articulating a common political platform or front. Instead of speaking with a unified Buddhist voice, the collective political influence of these groups is in danger of becoming fragmented and feeble. Amunugama argues that the Buddhist nationalists are not easily accommodated either on the political left or right, despite this both sides of the political spectrum have often used nationalist rhetoric during their political campaigns. This co-option by the main political parties of the nationalist movement's political agenda may have further disintegrated the nationalist movement's potential of developing a distinguished political platform of their own. Urmila Phadnis (1976) argues that while the pressure groups of EBP and SJS wielded significant political potency in 1956, they did so because they were able to create a new Buddhist front in Sri Lankan polity, of which the UNP was then unaware. However, soon every main political party saw the need for political patronage among the Buddhist *bhikkhus*, and this levelled the political influence of *bhikkhus* to that of mere paraphernalia (as 'stage-props'). The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement faced three significant challenges; uniting the fragmented groups into one common political platform, and from that point either work to co-opt their political aims by the main political parties, or develop the organisational and institutional resources of the nationalist movement in order to become an independent voice within the Sri Lankan polity.

Buddhism, war and peace negotiations

There have been numerous attempts at reconciliation between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in the Sri Lankan past. Five major mediations have all been abrupt (1957, 1965, 1987, 1997 and 2002). The sangha has historically had interests in many peace processes, usually discrediting any notion of devolution. After the electoral victory of S.W.R.D. in 1956, Bandaranaike regretted his Sinhala-Only policy, and decided to find amendments to accommodate Tamil needs. However, the negotiations between Bandaranaike and Chelvanayagam (The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1957), which sought to restore the Tamil language to its 'due place' were vehemently opposed by the Buddhist clergy which performed a sit-down protest outside Bandaranaike's house in opposition to the agreement. UNP, which earlier had been marked for its un-Buddhist practices, joined the protests against the agreement. Tambiah terms the bhikkhus as the final wreckers of the pact (Tambiah 1992: 48-50). A similar attempt for a solution was launched in 1965 (Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact), but also this attempt was opposed by the monks, and never finalised. As I already have pointed out, the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord led to intense opposition and even rioting in the south. Thousands of monks, predominantly young ones, participated in the protests and hundreds of monks were brought into custody and charged for violations of law and order in the country (Abeysekara 2002: 218).

In the last 15 years there have been two attempts to negotiate between the different fractions. In 1994 Chandrika Kumaratunga won the presidential election with the promise of a softer approach to the conflict. In 1997 her devolution proposal, known as 'The Package', was not well received by monks. Several bhikkhus resigned from their office in the Supreme Advisory Council in opposition to the proposal (Bartholomeusz 2002). Other organisations affiliated with the sangha were also critical of 'The Package', among them the Jathika Sangha Sabhava and the Organisation for the Protection of the Motherland (MSV) (Frydenlund 2005a: 19). Even though there have been elements among the monkhood that have been in favour of peace negotiations (among them Baddegama Samhita Thero, who entered the parliament in 2001), the critical elements in the sangha have been far more audible in

their views.[40] The monkhood has been poignantly critical of any proposal of devolution and/or federal solution. A critical aspect of this opposition can be found in their conceptualisation of Sri Lanka as a *dhammadvipa*, that Sri Lanka is a holy Buddhist island that has to remain undivided. While some monks have argued that people should put their faith in the government to find a solution to the civil war, these are often cast as traitors or pawns of the government (Bartholomeusz 2002: 129). Orjuela writes about how the Sri Lankan peace movement, enthusiastic about Kumaratunga's peace proposal, let themselves be co-opted by government programmes, a move that ruined much of their integrity later (Orjuela 2008: 199). This loss of integrity has haunted the peace movement, and the movement was weakened in the following years after the downfall of the peace proposal initiated by Kumaratunga. Orjuela argues that Buddhist monks have acted as 'spoilers' in the processes around peace mediation, and that they have promoted the idea of ending the war by military means:

> While there is a narrative thread in Sri Lankan Buddhist history and in contemporary rhetoric that endorses radical pacifism, there are interpretations of Buddhist stories which argue that, for the defense of Buddhism – that is, of the dharma – war is permissible, even necessary under certain conditions. (Bartholomeusz 2002: 145)

Bartholomeusz tries to identify seeds of a just-war theory among Buddhist scriptures, the Buddhist tradition, and as an attitude among contemporary monks. Her project "calls into question scholarly obedience to the canon's narrative of pacifism" (Bartholomeusz 2002: 145). While Deegalle (2009) is sceptical to any notion of just-war theory both in the Buddhist practice and in the doctrinal passages, Bartholomeusz finds the notion of a just-war theory most clearly articulated around king Dutthagamini in the *Mahavamsa*, the great chronicle of Buddhist kings.[41] Another

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[40] Obeyesekere notes that while the monks can be seen as partially responsible for the radicalization of the LTTE, their responses must nevertheless not be seen in isolation, but also in relation to the violence committed by LTTE towards the Sinhalese-Buddhist side. Examples of this are the killing of Buddhist monks on pilgrimages, attacks on civilians and the attack on the Temple of the Tooth in 1988 (Sri Dalada Maligawa) in Kandy, a very important temple for the Buddhists (Obeyesekere 2006: 136).

[41] In the chronicles, Dutthagamini faces conflicting obligations; on the one hand he is bound by the duty of non-violence from the canonical scriptures, yet, on the other hand, he has an obligation to defend the religion

scholar, Premasiri (2006), argues that the Buddhist tradition does not have an equivalent to the Christian holy war, but that the Buddhist tradition is nevertheless open to defensive measures of warfare.

Even though Bartholomeusz seems to have found an opening for the Buddhists to declare war in the name of their religion, this opening should be understood not as a rule, but as an exception. Bartholomeusz approaches the subject through the means of prima facie duties, an approach that enables her to elucidate her subject through the general principles (for example one single ethical principle, pacifism), and how it should be understood "*given the specific situation*" (Bartholomeusz 2002: 29). Thus, she reveals, depending on the context, how some Sinhala-Buddhists emphasise one prima facie principle over another, questioning the assumption that all Buddhists are pacifists at all times (Bartholomeusz 2002: 29). According to context, therefore, exceptional measures are allowed, which explains why several *bhikkhus* are able to justify, even encourage, defensive measures against the LTTE. The protection of their own promised land (Sri Lanka) for their people (Sinhalese) and their religion (Buddhism), a transformation revealed by the refuge of political monks (Bartholomeusz 2002: 69).

During my fieldwork in Sri Lanka, I heard a similar argument as to why war was permissible: because the Buddhist tradition does not approve of warfare, it is easily exploited by other, more militant, traditions. In other words, in order to keep the non-violent tradition of Buddhism, violence is sometimes justifiable on the grounds that it can preserve the nature of Buddhism. Consequently, a war can be justified, not so much in relation to the scriptures as to the situational context, and Bartholomeusz writes that "the just-war thinker would argue that, though the duty of peace is ineradicable, it can nevertheless be suspended for a time" (Bartholomeusz 2002: 39). One of the monks Barholomeusz spoke to was Ven. Rathana Thero, who has later become one of the most prominent members of Jathika Hela Urumaya. He

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(Buddhism). Dutthagamini goes to war, not for the sake of glory, but to protect Buddhism. There is, in other words, a suspension of the ethical duty of non-violence, it has been overridden so as to defend Buddhism. While Dutthagamini fulfils the notion of *ius ad bellum* (the proper reasons for waging war) by waging war to protect Buddhism, other ethical obligations during the warfare regarding the just-war theory (*ius in bello*) is fulfilled through the proper burial of Elara by the hands of Dutthagamini (Bartholomeusz 2002: 58).

alludes to a story, the *Cakkavatti Sihananda Sutta* (CSS) where a Buddhist ruler is accompanied by a large army, and he uses this story as a basis for how Buddhist teachings allow war. Ven. Rathana Thero asserts that Buddha knew that war was a reality of life, and that it can be justified. Even though Buddhist scriptures imply a non-violent attitude towards life, it can be set aside under certain conditions. The ideal situation must be differentiated from the situation on the ground, and thus "the CSS provide the contemporary Sri Lankan government with the Buddhist justification it needs to proceed with the war against LTTE" (Bartholomeusz 2002: 40). Ven. Rathana Thero (2001) comments upon how the Buddhist virtues work in a conflicting situation: "There are two central concepts of Buddhism: compassion and wisdom. If compassion was necessary and a sufficient condition, then the Buddha would not have elaborated on wisdom or *prajna*" (Rathana Thero 2001). We see here how Rathana Thero tries to reconcile Buddhist scriptures with an active stance on warfare, and argues that justifiable reasons exist within the scriptural tradition to engage in warfare.

Many scholars begin their analysis with the assumption that Buddhism inherently is a pacifist religion, and from this point of reference either confirm or contest this assumption. Their narrative focus on how Buddhism relates to war, but they often trap their own analysis with the dilemmas of Buddhism and war/peace. Some examples are given below:

> Buddhism preaches tolerance and pacifism. However, many of its adherents among the majority Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka have resorted to ethnocentrism and militarism. Various arguments have been advanced to explain this paradox, although most objective observers agree that political Buddhism, which emphasizes politics over Buddhist values, and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism stoked ethnocentrism and militarism. (DeVotta 2007: vii)

> Can Buddhists join an army? When one is a soldier what happens to one's Buddhist identity? Can a state that has a majority Buddhist population use force to manage a war situation? What is the role of Buddhism in a war-torn country? Can Buddhism justify a defensive War? Within the teachings of the Buddha, is there any consideration of the use of force? (...) Peace is central to Buddhism, but war is not. Buddhism is praised both by insiders and outsiders for its doctrines of love and compassion. (Deegalle 2009: 60-61)

> Rather, my intention has been to begin to free the study of Buddhism from romantic ideas about South Asian religion, South Asian pacifism and South Asian non-violence. After all, if we continue to insist that real Buddhism is the Buddhism of the texts, and only portions of the texts that comport with attitudes of non-violence, and fail to take seriously Buddhist practices that are not endorsed by certain readings of texts, then we are complicit in the faulty production of knowledge about Buddhism. (Bartholomeusz 2002: 67)

A plethora of publications elucidating the hardline positions among the Sri Lankan clergy in relation to the civil war have often pried open the paradox of supposedly peaceful Buddhism with the militant attitudes found among some Buddhist monks. This narrative focus, using the gap between precept and practice, has asserted a distinct difference between canonical and present day, Buddhism, and this vantage point has been dominant in how to understand the relations between violence and Buddhism. However, many of these publications can be criticised for using an unmediated concept of non-violence, a form of soteriological non-violence, directly into social and political contexts, without discussing how a political form of non-violence within Buddhist political formations ever took place. Pacifism is an extremely loaded political concept, and we should not conflate the concept of non-violence to pacifism without serious attention to the conceptual valence of these concepts. This criticism is also valid of the latest development of what is called 'socially engaged Buddhism', in which non-violence and compassion are portrayed as hallmarks of the emergent socially aware form of Buddhism (see King 2009).

Distinctions should be made between the various forms of non-violence, either they be soteriological, social or political. Scholars should be aware of the conceptual shifts of valence that occurs when transposing the concept from sphere to sphere, and rather study the rhetorical configurations of such shifts, rather than make unmediated comparisons across these spheres. The concept of nonviolence has in the present day achieved a rhetorical potency in many settings, but that does not alone qualify the concept for being the main gate for an understanding of violence when concerning Buddhist contexts. Lately, several publications addressing the active relations between Buddhist understandings of political use of violence and non-violence have emerged (see Frydenlund 2011, Harris 2010, Kent 2010, Bartholomeusz 2004), and

in recent publications this supposed paradox of peaceful Buddhism and militant monks no longer seems to be a feasible approach within the scholarly world (see Jerryson (ed.) 2010, and Brekke and Tikhonov (eds.) 2013).

The main problem with putting an idea of the canonical Buddhism as the narrative focal point of study is that the discrepancy between the ideational precept and the "dirty" practice is how it easily frames the actors as traitors to their own values. Ananda Abeysekara accuses this heuristic focus, especially blaming Tambiah (1992), of tacitly introducing the notion of two kinds of religion – "Buddhism as a moral practice" and "Buddhism as a political possession" – and to use them self-evidently. The effect of the question 'Buddhism betrayed?' hinges on the assumption that an essential, a 'true and authentic', form of Buddhism can be betrayed (Abeysekara 2004: 35). Thus, as scholars, we should be careful to separate our mode of analysis from that of our (tacit) moral judgment, and be aware of what White (2003: 81) has called "the narrator's moral authority", in how it affects the material highlighted and how the events acquire their meaning in how they are imposed by the narrator.

Ethnic conflict or pure terrorism?

Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thero, a prominent member, and later the leader, of Jathika Hela Urumaya, comments upon the civil war in Sri Lanka with these words:

> The fusion of a religion with a chosen land, a chosen people (that forms the majority in this case) can often generate dissent among the minorities and is a potential trigger point for ethnic and religious conflicts. Fortunately, this is not the case in Sri Lanka. (…) This is not an ethnic conflict, but terrorism pure and simple. (Omalpe Sobhita 2009)

Another prominent member of Jathika Hela Urumaya, Ven. Rathana Thero, argues that the Liberations Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is not a proper organisation to engage in negotiations with, as they already have eradicated the rest of the Tamil polity to emerge as the sole representation of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. "The LTTE has proven beyond a shadow of doubt that it is one of the most brutal terrorist

groups in the world" (Rathana 2001). Rathana claims the LTTE is using the standstills to rearm, regroup and to recruit cadres, and thus asks: "What is the Buddhist answer to this question?" (Rathana 2001). His experience of a rearming and regrouping LTTE is vital for the analysis of his decision to fight LTTE with military means, and is a decision that is infused more with political sentiments than religious ones. However, one of his answers is that it is the ruler, according to the *Cikkavatti Sihananda Sutta*, whose responsibility it is to quell the rebellion. The quote by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita is based upon the notion that the 'troubles' in Sri Lanka are due to terrorism by the LTTE, and not a genuine ethnic conflict. This distinction is quite common in Sri Lanka among Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, and has been a cause of resentment among scholars working on the conflict:

> The overarching ideology of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists is hostile towards Tamils, but now they can mask that disapproval by directing their wrath at the LTTE. (…) They consequently embrace the refrain that Sri Lanka does not have an ethnic problem; it merely has a terrorist problem. In doing so, they portray the LTTE as the main reason for the civil war, thereby deftly avoiding the civil war's root causes, which have to do with the quest for Sinhalese Buddhist domination. (DeVotta 2007: 37)

The stance among many Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists that the 'troubles' stem from terrorism, and not ethnic grievances, has provoked many scholars, and they accuse them of hiding their anti-Tamil attitudes behind anti-LTTE rhetorics: "JHU mask their hostility toward Tamils by lambasting the LTTE, (…) [and t]hey thus seek to maintain a veneer of ethnic tolerance even while promoting ethnocentric designs" (DeVotta and Stone 2008: 45).

One of the key arguments of anti-Tamil policies among the JHU has been their opposition against the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS), which would distribute international aid to tsunami refugees. The government agreement with the LTTE to cooperate on the P-TOMS, was an agreement that provoked JHU monks, and Ven. Omalpe Sobhita even launched a fast-unto-death protest against the plans. Thus, JHU opposed the distribution of aid through the LTTE in the north of Sri Lanka, which evidently determines the JHU monks' lack of

concern for Tamils in general. However, while DeVotta and Stone see the P-TOMS as a supposedly non-political body created for the purpose of disbursing humanitarian aid after the tsunami, others argue that the agreement also included a political mechanism which would give LTTE institutional foothold in six districts, which was seen as a first step towards a final settlement (Rainford and Satkunanathan 2009: 50). Considering Buddhist monks' vehement opposition against devolution proposals in general, the controversy around the P-TOMS agreement could also be seen as an extension of the peace mediation. An additional argument to this is that SIHRN,[42] another previously initiated body to deal with humanitarian disbursement between the north and south of Sri Lanka, "elicited no negative response from the Sinhala nationalist groups" (Rainford and Satkunanathan 2009: 51).

Since the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist state formation manifested in 1956, where the Catholic elites were dethroned and the Tamil minorities were politically marginalised by the enactment of the Sinhala-Only act, religious and ethnic minorities have since struggled with a sense of alienation from the state. The Catholics mostly coped with their grievances, while others put more emphasis on their ethnic, and not religious, belonging. The Tamil polity opposed the changes, first through non-violent means, but later Tamil mobilisation turned more and more violent. As Uyangoda notes, these two competing nationalisms forged a deadly dynamics: "by their mutual exclusivity, the majoritarian Sinhalese and the minoritarian Tamil ethnic nationalisms have nourished each other to produce a truly intractable conflict" (Uyangoda 2007: 12).

The civil war between Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government lasted from 1983 – 2009, and LTTE established what amounted to a *de facto* state during the conflict (Kingsbury 2012). While Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists are consistent in

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[42] The Sub Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) was to be " 'a short mechanism for responding to the immediate needs of the populations' and its establishment shall not impede the introduction of a provisional administrative structure" (Rainford and Satkunanathan 2009: 36). While the SIHRN agreement came in 2002, before the formation of the JHU, it is still important to note the lack of controversy of SIHRN in comparison to the P-TOMS, when dealing with the response of Sinhala nationalist groups.

branding the 'troubles' as a case of terrorism, things looked differently from the viewpoint of the Tamil minorities:

> Much has been made of the brutality of the LTTE in this regard and there have no doubt been some Tamils associated with the organisations that is has destroyed who have remained bitter about it, in some cases preferring a Sinhalese government in Colombo to an LTTE-dominated independence movement. Given the polarization caused by the conflict, there was little room for half measures and those who chose to oppose the LTTE often took the extreme step of going over to the other side. However, the LTTE did consolidate its military and political authority in a way that was probably necessary for possible success in prosecuting the war for independence. What many, perhaps most, Tamils quickly came to realize was that, even though they sometimes did not approve of the methods employed by the LTTE, they believed there was no other organization capable of protecting or representing their interests. (Kingsbury 2012: 69)

To brand the Sri Lankan civil war as a mere 'terrorist problem' ignores the Tamil grievances and continual alienation from the Sri Lankan state formation, but it also justifies the violent measures taken to end the war. It is in other words the simplest way to deal with the post-war situation, as the 'terrorist problem' is over, and no further changes or reforms are necessary. When LTTE was put on the list of international terrorist organisations in 2003, it infered the rationale that LTTE was merely a 'terrorist group'. This move curbed the Tamil diaspora's financial assistance to LTTE's warfare, and excluded the political leadership of LTTE to engage in international meetings on an equal level. 2003 was a critical year in Sri Lanka; the Norwegian led peace facilitation came to a halt, the government collapsed and the political trends changed in favour of exclusive nationalisms at the election in 2004 (especially with Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU)). In 2005 President Mahinda Rajapakse[43] was elected, with a ticket to end the civil war by military means. Active warfare in the north began again in 2006, and ended in 2009, with the humanitarian disaster in Mullaitivu, where an estimate of more than

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[43] The election of President Mahinda Rajapakse was not only due to an upsurge of nationalist sentiments, especially on the anti-Christian rhetoric in the wake of the tsunami in 2004 (Hertzberg 2014), but another important facet was that the LTTE called for a boycott of the election in their areas, a move that may have been decisive since the victory of Rajapakse was only marginal.

20,000[44] were killed the last weeks of the war (Kingsbury 2012).[45] Even though the Government initiated a commission to inquire into these stages, the *Lessons Learnt Commission Report*, this report, albeit receiving some praise for its critical stance on the political structures of the Sri Lankan government, was not viewed as a sufficient contribution by the international community on the accountability of the last stages of the war. While an unofficial UN report (The Darusman report) was submitted in 2011, much to the protests of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, UN initiated in 2014 an official inquiry into these issues of accountability of the last stages of the war.

An evaluation report of the Norwegian peace facilitation was submitted by Sørbø et. al.(2011), and this report gives an overview of some of the major political changes that have taken place in Sri Lanka the last fifteen years:

> The last fifteen years (a period coinciding with Norway's involvement) have seen: 1) Sinhala nationalism returning to the centre of power; 2) the emergence of a new political dynasty (Rajapaksa), challenging the dominance of English-speaking political families in the political apex in Colombo; 3) a major shift from an essentially two mainstream party dynamic to a more uni-polar political terrain; 4) the redefinition of what had become a mainstream consensus for resolving the civil war, i.e. from a negotiated settlement involving significant reforms of the state, to military victory followed by minimal political reforms; 5) the end of the long running civil war with the defeat of the LTTE, at the cost of many civilian lives; 6) the end of the LTTE statebuilding project, and the emergence of a new politico-military regime in the north-east; and 7) the redefinition of the state-minority relationship, with the hegemony of the Rajapaksas-led SLFP severely impairing the minorities' bargaining power and space for opposition (Sørbø, et.al. 2011: 124)

The political process of the anti-conversion bill is placed in the midst of these political changes, and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been a major part of these political changes. One of my informants even related to this period as a 'saffronisation' of Sri Lankan politics, indicating how this ethno-religious

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[44] UN operates with a number of 40,000 (see United Nations. 2011. Report on the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka).

[45] This event has led to discussion on the R2P, the *Responsibility to Protect*, which states that the international society not only has the right, but also an obligation, to intervene in certain circumstances (see Kingsbury 2012).

nationalism has entered the centre of power in Sri Lanka. This substantial list of changes did not find room to mention the Boxing Day tsunami which hit Sri Lanka in late 2004, and which also seriously impacted the political processes in the country, not only in raising the nationalist sentiments that eventually led to the victory of Mahinda Rajapakse as president in 2005, but also with the massive influx of funds and donors in the humanitarian efforts in the wake of the tsunami. Despite this rush of political changes in the recent years, we still see that the very same challenges that have been facing Sri Lanka for half a century still remain unresolved, which is why minorities feel alienated from the national project. This alienation has especially followed ethnic lines, and there is nothing in the post-war situation which has brought forward any major shifts of this process of alienation. On the contrary, the government remains adamant to refuse that any such alienation actually exists.

Few, if any contemporary political processes in Sri Lanka can be understood without reference to the three decade long civil war (1983 – 2009) that ravaged between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil militant groups, most notably the LTTE. What are the implications of polarisation in conflicts?

> Hence polarization explains simultaneously the onset of a conflict, its content and its violence. This causal link is generally simply assumed rather than empirically confirmed. We either observe an action at the microlevel (e.g., a Sinhala victimizing a Tamil) and conclude that (ethnic) polarization at the macrolevel explains this particular action; or we observe polarization around a given cleavage at the macrolevel and then generalize it to all individual acts of violence at the microlevel. (Kalyvas 2006: 65)

The concept of polarisation offers itself as an explanatory feature of violence, and it distinguishes clearly the relevant cleavage dimension of the conflict, and thus categorises actors in the conflict to either of the poles. Identity categories cluster around distinct and mutually opposing poles which display high internal homogeneity and high external heterogeneity. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake argues that a bi-polar ethnic imagination has construed Sinhalas and Tamils as mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive groups at the expense of hybrid identities and marginal groups (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999: 101). The notion that the civil war consists

of a single cleavage, where the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government compete as mutually exclusive entities, subsuming every other actor to position them accordingly, may blur important distinctions in contemporary Sri Lankan politics.

My aim will be to reveal how several fronts, multiple interests and a myriad of affiliations and alliances between different groups compete and interact, both within, but also isolated from the traditional Sinhalese-Tamil axis. Hence, the epistemology of conflict that lies beneath my understanding of conflict is a multifaceted approach which integrates and synthesises a variety of differing viewpoints and agendas, which can be related, but also decoupled from the major trends of the civil war.

The debate on 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka includes a variety of different actors, including not only the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and the various Christian denominations and umbrella organisations of the Catholic church, the Protestants and various strands of evangelical branches, but also Hindu interest organisations and secular policy organisations. While it was the minister of Hindu affairs, M. Maheshwaran, who brought with him legal formulations from a conference in Tamil Nadu held in 2002 back to Sri Lanka, similar discussions had already taken hold in Sri Lanka, especially among the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. In 2002 a report was launched on the status of the Buddha Sasana in Sri Lanka, and a chapter, "Conversion of Buddhists to other religions", was dedicated to discuss the threat of conversions. This chapter identifies three external threats to Buddhism in Sri Lanka; the process of inculturation by the Catholic Church, subversive conversion strategies by the Muslim population, and non-ethical evangelism by Christians. First, the commission claims that the Catholic Church at the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) decided to develop friendly relations, or dialogue, with other religions in order to pursue the evangelisation process. Such processes can already be seen with the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, and the commission looks with suspicion upon recent trends where the Catholic Church has started to adopt native Buddhist words and practices in their own religious repertoire. These trends are read as signs and sub-components of a larger ploy to evangelise Buddhists in Sri Lanka, as the process of inculturation of the Catholic Church seeks to make Catholic practices familiar for the Buddhist population.

Second, Muslims pose another threat for Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Rather than using evangelising methods, conversions to Islam are made through marriages. However, expat Sri Lankans working in the Middle East are met with Muslim propaganda to change their religion accordingly. The commission also claims that Muslims have occupied several holy Buddhist sites throughout Sri Lanka for themselves, and that many of these land disputes create conflict. Third, the commission offers a long list of examples to substantiate how evangelical churches work in non-ethical ways to harvest new grounds in Sri Lanka. One accusation is that Christian groups deliberately target vulnerable groups for their evangelisation. Examples of vulnerable traits are listed: poverty, unemployment, social injustice, refugees and personal problems. Christian groups would first settle in a village under the guise of doing social service, and, after winning the confidence of the locals, they would plant a church. As permissions to set up sites of worship are hard to attain, Christians would first set up other sort of institutions (preschools, hostels) and later convert them into prayer centres or churches. The aggressive forms of evangelisation are seen in relation to the influx of aid organisations, and the work of NGOs is seen in relation to international schemes which undermine the Buddhist identity of the Sri Lankan state to create instability. In particular USA and South Korea are noted.

In sum, the *2002 Report of the Presidential Commission of the Buddha Sasana* offers three sources of concern in their 9th chapter; The Catholic Church and their trends of inculturation, the subversive strategies of the Muslim population and the aggressive forms of evangelising by Christian groups. The concerns are diverse, and they come from different religious groups. The remedy for these concerns is threefold; to place greater restrictions and monitoring of foreign NGOs and religious groups, to introduce a bill to ban improper evangelical methods and to appoint an inter-religious advisory council with due representation from all the religions in Sri Lanka to negotiate in any religion-related conflict. The Buddhist demands for state patronage are still persistent, but are increasingly couched in legal demands, asking the government to introduce legislation for the protection of Buddhism.

Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka

When the British signed the Kandyan convention in 1815, it was the first time the practice of Buddhism was formally declared 'inviolable,' and received special protection from the state. History reveals that Buddhism has had strong relations to the polity in Sri Lanka even in ancient times, even though this practice existed side by side with a range of other religious practices. The notion of Buddhist kingships was challenged by the influx of colonial powers, and conversion was seen more as a change of political allegiance, than a change of faith. During the Buddhist revival from the 1860s and onwards, Buddhist agitators actively confronted the Christian hegemony in Sri Lanka, mostly through pamphlets, public debates and projects to elucidate national history. Even though some prominent figures of this period still have a high standing in Sri Lanka, the revival did not emerge into a unitary political movement, either in relation to independence, or in the post-independence era. However, while Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism did not develop a political or institutional template of its own, the ideology espoused has been a major influential voice in post-independence politics. Hence, while Sinhala-Buddhist organisations have emerged in a cyclical pattern in their mobilisation, the two main political parties, UNP and SLFP, have often resorted to 'ethnic outbidding' as a populist tactic to win elections, co-opting the agendas voiced by these Sinhala-Buddhist groups.

The civil war between the LTTE and the government developed as a result of this 'ethnic outbidding', and minorities have increasingly felt alienated from the state formation project based on a parochial form of Sinhala-Buddhist identity. Religion in contemporary Sri Lanka is not merely an issue of different practices and places of worship, but also a matter of political allegiance. Influential Buddhist actors demand that Article 9 of the constitution, securing the Buddha sasana the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka, should be more actively used. Protective laws, such as the anti-conversion bill, are but one form of rejuvenating the historical state patronage relations between Buddhism and the polity in Sri Lanka.

4. On the Religio-Political: Political Repertoires and Authority

When addressing the debate surrounding the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, both rhetoric and social action play a part in understanding the political actions taken by various groups. In this chapter I will discuss how I understand the intertwining of religion and politics through the concept of the political, and elaborate upon how the 'political repertoires' of particular groups and collectivities evolve in relation to the limits and possibilities of political action.

Antagonism, mobilisation, authority

This thesis is less about politics, than about the political. This distinction is primarily derived from Carl Schmitt[46] and his famous work *The Concept of the Political*.[47] However, while Schmitt discussed 'the political' between nation-states, Chantal Mouffe has in recent times drawn upon his work and adapted many of his thoughts to a domestic setting, between political groups within a particular nation-state. My motivation for adapting this concept is due to the many different political formations which play a part in the issue of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka. Thus, my focus is not only strictly limited to its settings in parliamentary politics in Sri Lanka, but how it is possible to understand the anti-conversion bill more widely by drawing upon how it is negotiated through the different (religio-)political formations and alliances through a wide array of encounters, both domestic and international. By discussing the political more broadly it enables me to analyse how the various groups have developed different political repertoires of their own, and how they have worked both inside and outside of what is normally understood as 'politics'. In order to

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[46] Carl Schmitt is a controversial figure, not least due to his intimacies with Nazi-Germany before Second World War. Wolin warns against what he sees as a 'whitewashing' or 'downplaying' of Carl Schmitt's disturbing facets in present day theoretical discussions (Wolin 1990).
[47] Originially *Der Begriff des Politischen* (1932).

understand this basic premise of the thesis, a thorough presentation on the concept of the political is needed:

> The political can derive its energy from the most varied endeavors, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antitheses. It does not describe its own substance, but only the intensity of an association or dissociation of human beings whose motives can be religious, national (in the ethnic or cultural sense), economic, or of another kind and can effect at different times different coalitions and separations. The real friend-enemy grouping is existentially so strong and decisive that the nonpolitical antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic and purely cultural criteria and motives to the conditions and conclusions of the political situation at hand. (Schmitt 1996: 38)

The concept of the political is determined by the friend-enemy distinction, and the "enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity" (Schmitt 1996: 10). Thus, the friend-enemy distinction is at its most prevalent in the dialectical emergence of how new collectivities arise in confrontational antagonism against other collectivities. While Schmitt acknowledges that war is an extreme and existential possibility of this relationship of enmity, this should not be seen as normal, common, ideal or desirable (Schmitt 1996: 23). The distinction of friend-enemy denotes intensity of a union or separation, association or dissociation, but in itself the 'political' is without substance, as the cleavage of friend and enemy needs to be operationalised by human motives such as ethnic, religious, cultural or economic distinctions.

Which substantial categories are strong enough to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy? When an antithesis (religious, economic, ethnic, ethical) is the main divisor in the friend-enemy distinction, it has undergone a transformation into a political one. In other words, religion becomes political when it is the main axis between collective groupings that enter into a confrontation with another collectivity. When a religious community enters into confrontation with members of other religious communities, or if it engages in other confrontations, it is already more than just a religious community: it has become a political entity in itself (Schmitt 1996: 37). The realm of the religious, when it enters into the realm of the political, can either intensify the given associations and dissociations already inherent in the political distinction or the religious distinctions may themselves be strong

enough to group human beings effectively into antagonising groups. The enemy is not to be hated personally, though. The enemy generated through the friend-enemy cleavage is solely the public enemy, due to his relationship to the collectivities entailed in the conflict. Schmitt draws a rigid divide between private and political enemies, and the "enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally" (Schmitt 1996: 29). The credo 'love your enemies' should be applied to the enemies of one's own private sphere, and not to political enemies.

Carl Schmitt draws a distinct boundary between the political (the friend-enemy distinction) and politics, and notes how the two concepts are used interchangeably. "The equation politics = party politics is possible whenever antagonisms among domestic political parties succeed in weakening the all-embracing political unit, the state" (Schmitt 1996: 32). The main possibility for conflict is not among the foreign, but domestic groupings, and it is not war, but civil war which is the extreme looming possibility. It is evident that Schmitt here talks from the perspective of the state, and less about domestic antagonism at lower levels. It is the perspective of the state apparatus which is the main concern: "As long as the state is a political entity this requirement for internal peace compels it in critical situations to decide also upon the domestic enemy. Every state provides, therefore, some kind of formula for the declaration of an internal enemy" (Schmitt 1996: 46). Within the framework of Schmitt, pluralism is something that negates the unity of the state, and threatens the very foundations of homogeneity upon which the state should be built. Schmitt emphasises the need for homogeneity in the demos to ensure consensus within the nation-state.

The texts of Carl Schmitt have in the last decade been subject to a renewed interest, and one of those who tries to adapt the ideas of Schmitt to the contemporary situation is the political theorist Chantal Mouffe. The aim has been to bridge the use of Schmitt from that of the interstate level to the intrastate level, keeping in mind that "what always matters is the possibility of conflict" (Schmitt 1996: 39). However, their conceptions of 'pluralism' differs starkly; while pluralism for Schmitt is something that poses a nagging threat for the homogenous demos of a state, Mouffe is accommodative of pluralism within the demos to the extent that there still exists a

'commonality' – "a form of commonality strong enough to constitute a 'demos' but nevertheless compatible with certain forms of pluralism: religious, moral, cultural pluralism, as well as pluralism of political parties" (Mouffe 2009: 55). She thus wants to avoid the notion of radical pluralism in which the state itself is seen as on par with the other groups of association, as the state should not be treated as any other group, but the prime existential feature of the political (Mouffe 1993: 131). While a fair amount of pluralism within a state is necessary to foster democratic tolerance, Mouffe emphasises the conflictual nature of modern pluralism and asserts that rather than to eradicate passions, one should try to mobilise them in democratic designs. Through this moderation of Schmitt, Mouffe coins the notion of *agonistic pluralism*. Schmitt's antagonism is turned into agonism, enemies to adversaries, while she is inherently relating her thoughts to the formation of collective groups through the us/them dynamics proposed by Schmitt. Indeed, if democratic confrontation disappears, antagonism will find new channels, and the challenge is thus to give antagonism a political outlet (Mouffe 2009: 114). The title of her book *The Democratic Paradox* alludes precisely to this negotiation of the tensions inherent in the society (Mouffe 2009: 114). Her other rhetorical adversary, for whom Schmitt also acts as her ally, is her polemics against liberalist notion of a political consensus:

> My concern is that this type of politics [of liberalism] – one played out in the moral register – is not conducive to the creation of the 'agonistic public sphere' which, as I have argued, is necessary for a robust democratic life. When the opponent is defined not in political but in moral terms, he can be envisaged only as an enemy, not an adversary: no agonistic debate is possible with the 'evil them'; they must be eradicated. (Mouffe 2002: 15)

Mouffe's main adversary in her writings is the political liberalism advocated by John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas. In her view, their idea of a universal rational consensus fails tragically in how every concept of consensus necessarily leads to a dynamics of exclusion. Thus, instead of creating a broader rationality of a public sphere based upon the conflictual models of 'the political', these thinkers frame 'difference' in a moral sense rather than in a political sense. The consequence of which is that those excluded from the 'rational consensus' are framed in an absolutist sense as 'enemies'.

Mouffe's sense of an adversary is a legitimate enemy, but by being excluded by the universal rational consensus means that one is framed by illegitimacy. Or to quote Schmitt: "The worst confusion arises when concepts such as justice and freedom are used to legitimize one's own political ambitions and to disqualify and demoralize the enemy" (Schmitt 1996: 66). However, these dynamics are not instantly visible, as the sphere of 'the political' is often dislocated in favour of bureaucratic procedures of administration and the judiciary. Central political issues are co-opted by supposedly neutral experts. Here we see that the judiciary has been given a far more extensive role "as responsible for organizing human coexistence and for regulating social relations" (Mouffe 2009: 115). In addition Mouffe proposes that a "multiplicity of associations with a real capacity for decision-making and plurality of centres of power are needed to resist effectively the trends towards autocracy represented by the growth of technocracy and bureaucracy" (Mouffe 1993: 100). Thus, instead of framing exclusion under the pretext of 'neutrality' and 'rationality', Mouffe argues that it is important to recognise those forms of exclusions that take form and the violence that entails.

The backdrop of these differences can be articulated through the notion of the contingency of the political. Schmitt emphasises that the friend-enemy relation is not forever; it is contingent. This contingency is at the heart of the conflictual nature of the political, and Mouffe notes how this works: "Different discourses will, indeed, attempt to dominate the field of discursivity and create nodal points through the practice of articulation, but they can only succeed in temporarily fixing meaning" (Mouffe 1993: 53). Any political philosophy should therefore make room for the possibility of change and contingency, and not treat political institutions or values as written *sub specie aeternitatis*. By articulating these notions of contingency, we are able identify different junctures in the political realm, as it enables us to assert the political realm as a multileveled stream of interests, agency, power and the relation between them (see Geuss 2008). Thus, when trying to come to grips with the changing and conflictual dynamics between the various actors in relation to the anti-conversion bill, I need to take into consideration how the issue of 'unethical conversions' have manifested itself in different ways in the political realm. Thus, a

division between the 'political' and 'politics' attests to how the conflict surrounding 'unethical conversions' has been played out at different levels, and involved a range of actors ranging from the state, the judiciary (both nationally and internationally), civil society groups, international organisations and political parties.

As we recall, my understanding of political Buddhism is derived from a fourfold concern; subject formation, institutions, affiliations and ideology. However, it is important here to make a sound distinction between what is meant by the concept of the 'political,' and political Buddhism. As the friend-enemy distinction of the 'political' denotes a certain intensity of association or dissociation, this happens when a certain category (as for example a Tamil) becomes a key factor in separating identities. With the concept of political Buddhism my aim is to explore the different ways Buddhist actors can engage in politics, nevertheless political Buddhism may not necessarily bring about an intensification of a divide of the 'political' (see the case of Baddegama, the 'peace' monk). However, in Sri Lanka, political Buddhism almost coincides with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and the ideology of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been a major driving force in the formation of 'political' identities in Sri Lanka. There is a conceptual difference, though, between political Buddhism and the concept of the 'political,' even though these are often freely paired in the context of Sri Lanka.

Religion, authority and legitimacy

The relationship between the civil society and political system can in simplified forms be subsumed to that of input (civil society) and output (political system). For Bobbio (2006) the varieties of conflicts (economic, social, ideological and religious) originate among the plethora of groups, movements and associations with different political ends, and that it is the task of these groups to mobilise and consolidate their political agenda to get attention from the political system. Political parties act on the threshold of this dynamic of input and output, as "they perform the functions of selecting, aggregating and transmitting demands originating in civil society and which will become the objects of political decision" (Bobbio 2006: 25). The issues

and agendas proposed by organisations and associations may find a diverse response from the political system, ranging from utter neglect to full accommodation. However, these issues are often prone to different interests and negotiations, and Mouffe defines politics as an "ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence in conditions that are always potential conflicting because they are affected by the dimensions of the political" (Mouffe 2009: 101). How can religious demands be transformed and accommodated within such political ensembles?

What is at stake here is how the anti-conversion bill arises as a demand from certain religious groups, to legislate 'unethical' conversions, which argue that this bill is necessary to enact as a protective measure of the religious adherents in the country. Hence, religio-political formations made a specific demand to enact anti-conversion legislation, where the aim was to impose regulations upon a practice, improper proselytising, which they saw as limiting religious freedom in Sri Lanka. Both the initiative for the legal proposal, and the subsequent implications of the legislation, derive from and affect religious groups and religious adherents, but the transformative operation of enactment and validation of this particular proposal is negotiated by various non-religious institutions and formations, from the political ensemble, the Supreme Court, the international human rights instruments, bureaucratic practices locally, nationally and internationally. The task here is to see how this particular demand, anti-conversion legislation, invokes different encounters, which need to be negotiated in order to attain the wanted implications, regulation of 'unethical' conversions. My project is to look into how this legal proposal has unfolded a political process where agency, affiliations and networks coalesce into political repertoires, and how these particular political repertoires have carved distinct rooms of maneuverability in the different encounters with various 'institutions' and 'offices' of non-religious discourses. How is the anti-conversion bill maneuvered politically? What were the legal requirements to make it sound? How did it shape (religio-) political formations both in Sri Lanka and internationally, and how much political leverage do the Buddhist nationalists actually have in Sri Lanka? Why did the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief intervene in Sri Lanka

and make her verdict on the legal proposal? What was the significance of the violence against Christians in Sri Lanka, and how was it used politically by the different parts of the conflict? How do state patronage and informal patronage networks inform the way religious pluralism is negotiated in contemporary Sri Lanka?

I am myself most interested in how these streams intertwine in a constant process of legitimation, contestation, negotiation by the actors and agents themselves, and how they contribute to specific forms of knowledge about agency vis-à-vis local and translocal networks of affiliation and patronage, or what I term political repertoires. Geuss notes that to "think politically is to think about agency, power and interests, and the relation between these" (Geuss 2008: 25), and these triadic relations are situated within the legitimatory mechanisms in a given society:

> The legitimatory mechanisms available in a given society change from one historical period to another, as do the total set of beliefs held by agents, the mechanisms for changing beliefs, or generating new ones (newspapers, universities, etc.), and the forms of widely distributed, socially rooted, moral conceptions. These are all important parts of what makes a given society the society it is. (Geuss 2008: 35)

Legitimacy and authority are concepts often discussed together, and they both relate to forms of recognition. Legitimation may take two different forms; either legitimacy is inferred due to a satisfaction of certain rules or according to some standards. However, while legitimacy is often referred to as a form of procedural satisfaction, written or unwritten, one can also understand legitimacy as something beyond procedural acceptance and more in the sense of moral assent (Geuss 2001). In one sense we can see how certain procedural institutions, such as the UN system or the Supreme Court, are ultimate wielders of legitimatory capital. Hence, when the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, visits Sri Lanka, her verdict on the situation carries with it the legitimacy and authority of the UN. However, as we will see in chapter 11, 'Monitoring Religious Freedom: Persecution, Documentation and the Role of Political Facts', this is not necessarily implicating recognition from all parties involved. A completely different form of legitimatory mechanism is how Buddhist nationalists accentuate their interventions into politics by asserting a 'crisis,' which not simply allows them but actually compels them to

engage in political mobilisation. I will look further into how the narrative repertoire of 'crisis' unfolds and subsequently asserts a set of rigid compulsory alternatives as the political solution in chapter 7, 'Conversions and Conspiracies: Nationalism at the End of Time'. While these forms of legitimatory mechanisms are either strictly procedural (the UN Special Rapporteur) or deriving from a moral impetus (nationalist mobilisation due to a 'crisis'), many legitimatory mechanisms are often negotiated in relation to set traditions or procedures, but may also carry with them elements of innovation.

The emergence of political monks is one such instance where the decision to enter politics must be seen in relation to tradition, or to draw upon other forms of legitimacy. According to the monastic law (*vinaya*) there is a sharp distinction between mundane affairs (*laukika*) and other-worldly nirvana-seeking efforts (*lokuttara*). This divide has often been the narrative focus of exploration into the dynamics of monks and politics, and how to assert political Buddhism as a phenomenon. In practice, however, this divide has been less rigid, and should rather be understood through the notion of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy (Holt 1999). As we have seen, Juliane Schober takes as decisive stance against this mundane/sacred divide and rather explores how "Buddhist conceptions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of political power in social, economic, and political realm" (Schober 2011: 11). Thus, there is no need to portray political monks as paradoxical figures because of their political involvement. Yet the distinction between *lokuttara* and *laukika* does have a normative element to it, which often infers the discourses and debates around the legitimacy of the political monks. Nevertheless, while it is important to keep this juncture in mind when explaining the political behaviour of Buddhist monks, it is not a necessity that this cleavage should be supported, by adopting native discourses, or reproduced uncritically by scholars. However, what is important is the means by which these political monks argue for the legitimacy of their own political involvement,[48] even though such a move is not

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[48] Another facet is how 'politics' is often understood as something 'dirty' in Sri Lanka which taints everyone that comes into contact with it (see Spencer 2008: 625).

commonly consented within the orthopraxi of the sangha. A possible way to understand this is through what Quentin Skinner calls 'innovating ideologists,' who attempt to legitimate a questionable course of action.

While Skinner beckoned historians to uncover the 'local canons of rational acceptability,' he himself is mostly interested in a particular phenomenon of the so-called 'innovating ideologists'. These figures are at the threshold of such norms found in the local canon of rationality, and are in the need of legitimating their position:

> There is a general and more specific conclusion to be drawn out here. The general conclusion derives from the fact that any course of action will be inhibited to the degree that it cannot be legitimized. Any principle that helps to legitimize a course of action will therefore be among the enabling conditions of its occurrence. The more specific conclusion derives from the fact that the range of terms that innovating ideologists can hope to apply to legitimize their behavior can never be set by themselves. The availability of such terms is a question about the meaning and use of the terms involved, and about how far these can be plausibly stretched. These factors serve as rather specific constraints and directives to those considering what lines of conduct may afford them the best of means of bringing their questionable behavior in line with some accepted principle, thereby legitimizing their conduct while at the same time getting what they want. They cannot hope to stretch the application of existing terms indefinitely; so they can only hope to legitimize, and hence to perform, a correspondingly restricted range of actions. (Skinner 2002: 156)

The boundaries of the politically feasible are determined by that which is possible to legitimate. By explicating upon how such innovating ideologists are 'legitimating some form of social behaviour generally agreed to be questionable' (Skinner 2002: 148), Skinner is able to portray the inherent dynamics in how a given value-system can be adapted to changing circumstances by rhetorical efforts. However, the rhetorical options are not entirely free and open, but need to take into consideration the constraints and limitations to what extent these new 'rhetorical redescriptions' may be legitimated within its sphere of context. Influenced by Wittgenstein, Skinner is interested in the question of 'which language games are being played by the actors involved'. He makes use of Austin's distinction between illocutionary forces and illocutionary acts, and how the "former term points to a resource of language; the

latter to the capacity of agents to exploit it in communication" (Skinner 2002: 109). Hence, Skinner is referring to a pool of resources more or less available to the given actor, upon which the actor's capacity to exploit these given resources does not necessarily amount to the ideal way, but rather the actor's preferred way of enacting it. Deeds are also words. The inversion of Wittgenstein's famous formula rings equally true and many of Skinner's ideas on the historicity of speech acts may be transferred also to encompass acts in general. Vocabularies and repertoires thus act as a pool of resources for the given actor(s), yet these are determined both by the variety and extent of the illocutionary forces available to the given actor(s), but these are also at the same time limited by the ways in which it is possible to legitimate the illocutionary acts within the given context of the local canons of acceptability.

When trying to situate the political agents surrounding the issue of the anti-conversion bill I will follow this simple, but encompassing tenet: *The boundaries of the politically feasible are determined by that which is possible to legitimate*. At the one end, this implies all the regulatory mechanisms at play in a societal context, but at the other end suggests the fact that the 'boundaries of the politically feasible' are under constant negotiation by those who want to see change as well as those who want to maintain status quo. Thus, I will use the notion of 'political repertoires' to probe the political space of maneuverability of different agents and groups, and from this vantage point explain the nature of their political interventions. However, I believe that to uncover the scope and range of such political repertoires, I need to situate the agents and actions not only in a contemporary political context, but also look at how these repertoires have been developed historically within their respective traditions.

Political repertoires: Tradition and innovation

What is a repertoire? A repertoire can be defined as 'the complete list or supply of skills, devices, or ingredients used in a particular field, occupation, or practice', but it also carries the connotation of being the *preferred* practice of a given agent or collective group. Taylor notes that: "At any given time, we can speak of the

"repertory" of collective actions at the disposal of a given group of society" (Taylor 2007: 173). Thus, agency here may entail a single individual, a group or an institution. Drawing upon the distinctions provided by Skinner by illocutionary forces and illocutionary acts the concept of repertoire then may both be used descriptively ('the complete list of skills available') and normative-descriptively ('the preferred practice or capacity of a given agent'). The enactment of a given repertoire faces the same issues as the 'innovating ideologist' in that it needs to be kept within the boundaries (at least at the threshold level) of the local canon of rationality. Taylor notes:

> Let's say we organize a demonstration. This means that this act is already in our repertory. We know how to assemble, pick up banners, and march. We know that this is meant to remain within certain bounds, both spatially (don't invade certain spaces), and the way it impinges on others (this side of a threshold of aggressivity – no violence). We understand the ritual. (Taylor 2007: 173).

Never mind that Taylor imposes his normative parameters on the proper conduct in demonstrations, what is at play here is how the very act of a given repertory follows almost a ritualistic behaviour of a repetitious pattern: 'We know how'. Some political performances are more or less general (marches, demonstrations, hunger strikes), while particular groups, such as Buddhist monks may develop distinct practices of their own. In addition, the political space of maneuverability, what is considered politically feasible, may vary greatly between various groups. Thus, seemingly identical behaviour from different groups does not entail the same meaning. Charles Tilly observes how the notion of political repertoires clears a middle-ground between that of the 'irrationality of crowds' and the strict instrumentality of 'rational choice'. What characterises political repertoires are their stickiness on the one hand, and the always present possibility of innovation on the other. Hence, the rhythms of tradition embedded within a particular group's political repertoire(s) need a nuanced consideration; both in how groups have a favourable way of enacting claim-making, but also how these groups are under constant pressure for further development. Tilly states:

> Note the paradox of contentious claim-making: genuinely unfamiliar performances almost always misfire, but perfect repetition from one performance to the next breeds boredom and indifference on the parts of claimants and their objects alike. (Tilly 2005: 41)

The evolvement of repertoires can neither be fully explained by their embedded position within a particular tradition, nor by focusing on the present situation alone. Tilly notes that "contentious politics behave like a loosely scripted theater" (2005: 41). Innovation and tradition go hand in hand, but not always in the same direction.[49] Moreover, while repertoires may reveal distinguishing characteristics of how particular (religio-)political groups behave, these dynamics should not be read independently of their contexts of emergence, both in relation to contentious politics and in relation to the state or other encompassing actors, in what Tilly calls a 'political opportunity structure.'[50] The next section will deal with how 'political repertoires' may unfold in different directions according to which connections and relations the respective groups may enjoy, and to the close alliance with their political networks, in particular under the aegis of the state.

Repertoires, patronage politics and the state

Political repertoires cannot be fully understood only by following the group which enacts them, but must also be read into a larger context of contentious politics and regulations of the state. Tilly observes:

> a regime's political history generates both a claim-making repertoire and a political opportunity structure. It has gone on to claim that, in the short run, the repertoire and opportunity structure interacts to constrain the frequency, location, and character of collective claims. But in the medium run, claim-making alters the regime. It does so

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[49] Tilly makes a distinction between four types of repertoire; no repertoire, weak repertoire, strong repertoire and rigid repertoire (see figure 3.1, Tilly 2005: 40).
[50] A political opportunity structure (POS) entails (a) the multiplicity of independent centres of power within the regime, (b) the openness of the regime to new actors, (c) the instability of current political alignments, (d) the availability of influential allies or supporters, (e) the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim-making, and (f) decisive changes in (a) to (e) (Tilly 2005: 44).

> by shaping arrays of effective political actors, political alliances, public programs, governmental personnel, and even forms of government. (Tilly 2005: 211)

The use of a particular repertoire is closely tuned in to the opportunities and threats that exist within a given political framework, what Tilly calls 'regimes'. These regimes may prescribe, tolerate and forbid certain political performances, and the development of certain repertoires is calculated against this room of political maneuverability. However, even though a regime has rigid schemata of forbidden and tolerated practices, the particular state may not have the necessary capacity to enforce these boundaries (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Moreover, as Gould observes powerful interest groups may usurp or control bureaucratic offices, making these complicit relations between mobilisation and the state hard to unwrap into neat categories of analysis, but all the more important to reflect upon the nature of the state (Gould 2012: 13-15). This leads us into the heart of what I term 'patronage politics'.

Patronage politics can be understood both narrowly and more broadly. The narrow definition follows how politics in a given nation-state is imbued by, and characteristic of, various patronage networks. The wider definition of patronage politics also includes what Korf et. al. (2010) have termed 'patrimonial rationale'. 'Patrimonial rationale' can be seen as an attitude that upholds existing bonds of allegiance and loyalty by expected patrimonial services from one's own organisational and ideological belonging. What is at stake here is a form of patrimonial allegiance, where an individual is embedded into a series of loyalties, group boundaries and connections, which gives the individual different levels of access, both societal and/or political. Korf et al. argue further that this "patrimonial rationale with its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion is a driving force of social conflict, political violence and ethnic antagonism in Sri Lanka" (Korf et.al. 2010: 563). A third way to understand patronage politics is not through the relation of the 'political' vs. the individual agent, but how Buddhist nationalists, as a group, demand state patronage for Buddhism from the state in Sri Lanka. Those already familiar with the context in Sri Lanka are aware of Article 9 in the constitution, where Buddhism is granted the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka. However, I will argue that this provision leads to more demands of political support to Buddhists, and that the anti-conversion

bill can be seen as one such demand. A more thorough discussion of state patronage, and a subsequent nuance of official and formal state patronage, will be elaborated in chapter 8, 'The Foremost Place of Article 9: Buddhist Nationalism and State Patronage'. Thus, to situate the maneuverability of political repertoires in Sri Lanka we need to identify which connections and accesses are available to the given groups, and how they are able to tap into those resources. While official and formal state patronage are mostly about claim-making repertoires, an important aspect is how Buddhist nationalists are able to wield networks of informal patronage to their advantage, through what we might call a patronage network.

What is a patronage network? Lemarchand states in an oft cited definition on political clientelism, a concept that is often used interchangeably with patronage:

> As has been repeatedly stressed, patron-client ties involve dyadic bonds between individuals of unequal power and socioeconomic status; they exhibit a diffuse, particularistic, face-to-face quality strongly reminiscent of ascriptive solidarities; unlike ascriptive ties, however, they are voluntarily entered into and derive their legitimacy from expectations of mutual benefits. (Lemarchand 1981)

Keywords to inform the notions of patronage are asymmetry, reciprocity and allegiance. Despite connotations of negative valence (Bearfield 2009), the concept of patronage has received a recent revival through the notion of 'informal institutions' (Auyero et.al. 2009). Thus, Helmke and Levitsky define 'informal institutions' as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 727). However, informal institutions may both coexist as well as compete with formal institutions,[51] yet a distinguished characteristic is that these informal rules often avoid the gaze of the public eye. Bearfield (2009) argues that patronage relations emerge at a marketplace of allegiance, where patrons can offer inducements and rewards with expectations of mutual reciprocity from the clients. Hence, patronage networks offer their own distinctions of in-group and out-group. Yet, as Lemarchand (1981) argues,

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[51] 'Formal institutions' are defined as "rules and procedures that are created, communicated, and enforced through channels widely accepted as official" (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 727).

the issue is not whether other identity formations (such as class, ethnicity, or religion) is substituted by a patrimonial rationale, but how clientelism interacts with, and often reinforces, other modes of identity. This point is taken further by Auyero et.al. (2009) when they argue that patronage does not necessarily antagonise collective action, but rather may inform how political repertoires are enacted by the means of patronage networks. Patronage is seen to activate both hierarchical and vertical networks. Hence, they see patron-client networks as a problem-solving strategy, both to enhance bureaucratic effectiveness through informal channels, but also as a mobilising structure for collective action.

In Sri Lanka, Dilesh Jayanntha (1992) has written about the patron-client relationships of electoral allegiance. While a central argument in his study of three villages from 1947 to 1982 was to show that the caste bond was only important when congruent with patron-client bonds, the study offers a detailed explication of how patronage networks shifted from that of landowners to the agents of the state in the disbursement of patronage. Hence, patronage networks are defined as the "whole system of patrons, intermediaries and clients", and while the patronage bonds of the agents of the state were more loose and temporary than that of the landowners', he argues that "state patronage could be used to reward supporters, strengthen one's intermediaries against those of a rival, cultivate new contacts and, if necessary, harass one's opponents" (Jayanntha 1992: 72). Korf argues how Sinhalese farmers were able to undermine Tamil claims to land due to their "close alliance with Sinhalese political, religious and military power-holders to enforce a quick decision in their favor" (Korf 2005: 210). Hence, patronage networks may reproduce already existing lines of conflict, and enable various actors to benefit from such informal capture of resources and favours. Writing of bureaucracy and civil society, McCourt (2007) notes how the notion of patronage is embedded within bureaucratic decisions that uphold a climate of political favouritism. As this thesis is not only about the relations between Buddhism and the state but also how to understand religious pluralism, we need to look closer into what a climate of political favouritism would imply for other, more marginal, religious groups.

By using 'political repertoires' as an analytical tool to understand the debate around 'unethical' conversions and the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, this enables me at one hand to focus on the agency of interests by the various groups (and their claim-making demands), but on the other hand also discuss this agency in relation to their political position in Sri Lanka and how this both enables and disables certain political repertoires to be enacted.

5. The Anti-Conversion Bill and Political Alliances

The call for anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka first arose in the beginning of the 1990s, but gained a momentum in 2002–2004, when widespread allegations of 'unethical conversions' were asserted. It was particularly Buddhist activist formations that were able to bring saliency to the issue, and with the emergence of the Buddhist nationalist party Jathika Hela Urumaya in 2004 the anti-conversion bill was launched as a private member's bill. This chapter presents the various political formations engaged in the debate around 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill, and in particular how the issue has been able to bring the Buddhist nationalists together behind a common political template. The issue also caught the interest of Buddhist ecclesiastical bodies that rarely make statements about politics in the public. The anti-conversion bill caused an outcry among Christians in Sri Lanka, and it challenged the Christian community to stand united in this case and speak with one voice, despite the internal fragmentations between various Christian traditions that the community experiences in Sri Lanka today. This chapter also aims to provide an overview of the many and different activist group formations in Sri Lanka, and how they relate in terms of institutions, affiliations and political repertoire.

Politics, activist groups and the sangha

To understand the relation between the *sangha* and politics in Sri Lanka, it is imperative to understand the mediating role played by various activist group formations. Dharmadasa (n.d.) claims that it is generally accepted that "Buddhist leadership is a crucial power factor" that has to be taken into consideration by the governing bodies, but that this Buddhist leadership is very rarely manifested into one unified activist group formation. More commonly, political issues are mediated through diverse activist groups; lay interest groups, different councils (ecclesiastical, lay, or mixed).

As befitting the traditional code of *bhikkhu* behaviour the Mahanayakas and the Nikaya organisations generally never articulated specific political interests. Even when it was believed necessary to do so it was couched in circumspect and covert language. The mainly lay organisations such as the YMBA, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, on the other hand, were more forthright in their interest articulation and put forward direct demands to political authorities. There have been occasions however, when this neat division became adhered and Buddhism monks have formed ad hoc associations to agitate on specific political issues. Interestingly, in spite of misgivings expressed by some about such "unbecoming" behaviour by *bhikkhus*, such agitations have had remarkable potency (Dharmadasa n.d.: 2)

While the *sangha* and the lay interest groups represent institutional longevity, many of the other formations, most notably the activist groups and the councils, are more loosely organised as ad hoc associations, often with limited duration. How do these different organisational modes affect the political repertoire of each 'institution'? While the *sangha* as an institution does not use its voice politically, as such an act would tarnish its reputation of being otherworldly, individual political monks may still form various political bodies indirectly representative of clergy authority. Thus, the political space of the *sangha* in itself is severely limited, yet the formation of different councils and ad hoc activist groups enable monks to mobilise politically in exteriority of the *sangha* structures. When a monk decides to mobilise politically, he needs to relate closely to the canons of normative acceptability, and one way of conducting a form of 'rhetorical redescription' is precisely to represent a distinct pressure group rather than the *sangha* as a whole.

The boundaries of the politically feasible are determined by that which is possible to legitimate. Keeping in mind the different political space open to activist groups along with the *sangha* in general, the given political repertoire available may also differ. While these differences can be ascribed to reputation maintenance among the various organisations/institutions, they can also be seen through the lens of 'temporal depth'. While interest organisations, such as Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC), have a longer history and timeline than various ephemeral pressure groups, and this enables them to develop a longer timeframe to scrutinise the present events. Activist- and pressure

groups often arise at the needs of the hour, and are often characterised by their short-sighted temporal focus, which beckons them to act, by the means available, within this limited timespan (see Schalk 1988). The political repertoire available to different groups is constantly negotiated, both from what kind of organisation that is involved, the charisma of the agents, as well as the situation at hand.

Different institutions and organisations develop different political repertoires and ways to act in the public. But these are also highly dependent upon the affiliations possessed by the different institutions/organisations, whether there are good contacts within the government, a high standing among international organisations, or ability to mobilise 'the masses'. Affiliations between the particular activist- and interest groups are also of imperative value, as it may enable them to speak with one voice on a particular issue. Hence, affiliations and disaffiliations are decisive in determining the breadth and depth of an organisations reach, and how far it is able to carry its (political) influence. In the following I will analyse pressure-, activist- and interest groups in Sri Lanka along the lines of their institutions, affiliations and their political repertoire. First, I will see how Buddhist activist groups have acted historically, before I look at how the present arena for Buddhist activism in relation to the anti-conversion bill. I will then discuss the dynamics between the Christian representative bodies – Catholic, Protestant and evangelical – before I look at which other organisations have taken policy interest into the issue of the anti-conversion bill.

The emergence of a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist Front: Formations and alliances

The party of Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) was formed only two months before the parliamentary election 2nd of April 2004 in Sri Lanka, and a total of 286 monks enlisted for the party. This was the first time a group of monks conjointly entered parliamentary elections, and the whole idea of monks creating their own party was novel. Despite the fact that Ven. Baddegama Samhita Thero, another monk from the south with a wholly different agenda, had won a seat in the parliamentary elections in

2001, the decision of the monks in Jathika Hela Urumaya stirred outrage both among laity as well as the ranks of the *sangha*. The 2004 election results gave JHU a total of 552,724 votes of a total of 12,899,038 votes, giving them 5.97% of the votes. Thus their number of elected members was 7, while in addition 2 were appointed members of parliament, giving them a total of 9 members of parliament (Warnapala and Yehia 2005: 449).[52] The candidates came from at least four different districts, and their leader, Uduwe Dhammaloka, received 42,850 votes (Deegalle 2006b: 236). Later, in 2005 they also formed government together with SLFP and JVP in the United People's Freedom Alliance (UFPA).

The political party of Jathika Hela Urumaya did not emerge from a vacuum, but in a period of severe political instability and insecurity. On the one side, the peace negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) had come to an abrupt halt in 2003, not exploiting the opportunity the stalemate had provided for them. On the other side, the sudden death of Ven. Gangodavila Soma Thero, a popular preacher monk and telegenic figure in Sri Lanka, sparked conspiracies that he was murdered during his trip to St. Petersburg in 2003 to receive an honorary degree at a small Christian institution. The famous monk was known for his fierce criticism of Christian activities in Sri Lanka, and his death brought the issue of 'unethical conversions' to national proportions, as well as a wave of violent attacks against churches. Through this political spectacle, the demand for legislature to curtail unethical conversions became a high-profile task, and two monks, Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thero and Rajawatte Wappa staged a fast-unto-death outside the Ministry of Buddhasasana from 30th of December 2003. Their aim was to put pressure on the then minister W.J.M. Lokubandara, the minister of Justice and Buddhasasana, to push forth legislation against 'unethical conversions', as was one of the recommendations of the Buddhasasana Commission in 2002. When the minister failed to provide a bill proposal within two months, the monks in JHU decided to front the issue themselves, and formed their own party. It was in this political climate

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[52] Monks who became members of parliament were: Ellawala Medhananda Thero, Athureliye Rathana Thero, Omalpe Sobhita Thero, Uduwe Dhammaloka, Kollonawe Sumangala Thero, Kathaluwe Rathanaseeha Thero, Aparekke Punnananda Thero, Kotapola Amarakitti Thera and Udawatte Nanda Thera.

that Ven. Omalpe Sobhita, a prominent JHU member, launched a private member's bill the 28th of May 2004 entitled: *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* (commonly referred to as the anti-conversion bill).[53]

While this certain turn of events, the peace negotiation and the death of Ven. Soma, triggered the emergence of JHU, there were several organisational predecessors to the new political party. The monks that formed JHU had already several organisational affiliations, and most important among them were National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT), Sihala Urumaya (SU) and Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya (JSS). The National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) was formed in 1998 after a LTTE bomb blast in Maradana, Colombo. One of the initiators, Champika Ranawaka, narrates:

> In 1998, the nationalist campaign was further strengthened by the formation of the National Movement Against Terrorism, widely known as NMAT. We were able to gather patriotic bhikkhus, academics, intellectuals, businessmen, students and the informed public under a single umbrella and mobilise them against moves to weaken the Sri Lankan state. It was prematurely transformed into a political party under the name of Sihala Urumaya, with a view to establishing a mainstream political platform to boost the morale of the nation following a series of military debacles under the Chandrika Bandaranaike regime. (Ranawaka 2009: 26)

Champika Ranawaka, one of the key figures in developing the institutional backing of the nationalist movement in Sri Lanka, first through NMAT and SU, and later as a minister for JHU, articulates his narrative of how the nationalist movement in Sri Lanka is consolidated into different organisational platforms. While the NMAT was a counter-measure to the 'ethnic troubles' taking place in Sri Lanka in the late 1990s, they had also other objectives: "However, our immediate enemy at the time was not LTTE but the Norway-backed peace propaganda programmes like Thawalama and Sudu Nelum that had been launched by the government" (Ranawaka 2009: 14). Born

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[53] Actually, two bills were submitted on conversions in Sri Lanka; Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion, as a private member's bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita (most commonly referred to as the anti-conversion bill) and Freedom of Religion act, a bill developed in a Hindu-Buddhist committee and forwarded by the minister of Buddha sasana Ratnasiri Wickremanayake. More details on the legal processes can be found in chapter 9 – 'The Aporias of Proselytism: Freedom of Religion, State patronage and Anti-Conversion Legislation.'

out of NMAT, Sihala Urumaya (SU) was a political party that was formed in April 2000, in an attempt to unite the loosely organised nationalist movement under one political platform. Deegalle notes the ambiguous SU's self-presentation as a "political party but a national movement as well" (Deegalle 2006: 238). The three key posts of SU were filled by S.L. Gunasekera (Chairman), Thilak Karunaratna (Secretary) and Champika Ranawaka (National Organiser), and they were able to secure one seat (1, 47%) in their first parliamentary election. Their main political agenda was to remedy the disadvantageous position majority Sinhala people was given under the ruling political conditions, and to restore the pride of the Sinhalese civilisation. However, the SU faced major disputes within their own ranks, and despite the fact that they were able to secure four seats in the local government election in 2002, they were perceived as a weak and fragmented political force. Yet, when JHU emerged as a new and unregistered political party, they sought the legal validation through SU, and signed a memorandum of understanding that only monks should contest the elections, and not any lay persons from the SU. Deegalle argues that due to these "unclear political links, it is extremely important to understand and distinguish the foundational ideologies of both the SU and the JHU for proper comprehension and evaluation" (Deegalle 2006: 237).

While the formation of JHU can be seen through a development of the nationalist movement through NMAT and Sihala Urumaya, it should be noted that the monks themselves organised politically through other formations before the emergence of Jathika Hela Urumaya. One of the political monks I interviewed, who earlier had had an affiliation with Jathika Hela Urumaya, narrated on how the various political processes unfolded:

> At this time SU was very weak - no seat in parliament. We organised JSS - Jathika Sangha Sammenalaya. We started in 2001. First our name was Hela Diva Sangha Sabhaha (Sinhala Island Sangha Council). In this organization my idea was to give political answers. I still had the federal idea. But I did not agree with the LTTE. The leader did not like the federal solution. The leader: Athureliye Rathana Thero and Ellawella Medhananda Thero. Omalpe Sobhita is different. He was liberal. He was also in the JSS. He had good experience and knowledge of the situation. He had walked within the UN in Laos. (...) I went to Australia. (…) Then I returned to Sri

Lanka and decided to walk again. When I came back we changed the name to JSS. Different ideas and different groups. (Interview, 15th of July, 2013)

My informant here narrates how different *sangha* councils predated the emergence of JHU. Another figure to note how various political formations predated Jathika Hela Urumaya, Ranawaka, also mentions an earlier sangha council, *National Sangha Council*, from 1995, which opposed Chandrika Kumaratunga's peace proposal known as 'the Package', and Ranawaka labels this as "The watershed moment of the modern nationalist movement" (Ranawaka 2009: 26). However*, Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya* is also translated as National Sangha Council, yet there is reason to believe that Ranawaka alludes to the Jathika Sangha Sabhava (1995) in his text, and that the Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya emerged first in 2001/2002 (Frydenlund (2005a) claims it was formed in 2002) and that it went through a makeover in 2003 (Deegalle (2006) claims JSS was formed in 2003). Anyhow, the political monks that later were to initiate Jathika Hela Urumaya had already participated in different political formations, particularly the JSS, and acquired relations and networks among like-minded monks and lay politicians. Ranawaka narrates the emergence of JHU:

> Having come to power, Ranil Wickremesinghe showed his inherent hatred towards the Sinhalese and especially Sinhalese Buddhists. Anti-Buddhist elements around him were making hay while the sun was shining. The time was ripe for bhikkhus to step forward. We set the stage in 2003 for the formation of National Sangha Council – a powerful new bhikkhu front led by Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Nayaka Thero. Many prominent and respected bhikkhus (…) supported the Bhikkhu Front. Unfortunately, the sudden and untimely demise of Ven. Gangodavila Soma Thera sent shockwaves through the country and it had a ripple effect. There was justification in pointing the finger towards evangelical forces given the circumstances in which the Venerable Thera passed away. The Buddhists were roused from their slumber and we stepped forward to galvanise them into collective action. (Ranawaka 2009: 16)

The monks 'arose from their slumber' in 2003 with the death of Ven. Soma Thera, and on the basis of this they formed their own party – Jathika Hela Urumaya. This simple unfolding of events is the dominating narrative of the emergence of the Buddhist political party, yet my informant within the JHU told me in 2013 a very

different chain of events in how to understand the sudden formation of the monks into the parliamentary political scene. However, he did not contest the importance of Ven. Soma Thera's death: "Gangodavila Soma. Valuable character in the country. His death was very natural. Clear. But there were so many insecurities. It changed the political scene. Everybody believed it was murder. My personal idea: natural death. It turned political, and then I understood political truth" (Interview 15th of July, 2013). While he asserted how the death of Ven. Soma was turned into a political spectacle, he had other explanations for how Jathika Hela Urumaya was conceptualised as a political party:

> This is very secret, but this is the truth. A new alliance: Chandrika and JVP. Western countries were afraid about that. China was behind the JVP as a sponsor to them. Not for socialism, it was for the Chinese business. India and Europe were not happy about that. Ranil Wickremesinghe wanted to stop them, as he had European advice. Ranil Wickremesinghe – a very unfortunate person – thought to use the national movement to create a third party. We did not have a concept of a party, but Ranil Wickremasinghe initiated it. (Interview 15th of July, 2013)

Here we see some stark differences of narrative, for while Ranawaka claims that JHU emerged as a counter-response to the leadership of Ranil Wickremesinghe, my other informant claim that it was Wickremesinghe himself that initiated the move that the monks in JSS should take their activities to another level and form their own party, to open up another front against the Chandrika – JVP alliance. However, the narratives do not necessarily contradict each other, and my informant elucidates how Champika Ranawaka was one of the main architects behind these new political formations and alliances: "Champika played a chess game" (Interview 15th of July, 2013). One of the most important moves here was to convince the Buddhist monks to participate on a political platform, as the Sihala Urumaya had failed to achieve their ends four years earlier. The rationale was that JHU needed 7 seats in parliament to have real political influence, and that this only was possible if Buddhist monks fronted the agenda. Jathika Hela Urumaya was not only novel in that it was the first time Buddhist monks participated in parliamentary elections collectively, but it was also the first time the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement was able to consolidate its influence into a party of its own, and not only let the main parties co-opt its agenda.

> We quickly got together to form the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) to block CBK's plans. The stunning victory we secured in the April 2004 general election with the support of urban and suburban middle class voters made it clear to others that the nationalist movement was a force to be reckoned with. (Ranawaka 2009: 16)

Buddhist political formations: SUCCESS, JCBO and others

The first time the debate on 'unethical conversions' peaked to national proportions was in the 1990s. While allegations of subversive and unpatriotic activities of NGOs had been common since the 80s, the NGO commission was launched by President Premadasa in the beginning of the 1990s. This commission also looked into the activities of various churches that were brought before the commission accused of using NGOs as a cover for their evangelical work (Saravanamuttu 1999, Wanigaratne 1997). At this time, it was a group called SUCCESS which coordinated the Buddhist allegations against various evangelical churches, and which brought these churches before the commission. The commission report, however, was never publically released, but various parts of it were leaked to the media, among them the accusations against various Christian churches. While it was the group SUCCESS that fronted the political opposition towards various churches in the 1990s, it did not remain an organisation for political purposes, but transformed into a Buddhist social service organisation working in different parts of rural Sri Lanka. However, when the debate around 'unethical conversions' again rose to prominence in 2002 – 2004, the persons behind SUCCESS were again active in coordinating a political front against conversions, but this time they did not use the organisation of SUCCESS explicitly, but initiated a network of Buddhist lay organisations in a broader coalition called the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations (JCBO). In an open letter published in *Buddhist Times* in February 2009, a total of 19 organisations were listed as member organisations in the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations (JCBO).[54]

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[54] SUCCESS Colombo, SUCCESS Kandy, SUCCESS Wayamba, Dharmavijaya Foundation, All Ceylon Women's Buddhist Congress, Damsara Foundation, Centre for Buddhist Action, Council for Buddhist Women, Thavalama Development Foundation, Lanka Bauddha Sanrakhana Sabawa, Buddhist Lawyers Association, Government Services Buddhist Ass., Buddhist Resource Centre, Aloka Foundation, Dammacharinee, Sadaham

These organisations are all Buddhist interest groups, which have come under a joint umbrella of Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations (JCBO), which has acted as a political spokesgroup for these organisations, especially concerning the anti-conversion bill. Among these organisations we also find some prominent development organisations with a Buddhist profile. We have already seen how the SUCCESS group saw its formation in the 1990s when various evangelical churches were tried before the NGO commission. However, the main priorities of SUCCESS has not been as a pressure group, but one of social service, and it is stated at their webpage: "The name of the organization SUCCESS denotes Secretariat for upliftment and Conservation of Cultural, Educational and Social Standards of Sri Lanka.(…) "SUCCESS SRI LANKA" from the time of its inception has earned an island wide reputation for regularly conducting several social service activities, for low income groups in our society" (www.success-srilanka.org [4.10.2013]). It was Gamini Perera,[55] the leader of SUCCESS, who initiated and founded the JCBO and who has been the main organiser of the network. In addition, he has been the most vocal spokesperson for the group, and he has written several op-eds concerning the anti-conversion bill in various newspapers. According to one of my informants who was closely connected with the JCBO network group there was a sharp decrease of activity after the death of Gamini Perera in 2010. When I spoke to my informant in 2011, he believed the group to have more or less dissolved, even though he still acknowledged that there were possibilities for ad-hoc activity or meetings. Another figure from SUCCESS that has been involved with the anti-conversion legislation is Ven. Dhammananda, who acts as the regional coordinator for SUCCESS in the Kandy branch, and who is within the upper segments of the *sangha* hierarchy of the Asgiriya-chapter. He has been active in the Sinhala public with his views on conversion, and is considered as one of those who have most intimate knowledge of what happens in the rural areas of Sri Lanka.

Charika, Buddhist Schools' Old Boys Association, Bodu Sahana Aramudala, Kandy Buddhist Doctors' Association.
[55] In his obituary, he is linked with a plethora of Buddhist interest groups, from SUCCESS and JCBO, as well as Dharmavijaya, All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, All Ceylon Women's Buddhist Congress, Young Men's Buddhist Association, The Buddhist Times and Centre for Budhist Action.

Another prominent development organisation with a Buddhist profile is the Dharmavijaya Foundation, which was founded by the late Ven. Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayka Thera in 1979, with the mission: "to promote the total development of man, both spiritually and physically with the application of Buddhist principles to development in accordance with the five Precepts and thereby establish a Dharmavijaya Samajaya" (Dharmavijaya Foundation 2009: 5). The Dharmavijaya Foundation is presently led by Olcott Gunasekara, whom also has wide contact network among different Buddhist organisations. He was the leader of the Buddha Sasana Commission in 2002, which devoted a full chapter to the issue of 'unethical conversions'. He also started the Red Lotus with Hema Goonatilake (from *Buddhist Times*) in 2005, and they were chosen, in their personal capacity, to sit in the committee for the 2,600[th] anniversary of Sambuddhatva Jayanthi, which was held in 2011. Even though his visibility in the Sri Lankan public space has been limited in relation to 'unethical conversions' and anti-conversion legislation, Olcott Gunasekera is undoubtedly a person with far-reaching influence and networks within the Sri Lankan polity, and who has advocated the need for a legislation in many forums.

Also among the conglomeration of different groups affiliated with the JCBO we can find the Centre for Buddhist Action, a small Buddhist interest organisation with a specific edge against the Catholic Church, which started to become visible in 2004. While the main antagonism around 'unethical conversions' is levelled against the evangelical and independent churches, there is also an undercurrent that carries a significant scepticism and even animosity towards the Catholic Church, or as one of their leading members bluntly stated: "Not that the Catholic Church is innocent" (Interview, 2nd November 2011). According to most of the informants on the Buddhist nationalist axis, the Catholic Church had more or less adapted to the Sri Lankan scene, and given up proselytisation, and was now occupied merely with ministering their flock. However, Centre for Buddhist Action was far more suspicious of the Catholic Church, and argued that they also had particular goals of converting Sri Lanka into a Christian nation, but that they did so by other tactics than the evangelicals. One of the main indicia of this plot was the text 'Eqlesia Asia', which the Buddhist nationalists felt was putting forward a plan to make Asia the new ground

for missionary activities in the coming millennia. Especially Catholic groups working with 'dialogue' and 'reconciliation' are seen as suspicious, as the Buddhist nationalists claim that these attempts are only subversion in order to forward the influence of the Catholic Church.

The list of member organisations within the JCBO reveals a mix of Buddhist interest groups for different occupations (Lawyers, doctors, Old Boys' Association), gender-based interest groups, but also different groups and organisations working on development and aid issues, such as SUCCESS and the Dharmavijaya Foundation. The only organisation that has a distinct political focus is the Centre for Buddhist Action. For the rest of the organisations, the JCBO network functions as a political mediator on their behalf. Thus, rather than jeopardising the core content of their activities, their affiliation with the JCBO enables many of these organisations both to continue their core activities unhindered, and in addition putting name and organisation behind a very distinct demand of forwarding anti-conversion legislation. The many affiliations within the JCBO creates the sense of a unitary political branch shared by many different organisations, led and administered by the leaders of the JCBO, most particularly Gamini Perera. Hitherto, as I introduced this chapter with the notion of an agent's political intimacy, we see here that these organisations are able to negotiate these boundaries in a very sophisticated way: in that by creating a larger representative body in JCBO, these small organisations do not in themselves flag their political opinion. This is perhaps most interesting with the SUCCESS. While SUCCESS was active and confrontational against the Christian churches in the 1990s, since then this openly confrontational line seems to have faded and the range of their developmental work expanded. In order to not put the current work of SUCCESS at stake, creating a larger network of political mobilisation through JCBO enables them to work in both ways.

Buddhist Times was established in 2002, and the issue of 'unethical conversions' was one of the main reasons for the emergence of the newspaper (see Berkwitz 2003 for this period). Topics directly or indirectly related to this issue have received wide coverage within the monthly newspaper, which also carries news reports of various events and debates within the Buddhist 'public sphere' (see also

Berkwitz 2008b). *Buddhist Times* has had a particular edge towards Christian evangelists, and the coverage of various aspects of how Christian proselytism takes place in Sri Lanka has been one of the most persistent topics of the newspaper. Another newspaper, albeit in Sinhala, is the *Dhamsara*, which also has followed the issue of 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill closely. The editor noted:

> Generally Buddhist people do not know of these things [unethical conversions]. It happens only in some parts of the country. Dhamsara makes people aware of what is happening here. (…) We have articles by various scholars and Buddhist activists. I read a lot of assents on the anti-conversion bill on the internet. It has been heavily debated in Buddhist circles. (Interview, 3rd of December 2011)

While different pressure group formations have been able to mount a political momentum in earlier times, we see that the political mobilisation around 'unethical conversions' and the anti-conversion bill has been enacted in a comprehensive manner that, at least for a time, brought the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement together in a common cause to support the enactment of anti-conversion legislature. The political party JHU was able to win 9 seats in parliament, and it was thus the first time Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists could influence Sri Lankan politics through a political template of themselves, rather than having their agenda co-opted by one of the larger parties, notably the SLFP or UNP. In addition to this commodification of a coherent nationalist movement, also other less political-minded institutions supported the initiative of an anti-conversion bill. Both statements from the sangha hierarchy, but also an initiative from the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress to form a commission team to look into and provide evidence for 'unethical conversions' took place in the wake of the religio-political mobilisation of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist movement.

Buddhist constellations: The sangha and the ACBC commission report

Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations (JCBO) have been those political formations that have fronted the anti-conversion bill most fervently as a solution to the alleged unethical conversions taking place in Sri Lanka. As I noted earlier, the *sangha* representatives very rarely take an active stance on political matters, at least not publically, and the political views of Buddhist monks usually are mediated through the presence of various Buddhist pressure groups. However, DeVotta and Stone (2008) note how even Buddhist monks opposed to the JHU views on conversions in contemporary Sri Lanka with utmost concern. Frydenlund (2011) experienced that many of her informants among Buddhist monks wanted to talk about the threat from evangelical Christians, rather than her topic – the present peace negotiations. A high-ranking monk in the upper echelon of the Asgiriya Chapter told the following:

> Maha Sangha means all of the monks. Both in Asgiriya Chapter and in Malwatte Chapter they have a council which consists of 20 members in each. All decisions concerning the sangha are made through these councils; activities among monks, decisions, statements. These councils have made statements in favor of legal provisions against "unethical conversions". (Interview, 30th of October 2011)

While the *sangha* hierarchy cannot be said to have mobilised politically on the issue of legal provisions against 'unethical conversions', their statements attest to the fact that they have endorsed the demand for an anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. In addition, several monks have personal communication with politicians and bureaucrats, where they also forward their political demands. Many of my informants among Buddhist monks often referred to their personal communication with the president(s) and other stakeholders in articulating their views on the issue. During some of my interviews, another organisational formation was alluded to, which was a network of influential monks, organisations and prominent Buddhist lay persons, where they would discuss issues related to the situation of Buddhism. A leader of a small Buddhist NGO told me about the mechanisms of a functioning, but not officially appointed Buddhist council:

> Buddha Sasana Kariya Sadhake Mandalaya? That is an umbrella advisory panel for Buddhism in Sri Lanka – Buddhist issues – broad topics. Unethical conversions have been discussed there. They meet once a month, first Tuesday in the month. Influential monks and organizations (SUCCESS and ACBC, among others) are present in the meetings. The panel works on an advisory capacity, but it is not government appointed. (Interview, 14th of October 2011).

This panel, council or network meets once a month where they discuss topics of concern or interest for Sri Lankan Buddhists. This could be an initiative for the government to appoint a steering committee for the 2,600th anniversary of Sambuddhatva Jayanthi in 2011, or to appoint a committee to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Anagarika Dharmapala. The panel has close relations with the government, but it is not officially appointed by the government. The Buddha Sasana Kariya Sadhake Mandalaya has frequently discussed 'unethical conversions' and subsequent legal provisions, and they have communicated their views directly to the political elite, and not through the public channels. Thus, the sangha hierarchy, prominent individual monks and the Buddha Sasana Kariya Sadhake Mandalaya prefer to channel their demands through a direct pressure without bringing their issues out in the media.

The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) also entered the debate on 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka, but not predominantly through another form of exerting pressure on the Sri Lankan government. In 2006 they appointed a commission to inquire into the matters of the allegedly 'unethical conversions', and released their report (in Sinhala) in January 2009 together with massive evidence of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka. The publication of the report was presented in a ceremoniously fashion, with the report escorted by a procession of elephants, before it was presented to the Maha Sangha Buddhist leaders who participated in the event. The report was later released in an English translation in 2012. As one of the members of the commission told me "ACBC appointed this commission. We are the highest Buddhist organization in this country. Whenever the issue comes up, we will cooperate with other Buddhist organizations" (Interview, 2nd November 2011). While the Buddha Sasana commission already had distinguished 'unethical conversions' as a national problem, the report did not provide substantial evidence of actual unethical

conversions taking place in Sri Lanka. In that regard, the commission initiated by the ACBC can be seen to be a counter-measure to the many different fact-finding reports by various Christian organisations, which documented violence and harassment of Christians in Sri Lanka. The massive allegations of unethical conduct among Christian agents, and the direct violence committed against Christian buildings and personnel triggered the Christians to mobilise against the animosity leveled against them by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists.

Christian constellations: Playing the blame-game

A basic criticism of the Buddhist nationalists is that they fail to distinguish between the different varieties of Christianity in Sri Lanka. However, without any foreknowledge of the basic premises of Christianity, the plethora of various names and denominations of different Christian bodies – churches, NGOs and prayer centres alike – are simply overwhelming. Thus, linking the individual churches to their institutional affiliations is a first step towards gaining a first understanding of these relations. Christians in Sri Lanka can roughly be categorised into four different institutional traditions; the Catholic Church, Protestants, evangelicals and independent evangelicals. The political resistance against the anti-conversion bill proposal has mainly been fronted by the various representative bodies for the different traditions in Sri Lanka; The Bishop's Conference for the Catholic Church, National Christian Churches of Sri Lanka (NCC) for the Protestants, National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), and The National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka (NCFSL) for the independent churches. These have been the main representative bodies that have fronted the opposition at the national scene, but also "Evangelical associations, human rights organizations, and western governments are among the international bodies that have entered into the fray of Sri Lanka's anti-conversion debate" (Berkwitz 2008b: 214).

The two most vocal bodies in opposing the anti-conversion bill have been the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) and the National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka (NCFSL), but these are not solely 'advocacy

groups' as they are termed by Berkwitz (2008b), but representative bodies for various institutionally affiliated churches. The NCEASL has a long history in Sri Lanka and was founded in 1952 (then under the name Evangelical Fellowship of Ceylon), and claims to represent more than 200,000 evangelical Christians from more than 200 different organisations in Sri Lanka. The National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka (NCFSL) claims to represent 200 indigenous churches. The NCFSL is more loosely organised, more like an affiliated network or umbrella organisation, and is not as old as the NCEASL. Both of these representative bodies can be seen to represent the evangelical fold in Sri Lanka, and thus both are the main targets for allegations of 'unethical conversions'. These organisations have also contributed significantly to the internationalisation of the conflict over the anti-conversion bill, by providing information and updates to various international Christian lobby groups, such as the Becket fund for Religious Liberty and the Jubilee Campaign, and religious persecution monitoring organisations (which I will come back to in chapter 11). One senior representative for the NCFSL narrated the following when I asked about the institutional background:

> There was a lot of exaggeration to the NGO commission. The Sinhala media, which is very biased, published stories and it led to a wave of attacks. This period saw some organizations coming up – SUCCESS. They consisted of professionals and it added to their strength. In 1991-1992 we had no organization, so we formed the Christian Consultation of Sri Lanka. I was the General Secretary, and we were monitoring the situation. We were a buffer to the Buddhist voice. The police and Buddhist monks are hard to get at. (Interview, 3rd of January 2012)

The organisation that he mentions – Christian Consultation of Sri Lanka – can be seen as a forerunner to the National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka. He continued: "Today the relationship is between NCC, NCEASL and the Independent churches". He did at first not mention the Catholics, but when I confronted him with the relations between the evangelicals and Catholic Church, he commented: "the Catholics say: We are also getting converted! Ban all evangelical groups! The Bishop of Colombo has intervened and acted as a bridge between Catholics and evangelicals" (Interview, 3rd of January 2012). The Catholic Church was in the beginning indecisive about whether they wanted to support or oppose the anti-conversion bill, particularly

because of their suspicious attitude towards certain evangelical activities. These relations where awakened when Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith issued a statement in November 2011 in which he beckoned the government to take a firmer action against evangelical misconduct. Many interpreted this statement that the Catholic Church would support a renewed initiative to bring forth anti-conversion legislation, but no processes were initiated in this regard. When I spoke to a Catholic lawyer who had mediated on behalf of the Catholic Church in the anti-conversion dispute, he elaborated:

> The Cardinal Ranjith statement? It has always been the view of the Catholic Church that we have been worried about the Pentecostal churches, but we are also worried of the Bill. My view: Most of the converts to evangelical churches come from Catholic people. That was our view earlier as well, by the former Cardinal. As such, we share the concern with the Buddhists, but we do not share the legislation approach. (Interview, 4th of January 2012)

The reluctant attitude of the Catholic Church towards the various evangelicals is further acknowledged in how several representatives of the National Christian Churches of Sri Lanka, who represent the Protestant denominations, articulated the situation for the Catholic Church in comparison with the other religious communities:

> The Cardinal statement? They [the Catholic Church] are affected as well. People talk of conversion from Catholicism. That is why they are hard on this. They feel threatened. We in the NCCSL do not want to become involved in a blame game. Sometimes it is hard to have a dialogue. We do not say that the allegations of the Buddhist-Hindu elements are entirely true. But there are some instances that are serious. Specific groups. I do not deny it. (Interview, 26th of December 2011)

The unity of the Christian community in Sri Lanka was in constant danger of fragmentation, either with the Catholic Church joining hands with the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists in forwarding the anti-Conversion bill, which in particular would have affected the activities of the evangelical groups, or by simply ostracising particular evangelical groups or affiliations for being behind the 'unethical conversions'. The government has thus far only embraced two of these traditions officially "The government deals with the Bishop's Conference and the NCC officially, but do not work with newer evangelical churches. The government relate to

the evangelical churches (NCEASL), but not in the same way" (Interview, 26th of December 2011). These communities receive greater patronage from the state, from the issuing of visas to other bureaucratic procedures, but still they have to answer for the activities done by independent Christian actors. There is a high level of frustration among the institutional actors, from the Bishop's Conference to NCCSL to NCEASL, in how the activities of smaller congregations bring repercussions over the whole Christian community. A senior member of the NCC, the coalition of Protestant churches, told the following:

> In addition to the NCEASL, there are other evangelical groups, and nobody represents the whole evangelical movement: Association of Free Churches, Fellowship of Free Churches, and Independent Fellowship. For these groups there is no governing mechanism. No accountability. It is individually run churches. (Interview, 26th of December, 2011)

Whenever I made an interview with a representative of the different representative institutional branches, I was told that they had articulated their own code of conduct which condemned the practice of 'unethical conversions'. Yet, despite this, most of them acknowledged that certain 'unsound' activities happened, but without them having the capacity to control or regulate the groups behind it. The representative of the NCC was very conscious of not letting this situation of 'passing the blame' ruin the unity among the Christians in Sri Lanka, and while the NCC has been less vocal in the media than any of the other institutional branches, the claim that they have worked tirelessly in the background to keep the Christians together in speaking with one voice. Two different informants at different levels in the NCC related to these processes:

> We have meetings with the Catholics frequently and with the NCEASL every second month. But the Catholic Church does not meet with the evangelicals. There is great distrust there. We serve as a link between them. (Interview, 26th of December 2011)

> In the NCC we had information meetings with the various churches to explain the details around the bill. We have tried to bring the Christians together to present one Christian voice. The NCEASL and the Catholic Church would usually not see each other eye to eye. The Catholics have tried to separate themselves from the evangelicals. (Interview, 3rd of April, 2013)

From these narratives we can see clearly that the NCC saw themselves as the main bridge between the various Christian institutional branches, and that they perceived their role as consolidating the Christian community into speaking with one coherent voice, especially as they theologically were located inbetween the others: "We are in a bad situation. We have pressure from both sides. We do not want to pass the blame" (Interview, 26th of December 2011). While the relations between the Catholics and the evangelicals were tense, and needed constant mediation from the NCC, there were also examples of cooperation between the NCEASL and the Catholic Church. The main example is the webpage www.srilankanchristian.com, which was a joint effort by NCEASL, the Archdiocese of Colombo (a Catholic institution) and Hela Kitthunu Urumaya. One representative from NCEASL highlighted how this cooperation brought the churches together:

> The issue of the anti-conversion bill very much brought the whole church together. The webpage was run by different congregations. Hela Kitthunu Urumaya is not very active right now. It was a movement within the Catholic Church. They tried to argue that Christians were not alien to this country. It became prominent in 2004, but I do not know when it started. (Interview, 13th of December 2011)

From these narratives we see that the anti-conversion bill has brought both disruption and unity into the whole Christian community in Sri Lanka. In one sense it has sharpened the sensibilities of the different institutional traditions in how they perceive each other and relate to one another, it has fuelled certain animosities and prejudices, but despite these disruptions and conflicts, the Christian community has managed to stand united in their opposition towards the anti-conversion bill proposal in Sri Lanka.

Other interest-based pressure groups

The conflict over the anti-conversion bill has mainly been articulated between Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists, but has also affected Christians in general. However, other actors have also been involved in the dispute, either as an

interested party themselves, with an attempt of negotiating the conflict of putting extra, especially financial and political, backing behind some of the claims. In the beginning, it was T. Maheshwaran who brought the idea of a bill proposal to Sri Lanka from India, and representatives for the All Ceylon Hindu Congress (ACHC) were for a long time involved in making a draft for a bill proposal in Sri Lanka. However, this process was later coopted, and ACHC decided to petition against the anti-conversion bill in August 2004 when they were not satisfied with the form of the proposal. Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) also petitioned the Bill, on the grounds that they felt the proposal would bring about a detrimental situation to the religious minorities in the country.

Another actor that took special interest in the bill proposal was the American Embassy. They initiated several meetings with the stakeholders of the dispute, and had personal meetings with many of those who were responsible for crafting the bill proposal, as well as other stakeholders both on the Buddhist side and the Christian side of the divide. After the implementation of IRFA (International Religious Freedom Act), which demand that the US monitor and sanctions states that violate religious freedom, they followed the situation in Sri Lanka closely. Berkwitz argues that the "IRFA has given added impetus for U.S. diplomatic personnel, particularly Embassy officials, to discuss U.S. concerns over the anti-conversion issue in meetings with Sri Lankan government officials at the highest levels, including President Chandrika Kumaratunga" (Berkwitz 2008b: 214-215). If Sri Lanka should be seen as violating the precepts of religious freedom, the U.S. would have a repertoire of different sanctions against the Sri Lankan state; "delay or cancellation of official and state visits to the U.S., the reduction or termination of certain assistance funds, and the impositions of targeted or broad trade sanctions", or as Berkwitz laconically comments about Sri Lanka "it can ill-afford to be reprimanded and sanctioned by the U.S. government under IRFA" (Berkwitz 2008b: 214). I will come back to the internationalisation of the conflict over the anti-conversion bill in the chapter 'Monitoring Religious Freedom'.

Political alliances in Sri Lanka: Institutions, affiliations and political repertoire

The issue of 'unethical conversions' has led to many new political formations, both among the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, but also among various Christian groups. SUCCESS was the first group that could be said to target the issue of 'unethical conversions' directly when they saw their formation in the beginning of the 1990s. However, when the issue of 'unethical conversions' gained increased awareness from 2002 and onwards, we see that Buddhist nationalists added this issue to their portfolio, and it eventually became an issue that united the otherwise dispersed and fragmented Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists behind a common front and behind different coalitions. One can perhaps speak of a period of saffronisation of politics in Sri Lanka, in that the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists for the first time were able to form a political template of their own in addition to wielding broader public influence. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been characterised by the many and fragmented groups of ideological similarity, which has lacked the institutional capacity to collect those groups into a common folder. It was particularly the emergence of Jathika Hela Urumaya, and the subsequent private member's bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita, that evoked international attention of the issue of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka. For the Christian community in Sri Lanka the allegations of 'unethical conversions' proved to be an enormous challenge, as it was a widespread opinion within the Catholic Church that Evangelical groups 'targeted' their fold as well. Thus, the anti-conversion legislation could have disrupted the Christian community in Sri Lanka in a bitter blame-game, yet the different Christian communities in Sri Lanka have been able to stand united on this issue, albeit a fragile coalition held more in place by a common 'enemy' than any sense of amity and commonality between the various denominations. Despite attempts of creating new coalitions between various Christian communities, the bulk of the Christian political pressure was negotiated by Christian representative bodies of the various traditions: the NCEASL (Evangelical Alliance), the NCFSL (Independent evangelicals), NCCSL (Protestants) and the Bishop's Conference (Catholic Church).

After the death of Ven. Soma in late 2003, the demand for anti-conversion legislature was high-pitched, and the Minister of Buddha Sasana W.J.M.

Lokubandara promised to bring forth a bill. Nevertheless, Jathika Hela Urumaya emerged as a new political formation, reluctant for a bill proposal to materialise, and proposed it as a private member's bill in May 2004. The demand for an anti-conversion legislation beckoned the political monks to form their own political party, and bring the proposal forth itself, without negotiating the issue with other actors. It was direct pressure par excellence. This was an act that gained momentum in Sri Lanka, but also internationally, and the demand for an anti-conversion legislation was further pressurised by various segments of the *sangha*, both through official statements, but also through the political pressure of Buddhist councils, such as the Buddha Sasana Kariya Sadhake Mandalaya. Along with this direct pressure, Buddhist political formations were also able to mount a significant public pressure on the demand for anti-conversion legislation, not only through the public visibility of the political monks in JHU and the lay coalition of JCBO, but perhaps most prevalent through the emergence of several new Buddhist publications, *Buddhist Times* and *Dhamsara* most prominent among them, that at times were able to tune the issue into a national momentum.

Christian formations, however, complained that they were not heard by the national media. International media formations, especially those with a Christian background, covered the conflict extensively. Christian formations thus came in the situation that their hardships were covered internationally, but not received media awareness within the national boundaries of Sri Lanka. This dynamics have led these Christian formations to consolidate their pressure efforts of convincing international bodies, especially those monitoring 'religious freedom', and other nation-states in conducting pressure towards the Sri Lankan state not to pass the anti-conversion bill, a dynamic that I will give full attention in my chapter on 'Monitoring Religious Freedom'. Apart from direct or public pressure, this form of structural pressure works on the basis of delivering reports on a certain issue to catch the attention of stakeholders and policymakers, and make them address how this particular 'problem' should be solved. While the Buddha Sasana report from 2002 addressed the issue of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka, it is first and foremost the ACBC commission report that took the challenge of documenting cases of unethical conversions that had

taken place in Sri Lanka. By launching a massive effort of documenting cases of unethical conversions in Sri Lanka, the report called for an enactment of anti-conversion legislation to remedy the situation at hand.

6. Narratives of Conversion: Conviction, Subversion and Political Allegiance

This chapter brings closer scrutiny to the concept of 'unethical conversions'. While Buddhist nationalists claim that Christian missionaries use unsound methods in acquiring new converts, which attests to the need of an anti-conversion legislation, many Christians argue that these allegations are based upon misinformation, exaggeration and antagonism against the Christian minority in Sri Lanka. With a closer investigation of the accusations made by the Buddhist nationalists, this chapter seeks to unravel why and how the issue of 'unethical conversions' has gained such prominence in Sri Lanka. In order to understand the discourse around conversion, I will first elucidate how one can understand the process of conversion more generally, as well as how it is understood in the Buddhist and Christian tradition. However, religious conversion should not be understood solely in relation to religious traditions, and I will at the end discuss the interrelations between religious conversion and political allegiance.

Understanding conversion: Potential, catalysts and results

I will understand conversion as a shift in religious institutional affiliation. Rambo and Farhadian (1999) make an assumption that conversion is a process, and on the basis of this they develop a stage model to portray the different phases of a conversion process. The stage model contains 7 distinct phases, but which should not be understood in a rigid sense: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences. From these categories I will speak of conversion potential (context, crisis, quest), conversion catalysts (encounter and interaction) and conversion results (commitment and consequences), even though I will follow the categorisation proposed by Rambo and Farhadian (1999).

Rambo and Farhadian understand the context in three interconnected spheres (macro, micro and meso) which can be translated into the political context, the personal context and the regional/institutional context. They argue: "Contextual

infrastructures provide a range of mobility, flexibility, resources and opportunities as well as different powers of access, support, control and repression" (Rambo and Farhadian 1999: 25). Crises are seen as 'disordering and disrupting experiences' (Rambo and Farhadian 1999: 25) and may derive from personal experiences and/or events. Crucial features of the crisis stage are the degree of severity, the duration and scope and whether the source of the experience/event is externally or internally derived. By 'quest', Rambo and Farhadian allude to the active seeking by a particular individual for a meaning in life, or in other words, their motivational structures. These motivational structures can be towards religious or political aspirations, professional career or the need for social or existential comfort. These three categories may all relate to one another, a crisis may lead to a stage of seeking (quest), or a mystical experience may throw an individual into personal crisis, and in many ways the contextual apparatuses are decisive for which opportunities this dynamic can result in.

By 'encounter' and 'interaction' Rambo and Farhadian describe the contact and interplay between the potential convert and the advocate/proselytiser, as well as the setting of the whole encounter. It should be noted that these encounters themselves may instigate and intensify a crisis or lead to a quest for a particular individual. On the one hand, we have here the different approaches and methods employed by the proselytisers towards the particular individual, but on the other hand it is important to note the susceptibility of the individual for such a religious change that is involved by conversion. The setting, however, provides a background for the conversion, and this includes everything from personal meetings (and knocking on doors) to campaigns in public locations, distribution of leaflets as well as huge public gatherings. 'Interaction' is the process when a brief encounter transforms into regular encounters between the potential convert and the proselytisers, and Rambo and Farhadian describe four features of this contact: ritual, relationships, rhetoric and roles. The greater levels of accommodation of the potential convert into the fold, the greater are the chances for success of religious conversion. Within this, the group communicates, tacitly or explicitly, their expectations for the potential convert the changes that will take place. Moreover, the convert is exposed to the specific rhetoric

of the respective group, which can offer an "interpretative system that has the potential to dramatically transform the worldview of the converting person" (Rambo and Farhadian 1999: 30). Thus, this interplay provides the guidelines for an eventual conversion, both in terms of expected behaviour, regulations and values.

The two last stages, which I have termed conversion results, happen when the conversion process is institutionalised. By commitment, Rambo and Farhadian allude to the decisive choice of the potential convert to actually bring the conversion process to an end, a change of institutional affiliation. To mark this event one can have a public demonstration, baptism or any other ritual which mark the decision of the convert. In many congregations, a personal testimony of the conversion commitment is expected, where the convert usually follows a specific script in how to narrate one's life story and conversion process. However, such an act or ritual does not bring an end to the religious transformation involved, and the long-term results are needed to see if the conversion has been 'authentic'. For most religious traditions this involves that the convert follows the prescriptions and proscriptions, as well as an engagement within the community of the fold. The question of authenticity plays a key role in the understanding of 'unethical conversions' by the different parties involved. Before I go through the various allegations against Christian missionaries and NGOs in how they conduct 'unethical conversions', I will briefly look into some of the dominant narratives in the Christian and Buddhist tradition in how they portray the ideal image of a conversion process.

Conversion narratives in Buddhist and Christian traditions

The most paradigmatic conversion narrative is the sudden, spectacular Pauline conversion (Gooren 2010). The apostle Paul was first known as Saul of Tarsus, who was a devout Jew and was in the frontline of early Christian persecution. On his way to Damascus "suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do"" (Acts 9:3b-6) (As

quoted in Bryant 1999: 180). Later, within the city walls of Damascus Saul meets Ananias, who first is reluctant to meet with Saul due to his ill-reputation of persecution, but then blesses and baptises Saul and gives him the name Paul. Thereafter, the apostle Paul is known for his relentless missionary effort and his many letters to the different congregations of Christians, which have become part of the Christian scripture (Bryant 1999).

Another famous conversion narrative in the Christian tradition is that of Augustine. Here we can find some of the same elements as in the example of the Pauline conversion, in how Augustine suddenly experiences a dramatic moment in the gardens of Milan:

> Opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and in wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites. I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant … it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled. (As quoted in Bryant 1999: 182)

However, Bryant argues that many scholars have been too fixated on this particular sudden moment in narrating the conversion of Augustine, and that a coherent reading of Augustine's confessions reveals that this moment was only a climax of a longer process of conversion that 'unfolded over his whole lifetime' (Bryant 1999: 182). Yet, the story of Augustine is another 'archetypal account' of a Christian conversion and it pinpoints how "sinful humanity is unable to turn towards God without the presence of transforming grace" (Bryant 1999: 184). A further development of conversion narratives within the Christian fold can be found through the redemptive conversions, which both entail a shift in institutional allegiance, as well as a shift in the orientation towards god. Bryant identifies four stages of redemptive conversions: (1) a conviction of sin; (2) a recognition of one's need for a redeemer; (3) an experience of redeeming love or assurance of salvation; and (4) the living of a Christian life. With redemptive conversions it is the 'change of heart' in the orientation towards god that is the central focus and not the ritual act of baptism. Many Christians claim that Jesus himself ridiculed that baptism without a 'change of

heart' could be called a true conversion. Thus, redemptive conversions offer a more fixated image of the experience of 'conversion' and 'new birth', and a paradigmatic rhetoric is whether the conversions are authentic or not. The image of redemptive conversion is especially found within the evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal traditions of Christianity (Bryant 1999).

Thilakaratne writes in his article "Buddhist View on Religious Conversion" how Buddhists perceive conversion to be 'an ethico-intellectual voluntary act' (Thilakaratne 2005). As in Christianity, the Buddha also stated "they should go on teaching for the well-being of the many and for the happiness of the many (*caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujana-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya*) (Thilakaratne 2005: 72). However, the emphasis in this mandate was to spread the dhamma to 'those who have ears,' or those who had the intellectual and emotional capacities to acquire the teachings of Buddha. Thilakarane quotes a well-known statement: 'This Dhamma (teaching) is for the intelligent; not for the unintelligent' (Thilakratne 2005: 73), and argues that this logic precluded that the persons who did not have the potential for acquiring the teaching, such as Cunda, a nearby swine-dealer. Conversion, thus, "is ultimately an act of intellectual conviction" (Thilakaratne 2005: 73).

Several of my Buddhist informants alluded to the Kalama Sutta of the scriptures as an introduction to why they were against 'unethical conversions'. The Kalama Sutta begins with the group of Kalamas who are visited by the Buddha, but they are confused over which teaching they should follow, as all preceding teachers have praised their own system of thought while talked denigrating of other systems of thought. Thus, Buddha makes a list of ten reasons to be critical of when one evaluates a religious assertion: revealed religious tradition, succession, hear-say, textual tradition, fittingness to a context, respect for a teacher, logicality, methodical-ness, reflection on reasons and being convinced of a theory (as found in Thilakaratne 2005). Many of my informants, both Buddhist monks and lay people alike, found the Kalama Sutta to be like a formula for dismantling authority, and placing the decision back to one's own judgment. While the Buddha is known to have conducted miracles, these tricks and methods are not allowed as a means to attract new followers, and Buddha discouraged the use of miracles to win popularity. Another example of a

conversion narrative in the Buddhist scriptures is that of Upali, a wealthy Jain merchant who approaches Buddha to refute his teachings. Upali, however, falls short of Buddha's argumentation, and asks him to take him as a follower. Buddha shows his reluctance to this, and asks Upali to think over the matter once again. When Upali finally decides to convert, Buddha reminds him that he still should keep his commitments to his former religious community (to continue to give alms to Jain mendicants).

Conversion, conviction, coercion

Many Christian leaders have conveyed their fears in regards to the anti-conversion bill, and they feel that the whole issue of unethical conversion is exaggerated, misinformed and antagonising against the Christian minorities in Sri Lanka. However, the Christian tradition in Sri Lanka consists of many different strands, and they do not speak with a single voice, but often have differing and contrasting views on the topic of conversions. It is normal to divide the Christian minority into 4 sections in Sri Lanka; the Catholic Church, the Protestants, the evangelicals (who have an institutional network) and the independent evangelicals (which do not have any institutional affiliation). A Catholic priest dedicated to social work stated:

> There is some justifiable doubt. A feeling among the Buddhists that Christians are into conversion. There have been some cases in the village areas - fundamental areas, and not very many – but there is also some exaggeration by the Buddhists that the purpose of all Christians is to convert. That is wrong. Jehova Witnesses and such go to poor areas. That is a fact, and we cannot deny that. If people are helped financially, they become followers of different groups. On the other hand there are moderate Buddhists who understand what the church is doing: education, social work, health services. People are doing this in the name of Christ, but their purpose is not to convert. (Interview, 5th of December 2011)

While Catholics often asserted that they were more severely affected than the Buddhists by the evangelical missionary activity, and thus blamed the evangelicals for this kind of aggressive behaviour, the Catholics did not support legislation on the issue. The Catholic priest continued: "We do not notice unethical conversions so

much. It is media boosted" (Interview, 5th of December, 2011). Another Catholic theologian stated: "Unethical conversion is problematic to put in legal terms. Conversion often happens from Christians to Christians. From mainline churches. This is freedom of religion. It is how it is" (Interview, 4th of May 2011). Further still, one observation, when interviewing various Christian leaders was that while the mainline denominations, particularly among Catholic and Protestant congregation, they would acknowledge improper conversions and blame the evangelical and charismatic Christian groups for unethical conduct. However, evangelical pastors usually denied the allegations of 'unethical' conversions altogether. An evangelical informant told me: "There is no solid evidence of "unethical conversions". Take a look at Asma Jahangir's report. There have been all kinds of stories, but there have never been presented any proofs" (Interview, 12th of December 2011). The most common form, however, was to blame some marginal groups for this kind of conduct, and assert that one's own group did not indulge in such activity. Representatives from the independent churches were the ones to challenge the Buddhist resistance against 'conversions' as a general symptom of anti-Christian attitudes, and not due to 'unethical' practices. An independent evangelical pastor argued: "Unethical conversion? They have more problem with 'conversion', than 'unethical'. Only a bit 'unethical', but that is marginal" (Interview, 3rd of January 2012).

Another assertion was that Buddhists in general were unable to distinguish the different forms of Christianity in Sri Lanka: "Mainline churches do social service, while evangelicals preach the gospel. The Buddhists mix these two" (Interview, 3rd of January 2012). Nevertheless, it is a valid point to make that few Buddhist monks or other nationalists on the ground are well versed in the terminology of the various churches, and that not all of them were aware of the distinction between Catholic, Protestant and evangelical Christians. But on the other hand, one of the very characteristics of evangelical Christianity is the presence of a plethora of small, but interconnected churches, often bearing various individual names. In addition comes all the various aid agencies with religious sounding names, and the ACBC commission (2012) makes a list over 379 organisational bodies, both religious organisations and NGOs, with some form of religious affiliation working in Sri

Lanka. To have a sound categorisation of them all is no easy task, even for those who work professionally with the area. Nevertheless, leaders among Buddhist nationalists always deliberately pointed their finger at evangelical groups, and distinguished them from the other Christian groups. One of my Buddhist informants, a medical doctor affiliated to a Buddhist NGO in Kandy and active in the reconstruction work after the tsunami, reflected upon this:

> We are born Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This is not a good thing. One should decide this for oneself. Buddhists also preach and convert people, and some are taken up by this, and follow what Buddha says. Hindus do not try to convert, but conversions are a very bad habit of Christians. They are deceiving people and converting them through inducements. Some of these proselytizers are particularly clever. But it is only a small percentage, 99% of them are ok. But there are a few very active evangelists. Many countries have the same problems. They have been colonized for some time, and developed an inferiority complex; whatever that comes from the West is great. Even just colour. There is an inferiority complex in play here, and people take advantage of this. (Interview, 4th of December 2011)

When meeting with various Christian representatives, I also encountered the notion that 'unethical conversion' was a contradiction in terms. "The conversion that Christ expected was certainly not a "change of religion" (proselytism) which he ridiculed (Mt 23:15), but a "change of heart" (*metanoia* in Greek)" (Peiris 2005: 33). Thus, the use of material inducement was seen in opposition to genuine conversion, a conversion by sound conviction. In a conversation with two American missionaries, working as schoolteachers in central Sri Lanka, they argued that a practice of 'unethical' conversions would have severe limitations: "Conversions should be sincere, and by their own will. Otherwise, it would not last" (Interview, 4th of September, 2011). As one prominent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist, running a national Buddhist newspaper, told me: "Conversion by conviction is a human right. Buddhism was the first missionary religion in the world. One has the right to do missionary work" (Interview, 25th of November, 2011). However, while 'conversion by conviction' was more or less the golden standard everyone could accept, the nuances of 'conviction' varied greatly. In a small Catholic bookshop I found a book from India about conversion entitled *Blame It on God If Brahmins Became Christians*, and

the blurb states: "it is God who has to take the credit or blame for every true conversion" (Lacombe and Sundaram 1995). According to this image conversion is god-induced rather than man-induced, and any notion of socio-economic reasoning behind conversions fails, as the change ultimately lies with 'God'. One evangelical informant told me "Conversion is a matter of conviction. Only God can make this come through. Money can only hold people for a temporary amount of time" (Interview, 12th of December 2011). On the one hand, Christians argue that 'unethical conversions' are counter-intuitive, as they will only give temporary affects and expectations of continuing material support. On the other hand they argue that they themselves have an inferior role in the conversion process, as it is God himself who is the redeeming force in any conversion.

Thus, when talking of 'conversion by conviction' we see that Buddhists and Christians often talk about different conversion images. While 'conviction' for Buddhists often is an intellectual conviction of the superiority of a given tradition, 'conviction' for Christians (evangelicals in particular) mean a redemptive process of transforming grace, a god-induced 'change of heart'. However, in a chart offered by Lofland and Skonovd (1981) both the intellectual and the mystical conversion processes entailed 'little or no' degree of social pressure. Sharma (2005) writes in "Christian Proselytization: A Hindu Perspective" on the distinction between accepting converts (and proclaiming the gospel) on one side, and seeking converts (even in the face of indifference or opposition) on the other, and how the latter is often seen as provocative in the Indian context. The main question of dispute, therefore, is whether the level of social pressure in the given conversion context amounts to allurement or coercion. Buddhist nationalists claim that Christians use charity and aid precisely to win the trust and confidence of poor villagers, and after a while transform these activities into religious worship. Several studies have shown (Woods 2012, Nanayakkara 2007, Perera 1998) how Christians see it as tantamount to subvert spaces of encounter be in direct contact with people on the ground, exerting at least some degree of social pressure.

However, my Christian informants found it hard to relate to the 'cunning' image they were given by the Buddhist nationalists, and often asserted that the whole

issue of 'unethical conversions' was based upon several layers of misunderstanding, exaggerations and misinformation. The theologian Lienemann-Perrin (2007) has tried to show some of these dichotomous views of proselytism in a chart:

Complain:proselytism by unethical means	Christian witness at stake
Inducement of young people who are underage / minors	Care for children; provide education and training to minors to achieve self-reliance
Enticement of mentally and physically ill, ignorant, desperate people	Care for the disabled, sick, prisoners, naked, hungry
Luring members by material offerings	Option for the poor
Cultural arrogance	Prophetic criticism of social, cultural and spiritual evils
Disturbance of public order	Public witness of the Gospel
Aggression against other religious communities	Call to witness among all nations
Accusation against converts	**Claim of converts**
Apostasy, betrayal, harm against the own religious community	Following the call to return to God
Victim of lure, enticement	Decision out of free will

On the other hand, do Christians have the right to offer help to vulnerable groups? While Buddhist nationalists read the Christian mindset as cynical conversion machinery, it cannot be contested that these vulnerable groups are also the very same groups that are in need of assistance. The theologian Lienemann-Perrin argues:

> Are not many of the accusations that Christians proselytize with unethical means ill-founded insinuations and propaganda? If, for example, Christians care for the poor, the sick, the prisoners and outcasts ignored by their fellow believers, is that really a case of inducement to conversion by unethical means? (Lienemann-Perrin 2007: 455)

Most of the Christian informants I spoke to argued that an eventual enactment of the bill would target and bring suspicion to genuine Christian social work among the

poor and destitute in Sri Lanka. As in the incorporation cases,[56] where some Christian organisations were denied formal registration due to their apparent mix of religious instruction and socio-economic uplifting (Berkwitz 2008b, Owens 2006a/2006b) people felt confused over what the bill actually sought to prohibit. Christian leaders feel that an enactment of an anti-conversion legislation would bring similar suspicion to social work in general, and that it would lead to a sense of arbitrariness for Christian charity whether they faced charges of unethical conduct or not. Matthews notes: "Outwardly, these actions appear aimed at only evangelical groups. (...) But mainline denominations are very much threatened as well. Catholics and Anglicans have both issued media releases indicating that they have no connection with 'evangelical fundamentalists' and that they recognise the risk of deteriorating religious harmony" (Matthews 2007: 468). Catholic and Protestant churches thus walk on a fine line between safeguarding their own community of believers and bringing support to the wider domains of Christian congregations in Sri Lanka.

Mayer (2008) observes that conflicts over proselytism only rarely contest conversion per se, but articulate a resistance against 'improper' or 'aggressive' proselytisation. Several Buddhist informants had attained a copy of Paul Hattaway's book *Peoples of the Buddhist World: A Christian Prayer Guide* (2004), which contains meticulous material on Buddhist populations in the world, informing "what special challenges they present for Christians who want to bring the good news of Jesus to Buddhists" (Hattaway 2004: Backcover).[57] A paragraph in the book that many had the urge to show me read:

> Does it break God's heart today that hundreds of millions of Buddhists are marching to hell with little or no gospel witness? Does it break the saviour's heart that millions worship lifeless idols instead of the true, glorious heavenly Father? Does it pain the heart of the Father that so few Buddhist have ever heard the Name of his beloved Son? (Hattaway 2004: xii)

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[56] See Chapter 8 for a closer examination of the incorporation cases.

[57] Something that many of my Buddhist informants found provocative was a picture inside the book, which the editor, Hattaway, introduces with the following: "And my favourite image of all – a group of beaming Buddhist monks sitting in a circle on the floor while scoffing down boxes of pizza from Pizza Hut, washed down with cans of Coca Cola!" (Hattaway 2004: xi). The image itself contains the words: "Serving hungry bodies and hungry souls" (Hattaway 2004: 243).

The book was seen as evidence that Buddhism was not facing sporadic interventions from various missionaries, but that Buddhists around the world are subjected to concerted Christian efforts of proselytisation. Publications, and articles, like this, emphasising the 'eschatological urgency' of conversions, especially targeted at Buddhists or at vulnerable groups, serve as an important backdrop to how many Buddhists perceive Christian, especially evangelical, interventions in Sri Lanka as first and foremost being about conversion. Hence, Christian discourses on conversion and proselytism inform the public debate in Sri Lanka, and contribute greatly to the reputation that Christians, foremost among them the evangelicals, will use any opportunity to secure a conversion. Allegations of 'unethical' conversions are a natural continuation of the anxieties experiences by the Buddhist population. The next part will deal with how many Buddhists accuse Christians of using subversive methods in their conversion encounters.

'Unethical conversions': Subversive methods

The most common allegation against (evangelical) missionaries is that they use improper methods to win their converts. In the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill this is articulated as: "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person aid or abet any such conversion." 'Allurement' is interpreted as: (i) any gift or gratification whether in cash or kind, (ii) grant of any material benefit, whether monetary or otherwise; (iii) grant of employment or grant of promotion in employment. ''Force' shall include a show of force including a threat or harm or injury of any kind or threat of religious displeasure or condemnation of any religion or religious faith', while the last keyword, 'fraudulent', means 'includes misinterpretation or any other fraudulent contrivance.' While these concepts are taken from the legal jargon, I will here look into various descriptions and narratives of what kind of conversions the Buddhist nationalists have in mind when they seek to prescribe legal regulation of

proselytisation. The term 'unethical' may contain various elements, and I will here divide them into how many Buddhists feel that Christian evangelists employ unethical methods. In addition I also follow how the evangelicals' particular focus on vulnerable groups is seen as provocative. A lengthy section in the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress' commission report (2012) gives an in-depth presentation on how influential Buddhists feel about conversions in Sri Lanka:

> Christian Evangelists are well aware that they cannot convert Buddhists who have a good understanding of the teachings of the Buddha by explaining Christianity to them, but they can do so only by bribing them with money, gifts and other allurements and by deceiving them with assurances that sickness and disease can be cured by prayer. This is why they go in search of helpless, uneducated Buddhists living peacefully in rural villages, shower them and their children with gifts and presents, help alleviate their economic hardships, take undue advantage of the quality of gratitude inborn in them precisely because of the Buddhistic nature thereby enticing them into being accompanied to Prayer Centres and using sinister methods to wean them away from the quality of being Buddhistic and then convert them to their faith. (ACBC 2012: 46)

The given quote offers a comprehensive insight into how the committee of ACBC understands the conversion dynamics in Sri Lanka. Christian missionaries deliberately targets 'helpless, uneducated Buddhists' in rural villages bribing them with allurements and assurances of good health, exploiting the inborn gratitude of the Buddhistic nature. Thus, by enticing poor Buddhists by their 'sinister methods', the missionaries are able to wean them away from the quality of the Buddhist path and into the Christian fold. However, this process is not an intellectual one, those of good understanding of the teachings of the Buddha would not comply with the simple tricks and enticements of the missionaries, and only the poor and the backwards are susceptible to the Christian cunning. What is revealing in the quote is the triadic interplay between different caricatures of the 'cunning' missionary, intelligent educated Buddhist and the deprived village Buddhists, naïve and grateful, susceptible to Christian proselytisation, especially through gifts and other allurements.

During an interview with a representative of Sarvodaya,[58] the famous Buddhist social service organisation, this dynamic of intellectual Buddhism and exploitive Christianity was particularly highlighted. The representative confirmed that he had seen many incidents of 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka, but that he was not provoked by this, and gave the issue little concern: "But Sarvodaya never tell people to change the religion. When the Christian priest comes to the village, they say that he tries to make them change their religion. When people get things from the priest, they will automatically go to the church" (Interview, 15th of October, 2011). In his opinion, conversion went both ways: "Sometimes Buddhists go to Christianity because of the prize. But Christians go to Buddhism because of the philosophy" (Interview, 15th of October, 2011). This view was further articulated: "People change their religion due to poverty. People who know the Buddhist philosophy by heart will not change their religion. If they know their religion thoroughly, they will not change their religion" (Interview, 15th of October, 2011). The Sarvodaya representative offers here an ideological defense of conversion, in that those committed and dedicated to the Buddhist teachings will not change their religion, and that conversion only happens due to poverty. The backside of his argument, though, is that conversion from Buddhism to Christianity is motivated by socio-economic reasons and not by spiritual and philosophical attraction. The net result of this argumentation is that any convert to Christianity is because of the material benefits: "Labe thiannava harenava, labe thiannava onedeyak karanava" ("if he gets a prize [material benefit], then he will change religion") (Interview, 15th of October, 2011).

A much narrated story during my interviews was about the Jesus box and the Buddha box. Sometimes it also included a box with Krishna or Ganesh as well. A high-profile monk working in a Buddhist NGO for development, with much experience from the villages told the following: "There was also an incident with small gifts to children: they had two boxes; one depicting Buddha and the other Jesus. When the children put their hand into the Buddha box, it turned out to be empty.

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[58] Sarvodaya does not support the anti-conversion bill, nor have they taken a public stance on the issue of 'unethical conversions'. In fact, they are often labeled as unpatriotic by Buddhist nationalists, as they often cooperate with international donors in their programmes of village uplifting.

When they put their hand into the Jesus box, they would find a toffee or a chocolate or a little toy" (Interview, 30th of October, 2011). Episodes and incidents involving children in the matter of faith seem to be very sensitive. Apart from the promise of hell for the unbeliever, short anecdotes have allegedly been told to children, with a denigrating purpose. The editor of a national Buddhist newspaper elaborated upon some stories involving children:

> "While teaching there Christians are like this: 'Children, love your mother and father, but if your mother and father departs, would you like it?' The child would say no to this. 'But Lord Buddha left the palace, leaving his infant son and his wife. Do you still feel that Buddha was a good man?' This is how they infuse poison into these children's minds only gradually. They do not say it at once – and this method really affects small children. 'Why are these flowers blooming? Butterflies, bees and insects used these blooming flowers, it was their food, but what happens if you give these flowers to Buddha? These insects will have difficulties to exist. Is it god or bad?' 'Bad!' the children would reply. 'Why then offer flowers to Buddha?' Gradually by asking these questions they infuse something bad about Buddha into the children's mind." (Interview, 3rd of December, 2011)

Menon (2003) notes how the same types of stories circulate in India: how the naivetè of the convert is contrasted with the devious and calculating missionaries. She tells one story where a missionary put up pictures of Ram, Sita and Ravana on different magnets, and how he can then ridicule the Hindu gods by making Ram and Sita anti-polar, while Sita attracts to Ravana. These stories are often figuratively speaking; they involve the innocent and naïve convert, the cunning missionary, and the disrespectful denunciation of either Buddhism or Hinduism. Thus, conversion stories involving children are seen as extra provocative, as they are both one of the prime symbols of a vulnerable category, but also the recipients of cultural traditions, in their critical formative stage of cultural awakening. The children, as well as the other vulnerable categories, are in need of protection against such aggressive and unethical missionaries, both through a revival of Buddhist heritage but also through the enactment of protective laws. I believe it is because of the symbolic ramifications that narratives about children and trickery rings high in the debate, instead of meticulous narratives about opportunity-seeking employees aiming for a quicker career-achievement.

The supposed insensitivity of evangelicals can also be seen in other situations. Nanayakkara (2007) notes how the death of a famous nationalist monk, Madihe Pannasihe, in 2003 stirred joy among the evangelicals. In one of their newsletters, evangelicals made an argument about the 'timely' death of the monk, in how it coincided with the prayer and fasting schedules of the Christian group. Another incident happened in 2005, when a leading monk died in Piliyandala,[59] where numerous posters reading 'Jesus is the salvation' were displayed in the vicinity of the respective temple in the immediate aftermath of his death. Several of my informants told various stories of how people were visited by missionaries during Vesak or Poya days, and how some missionary groups would distribute Christian leaflets and literature within the territories of Buddhist holy sites, such as Mihintale and Sri Pada (Adam's Peak) (Perera 1995). One senior pastor in the evangelical fold also commented upon this: "Evangelical insensitivity to these cultural forms has been hurtful. We should have localised our masses more with less foreign influence" (Interview, 14th of December, 2011).

In an interview with an editor of a national Buddhist newspaper, a variety of issues were mentioned regarding how evangelicals would work in Sri Lanka:

> They used unethical methods to convert Buddhists to their religion. Poor people were given material benefits as well as jobs in Christian companies. They got education, health care, etc. By doing these things they collected a lot of funds from the Western countries, and showed to their sponsors that the Christian population was increasing in Sri Lanka. (Interview, 3rd of December, 2011)

This argumentation resembles the definition of 'allurement' in the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill.[60] The main allegation is that Buddhists feel that evangelicals mix social uplifting and proselytisation, and that this mix involves an

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[59] When I went through the reported violence (from Christian sources, see chapter 11) the location of Piliyandala was often mentioned as a site with violent episodes, but where the violence abruptly stopped. I also became aware of some episodes in Piliyandala in 2013, but I did not have the chance to look further into them.
[60] (i) any gift or gratification whether in cash or kind, (ii) grant of any material benefit, whether monetary or otherwise; (iii) grant of employment or grant of promotion in employment.

undue pressure on vulnerable persons to convert into the Christian fold. The ACBC commission report (2012) contains several stories of how different people have been pressurised on socio-economic and health issues as a motivation for conversion.

> It seems to me that in these kinds of situations, people often convert out of necessity rather than out of conviction or faith. In such situations, the decision to convert is a rational economic decision [more] than a matter of spiritual salvation. (Perera 1998: 67).

However, Perera (1998) goes against those critics who assert that the recent success of evangelicals alone can be attested to aggressive proselytising and western funding. One of the main causes for the expansion in evangelical numbers is precisely their commitment and intimacy with social work. The evangelical groups offer counseling, self-help and personal involvement from both the pastors and the congregation. The evangelical fold offers a whole new community, which is far more ready to enhance the worth of the individual. Personal interaction, dealing directly with people's problems and concerns, is the main veneer of evangelical social work, which, according to Perera (1998) most often targets those of a socially or emotionally depressed background. Robbins (2004) notes that while deprivation and disorganisation are often highlighted as reasons for evangelical growth, the questions regarding the cultural transformations that follow tend to be overlooked. Nanayakkara (2007) argues that the rise of evangelical Christianity can be understood against the template of pastoral ministry, a sense of community and the failure of traditional religious institutions. Through prayers and material support, both to low-income and middle-income individuals, these evangelical interventions were able to win the hearts and minds of new converts. This can also be seen in contrast to the traditional religious institutions, which Nanayakkara perceives to be slow and bureaucracy-ridden without the personal intimacy to their own congregation. In addition, Buddhist monks are seen as uncaring for the poor and for some vulnerable sections of society conversion is a reaction of long-time neglect (Nanayakkara 2007).

This strain of self-criticism can also be found among some of the Buddhists, represented by the editor of a national Buddhist newspaper:

> Buddhists have their faults – some temples are corrupted. Most of the things Buddhists do indirectly help the missionaries. When Buddhists do not adhere to Buddhist principles and ethical practices, lay Buddhists become frustrated. That tells missionaries to peep through their windows; it is not a problem of missionaries, but also a problem of Buddhists. (Interview, 3rd of December, 2011)

Nevertheless, the standard way of phrasing discontent with the evangelical expansionism was to allude to how they approached new ground. For many of my informants the fact that evangelical groups settled in monoreligious Buddhist villages with the intent to proselytise, was provoking in itself. Others would narrate how these evangelicals would approach such communities. The same editor told me how the evangelicals would work: In the beginning they would settle in uncharted territory without revealing their religion. They would start an aid organisation, a health care centre, or a Montessori (Kindergarden) to first win the trust of the local inhabitants. As he put it: "Poor villages rally around them in good faith. (…) Then, after some time, they distribute small gifts to the children. And they say: this gift is from the god" (Interview, 3rd of December, 2011). After gradually being accepted into the community these Christians first establish a house church, which is later converted into a place of worship. Perera notes: "Evangelical organisations gain access to households, families, communities and often people's trust in local particularities" (Perera 1998: 79). Drawing on the notions of conversion catalysts, we see that evangelical organisations place an added impetus on various encounters, which may be interpreted as subverted encounters by suspicious observers. Woods notes: "Buddhist agitators feel that such privatised religious practices are a form of deception that mask the subversive intentions of evangelical groups" (Woods 2012: 225).

Woods (2012a) studies the phenomena of house churches in his doctoral dissertation *Evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka: The Politics of Growth*, where his informants tell him that the whole idea of a house church is to gain entry into an unreceptive area, called 'grey areas'. One of his Christian informants calls house churches a 'low cost crusade', and Woods argues that the intention of the house

church is to be as 'unobtrusive and misleading as possible' (Woods 2012a: 119). On one level, the outward appearance of the house church is to evade the designation as a religious structure, and often the pastors themselves would add to the confusion by referring to the structure as a worship centre or similar concept. The evangelism does not start at once, not before the evangelist has been stationed at a particular location for a while, and established trust among the locals. Often, religious services are held in the house of believers, and not only at the house church, in an attempt to disguise the activities of the congregation. In addition, the evangelical pastor himself has a nondescript appearance, in contrast to the Buddhist clergy, a trait that both avoid public visibility in the local community, but also enables them to mix more freely with the people on a casual basis, as most Sri Lankans are used to the religious hierarchical mentality that would distance the clergy from the laypeople. Even the laypeople are discouraged from displaying their Christian trappings. Woods (2012a) also shows how it is not the clergy, but the laity that is the frontline of the evangelical outreach, and that the clergy mobilise the laity to use their existing networks within their social sphere to influence others of the Christian message. One example of this is given through the method of 'Harvest 12', which is a sheet with 12 blank spaces where the Christian members are required to fill in names of twelve non-Christian affiliations who will receive prayers and invitation to the activities of the church (Woods 2012a: 125).

Woods argues that 'The house church is the single most important site of evangelism in Sri Lanka' (Woods 2012a: 195). Rather than perceiving this as a sacred place, the house churches should rather be seen as a part of a larger sacred network of relations. Under the aegis of a hostile environment, the fixity of a particular place can be vulnerable to violent repercussions, while sacred networks offer a fluid approach to circumnavigate such opposition. Woods thus understands the growth of evangelical Christianity through the concept of 'structural mosaic': "The structural mosaic leads to the complication of two-dimensional constructions of religious boundaries and difference, instead showing the multi-dimensionality of evangelical agency" (Woods 2012a: 216). One of the most important elements of this 'multi-dimensional evangelical agency' is how evangelicals use social ministry as a way of

entry into unreceptive environments to 'circumnavigate prevailing patterns of religious dominance and repressions' (Woods 2012a: 147). Thus, the use of (supposed secular) social ministry at community sites and locations, enable evangelical groups to win the confidence of the local population. These deliberate tactics to evade suspicion can also bring the evangelicals to cooperate with Buddhist temples for the use of temple grounds as the base for social projects; as such cooperation certainly will enhance the social standing of the social ministry. One Christian group was even able to start a Montessori within the temple grounds (Woods 2012a: 214). However, as we have seen among the Buddhist informants, such use of structural mosaic 'aids and abets religious conversion, and fuels (mis)conceptions of unethical practice' (Woods 2012a: 223). As such, we can see 'how leveraging the structural mosaic encourages pastors to engage in activities that can be interpreted as forceful, fraudulent or alluring' (Woods 2012a: 224).[61]

The mindset among the evangelical to proselytise at all costs have given them a caricatured reputation of conducting 'pathological messiahnism' (Perera 1998: 54). Gooren notes how the movement of Pentecostalism is marked by an 'eschatological urgency' (Gooren 2010). Nanayakkara comments that the evangelicals in Sri Lanka have an urgency to expand in numbers, and to bring 'sinners' into the Christian fold (Nanayakkara 2007: 149). This mindset often leads evangelicals to intrude into 'grey areas,' unreceptive areas for conversion, precisely because it is imperative for them to bring salvation to the lost souls. Concepts like 'harvest time,' 'hungry souls' etc. are provocative for Buddhists, because such concepts tacitly claim that there are masses of people whom are ripe and ready for conversion to Christianity. Nanayakkara argues that evangelicals lately are getting more evasive and secretive, and that such a development will only fuel further aggression towards them (Nanayakkara 2007). "God has not given us a spirit of fear. As the times are short, we must proclaim the good news to the lost without fear or favor" (Perera 1998: 61). If evangelicals are being accused of exploiting the structural mosaic generally, allegations also claim

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[61] While I in this part rely upon Woods' PhD-dissertation (2012a), he has later developed his argumentation into several articles (see Woods 2012b, 2013a, 2013b).

that they target specifically vulnerable people, and exploit catastrophes to facilitate conversion encounters.

'Unethical conversions': Vulnerable groups and encounters

One of the most formative documents in the debate around 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka is a brief article, "Unreached People of Sri Lanka", written by Dr. Lalith Mendis in the Christian Magazine *Direction* in 1987. The ACBC Commission Report on Conversions (ACBC 2012) quotes an excerpt of this article: "An unreached people, is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelise this people group without assistance". Thereafter a list of 16 different groups is given:

1. Villagers,
2. Model Villages and re-awakened villages,
3. Colonies associated with Mahaweli and other development schemes,
4. Refugees,
5. Prisoners,
6. Drug addicts,
7. Educated Buddhists,
8. Muslims/Malays,
9. Estate Tamil labor population,
10. Coastal fishing areas,
11. Rodiyas, Gypsies, Veddahas (low-caste and aboriginal),
12. Urban slums,
13. University students,
14. Harlots,
15. Security forces,
16. Militants.

The list can be read in different ways; it tells how some Christians will turn every stone to find new ground for proselytising. In particular it describes how coordinated this effort really is, and especially how their proselytising strategies are directly targeted at, what Buddhist sources term, vulnerable groups. I believe the article has gained such prominence in the debate around the 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka precisely because it kindles the fears held by many Buddhists – that the Christians worldwide lead a deliberate campaign to harvest souls among the poorest and most

vulnerable segments of societies, especially in the area that is referred to as the "10-40 window". The 10-40 window alludes to the geographical space of latitudes 10 to 40 degrees north, including many of the states with a hegemonic presence of Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist populations. During my interviews, the mentioned article was referred to numerous times, and for many Buddhist nationalists it serves as the blueprint for how the Christian mindset works.

The Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion bill is sensitive to these categories, and develops an additional section where attempted conversion towards 'vulnerable groups' should give increased punishment ('not exceeding seven years and also be liable to a fine not exceeding rupees five hundred thousands'). This section refers to minors (below the age of 18), women and an extensive listing in Schedule 1:

1. Those persons classified as samurdy beneficiaries,
2. Prison inmates,
3. Inmates of rehabilitation centres,
4. Inmates of detention centres,
5. Physically or mentally disabled,
6. Employees of an organisation,
7. Members of the armed forces and the police,
8. Students,
9. Inmates of hospitals and/or places of healing,
10. Inmates of refugee camps and
11. Any other category as may be prescribed by the minister by regulations.

The list developed in the Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion bill resembles the concept of 'captive audiences', which is used whenever specific groups are targeted for proselytising, and where promises of material inducements are made, and especially when there is a disparity of power, status or wealth between the proselytiser and the targeted audience (Kao 2008: 79). Woods writes how evangelicals in Sri Lanka have been attentive to vulnerable categories, and established missionary linkages in that direction. As we already have seen, they often establish secular services in the vicinity of poor villages, in order to win their confidence and trust, before they reveal their intentions of proselytising. Woods also notes how they have conducted conversion within refugee camps, during post-war

reconstructions, among the estate Tamils in Nuwara Eliya, as well as among prison inmates and persons with medical needs (Woods 2012a).

> Through exploitation of the structural mosaic evangelical groups are able to gain a foothold from which religious agency can be expressed, and religious alternatives flourish (Woods 2012a: 41)

The evangelical organisation have in other words been able to "exacerbate, manipulate and sometimes subvert structural determinants of change, and to create a demand where it may otherwise be lacking" (Woods 2012a: 24). Evangelicals are thus specialising in subverting spaces and locations for proselytisation, as well as reaching out to different groups in need to offer their social and religious services, like professionalised conversion architects. This does not only limit itself to vulnerable groups, but also particular situations can be especially prone for proselytising. Rambo and Farhadian (1999) asserted that a sense of crisis often had a direct and/or indirect impact on the possibilities for religious change, in that these crises could lead people into reevaluating their current commitments. While some of the categories listed fall in under the concept of 'captive audience' (employees, police and students), some of the other categories listed (prison inmates, rehabilitation and detention centres, medical patients and inmates of refugee camps) can certainly be categorised as going through some sort of crisis (Kao 2008). In a sense, the arguments displayed that vulnerable groups and situations should fall under the concept of 'unethical conversions' which would mean that Christian groups, and evangelicals in particular, unduly exploit the opportunities of linking the religious encounter directly with a sort of crisis experienced by the individual.[62] By acting as conversion catalysts, these Christian groups are often able to tap into the conversion potential of people experiencing some sort of crisis and hardship, and are by such encounters able to both magnify the particular crisis and offering a (conversion) solution at the same time. As we now turn to a discussion of the post tsunami-

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[62] Recently, a similar case happened in Norway, where a Christian organization was exposed in doing proselytisation among lone minor asylum applicants in a transit centre (*Aftenposten*, 27th of February, 2013), and event that caused outcry in Norway, despite its Christian traditions.

reconstruction work in the wake of the Boxing Day tsunami, we need to consider how the issue of proselytisation in catastrophes kindles ethical boundaries along topics of moral responsibility in humanitarian interventions (see Fassin 2010, Slim 1997).

Conversions and the tsunami

A momentous event in this debate on proselytisation in circumstances of vulnerability is the Boxing Day tsunami, which struck 70% of the coastline of Sri Lanka on the 26th of December 2004, with a total number of 1,000,000 displaced and casualties amounting to 36,000. What is especially important here is how the tsunami post tsunami-reconstruction phase was characterised by 'competitive humanitarianism' (Stirrat 2006), not only by the regular major actors of humanitarian intervention, but also the massive influx of small and uncoordinated NGOs in response to the disaster, which has been widely debated among scholars (see de Alwis (2009), Frerks (2010), Frerks and Klem (2011), Hyndman (2009), Gamburd (2010), Keenan (2010), and in relation to the civil war, see Kleinfeld (2007) and Le Billon and Waizenegger (2007)).

While the immediate aftermath of the tsunami was one of amity between the religious communities, animosities and suspicions soon arose from the reconstruction work, and the rhetoric in the newspapers sharpened. The *New York Times* reported a case of unethical conversion that was widely alluded to during my fieldwork: "The Antioch Community Church is one of a growing number of evangelical groups that believe in mixing humanitarian aid with discussions of religion, an approach that older, more established, Christian aid groups like Catholic Relief Services call unethical" (Rohde 2005). While complaints of Christian misconduct had been high after the anti-conversion bill was launched in 2004, the fervour of these complaints grew considerably after the tsunami. *The Buddhist Times* ran at their front-page February 2005 "A tsunami of conversions," and Bastin observed two posters in the aftermath of the disaster urging people to fight the 'religious tsunami' and one explicitly stating: "Let's defeat the NGO mafia" (Bastin 2010). The national debate on 'unethical conversions' peaked in the aftermath of the tsunami, especially with the

influx of foreign NGOs. While some NGOs were able to carve out an amicable 'humanitarian space,' this debate strengthened Buddhist nationalists politically, and the candidacy of Mahinda Rajapakse particularly (Hertzberg 2015).

Some of the strongest testimonies about unethical conversions given to me during my fieldwork were somewhat surprisingly offered by informants who were strongly against the anti-conversion bill launched by the JHU. One monk, politically opposed to JHU, called the bill "a mere device of the fear-psychosis propagated by the JHU-monks" (Interview, 27th of December, 2011). However, the same monk claimed that he could point out houses in the Galle area given to tsunami victims in favour of (Christian) conversion, but that he himself did not care much about it. Another informant, from a Hindu charity group, related her experiences as a tsunami aid worker in the east and north: "I have been working with war widows and destitute children. My observation is that unethical conversions are a BIG problem" (Interview, 6th of December, 2011). She continued her story by adding details about the inequity between local/national NGOs and international NGOs in terms of funds: "Unethical conversions. The Christians give everything free: machines, food, vehicles, jobs. After a while they ask you to come to church. They say: 'We will pray for you!' Every household in Jaffna has lost someone to the war. They say: 'We can pray for you! The temples did not help you. Jesus is here, with his open arms!' And they will ask: 'What do you want?' 'We want conversion.'" (Interview, 6th of December, 2011).

Lešnik and Urek (2010) describe the local trajectories of humanitarian aid in a small village along the southern coast, and they recount stories of an American evangelistic congregation with alleged hidden motives. This group did a good job of building nice houses (some said they were too nice) for the tsunami victims, but local people argued that "the real catch was that they also planned to build a church in the complex, in an area with a mainly Buddhist population" (Lešnik and Urek 2010: 279). Lešnik and Urek argued that these complaints could not be taken as expressions of religious intolerance on behalf of Sinhala-Buddhists, but that they were "invariably complaints about manipulation" (Lešnik and Urek 2010: 281). Thus, this local debate concerning the hidden motives of the Christian congregation was actively dislocated

from the larger national debate on unethical conversions, and it rather portrayed how the dynamics in the village were seen to be threatened by the arrival of the Christian congregation. The editor of a national Buddhist newspaper stated:

> Some organizations came here in disguise. They came to help people affected by the tsunami, but they started converting people. As such, the tsunami was a blessing in disguise for them [the Christians], as it was a good chance for them to come here. Missionaries were very active before the tsunami. During the tsunami people believed that their intentions were to help. And they did some good work. They built and restored houses, but churches also (Interview, 3rd of December, 2011).

If we follow the dynamics of gift-giving and aid in Sri Lanka post-tsunami along other trajectories, we find that it involves a set of complex societal inter-relations. As argued by Korf et al.: "gifts are not just material transfers of 'aid', but also embodiments of cultural symbolism, social power, and political affiliations" (Korf et.al. 2010: 561). The 'pure gift' of aid is contrasted with the interested exchange of patronage politics, yet sometimes the relationship between them was blurred. In Ampara, in the eastern part of Sri Lanka, three different Christian organisations were given the task of allocating and relocating beneficiaries from a local village to their new destination. The organisations were the Methodist Church, Eastern Human Economic Development (EHED), a local development agency of the Catholic Diocese in Batticaloa, and the Smyrna Fellowship, the aid channel of a US-based evangelical church. The organisations were merely to implement the allocations decided upon by the District Secretary, which made these decisions irrespective of ethnicity and religion:

> However, the recipients attached significant importance to religious identity and had clear expectations about their religious leaders and the way they handled gifts. While the churches had long abandoned the idea of using gifts for conversion or as a patronage resource for their followers, their constituencies expected them to do just that. Christian respondents wanted their religious patrons to provide assistance to them. (Korf et al. 2010: 570)

It was reported that this attitude caused some tensions in the community, and some of

the respondents swore allegiance to the Smyrna Fellowship for helping them with the housing, unaware that it was the District Secretary that made decisions about the relocations. Both the Catholic and the Methodist church experienced that people came to them and expected help, but that the church groups did not select the recipients of their aid and were therefore unable to address each request. This narrative offers another perspective to the entanglement of the gift-giving dynamic and patronage politics in Sri Lanka as it offers us a clear view of how allegiances were expected to function. Particular congregations expected their churches to use development aid as a patrimonial resource for their own flock. Attempts of 'unethical conversions' did happen in the tsunami aftermath in Sri Lanka (for example, as with the Texas-based Antioch Church community), but there is reason to believe that some of the allegations about 'unethical conversions' were based on misunderstandings and mistaken expectations. Churches may have felt that their post-tsunami efforts entitled them to set up a church in the same areas. Some victims may have found solace in the organisations and groups that came to their assistance, identifying them as patrimonial guardians. Yet other organisations may have actively asserted their non-partisan attitude in their development work (such as the Methodist Church and EHED discussed in Korf et al. 2010). Nevertheless, both churches and temples were accused of favouring their own in terms of how aid was distributed, and, on a local level, debates on post-tsunami relief efforts centred on the issues of patronage, inequity, and the mismanagement of funds (Moonesinghe 2006). The patrimonial rationale of gift-giving in Sri Lanka most certainly made the situation on the ground more difficult for foreign NGOs to understand, while, on the other side, it made affected communities easier to exploit along patrimonial lines. This was not the case solely for religious actors in the post-tsunami recovery, but for the post-tsunami aid scene in general.

The debate on the post-tsunami reconstruction informs the debate on 'unethical conversions' in several ways, and this is not only due to how the tsunami figures as the foremost place in the minds the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists as the primary event that led to improper conduct by some Christian organisations. What is important here is how benefactors, and among them religious benefactors, were perceived as patrimonial guardians for the flock which they served. Hence, the dynamics of gift-

giving were deeply entangled with a patrimonial rationality of shifting loyalties and allegiances, where one both expected patrimonial services from one's own organisational belonging, but also engaged in shifting loyalties when other organisations took the role as patrons. Aid was not considered a 'pure gift,' but rather as a patrimonial resource which could be instrumental in inferring shifts of allegiance at the local level. Thus, the identity of the benefactors are of utmost concern, as the practice of gift-giving is embedded within a framework of reciprocity of patrimonial allegiance, which during the tsunami led to "reinforced and reshuffled loyalties, group boundaries, and connections" (Korf et al. 2010: 563). Korf et al. argue further that this "patrimonial rationale with its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion is a driving force of social conflict, political violence and ethnic antagonism in Sri Lanka" (Korf. et.al. 2010: 563). In their view, 'Unethical conversions', and the allegations of them taking place, should not be discussed as an isolated phenomenon, but should be seen as operating within the dynamics of the 'patrimonial rationale'. However, this entails a shift in how to understand conversion, not derived from the different religious narratives of the ideal conversion process, but how religious identity, and the subsequent conversion, is deeply enmeshed within systems and dynamics of political allegiance.

Religious conversion and political allegiance
By re-configuring our understanding of conversion from a shift in religious institutional affiliation alone, to a notion of conversion that also entails a broader shift and reshuffling of allegiance and loyalty within a patrimonial rationale, the lines of conflict become more visible. The influx of NGOs in Sri Lanka is of critical importance, as these humanitarian interventions engage in, and entangle themselves into, patterns of patrimonial connections and allegiances. For example, humanitarian interventions can be seen as subtly dislodging existing loyalties and connections and replace them with new patrimonial guardians. Seen in this light, the humanitarian interventions by various NGOs are not only circumscribing the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state, but also disrupting existing patronage networks in different communities and villages. During my fieldwork, the dynamics of winning the trust of

the locals through charity work, and subsequently setting up a church, was one of the most common allegations from my Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist informants, here represented by a high-ranking monk: "Christian organizations come under the guise of NGOs, but will then establish a church along with the village uplifting" (Interview, 30th of October, 2011). My argument is that these dynamics are particularly critical as they are seen as disrupting existing patronage networks in the villages, and that the change incurred by conversion is not merely seen as a shifting religious affiliation, but as a complete reshuffling of societal, religious and political identities and loyalties. As we saw from the Portuguese era, religious conversion entailed a substantial restructuring of loyalties: "What was new was the radical and comprehensive conception of religious conversion, which could easily be interpreted as a sloughing off of all former identities and loyalties" (Strathern 2010: 111). Even though Strathern observes how conversion is understood in the sixteenth century, these articulations of the implications of conversion are relevant today, in how conversion is cast as a complete transformation of former connections and allegiance. Further, Portuguese Christians viewed conversion as "most successful as process of de-socialization and re-socialization that required the daily company of other Christians" (Strathern 2010: 121). Such conceptualisations of conversion entail a more encompassing understanding of the effects of conversion, not only as a shift of religious affiliation, but a total transformation of bonds of loyalty, religiously, societally and politically.[63] While all proselytising religions encourage change in some way, Robbins (2004) argues that charismatic Christians in particular emphasise a discontinuous transformation in antagonising the former culture of the convert. Hence, when Christian organisations engage in such humanitarian interventions, these organisations are seen as espousing contradictory loyalties to that of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. As the high-ranking monk stated, emphasising his

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[63] Spyer (1996) observes how the Aruese in Indonesia, a native group in the south Moluccas, converted to one of the five officially religions in a 'modernizing' process of attain subjecthood and formalizing the demands of citizenship. However, as Spyer notes, the particular conversion processes were of an arbitrary nature, often going back and forth, as to a 'conversion to seriality'.

experience from village uplifting: "Conversion will break our culture and our social values" (Interview, 30ᵗʰ of October, 2011).

A reconfiguring of political loyalties and allegiances due to religious conversion should not necessarily be understood as a one-to-one break with formal political organisations, such as political parties. As Fernando observes: "Sri Lanka's evangelicals did not necessarily shift political allegiances consequent to conversion, choosing instead to frame their existing political affiliations through biblically informed lenses" (Fernando 2014: 576). However, as one JVP informant noted, despite JVP's official opposition to evangelical Christianity, he saw it "as his task to enact a change from within" (Fernando 2014: 587). As Viswanathan (1998) observes, conversion is often closely and intimately linked to dissent. We see that the dissent arising from conversion can find accommodation within existing political affiliations, but nevertheless that this dissent involves a change in loyalty perhaps best understood with reference to the broader swathes of the 'political'. As Mouffe asserts, the political can both encompass politics, but also be enmeshed within particular political organisations, such as political parties or other political interest groups. The agonistic lines of the political could divide political organisations, and despite these continual engagements within existing political frames, Fernando argues that the motives for political participation have changed to mediation between 'God' and the 'state'. Conversion was not merely a shift of religious affiliations, but had deeper political connotations:

> Evangelicals, the majority of whom were Sinhala and had converted to Christianity from Buddhism, were also reflexively aware of how their conversion meant a repudiation of cultural citizenship, involving instead the occupation of a marginal social location when viewed through the hegemonic formations of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. (Fernando 2014: 587)

While Strathern observed how conversions in the Portuguese era usually happened from a position of political marginality, we see that Fernando argues that a conversion to evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka is a movement into national political marginality. A central assumption, however, is how both scholars present religion as a major arbiter of political identity. Hence, it is possible to argue that

whenever religion is embedded in political identities, acts of conversion are not solely shifts of religion, but also in a broader sense encompassing shifts of social and political allegiance.[64] One of my Catholic informants stated wryly: "In Buddhism, conversion is political. In Christianity, conversion is individual." (Interview, 4th of May, 2011).[65] Two main strains can be followed here; one is how Buddhist sentiments in Sri Lanka are seen as aspiring of hegemonic ambitions, but also how Christians rhetorically inscribe themselves to a position of political marginality, a complex position, which also has the potential for political leverage, especially when it comes to 'persecuted minorities'.[66] Buddhist resistance to conversion is only logical, in light of the religious market model, given their majority position in Sri Lanka, and religious attitudes towards religious regulation are often inferred by their standing in a particular nation-state.[67] When religion is intertwined with the sentiments of national identity, acts of conversion connote different levels of betrayal, both along the axes of the religious and the national. The effects of this are deeply political, in the encompassing notion of the term. The ACBC-report quotes Swami Vivekananda on how conversion not only means one adherent lost, but also an enemy created (ACBC 2012: 87). Viswanathan argues that conversion in many circumstances can be understood as a form of dissent:

> If dissent expresses itself most powerfully as conversion, particularly to minority religions, the reasons are not hard to understand. By undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders. (Viswanathan 1998: 16)

Viswanathan, and also van der Veer, have understood this dissent as a form of heresy of the original religion. However, while heresy is a form of illegitimate heterogeneity

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[64] A common assumption today is that conversions became more depoliticized in Europe from the seventeenth century (van der Veer 1996), yet, conversions to Islam in European contexts are often discussed also according to political allegiance.

[65] Despite the fact that this observation was made by a Catholic informant, the eschatological urgency of evangelicals to engage in conversion encounters should also be seen as a form of political eschatology.

[66] See Chapter 11 for a more thorough discussion on the effects of marginality as a political position.

[67] Birchok (2014) discusses a conversion process in Indonesia, where a minority Chinese Buddhist converts to Islam as a way of fulfilling his nationhood, not necessarily to avoid cultural and political marginality, but experiences that the conversion did not fulfil the expectations of completeness in terms of societal and political acknowledgement.

within orthodox confinements, an act of conversion is an abandonment altogether of such orthodoxy, and should rather be conceptualised as a form of mutiny. Conversion is not a form of unorthodoxy, but a resistance or even rebellion. Mutinies can both take active and passive forms of resistance, which support new forms of authorities, and abandon former loyalties. Hence, the mutinies of conversion implicate a double threat to religio-political formations: adherent lost, enemy gained. From such an angle, conversion is probably most controversial in countries where religion informs national and political identities.[68] The most extreme impacts of conversion were seen in the Portuguese era, when religious conversion changed the allegiance of juridical subjects completely, a process which has later been termed a spiritual conquest. Yet, taking into consideration how different peace negotiations in Sri Lanka have been deeply controversial in how they challenge notions of 'sovereignty' and 'unity' (Schalk 1988) of Sri Lanka, conversions from Buddhism to other religions, especially evangelical Christianity, are seen as disrupting this unity to more permeable borders of nationhood.

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[68] An important aspect to keep in mind here is that religious conversion as political allegiance very well explains why Sinhala Buddhist nationalists oppose conversion, but perhaps less so why many Hindus and Catholics also have had the same anxieties of unethical conversions. However, Viswanathan (1998: 16) also notes how conversions from alternative or minority religions to the mainstream religion can be disruptive to the state.

7. Conversions and Conspiracies in Sri Lanka: Nationalism at the End of Time

The anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka cannot be understood without a wider discussion of Buddhist nationalism, and how the alleged practices of 'unethical' conversions are seen by Buddhist nationalists as a threat to socio-political stability in Sri Lanka. At first, three different narrative motifs are discussed – mythic national heroes, the ideological concomitancy of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' and the image of the village as the core of the nation – before delving into how conversions and conspiracies are understood as disruptive elements threatening the position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. A central argument in the chapter is how Buddhist nationalism relies on a temporal doubleness, where seemingly 'timeless' categories are verified by contigent political circumstances. Conversions, as such, may threaten the 'unbroken' history of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. I will end the chapter by looking deeper into how the imagination of 'nationalism at the end of time' shapes both the rhetorical framing and direct political mobilisation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka.

Nationalism: Autochthonous sentiments and political contigency

> The strength of nationalism as a political phenomenon is its ability to draw on sentiments – language, religion, family, culture – that appear to be natural and autochthonous. Their cultural expression required the emergence of a set of new and hardly autochthonous circumstances. This is the paradox of nationalism. (Kemper 1991: 224)

Nationalism is often based upon a set of given sentiments – language, religion, ethnicity – that form a 'natural' basis of division, where the boundaries of the nation conjoins with that of the state in the ideally homogenous nation-state. The rhetorical strength of nationalist movements lies precisely in how they are able to portray such

allegedly 'natural' distinctions into narrative structures and political frames with the result that they appear 'autochthonous'. In Sri Lanka, nothing is as common as the allusion to the country's long and unbroken past, where national crises have been resolved by sturdy national heroes rescuing the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage. Whenever the nation has seen its end – the rupture of its ancient traditions – brave heroes have risen to the needs of the hour and restored the glory of the Sinhala-Buddhists. This chapter examines how Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists find themselves at the end of time, where the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage is threatened, both by external and internal enemies, and in dire need of an urgent rescue operation in order to not break its line of continuity. There is a haunting temporal doubleness in how nationalism often positions itself at a moment of crisis that can bring about the end of time. The concept of 'crisis' opens up a temporal horizon where the distinct problem is narrated upon the deeper template of an unbroken history, and this rhetorical framing of the problem gives the issue a sense of incontestable urgency that beckons immediate action.

However, the issues involved are hardly 'autochthonous' in how they emerge as a threatening force upon the continuity of history. Rather they are often grounded in deliberate mobilisation to arouse political emotions. In fact, it is possible to argue that nationalist movements are in need of articulating a distinct 'crisis,' and that this crisis only can be resolved by a nationalist turn of the political. Hence, the political template of nationalist movements is often built around salient 'issues of threat' that give attention to both the particular issue and the movement at the same time. Thus, rather than to assert the 'autochthonous' nature of such issues, it is instead critical to see such dynamics within the contingency of the political, and especially to identify different junctures in the political realm, as it enables us to understand the political realm as a multileveled stream of interests, agency, power and the relation between these (Geuss 2008). By scrutinising the agency of religious nationalists we see how this 'autochthonous' paradox enables them to wield a distinct narrative repertoire to frame certain issues into vibrant 'autochthonous' sentiments – history, religion, country, village – that are able to arouse political emotions in the general public. Hence, it is imperative to unravel how such rhetorical manipulations of framing are deliberately put into play by religious nationalists:

> The authority of Sinhalese nationalist rhetoric is partly secured by the temporal hierarchy that renders absolute an official version of the past produced by a number of agents and institutions of the state system, a version whose selectivity demonstrates that remembering is also forgetting. (…) I argue for the importance of analyzing manipulations of framing, voice and narrative structure for understanding how histories produce effects of power/knowledge. (Alonso 1994: 389)

While narrative structure and framing of 'autochthonous' sentiments give Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists an enhanced form of narrative repertoire, it is necessary to uncover how 'unethical conversions' are linked to the narrative threads of nationalism in Sri Lanka. Rather than designating one hegemonic narrative of (Sinhala-Buddhist) nationalism in Sri Lanka, I will identify three distinct narrative threads to see how different nationalist sentiments fuel the issue of 'unethical conversions'. The first narrative thread is how certain nationalist heroes through their courage have restored the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage, the second thread articulates how the slogan *rata, jatiya, agama* (country, nation, religion) has been used to create a Sinhala-Buddhist commodification of identity, and the third narrative analyses how nationalists have framed the village to be the 'core of the nation' and how Sri Lanka consists of a 'nation of villages'. From these narratives I will look into how unethical conversions are cast as a threat to the national unity of Sri Lanka, and how the activities of Christian actors and NGOs are framed as conspiratorial agents determined to undermine Sinhala-Buddhist culture.

Myth, history and national heroes in Sri Lanka

It is impossible to write about nationalism in Sri Lanka without including the mythic figures of Prince Vijaya and King Dutugemunu, as well as the modern reformer Anagarika Dharmapala. Steven Kemper (1991) argues in his book *The Presence of the Past* that the ancient chronicle *Mahavamsa* has been a central element in the direction of Sinhalese nationalism. The *Mahavamsa* (transl. 'Great chronicle') is an old historic narrative of kings and their monastic relations, compiled and written into a single coherent document by the monk Mahathera Mahanama in the 5th century in Sri Lanka. Initially covering the period from the alleged arrival of Prince Vijaya in

543 BCE until the reign of King Mahasena (334–361), the document has been expanded and abridged ever since, including the line of regents in Sri Lanka also in the modern age. However, despite the never-ending task of updating the Mahavamsa, any reference to the work usually alludes to the version compiled and translated by Wilhelm Geiger, which has been widely circulated in the modern era.

According to *Mahavamsa*, the history of the Sinhala state starts in a kingdom in North India, where Vijaya (and Sumitta) is born as the first of sixteen pair of twins by the union of Sihabahu and Sihasivali. Prince Vijaya gains the reputation of being an unruly prince early on, and is finally expelled, together with his followers, from the kingdom of his father, and drifts ashore at the island of Lanka, which is then called 'Tambapanni' (copper-coloured), due to the colour of its earth. However, in Sri Lanka, Prince Vijaya founds the city of Anuradhapura, and builds afresh a kingdom of righteous rule. Kapferer highlights this transformation of Vijaya, how he and his crew reconcile their earlier wickedness, plundering and evil with becoming 'a benevolent and orderly king' (Kapferer 2012: 55). Thus, this narrative of Vijaya constitutes the formation of statehood in Sri Lanka, and entails how the state was founded by a prince of North-Indian origin (demarcating the Sinhalese from the Dravidians of South-India) expelled due to his wicked character. Another mythic story, which also carries the element of wickedness at its core, is the one about King Dutugemunu.

While the mythic narrative of Vijaya is seen as the birth of the state, Kapferer argues that the Dutugemunu myth can be called its rebirth, or even an apogee (Kapferer 2012: 57). In contrast to Vijaya, who brought the people of the lion to Sri Lanka, the events of King Dutugemunu take place after the advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Anuradhapura however, the mythic centre of Sri Lanka, is now reigned by a Tamil named King Elara, and Dutugemunu fulfils a promise to unite the whole of Sri Lanka under the aegis of Buddhism once again. The quest of Dutugemunu is at once seen both as a restoration of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony in Sri Lanka, as well as the recovering of its mythic centre, Anuradhapura. Dutugemunu, which is combined by 'dutu' (transl. 'wicked') Gemunu (name of the prince), carries some of the same connotations of wickedness in the narrative as do Vijya. After Dutugemunu

has conquered his righteous foe of Elara, and given him a proper funeral, he feels remorse for those fallen in combat, but he is then consoled by eight *arahants*:

> And thereon the king said again to them: 'How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?''From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!' Thus exhorted by them the great king took comfort. *Mahavamsa* (108-112)

This brief presentation of some of the key actors and scenes of the Mahavamsa alludes to the fact that the chronicle in the contemporary era serves many purposes; it is read historically, morally and politically – at once. The need to distinguish Sri Lanka's historical past from its nationalist past stems from the ambiguous relation of history and myth contained in the chronicle.[69] Kemper argues against that "the nationalist use of the past is a thing of "shreds and patches"", but while historians judge historical facts in terms of their reliability, nationalists judge historical events in terms of their serviceability to ideology (Kemper 1991). That these two strains of historical approaches have an uneasy relationship in Sri Lanka is an underestimation, and from the nationalists' perspective the project of recovery of their glorious past is inseparable from their goal of propagating the rightful Buddhism in the present. Thus, Kemper notes the idea of a 'Mahavamsa-mentality' in how the narrative of the chronicle has been turned into a popular imaginary for the serene joy and emotion of the pious in contemporary Sri Lanka, especially in its elucidation of heroes and race as a characteristic trait of the chronicle. As would be expected, this form of portrayal of the historical 'facts' have led to an almost industrial production of various narratives and counter-narratives around the contentious issue of the past in Sri

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[69] I speak of the chronicle here in singular, yet there are several other chronicles both related and unrelated to Mahavamsa, which could be subsumed under similar discussions. However, my point here is rather to make a general point about the reading of the past, more than going into the details of the specificities.

Lanka. Kemper notes how the "volume and intensity of public discussion of historical issues indicates the importance of the past in Sinhala life" (Kemper 1991: 108), a tradition that I would see as alive and thriving based on my own fieldwork experiences.

A third 'hero' of the nationalist imaginary is Anagarika Dharmapala (1894 – 1933), who was greatly inspired by the *Mahavamsa* and who is seen as the father of modern Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Inspired by the *Mahavamsa*, Dharmapala invoked the idea of a righteous ruler, who rules according to Buddhist principles and morality. Kemper writes that the key notions in nationalist feeling are race, the unification of the island as a spiritual goal, resisting foreign domination, and asserting religious responsibility. Dutugemunu was seen as a paradigm of moral behaviour and political will (Kemper 1991), and Dharmapala wanted a similar mobilisation among the Sinhalese to throw out the British colonial administration. This could only be done by embracing Buddhist morality; by a return to righteousness it would take, according to Dharmapala, a mere 5 years to restore Lanka to its former glory (Seneviratne 1999: 30). The basis for Dharmapala's pride in the Sinhalese lay in their history: "The study of history I consider is of the utmost importance for the development of the patriotic consciousness. No nation in the world has had a more brilliant history than ourselves" (Dharmapala in Guruge 1965). The history found in the *Mahavamsa* was seen as a blueprint for the following generations; a horizon of expectation that once again could be available to the Sinhalese, if only they would walk the noble path of the *Tathagatha*, the Buddha. The expectancy of a Buddhist revival was modeled on the blueprint of Dutugemunu and his restoration of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation, and only by returning to its glorious past could the Sinhalese again find inner strength to rid themselves of the foreign colonial administration. His intentions were to mobilise support, mobilise the Sinhala, mobilise the Buddhists and mobilise the *sangha*, and when Dharmapala uttered the now famous slogan of '*rata, jatiya, agama'*, it was nothing but a battle cry that would only later make its resonance through the Sri Lankan history.

'*Rata, jatiya, agama*': The commodification of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity

> Yakkaduve's writings, as do those of his colleagues, refer constantly to "country, nation, and religion", a usage we have traced to Dharmapala. What they have in mind are Sri Lanka as a territorial unit, the Sinhala ethnic group, and Buddhism. The union of the three terms in this usage makes the territory of Sri Lanka one that belongs exclusively to the Sinhala Buddhist ethnic group. (…) Stated differently, the worldview expressed in the usage "country, nation, and religion" envisages a hegemonic Sinhala culture empowered to place its stamp on other cultures in order to bring about a homogenous utopia. (Seneviratne 1999: 159-160)

Several researchers have noted how the conglomeration of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (country, nation, and religion) represents a cluster of concerns in a broader ideological unity among Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka (Bartholomeusz 2002, Schalk 2007, Seneviratne 1999, Kent 2010, Wilson 1988). Bartholomeusz makes the following remark: "The transformation [of making Sri Lanka a monastic site of righteousness] is revealed by the slogan "*rata, jatiya, agama*" ("country, nation/race, religion") which has become the new refuge of political monks, replacing the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, the traditional Three Refuges" (Bartholomeusz 2002: 69). She continues with a quote from a song by Elle Gunavamsa, a Buddhist monk, and claims that he inspires young soldiers to protect their land, faith and Sinhala people: "Country, religion, race are my triple gems" and concluded that "the songs reveal the degree to which the idea of war, endorsed by monks and legitimated by the *vamsas*, has become part of the fabric of contemporary Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Bartholomeusz 2002: 69). Omalpe Sobhita, a prominent figure in JHU, alludes to Dharmapala and the importance of the "preservation of our nation, our literature, our land and our most glorious religion at whose source our forefathers drank deep for nearly seventy generations" (Omalpe Sobhita 2009).

While the slogan of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' has most often been ascribed to Dharmapala as a new set of concerns for the Buddhist monks, the commodification of this cluster of concerns reached its climax in 1946, with the Vidyalankara Declaration. The statement *The Declaration of the Vidyalankara Pirivena* passed on February 1946 was a response to a statement made by D.S. Senanayake, premier

(president) in Sri Lanka, in a speech in January 1946, where he asserted that monks should not interfere in political matters (Phadnis 1976: 163, Liyanage 1995: 117). The Vidyalankara Declaration is a short statement that allows the monks to engage in politics, or activities concerning the welfare of the people, as long as it does not hinder the religious life of a monk. The Declaration was controversial from the beginning, and both politicians and the press showed an intense hostility towards the statement. The word *dussela* (unvirtuous) was used to discredit the Vidyalankara monks, and the term frequented in the press and in various pamphlets, and "national newspapers emphasized the need to eradicate the influence of a 'small coterie of political *bhikkhus*'" (Warnapala 1978: 75). The most prominent figure of the Vidyalankara tradition was Walpola Rahula (1907 – 1997), a famous scholar monk who has maybe influenced the monkhood more than any other figure in the last century with his work *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (or *Bhiksuvage Urumaya*, from the 1946 Sinhala publication). The book examines two different, but intertwining arguments: that Sinhalese kingdoms have been inextricably linked with Buddhism throughout history, and that Buddhist monks had traditionally been involved in political decision-making. As such, the role of the monks was precisely to foster and protect the inseparable link between '*rata, jatiya, agama*,' which also proves the conviction that the *bhikkhus* should be present in the contemporary world of politics. While this dispute at first was a theoretical debate concerning the role of *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka, the slogan regained another use a decade later when its polemical sting was brought directly into an election campaign.

The slogan of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' has in recent decades been used in various ways within the polemical political debate in Sri Lanka, and most often to safeguard the interests of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. In 1956 it was used by a Buddhist pressure group named Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP) against the sitting UNP government, and posters ran: 'rescue your country, your race and your religion from the dangers of evil,' in which UNP was portrayed as a risk for the Buddhist heritage. EBP was anti-west, anti-Catholic and anti-UNP (Phadnis 1976: 186). Political *bhikkhus* also entered the political stage in 1987, when they became vocal opponents of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, which tried to find a solution to the ethnic crisis in

the country. Two groups emerged to coordinate the resistance, MSV (Mavbime Surakime Vyaparaya), or 'Campaign for the Protection of the Motherland' and the revolutionary Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Both groups placed a new premium on the role of the monk as one who sacrificed his' religious duties' (bana, meditation and sleep) and life for the protection of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' (Abeysekara 2002: 212). These groups proclaimed that the Sinhala state should be one of 'sovereignty' and 'unity' (Schalk 1988). The monks in JHU used similar argumentation when they opposed the Norwegian-led peace facilitation in Sri Lanka. Kent (2010) shows how Buddhist monks encourage soldiers to protect '*rata, jatiya, agama*' instead of committing violence (or as a euphemism) when conducting blessings for the Sinhalese soldiers during the war against LTTE.

A related concept to the collocation of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' is *dhammadipa*, which can have several translations and figures in various canonical and historical texts. The concept was first expressed in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, where it entailed an individual soteriological significance: '(whoever) has the dhamma as (guiding) light' (Schalk 2006: 90). The term 'dipa' can mean both 'light' and 'island', and various commentators have used this ambivalence to interpret the concept of *dhammadipa* into new usages. The concept later occurs in the *Mahavamsa* chronicles, where it is the island of Sri Lanka that has the dhamma as a guiding light. However, in Dharmapala's reading of *Mahavamsa*, the initial meaning that 'Sri Lanka has the dhamma as a guiding light' is turned into the simpler 'the island of dhamma' As a consequence of this interpretation, there is a taint of Buddhist exclusivity for Sri Lanka in the meaning of *dhammadipa* (Schalk 2006). Dharmapala uses some passages in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta (D.II.100) in his famous pamphlet 'A Message to young Men in Ceylon': My message to young men in Ceylon is: Attadipaviharatna atta sarana ananna sarana, dhamma dipaviharatna dhamma sarana anannasarana. (…) Enter into the realms of our King Dutugemunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of the great king who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from oblivion" (Dharmapala in Guruge 1965: 510). It is no longer the individual 'whoever' who is in need of salvation, but the 'island of dhamma,' Sri Lanka. The concept has been turned into a rhetorical tool for claiming Buddhist

exclusionary rights for the country, as in how Ven. Omalpe Sobhita of Jathika Hela Urumaya alludes to Sri Lanka as "the 'island of Dhamma' (Dhammadipa), a land for Buddhism" (Omalpe Sobhita 2009). Hence, the notion of *dhammadipa* is often used interchangeably with the slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' in the political mobilisation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists.

However, while the slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' is used in different situations and antagonises a variety of actors, the continuing use of the slogan bears a chain of resemblance. While the antagonism of the slogan has changed radically during the last century, a line of continuity can be seen in its assertion of the collocation of country, nation and religion, implying the island of Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese ethnic group and the Buddhist tradition. '*Rata, jatiya, agama*' has entered into the minds of the Sinhalese, and links the island, the Sinhalese and Buddhism inextricably together. The slogan reinforces each of the particularities, and weaves together an image of the ideal Sinhala-Buddhist as a form of nationalist archetype (Hertzberg 2011). Mobilisation around this given identity marker can be used in the process of gaining support in antagonising a given enemy, and it has the flexibility to change according to the situation at hand. By bringing together such bonds in a strengthened form of hegemonic identity, these Buddhist nationalists are able to cast suspicion upon those who do not fulfil the very same characteristics. Perera attacks this 'monopoly of patriotism' in which people are castigated as unpatriotic if they do not fit into the model molded by the nationalists: "The self-professed patriots exclude those who do not fit into their model of patriotism as not merely unpatriotic, but also as conspirators, spies and irreligious and de-cultured louts" (Perera 1995: 13). Fernando observes how evangelicals in Sri Lanka produce counter-narratives to how the Sinhala-Buddhist identity is termed in relation to the state identity, noting that they as evangelicals feel themselves at the margins of the state (Fernando 2014).

The commodification of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity can be seen in how the slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' is evoked in Sri Lanka to assert the intimate relations between Buddhism, the Sinhalese people and Sri Lanka as a chosen island – the *dhammadipa*. The slogan '*rata, jatiya, agama*' has functioned as a nexus of 'the political' and it has in many instances provided an impetus for distinguishing a

particular enemy of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. It also reinforced how the particularities of country, nation and religion have become the hegemonic elements of a nationalist self-portrayal in Sri Lanka. This portrait of an ideal patriotic identity in relation to the state has also lambasted other minority groups to feel at odds with the national state identity, and thus the collocation of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' also contributes to a dynamic of orthodoxy/heterodoxy of patriotic identities within the Sri Lankan state (see Spencer 2012). Another nationalist narrative which is deeply intertwined with the concept of country, nation and religion is the way in which Sri Lanka is cast as a 'nation of villages', that carries the connotations of the dual image of the robe and plough in Sri Lankan politics (see Gunawardana 1979, Bastin 2010[70]). While the 'robe and plough'-metaphor links the monkhood and peasantry together in a traditional combination, the 'village' is also seen as a link to the past: "Revitalization of the village community is thus placed at the core of the nationalist project that shapes its vision of the future to match the dictates of its imagined past (Brow 1990: 128).

The Sri Lankan village: The tank, the paddy fields and the stupa

Jonathan Spencer writes in his seminal work *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble* (1990) that the idea of the village can be captured in the triple image of the tank, the paddy fields and the stupa (*vava, yaya* and *dagaba*). This triple image bears the connotations of being traditional, natural and unchanging. The village, however, can also connote ideas of poverty, backwardness and ignorance. Both of these two conceptions of the village can easily be evoked, and live, paradoxically, often side by side. Brow (1999, 1996) notes how Sri Lanka has often been called as a nation of villages, and how the village community has been imagined as a moral core of the nation. Both Spencer and Brow observe how nationalist images of the rural past are based upon nostalgic constructions of social cohesion and a sense of belonging

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[70] Bastin (2010) here uses the 'robe and plough'-metaphor to make a distinction of JHU and JVP in Sri Lankan politics, in how they both tap into different forms of nationalist narratives.

together. Thus, this constructed and ideal image of rural harmony offers itself as a moral yardstick of the nation, but, on the other side, this image can also be easily evoked in nationalist rhetoric of identifying a community under threat. As Spencer laconically comments: "The countryside never simply changes, it decays" (Spencer 1990: 140). The village has, then, become somewhat of a symbol for the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist rhetoric, but as Brow (1996) observes, this dominant ideology has mainly been the work of urban intellectuals, and not something initiated by the rural areas themselves. The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress commission report puts a strong emphasis on how it is the villages that are most prone to the practice of 'unethical conversions':

> Christian Evangelists are well aware that they cannot convert Buddhists who have a good understanding of the teachings of the Buddha by explaining Christianity to them, but they can do so only by bribing them with money, gifts and other allurements and by deceiving them with assurances that sickness and disease can be cured by prayer. This is why they go in search of helpless, uneducated Buddhists living peacefully in rural villages, shower them and their children with gifts and presents, help alleviate their economic hardships, take undue advantage of the quality of gratitude inborn in them precisely because of the Buddhistic nature thereby enticing them into being accompanied to Prayer Centres and using sinister methods to wean them away from the quality of being Buddhistic and then convert them to their faith. (ACBC 2012: 46)

This quote shows how Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists cast villagers autochthonously as 'uneducated Buddhists living peacefully in rural villages' who because of their inborn gratitude are targets of the 'sinister methods' of Christian evangelists in Sri Lanka. The symbol of village Buddhists rings high in the debate concerning 'unethical conversions', and according to the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Commission Report (ACBC 2012), the battlefield of conversion is precisely located within the villages, where Christian evangelists deceive villagers by 'money, gifts and other allurements'. If these villagers are not offered protection, Christian evangelists will exploit the vulnerability due to their 'economic hardships.' It is not only conversion of a set of given individuals, but a conversion of a social and cultural texture, a conversion of Sinhala-Buddhist identity in itself. The anti-conversion bill is seen as

an apparatus that will protect these villages of the disruptive forces of Christian allurements, as people then would be able to bring their complaints to the police (and not by vigilante violence), as one prominent Buddhist monk and leader of a Buddhist development organisation told me:

> Inside the village there is a problem with conversion. Pastors and others may get involved in fighting and similar occurrences. Need a law so that people may complain somewhere. If there is a law – the anti-conversion bill will be explained. Anuradhapura and Ampara. Areas such as these work mostly on the basis of feeling, but if there is a law people would go to the police with their complaints. (inteview, 30th of October, 2011)

The anti-conversion bill is needed in order to protect these 'helpless, uneducated Buddhists living peacefully in rural villages' from the disunity and disharmony brought along with the (evangelical) conversion. The whole ACBC commission report is wrought with allusion to the countryside and how these Christian groups take 'undue advantage of ignorant and disadvantaged folk' (ACBC 2012: 147). Thus, these 'propaganda squads' with a 'façade of social service organisations with Christian origins' enter 'villages which are 100% Buddhist in a very subtle way' (ACBC 2012: 147). Thus, we have on the one hand the notion that Buddhists acknowledge conversion by conviction as an intellectual process, but on the other hand denies that such intellectual debates on religion take place at the village level, precisely because of the cunning tactics employed by the Christian groups.

Conversion is seen as a threat both to the unity of the 'pure' Sinhala villages, but also within families, where instances of conversion among family members may break the unity of the family. From the perspective of the Buddhist nationalists, Christian groups (and NGOs) deliberately try to create disharmony and disputes in villages and families, as they then would benefit from such conflicts. These groups' disrespect for the village temple and village monk is seen as particularly provocative, and many of such Christian/NGO groups are in the ACBC report accused of deliberately breaking the ties between the village and the temple. He continued:

> World Vision Lanka has been engaged in conversion. They go to villages and work

there. In Sri Lanka, the temple is connected to the village. But NGOs go to villages and build a community hall. But there is already a community hall at the temple. These NGOs start to do social work from this new community hall. And then the people in the village will say: "The temple priest will do nothing for us! Only the NGO will help us!" The NGOs will separate the link between the temple and village deliberately. (Interview, 30th of October, 2011)

The allegation that the practices of NGOs in the village areas are unpatriotic and detrimental to the social texture of the people was common among my informants. NGOs were often ascribed to have a 'hidden agenda', and much of their work was seen in direct opposition to development based on Buddhist values. The development scene, the poor villages, refugee camps, and catastrophe affected areas, was where the issue of 'unethical conversions' was most contentious, and while parts of this scene related to war and calamities provided a context for the exploitation of vulnerable groups and people, the narrative of the pure Sinhala-Buddhist village assaulted by cunning Christian missionaries connects magnetically to the wider idiom of the nationalist imaginary of the role of how 'the nation of villages' form the social texture within the Sri Lankan state.

> Thus variably constituted, the notion of the village community has served as a rich and volatile ideological concoction, and its evaluation and deployment in political practice have been extraordinarily complex and contentious. (Brow 1990: 126)

While the nationalist imaginary portrays the Sinhala-Buddhist village as a pure and harmonious entity, it is just that: an imaginary. Several researchers have documented how various villages have their own disputes and disruptions within a complex array of property, caste, religion, personal dislikes, distribution of land, political patronage and development projects (Spencer 1990, Brow 1996, Brow 1990, Woost 1990, Tennekoon 1988, Woost 1993). Village uplifting has been a key element in the development of the Sri Lankan nation, and these studies show how the national narratives connected to development projects in villages often have their own local equivalent in the distinct village, and that these national narratives are subjected to various forms of negotiation. However, "matters indicate that villagers may employ

the symbols of nationalism for instrumental reasons of their own that have little or nothing to do with the promotion of nationalist goals" (Brow 1990: 128). The direction of development is then either celebrated through 'rituals of development' in which government projects are sanctified by distinct rituals connecting them to the heritage of tanks and temples and its connotations of material and spiritual prosperity (see Tennekoon 1988), or else as disruptive foreign forces intruding into the pure spheres of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony as a cynical ploy to convert the ignorant and backward villagers to the evangelical fold. By continuing with imaginary as the 'core of the nation,' the village is torn by the notions of 'celebration' and 'disruption' when it comes to attempts of development. The contested role of the villages is precisely due to its imaginary as the social texture of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka that links the present to the past. Brow observes:

> These goals are legitimated by their placement within the mythological framework of Sinhala nationalism, which sanctifies them with the assertion that the Buddha himself selected the island of Sri Lanka as a place where his teachings would flourish. Structured as a narrative of virtue, degeneration and redemption, contemporary nationalism seeks to restore society to the condition of probity and prosperity it is believed to have enjoyed when righteous kings ruled over harmonious and largely self-sufficient villages. (Brow 1990: 127-128)

The village has a particular saliency within the imaginary of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as it is a link to the glorious past, when the villages were self-sufficient and harmonious, and cherished the links between the temple, the paddy fields and the tank, symbolising the lost virtue of Sri Lanka. Hence, narratives of virtue, degeneration and redemption are a powerful imaginary and the notion of the village has a key role in these narratives. This virtue is upheld by '*rata, jatiya, agama*' as a commodification of Sinhala-Buddhist identity. The village is the site of degeneration and redemption is sorely needed through an active intervention securing the continuing existence of Sinhala-Buddhist identity.

Conversions within the narratives of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism

The three threads of nationalist narratives cast each other differently in relation to the understanding of the role of 'unethical conversions' and the proposed anti-conversion bill. The village narrative, where the villages are seen as the moral core of the nation, articulates how the very texture of the autochthonous Sinhala-Buddhist culture of the triple image of the tank, the paddy fields and the stupa (*vava, yaya* and *dagaba*) is deceptively separated from Christian missionaries and NGO workers who, according to the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, deliberatively sever the traditional bonds between the community and the temple. Thus, rather than working with the concept of 'conversion per conviction' Christians/NGOs use subversive methods to win 'uneducated' Buddhist villagers over to their fold, a move that is seen as doubly provocative for the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists as such a strategy allows the Christians/NGOs to subvert the moral core of the nation – the village.

While the village is seen as the vulnerable arena for 'harvesting souls,' conversion to Christianity (or any other religion) also challenges the patriotic ideal of being Sinhala-Buddhist. On the one hand this threatens the Sinhala-Buddhist commodification that has been articulated and manifested through the use of the slogan *rata, jatiya, agama* (country, nation, religion), and the intimate links this slogan is able to form between the Sinhalese ethnic group, the Buddhist tradition and Sri Lanka, the *dhammadipa*. On the other hand, conversion challenges the demographic stability of the nation, especially the Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony, which in turn will affect the identity of the (nation-)state. As one of my informants, an elder Catholic theologian, told me: "In Christianity, conversion is individual. In Buddhism, conversion is political" (Interview, 4th of May, 2011).[71] Appadurai argues in *Fear of Small Numbers* how majority populations can develop predatory identities:

> Predatory identities emerge in the tension between majority identities and national identities. Identities may be described as "majoritarian" not simply when they are invoked by objectively larger groups in a national polity but when they strive to close the gap between the majority and the purity of the national whole. This is a key point

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[71] It needs to be noted that in a Mouffian sense, few things are as 'political' as proselytisation.

about the conditions under which identities turn predatory. Majority identities that successfully mobilize what I earlier defined as the *anxiety of incompleteness* about their sovereignty can turn predatory. Incompleteness, in this sense, is not only about effective control or practical sovereignty but more importantly about purity and its relationship to identity. (Appadurai 2006: 52-53)

Appadurai writes about how a 'threatened majority' may develop a predatory identity with regards to the minorities in the given national context, and how minorities are seen to be a disadvantage to the classical national project of an 'autochthonous' and homogenous nation-state. The gap between numerical majority and national purity make such predatory identities anxious of the majoritarian-minority cleavage, and generate a fixation on census and statistics of populations and representations. This demographic anxiety places a particular focus upon conspirators, spies and traitors, or, the boundaries of the political are sharpened, enemies identified, and the poignant dynamics of orthodoxy/heterodoxy come into full play.

During one of my interviews with a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist, involved in several organisations, I was shown a selection of Sri Lankan stamps, and my informant claimed that the number of each religion depicted was grossly disproportionate in favour of 'Christian' stamps: "So many stamps are issued. There are 7% Christians in this country, but they have 30% of the stamps." (Interview, 26th of November 2011). This was in the year of the Sambuddhatva Jayanthi celebration, and my informant complained that despite the fact that the Buddhist tradition had a major celebration, the celebrative stamps where issued within the standard representational issuing of 'Buddhist' stamps. Thus, while Christian organisations got their anniversary stamp in addition to their standard representation (the 116th Anniversary of the Salvational Army in 1999 and the 177th Anniversary of the Sri Lanka Baptist Union in 1989), the Buddhist stamps were confined to their normal standards. He also felt that the anniversaries of the Christian bodies made a mockery of the other religious traditions in the country, especially Buddhism. Most of all, the meeting gave me the impression of how fixated some of these Buddhist nationalists are on demographical and representational issues. This demographic anxiety of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists was expressed in many different cases. The leader of a

national Buddhist development organisation told the following:

> It is not only about the Christians, but also of Muslims of Sri Lanka. You should widen the scope of your research. That is the politics of conversion. The numbers of Sinhalese women who change their religion when marrying a Muslim are increasing. Every week about 10-15 notices of names changing: Sinhala to Muslim. Muslims never came to Sri Lanka with their wives. It is like the problem in Europe. Netherland and Denmark is changing to multiculturalism. Gaddafi came to Sri Lanka: "we want the Muslims to have more and more children". Not by war, but by another methodology. (Interview, 25th of September 2011)

Here, my informant draws a picture in which the Muslims in Sri Lanka 'wage a war' against the Sinhalese-Buddhists, but through the subtle methods of conversion, marriage and fertility programmes. The hegemonic position of Sinhala-Buddhists is threatened, and they are losing their demographic numbers day by day. Their demographic anxiety is further threatened by the fact that the Buddhists are not given equal representation in various religious councils: "The membership of inter-religious committees should be made proportional according to the religions of the country. Now when they hold such councils there are one representative from the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Catholics. There are thus four against one. In it 70% membership should be of Buddhists – it should follow the representations of the people" (Interview, 25th of September, 2011). Thus, despite the numerical majority of Buddhists, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists feel at a disadvantage both in relation to the minorities in Sri Lanka, but also with regards to the state patronage of Buddhism. Three levels of Sinhala-Buddhist patronage relations can be identified; the social fabric (articulated at the village level), the demographic hegemony, and the role of state patronage (Buddhism as the 'foremost' religion).

Viswanathan argues that "conversion ranks among the most destabilizing activities in modern society, altering not only demographic patterns but also the characterization of belief as communally sanctioned assent to religious ideology" (Visawanathan 1998: xvi). Thus, the stakes are higher than Buddhist villagers being converted by 'sinister methods,' rather it is the national identity of Sinhala-Buddhist heritage itself that is threatened by the (mal)practice of 'unethical conversions'. This

articulation of 'crisis' beckons heroic actions, and by narrating this threat of conversion within the frames of patriotic heroes, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists claim that only swift and urgent action (read: the anti-conversion bill) is able to remedy the situation at hand.

> Although NGOs have a reputation of being 'Good Samararitans', they have a hidden agenda with political objectives and questionable activities. (…) The author of a letter which appeared in the "Times of India" on 2nd November 1999, points out that Missionary activities are tools, as well as links of colonization. The caption of the letter was "Expanding the Empire with Conversion". (ACBC 2012: 179)

The conspiracies: Christian missionaries, international society and the NGO mafia

Allegations that NGOs are subversive and unpatriotic have erupted regularly since the 1980s, and the suspicions rose to a climax with the NGO commission under Premadasa's reign in 1993 (Saravanamuttu 1999). The NGO commission did at that time, among other things, also treat allegations made against evangelical Christian groups that they were using NGOs as a cover for their evangelical work. The commission's recommendation was stronger monitoring of the NGOs operative in the country (Wanigaratne 1997). One of my Christian informants, a senior pastor in a large and influential evangelical church in Colombo, began his narrative with a recollection of the NGO commission:

> There was another commission under President Premadasa in 1990–91, the NGO commission. I still have a file on it. We discovered it in September 1991, because some of our churches were called before the commission. We thought the commission only was on the malpractice of NGOs. It was made a bit sensational around World Vision. They asked with their lawyers: "How can you go into churches?" There was a group of witnesses that gave evidence of churches before the commission, and yet we were not allowed to give a reply. The evidence was given to the newspapers and we faced a lot of hardships due to it. One 7th day Adventist Church was burned to the ground in Habaraduwa. Several anti-Christian articles began occurring. One of it mentioned the event of a kiribath pudding of Buddha was made and eaten. At that time the head of the movement was the SUCCESS movement. They had an anti-Christian hostility. The Chief Judge of the NGO commission later became involved in Buddhist activism. The NGO commission said that "unethical conversions" should be reduced. (Interview, 14th of December, 2011)

Several of my informants asserted that the problems of 'unethical conversions' rose significantly after the economic reforms of President J.R. Jayawardene in 1977. Bastian argues that "these aid flows were part and parcel of a larger process of integrating Sri Lanka into the structures of global capitalism" (Bastian 2007: 54).[72] The NGO sector and their respective 'humanitarian space' have been a field of intense politicisation in Sri Lanka for the past few decades, and the allegations of NGOs conducting 'unethical conversions' under the guise of aid work only added to the tension against NGOs as anti-national elements. Orjuela observes that the "constant process of distinguishing themselves from 'NGOs' is also a way to navigate and survive in an environment which has been very anti-NGO" (Orjuela 2008: 211). An informant in a religious ecumenical organisation narrated:

> There have also been allegations against NGOs, and there has been a strained relationship between what has been seen as international relations, and Buddhist interests. Some Buddhist elements, among them the JHU, have had a very skeptical attitude towards the international society. (Interview, 1st of September 2011)

As already mentioned, the death of Ven. Gangodavila Soma in December 2003 sparked an avalanche of various conspiracy theories that it was a global campaign among the Christians that were behind his death. Ven. Soma died during a trip to St. Petersburg in Russia, where he was granted an honorary degree from a Christian institute, and this fuelled the rumours that his death was part of a malign campaign against Sinhala-Buddhism in general and Ven. Soma in particular (Berkwitz 2008a). An additional concern was that the monk himself had prophesied that he would be assassinated (Deegalle 2006). Given Ven. Soma's vocal dislike of evangelical Christian groups and his pointed fingers against the practice of 'unethical conversions', it came as no surprise that his followers that initiated Jathika Hela Urumaya brought forward issues of NGO suspicion in their election manifesto:

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[72] See Bastin 2010 for a wider interpretation of JHU in relation to global capitalism.

> The Government should control and monitor all the activities and monetary transactions of the non-government organizations (NGOs) that are in operation in Sri Lanka. This is an indication of a religious concern that the JHU has raised with accusations to evangelical Christians that the majority of NGOs that are registered in Sri Lanka under the corporation law undertake evangelical activities of converting poor Buddhists and Hindus to Christianity in the guise of providing technical education (Deegalle 2006, excerpts from the election manifesto of JHU)

The concern of foreign NGOs is not something that belongs solely to the JHU, but these NGOs are subject to suspicion both from the state and the general population that they are typically understood as corrupt entities working to promote foreign interests in Sri Lanka (Orjuela 2008). Spencer and Amarasuriya (2012: 119) argue that the most consistent critics of NGO activity have been the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. The ACBC commission (2012) also had the practice and activities of the NGOs as one of their main objectives, and some of the questions posed were whether foreign funding to legalised charitable organisations, foreign religious organisations or non-governmental organisations was surreptitiously diverted for purposes linked to conversion of Buddhists to other religions and whether relief workers used the tsunami disaster in 2004 as an opportunity for proselytisation. One independent writer, Susantha Goonatilake (2006) argues that Tambiah in his *Buddhism betrayed?* (1992) portrays the Sinhalese monks as villains, and that Tambiah solely blames the Sinhalese (and especially the monks) for the continuing presence of violence in Sri Lanka. Spencer labels Goonatilake as a 'high-profile Sinhala nationalist in Sri Lanka', and claims that he was actively involved in a campaign of having Tambiah's book banned (Spencer 2007: 71). Tambiah is not the only scholar who is criticised: Goonatilake is also very critical of the academic works of Bruce Kapferer, Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, arguing that their negativity towards Sinhala Buddhist has become the defining version of Sri Lankan reality (Goonatilake 2006: 132). Goonatilake evaluates the works of these scholars and terms many of their findings as flawed and based upon false presuppositions as they have only adopted one of the native discourses (on the civil war) and supported this side. He claims that they are influenced by a group of NGO personnel that influence the scholars with their NGO-minded perceptions to the conflict. As such, the works of the scholars

mentioned are by Goonatilake seen as 'colonial anthropological writings,' which is linked to foreign funded NGOs:

> The distortions in their writings were fed by a set of persons associated with foreign funded NGOs, which collectively provide a social framework that helps filter their own version of Sri Lankan reality to authors living outside the country. This set of institutions and individuals, working largely outside the university structure and public domain, acts as a social cognitive matrix that filters the local reality for visiting anthropologists. The re-emergence of a virulent colonial anthropology in Sri Lanka is due partly to their efforts. (Goonatilake 2006: 132)

The scholars mentioned are seen as a threat to the integrity of Sri Lanka and as collaborators in the plan to recolonise Sri Lanka. Goonatilake believes that some NGOs try to undermine the sovereignty of Sri Lanka by proposing foreign intervention, and that they advocate the break-up of the country through the funding of organisations with international affiliations. While Goonatilake is an independent writer, his works can be seen to represent a growing distrust with civil society, more precisely the internationally NGOs, in Sri Lanka, which are also sometimes framed as traitorous (Orjuela 2008: 156). DeVotta notes how there are a claim that "NGOs are part of a western conspiring vanguard determined to emasculate Sri Lanka by keeping it in a subservient state" (DeVotta 2006: 176). Such conspiratorial allegations against Christian groups and/or NGOs intent on colonising Sri Lanka, and the 'autochthonous' Sinhala-Buddhists in particular, should be seen as part of the narrative repertoire of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. Sapountzis and Condor (2013) argue that conspiratorial reasoning should be seen as part of a narrative device:

> However, we would argue that as a general rhetorical resource, conspiracy narratives might also be regarded more positively: as strategies available to social actors to counter prevailing explanations of problematic social or political events. In addition we would suggest that a priori assumptions that conspiratorial accounting is necessarily unusual, irrational, or socially dysfunctional cannot easily be reconciled with currently popular social identity theory perspectives on political cognition and actions. (Sapountzis and Condor 2013: 3)

While we have seen how the narrative structure and framing of 'autochthonous' sentiments give Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists an enhanced form of narrative repertoire, we should also label the allegations of conspiracies to this list of rhetorical manipulations. I here agree with van der Veer in how religious nationalists have too often been condescendingly labeled with emotional hysteria: "Religious nationalist action is "passion", "the frenzy of the mob," not consciously chosen political behavior guided by a specific worldview" (van der Veer 2004: 20). In Sri Lanka, conspiracies can usually be found on the LTTE – Christians – NGOs – nexus, and these international networks are seen to work deliberately to weaken the Sri Lankan state. Spencer and Amarasuriya note that "Rumours circulate when their contents resonates with collective interests and collective anxieties" (Spencer and Amarasuriya 2012: 115). When Sinhala-Buddhists have been able to frame their national heritage as threatened by a series of national and international conspiracies, they portray the national unity in a deep crisis. However, conspiratorial narratives often thrive in environments of uncertainty and anxiety, and thus the imaginations of 'crisis' and 'conspiracies' enter into a self-reinforcing dynamics. Perera argues that conspiracies are a general malaise in Sri Lanka: "Conspiracy theories are endemic in societies which experience chronic socio-political instability" (Perera 1995: 22). Conspiracy theories can serve several purposes; they explain events and power relations, inculcate a sense of group bonding, and justify forms of collective action.

> However, our research has nevertheless drawn attention to the possibility that, in some contexts at least, conspiratorial reasoning may represent a widely available narrative device which can be used to radically reconceptualize social context, overturn conventional understandings of power relations and political legitimacy, recover spoiled group identity, and justify forms of collective action. (Sapountzis and Condor 2013: 18)

The allegations of conspiracies are usually most effective in periods of political instability and disruption, and can be an effective way of diverting attention away from uncomfortable political scenarios and contexts. For example, when the UN appointed Darusman Commission's report was leaked to the Sri Lankan public in

2011 it contained heavy criticism of human rights violation in the last stages of the civil war. However, rather than discussing the content of the report, the commission team and the UN itself were framed as agents of an international conspiracy in the national media in Sri Lanka. Thus, there is a need to meticulously separate reasonable from irrational conspiracies. However, an important aspect of conspiratorial narratives is how they are teleological in nature, as they do not only relate a direct design of particular events, but "often involve empirically suspects, and sometimes potentially dangerous accounts of political events and processes" (Sapountzis and Condor 2013: 3). Thus, the narrative repertoire of 'conspiracy' is used by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists to incur a sense of 'crisis' where the distinct problem is narrated upon the deeper template of an unbroken history, and this rhetorical framing of the problem gives the issue a sense of incontestable urgency that beckons immediate action. Hence, we again encounter the notion of 'nationalism at the end of time,' and we need to see how this idea or imagination gives a certain impetus for how Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists justify different forms of collective actions.

Nationalism at the end of time

> Not least of all, this is proven by the fact that historico-philosophical diagnoses of crises often operate within rigid compulsory alternatives which preclude a differentiated diagnosis but which appear to be all the more effective and plausible because of their prophetic associations. (Koselleck 2002: 240)

Koselleck place the notion of 'crisis' between the act of diagnosis and the act of prophecy, and it is from this dialectical temporal space between past and prognosis that a particular crisis can arouse political emotions. Thus, playing out the narrative construction of 'crisis', three elements become pervasive: intimate relations with a valuable past, the prognosis of an imminent rupture of this past, and that this process only can be countered by a set of 'rigid compulsory activities'. The debate on 'unethical conversions' in Sri Lanka follows a similar pattern, where subversive conversions pose a threat not only to the particular individual, but to the Sinhala-

Buddhist tradition as a whole. We see that the rhetorical repertoires of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists have a remarkable ideological coherence, as their constant iterations of their nation's glorious past is further narrated along the nexus of the intimate relations of *rata, jatiya, agama* (country, nation, religion) in the commodification of Sinhala-Buddhist identity, as well as in the notion of the village, and its conglomeration of the triple image of the tank, the paddy fields and the stupa (*vava, yaya* and *dagaba*), and how Sri Lanka is portrayed as a 'nation of villages'. 'Unethical conversions' are thus not primarily a threat to the personal integrity of converts, but destabilise the demographic patters and the social texture of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture and thus strike directly at the idea of national intimacies of the relations between Sinhala-Buddhists and their villages. A high-ranked Buddhist monk and leader of a Buddhist development organisation uttered his frustration:

> Why we are against conversion? It will break our culture and our social values. Buddhism should be protected. 75% of the population in Sri Lanka today is Buddhists. With conversion [evangelical] groups may reduce this amount. And these groups do not care about our culture, tradition, society, Buddhism, politics, history. Conversion will cause people to loose these links. (Interview, 30th of October, 2011)

A given conversion is not only the end of a believer; it is the end of the tradition, the Sinhala-Buddhist culture and the end of the nation. It is indeed a 'crisis'. By narrating conversions as the rupture of the Sinhala-Buddhist tradition, we see how this demographic alteration poses an imminent threat for the Sinhala-Buddhists. The unbroken Sinhala-Buddhist tradition finds itself at the end of time, and without immediate action this continuity will be broken – forever. Hitherto, nationalism at the end of time is infused by 'temporal panic' (Fenn 1997), and we can argue that this kind of nationalist movements both "arise from and exploit anxiety and panic of running out of time" (Fenn 1997: 2). While the unbroken past posits intimate relations with the challenges at hand, the notion of 'crisis' points towards a pressure of time (Koselleck 2002) that both raise the stakes of the challenge and opens a set of given responses: "The more that a society's environment impinges on it, the more members of that society are likely to feel that the social order itself is running out of

time" (Fenn 1997: 9). The articulation of a crisis is also an articulation of the lack of time, and when time becomes compressed 'rigid compulsory alternatives' and other desperate measures are seen as more legitimate. Fenn argues: "That collapse foreshadows a widespread feeling that the system itself is running out of time and may result in calls for draconian and even fascist remedies" (Fenn 1997: 8-9). Hence, when religious nationalists articulate a particular 'crisis' by the means of rhetorical manipulations, they are, at best, able to frame the political discourse from that of a set of optional priorities to that of necessity and decision. By way of the enacting the narrative repertoire in inducing a sense of imminent crisis, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists are also influencing the given political repertoire that is necessary to deal with this particular situation, which opens up for desperate and draconian measures in 'temporal panic'. The notion of 'nationalism at the end of time' alludes to how Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists are able to bring about a sense of 'temporal panic' in how they frame the issue of 'unethical conversions' in contemporary Sri Lanka, and how certain remedies, in this case most prevalent the anti-conversion bill, are seen as critical to save the Sinhala-Buddhist heritage in Sri Lanka.

On religio-political nationalism and political repertoires

I started this chapter by probing the paradox of nationalism, where seemingly autochthonous categories – language, religion, family, culture – need constant reiteration in relation to contingent circumstances, which are hardly autochthonous. As the interviewed *bhikkhu* stated above, conversion will cause people to lose the links of 'our culture, tradition, society, Buddhism, politics, history.' Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has for a long time been portrayed as an example for religio-political nationalism worldwide (see for example Kapferer et.al. 2010, Juergensmeyer 2008, Lincoln 2003). My ambition has been to analyse how opposition to ('unethical') conversions has become a central feature of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka.

Powerful imaginaries of the concomitancy of '*rata, jatiya, agama*' and the idea of 'the village as the core of the nation' are imperative to understand the

emotional reactions of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists to conversion, and Appadurai's notion of 'predatory identities' fits well into the Sri Lankan context. As Kong and Nair (2014) observe spatial distribution of religious groups happen through conversion and immigration, and resistance to such change in spatial distribution is common among nationalist projects. Thus, resistance against conversion reveals how Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists are involved in boundary maintenance of the majority population. However, while resistance against conversion is a prominent feature of religious nationalism, other groups also voiced their demographic anxiety about conversion. Many individuals from other religious groups voiced similar concerns over conversion, completely unrelated to the nationalist narratives analysed in this chapter. In a recent collaborative ethnography on religio-political dynamics in the east of Sri Lanka various religious communities are seen to patrol their own boundaries, especially against the emergence of evangelical churches, while the mainline religious actors have a tacit agreement to not proselytise among each other's communities (Spencer et. al. 2015: 158-161). Thus, the demographic anxiety stirred by conversion should be understood beyond the narrow confinements of religio-political nationalism, and studies of conversion are in dire need of other approaches than that of the national political arena and the study of individual conversion narratives alone.[73]

While it is important to keep in mind that resistance to conversion also figures prominently within many communities outside the nationalist fold, resistance to conversion informs how religio-political nationalists often argue against this form of religious change. Alonso observes how the spatial and temporal modes of argument on the past-present relationship entail "both rupture and continuity, distance and proximity, nostalgia and plenitude, official Sinhalese nationalism modernises the traditional and traditionalises the modern, turning continuity into fatality" (Alonso 1994: 389). This resembles what I have termed the temporal doubleness of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, where the term 'crisis' is not only a diagnosis, but also an act

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[73] Although *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* was just recently published (Rambo and Farhadian 2014) it unanimously treats the issue of conversion as a very individual process.

of prophecy. The claims of an unbroken history are as much about the future as the past, and the assertions of an unbroken past are important as a teleological use of history in contemporary political debates. Moreover, we can reformulate Spencer's observation of the 'countryside' to that of 'history' in that it "never simply changes, it decays" (Spencer 1990:140).

Religio-political nationalism hinges on a doubleness between 'timeless' categories and contingent political circumstances. The processes of spatial and temporal doubleness are also applicable to contestations around many sacred sites in Sri Lanka, where many Buddhist sacred sites have been restored on the basis of historical evidence (see Spencer et. al. 2015: 68-89 for a case on Dighavapi in the east), and especially as evidence for Buddhist archaeological remains in the north and east,[74] which is particularly important for Buddhists to claim their heritage in the contested regions of the war. What van der Veer argues of Hindu nationalism can also be transported to the Sri Lankan context: "In the case of Hindu nationalism, it identifies the nation with the community of believers, sacred space with territory, and sacred history with national history" (van der Veer 1994: 144). We see here a conflation of time and space, what Brekke terms as 'timeless religions' (Brekke 2012: 63) and van der Veer as 'denial of history' (van der Veer 1994: 144). However, these autochthonous structures are, also, dependent on political contingent circumstances (which include contested sacred sites, conversions, traditional practices) that are in 'crisis,' and these crises enables religious nationalists to tap into the temporal and spatial doubleness of contingency and permanence.

Tambiah has brilliantly described how incidents on the ground are transformed into national prominence through the concepts of focalisation and transvaluation: "focalization progressively denudes local incidents and disputes of the contextual particulars, and transvaluation distorts, abstracts, and aggregates those incidents into larger collective issues of national or ethnic interests" (Tambiah 1996: 81). Hence, to engage in such processes of focalisation and transvaluation, religious nationalists

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[74] Evidences for Buddhist archaeological remains have been compiled by a prominent JHU-member, Ven. Ellawella Medhananda Thero (see Medhananda 2005).

need heuristic skills for identifying and transforming particular incidents and processes from their localised context to national importance. Thus, by labelling themselves as the faithful adherents of the nation, religious nationalists are able to launch emotionally charged demands to the state, challenging state policy on not only practical, but also symbolical matters.

> In this situation certain clergy and laypeople may come to understand and portray themselves as the most—or indeed, the only—faithful adherents of the nation's traditional religion. Such actors find they can make effective use of religious language, symbols and signs of identity to authorize mass struggles against the minimalism of the state. (Lincoln 2003: 65)

Lincoln differentiates between maximalist and minimalist of religious actors regarding the state. However, rather than exploring these polar definitions, in our case of the anti-conversion bill, the intermediate position may be most useful in how religious nationalists wage specific demands. As Lincoln further notes: "Initially, their goal may be limited to forcing revision of specific policies" (Lincoln 2003: 65). Knutson argues that religious interest groups are not as restrained in their political rhetoric as some prophetic models suggest, and that it is imperative to be keen to the political strategy and sophistication employed by various religious actors in the political realm (Knutson 2011). However, although religious groups may display a variety of strategies in their political work, they are often unyielding when it comes to specific political objectives. While religious actors may act like any other political actor, they also carry the potential of drawing symbolical potency out of specific cases, by the means of 'religious language, symbols and signs of identity,' so that seemingly minor cases may transform into matters of principle. The question is how the state is to deal with these demands, and what kind of repertoires the state has to negotiate the claims and symbolic potency of religio-political actors. Lincoln observes that these encounters between 'aggrieved groups' and the 'secular' state can take many forms, and not limited to that of dismissal or accommodation:

> In dealing with the demands of aggrieved groups who claim to represent the religious nation, a secular state runs clear risks. Should its responses be—or be perceived as— dismissive, insulting, indecisive, inconsistent, provocative, heavy-handed, arrogant,

patronizing, or unsatisfactory in countless other fashions, leaders of such groups may use this to telling advantage. Most traditions possess a large discursive repertoire that knowledgeable actors can deploy, in open or densely coded fashion, to identify their immediate campaign with a sacred and transcendent cause, while representing themselves as heroic defenders of the faith against demonic, infidel, or apostate opponents.

As such rhetoric finds and persuades its audience, the movement will grow and may succeed in seizing the terms of debate, forcing the state and others to adopt crucial items of their discourse. (Lincoln 2003: 65)

While religious groups should indulge in multiple rhetorical strategies to voice their claims and demands, these demands must also find accommodation within the state apparatus. Before I can discuss the technical aspects of the anti-conversion bill (see chapter 9) I need to contextualise the political circumstances for the demands for an anti-conversion bill. The Buddhist nationalists sought support for a bill within the government, before identifying a need to establish a political party of their own, Jathika Hela Urumaya, to launch the legislation. The next chapter will go into depth in how the issue of conversion is linked to Article 9 of the constitution, which promises Buddhism the foremost place in Sri Lanka. The rhetorical notion of 'crisis' also opens for a re-evaluation of the monkhood as 'guardians of the nation,' where monks legitimate their political intervention whenever they see the nation under considerable threat.

8. The Foremost Place of Article 9: Buddhist Nationalism, Political Monks and State Patronage

This chapter will investigate Article 9 in the Sri Lankan constitution, and how it is embedded within Buddhist political mobilisation. Many scholars have criticised Article 9 for how the provision patronises Buddhism, giving Buddhism the 'foremost place' in Sr Lanka. However, for Buddhist nationalists, the provisions in Article 9 ensure them state patronage, and is often a rhetorical asset in demanding privileges for Buddhist interests. By distinguishing between official and formal state patronage, we can reveal some of the distinct dynamics that unfold due to the particular formulations in the constitution, and see how these provisions enable a unique form of Buddhist political mobilisation. My argument is that the anti-conversion bill can be seen as a symbolical law because it links official and formal state patronage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Article 9: Buddhist hegemonic position?

Article 9 of the Sri Lankan constitution was first implemented in 1972, and was later revised in 1978. The Article was also subject to suggested revisions in a draft constitution in 2000,[75] but this version was never implemented. The Articles on religion in the Sri Lankan constitution (1978) read:

> **Article 9**. 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).

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[75] Bretfeld observes how the draft bill presented to parliament in August 2000 made certain amendments in the formulations by replacing "while assuring to all religions the rights.." with another formulation "while giving adequate protection to all religions and guaranteeing to every person the rights…". However, another novel aspect was the suggestion to establish a new institution, a Supreme Council, in matters relating to the Buddha Sasana: "The State shall, where necessary, consult the Supreme Council, recognized by the Minister of the Cabinet of Ministers in charge of the subject of Buddha Sasana, on measures taken for the protection and fostering of the Buddha Sasana" (as quoted in Bretfeld 2013: 185).

> **Article 10**. Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion of belief of his choice.

> **Article 14(1)(e)**. Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

Many scholars have examined Article 9 in the Sri Lankan constitution because it privileges Buddhism as a religious tradition. DeVotta and Stone argue that the provision stopped short of designating Buddhism as the state religion in Sri Lanka, and that Jathika Hela Urumaya sought to challenge the state to make Buddhism the state religion (DeVotta and Stone 2008). Schalk writes: "Buddhists only can refer to a constitutional priority. The specific feature of the Sri Lankan system of patronage is that patronage is bestowed to the religions in a hierarchical order with only one religion, Buddhism, at the top. This is a first indication of a process towards monopolisation of Buddhism" (Schalk 2001: 52). Schonthal argues that this not only constitutes a hierarchy of religions in the constitution, but irreconcilable positions in negotiation between the special status of Buddhism and the equal protection of other religions (Schonthal 2014b). Hence, the proposed anti-conversion bill is not only about the regulatory practices of the state regarding Christian missionaries, it also negotiates how the state will mediate the tensions between granting the foremost place to Buddhism and the ensuring of equal rights to all religions in the constitution.[76] Moreover, the anti-conversion bill is not just any attempt to formalise a form of regulation through Article 9, but a proposal vested with prestige and urgency. Backed by an emergent political party consisting solely of Buddhist monks, the government can ill-afford to outright dismiss the proposal without stirring an outcry among the clergy in Sri Lanka. Thus, the anti-conversion bill is important not only to understand how religious pluralism is negotiated by legal means, but also to

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[76] Woods argues that this oligopolistic outlook (i.e., one that privileges Buddhism, yet ensures fairness across all recognized religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Catholicism and "mainline" Protestant denominations) in itself is not the main problem, but the problem is how "the legal structure often does not reflect what takes place at the local level, where invidious assertions of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony are common" (Woods 2012: 206).

understand how it rejuvenates the demand for privileged state patronage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

There are different opinions among scholars when it comes to explaining the emergence of Article 9 in the constitutional amendment in 1972, which was later revised with minor amendments in 1978.[77] K.M. de Silva argues: "The formula proved elastic enough to cope with the pressures of Buddhist activists for a special status for Buddhism within the Sri Lankan polity, without making it the state religion on the Burmese model" (K.M. de Silva 1993: 336). While influential organisations such as the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) preferred state religion in 1978, the provisions entailed in Article 9 were distinctively short of making Buddhism into a state religion (de Silva 1993: 336). Noting that the period from 1960 to 1977 experienced no anti-Tamil riot or other collective violence against ethnic minorities, Tambiah asks whether this correlates to the fact that the interests of Buddhist nationalists, especially the provisions given in Article 9 in 1972, largely were met by the state (Tambiah 1992: 63). Hence, when issues had settled in their favour, Buddhist activism was no longer the vibrant force at the end of the 1970s as it had been in the decades before (de Silva 1993: 336). However, Schonthal notes that the tensions between Buddhist privileges and universal rights in Article 9 were barely unpacked legally before 2000, claiming that Buddhist rights have emerged regularly ever since. Schonthal (2014b) argues that what was rhetorically framed as a 'very balanced'[78] constitutional solution in 1972 has instead become a pyrrhic victory where the Sri Lankan state is struggling to resolve the irreconcilable aspects inherent in the constitutional approach to religion. Since 2001, Buddhist political demands have increasingly been wagered through the legal system, which challenges the state in how it can practically deal with the different provisions regarding religion in the constitution.

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[77] Schonthal argues that the change in Article 9 from 1972 to 1978, where the word 'Buddhism' was replaced by 'Buddha *Sasana*' has imperative repercussions as the new term referred to a wider range of Buddhist phenomena now under state protection (Schonthal 2014b).

[78] Schonthal quotes Colvin R. De Silva, the architect of the constitution: "I would earnestly urge that any efforts to change the language or the content of what is a very carefully expressed Basic Resolution may result in, shall I say, some kind of unanticipated unbalancing of what is a very balanced Resolution" (Schonthal 2014b: 12).

The provisions in Article 9 are ambiguous in how they assert the role and position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, as an unresolved tension between hierarchy and equality. In some ways the formulations of Article 9 can be read as a compromise solution between a secular state and having Buddhism as a state religion, where Buddhism and the state shall retain their patronage relations historically enjoyed. This tension between hierarchy and egality was also discussed in 1997 with Chandrika Kumaratunga's proposal of a constitutional status of an advisory council[79] consisting of Buddhist monks, as an attempt to link the Buddhist sangha to the state. de Silva and Bartholomeusz argue that: "[s]ince independence, Sri Lanka's political armature has attempted to accommodate the *sangha*'s self-proclaimed role as defenders of Sinhala-Buddhism" (de Silva and Bartholomeusz 2001: 12). Schonthal (2014b), however, argues how Article 9 sets the state in an irreconcilable position vis-à-vis the religious minorities, and the state has a profound challenge as to how it shall practically negotiate between various religious demands. Whenever Buddhist nationalists are able to portray the situation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka as one of danger and crisis, they can beckon state intervention to address the problems.

The anti-conversion bill can be seen as a practical, but also symbolic, negotiation of Article 9, vested with prestige and expectation, where Buddhist nationalists demand state protection, and a confirmation of their state patronage, against aggressive missionary conduct which allegedly threatens the social and religious culture of Buddhism on the island. Moreover, the demand for an anti-conversion bill should not just be seen as another practical negotiation of Article 9, but as an intensified arena of contestation between Buddhist political demands vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan state. The issue is not whether any political party will accommodate the legislation, but implies a situation where Buddhist monks have collectively organised into a political formation, to forward this symbolic legislation. Hence, by turning the bill down, the government is not dismissing just another

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[79] A Supreme Advisory Council was created by the state in 1990, under president Premadasa, which consisted of 17 monks and 10 lay Buddhists. This council was operative until 1997, when the council resigned in protest against president Kumaratunga unwillingness to heed their advice (see de Silva and Bartholomeusz 2001: 17-18).

practical negotiation of Article 9, but refusing to accommodate a salient demand backed by a unique political formation, which would, in the eyes of the Buddhist nationalists, dismiss both the potency of Buddhist political mobilisation as well as the vitality of Article 9. As noted earlier, Jathika Hela Urumaya is not a marginal political group; from 2005 it has been part of the Sri Lankan parliament from which they actively supported the war initiatives launched by the government. In many ways, the period 2004–2010 could be called the 'saffronisation of politics' in Sri Lanka, where Buddhist influence in the political spheres in Sri Lanka reached a climax. Both the general context (Article 9) and the specific political context (JHU and Buddhist monks in parliament) are indicative of the favourable situation which led to anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. Thus, I would like to argue that the subsequent failure to enforce anti-conversion legislation shows the limits of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka. The political space of manoeuvrability for the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists is not unlimited, and with a micro-levelled reading of the anti-conversion bill we can see how the various political repertoires have unfolded along the lines of local and national patronage affiliations, and have been entangled in the murky politics of official and formal state patronage.

The foremost place of Article 9: Demands of the Buddhist nationalists
It is important to distinguish between Buddhist political demands on the one hand, and state accommodation on the other. I will portray two different ways of conceptualising such religion-state relations; the *dharmacratic* model and the interventionist model. The dharmacratic model ultimately asserts that the demands by Buddhist nationalists seek to dress the Sri Lankan state in a Buddhist ideal – make Sri Lanka a Buddhist state (preferably a state religion), where the other, the interventionist model, assert that Buddhist political mobilisation is about specific issues (and dangers) from which these political groups need protection and state accommodation. The difference between these models, which are not mutually exclusive, can be seen through some statements by various Buddhist reports, and how they forward their demands:

> However, the attempt by Evangelical Christians and such others, and by various crusading organizations, to convert the Buddhist community which is about 69% of the population in Sri Lanka, through unethical, unconventional and deceitful actions, employing subtle methods, has been going on for a very long time. Unless speedy remedial action is taken to save the Buddhist community from this predicament, the mere fact, that the Fundamental Law of the State is to give Buddhism the foremost place and to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana will remain a dead letter. (ACBC 2012: 324)

The above quote from the ACBC-report is striking: first it identifies a problem ('unethical conversions'), it does not however argue that unethical conversions pose a threat or violation of the integrity of the effected individual. Rather it shows how conversions (unethical, unconventional and deceitful) may alter the demographical supremacy of the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. This 'crisis' beckons action, and is an occasion where the government should show its affirmative position towards Buddhism as stated in Article 9 of the constitution. Hence, in the minds of the Buddhist nationalists, represented by the ACBC-report, Article 9 'remain[s] a dead letter' if it is not followed by substantive measures of protecting the Buddha Sasana, and anti-conversion legislation is precisely such a 'remedial' effort to 'save the Buddhist community' in Sri Lanka. The anti-conversion bill is a mechanism forwarded to restore and protect the patronage relations between Buddhism and the state of Sri Lanka, a means of activating the provisions guaranteed in Article 9 of the constitution. The report demands intervention from the state to protect Buddhism and activate its role as patron.

The dharmacratic model highlights how the various demands by the Buddhist nationalists can ultimately be read as epiphenomena of the greater project of constructing an encompassing Buddhist state. Schalk observes:

> Here, I shall focus on one special kind of political Buddhism in Lanka. It defends the integrity and sovereignty of the unitary state. Its character is ethnic homogenization and political centralization. Here, we have to do with an anti-democratic or totalitarian form of political Buddhism, whose self-designation is *siṃhalatva*, '(ideology of) siṃhalaness', or *jātika cintanaya*, 'national ideology'. As outsiders we would say Siṃhala-Buddhist ethno nationalism. (Schalk 2007: 139)

As an extreme variant, the dharmacratic model refers to how some activists reject the notion of religious pluralism and demand state support for one religion only, a form of 'Buddhism-Only' (see Schalk 2001: 52). Bretfeld argues "[t]he far-reaching monopolisation efforts of Buddhist representatives had an enormous impact on the religious neutrality of the state" (Bretfeld 2013: 184). However, this dharmacratic model does not only refer to an ideology of monopolisation of religion or a 'totalitarian form of political Buddhism', but also in a more moderate form how many of the demands of the Buddhist activists are predominantly about the nature and identity of the Sri Lankan state, and especially about the privileged position of Buddhism in comparison with other religions in Sri Lanka. Perhaps the most visible feature of the dharmacratic model is how it seeks to conceptualise the situation in Sri Lanka in line with particular concepts of Buddhist rule ('dharmacracy' and 'dharmarajya').

The dharmacratic model is useful to connect relations between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka to the broader debates on religion and politics globally, through concepts such as fundamentalism, secularism, religious resurgence or 'questioning the secular state' (see Bretfeld 2013, Brekke 2012, Juergensmeyer 2008, Bartholomeusz and de Silva 1998, and Matthews 1996). These approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and many of them have enabled the relations between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka to be compared with other phenomena globally. However, while concepts such as 'dharmacracy' and 'dharmarajya' are indeed alluded to by Buddhist nationalists, few, if any studies, have been made on how the Buddhist nationalists actually employ these terms, other than as mere rhetorical ornamentation. While many of these terms, such as 'dharmarajya', 'dharmacracy' and 'secularism', had a substantial part in the beginning of my own project, my Buddhist informants seldom referred to these concepts, and rarely put any emphasis on them. The demands were not so much stated because of a wish for Buddhist rule, but rather for the protection of Buddhism. However, that does not mean that demands for Buddhism as a state religion were negligent, but that Buddhist political mobilization evolved around other salient issues (anti-conversion bill, devolution, sacred sites).

Thus, the dharmacratic model needs to be supplemented by the interventionist model, where particular issues form the basis of political mobilization.

The issue of Buddhism as a state religion was brought forward in the 2002 Buddha Sasana Commission Report which observed: "From the Devanam Piya Tissa era to 1815, the state religion had been Buddhism. Therefore, Sri Lanka, in which about 70% are Buddhists, has qualifications to make Buddhism the state religion" (2002 Buddha Sasana Commission Report). It is also worth noting that the very same report also recommended that Buddhist monks should not be allowed to contest elections nor engage in politics (DeVotta 2007: 28). However, the demand to make Buddhism a state religion is not, in my view, in itself a major issue among Buddhist nationalists,[80] what they demand is active participation from the state to guarantee state patronage to Buddhism, especially in matters of utmost concern.

What are the concerns of Buddhist nationalists? How do they want the state to interact? As showed in the last chapter, there are several issues that stir the emotions of Buddhist nationalists. Conversions are a major obstacle in the mind of these nationalists as these can alter demographical patterns, sever the bonds of cultural heritage and village belonging, as well as make new enemies for Buddhism. Hence, religious conversion is looked upon as a major destabilising activity, especially as it can be linked to the many 'conspiratorial' forces that threaten Sri Lanka. When Sinhala-Buddhists have been able to frame their national heritage as threatened and in crisis, they turn to the state to demand protection. Hence, the ability of Buddhist nationalists to promote a sense of crisis enables them to press for state involvement and state patronage. The Buddhist nationalists' relationship with Article 9 is, I argue, both one of expectation and frustration.

Buddhist nationalists demand protection from the state, which the state is required to through the formulations of Article 9. How can we understand the dynamics of state patronage of Buddhism in relation to the equality given by the law

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[80] One should observe here the proposal by Ven. Medhananda (JHU) in 2004 to make Buddhism a state religion. The bill can be read as a desperate measure and frustration over the Supreme Court's verdict over the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversions of Religion* (the anti-conversion bill) in August 2004.

for other religious persons? Omalpe Sobhita, a leading figure in Jathika Hela Urumaya, discusses a 'fluid form of secularism unique to Sri Lanka':

> Modern Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-religious democracy. Although Buddhism is been given foremost place in the 1972 constitution, the legal protection of all religious are also guaranteed in Articles 10 and 14. In many cities and towns across the island, Buddhist temples stand alongside kovils, churches and mosques. Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims are allowed to practice freely within the law. (…) If one is to ask if Sri Lanka is a Buddhist or secular state, one could say it is a fluid form of secularism unique to Sri Lanka. (Omalpe Sobhita 2009)

As Omalpe Sobhita claims, defining Sri Lanka into a fixed modality of a Buddhist or secular state is difficult, albeit Buddhist political mobilisation often has been read into a greater global struggle of religious mobilisation challenging the notion of a secular state (see Bretfeld 2013, Juergensmeyer 2008, Schalk 2001, Matthews 1996). While some Buddhist nationalists do indeed kindle ambitions of making Buddhism the state religion in Sri Lanka, the main demand is nevertheless aimed at making the state fulfil its promises guaranteed in Article 9, that is, formalise the state patronage into substantial legal instruments, of which the anti-conversion bill is but one attempt. However, when Omalpe Sobhita notes that the state curtails 'a fluid form of secularism unique to Sri Lanka' he proposes a pragmatic stance on what Schonthal (2014b) has termed 'irreconcilable positions' in how the state can negotiate Buddhist privileges with religious pluralism.

A weakness with the dharmacratic model is that it often reduces the options into 'irreconcilable positions'. What is lacking from this conceptualisation of the state is how historical relations are embedded within the demands of the Buddhist nationalists, and we cannot look at Buddhism-state relations without taking into consideration their interaction and complicities in the past, and how religio-political mobilisation has at critical junctures often played a decisive role in Sri Lanka (see Matthews 1996, Schalk 1988). Most of these critical junctures have fluctuated around different peace mediations, which are seen as threatening 'unity' and 'sovereignty' (Schalk 1988). However, other issues have also emerged as critical to the wellbeing of the Buddhist heritage in Sri Lanka. The 'interventionist model' understands the

articulation of Article 9 both as a particular result of political Buddhist mobilisation[81] and from 1972 onwards also as a catalyst for further demands of protection. To understand the emergence of Jathika Hela Urumaya in 2004, especially in relation to the anti-conversion bill, it is imperative to look at a series of legal cases that involved the registration of Christian social organisations which were accused of combining social upliftment with (potential for) proselytism.

The incorporation cases and Article 9

The formulation that Buddhism is given the foremost place and constitutional priority is increasingly being discussed in contemporary debates including legal settings. Buddhist interests have often politically wagered for greater state patronage and protection of Buddhism. However, from 2001–2003 three seemingly regular incorporations of Christian legal bodies were challenged before the Supreme Court due to their apparent mixture of social upliftment and religious motivations, and this was a new forum to discuss the relations between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka.

These three cases have later been named the Incorporation cases, due to their challenging of the constitutionality of their incorporation in the Supreme Court. While it is not a legal requirement for religious bodies to register with the state, it is only by incorporation by an Act of parliament that they can fulfil the requirements of becoming a legal persona (Wickremesinhe 2009: 39). Incorporated status is important for organisations in Sri Lanka as it enables them to hold immovable property and attain corporate legal capabilities. The first case in May 2001, on the *Christian Sahanaye Doratuwa Prayer Centre*, was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, and Owens (2006b) argues that this was on the basis of the "combination of religious objectives together with economic/ commercial objectives and the financial powers of the prayer centre"(Owens 2006b: 55). One of the arguments of the

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[81] It can be argued that the enactment of the 'foremost place' of Buddhism in 1972 came as a result of ethnic polarization in Sri Lanka (Schalk 2001).

Supreme Court was that the Sri Lankan constitution did not include the right to propagation of religion, only for its manifestation.[82] This is in contrast to the Indian constitution where 'propagation' is contained. The second incorporation, the *New Wine Harvest Ministries* was ruled unconstitutional for the same reasons in January 2003, and the Supreme Court concluded that the "allurement which would result in the process of uplifting socio-economic conditions would distort the freedom which every person should have to observe a religion or belief of his choice as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Constitution" (as quoted by Owens 2006b: 58-59). These two decisions set the ground for further cases, and the last incorporation case, the Menzingen case, generated public interest far beyond the other cases, probably due to that the issue of 'unethical' conversions which had risen into public prominence in 2003.

The constitutionality of the *Provincial of the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis in Menzingen of Sri Lanka* was challenged before the Supreme Court in August 2003, and this time the challenge was not only whether the incorporation breached Article 10 of the constitution, but also Article 9. The Supreme Court confirmed the allusion to Article 9, providing Buddhism the foremost place and state protection of the Buddha Sasana, and responded: "when an institution is established to propagate Christianity by providing material and other benefits and thereby converting such recipients, that would affect the very existence of Buddhism" (S.C. Special Determination No. 19/2003 as quoted from Owens 2006b). The Supreme Court also reiterated its stance that the Sri Lankan constitution only allowed manifestation of religion and not propagation.

However, the Menzingen Sisters took the Supreme Court verdict before the U.N. Committee of Human Rights, which came to the conclusion that the Supreme Court ruling had breached Article 18(1) and Article 26 of the ICCPR, and stated that:

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[82] The ruling alludes to Article 14 (1) (e) in the Sri Lankan constitution: "the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching".

[F]or numerous religions…it is a central tenet to spread knowledge, to propagate their beliefs and to provide assistance to others. These aspects are part of an individual's manifestation of religion and free expression, and are thus protected by article 18, paragraph 1, to the extent not appropriately restricted by measures consistent with paragraph 3 (Views of the Human Rights Committee)(as quoted by Owens 2006b: 70-71)

The Menzingen Determination received heavy criticism both from international and national sources, and Asanga Welikala, a human rights scholar in Sri Lanka, opposed the ruling and argued how this legalistic take on religion was decidedly illiberal: "There is something decidedly illiberal about constitutional or legal constraints on the way a religion must be structured and practiced" (Welikala 2003: 5). Saran (2003) notes how the anti-conversion issue is an import from India, but receives different treatment in Sri Lanka as their constitution does not endorse religious actors to 'propagate,' where as the India constitution does. Owens observes that the three incorporation cases serve as a fundamental background to the attempts of anti-conversion legislation (Owens 2006a). The verdicts of the Supreme Court, and the successful petitions against Christian registration on the issues of combining social uplifting with religious propagation had made Buddhist mobilisation confident on the topic of restricting proselytism. These cases serve not only as an important backdrop to the anti-conversion legislation, but also reveal how the dynamics of friend-enemy alliances were yet to be consolidated, where Buddhists and Hindus were in general positive to legislation, while evangelicals were outright negative, yet other religious actors, most notably the Catholics, were reluctant to take a firm position. The Minister of Religious Affairs, W.J.M. Lokubandara, however, felt that the recent verdicts in the Supreme Court actually made attempts of anti-conversion legislature superfluous, as the Buddhists were already protected from 'improper' proselytism under the aegis of the Sri Lankan constitution. For the Buddhist nationalists, the ruling in the Menzingen case approved their sentiments that Buddhism shall receive special protection from the Sri Lankan state, and that Article 9 should be more than a dead letter in the constitution. As Owens has showed, these incorporation cases formed a backdrop to the demand from Buddhist nationalists to propose anti-

conversion legislation in Sri Lanka, and they were further encouraged when the Supreme Court gave Buddhism protection under Article 9.

Jathika Hela Urumaya and the critical junctures of political Buddhism

Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have most often mobilised politically to what they refer to as 'crises', where they have used nationalist rhetoric in asserting a threat that needs to be overcome. This has led to a fluctuating pattern of political mobilisation among monks, but these irregular interventions by Buddhist monks into politics are also what gives them a sense of urgency and potency. When describing the birth of Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) in 2004, Omalpe Sobhita Thero says of the controversy: "In 2004, Sri Lankan monks stirred up a huge controversy by running for elections under the banner of Jathika Hela Urumaya" (Omalpe Sobhita 2009). As with Baddegama Samhita Thera, who was elected into Parliament in 2001, the monks in JHU provoked a great debate both among laity and the monastic communities regarding the role of monks in politics.

Several Buddhist leaders condemned the JHU and their decision to enter politics and the *Mahanayaka* (Chief Monk) of the Ramanna Nikaya order stated: "Buddhist priests do not have a role to play in party politics and by doing so it will bring about the destruction of the Buddha Sasana" (in DeVotta and Stone 2007: 39). In the Ramanna Nikaya, the official monastic title is not able to be used when participating in political work (de Silva 2006: 205). To come to terms with the disharmony on the issue of political monks, several Buddhist leaders have proposed that the *nikayas* in Sri Lanka should create a *sangharaja* (Chief council of the sangha), following the model of Thailand, which would ensure unity and enable them to combat political monks. Some segments of the *sangha* even submitted a bill to parliament prohibiting the monks to enter politics as they could not do it within their own sangha system (DeVotta and Stone 2008: 46). The monks in JHU did not only provoke other monks, but also stirred emotions among some politicians, who refused to give *dana* (ritual of giving food to the monks) to them (Frydenlund 2005a). Some of the most ardent critics even used the name *Jathika Hela Karumaya* (National Sinhalese Curse) as a

nickname for JHU (DeVotta and Stone 2008: 47).

Many scholars claim that it was the death of the famous monk Gangodavila Soma during a visit to Russia in 2003 that sparked the decision to form Jathika Hela Urumaya. Politically, the JHU have been ardent supporters of ending the war against LTTE by military means, opposing the Norwegian led peace facilitation that began in 2002. However, perhaps their most prevalent issue was to bring forth anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka in the wake of Ven. Soma's death (Hertzberg 2010). While Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists were upset by many issues in 2003/2004, in particular the ethnic conflict, the most defining political characteristic of JHU was their insistent demand for promoting anti-conversion legislation. Despite the fact that W.J.M. Lokubandara, Minister of Religious Affairs, made a promise to launch anti-conversion legislation after the fast-unto-death by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita and Rajawappe Thero in 2003, no such laws were immediately forwarded. Hence, Jathika Hela Urumaya stepped forward to contest the 2004 general elections, where one of their main issues was to bring forth the anti-conversion bill. Later, Omalpe Sobhita, a leading member of JHU, explained in a text why such legislation was imperative: "The proposed Bill against Unethical Conversion tabled by Buddhist monks in Parliament in 2004 is not an attempt to curb the spread of other religions, but to protect Buddhism from such unethical forces" (Omalpe Sobhita 2009). Buddhist nationalists' relationship with Article 9 is, I argue, both one of expectation and frustration, and the refusal of state accommodation of demands from the Buddhist nationalists may result in a backlash of religio-political mobilisation among Buddhist monks.

Dhammavihari, monk and prominent scholar, makes a distinction between the normal governance of a country and a situation of political crisis in which the governance should be guided by the *dhamma* and the counsel of religious leaders. As such, where the religious advice beckons, the ruler should 'act accordingly in times of political crisis', and even that "[t]he rulers are required to change their state policy accordingly" (Dhammavihari 2006: 139). Thus, in the state of exception, the political crisis, the religious leader's role is transformed from that of advisor to that of policy maker. That their decision to enter politics was taken with much reluctance implies

the controversial nature of crossing this threshold between advisors and policy makers. It also gives the impression of necessity: even though we do not want to cross this line, it is 'the need of the hour'.

Ven. Rathana stated in 2004, as the spokesman of JHU: "the Sangha has entered the arena of politics to ensure the protection of Buddhist heritage and values which had been undermined for centuries" (as quoted in Deegalle 2006b: 244). Buddhist heritage is under threat, not only from the civil war and the continuing peace process which may divide Lanka, the *dhammadipa*, but also by Christian proselytisation that undermines Buddhism. Omalpe Sobhita had a similar narrative: "Throughout Sri Lanka's history, whenever Buddhism or the island was threatened by invading armies or ideologies, the Sinhalese Buddhists had always stepped forward to champion the causes" (Omalpe Sobhita 2009). Such grandiose narratives are not uncommon among monks, and it is often said that "monks are the custodians of the nation" (Abeysekera 2002: 207) or the "guardians of the nation" (Seneviratne 1999).

These dynamics reveal the mechanisms of a system of dual patronage. While the state guarantees the protection of Buddhism, Buddhist monks, whenever there is a situation of national/social/political crisis, can emerge as a direct political force to overcome this particular threat. Hence, in times of crisis the religious authority of Buddhist monks can be transformed into political authority, to give a shock of clergy involvement in politics. While Buddhist monks are symbols of the national imaginary, they also have a duty to respond in the hour of need. However, such narrative conceptualisations are often in conflict with contingent time; they conflate the nation with community, sacred place with territory and sacred history with national history. In such terms, the "now" is in an eternal sense of crisis. Political interventions by Buddhist monks are most salient when they are able to conflate religious and political authority. Thus, the naturalisation of political monks into Sri Lankan politics may decrease the salience of political involvement by the clergy, and reduce their political impact.

Juergensmeyer remarks that there has been an ongoing discussion within the JHU reagarding whether they should continue to involve themselves in electoral politics or continue their agitation outside the government (Juergensmeyer 2008:

135). Another indication of this threshold between advisor and policy maker can be seen in relation to the minister post offered to JHU when they formed a coalition government: while 9 monks from JHU were members of parliament, the position (in the ministry of Environment and Natural Resources) was given to Champika Ranawaka, a layman who then replaced the seat of Ven. Omalpe Sobhita. Deegalle writes:

> Due to the controversial nature of the issue and debates of the monks' actions, the JHU monks themselves have tried to explain the current political and social circumstances that led them to take such an unconventional decision. Their entry into active politics, they consider as the last resort, 'a decision taken with much reluctance.' (Deegalle 2006b: 244)

Jathika Hela Urumaya itself uses the rhetoric of the 'exception' as explanation of their decision to enter politics. It is the monks' *decision* whether and whenever a situation of political/social/national crisis emerges, and whether such a crisis beckons them to act. It is also the monks' *decision* how often these emergencies occur, and whether the interference of monks into politics is limited to that of an exception. However, exceptions may turn out to be the norm if they happen too frequently. From this perspective, the decision to enter politics may follow a different rate of acceleration than before, and may become a more frequent and common phenomenon, thus integrating political monks as a natural part of politics.[83] What this blending between normalcy/exception implies for the political participation of the monks is that they will always need to legitimise and justify their political involvement with a particular *situation* or regarding a certain *threat* that needs to be overcome. Since the concept of the political has no substance in itself (see Schmitt 1996), the political monk also needs to justify his own decision. A political monk is dependent on an agenda: a given 'enemy' distinction that is seen as a threat. The mobilisation is determined by the needs of the hour, it is the definition of the situation that decides whether it is required by the monks to engage with exceptional measures into the present situation. Amunugama has made an interesting remark in this respect:

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[83] See Hertzberg 2014b for a more thorough discussion on this dynamic.

> The ethnic conflict provided an opportunity for the monks to openly engage in social and political activity since it was presented as a problem of national concern. Any doubts concerning their proper role had to be suppressed in a time of crisis. (Amunugama 1991: 127)

Amunugama asserts that the political monks seize the opportunity in situations of national concerns, even though the political engagement of the monks in these emergency issues do divert the attention away from the demarcated role that is considered proper for a monk. If the *bhikkhus* are able to define a situation as imminently threatening, they are able to mobilise both within their their own ranks, and gain the support in order to emerge as a potent factor electorally, and/or eventually challenge the current rule of government. From this perspective, the potential mass mobilisation of monks can cause problems of governance, as the monks can challenge the sitting rulers' current position, and emerge as a 'hidden' factor in times of political crisis. Thus, the influence of the political monk is not fully measured by the fixing of their position in relation to the government, but by their very ability to emerge as a potent challenge to the government in an eventual crisis. As such, the *sangha*, and its political elements, is a force that needs to be reckoned by the politicians. By coping with the robed potential of the political monks, the politicians need to continually measure their ability to draw satisfaction from the Buddhist *sangha*. While the Buddhist *sangha* has the ability to legitimise the sitting government, this mandate from the *bhikkhus* is under constant evaluation, and it may turn into a sudden shift of de-legitimation. As we recall, Omalpe Sobhita talked of a 'fluid form of secularism unique to Sri Lanka', and we need to discuss just how to understand the relationship between religion and the state in a broader sense before discussing how an eventual anti-conversion bill would influence these relations.

Buddhism and state patronage in Sri Lanka

How can we understand the relations between Buddhism and state patronage in Sri Lanka today? The importance of Article 9 has proven central both to scholars critical

of the role taken by Buddhist political formations (and their accommodation within the Sri Lankan polity), yet among Buddhist nationalists themselves the provision entailed in Article 9 is both one of expectation and frustration. It is critical to address these tensions in how the role of Article 9 is envisaged among different actors, and how Article 9 is negotiated differently on various levels. Hence, a distinction between official and formal state patronage will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of religion and state patronage in Sri Lanka.

Official state patronage is the *sine qua non* in the relationship between the state and religion. Whereas the official relations between the Sri Lankan state and Buddhism are those that are imprinted in Article 9, to 'give Buddhism the foremost place' and 'to foster and protect the Buddha Sasana', in Article 10 and Article 14(e), these provisions are vague and general, but of immense symbolic value. Official state patronage can vary from state religion (Myanmar) to interested secularism (India) to a complete ban on religion, but these officially recognised relations, albeit symbolically potent, cannot explain the complete picture of state-religion relations. While Article 9 is the officially recognised relation between Buddhism and the state in Sri Lanka, these formulations lack practical enactment. How do the state foster and protect the Buddha Sasana? What does it entail to give Buddhism the foremost place? How does it assure every person to manifest his religion? There is a tension here between official and formal state patronage and it is important to scrutinise just how this tension is negotiated.

Formal state patronage is how the state-religion relations are semantically adopted, practically regulated, politically reinvented, collectively imagined and legally institutionalised (see Goel 2010). Hence, the domain of formal state patronage is where the state regulations and relations are practically adopted and negotiated, from the seemingly irrelevant details to the more comprehensive ways in whichthe state engage issues of regulating religion. The issuing of laws and regulations concerning religion, maintenance and construction of sacred sites, and state involvement in festivities and rituals are all activities under the domain of formal

state patronage.[84] Thus, the formal state patronage is the world of political bargaining when it comes to state-religion relations, and where interests and conflicts are unfolded by religious actors and the state alike.

Gill argues that religious liberty should not be understood according to its ideational foundations within a particular religion, but after an interest-based reading of the political position in a given country:

> Spiritual monopolies that have a captured market prefer to keep the barriers to entry in the religious marketplace high. Although rhetorically in favour of freedom of conscience, they will seek laws that require minority religions to gain the government's official permission to proselytize, restrict visas on foreign missionaries, impose zoning and impose media restriction on alternative faiths, and so on. (Gill 2008: 44)

While official state patronage is the *sine qua non* of relations between religions and the state, it is the regulatory space of formal state patronage where the government mechanisms of allowance and restrictions of religious practices take form. Religious groups and practices are bound by a plethora of regulations, with both intended and unintended consequences, but as Gill argues, these regulations are not made in a vacuum but through negotiations between religious leader, activists, bureaucrats and politicians. Such regulations do not only take form as restrictions, but also as endorsements of particular religious groups and practices.

The issue of proselytisation challenges and contests how we are to think of religious pluralism, as any regulations of the subject often compromise either proselytisation efforts or the targets of proselytisation (Feener & Finucane 2013). The anti-conversion bill is but one such law, which seeks to regulate how certain religious behaviour is allowed or not within the Sri Lankan state. While the official state patronage envisages the broader and ideal relations of religions with regards to the state, the sphere of formal state patronage is where these ideals are enacted and

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[84] The use of the concept 'formal state patronage' is not only linked to 'official state patronage' but also to 'informal state patronage'. Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 727) define 'informal institutions' as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels". However, informal institutions may both coexist as well as compete with formal institutions, yet a distinguished characteristic is that these informal rules often avoid the gaze of the public eye. Informal patronage relations will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 10.

substantialised. Distinguishing these categories as separate entities enable us to discuss how the dynamics between the state and religions are negotiated, and how official commitment to one religion ('Buddhism shall have the foremost place') inspires a particular mode of political mobilisation.

Thus, the anti-conversion bill is rhetorically framed as a mediating mechanism between the official state patronage enjoyed through Article 9 and the destabilising effects ('unethical') conversion poses to demographical patterns and Buddhist social texture in Sri Lanka. In the eyes of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists the official state patronage promised in Article 9 should be formalised and substantialised through the anti-conversion bill, as the practice of 'unethical' conversions are seen to bring an immediate danger to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. If Article 9 of the constitution is not substantialised and formalised by additional measures, the provisions promised in the article is not but a symbolic gesture and remains a dead letter to the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. In sum, the anti-conversion bill is a symbolical link law between official and formal state patronage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Anti-conversion bill and the foremost place of Article 9

The emergence of Jathika Hela Urumaya and the subsequent private member's bill *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* by Omalpe Sobhita fall into a pattern of religio-political mobilisation among Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka. For JHU their promise of launching legal instruments to curb what they term 'unethical' conversions is what their political career will be judged by, as this was their most prestigious election-promise in 2004. Several reasons led to the formation of JHU, yet their timing of submitting a private member's bill just after the election was considered by many of my informants among the Buddhist nationalists as an 'impatient move'. Nevertheless, it gives some clues of the urgency felt among the Buddhist nationalists to ensure such legislation, and when the state failed to immediately cater to their demands for such an instrument, Jathika Hela Urumaya emerged as a political force of their own. Hence, the decision of the state to accommodate Buddhist demands needs to be carefully weighed against the possibility

for religio-political mobilisation among Buddhist nationalists. Article 9 may have been one attempt to negotiate this particular dynamic.

While distinctively short of being a state religion, the provisions of Article 9 literally give Buddhism the foremost place in Sri Lanka. Yet, how this particular clause is negotiated can be more clearly viewed by the distinction of official and formal state patronage. The provisions raised the expectations of Buddhist nationalists that state patronage will be granted, and unwillingness by the state to accommodate their demands lead to bitter frustration. Schalk observes how this tension between expectations of Buddhists and accommodation of the state opened a particular political space unique to Sri Lanka, when he discusses a set of political demands by the Mahasangha in 1988: "The Buddhasasana should be given the foremost place and not be assigned a position of mere equality with others" (Schalk 2001: 59). Hence, the demands of the Buddhists are both more confrontational, and the stakes are higher meaning that non-accommodation will subsequently lead to different forms of religio-political mobilisation. Buddhist political formations are well aware of this dynamic, and DeVotta observes that "political bhikkhus hold rallies, go on hunger strikes, block the road to parliament, and threaten all sorts of instability if the government hints that it will ignore their preferences" (DeVotta 2007: 24). The verdict in the incorporation cases, especially the allusion to Article 9, encouraged the Buddhist nationalists to seek further consolidation of formal state patronage, as we can argue about the anti-conversion bill.

When Buddhist nationalists wage demands to the state these are often coined as a fulfilment of the obligations entailed in Article 9. As a consequence, Article 9 is capitalised as a foremost place in many of the the political repertoires wielded by Buddhist nationalists. It functions as a parameter both for the Buddhist nationalists as to what this special state patronage entails when it is formalised and for other religious denominations as to how the state guarantees their equality. While dominant religions often seek to introduce legislation that curb the religious practices of other religious groups, such an interest-based approach is dependent upon human agency, which infers a significant role to the decisions of the "interests and incentive structures of politicians" (Gill 2008: 47). Hence, for politicians such legal proposals

would also undergo a cost-benefit analysis, as any other legal proposal. What would the costs be if the bill is passed? How would the Buddhist nationalists react if the bill was dismissed? It is imperative to note that my topic of study is a bill proposal, not an enacted law. Although the proposal received a favourable verdict in the Supreme Court in 2004, the government's response can at best be described as 'reluctant,' 'ambiguous,' or 'avoidant,' and the bill was technically dismissed with the lapse of government in 2010. From the logic espoused by Gill (2008), this reluctance of the Sri Lankan government towards the anti-conversion bill is hard to explain. However, Gill notes that legislations are rarely considered in isolation, and that specific political decisions can have seemingly unrelated trade-offs.

In order to capture the full extent of how the issue of anti-conversion legislation and 'unethical' conversions can be seen as espousing state-religion relations in Sri Lanka, my emphasis will not be on the legal technicalities of the anti-conversion bill alone, but bring in how various political repertoires, embraced by Buddhist and Christian groups, both navigate into and circumnavigate the anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. Hence, the broader conflict over unethical conversions has repercussions regarding legal issues (the anti-conversion bill), exclusionary violence, documentation and monitoring of religious grievances and politico-bureaucratic mobilisation. I mentioned in the introduction that this thesis follows a binary structure of composition, where the first part would deal with religio-political mobilization and claim-making by Buddhist nationalists. The second part of the thesis has a distinct focus on the various political repertoires employed, from the legal domain ("The Aporias of Proselytism: Freedom of Religion and the Anti-Conversion Bill in Sri Lanka"), to the enactment of exclusionary violence ("Buddhist Strongholds, Patronage Networks and Exclusionary Violence against Religious Minorities in Sri Lanka"), the ways and implications of monitoring religious freedom ("Monitoring Religious Freedom: Persecution, Documentation and the Role of Political Facts") and finally there is a chapter which will look into other related laws and a bureaucratic circular as well as discuss how to understand political repertoires and religious freedom more broadly ("Political Repertoires and Religious Freedom").

9. The Aporias of Proselytism: Freedom of Religion, State Patronage and Anti-Conversion Legislation

Anti-conversion legislation has been on the rise in South Asia the last decade, with religious nationalists in India as the main protagonists of mobilisation. Controversial and contested, the focal point is whether proselytism is guaranteed by the formulations in international law, which would protect the rights to missionary activities, or whether the rights of the targets should be protected by undue intervention by 'aggressive' missionaries. This chapter will have a twofold focus; it will discuss the anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka in how it relates to the instruments of international human rights. It will also follow the historical trajectories of the emergence of the distinct formulations, most notably inspired by Indian anti-conversion proposals, in the legislation. In Sri Lanka two proposals for anti-conversion legislation were drafted, and I will discuss how these drafts relate to religious mobilisation, Buddhist nationalism and the role of the state in Sri Lanka.

The aporias of proselytism in international law

There is no formulation in international human rights instruments that targets the concept of proselytism directly. The most relevant formulation addressing religious freedom is Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Every debate on anti-conversion legislation needs to take into account the formulations of the Article 18 of the ICCPR. However, this article does not mention a single concept that is directly related to proselytism. Nevertheless, Article 18 is the fixed vantage point from where to start legal discussion about (regulations of) proselytism, and legal scholars have vented their frustration over the vague articulations on the subject within Article 18:

> It is unfortunate that in drafting (…) the Human Rights Committee failed to be more explicit on the subject of proselytism, in spite of the fact that its importance was raised even in the earliest debates and it continues to be a live issue throughout many parts of the world. (Taylor 2005: 48)

Nevertheless, actors with different interests often read their own intuitions into the formulations, and while most Christians would claim that these formulations enable missionary activity, other actors understand some of the formulations as a protective measure against aggressive and overzealous proselytisers (see Taylor 2005). Stahnke observes:

> Is proselytism a manifestation of religion or belief, and therefore encompassed within the concept of the right to freedom of religion or belief? There is no definite consensus in international human rights instruments. (Stahnke 2001: 275)

There is no autochthonous understanding of how to interpret 'manifestation of religion', and so far no international human rights instruments offer a definition of 'coercion' and what forms of conduct and communication that would be covered under the aegis of Article 18(2) (Taylor 2005). The omission of such criteria of defining 'manifestation' and 'coercion' attests to the aporias of proselytism in international human rights instruments. Stahnke observes that the "lack of any direct recognition of proselytism may be an indication of the sensitivity of states to the issues it raises and the difficulty in delineating agreeable standards" (Stahnke 2001:

276). As such, these aporias of proselytism in international law is a continuous source of tension and conflict between different actors in how to approach the issues of proselytism, proselytisation, anti-conversion legislations and similar issues. As we will see, the aporias inherent in the formulations in the Article 18 of ICCPR are open for flexibility and negotiation. Golder and Fitzpatrick argue, in the extension of Foucault's notion that power is relational, that law is not fixed in any enduring stasis, but continuously open to different forms of interpretative interventions:

> Foucault's law, like his more famous (re) thinking of power as relational, cannot be rendered in any enduring stasis, but rather, must always remain incipiently responsive to the advent of alterity, and to the ineradicable and importunate demands of resistance and transgression. (Golder and Fitzpatrick 2009: 54)

The challenge of lawmakers and lobbyists in Sri Lanka is to argue that the proposed anti-conversion legislation either is in accordance or discordance with the formulations of Article 18 of ICCPR. However, it is not this formulation alone that is imperative in validating an eventual anti-conversion legislation, but one also need to take into account the record of previous legal cases on the subject. Thus, the challenge is to find the relevant framing, argumentation and accommodation of the rights of those involved in any act of proselytism. In this sense, the repertoires of legal competence, relevant examples and timid definitions are of decisive importance.

> Determining that proselytism is encompassed within either the freedom to manifest religion or belief or the right to freedom of expression does not mean that it cannot be restricted. However, such a determination establishes a presumption in favour of permitting proselytism, and any restrictions must meet the requirements laid down in international instruments. (Stahnke 2001: 280)

There are various ways in how to approach the aporias of proselytism in human rights instruments. One is by tacitly incorporating one's own views of the interpretation of Article 18, without explicating upon why a given conclusion is reached, an approach that probably would sediment its differences along regions hostile and positive to the practice of proselytisation in the beginning. Taylor (2005) proposes that we should go back to the process of writing the formulation of Article 18 to look at the various

intentions they had when they agreed upon a fixed set of formulations. A third option is to allow the negotiation over contested issues of the formulation, and have further discussions about whether these are appropriate means of addressing the issues. Stahnke argues: "In conflicts involving proselytism, the rights and interests of the source, the target and the state can be arranged against one another" (Stahnke 2001: 275). Thus, rather than aiming for another fixed additional formulation to the Article 18 of the ICCPR, Stahnke develops a charter for how different interests play into the way legal measures on proselytism is articulated:

> (1.) The rights of the source of the proselytism to manifest their religion and engage in free expression
> (2.) The rights of the target of the proselytism to change their religion, to receive information, to be protected from injury to their religious feelings and to maintain their religious identity
> (3.) The interests of the state to protect dominant religious traditions or official ideology and to preserve public order.
> (Stahnke 2001: 254)

The rights of the source, in other words the missionary, are accommodated by accepting that proselytism should be an inherent part of manifestation of religion. However, restrictions on proselytism consequently lead to a regulation of certain religious conduct, especially among those religions with a mandate to perform religious persuasion. This right of conducting proselytism if often contrasted with the rights of the target (of proselytism), or (2.) in Stahnke's charter above, in how the very act of proselytism may denigrate the freedom of religion of another believer. Thus, proselytism may violate the target's right to maintain her religion, or it can be argued that proselytism, in one way or another may constitute an injury to one's religious feelings. Nevertheless, by putting restrictions on proselytism this may also hinder the target's right to information (to make a sound choice of which religion to belong to) and as such also infringe upon the target's right to change her religion. Hence, too much protection of the target's rights actually deprives the target of being able to make their own judgements. In addition to the rights of the source and the target, the state enters as a third interested party, that is (3.), in the negotiations of how to delineate a boundary on the issue of proselytism. The rights of the state are

articulated in Article 18(3) of the ICCPR: 'Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others'. Thus, in order to propose anti-conversion legislation within the ambit of Article 18 in the ICCPR the national legislature needs either to safeguard the religious rights of the target or to refer to a societal concern (protection of public order) of the state due to proselytism. Restrictions on proselytism will most likely preserve the patterns of religious affiliation, and thus favour majority religious groups, especially if they are not aggressively seeking converts of their own (Stahnke 2001).

Mayer observes that the most common line of conflict does not contest proselytism per se, but rather articulates the resistance against the notion of 'improper' proselytism (Mayer 2008). Allegations that missionaries and aid workers are active in inducing conversions by means of external pressure have led to discussion on anti-conversion legislature in many countries, and in South Asia in particular with India as the nexus of argumentative repository. However, before looking into the context of anti-conversion legislation in India, we should look at how the notion of 'improper' proselytism gained prominence through two legal cases in Greece, namely *Kokkinakis v. Greece* and *Larissis and others v. Greece*. In the Kokkinakis case the Jehova witness Minos Kokkinakis was convicted for violating the Greek law which prohibited proselytism.[85] The Greek government argued to the European Court that the prohibition was a legitimate aim to protect the rights of others, and it attempted to demonstrate the difference between 'Christian witness' and 'improper proselytism,' describing that the latter:

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[85] The relevant article (Section 4 of Act 1363/1938, as amended by Section 2 of Act 1672/1939, reprinted in Kokkinakis, 260 Eur. Ct. H.R. (ser. A) at 12) reads: "2. By "proselytism" is meant, in particular, any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion…, with the aim of undermining those beliefs, either by any kind of inducement or promise of an inducement or moral support or material assistance, or by fraudulent means or by taking advantage of his inexperience, trust, need, low intellect or naivety. 3. The commission of such an offence in school or other educational establishment or philanthropic institution shall constitute a particularly aggravating circumstance." (as quoted in Stahnke 2001: 288f).

represents a corruption or deformation of it [Christian Witness]. It may… take the form of activities offering material or social advantages with a view to gaining new members for a Church or exerting improper pressure on people in distress or in need; it may even entail the use of violence or brainwashing; more generally it is not compatible with respect for the freedom of thought, conscience and religion of others. (as quoted in Stahnke 2001: 289-290)

Taylor (2005) argues that the *Kokkinakis case* failed to clarify the distinctions between acceptable and 'improper' proselytism, and while the 'protection of others' was a legitimate aim, most countries that discussed laws restricting proselytism had a distaste for the very concept of proselytism, and rather sought this restriction as a means of regulation religious minorities. In another case, *Larissis and others v. Greece*, a Greek air force officer was convicted for proselytism towards his subordinates in the armed services, and while the case did not offer any succinct definition of 'proper' and 'improper' proselytism, the European Commission accepted that the subordinates were susceptible to the influence of their superior, yet that this distinction would not apply to civilians. While Taylor is openly sceptical towards any attempts or forms of anti-conversion legislation he is nevertheless frustrated by how every case fails to make a succinct analysis of 'proper' and 'improper' proselytism.

The whole debate around proselytism and anti-conversion legislation is haunted by vague and ambiguous formulations in different legal contexts. The various 'code of ethics' regarding proselytism that many proselytising bodies themselves produce attest to the fact that there exists in many people's opinion a line between 'proper' and 'improper' proselytism. However, many instruments of law often are seen as carrying political motivation on behalf of the majority religious groups. Both Taylor and Stahnke note that the notion of 'coercion' should be the guiding principle in defining 'improper' proselytism in relation to more benign forms of religious persuasion. Taylor suggests that the debate should be formatted around the notion of 'coercion that impairs religious choice', while Stahnke (2001) develops a chart of factual circumstances to deem whether an act of proselytism could be deemed 'proper' or not according to the "coercive nature of certain relationship": 1. Attributes of the source, 2. Attributes of the target, 3. Where the action alleged to be

improper proselytism takes place, and 4. The nature of the action. The general outlook of this chart follows how the source may impair an undue authority of the target, or whether the target has some form of innate vulnerability that would more easily impair his or hers religious freedom. Stahnke also discusses in which spheres proselytism should be allowed or not, and how the act of exchange itself could carry a potential for coercion. Perhaps a more practical issue, but nonetheless hard to circumvent, is the difficulty of deciding and monitoring 'improper' conversions. In one way a legalistic approach to proselytism would make court judges responsible for deciding between 'genuine' and 'improper' conversions. And in contrast to violence against religious groups, 'improper' conversions are harder to document, not only because every act of conversion would need to be contextualised, but also due to the fact that motivations and intentions are not externally displayed.

The readings of the international human rights instruments have shown that it is possible to draft anti-conversion legislation within the ambit of Article 18 of the ICCPR, yet that such legal proposals need to balance different rights in the process. Stahnke (2001) notes that the general silence of international human rights instruments on issues of proselytism have caused divergent practices around proselytism around the world. The aporias of proselytism in international law make it possible for religious nationalists to mobilise for anti-conversion laws under the aegis of protecting religious freedom, and it is possible to interpret Article 18 both in favour and disfavour for restricting proselytism. However, while the principles of freedom of religion entailed in Article 18 of the ICCPR, in theory, are open for a reinterpretation that may prohibit or restrict proselytism, both the Human Rights Committee and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief have endorsed the view that proselytism should be recognised as a manifestation of belief. In issues regarding anti-conversion legislation the Special Rapporteur has been far more critical of attempts of restricting missionary work than the coercive effects of (improper) proselytism (Taylor 2005)(see also Jahangir 2009 and 2005). The dark side of anti-conversion legislation is that these are often drafted for discriminatory purposes, rather than as an attempt to delineate the line between 'proper' and 'improper' proselytism, and because of this they formulate vague regulations that are

susceptible for abuse by the majority religious groups. Before I discuss the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill* by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita in Sri Lanka, I would like to draw some lines from similar debates in India, where the opposition against proselytism takes a more ideological form as Hindu-nationalists often proclaim that the very act of proselytism is a foreign malpractice that contravenes Indian religiosity. Buddhism is itself a proselytising tradition and thus any legal draft would need to focus more on the notion of impropriety than proselytism per se. By contributing to a nuanced articulation of propriety and impropriety when it comes to proselytism the Sri Lankan case would not only make sound delineations for use nationally within Sri Lanka, but their legislative drafts may also provide a new constitutive frame for how to delineate disputes over (improper) proselytism internationally. What is at stake here is whether the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka would bring fresh insights into the international human rights instruments by providing clarity of delineations, or if the bill would be just another discriminatory measure against religious minorities forwarded by the parochial attitudes of religious nationalists.

Anti-conversion legislation in India

I will begin my analysis of the anti-conversion legislation(s) in Sri Lanka by introducing the debate on anti-conversion legislation in India. This is not only due to the fact that India has a long history of different anti-conversion legislations, but also because of the eruption of a demand of anti-conversion legislature in Sri Lanka can be equated with the wave of anti-conversion laws and proposals that were forwarded in different states in India between 2002–2009. Thus, I would argue that there is a direct link between the bill proposals in India and in Sri Lanka, yet that their legal and political negotiations have nevertheless followed different trajectories in their respective national contexts.

The first legislation against conversion can be traced back to the Raigarh Conversion Act (RCA) from 1936, where Raigarh was a princely state under British colonial administration. Osuri notes:

> The RCA, the first of the princely state acts, justifies its enactment through reference to the disturbance of public order: "Whereas is has been brought to the notice of this Durbar that some recent conversions have fanned communal fires to such an undesirable extent that communal friction might break out any time, and it is desirable to check unauthorized conversions" (RCA 1936: 1)(as quoted in Osuri 2013: 30)

Osuri argues that the princely states were keen to maintain status quo, and therefore opposed and restricted activities that were seen as disruptive, which included both conversions and the freedom movement led by Gandhi. More than a preservation of religious identity and Hindu nationalism, the colonial anti-conversion laws can be read as accommodating the interests of landlords and the upper-caste to maintain their hegemonic relations of power in relation to dalits and tribals. The Raigarh State Conversion Act gave the task of registration and managing conversions to a special officer, and it prohibited outright conversions for minors and those of an unsound mind (Osuri 2013). While the Raigarh[86] State Conversion Act stood as the most prominent example of laws limiting conversions in the princely states, similar legislations were enacted in Kota, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Patna, Surguja, Udaipur and Kalahandi (Jenkins 2008). After independence, Article 25[87] of the Indian Constitution stated that "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." This formulation did not come without dispute, and the word 'propagate' was one of the most contested in the whole Indian constitution. In the first proposal from the Advisory Committee to the

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[86] Raigarh became a district of Madhya Pradesh after independence, and then again part of the new state Chattisgarh in 2000, and this area is one where the contestation of conversions has been most intense, and even led to a pivotal Supreme Court case (Jenkins 2008).
[87] Article 25 of the Constitution of of India reads: "*Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.*—(1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion. (2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law—(*a*) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;(*b*) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. *Explanation I.*—The wearing and carrying of *kirpans* shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion. *Explanation II.*—In sub-clause (*b*) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly."

Constituent Assembly 23 April 1947 a clause regarding conversion was included: "Conversion from one religion to another brought about by coercion or undue influence shall not be recognized by law" (as quoted in Kim 2003: 46). However, to the favour of Christians the word 'propagate' was included and the formulation on conversion deleted altogether, despite its disputed nature.[88] In many ways, the constitutional drafting process in India highlighted the differences in how Christians and Hindus perceived the phenomena of conversions.[89]

The tensions between Hindus and Christians on the matter of proselytism and conversion still prevailed, and in 1954 the state of Madhya Pradesh commissioned a report, commonly known as the Nyogi-report[90] after its chairman, after complaints of fraud and inducement in relation to Christian conversions. It was an ominous report, based on extensive documentation both from interviews and written testimonies, and ran more than 1,000 pages (Bauman 2008). Despite its impressive list of documentation, commentators agree that the composition of the commission was clearly biased against Christian proselytism (Osuri 2013, Bauman 2008, Kim 2003). However, the report has attained a special position among Hindu nationalists as it provides evidence for undue proselytism among Christians.[91] Its vocabulary of recommendations to restrict proselytism along the terms of 'force, fraud and inducement' has "paved the way for legal restrictions" (Jenkins 2008: 114) and been replicated in many subsequent legal attempts of restricting 'improper' proselytism (Bauman 2008). The first anti-conversion laws that were passed in India took place in Orissa and in Madhya Pradesh in 1967 (the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act) and 1968 (the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam) respectively, both of

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[88] However, Kim (2003: 54) notes that: "It has been argued that the Hindus accepted the word 'propagate' in a compromise with the Christians that involved that the latter giving up their reserved seats in the legislature."
[89] Apart from the standard image that opposition towards conversion is just a key concept among Hindu nationalists, Claerhout (2014) discusses Mohandas Gandhi's perception of proselytisation in general, as well as his famous statement: "if I had the power to legislate, I should certainly stop all proselytising" (as quoted in Claerhout 2014: 54).
[90] Its official title was: *Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee* (1956).
[91] As such, the report was reprinted in 1998, and is still occasionally referred to by Hindu nationalists, more than 50 years after its inception, as evidence for Christian misconduct and legitimate claims to enact anti-conversion legislation (Bauman 2008).

which are still active. The main section is nearly identical in the two bills, except for the wording inducement vs. allurement:

> (3) Prohibition of forcible conversion: No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement[92]/allurement[93] or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

These laws also made it mandatory to report any conversion to the district magistrate for validation, and the risks of conviction entailed either imprisonment or a fine. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act and the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam were quickly challenged by Christian legal action,[94] and while receiving different treatment in the state courts, the Supreme Court of India gave its final verdict on the issue 17th of January 1977 and upheld the Madhya Pradesh High Court in validating the Act regarding Article 25 in the Indian Constitution. In this case the verdict, also known as *Rev. Stainislaus* v. *Madhya Pradesh*, meant that the Supreme Court authenticated the anti-conversion legislation forwarded in the states of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. This verdict was based upon two arguments. First, while the notion of 'propagate' indeed validated a right to the exposition of the tenets, this right did not entail a right to 'convert', as this would have impinged upon other persons'

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[92] The word used in the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (1967) reads 'inducement'. Section 2 reads: 2. Definitions: In this Act unless the context otherwise requires: (a) 'conversion' means renouncing one religion and adopting another; (b) 'force' shall include a show of force or threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunications; (c) 'fraud' shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance; (d) 'inducement' shall include the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise; (e) 'minor' means a person under eighteen years of age.

[93] The word used in the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam (1968) reads 'allurement'. Section 2 reads: 2. Definitions: In this Act unless the context otherwise requires: (a) 'allurement' means offer of any temptation on the form of – (i) any gift or gratification either in cash or in kind; (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise; (b) 'conversion' means renouncing one religion and adopting another; (c) 'force' shall include a show of force or threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication; (d) 'fraud' shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance; (e) 'minor' means a person under eighteen year of age.

[94] The High Court of Orissa in *Yulitha Hyde* v. *State of Orissa* accepted the validity of 'force' and 'fraud', but deemed the notion of 'inducement' unconstitutional as its vagueness could violate Article 25 in the Indian Constitution. In a similar challenge in Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh the Madhya Pradesh High Court validated the constitutionality of all definitions of 'force', 'fraud' and 'allurement' to be in accordance with the Indian Constitution.

'freedom of conscience.'[95] Second, the Supreme Court hypothetically argued that forcible conversions need to be restrained due to the probability of a breach of public order.[96] Thus, the Indian Supreme Court validated two of the arguments possible in relation to the issue of proselytism, and freedom of religion more generally in Article 18 of the ICCPR, namely for the protection of the rights of others and the concern for public order. Osuri argues that such arguments of 'maintaining public order' indicate that the (supposedly secular) Indian State favours Hindutva activists:

> Public order is abstracted to refer to the government as a neutral adjudicator in communal strife, and the converts and converters bear the brunt of the restriction of the right to propagate subject to public order rather than Hindutva activists who historically and at present have been the agents of communal strife where it concerns the matter of conversion. (Osuri 2013: 33)

Osuri (2013) challenges the asserted "neutrality of the secular state" with how the allusion to public order in disputes of forcible conversions actually place the restrictions upon 'propagating' Christians, which are protected by Article 25 in the Constitution, rather than the various Hindutva activists that she sees as mainly behind the communal strife that disrupts public order. Hence, she further argues that such dynamics of anti-conversion legislation underpins "the complicities that characterise the relationship between liberal democratic institutions and right-wing religious nationalisms" (Osuri 2013: 3). As such, it can be argued that anti-conversion legislation is tightly interwoven with religious nationalism that seeks to monitor and control the population, religious minorities in particular.

The next significant avalanche of anti-conversion legislations in India started in 2002 and within a decade a total of 8 Indian states had either a proposal for, or had already passed, anti-conversion legislature (Huff 2009). These states were, in addition

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[95] "[W]hat the Article grants is not the right to convert another person to one's own religion, but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets…. There is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion… that would impinge on the 'freedom of conscience' guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike (AIR, Supreme Court, 1977: 908-912)"(as quoted in Kim 2003: 79)

[96] "[I]f forcible conversion had not been prohibited, that would have created public disorder in the States"; and, "[I]f an attempt is made to raise communal passions, e.g.[,] on the ground that some has been 'forcibly' converted to another religion, it would, in all probability, give rise to an apprehension of a breach of the public order, affecting the community at large (Stainislaus, A.I.R. 1977 S.C. 908)" (as quoted in Jenkins 2008: 116).

to the historically enacted Acts in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh,[97] Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Jenkins observes that the "renewed attention to conversion in India the last decade coincided with the political ascendancy of Hindu nationalism, including the BJP" (Jenkins 2008: 120). It started with the passage from the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance[98] in October 2002, after a series of mass conversion incidents in Tamil Nadu the years before (Arun n.d.: 13-14). Actually, the legal mechanism was an ordinance, and not a regular law, as it was passed in urgency by the state governor as the State Legislative Assembly was not in session (Arun n.d.: 14). The ordinance was based upon the laws of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, but also included another section that provided higher penalty if conversions targeted vulnerable groups, such as minors, women, Scheduled Castes or Tribes. The Tamil Nadu ordinance was later repealed in 2004, when the BJP had lost their favour in Tamil Nadu. In addition to the ordinance, the groups supporting the legislation organised a large-scale conference in Chennai, which was attended by "a large number of cadres and senior leaders from the State's Sangh Parivar outfits, including the VHP, the RSS and the Hindu Munnai and the BJP" (Arun n.d.: 17). An additional attendee was Mr. Maheshwaran, the minister of Hindu Affairs in Sri Lanka, who brought the formulations of the Tamil Nadu *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* Ordinance back to Sri Lanka, and which subsequently started the first debates on the articulation of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka.

Gujarat *Freedom of Religion Bill* of 2003 followed the Tamil Nadu legislation, and added that the notice to the district magistrate had to be given in advance. In

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[97]Arunachal Pradesh passed a law formulated on the basis of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam in 1978, after the Stainislaus v. Madhya Pradesh verdict in the Supreme Court in 1977.

[98] The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act (2002) follows the definitions of 'force, fraud and allurement' articulated in the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam (1968). In addition, it brings extra sanctions special groups: "Provided that whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 I respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to Scheduled Caste of Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to four years and also be liable to fine which may extend to one lakh rupees". Another novel aspect was that every conversion should be recognized by the District Magistrate: "5. **Intimation to be given to District Magistrate with respect to conversion**.— (1) Whoever converts any person from one religion to another either by performing any ceremony by himself for such conversion as a religious priest or by taking part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall, within such period as may be prescribed, send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the district in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion in such form as may be prescribed".

Rajasthan an anti-conversion legislation was also proposed in 2006 and passed the state legislature, but it was never signed by the then Governor Pratibha Patil, and thus not put into effect (Jenkins 2008). The same happened in Chhattisgarh in 2006, were a similar legislation did not come into the effect due to the lack of signatory. This legislation included another amendment which acknowledged the right of 'reconversion' (*shuddhi*) back to the Hindu fold (Huff 2009). In Uttarakhand anti-conversion legislation was proposed in 2007, and the majority of all these proposed legislations have been forwarded by the BJP and have commonly been referred to as a Hindu nationalist phenomena, yet in Himachal Pradesh the Freedom of Religion Act was proposed and signed in 2006/2007, under the aegis of the Congress Party (Huff 2009). Jenkins observes that these anti-conversion laws are maybe changing in their practical orientation:

> Notably, these laws seem to only rarely result in arrests, perhaps due to the difficulties in providing something as intangible as a forced conversion. An older law in Arunachal Pradesh (1978) has never been implemented, nor has the Tamil Nadu law resulted in any arrests. Yet arrests have been made in several states with the newer laws, so there may be a shift from symbolic enactment toward actual implementation. (Jenkins 2008: 123-124)

Jenkins (2008) argues that the sudden rush of such anti-conversion laws of late should be attested to the political calculation of elections, as the enactment of laws which target unpopular practices among religious minorities "tap into social uneasiness about cultural globalization in an era of neoliberal economic policies" and this is an easy way of creating cohesion among potential voters. Fernandes claims that the Hindu nationalists are not alone in territorialising religious conversion into fixed modes of identity: "This convergence between secular and religious nationalist conceptions of religion points to the ways in which the democratic state in India relies on the preservation of fixed, distinct religious borders" (Fernandes 2010: 131). Further, the politics of religious conversion is disruptive of such fixed boundaries, and unsettles the given territorialisation of religion. Osuri, by "locating conversion within religio-cultural, political and juridical struggles for sovereignty (Osuri 2013: 9), expands the notion of how "Hindu nationalist sovereign violence feeds upon

secular nation-state sovereignty, pushing at its limits and exclusions" (Osuri 2013: 36). Hence, conversion is exempted from the principles of religious freedom in the Indian constitution due to the protective measures of public order, as "an exceptional event or site which necessitates sovereign decision either within the terms of the Constitution of through anti-conversion laws" (Osuri 2013: 37). In this way converts become "traitors and betrayers of the sanctity of the Hindu nation" (Osuri 2013: 37), which can act as exceptions constituting the Hindu normality, or as subjects in need of surveillance and regulation through anti-conversion legislation. According to the arguments of Fernandes and Osuri the primary motivation behind anti-conversion legislation is not to find a balance between the rights of the source, the target and the state, and thus articulating principles for the protection of the individual target's rights in the encounter with aggressive proselytism, but rather use the mechanisms of anti-conversion legislation as an arbiter of religious identity where the Hindu identity will have supremacy within the Indian nation-state.

The anti-conversion bills of Sri Lanka: Constitutional background

In Sri Lanka two different bills were actually submitted to parliament in an attempt to regulate the practice of 'unethical conversions'; firstly the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversions of Religion* bill was submitted as a private members bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita the 28th of May 2004, and the other bill, the *Freedom of Religion Act* was submitted in February 2005 by minister of Buddha Sasana Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, but it never came up for the 1st reading in the Sri Lankan Parliament. This section probes into how these legal proposals relate to international human rights instruments, but also into the different political processes in which the proposals were embedded. The Sri Lankan Constitution[99] includes a statement that it

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[99]**Article 9**. 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). **Article 10**. Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion of belief of his choice. **Article 14(1)(e)**. Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

shall give 'to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana'. As I noted in my discussion of Article 9 in the previous chapter, Schalk argues that "The constitution stands for a hierarchized integrating, but subordinating, pluralism of religions, but there is a tendency of monopolisation of Buddhism" (Schalk 2001: 57-58). Schonthal, on the other hand, argues that this not only constitutes a hierarchy of religions in the constitution, but irreconcilable positions in negotiation between the special status of Buddhism and the equal protection of other religions (Schonthal 2014b). This provision in the constitution alters some of the dynamics which are not present in the Indian constitution, namely that Buddhism enjoys constitutional priority. Moreover, in contrast to the constitution of India, the Sri Lankan constitution does not entail the right to 'propagate', but rather alludes the right to 'manifest' religion, as guaranteed in Article 18 of the ICCPR, which Sri Lanka signed in 1980. Hence, while the idea of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka is inherited from the debates in India, and bear family resemblances to them, the situation in Sri Lanka consists of different legal frames that set the conditions for how anti-conversion legislation may appear. I will now look into the political and legal processes around the *Freedom of Religion Act* and the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion*, starting with the *Freedom of Religion Act*, as this was the first process that was initiated in Sri Lanka.

Drafting anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka: *The freedom of religion act*

Roshini Wickremesinhe, legal advisor of NCEASL, observes that the first draft of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka was made by Minister of Hindu Cultural Affairs, T. Maheshwaran. As we know, Maheshwaran attended a conference on how their anti-conversion ordinance was modelled in Tamil Nadu, late in 2002:

> The initial draft bill (modelled almost exactly on the now repealed anti-conversion bill of Tamil Nadu state) was unveiled in July 2003 by Minister of Hindu Cultural Affairs Mr Maheswaran. Although a cabinet minister, Mr Maheshwaran was a minority ethnic Tamil and a Hindu who wielded little political clout both within and without the House. (Wickremesinhe 2009: 36)

While T. Maheshwaran brought the initial draft bill to Sri Lanka for discussion, the idea of proposing an anti-conversion bill of their own took hold in Sri Lanka. W.J.M. Lokubandara, Minister of Buddha Sasana and Minister of Justice, Law Reform and National Integration, made public statements on the issue of an anti-conversion bill, and a Hindu-Buddhist committee, with the backing of several religious interest organisations,[100] emerged intent on drawing up a draft bill for the Sri Lankan context. The Hindu-Buddhist Committee sent a letter dated 17th of September 2003 to both W.J.M Lokubandara and to T. Maheshwaran with a draft bill attached, named *Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion*. The letter was signed by Kandiah Neelakandan (convenor) and Jayantha Wickramasinghe (convenor) of the Hindu-Buddhist Committee, yet the drawing and process of this draft bill had included several others in different roles, among them Hema Goonatilake (editor of *The Buddhist Times*), Anula Wijesundere (former member of the Presidential Commission of the Buddha Sasana), Sivanandini Duraiswamy (President of the Hindu Council of Sri Lanka) and Manohara de Silva (lawyer). This committee held many workshops in the autumn 2003 to articulate a draft bill on anti-conversion regulation, and they went public in a conference with their draft proposal in February 2004, where Manohara de Silva stated: "We don't ask that the bill that is in drafting stage at the Ministry of the Buddha Sasana to be replaced by our draft bill. We only want the contents of our bill be seriously considered when drafting the ministry bill" (Daily Mirror, 14th of February, 2004). The request of the Hindu-Buddhist committee was granted, and the bill drafted by the government, the *Freedom of Religion Act*, was modelled upon the draft proposal suggested by the committee with a few minor revisions.

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[100] The letter affirms backing of the following organisations: All Ceylon Hindu Congress (ACHC), All Ceylon Young Men's Hindu Association, Hindu Council of Sri Lanka, Hindu Mantiam, Hindu Women's Society, Vivekananda Society, All Ceylon Buddhist Congress – Colombo, All Ceylon Women's Congress, Bauddha Sanrakshana Sabawa – Colombo, Bauddha Sanrakshana – Kandy, Bodu Pubuduwa Foundation – Panadura, Buddhist Theosophical Society, *TheBuddhist Times*, Center for Buddhist Action, Center for Buddhism (International), Dhammacharinee, Dharmavijaya Foundation, Kalana Mithuru Sevana, Sakyadhita, Sri Lanka Federation of Alumni Association of Buddhist Schools, SUCCESS – Colombo, Thawalama Foundation, Young Men's Buddhist Association – Colombo.

Freedom of religion act

2. (1) No person shall unethically convert or attempt to unethically convert, any other person espousing one religion, or holding or belonging to one religious belief, religious persuasion or faith, to another religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith which such person does not hold or belong to. No person shall abet any such unethical conversion.

3. No person, who being in the fiduciary capacity or in a relationship of trust, shall compel or coerce any person espousing one religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith to participate in praying or to attend religious meeting of a religion to which such person does not belong or subject such person to punishment or disadvantage or deny such person a right or privilege which such person would have otherwise enjoyed, consequent such person refusing to accede to such compulsion or coercion, as the case may be.

4. (1) No person shall accost any other person with a view to converting or attempting to convert such other person espousing one religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith, to another religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith which such person does not hold or belong to. No person shall abet any person who is accosting or attempting to accost any other person.

7 (2) Where any of the offences specified above are committed in a school or an institution of higher education or place of learning or training, or in a place under the control of the armed forces or the police force, or in a refugee camp or transit centre, a hostel, a hospital, a nursing home, a health centre, a home for children, elders, the disabled or a home for the sick, or in a prison or detention camp, such fact shall constitute an aggravating circumstance which shall be taken into consideration in imposing punishment.

10. In this Act, unless otherwise requires-
"accost" shall include the confronting of a person in a public place or the intrusion into the privacy of a person either at home or at the place of work;
"allurement" shall include the offer of any gift or gratification either in cash or kind, or the grant of any benefit either pecuniary or otherwise;
"coerce" shall include any constraints or undue influence;
"fraudulent" shall include any form of fraudulent contrivance including wilful misrepresentation
"force" shall include a show of force including threat, harm or injury of any kind or a threat of divine displeasure or condemnation of any religion, religious faith or of social excommunication
"minor" means a person under eighteen years of age
"person in a fiduciary capacity" shall include –
      (a) An employer; or
      (b) A person holding a position of trust or confidence over another person; or
      (c) An officer of the armed forces or the police force; or
      (d) A Principal, tutor or a teacher of a school or of a higher educational institution of of a training institute; or

(e) A person in authority in a prison or detention camp or a refugee camp; or

(f) A person in charge of a hostel, a hospital, nursing home, Health Centre, Children's Home, Elders' Home, Home for the Disabled or a Home for the sick or other similar place

"Unethically convert" with its grammatical variations and cognate expressions means-

(a) To directly or indirectly, make, persuade or influence a person to renounce his religion, religious belief, religious persuain of faith and to adopt another religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith which such person does not hold or belong to; or

(b) To intrude on the religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith of such person with the aim of undermining the religion, religious belief, religious persuasion or faith which such person does not hold or belong to,

Either by use of any kind of allurement or promise of allurement, inducement or promise of an inducement, or of moral support or promise of moral support, or of material assistance or promise of material assistance, or by fraudulent means or by taking advantage of such persons inexperience, trust, need, low intellect, naivety or state of distress.

The *Freedom of Religion Act* was submitted for approval in Parliament in February 2005 by the then Minister of Buddha Sasana, Ratnasiri Wickramanayake. However, it was never presented in parliament, and thus it never received a 1st hearing. Despite the fact that this bill never received any serious political consideration in Parliament, both the drafting process and the formulations entailed in the proposal are invaluable for understanding the context of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. While the JHU bill that was submitted already in May 2004 was fronted by Buddhist nationalists, the work of the Hindu-Buddhist committee was a conjoint effort drawing together various religious organisations across denominational lines. *The Buddhist Times* allotted a whole number in September 2003 to the subject "Buddhism and Hinduism under Assault", and carried forth the suggestion that Hindus and Buddhists should cooperate to introduce legislation against unethical conversions.[101] Thus, the arguments proposed by Osuri (2013) and Jenkins (2009) that anti-conversion legislations only are political instruments wielded by religious nationalists to claim religious sovereignty within a national context or gain electoral momentum simply

[101] Hema Goonatilake, the editor of *The Buddhist Times*, was also a prominent member of the Hindu-Buddhist committee.

cannot be argued with the draft proposal by the Hindu-Buddhist committee. In a text explaining the inspirations and rationale behind the Hindu-Buddhist committee proposal, which subsequently led to the *Freedom of Religion Act*, Manohara de Silva explains:

> As it has always been, you can always attempt to convert people by inviting them for religious meetings in your respective places of worship, broadcasting your belief over the electronic media, publishing books, writing articles to newspapers or even having your own newspaper, but you cannot use force fraud allurement or other unethical means to convert people to your religion. Such conduct would necessarily infringe the freedom of thought conscience religion of others. (Manohara de Silva n.d.: 2)

Perhaps the most novel formulation of the bill is how the regulation of proselytism is not only restrained to conduct, but also at which particular locations where proselytism is accepted in that it is not allowed to 'accost' or confront a person either in public, nor disrupt their privacy either at home or at work. Thus, proselytism is restricted to their 'respective places of worship'. In an interview with Manohara de Silva, a prominent Buddhist lawyer involved in the process, he elaborated upon the subject:

> To put it simply: The church wants to have freedom of expression, and they can invite people to the church. Do a notice in the paper to announce conversion programs or Bible reading. They can use websites or publish books. But whether someone can approach me uninvited and attempt to convert me? This could infringe upon my freedom of thought. If he approaches me at home? This should not be allowed. (Interview, 17th of December, 2011)

In the triangle of the interests of the source, the target and the state, we see that this conceptualisation of proselytism is one that places the target in the primary position. The law does not prohibit conversion, but it entails rigid schemata for where and when proselytism can be conducted. The external pressure for conversion is reduced to a minimum, and it is the target that should herself invoke an eventual change of religion: "The main thing is that the initiation to conversion should come from the recipient" (Interview, 17th of December, 2011). In another text, Manohara de Silva (n.d.) alludes to a variety of examples and cases to portray the rationale behind the

Hindu-Buddhist committee's draft proposal. Here, he argues both how the legal proposal (Freedom of Religion Act) is in accordance with the formulations of Article 18 of the ICCPR, inspired by the anti-conversion legislature in India (Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, as well as the *Stainislaus v. Madhya Pradesh* case), as well as the legislation in Greece prohibiting proselytism[102] and the two cases against Greece (*Kokkinakis v. Greece* and *Larissis and others v. Greece*) and the respective European Human Rights Commission convictions on these cases. Another aspect that is developed in the *Freedom of Religion Act* is conversion condoned by persons of a 'fiduciary capacity', which is where relationships of trust can be seen to be operative (see *Freedom of Religion Act* (10)).

> Some countries ban Christian literature and things like that. We have been careful not to restrict that liberty. People can bring any books to the country – unlike some Islamic countries. There is no restrictions on this. Or meetings for the public. What is wrong is to force oneself into schools, hospitals, prisons, etc., where there is a 'captive audience' (Interview, 17th of December, 2011)

Manohara de Silva (n.d.) notes how this provision of 'fiduciary capacity' is articulated on the basis of Larissis v. Greece and the subsequent treatment of the case by the European Human Rights Commission. We see here that some of the formulations of the *Freedom of Religion Act* closely resemble those of the Greek law prohibiting proselytism.

While the bill proposal by the Hindu-Buddhist committee cannot be directly seen as a political instrument wielded by religious nationalists in search for hegemonic positions, state patronage or electoral gains, it nevertheless received widespread opposition from different, especially Christian, organisations. While not

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[102] Manohara de Silva quotes Section 4 of law No. 1363/1938 as amended by law no 1672/139 in in Greek law which prohibits proselytism in the following manner: 1. Any person engaging in proselytism shall be imprisoned and be fined between 1000 and 50000 drachmas; he shall moreover be subject to police supervision for a period between six months and a year to be fixed by the court when convicting the offender. 2. By 'proselytism' is meant, in particular, any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion within the aim of undermining those beliefs either by kind of inducement or promise of an inducement or moral support or material assistance or by fraudulent means or by taking advantage of his experience, trust, need, low intellect or naivety. 3. The commission of such offence in a school or other educational establishment or a philanthropic institution shall constitute a particularly aggravating circumstance (as quoted in Manohara de Silva n.d.: 11).

discussed as thoroughly as the 'JHU-bill,' most likely due to its inferior political position, the proposal has been labelled by some Christian commentators as the "more draconian of these two draft legislations" (Wickremesinhe 2009: 36). In a petition made by Rt. Rev. Frank Marcus Fernando, on behalf of the authority of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, many aspects of the *Freedom of Religion Act* were challenged, in particular the vagueness of definitions and the confinement of proselytism to special locations. The petition argued that if the bill was to be enacted into law "it would result in the effective persecution of religious minorities with statutory sanction, which is a fundamentalist and majoritarian objective" (Fernando 2005: 3). As the Catholic Church was a potential ally in the formulation of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka, their utter refusal of the bill attests to the fact that these bills were seen as regulating mechanisms in the hands of the majoritarian religion. The *Freedom of Religion Act*, however, never crossed the political threshold, and Wickremesinhe notes: "It was shelved due to internal political upheavals as well as pressure from human rights groups and the international community" (Wickremesinhe 2009: 37). While the *Freedom of Religion Act*, after years of drafting by various interest formations, was shelved, the other similar legislation *The Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill* proposed by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita from the JHU received a far more comprehensive reception in the political system.

Anti-conversion legislation: *The Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion bill*

The interesting situation that came about in Sri Lanka was that not only one, but two proposals of an anti-conversion legislation were drafted. Unlike the Hindu-Buddhist committee drafted the *Freedom of Religion Act*, consisting of both Hindu and Buddhist, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion bill* proposed as a private member's bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita of Jathika Hela Urumaya the 28th of May 2004 received a far more rudimentary drafting process before it was brought before the parliament. However, many of the same persons working on the *Freedom*

of Religion Act within the Hindu-Buddhist committee ended up defending the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill* in the Supreme Court even though they felt that this bill usurped the work they had done through the Hindu-Buddhist committee. In addition, while the *Freedom of Religion Act* was submitted by the leader of the Buddha Sasana Ratnasiri Wickramanayake in June 2005, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was submitted as a private member's bill by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita of Jathika Hela Urumaya almost immediately after entry into parliament. The *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill had not secured its backing in parliament before its submission, and its status as a private member's bill could cause an arbitrary reception in parliament. The enactment process of a private member's bill has often fewer representatives in parliament than normal legal proceedings. This was a great concern for Christian pressure groups, as they were insecure about being able to mount enough opposition among those who would actually attend the session of private member's bills. While the *Freedom of Religion Act* was deemed the most "draconian" of the two proposals, when the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was submitted in May 2004 a major concern arose, not only among several religious bodies, but also other polity oriented organisations in Sri Lanka. In total the bill was challenged by 21 petitions (and 21 intervenient petitions) before the Supreme Court. The most important parts of the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill read:

The Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion

2. (1) No person shall, either directly or indirectly, convert or attempt to convert any person professing one religion to another religion by the use of force, by allurement or by any fraudulent means.

6. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires—
"allurement" means the offer of any temptation for the purpose of converting a person profession one religion to another religion, in the form of —
  (i) Any gift or gratification whether in cash or kind
  (ii) A grant of any material benefit, whether monetary or otherwise
  (iii) The grant of employment or grant of promotion in any employment presently engaged in;

"convert" means to make one person to renounce one religion and profess another religion ;

"force" means a show of force and includes a threat of harm or injury of any threat of religious disgrace or condemnation of any religion or religious faith for the purpose of converting a person from one religion to another religion ;

"Fraudulent" means any wilful misinterpretation or any other fraudulent contrivance used for the purpose of converting a person from one religion to another religion ;

"minor" means a person under eighteen years of age

Schedule

1. Persons classified as samurdi beneficiaries
2. Prison inmates
3. Inmates of rehabilitation centres
4. Inmates of detention centres
5. Physically or mentally disabled persons
6. Employees of an organization
7. Members of the armed forces of police force
8. Students
9. Inmates of hospitals and or places of healing
10. Inmates of refugee camps

In contrast to the *Freedom of Religion Act*, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill does not carry any regulations upon the different locations where proselytism can take place. Nevertheless these bills share many of the same characteristics. Both bills criminalise conversion induced by force, fraud and allurement/inducement, and both hold increased penalties[103] for conversion of 'captive audiences'. The most prevalent critique of the formulations of the anti-conversion bills is the vague and ambiguous language employed, especially in the definition of allurement, which Christian petitioners argue jeopardises Christian core activites, and thus their freedom of religion. One of the petitions argued: "In short, all Christians are required by the teachings of the Bible, to both: (i) inform others of the foregoing biblical divine truths regarding forgiveness and deliverance from sin; and (ii) to provide social services where such services are needed" (Petition 4/2004: 9). Thus, many Christian petitions argued that the bill would deny them a historical right

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[103] While these penalties were not the main issue in the petitions against the bills, the various potential penalties were often highlighted in news items and reports used in Christian lobbyism.

to propagate in Sri Lanka, and that the given bill would deprive them of these rights. Their worry was that the bill should become an instrument of abuse instead of protection as it would infringe upon the rights of religious minorities:

> It is submitted with respect that the totality of the said Bill is such that if enacted into law, it would result in the effective persecution of religious minorities with statutory sanction, which is a fundamentalist and majoritarian objective that is inconsistent with the very spirit of the Constitution, a secular state, norms of a pluralist democracy, and international obligations of Sri Lanka. (Petition 4/ 2004)

Another vein of criticism came against the formulations in the preamble, where the submitted JHU-bill states "Whereas, Buddhism being the foremost religion professed and practiced by the majority people of Sri Lanka…". The petitioners noted that while Buddhism is given the *foremost place* in the constitution (Article 9), it is not defined as the *foremost religion*. Thus, they argue that the phrasing in the preamble contravenes the principles of Article 14(1)(e), that ensures equal rights to every religious adherent. This formulation was not only contested by the petitions from Christian organisations, but also by All Ceylon Hindu Congress on behalf of Kandiah Neelakandan who was simultaneously working with the drafts that led to the *Freedom of Religion Act*. Hence, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill combined both the aims to enact anti-conversion legislation as well as give Buddhism supremacy in Sri Lanka. This stirred an outcry even among the usual supporters of anti-conversion legislation in general. The *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill carried a special state patronage for Buddhism simultaneously with its restrictions and regulations of "unethical" conversions, a complicity that created widespread suspicions of the intentions of the bill.

The Supreme Court, however, decided that the general aim of the bill was constitutionally sound, as the bill "seeks to address it [forcible conversions] by way of legislation" and that "the restrictions sought to be placed by the Bill through 15(7) on Article 14(1)(e) are designed to ensure public order, morality and the purpose of meeting the just requirements of the general welfare of a democratic society" (Supreme Court Verdict 2004). In its verdict the Supreme Court argues how the bill is in accordance both with the Sri Lankan constitution as well as Article 18(2) of the

ICCPR, and they allude especially to the *Kokkinakis vs. Greece* case in the European Court of Human Rights to distinguish between proper and improper proselytism. However, while the general scope of the bill was deemed to be consistent with the constitution, the Supreme Court found that clause 3 and clause 4(b) violated Article 10 of the constitution. Clause 3 and clause 4(b) subjected that any act or ceremony of conversion should be informed in advance to the district secretary, and that this contravened the principles of the constitution. Thus, these provisions either had to be amended in a new draft, or the bill would need a 2/3 majority in parliament to be passed. In addition, while the Supreme Court sided with the intervenient petitioners on behalf of Buddhist interests, they recognised the worries of the Christian community that some of the formulations in the bill were too vague and could have detrimental consequences:

> The contention of some petitioners who oppose the Bill that acts of benevolence and charity in obedience to the gospel command may be construed as acts of enticement, falling within the definition of allurement in the bill making it an offence, merits our consideration. What is improper in this context is the willful engagement of a deceitful exercise to secure a conversion. (Supreme Court 2004)

The recommendations of the Supreme Court were to make the definitions of force, fraud and allurement more succinct and in relation to the primary objective of the bill. While the *Freedom of Religion Act* demanded that it was the actual recipient that should take the initiative to an eventual conversion, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill is less concerned with the different locations of proselytism and instead articulates how the different means of proselytisation should be criminalised to protect the rights of the target. Thus, both proselytisation and conversion is guaranteed under the bill, but it seeks to put restrictions upon on how, and between whom, sound proselytisation can take place. However, many Christian lobby groups do not find the legislation in any way sound, and argue that the bill has an instrumental purpose of oppressing religion, or as one of their texts is titled: "Rights Rhetoric as an Instrument of Religious Oppression in Sri Lanka" (Hresko 2006).

In 2005, a report by UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, took a critical stance towards the anti-conversion proposals circulating in Sri Lanka. The report critisised both their substance and allegedly concordance with international human rights instruments, and discussed whether legislation in the first place would be the appropriate response to the situation. As such, she argues that "the Special Rapporteur is of the opinion that the draft legislation is not an appropriate response to the religious tensions and is not compatible with human rights law" (Jahangir 2005: 22), and further still that "the very principle of these laws as well as their wording could engender widespread persecution of certain religious minorities" (Jahangir 2005: 22). She also notes how earlier attempts of monitoring and addressing the issue of 'unethical' conversion has aggravated the religious tensions, rather than brought ease and reconciliation. Asma Jahangir's visit in 2005 was a powerful intervention, and her concerns were mainly targeted at the widespread violence and discrimination faced by Christian minorities. Jahangir's report "condemns all acts of religious violence and intolerance that have been committed against any religious communities", and while she noted that there had been some instances of aggressive proselytisation, she considered that "the allegations of "unethical" conversions have rarely been precise and largely overestimated" (Jahangir 2005: 21). Hence, the argument made in the preamble of the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill that this legislation is needed to address the present religious tensions in Sri Lanka is put in doubt by the UN Special Rapporteur, and she advises other measures to solve these religious tensions, like inter-religious councils for example. Here the UN Special Rapporteur contravenes the verdict of the Supreme Court, which says that such legislation is needed precisely to protect the public order and ensure religious harmony. There is a breach in how this legislation is to be understood, and while the Supreme Court in Sri Lanka takes the legislation in defence, the international society and the UN Special Rapporteur have been far more critical to the intentions inherent in the bill proposal.

The UN Special Rapporteur also follows the rationale put forth in some of the petitions against the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill which argue that the practical delineation of conversion in itself would lead to difficulties. Some

of the petitions claim that ""Religion" is incapable of precise legal definition", and that the said Bill would inasmuch become "subjective and incapable of legal deciphering" (Petition 4/2004). Jahangir states: "it is very difficult to assess the genuineness of a conversion. While it may be easy to prove that a person has received a gift, it would not be easy to demonstrate that the person has converted because of the gift" (Jahangir 2005: 15). Hence, the alleged gifts of allurement which the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill sought to criminalise entails a double edge that this provision is especially prone for misuse and abuse that would legitimise religious intolerance against certain religious groups and religious minorities. Jahangir concludes: "The wording of the draft laws is also too vague. It allows too great a margin of interpretation, which could be a source of possible abuse and could potentially transform the law into a tool of persecution by those who are genuinely opposed to religious tolerance" (Jahangir 2005: 15). Hence, while it is precisely the practice of what is termed enticing and alluring conduct that religious nationalists find provocative in terms of proselytisation, it is the same terms that pose difficulties for explicating a clear legal formula for anti-conversion legislation that would find international consent, under the aegis of human rights instruments.

The standing committee: Looking for a Catholic compromise

After the Supreme Court verdict the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was sent for further treatment in a 19 member standing committee, who were responsible for calling for evidence for the bill and eventually developing another draft version of the bill. This committee is sometimes referred to as a select committee, or consultative committee. It was appointed by Parliamentary Speaker W.J.M. Lokubandara on the 5th of April, 2005. Several persons whom were affiliated with the process around the anti-conversion legislation were called to testify before the standing committee, yet many of them complained of a long-winded process. However, the standing committee initiated a meeting between Buddhist and Catholic lawyers as an attempt to find a compromise solution for how to draft anti-conversion

legislation acceptable to both parties. One of the Buddhist lawyers involved in the process commented on this work:

> After the 1ˢᵗ reading it went to a consultative committee. They deliberately prolonged the bill in length and called evidence of the bill. Their prime objective was to reach consensus among religious leaders for a bill. I participated in this process. Archbishop Oswald Gomis was also there. In that session we agreed to form a legal committee – by both sides – Buddhists and Christians. It was an attempt to reach consensus on it. We met three times. We were considering the views of the lawyers, and thereafter we modified the draft and presented it to the Christians, mostly Catholic, lawyers for their views. From then on we did not have any response from them. (Interview, 9ᵗʰ of January, 2012)

Many of the Buddhist lawyers that were involved in this process claim that the Buddhist-Catholic lawyers committee more or less agreed upon a finalised outcome, but that the process was suddenly halted by unresponsive Catholic lawyers. My Catholic informants who were involved in the process were less interested in offering any details of the process, commenting on as to why it halted: "We were in the committee. We met for about a year, 10 to 15 times, but we could not agree on a finalised outcome" (Interview, 4ᵗʰ of January, 2012). What is interesting here is how the Catholic Church is suddenly perceived as an essential partner in ensuring anti-conversion legislature in Sri Lanka. Earlier *Jathika Hela Urumaya* and the Buddhist nationalists ignored other actors when ensuring backing for the bill. But after the comments of the Supreme Court along with the international response, cooperation with the Catholic Church was seen as critical to make the bill pass in government. Hence, the process to ensure anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka was a cooperative measure between Buddhists and Hindus (the Hindu-Buddhist Committee) before the death of Ven. Soma Thero and the formation of Jathika Hela Urumaya. When the proposal of JHU failed to gain the sufficient response in Sri Lanka, the Catholic Church was drawn in to find a compromise solution.

Not everyone was pleased by this sudden shift of reconciliatory efforts between the Catholic Church and the Buddhist nationalists. One of my evangelical informants commented upon their own role in the political play around anti-conversion legislation:

> The Standing Committee tried to find a way of compromise that Buddhist and Christian lawyers should meet and see whether there was an opportunity for a compromise bill. (…) But this group left out the Evangelicals, at whom the bill was brought forward against. Evangelicals were excluded. (Interview, 13th of December, 2011)

One of my Catholic informants acknowledged the fact: "There was no representative for the evangelical movement" (Interview, 4th of January, 2012). This Buddhist-Catholic lawyers committee consisted of Buddhist lawyers at one side, and Catholic and Protestant lawyers at the other. The evangelicals, whom were at the heart of the conflict, were left out of this process. This reveals the very tense relations between Catholics and evangelicals, and how the Catholic Church was one of the most important stakeholders in the process of anti-conversion legislature in Sri Lanka. If the Catholics had taken the side of the Buddhists, and supported legislative efforts against unethical conversion, arguments that this bill was solely an oppressive instrument of Buddhist nationalists would have been harder to cast. While the Catholic Church has been one of the most ardent critics of unethical conversions in Sri Lanka, they have never committed themselves to a support of an anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka. One central Catholic lawyer explained:

> The Cardinal Ranjith Statement? It has always been the view of the Catholic Church that we are worried about the Pentecostal churches, but we are also worried about the bill. My view: Most of the converts to evangelical churches come from Catholic people. That was out view earlier as well, by the former Cardinal. As such, we share the concern with the Buddhists, but not the legislative approach. (Interview, 4th of January, 2012)

In the end, we can wonder if it was the failure of allies that made the anti-conversion bill impassable in Sri Lanka. In the beginning, Buddhist nationalists were unable to maintain support from the Hindu groups for a bill, and in the end they were unable to find a compromise solution with the Catholic lawyers upon a mutual agreement of a bill. What is imperative here is how the Buddhist nationalists were unable to grasp that they were not politically able to push forth the legislation alone, and when they did, it was too late to garner support for their proposal. Thus, a sensitivity to the

shifting circumstances of the political, operating in a continuum of change, is uncovered, and adds importance to the political anticipation which is vital to sense and act upon what can be seen as a string of opportunities on which one can successfully intervene in a given situation. Several of my informants among Buddhist nationalists were critical to how they felt that Jathika Hela Urumaya had rushed the proposed legislation, without securing political backing for the bill. This did not only accentuate the symbolic potency of the bill, but also co-opted other drafting processes and sidelined other important actors. The very timing of when and how the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was proposed gives evidence to how Jathika Hela Urumaya failed in making a correct judgement of the political situation. As we now shall see, timing and judgement were also crucial factors in how the bill was ended; yet not in a spectacular moment of judgement, but by considering how such spectacular moments were inverted in a way that no-one really could answer how it had lapsed. This draws attention to the importance of timing in political action:

> A related aspect of politics is the importance of timing in political action. Successful action, particularly large-scale action of a drastic kind, often depends on making a delicate judgment about what is realistically possible at what point in time, on identifying the καιρός – the moment that must be seized now because it will never recur – seeing when time is ripe for action and grasping opportunities that will not present themselves again. An ability to pick the crucial moment when action can be successful is an important constituent of one of the skills a good politician exhibits. (Geuss 2008: 31-32)

Geuss articulates here that there is salience both in the realism of the propositions at hand, but also identifying the opportune moments for putting such propositions through the political system. That which is possible to legitimate determines the boundaries of the politically feasible. Hence, in a political world where various commodities are of limited supply, Geuss argues that skill in timing is "particularly important precisely if I thought of the political world as providing opportunities that would not present themselves again" (Geuss 2008: 33). Hence, when Jathika Hela Urumaya decided to push forth anti-conversion legislation alone, this behaviour was a significant signal to the other religious groups that the bill was not intended for a

protection of religious pluralism, but that it was accentuating a form of Buddhist supremacy. Even though there were attempts of reconciliation and compromise with the Catholic Church, the Catholic lawyers now treated the proposition with utmost reluctance and suspicion. Whether Jathika Hela Urumaya failed to identify the lack of windows of opportunities in the matter of anti-conversion legislature, or if they were confident that legislation could be passed without further support, is hard to tell. The following extract from a legal note drafted in late 2008/ early 2009 attests to how Christian interests viewed the rejuvenation of anti-conversion legislature in 2009 with increasing suspicion:

On 28th November, the Bill [containing the amendments prepared by the Legal Draftsman] was examined by **Standing Committee A** of Parliament. At this meeting, further amendments were effected by the committee. The committee was concerned only with the technical wording of the Bill, to bring it into line with the Supreme Court's determination. The merits of the bill were not examined. The Bill, as finally amended by the Committee, was sent to Parliament.

[*This meeting of the Committee was dominated by the members of the Jathika Hela Urumaya. The two Christian members of the United National Party who were present at this Committee meeting indicated their opposition to the Bill on the merits, but this was not recorded in the minutes of the Committee. There were no Christian members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party present at this Committee meeting.*]

(…) The Bill is **strongly sponsored** by the Jathika Hela Urumaya. It is possible that the Weerwansa faction of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna would **support** this Bill. This being a Private members Bill on a religious issue, it is likely that the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party will allow a **free vote** to their members. The Christian members of the United National Party have indicated that they will **oppose** the Bill. The Christian members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party have been **silent** so far. The minority parties too have been **silent**. (Anon., n.d., "NOTE on "Prohibition Of Forcible Conversion Of Religion" Bill")

It is clear from this excerpt that the Christian communities in Sri Lanka were in doubt that the anti-conversion bill would lapse in parliament, especially when it was prone for a 2nd reading in spring 2009. Not only were they insecure about the reach and influence of the Buddhist nationalists, but also of their own political alliances among the political parties. Not least because the bill was a private member's bill, which enabled candidates within each party to be more likely to cast a personal vote, not to mention that the attendance of the voting was an issue of concern. Hence, while the substance of the bill has been a matter of debate, we have seen how the various actors looked upon the various political alliances as the most important aspect for whether the bill would pass in parliament or not. Jathika Hela Urumaya was unable to secure a broad alliance supporting the bill in 2004, and unable to bring the Catholic Church to support a compromise bill at the end. Thus, the amended draft version of the bill that was proposed by the Standing Committee late 2008 was backed solely by the Buddhist nationalists. We will inquire into how the final stages of the bill were negotiated by the state in relation to the Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelicals. The indefinite end of the bill shows how the government was meticulous in their timing, or rather lack thereof, in letting the bill fade out of public attention.

The indefinite political end of the anti-conversion bill

One of the most confusing things during my fieldwork in Sri Lanka was that no one really could tell me what happened to the anti-conversion bill. The people I talked to who had worked closely with the drafting process had their attention worn off during the tedious political treatment of the bill. From when the bill was submitted in 2004 it took 6 years, with the dissolution of Parliament in 2010, before the bill technically lapsed. Jahangir stated already in 2005, in her report on the matter, that the process was slow. Also Matthews (2007) and Berkwitz (2008b), when writing about the political discourse around the legislation, remarked on the slow process. The Standing Committee, and the subsequent attempt to find a compromise solution, took

its time, and a new draft was not prepared until the autumn of 2008. A Buddhist lawyer involved in the process elaborated:

> In late 2008 the Select Committee produced their report and tabled it in the Parliament. They had improved the bill with minor amendments. The next step would have been to table it for the final debate and take a vote on it, but, unfortunately, the committee of party leaders never included this bill on the agenda. The unofficial explanation by the Government of Sri Lanka was that they were in agreement with the bill, but they were not in the position to support the bill due to the international pressure on it. (Interview, 9th of January, 2012)

While my Buddhist informant claimed that it never came up for another reading in Parliament, one of my Christian informants told me that it was referred to another, new committee, whose members were not known:

> In 2009 it was brought up again. In January 2009 it went for a second reading. It was also brought for a third and final reading, and Members of Parliament did not have an opportunity to propose amendments. Afterwards, it was sent to a 'new' committee. (Interview, 13th of December 2011)

And after this the bill faded silently away from public attention, while the public noise around the last stages of the civil war against LTTE were raging both in the north of Sri Lanka, as well as in the media. Its end was timidly timed; it was an indefinite ending, where the government was able to silently escape from a dispute from which the government itself had nothing to win. Two of my informants, one high-ranked Buddhist monk and one evangelical informant at the forefront of their political activism, related its failure in this way:

> In personal communication with the President I asked him why we could not have the anti-conversion bill passed, and he answered: "I cannot do two wars at the same time. All Christians will come against me. It is not possible. We cannot do this." (Interview, 30th of October 2011).

And the evangelical stated:

> The Government has been facing international pressure on different war-allegations. They did not want another black mark on the field of human rights. He had his

reasons for delaying it. Yet, the Government also had a close dealing with the JHU. (Interview, 13th of December 2011).

The government was able to evade the issue of taking a stance on the anti-conversion bill altogether. Thus, the 'state' did not emerge as the main adjudicator of the bill, or perhaps it did, in the way that it let the political concerns prevail in matters of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka. The Christians had been able to mount considerable international pressure against the bill, and the government would have to take the blame from the international society and major stakeholders, especially the US, in explaining their stance on religious freedom. However, if the government had passed the legislation it would have been a major victory for JHU, both practically and symbolically. Considering that Rajapakse and JHU were fishing in the same electoral waters, an anti-conversion bill could also have negative impact for the president in his own electoral campaigning in that it would strengthen the JHU candidacy nationally, while Rajapakse would have to take the blame internationally. Hence, the way the bill was allowed to dwindle out of public attention was a lucid way of closing windows for an eventual storm, which surely would have come if the government had taken a decisive stance on the bill. Whereas the same process in Tamil Nadu was rushed in passing anti-conversion legislation as an urgent ordinance, we see that the Sri Lankan government had been abiding its time, meticulously calculating the process to an indefinite ending.

Anti-conversion legislation, state patronage and religious nationalism
One of the problems with anti-conversion legislation is that it is often seen as an oppressive instrument by majoritarian religious nationalists in their respective countries. Anti-conversion legislation has a dubious reputation, and was thus prone to elicit scepticism of international observers (Taylor 2005). Thus, the two anti-conversion legislations drafted in Sri Lanka are not only connected to the cases in India by copying formulations and inspirations, but these new laws simultaneously inherit their reputation and international standing. While the usual suspects behind anti-conversion legislation are religious nationalists with majoritarian ambitions, the

fact that the drafting committee behind the Freedom of Religion Act consisted both of Hindus and Buddhists made the proposal harder to criticise as an oppressive political instrument. However, the composition of the drafting committee is not a guarantee for an anti-conversion draft that would resolve the many difficulties inherent in drafting issues of proselytisation and make it accepted by everyone, and in Sri Lanka the *Freedom of Religion Act* drafted a proposal that deliberately sided with that of the target. If Buddhist, Hindu and Catholic lawyers had conjointly aimed for finding a wording for an anti-conversion legislation that would have been acceptable for all parties, with clearly defined criteria and less susceptible for abuse, it could have changed the international discourse on anti-conversion legislation.

When the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was submitted as a private member's bill in May 2004, it sidelined the work done in the Hindu-Buddhist committee. As this new initiative was brought forward by the newly emergent political party Jathika Hela Urumaya, the whole proposal had a strong scent of being a political manoeuvre by a group of Buddhist nationalists. That a vital coalition partner in the Hindu-Buddhist committee, the All Ceylon Hindu Committee, actually submitted a petition against this anti-conversion proposal, despite being in agreement with the general principles, attests to the fact that Jathika Hela Urumaya let the political interests, in promoting the Buddhist supremacy, prevail in the matter. Rather than make the legal efforts to find an acceptable and comprehensive articulation of forcible conversions, Jathika Hela Urumaya, with Ven. Omalpe Sobhita, used the occasion for political gain to demand state patronage for Buddhism, which was stated in the preamble. Thus, the *Prohibition of forcible Conversion of Religion* bill was less about legal mechanisms to address 'unethical' conversions, and more an attempt to gain recognition of state patronage from the government to protect Buddhism. The bill seeks to activate the protection of Buddhism guaranteed in Article 9, which promises Buddhism the foremost place in Sri Lanka and the protection of the Buddha Sasana by the government. While not directly an attempt to make Buddhism the state religion in Sri Lanka, the bill demands that these state obligations towards Buddhism should have more than symbolic value. Thus, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill capitalises state patronage of

religion through Article 9 of the constitution, more than an actual address to find a legal solution to the practice of 'unethical' conversions.

The impression that the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill is an attempt to rejuvenate the patronage bonds between Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state is further stated with another bill proposal submitted by Ven. Ellawella Medhananda of Jathika Hela Urumaya as a private Member's bill later in 2004, the *19th Amendment Bill*. This bill seeks to make Buddhism the state religion in Sri Lanka, and it states in the preamble:

> whereas the Buddhist population which is the overwhelming majority must practice its religion in peace and harmony, and as the Buddha Sasana has faced the threat of decline (...) it is the duty of the Parliament to restore the patronage and protection historically enjoyed by the Buddha Sasana. (*19th Amendment Bill*)

The Supreme Court determined that the proposed amendments were inconsistent with the constitution, and that it required a 2/3 majority in parliament or approval by the people at a referendum in order for it to become enacted as a law. This proposal made it even easier for the Christian pressure groups to highlight the (mal-) intentions of the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill. While the stated aim of the bill was to ease religious tensions in Sri Lanka, such legal mechanisms would most likely have contributed to hardened lines of conflict between the religious communities.The *Freedom of Religion Act* was indeed submitted by the Minister of Buddha Sasana Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, but this bill was not associated with being a political manoeuvre by the Buddhist nationalists, despite the promise by Minister Lokubandara in December 2003 to enact anti-conversion legislation after the fast-unto-death made by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita and Ve. Rajawatte Vappe. Many of my Buddhist nationalist interviewees claimed that the government was reluctant to the whole project of enacting anti-conversion legislation. The promise to bring forth such legislation has been made from time to time, even after the lapse of the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill, but these statements can be read

as mere attempts to please the Buddhist constituency on certain occasions.[104] The political process around the anti-conversion bills the last decade has shown that there is no substantial political backing in favour of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka.

Anti-conversion legislation is but one method religious nationalists use to enforce boundary protection of their own fixed modes of identity. Gill (2008) notes how the way in which restrictions and regulations of religious liberty often follow the majority religion within the given nation-states, rather than particular religions being ideologically in favour of certain liberties *sui generis*. Hence, the dominant religion would more likely be in favour of regulations; curtailing the activity of missionaries and putting restrictions on conversions are effective means to uphold *status quo* of religious representation. The proposal for an anti-conversion bill was not for an amelioration of religious pluralism in Sri Lanka, but an enactment for regulatory purposes in the hands of religious nationalists. While I would argue that the bill was first and foremost intended to accentuate the patronage relations between the state and Buddhism (that is, formal and official patronage), the bill could nevertheless have been a powerful tool for regulating unwanted practices and groups.

As religious conversion is often seen as disruptive of the fixed boundaries of religious representation, Fernandes (2011) offers the argument, in the case of India, that this restriction of change in religious membership is in the interest both of the secular Indian state as well as the Hindu nationalists. Osuri (2013) goes even further and states that "the focus on (anti) conversion enables an examination of the complicities that characterize the relationship between liberal democratic institutions and right-wing nationalisms" (Osuri 2013: 3). However, a very important distinction between the situation in India and that of Sri Lanka is that Sri Lanka never enacted an anti-conversion bill. It never passed through parliament, and it lapsed when the government was dissolved in 2010. Thus, arguing for complicity between the Sri Lankan state and the Buddhist nationalists in terms of anti-conversion legislation

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[104] Even the Sambuddhatva Jayanthi committee appointed personally by the president for the Sambuddhatva Jayanthi commemoration in 2011 stated their support for anti-conversion legislation.

would be meaningless, as the reluctance on behalf of the Sri Lankan state to enact anti-conversion laws, whether due to international pressure or any other reason, in many ways attests to the limits of the demands made by the Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka. Even when Jathika Hela Urumaya became partner in the coalition government in 2005, their demands for anti-conversion legislation did not receive resonance within the parliament, despite the fact that the Supreme Court had been audible to the argumentation of the Buddhist nationalists.

The failure to enact anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka proves the limitations of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and shows that there is no direct complicity between nationalist demands and state accommodation. Even though Buddhism enjoys official state patronage in Sri Lanka, the government was not willing to concede on the issue of an anti-conversion bill. Despite the fact that different state institutions have enacted in ambiguous relations around the matter of anti-conversion discourse, the (in)decision by the state shows that the official state patronage will not necessarily be turned into a formalised and substantialised effort whenever Buddhist nationalists utter that they are in a 'crisis'. However, if we should end our study of state-religion relations here, between that of an official and formal state patronage, our study would neglect important aspects of how the wider conflict between Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians have unfolded. I would like to claim that the triadic state-religion nexus of official, formal and informal relations are better equipped to unravel the nuances of how the conflict over anti-conversion have been embedded within Sri Lankan society. Further, as Gill (2008) argues, efforts to regulate religious freedom should not be seen as one modality alone, but take into consideration a wide array of interests and policies. This means that we should look not only at how the demand for anti-conversion legislation was negotiated by the state in relation to the Buddhist nationalists, but also which other regulating policies were enacted in relation to religious freedom in Sri Lanka.

The political repertoires employed by Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians are ingrained in how the contextual infrastructures provide power of access, support, opportunities and resources, and this is particularly prevalent in how Buddhist nationalists have mobilised along national channels of support and access,

while evangelical Christians have relied upon a vast network of different global monitoring systems of religious freedom to accentuate their situation to a global audience. The political repertoires were developed with an intimate awareness of what was possible, likely and productive, while traversing the power of access along the boundaries of the politically feasible. While the legal discourse about the anti-conversion bill was the single most important modality for understanding the regulation of religious pluralism (and 'religious freedom') in Sri Lanka, the conflict between Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians has followed other trajectories in how the groups have enacted various political repertoires of control, repression and regulation. The next chapter will deal with how Buddhist nationalists have carved out a political space to enact exclusionary violence with impunity, by relying on their informal patronage networks externally and internally of the state.

10. Buddhist Strongholds, Patronage Networks and Exclusionary Violence against Religious Minorities in Sri Lanka

On the 19th of August 2012 the national Sri Lankan newspaper *The Sunday Leader* carried an article titled "Police turns Blind Eye to Assault on Pastor", where the article reported from an incident of an "alleged assault of Reverend Lasantha Jayalath, Regional Presbyter of Deniyaya, and his wife by a mob led by members of the Buddhist clergy" (Colombage 2012). The article further stated that the pastor was confronted by the mob due to his visit to a nearby home, allegedly for conducting proselytisation by deceitful means, and that the pastor, albeit suffering injuries to his arms and legs, was able to escape from the confrontation. However, after lodging a police complaint, the pastor did not receive any response from the police, and the General Secretary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), Godfrey Yogarajah, stated: "This act is just another example of growing religious intolerance on the part of a few in the country. It is the duty of the police to act on such complaint and ensure the safety of the citizens of the country" (Colombage 2012). This is just one of numerous other incidents reported on exclusionary violence against evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka. This chapter will go deeper into the relations between Buddhist strongholds, patronage networks and exclusionary violence against religious minorities in Sri Lanka.

Exclusionary violence and patronage networks

Goodhand et al. argue that in Sri Lanka "violence is less about social breakdown than the creation of new forms of political economic relations at local, national and international levels" (Goodhand et.al. 2000), and that Sri Lanka scores high on social indicators despite much long-term conflict. By including acts of violence in the texture of a wider political repertoire, and not as a societal anomaly, we can scrutinise

which purposes these acts of violence have sought to address. This entails a favouring of the instrumentalist approach to political violence, as opposed to cultural explanations of violence ('interests' vs. 'passions'). Bubandt (2000) warns that such instrumental approaches to collective violence may sideline and portray the rest of the given populations as passive victims lacking transformative capabilities, running orchestrated errands of the political elite. However, an instrumentalist notion of violence often reveals important *dramatis personae* of the conflict, and addresses how the nexus of patronage networks and information flow can contribute either to an allowance or resilience of outbreaks of collective violence (Berenschot 2010).

International surveys on religious freedom in general rank Sri Lanka low on direct governmental discrimination, but high on social control (see Grim and Finke 2006).[105] Woods (2012) argues that the problem for evangelical Christians has not been due to the regulatory practices of the government, but more often due to the patrolling of 'religious cartels' of Buddhist nationalists. Hence, in order to understand the situation of freedom of religion in Sri Lanka, official and formal sanctions are not sufficient, rather the role of social regulation, also by means of violence, need to be taken into account too. Note that my approach in this chapter takes a decisive step away from the often recalled paradox of Buddhism and violence in Sri Lanka. My question is not: 'how can the supposedly peaceful Buddhism contribute to the legitimation of violence?', but rather: How are the dynamics of social regulation of religion unfolding in Sri Lanka?

Brass (2006) argues that the emergence of collective communal violence in India should not be read as "spontaneous outbreaks of passion", but rather as deliberate use of political violence, often produced by organised groups. With this in mind, he develops an understanding of these events by means of the analytic concept of 'institutionalised riot systems', where he divides these events into three distinct phases: preparation/rehearsal, activation/enactment and explanation/interpretation. The advantage of these analytical tools is that they approach riots and collective

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[105] See also ARDA: http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_210_3.asp [19.06.2014]. The dataset used at the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA) is developed by Grim and Finke.

violence not through abstract communal categories, which are often entailed in the conflict, but the differing roles and motives, as well as the particular timing, by the various participators and instigators of the event. Brass identifies two distinct roles, and one process in producing such riots: 'fire tenders', who keep the intergroup tensions vivid by inflammatory behaviour, 'conversion specialists', who decide the timing and the practical enactment of the violence, and, finally, how various actors are able to portray these events as the result of interethnic or inter-communal animosities on a general level, and thus contribute to the wider process of polarisation.

The situation of exclusionary violence in Sri Lanka, although different from the one in India, shares many of the same characteristics of polarisation, and I believe that the nexus of patronage networks, the role of police/judiciary and the information flows are pivotal for the understanding of religio-political violence. However, while religio-political violence in India, the so-called Hindu-Muslim communal violence, offers itself as one of the major distinctions in Indian politics, the main cleavage in Sri Lankan politics has been that of ethnicity, both in terms of the long-term civil war as well as in terms of communal riots (see Uyangoda (ed.) 2008). The Buddhist-Christian violence in Sri Lanka is far more low-key, and does not at all generate the same media attention in vernacular media in Sri Lanka. The scale of the episodes and the geographical spread of incidents around the island makes it difficult to speak of a coherent organised 'institutionalised riot system' along the lines of religio-political violence in Sri Lanka,[106] even though the presence of similar ethno-political violence has been extensively documented.[107] Yet some of the distinct processes that are embedded in the 'institutionalised riot system'-approach are helpful to understand the emergence of the religio-political violence against (predominantly) Christians in the last decade within the Sri Lankan context of exclusionary violence. Bergmann (2002) further informs how exclusionary riots often require certain structural parameters, such as a favourable political structure and a clear asymmetry of power between the

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[106] Riots exclusively about religio-political violence in Sri Lanka have been relatively few, and in this case the Gampola riots in 1915 stand out. Ethnic riots, however, have occurred with regular frequency in Sri Lanka.
[107] For more details about ethnic riots in Sri Lanka see Tambiah 1996, or Uyangoda (ed.) 2008.

instigator and the victim of the riots. Rather than studying the ideological constraints Buddhist monks face when legitimating violence, this chapter will be explaining how Buddhist monks *structurally* may capitalise upon the repertoires of exclusionary violence through the means of the privileged position in society and the reach of their patronage networks. The next section will explore how the trajectories of violence have unfolded along with other political events in Sri Lanka.

Methodological remarks

I will in the following make a spatio-temporal analysis of the religio-political violence in Sri Lanka that has happened in the wake of the anti-conversion bill. One of my aims in tracing the spatio-temporal patterns of anti-Christian violence, is precisely to be able to designate which areas, and in which periods, attacks have been most frequent. These stages follow important political junctures: from the beginning of 2003 with the first public debates around an anti-conversion bill; the 12th of December when the death of a famous Buddhist monks sparked anti-Christian sentiments in Sri Lanka; the 26th of December on which the tsunami struck the coastline of Sri Lanka; and finally the end of the civil war the 18th of May 2009. I do not imply that all instances of violence can be read as clean-cut religious-based violence, but rather argue that these violent episodes cannot be read in a political vacuum. In a context of political instability 'shadow conflicts' are more likely to occur, where personal disputes are played out in communal garb. However, my findings indicate that the trajectories of violence unfold in the times after the tsunami and during the last stages of the civil war. Religio-political violence often follows, but not necessarily, important political junctures.

I have used four different main sources to attain information about the violence against (predominantly) Christian churches in Sri Lanka that have happened in the wake of the anti-conversion bill. In addition, I have made several interviews with key informants among both Christians and Buddhists, which give further insight into the topic. However, I wish to stress that I do not claim to compete with the different commissions and fact-finding missions in identifying the complete scope of

committed violence, rather I see my role as an observer that can use these sources of information to say something on how the violence has unfolded in Sri Lanka the last decade.

My four main sources are International Christian Concern (www.persecution.org), Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.net, which also runs the site www.persecution.com, which seems to offer much of the same content), and the Sri Lankan Christians (www.srilankanchristians.com). My last source is a report by Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), *Attacks on Places of Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka*, which was released March 2013. The two first organisations, International Christian Concern (ICC) and the Voice of Martyrs (VoM), are two international Christian monitoring organisations that conduct work on advocacy, assistance and awareness campaigns for 'persecuted' Christians around the world, but particularly in areas of tension. Both organisations have originated from the US. The Sri Lankan Christians is a coalition made of at least three different Christian organisations in Sri Lanka, the NCEASL, the Archdiocese of Colombo, and an interest group named Hela Kithunu Urumaya (a Catholic activist group). The fourth source is the report from Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), which is an independent and non-partisan organisation in Sri Lanka committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued and alternatives identified and disseminated. A closer discussion of these monitoring organisations will follow in the next chapter, but here I will use these sources to unravel some of the episodes and incidents to discuss what Bubandt (2000) has described as the 'discursive construction of violence'.

Trajectories of violence

The death of Ven. Soma Thero on the 12th of December 2003 brought a massive wave of attacks against Christians in the following weeks. Ven. Soma Thero had been one of the most vocal spokesmen for the introduction of an anti-conversion bill, and he was also highly recognised for his fiery television speeches. His death sparked an avalanche of conspiracy-theories that Christian groups deliberately had murdered

him, and the issue received much media attention. His funeral was also highly politicised, and reports say that Buddhist nationalists wanted to hold his funeral at the 25th of December 2003, on the Christmas Day celebrations, but that this was rejected by the authorities. The situation between Christians and Buddhists was extremely tense during these weeks. Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thero and Ven. Rajawatte Vappe Thera staged a fast-unto-death to pressurise the government on anti-conversion legislation, and a wave of violence erupted against churches and other Christian buildings. The monitoring page of Sri Lankan Christians counted 31 attacks between 27th of December 2003 and the 1st of February 2004, 28 of which happened in the Western Province. Godfrey Yogarajah, the General Secretary of the NCEASL, comments on the occasion:

> There was a plot to unleash violence on Christians after the monk's funeral on Christmas Eve. Fearing a religious riot and mass destruction, the country's president issued a directive to mobilize security for all Christian churches. Many churches held worship services with armed police or army personnel standing guard. Fearing attack, Christians in some areas cancelled Christmas services, and pastors were evacuated to safety. That Christmas, approximately twenty churches were attacked or torched in spite of tight security. (Yogarajah 2008: 88)

Several of my evangelical informants recalled this period with dread and trepidation, yet they also recognised the efforts of president Kumaratunga in that "she was able to avoid mass collision" (Interview, 13th of December, 2011). Another informant, an evangelical Christian pastor, claimed that there existed a list of 100 'target people,' that were prone for attacks that Christmas. He himself fled from his house, but received a phone call from a worried neighbour that he should not return home (Interview, 3rd of January 2012). President Kumaratunga made a public statement in mid-January that she would take firm action against any anti-Christian violence committed by Buddhist elements (Asian Tribune, 20th of January, 2004). The Voice of the Martyrs reported on the 4th of February that the President also had set up local peace committees of local police, Buddhist monks and Christian clergy, but VoM noted that these meetings not had been a success due to threats and intimidation against the Christian clergy during these meetings. However, VoM noted in the same

entry that the massive violence had slowed down, even though there still were occurrences of sporadic outbreaks of violence.[108] Frederica Jansz, one of few outspoken critical journalists in Sri Lanka, commented in an article in *The Sunday Leader* on 15th of February:

> What cannot however be condoned is the unlawful acts of arson, assault, threats, intimidation and desecration of places of worship of all Christian denominations. In fact, there has been a very deliberate and well orchestrated attempt by certain groups to incite hate and distrust of the Christian community using sections of the media and poster campaigns as well. The police are yet to make any arrests despite the many incidents while rumour is rife that the attacks are being spearheaded by a Sinhala chauvinist political party (Jansz 2004, The Sunday Leader, 15th of February, 2004).

After the decisive stance of President Kumaratunga, the violent episodes slowed down their frequency, but the following year of 2004 still saw violent episodes on a regular basis, and this year was regarded as the peak of Buddhist-Christian tensions. However, while many scholars pinpoint the death of Ven. Soma as a decisive turning point between Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka, exclusionary violence against Christians were not novel to Sri Lanka, and tensions had been mounting throughout 2003. The first incident that can be related directly to the process around an anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka is the Modera-incident, where Christians attacked a Hindu congregation in Modera, just north of Colombo. The precursor to this was the promise made in the beginning of 2003 by the Minister of Hindu Affairs, T. Maheshwaran, to bring anti-conversion legislation to Sri Lanka. Subsequently, violence against Christians escalated in August 2003, simultaneously with the Menzingen incorporation case in the Supreme Court, which sparked a national debate on the need for an anti-conversion legislation.

Attention around religious violence in Sri Lanka was attracting international attention already before the death of Ven. Soma in December 2003, and Voice of the Martyrs carried Sri Lanka as a theme for their special issue release of their October newsletter in 2003. Most of the reported attacks were directed at small churches,

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[108] http://www.persecution.net/lk-2004-02-04.htm

either independent churches or house churches, often in remote places. Churches linked to the Assembly of God, which is a large cluster of churches under the evangelical branch, seem to be particularly targeted, yet also a Methodist church and the office of World Vision, the famous Christian aid organisation, faced hostilities. A recurring context for the attacks was identified as the set-up of new buildings, or allegations by Buddhists that the church was involved in bribery and 'unethical' conversions. The attacks vary from threats and intimidation to physical assault and severe damage on property. In Embilipitya, one pastor was nearly stabbed to death in March 2003, and the VoM documents a range of physical assaults against Christians. Several churches were also burned down, often after local intimidation that the church should close down and move away, and two of the targeted churches at the outskirts of Colombo were burnt down after preliminary episodes of physical attacks and intimidation. Thus, the death of Ven. Soma intensified the conflict that was mounting on the anti-conversion issue, and in many ways changed the dynamics of how the concerns over 'unethical' conversions were voiced.

Rather than capitalising on the Hindu and Catholic worries of evangelical 'misconduct', Buddhist political formations, most notably the JHU, trenched the conflict as between 'Buddhists' on one side and 'Christians' on the other. Bastin (2011) notes that the sense of conspiracy among the Buddhist nationalists continued, and on the first anniversary (12th December 2004) of Soma's death they staged a protest demonstration at a huge Bollywood concert that was to be held in Sri Lanka. Massive demonstrations, where JHU participated, were held against the concert. During the show a grenade was thrown into the crowd, and two people were killed. The year of 2004 marks the time when the confrontation between Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists escalated into high tensions, where both violence and the legal debates where at their most intense.

Trajectories of violence: The Boxing Day tsunami
The tumultuous year of 2004 ended with the devastating Boxing Day tsunami which hit Sri Lanka hard. The Indian Ocean Tsunami struck 70% of Sri Lanka's coastline,

displaced over 1 million people, and an estimate of 36,000 people were killed. Only Banda Aceh in Indonesia was worse affected, and the casualties in these two countries make up approximately 90% of the total casualties after the tsunami. Several reports and scholars note the feeling of 'communitas' and the easing of communal tensions in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe (See Gamburd 2010, Keenan 2010, Frerks 2010, Hyndman 2009, Renner and Chafe 2007). The tsunami led to an abrupt halt in the violence against Christians in Sri Lanka, and none of the agencies report violent incidents the following months after the tsunami. It would take five months before the next violent episode emerged, then in the badly struck Batticaloa, in the eastern part of Sri Lanka, where a Methodist Church was attacked after being accused of distributing relief to the advantage of religious conversion.

In May 2005, Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, visited Sri Lanka, and her visit can be seen as a momentum in the religio-political process of the anti-conversion bill, and her assessment of the situation was by many taken as a first evaluation of the bill. Several issues were at stake before her visit: how would she assess the allegations that Christian groups indulge in 'unethical' behaviour when proselytising? How would she evaluate the anti-conversion bill proposal? How would she read the violence committed against Christian churches? That Jahangir did not find the Buddhist commission from 2002 reliable outraged many Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, but also prompted the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) to launch another more thorough commission, the commission on unethical conversions, to look into the matter. Her first public statement criticised the ongoing violence against Christian churches along with the inactive police, and claimed that the upcoming anti-conversion legislation was not the solution to remedy religious harmony in Sri Lanka. As previously noted, the statements of Asma Jahangir were a moral victory for the Christian side, and the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists felt great disappointment with the assessment. The following Sunday after her visit, 15th of May, some churches were threatened, and in the beginning of June the Voice of the Martyrs (VoM) reported that there had been an escalation of violence against Christians the last month. While there is no direct

evidence of the relation of the visit of Asma Jahangir and the sudden escalation of violence against Christians, there are reasons to believe that this event reignited violence against the Christian minorities in the post-tsunami era.

The new outbreak of violence definitely ended the post-tsunami amity between Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka, and the violence returned its regular pattern of sporadic attacks around the island. One feature that can be seen in this period is that the rebuilding process after the tsunami became further complicated. In locations where pre-tsunami animosities were prevalent, opposition and protests from Buddhist groups persisted also after the tsunami. The period between 2005 until the end of the war on the 18th of May 2009 also witnessed violence against all the Christian denominations (Protestant churches, evangelical, independent and the Catholic Church), and also against some Christian orphanages. The change of presidency in 2005, from Chandrika Kumaratunga to the more pro-nationalist Mahinda Rajapakse, who forged a coalition with JVP and JHU, does not seem to have brought significant, neither better nor worse, changes to the tense situation between Christians and Buddhists, even though his electoral victory sparked grave concerns among the Christian community. While Buddhist extremists are accused of being behind most of the attacks, some allegations are also directed at Hindus.

Trajectories of violence: The civil war and post-war Sri Lanka
The re-emergence of the Civil War from 2006 onwards seems to have deteriorated the climate in favour of potential violence, and several grave episodes occurred in this period. A lot of disappearances happened in the North, also among Christians. In Ampara, one pastor was shot and killed in February 2008, and the sources speculate whether this was because of the conversion of a prominent local person.[109] Another pastor was found dead in the outskirts of Colombo, after he had disappeared after a religious meeting some days before.[110] There were also reports of a 500 hundred men

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[109] http://www.persecution.net/lk-2008-02-20.htm.
[110] http://www.persecution.net/lk-2008-10-22.htm.

strong mob, led both by a number of Buddhist monks, accompanied by a Catholic priest, which demanded an Assemblies Of God church to close down. In this period there were also some signs that the police took the violent episodes more seriously, and in one incident a police officer was subjected to mob violence when trying to intervene in a situation.

One event that attracted particular media attention was a mob attack on a Christian church in Thalahena in the Western District, where a mob led by a group of monks intimidated the congregation and attacked the church. The episode was documented in *The Sunday Leader*, 13th of July, 2008, and brought forth statements both from the pastor and one of the monks leading the attack. According to the article, a mob which included Buddhist monks, interrupted the service, and threatened to destroy the premises; in the same way they had already attacked 23 other Christian churches, they allegedly told the pastor. A rumour was spread that it was the Christian congregation that had assaulted the Buddhist monks, and an additional mob of 300-400 villagers arrived at the scene. A number of policemen also arrived, and tried to control the situation, and disperse the crowds. The pastor was promised police protection, but when he sent his congregation home, he and the church were assaulted by the mob, and the police was unable to protect him and he was severely injured. The pastor accused the police of being biased, and claimed that a prominent JHU lay politician had met with the police the following day to have the offenders in police custody released, something that was blatantly refused by the officer-in-charge in the police. One of the monks that had led the crowd, Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero, confirmed, in a national newspaper, that he was at the church to 'teach a lesson' to the pastor:

> The Buddhists are against conversion and we have reprimanded the church on many occasions that this should not continue further but to no avail. It was I who first raised the voice against conversion and although the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) monks who entered parliament in 2004 promised to bring the anti conversion bill they have so far failed to keep their promise. So if those who are in the legislature are

not willing to talk against illegal conversion we as responsible Buddhist clergy in the country have to take the law in our own hands to put a halt to these activities.[111]

Another incident that got widespread media attention was a healing session held by a Christian prayer group called 'Jesu Ath Nohari' (Jesus never fails) at the Vihara Mahadevi Park in Colombo the 31st of October 2009, where two participants died during the session. These participants were two Buddhist women of alleged good health, who had come to the event from far away, sparked by advertisements and distributed prayers on CDs. However, they both had fallen ill during the sessions, and the organisers had, allegedly, refused to bring them to the hospital.[112] This incident stirred national outcry, and the organisation 'Jesu Ath Nohari' faced huge demonstrations as well as intimidation, harassment and arson following the episode. Monks from the JHU were at the forefront of these demonstrations, 5 months after the end of the 26 year long civil war.

The end of the war brought a new situation to Sri Lanka. Christians, however, did at first feel themselves as a new enemy, and reports were released with the concern for Christians in the post-war situation. The end of the war did not bring about an abrupt halt to violence towards Christians, and there were sporadic instances of violence throughout 2009 and 2010, and then again in 2012. When the parliament was dissolved in 2010, the anti-conversion bill also lapsed. Thus, some of the tensions in this issue resolved, and the activities of the webpage www.srilankanchristians.com declined in this period, and no more incidents were recorded. The other two sources continued their records, and note sporadic episodes of violence, like the case where a Christian schoolboy was harassed by a Buddhist monk teaching Sri Lankan history, but reports were more often on general concerns than direct episodes of violence. There has also been a shift of antagonism, where some Muslim mosques have been attacked, and a Hindu Kovil been threatened. International Christian Concern has reported these incidents, and stated their concern

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[111] Interview with Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara, *The Sunday Leader*, 13th of July, 2008.
[112] See *The Buddhist Times*, 'Healing Session Kills Two Women: The Need for Legislation', October/November 2009.

for religious pluralism in Sri Lanka. Another monitoring body of religious violence was also initiated in mid-2012, and the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) released its report *Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka* in March 2013, which will be discussed in next chapter. Now I will bring some notes on the changing situation for Christians in the post-war era.

When it comes to the situation for Christians the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), which is a worldwide evangelical initiative, released in 2012 a 'Colombo Statement on the Church in Sri Lanka' where they called for the recognition of NCEASL as a representative body of the evangelical churches in Sri Lanka, and that the Sri Lankan government would not pursue anti-conversion legislation nor arbitrary regulations by imposing compulsory registration of places of worship, and an end of violent attacks on clergy and places of Christian worship. The International Religious Freedom Report (IRFR) for 2011 observes that the "number and severity of attacks reportedly diminished somewhat during the year". While the report notes the renewed attempt in late 2011 by JHU to re-invigorate the anti-conversion legislation, most of their discussion concentrates upon the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs circular that was issued in September which directed that the ministry must approve construction or maintenance of a place of worship. In practice, this circular has made administrative obstacles especially to the evangelical branch of churches, which lack formal recognition and legal status within the Ministry of the Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs. Local authorities have already ordered the closure of several churches on the basis that they could not procure approval for building new places or maintaining their existing places of worship.

Sri Lankan Christians, evangelical branches in particular, have in the last decade faced a diverse array of regulatory practices, from the lack of state recognition, systematic intimidation and violence by non-state actors with regulatory intentions. However, it was a brief circular from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs on the maintenance of worship sites which became most problematic for evangelical religious practice, as the circular curbed much of the activities of smaller churches, but also further encouraged the policing of religious boundaries among the committed non-state actors. The issue has transformed from a

legal and political issue, from the spheres of momentousness and visibility, to the uneventful and tedious world of bureaucracy. However, to fully understand both the exclusionary violence committed against Christians in Sri Lanka, and the new bureaucratic endeavors, it is imperative to understand how certain political repertoires are connected to informal patronage networks.

Political repertoires and informal patronage

Bergmann (2002) argues that exclusionary riots often emerge with triadic relations, where the perpetrators are allowed to victimise a group, with the state as an ambivalent third party. Usually, there is a clear asymmetry of power between the (majority) perpetrator and the (minority) victims, and such riots require favourable political structures to be able to unfold. While Brass (2006, 2003) accuses politicians of being behind the instigation of riots in India, timing them for electoral gain, Bergmann on the other hand, notes how certain majority groups often work under the tacit consent of the state apparatus, negotiating their space of maneuverability, where the state and bureaucracy themselves play an indirect role in these riots. Thus, violent groups with an exclusionary agenda may adopt state mechanisms of social control, and themselves regulate the activities of their target group.

The relationship between Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and the Government of Sri Lanka is dependent upon the political constellations present at the time. These constellations may have shifting configurations not only according to the sitting politicians in power, but also according to the persisting political climate within the country. Thus, while President Chandrika Kumaratunga took prompt action in defending various churches from riots and attacks during Christmas 2003, other attacks both before and after this event have passed without repercussions. What Brass defined as rehearsal violence was allowed to unfold; yet direct riots were prevented, and violent episodes were quelled for a while, before they again emerged with regular frequency. Thus, violent episodes rising to national proportions, and discussed in the national media, beckon the politicians to act on the issue, yet the plethora of similar episodes around the country which did not attract the same

attention were only mediated by the local political bodies and bureaucracy. Bergmann notes how the agendas of exclusionary groups may find sympathies within the bureaucracy, and a grave concern among the (evangelical) churches in Sri Lanka is the degree to which the police and local bureaucracy and judiciary have failed to take decisive action upon the church attacks. The role of Buddhist strongholds, patronage networks and Buddhist vigilante formations are in need of deeper scrutiny as to how exclusionary violence has unfolded in Sri Lanka.

This far my emphasis has been on the different political repertoires wielded by certain agents, especially Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians. However, these repertoires should not be seen as external or independent to the state, but in relation to it. Thus, the many complicities and contestations around the anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka between religious communities in relation to the state should be approached from a bottom-up approach in relation to the state. In addition, these complicities demand that we do not look upon the state as a monolithic adjudicating entity, but a series of nodes at a local, national and official level. Hence, I heed the advice of Spencer to "not base oneself upon a model state" (Spencer 2007: 137). Gould observes that "there is not, and never has been, any clear line of demarcation between the institutions ostensibly espousing secularism and those of religio-political mobilization" (Gould 2012: 23). Blom Hansen notes the ambivalence of state power in India:

> The ambivalence regarding state power in the Hindu nationalist movement indicates the protracted attempt to straddle the tension between the sovereignty of the community-nation and an equally strong desire for a powerful state capable of maintaining order (Blom Hansen 2005: 181).

Practices of authority are not delineated through the vistas of a monolithic state alone, but operate simultaneously through a plethora of different conglomerations of confluence. What is at stake here is the concept of the state: "It should be clear that shorthand allusions to 'the state' or even 'the local state' cover a multitude of different institutions, practices and representations" (Spencer 2007: 141). My claim is that the issue of unethical conversions, and the anti-conversion bill, is not a dispute about the formal relations between religion and the state alone Rather, it should also

be seen in a broader sense, in how Buddhist nationalists are able to garner a multilevelled state patronage for the protection of Buddhism. We need to take into consideration what Blom Hansen terms "de facto practices of sovereignty in the name of the law, the community and the local "big man"" (Blom Hansen 2005: 170).

Blom Hansen observes that the "use of courts and litigation is but one among several means of a battle over authority and resources" (Blom Hansen 2005: 169). We should not fall into what Gould terms as a "common assumption about the state", that is "that it largely stands above or adjudicates the moments of direct conflict and confrontation between different communities" (Gould 2012: 18), but rather see how patterns of confluence between the state and religious groups are intertwined. Hence, my reasons for explicating the various political repertoires wielded by Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelicals are precisely to elucidate the various dynamics which are intertwined with the anti-conversion bill. While the political repertoires are developed in relation to the state, they are also embedded in different nodes of authority, alluding to an understanding of "sovereignty as multiple, provisional, and always contested, and of the state as an unfinished project of control and subordination" (Blom Hansen 2005: 172).

Encompassing the scope of formal relations between religious communities and the state in Sri Lanka, I will traverse the notions of official, formal and informal patronage relations of religion and the state. As we have seen in chapter 8 ("The Foremost Place of Article 9: Buddhist Nationalism and State Patronage"), Article 9 of the Sri Lankan constitution initiates a series of claims, especially from the Buddhist nationalists, that the state must formalise these formulations into formal and/or substantial legal enactments, one of them being the anti-conversion bill. However, it is pertinent to go beyond this dichotomy of formal and official state patronage and add how informal patronage relations can inform the development of various political repertoires. Blom Hansen observes that: "the repertoire of informal authority operates alongside those of the community and that of legality" (Blom Hansen 2005: 190). By inferring informal patronage relations, especially when discussing exclusionary violence in Sri Lanka, we see how formal state-religion relations are circumscribed by local forms of authority and 'sovereignty' (see Schmitt 1996), especially when it

comes to the police, bureaucracy and other mediating power brokers, or what Spencer calls the "complex and murky contingencies of local political affiliation" (Spencer 2007: 86). The next section will discuss how informal patronage relations enable Buddhist nationalists to wield exclusionary violence often without judicial repercussions.

Buddhist strongholds and vigilante formations

In order to understand the dynamics of religiously-informed exclusionary violence in Sri Lanka we need to distinguish between Buddhist strongholds and mobile vigilante formations, particularly when explaining the outbreak of violence towards (predominantly) Christians in Sri Lanka. Woods (2012) argues that a Buddhist stronghold can be compared to the operating mechanisms of 'religious cartels', where Buddhist civil society groups police their boundaries and regulate the religious marketplace in Sri Lanka according to their own practice and law (Woods 2012). A typical example from the Christian monitoring industry identifies a Buddhist stronghold as behind the threats and harassments against local congregations:

> In the first week of October, a crowd of around seventy people, led by the Balapitiya Bauddha Balamandalaya members and Buddhist monks, threatened the Balapitiya branch of the Ambalangoda Assemblies of God (A.O.G.) Church, demanding that the church close within a month. When the police were informed, the officer in charge refused to record the complaint, saying he would consult his superiors and take necessary action.[113]

Christians assert that the local natives, often headed by the local monk, bring threats and intimidation upon the Christian activities in the area, often accusing them of unethical conversions or illegal building. By ignoring these intimidations, the local Christian group faces the danger of violent attacks. Complaints to the local police have no effect, as the police officer himself is part of the very same node of resistance. Thus, the concern of the Christians is twofold; on the one side they face

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[113] http://www.persecution.net/lk-2003-10-21.htm

intimidation and violence from the Buddhist locals, and on the other side, the Christians are not taken seriously by the local authorities. Thus, Christians are often subjected to local regulations by what we can term Buddhist strongholds, where the nexus of patronage networks, police/judiciary and the information flows are especially strong. Woods (2012) calls it "Sri Lanka's oligopolistic religious marketplace". Drawing upon the concept of the 'informal religious economy', Woods argues that while evangelical churches are not illegal, they simultaneously lack legal recognition from the state, and that they are therefore not subject to the same regulatory controls as their legal/illegal religious siblings, which force them to register under the Companies Act, and thus furthers 'obfuscating their religious, and political, position' (Woods 2012). However, the problem for evangelical groups has not been so much the regulatory practices of the government, but the various forms of regulation they suffer due to the operations of Buddhist strongholds in different localities. However, in addition to the Buddhist strongholds, the exclusionary violence committed in Sri Lanka can also be put down to various mobile vigilante formations.

Local Buddhist strongholds often voice their complaints on various disputes though their patronage networks or other affiliations. In Sri Lanka I was informed that several vigilante formations were operative from 2003, and travelled around the island to instigate confrontations with (evangelical) Christians. Brass (2006) argues that the concept of rehearsal can explain how vigilante groups test the boundaries of what they are allowed to do without police or state intervention. The concept of rehearsal, or the preparation of collective violence, is a metaphor taken from drama, yet its meaning does not entail that it is merely a warming up exercise for the 'real' violence. Stages of rehearsal are often instances of collective violence themselves, but the designation of rehearsal violence entails that these events add new layers and new elements to the political repertoire of collective violence, and it is also a testing of certain boundaries, investigating if the police and government allow such transgressions, respectively. The expansion of a repertoire of collective violence is under testing, and paves the ground for further and larger enactments in the future if they are successful. While violence and intimidation emerging from Buddhist

strongholds usually have a local explanation, either from some provocative episode or intensified social patrolling, the existence of mobile vigilante formations are often due to political leverage. As such, these mobile vigilante formations do not only perform their social patrolling for their own sake, but also in order to bring the rising disharmony between Christians and Buddhists to national attention.

Several of my Buddhist informants acknowledged the existence of several vigilante groups operating throughout Sri Lanka, conducting, sometimes violent, social control over alleged unethical proselytisation or unauthorised building processes, drawing on extensive networks of similar nationalistic minded people on the island. A former political monk told the following:

> At that time [he] had a group. They attacked new Christian groups and prayer centers in particular. It was random where they attacked. There were several groups. They acted freely, and there was no good communication or plan. They did not have a clear agenda. (Interview, 15th of July 2013)

These unnamed groups were led by Buddhist monks and conducted episodic mobilisation against various churches of ill repute, mostly in the western province, but also at other locations. Some groups had linkages to Jathika Hela Urumaya, but cannot be seen as an extension of the political party, yet these network relations may have offered them some sort of judicial immunity. The usual procedure was for the vigilante formation to respond to a particular complaint from a Buddhist stronghold against a church or praying centre that had received numerous warnings to stop or halt their religious practice. While some of these confrontations were targeted at a particular pastor, many of them interrupted Christian congregations in their worship to the effect of a religio-confrontational spectacle at the particular location.

The leader of one of the groups admitted being behind more than 20 closures of Christian churches, and did not estimate the number of riotous incidents in which they were involved. However, he admitted that at present, writing in March 2013, he and his group could only notify the police if there were any irregularities with church buildings, and then the police would take care of it. Earlier, however, his role had been to take the law in his own hands:

> We have so many places where they alert always. They bring in issues from around the country. Especially about evangelical groups, there are so many of them. The Catholics and the Anglicans are no problem, they have the same problem themselves. We will inquire about it, and then we will give it to the police. They will take care of it. When a concern is told to us, we then ask the police to look into it. (Interview, 7th of April, 2013)

When I confronted him on the topic of exclusionary violence, he said the situation had changed: "Before we had to take the law in our own hands, now the police will take care of it" (Interview, 7th of April, 2013). Hence, these groups had changed. Before they had been operating by themselves, sometimes by violent means, and their activities were tolerated by the police. Now, however, they would find a reason for calling the police and regulate the particular church or prayer centre by bureaucratic sanctions. However, religious-based vigilante behaviour in Sri Lanka is still operating, as was observed in a recent report by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA 2013). Yet, the vigilante behaviour of these could not have taken place without the police and judges condoning them and their ways of enacting exclusionary violence. Hence, their social regulation of Christian groups by the means of violence and intimidations had to be tolerated by the police and judges, and the vigilante activity of Buddhist activists had to carefully negotiate these relations.

Patronage networks and Buddhist strongholds: Monks as informal sovereigns?

How are religious clergy in general and Buddhist monks in particular fitted into this system of patronage networks? A temple and the respective monks are a node of societal influence and authority, with close ties and familiarity with people in the particular locality. The degree of influence and authority is dependent upon the individual monk and his standing, but in general monks are looked upon with respect and veneration. Monks are able to represent their locality and their stakeholders politically, and mediate specific demands through bureaucratic and political offices. Hence, monks are well connected to their sponsors, and both give and receive favours. In addition, monks are often a broker of information, and able to disseminate

this information both through formal and informal channels. They are connected to various networks, both religious networks of temples, the sangha, to other monks, as well as to societal networks, with their sponsors, local inhabitants, temple adherents and sometimes also to politicians. The influence and authority of monks enable them to wield considerable potency in various relations, and many are attracted to, and act, as a patron in their respective locality. Some are even able to act as 'informal sovereigns,' as we just noted earlier with monks who had the impetus to take the law in their own hands.

Due to the Buddhist monks' religious and societal position they wield a unique form of influence that makes them powerful figures within a patronage network. They also have a form of informal resilience in relation to the police and other bureaucratic institutions that make them less prone to arrest and legal prosecution, a practice that some monks know how to exploit to their own extent, also politically. We can even talk of certain political repertoires opening almost exclusively to Buddhist monks, like the *pattam nikujjana kamma* (turning the bowl) or indulging in cursing of political foes. When monks stage a fast-unto-death or turn to self-immolation[114] as a tool for political protests, it certainly raises the symbolical value of those acts (Hertzberg 2014a). Hence, the combination of social prestige, the monks' lack of mundane vulnerability (losing their jobs, possessions or facing legal prosecution) and their network capabilities (both in urgency and reach) enable Buddhist monks to be vibrant actors within different patronage networks. This privileged position enables monks to endorse political repertoires based upon informal authority and 'sovereignty,' and operate alongside nodes of legality. This unique space of maneuverability is indicative of how some Buddhist monks are able to engage as 'informal sovereigns,' in various roles, in exclusionary violence by tapping into local forms of authority.

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[114] The first act of self-immolation in Sri Lanka by a Buddhist monk occurred at Vesak 2013 outside the Sri Dalada Maligawa temple. The alleged reasons were a protest against animal slaughter and the failure to introduce anti-conversion legislation in the country. The act of self-immolation caused outcry in Sri Lanka, but was endorsed by some political groups, most notably the Sinhala Ravaya.

Monks act as patrons in many ways. In the matter of land disputes, Sinhalese farmers were able to mediate their political demands through strong alliances with the army, police, politicians – and *powerful* clergy (Korf 2005: 213). In a recent article, Heslop argues how Sumangala, the chief monk of the Dambulla cave temple nourished his own political patronage network among stakeholders locally in his district, in competition with another political patron, by everyday politicking: "leveraging influence through networks, connections, favours and patronage" (Heslop 2014: 30). In addition, Sumangala was a character who was able to transform the local disputes of sacred ground in Dambulla to a national level due to his "public performance of political rhetoric" (Heslop 2014: 32). During my own fieldwork I experienced how Buddhist monks were deeply committed to social work in their respective communities, running schools, kindergartens, dhamma schools, provided for the poor and maintained animal welfare activities. Buddhist monks may in many ways act as a patron for their communities, in more than a strict religious sense of accruing merit for their devotees.[115]

The political influence wielded by Buddhist monks should not merely be related to the sacred/mundane binary, but rather how "Buddhist conceptions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of political power in the social, economic and political realm (Schober 2011: 11). In Myanmar, Gravers (2012) has noted how Buddhist monks are treated as 'enchanted subjects,' a concept which is also transferable to the Sri Lankan context. Some of my informants among the monks referred to themselves as having 'ambulance law,' indicating that they had certain privileges in contrast to normal citizens. When Heslop (2014) notes that Sumangala is the leader of every organisation in Dambulla he is involved in, the reason for this is that laypeople are reluctant to assume leadership in an organisation with monk involvement. Another quite common informal practice is that, when driving a car, the monk is the license, which enables drivers without a license to drive the car without

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[115] Issues of monastic patronage have been studied by Samuels (2007) where Buddhist temples were being built as a counter-strategy to the lack of sufficient accommodation given to a particular caste-group by monks at a nearby temple.

legal repercussions if there is a monk present in the car, and that the police will look beyond minor offences.

When I was visiting a prominent temple in central Sri Lanka, I noticed that the plate on which I was served food was engraved, in Sinhala, with the name Sarath Amunugama, a renowned politician. One informant told me that it was rather common for a politician to have close allegiance with a particular monk, and that they both would draw upon this dual patron-client relationship for mutual benefit.[116] Seneviratne argues that monks are letting themselves be used in an instrumental fashion by politicians eager to ensure 'political merit' by visiting temples and attending religious ceremonies (Seneviratne 1999). However, I would argue that these connections should not exclusively be seen as political paraphernalia, rather that these allegiances are sometimes used to wield political influence through patronage networks both locally and nationally, displaying their political authority as 'informal sovereigns' at various levels. However, these patronage networks are also effective in spreading information, and disinformation about certain events and processes in Sri Lanka.

Exclusionary violence and (dis)information

Several of my Christian informants highlighted the role of the vernacular press in a portraying Christians as enemies in Sri Lanka. In an interview with a NCEASL representative, I was told the following:

> The media-coverage has been very biased. Once, a truck was taken for transporting explosives. The sticker 'God Bless You' was highlighted by the media. They would highlight the Christian-LTTE link. Media portray the Christians as anti-Sri Lankans. (…) Generally they would not cover attacks on churches. If they do, it is because the church deserves it. Not about the villagers and the monks. The media has been unwilling to cover attacks on churches (and we would never retaliate). In 2004 we

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[116] Relationships between Buddhist monks and particular politicians are something that qualifies for further study. One such prominent relationship of late has been between Gotabhaya Rajapakse, minister of Defence and brother of the president, and Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero, the leader of Bodu Balasena, a newly emerged Buddhist nationalist group (Hertzberg 2013).

wanted to publish something in the news, but they refused to publish it. Then we had to buy advertisement space. (Interview, December 13th, 2011)

In addition to this story, an incident was reported in which the NCEASL office was vandalised in what the report asserted to be an attack 'in response to their first advertisement in the Daily News paper in a public awareness campaign'.[117] Yogarajah entitles his article on the situation in Sri Lanka as "Disinformation, discrimination, destruction and growth", and argues that the last decade has seen a very effective media disinformation campaign against Christians, in which Christians have been neglected counter-responses, and that the hostility has 'resulted in criminal expression of hatred against Christians" (Yogarajah 2008: 88). Yogarajah also draws attention to the monthly newspaper *The Buddhist Times* which he claims 'carries distorted and inflammatory articles, and vivid pictures, portraying Christianity as an enemy of Buddhist culture and religion' (Yogarajah 2008: 87). One of my Christian informants referred to *The Buddhist Times* as a 'diabolical paper' (Interview, 14th of December, 2011). However, while Hema Goonatilake, the editor and *modus operandi* of *The Buddhist Times*, may acknowledge the inflammatory spirit, and in her own words, 'a provocative edge' against Christians, she was one of very few that by her own initiative condemned the violence committed by Buddhists, and she has also publicly committed to this position in an article in the OPA Journal where she discussed that such 'shameful acts bring disrepute to Buddhism, Hinduism and Catholicism' (Goonatilake 2009). Nevertheless, many Christians see *The Buddhist Times* as a carrier of rumours and inflammatory speech, containing several articles for the purpose of disinformation. In general, the vernacular media is seen as unsympathetic to Christian suffering, yet the issue of religio-political violence and 'unethical' conversions has received extensive covering in *The Sunday Leader,[118]* which has a reputation for being one of the few critical papers in Sri Lanka.

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[117] www.srilankanchristians.com, 3rd of July, 2004.
[118] The issues of unethical conversions and the anti-conversion bill have been covered in particular by Frederica Jansz. She was first connected to *The Sunday Leader* and later to the new internet-publication *Colombo Telegraph*. Jansz is now in the US due to death threats from certain politicians in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has for a long time been a dangerous place for journalists.

In addition to the organisational aspects, the communicative and imaginative aspects of conflict and violence need to be scrutinised. These episodes and events unfold in a discursive universe of political instigation, and a template of paranoid national imagination is a catalyst of conspiratorial interpretation. When the death of Ven. Soma Thero was interpreted as the work of conspiratorial Christian forces, President Kumaratunga appointed a commission to look into his untimely death, yet the circulation of rumours had already taken hold. The situation did not ameliorate by the fact that the commission itself was split over the issue by the time of their report, and many of my informants still had strong opinions on the issue when I met them in 2011. Rumours often take hold as a political veracity, and narrative 'truths' often achieve social factuality, blurring the very distinction of fact and fiction (Spencer and Amarasuriya 2012). What is salient here is the importance of information flows in times of social unrest and paranoid atmospheres. In a template of paranoid national imagination, rumours, conspiracies and violence are both produced by, and productive of, increasing distrust between antagonistic groups. Hybrid and multiple identifications between such groups can counter such deteriorating effects (by negating rumours), but are often seen with increasing scepticism, and target of the very same distinction of friends and enemies.

The grammar of exclusionary violence

There is a dispute between evangelical Christians and Buddhist nationalists about how to interpret the causal factors behind exclusionary violence in Sri Lanka. While evangelical Christians argue that the violence is a deliberate effort to increase religio-political tensions in Sri Lanka, Buddhist nationalists argue that acts of violence often come as passionate local reactions because of (evangelical) Christian misconduct. One Christian explanation on a violent incident argued that the recent attacks were used to incite religious disharmony in order to make the issue of an anti-conversion bill more politically salient:

That same weekend, homes of Christians in Ganemulla were vandalized and a mob led by Buddhist monks attacked the Calvary Church in Hikkaduwa. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka believes that it is very likely that this spate of organized attacks is the beginning of an attempt to incite Buddhists against the Christian community, creating an environment of religious disharmony which in turn will be sited as a convincing platform to launch an impending anti-conversion bill.[119]

The creation of religious disharmony by means of church attacks is seen as a campaign to launch the anti-conversion bill as a solution to these 'problems'. The acts of exclusionary violence are used to create political mileage over the topic, giving a sense that Buddhists locally rise to the occasion in acts of resistance against the Christian's evangelical conduct. This argument was forwarded by the editor of *The Buddhist Times*, Hema Goonatilake, who is one of the few who has actively taken stance against Buddhist violence in Sri Lanka:

Anti-Christian violence began around the same time and increased with the increase in unethical conversions. It was the aggressive campaigns of the new Evangelical churches to convert rural Buddhists that resulted in this backlash. Such activities are an exploitation of the victims as done by vultures, in the sense that they prey on the victims of poverty and other misfortunes. (Goonatilake 2009: 44)

This argument, that the violence against Christians is 'spontaneous' reactions towards Christian misconduct in the rural areas, brings forth the anti-conversion bill as a solution to the social unrest. In addition, she brings forth an argument to the exacerbation of violence against Christians, linking the increase of 'unethical conversions' with the attacks on Christians. The violence is not framed as intolerance, but as resistance, sometimes by violent means. Bastin (2010), on the other hand, argues that most of the attacks occurred in the rapidly urbanising Western Province, and that the Christian churches where used as scapegoats for a violent reaction against greater trends of a rupturing state and active capitalist deterritorialisation. An assumption shared by both Goonatilake and Bastin, however, is that the violence against Christians erupted by spontaneous outbreaks of antagonism among locals,

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[119] http://www.persecution.net/lk-2003-08-06.htm.

within the very same geographical fold as the attacks. The existence of mobile vigilante Buddhist formations proves otherwise, and reveals that the various attacks not only can be explained location-wise by local mobilisation, even though these Buddhist vigilante groups have most likely been invited to the scene by some fellow nationalists locally.

Another important assumption made by Goonatilake (2009) is the conjuncture of anti-Christian violence with the rise of 'unethical conversions', which in a subtle way asserts the need for anti-conversion legislation. Arguments about how to understand the violence can be phrased on different levels; (1) an increase in 'unethical conversions' lead to increased violence, (2) systematic mobilisation for the issue of anti-conversion legislation lead to increased violence as part of the campaign to make the issue more politically salient, (3) increased awareness of the dangers of 'unethical conversions' due to the public campaigns of particularly Buddhist vernacular press beckoned local actors to regulate and police their own boundaries. As we have seen, the Christian groups understand the violence committed against them in two ways: by oppressive Buddhist strongholds and the coordinated political violence by Buddhist vigilante formations. The violence is interpreted as intolerance and political instigation, and is linked with the political attempts to press through the anti-conversion bill. The Buddhists, on the other hand, explain the violence as emotional outbreaks over aggressive proselytisation in rural villages, linking the violence with the rise of 'unethical' conversions, which prove the need for an anti-conversion bill.

The grammar of exclusionary violence is read differently by Christians and Buddhists. Buddhist nationalists argue that the violence and disharmony generated locally by 'unethical' conversions attest to a need for an anti-conversion legislation to regulate these affairs in a more peaceful and harmonious way. Christians, however, link the increase of exclusionary violence against Christian groups as a binary mechanism related to the initiative of bringing forth an anti-conversion bill, where exclusionary violence and legislative initiatives are a double mechanism of religious discrimination.

The existence of Buddhist vigilante formations resembles some of the aspects highlighted by Brass and his notion of 'institutionalised riot systems', in that these groups try to gain political mileage through the acts of exclusionary violence against Christian groups. While not directly linked to elections, as Brass finds most common, the repertoires of exclusionary violence by these Buddhist vigilante formations are directly linked to the attempt to bring forth legislation on anti-conversion in Sri Lanka. In order to exploit the full potency of these acts of violence, they need to be interpreted in ways that would benefit the legislative initiatives around anti-conversion, indicating that these violent acts are not understood as autochthonous, but need a certain interpretation which enhances the need for anti-conversion legislation. Hence, the grammar of exclusionary violence is dependent upon how it is portrayed discursively, especially through different media outlets.

Buddhist strongholds, exclusionary violence and patronage networks

The levels of exclusionary violence against Christians in Sri Lanka have in the last decade closely followed the political situation in general, where periods of uncertainty and instability have generated more instances of violence. One exception, however, was after the Boxing Day Tsunami, when exclusionary violence halted for nearly six months until the arrival of the UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir. In 2003 violence against Christians escalated along with the deteriorating process of the peace negotiation between the government and the LTTE, and further peaked after the death of Ven. Soma Thero December 2003. While the government took action against exclusionary violence during Christmas 2003, exclusionary acts against Christians have been allowed to unfold both locally as well as nationally.

The acts of exclusionary violence targeted against Christian minorities can be seen in the practice of Buddhist strongholds, policing their own religious boundaries, but also to the existence of various mobile Buddhist vigilante formations, whose, sometimes violent, activism has had a geographical spread all over the country. These acts of violence have often been met with impunity from the local police, and Buddhist activists, and Buddhist monks in particular, have enjoyed certain, informal,

privileges from bureaucratic offices. The enchanted position of Buddhist monks enables them to wield considerable influence over various stakeholders in the police and in the judiciary. These informal patronage relations play a key role in how Buddhist monks and activist groups are able and allowed to exert considerable social control over religious minorities in Sri Lanka.

The government did not grant formal patronage to Buddhism in Sri Lanka when they reluctantly refused to pass the anti-conversion bill. While Article 9 gives Buddhism the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka and promises to 'protect and foster the Buddha Sasana,' the government was not willing to push through legislation on anti-conversion. Buddhist nationalists claim that Article 9 will 'remain a dead letter' if this official statement is not transformed into practical legislative protection against threats of Buddhism. However, while the Buddhist nationalists were unsuccessful in acquiring a formal patronage relation with the state, the way the state has turned a blind eye towards acts of exclusionary violence indicates that Buddhist nationalists have benefitted from informal patronage relations with regards to the state apparatus.

The grammar of exclusionary violence has been interpreted differently among the Buddhist community and the Christian community in Sri Lanka. While Buddhists interpret the outbreak of passionate communal violence as an understandable, if not legitimate, response towards the practice of unethical conversions, Christians, especially from the evangelical fold, have argued that the concomitancy of anti-conversion legislation and exclusionary violence against Christian minorities are evidence of systematic religious discrimination of Christians in Sri Lanka. The next chapter will go into depth on how monitoring these violent incidents have become a powerful political repertoire, transforming exclusionary violence into a tool of empowerment.

11. Monitoring Religious Freedom: Persecution, Documentation and the Role of Political Facts

One of the unresolved issues relating to the political process around the anti-conversion legislation is the extent to which 'unethical' conversions take place in Sri Lanka. While Christian monitoring bodies have been able to document numerous and grave offences of violence and religious discrimination against Christians, the Buddhist groups were accused of not providing any factual proofs. This chapter looks into the task of monitoring religious freedom, and the importance of various reports and fact-finding missions to alleviate documentation into generating political facts critical to decision-makers. After an introduction on the legitimacy of the truthteller, I will elucidate how the Christian monitoring organisations work as an industrial enterprise in producing facts of persecution, before I look upon how Buddhists in Sri Lanka initiated a grand report to document instances of 'unethical' conversion in 2006. Thereafter, I discuss the intervention by Asma Jahangir in 2005, and how she reported upon the differences of documentation, and finally I will discuss the relation between facts, truth and politics in the matters of monitoring religious freedom.

Monitoring religious freedom

The act of monitoring religious freedom entails a fine balance between the notions of truth, facts and politics. Already inherent in conceptual framing, incidents and episodes, what we may term 'facts,' is a dependency upon the definitions of religious freedom in use. Some questions arise; what is monitored? Who enacts the monitoring? And to what purpose? The dispute around anti-conversion legislation, and the emergence of violence thereof, in Sri Lanka has made the issue of monitoring religious freedom tantamount for understanding the conflict about conversions. Incidents have been counted; atrocities described, allegations launched, and yet, amidst this scenery of 'facts in the making' deep trenches remain in how the story of the anti-conversion bill is interpreted by the different parties involved.

A fact may only turn political if it is carried forward by a story. In itself any given fact is silent and alone, amidst the chaos of any other trivial fact. As such, a fact is dependent upon something that is greater than itself, a story that breathes life into a fact and rearranges it in accordance with other facts. Hannah Arendt notes: "A factual statement only acquires political implications by being put into an interpretative context" (Arendt 2006: 245). The salience of political facts is dependent upon a storyline, a trustworthy narrator and a situation that can be remedied.

Facts have no interests in themselves; their contingency is kept alive only as far as they are part of a political plot. Factual truth and political interests may both contest and accommodate one another, and facts are often a vital part of how prosaic politics narrates (a chain of) events into a given interpretative frame. The contingency of facts attests to their dependence of prosaic politics to keep them relevant, and different political actors will emphasise different facts either in affirmation or contestation of other political contenders. However, while the dual nature of the fact attests that it is both vulnerable and dependent upon a narrative frame to be activated, the fact in general has nevertheless acquired an unmistakable reputation as the ultimate token of truth. Foucault observes in his essay "Truth and Juridical Forms":

> The inquiry is precisely a political form–a form of power management and exercise that, through the juridical institution, became, in Western culture, a way of authenticating truth, of acquiring and transmitting things that would be regarded as true. (Foucault 2002: 52)

Foucault has gained a widespread recognition for his assertion that knowledge, and its various forms of production, is interwoven with political power. A fact is not just a fact, but it is subject to various forms of control and regulation: ""Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" (Foucault 2002: 132). Hence, the production of political facts is often a costly affair, including and integrating several layers of bureaucratic procedures. Thus, facts are never neutral, but rely upon systems or actors interested in their production and refinement, but also the task of

authenticating truth, either through the trustworthiness of a narrator or the validating mechanisms of an inquiry. Arendt observes:

> the teller of factual truth, when he enters the political realm and identifies himself with some partial interest and power formation, compromises the only quality that could have made his truth appear plausible, namely, his personal truthfulness, guaranteed by impartiality, integrity, independence. There is hardly a political figure more likely to arouse justified suspicion than the professional truthteller who has discovered some happy coincidence between truth and interest. (Arendt 2006: 245-246)

The efforts to monitor religious freedom are precisely to be a form of truthtelling. Both the trustworthiness of the narrator and their respective mechanisms of validating the facts can provide integrity and impartiality. However, any inquiry in itself is not sufficient in bringing legitimacy, and the truthteller can be contested in many ways. Thus, in the relation between truth, facts and politics two important junctures stand out; the integrity of the truthteller and the contextual relevance of the political facts provided by the inquiry. By monitoring religious freedom it is the grievances suffered by religious subjects that are in focus, yet it is the task of the monitoring body to transform these grievances into political facts that produces a coherent image of how it is precisely the 'freedom of religion' of these subjects that is under threat. The reports need to form a reliable and persuasive interpretation of incidents, events and episodes and weave them together in a story of how their religious freedom is violated, and what should be done about the situation.

It is common to divide external monitoring mechanism into three distinct categories; multilateral mechanisms (usually international organisations such as UN and the like), bilateral mechanisms (where one country monitors another and exerts direct pressure) and the existence of NGOs, of local, national and international standing, which initiate and forward their own monitoring efforts (Danchin 2002). In this chapter I will look into how both Christian and Buddhist organisations have initiated their own investigations and fact-finding missions to supply evidence of how their 'religious freedom' is threatened in Sri Lanka. These initiatives do not stand alone, but are supplemented by how U.S. foreign policy intervened in the debate

through the monitoring efforts of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), and Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, conducted her own fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka in 2005, where she also derived her report upon the fact-finding missions supplied to her by different (religious) NGOs in Sri Lanka.

The Christian voice: Blessed be those who are persecuted

For the evangelical Christian community in Sri Lanka the introduction of the anti-conversion bill proposals was a blessing. This seems to be an odd thing to say, but considering that the evangelical Christian community in Sri Lanka had already before the anti-conversion bill proposals experienced episodes of harassment and violence, the anti-conversion bill not only came as the ultimate proof that that they were indeed a persecuted minority – it also gave them a golden opportunity to mobilise politically around their grievances and attain international interest for their case. In the following discussion I will look at how the Christians in Sri Lanka responded to violence by launching an intensive campaign of reports and lobbyism in their efforts to monitor religious freedom. The concomitancy of the concepts 'persecution' and 'religious freedom' has lately achieved international currency. Castelli states:

> There is no precise origin point for the contemporary discursive project of the Christian persecution complex, though political activism organized under the sign of "religious persecution" and "religious freedom" has certainly grown substantially in the last decade and most pressingly in the post-September 11th context. (Castelli 2007: 156)

The historian K.M. de Silva noted already in 1998 that 'charismatic' churches need to act in self-restraint, like the rest of the Christian community in Sri Lanka, or otherwise they will end up in confrontation with Buddhist activists (de Silva 1998: 117-118). However, to document an upsurge of confrontational evangelical activity from 1998 onwards, with the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in US in 1998, would be exceedingly difficult, as this period witnessed an upsurge of different monitoring efforts to document evidence of 'religious

persecution'. In Sri Lanka, the years 2003-2005 saw a tremendous escalation of various monitoring bodies that came to the island to conduct various fact-finding missions, and several international, but also national, monitoring bodies forwarded incident reports from Sri Lanka on a day-to-day basis. These had almost exclusively a Christian evangelical background and had experience in monitoring violations of religious freedom from other contexts. Thus, the intensification of animosities towards Christians in Sri Lanka was soon mediated into a larger international monitoring industry, which converted the current context in Sri Lanka into an international front against the anti-conversion legislation and the 'persecution' of Christians in Sri Lanka.

Organisations such as the Voice of the Martyrs (VoM), International Christian Concern (ICC) and Christian Monitor served and still serve a day-to-day reporting on incidents against Christians in Sri Lanka.[120] This could be everything from assaults, threats or other episodes of violence against Christians, or status updates on the legal process of the anti-conversion legislation or related legislative attempts that affect Christians. The evangelical Christians can use these forums to gain awareness and support for their case, and these international networks centred on 'the persecuted church' worldwide provide a structural mechanism for reporting and monitoring incidents of 'religious violence'.When speaking of the Christian monitoring of freedom of religion what seems to be an innocent documentation of facts is a powerful mechanism to make all these incidents and events form a sequential storyline. These facts are not alone, and the monitoring mechanisms transform these lone incidents together into the coherency that enhances the salience of political facts, which bring witness of a concerted effort against Christian minorities. These forums made it far easier for the evangelicals in Sri Lanka to inform globally about their hardships, and these monitoring efforts subsequently generated more interest in probing the situation of the Christians in Sri Lanka. Castelli, who discusses Christian

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[120] Castelli (2007) notes that many of these organizations indulged in monitoring persecution have roots from the cold war missionary front.

activism and the persecuted church globally, notes the following trends in reporting 'facts' and 'stories':

> "persecution" is meanwhile defined by means of a specific range of rhetorical strategies. The three most central rhetorical gestures are the practice of *graphic synecdoche* (where the speaker lists long series of violent and atrocious acts—kidnapping, rape, torture, murder—which everyone agrees are deplorable and unacceptable and which then become specific elements of the broader category, "persecution"); *narrative metonymy* (where incidents are narrated often without specifying details and come to stand as emblematic examples of a more general category); and the *strategic use of deeply personalized anecdotes* (where again an individual is named and geographically located and his or her story told in brief, again as an illustrative example of the more general category, "persecution"). (Castelli 2005: 326)

"Persecution" is not a neutral term, and Castelli (2007, 2005) notes how global evangelical activism has adopted the language of human rights as an arbiter to connect activism against persecution within the frames of religious freedom. During my encounters with evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka they continually reiterated bible verses and anecdotal sayings to explain their own political marginality in Sri Lanka: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.10) and "The blood of the martyrs is the seeds of the church" (from Tertullian). Castelli argues that Christianity itself is founded upon the concept of persecution as an archetype of religio-political standing and that "persecution plays a defining role in the generation and sustenance of Christian identity" (Castelli 2005: 329). Many of my evangelical informants claimed that the evangelical pastor Lionel Jayasinghe in Tissamaharamaya was the first martyr[121] in Sri Lanka, and that his death in 1983 started the persecution of evangelicals in Sri Lanka.[122] Hence, suffering, persecution and martyrdom are not solely individual

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[121] Castelli notes how earlier stories of martyrs often are transported into political contexts: "Matyrdom continues to strike a resonant chord where political struggles are taking place and when those who seek to mobilize others to their cause attempt to find an irrefutable authorizing ground for their stance in those struggles. (…) It is in such moments of catastrophe and crisis, uncertainty and heightened conviction that the martyr/the suffering innocent emerges especially as a figure to convince and reassure" (Castelli 2006: 18).
[122] Fernando (2014) bases his article upon the congregation in Tissamaharamaya, where the wife of the deceased Lionel Jayasinghe took leadership of the congregation after his death to great success, and Fernando

grievances of Christians, but tied into political ideas about how Christians are likely to meet violent response in confrontation with their enemies. As such, in order to understand political mobilisation among evangelicals it can be misleading to survey their engagement in (party) politics, but often more productive to refer to how such friend-enemy distinctions are embedded within (global) Christian activism. Hence, it is imperative to look at how different organisations, national and international, have worked in Sri Lanka to monitor religious discrimination and religious freedom.

The organisation Christian Solidarity Worldwide has launched 4 reports, or 'Briefings', about the situation of religious freedom in Sri Lanka; the first one ("Religious Freedom Threatened By Anti-Conversion Legislation") launched September 2004, and with another report from a fact-finding mission 15th- 25th of September and a follow-up study between 26th of May – 2nd of June in 2006, before their final report ("Religious Freedom in the post-conflict situation") came in January 2010. The Christian Solidarity Worldwide (www.csw.org.uk) state that their aim is to work for religious freedom through advocacy against religious discrimination and persecution. One of their primary methods is to conduct advocacy work in western countries, especially UK and US, as well as the EU.

The formation of www.srilankanchristians.com became active in the autumn of 2004, and was launched to monitor instances of religious violence, predominantly, if not exclusively towards Christians, but the webpage has also put effort into releasing public documents concerning the anti-conversion bill for greater public access. The formation of Sri Lankan Christians is a joint effort between the Archdiocese of Colombo, the representative for the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, National Christian Evangelical Alliance in Sri Lanka (NCEASL) and Hela Kitthunu Urumaya, which was a radical Catholic group who worked for a greater recognition of Christians in Sri Lanka, especially historically (their name can be translated as Sinhala Christian Heritage). This conjoint effort between Catholic and evangelical actors is quite uncommon, as these two Christian bodies often have been suspicious

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notes how the "martyrdom, in the eyes of Sri Lanka's evangelicals – is often interpreted as a victory for evangelicalism rather than a defeat" (Fernando 2014: 581).

of each other, especially in relation to the anti-conversion bill and the issue of unethical conversions. While several people among the Protestants (the NCC) claimed that they had to negotiate between the evangelical and Catholic community,[123] the website www.srilankanchristians.com attests that cooperation between Catholics and evangelicals could be found on particular topics.

The Christians' grave situation also attracted other organisations that were more directly connected with particular congregations. The America-based evangelical advocacy group for religious liberty named Jubilee Campaign visited Sri Lanka on a two-and-a-half-day visit in October 2004, and while the fact-finding mission conducted several interviews with several leaders of different religious congregations and some political leaders during their stay, the Jubilee Campaign is intimately associated with the National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka (NCFSL), a loose network of independent evangelical churches. Apart from raising the awareness of the situation of Christians in Sri Lanka, the Jubilee Campaign also facilitated meetings between evangelicals in Sri Lanka and the U.S. embassy in an attempt to enhance the prominence of religious liberty and protection of the Christian minority in Sri Lanka as a basis for negotiation between the two countries (Berkwitz 2008b).

Many international, mostly Christian, organisations came to Sri Lanka for various fact-finding missions between 2004–2006, where they reported both from the violent incidents as well as the legal progress of the proposed anti-conversion bill. One organisation, however, confined itself predominantly to the legal side of the dispute. The Becket Fund, also an U.S.-based religious liberty advocacy group did arrange fact-finding missions to Sri Lanka, but focused their advocacy through the webpage www.lankaliberty.com where they published various documents relating to the ongoing process around the anti-conversion legislation. In particular they argued that the anti-conversion bill draft violated the principles in Article 18 of the ICCPR, and argued that it infringed upon the individual right to freely choose and adopt a belief.

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[123] The NCC did not participate in monitoring efforts of religious freedom in Sri Lanka as they felt that such efforts only would increase the tensions between the various religious communities in Sri Lanka and lead to further antagonism and animosities.

While the efforts to monitor the situation of religious liberty in Sri Lanka were most intensely embraced by evangelical advocacy groups internationally, we also see that a similar monitoring body was constructed nationally through the www.srilankanchristians.com. Most of the reports complain about the persecution of the Christian minority in Sri Lanka, and place the blame of the conflict around unethical conversions upon the Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka. The Jubilee Campaign argues that the violent repercussions launched by the Buddhist extremists are their primary means in acquiring religious supremacy in Sri Lanka, and that the anti-conversion legislation is just a symptom of this general malaise:

> They [the evangelical pastors] believe, on the contrary, that the attacks are the paramount issue, and that the legislation was merely one part of an overall strategy to assert the primacy of the Sinhalese Buddhism in Sri Lanka and eliminate every religious group that threatens their primacy. Their fear is that the international community will stop paying attention after the demise of the bills, but that the monks will continue their campaign of terror—"diplomacy by other means," one might say. (Jubilee Campaign, 25th of March, 2005)

The way in which the relation between the violence directed at Christian minorities is understood in relation to the proposed anti-conversion bill is not arbitrary. Osuri (2013) argues that the Indian government has granted the Hindu nationalists an important victory when they acceded to ban unethical conversion on the grounds that they threaten public order, as they invoke violent responses from Hindu nationalists. As such, it is possible to invoke the argument that anti-conversion legislation is enacted precisely to guarantee religious harmony. Hema Goonatilake, the editor of *The Buddhist Times*, argues: "Anti-Christian violence began around the same time and increased with the increase in unethical conversions. It was the aggressive campaigns of the new evangelical churches to convert rural Buddhists that resulted in this backlash" (Goonatilake 2009: 44), and she further concludes that: "A major reason why legislation is necessary is that the law is the most effective way to prevent further religious disharmony" (Goonatilake 2009: 46). The argumentation is that violence erupts due to emotive responses of 'unethical conversions' and that with an enactment of an anti-conversion bill these eruptions would come to a halt, as it would

stop the methods of aggressive proselytisation by evangelical churches. Thus, explaining the violence against Christians in Sri Lanka may take two different venues; either see them as (rural) responses against aggressive proselytism ('unethical' conversions), or concerted effort to gain political leverage to introduce the anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka.

The various Christian reports argue that both the violence towards Christians and the upcoming anti-conversion legislation can be seen as instruments of religious discrimination. An occasional church attack is no news item, but a concerted campaign of oppression against Christian minorities both through legal mechanisms and exclusionary violence provides a more potent storyline from which to draw conclusions of religious persecution. Thus, the combination of an oppressive law, together with exclusionary violence, is a powerful imaginary of religious persecution, which would give international awareness and mobilisation to the particular case at hand. Thus, the anti-conversion bill proposal in Sri Lanka acted as a catalyst for generating more international attention to the situation of Christians in Sri Lanka, and it was framed as a testimony that Christians in Sri Lanka was targeted by a concerted effort. However, we also see how the political mileage of evangelical Christians is dependent upon their marginality in general and violence in particular. Through such marginality and especially as victims of violence they are able to find patronage among these Christian international monitoring organisations specifically, and the international society more generally. Hence, exclusionary violence is a political commodity necessary for subverting political marginality into global activism and international patronage.

The most important forum of advocacy for Christians on the theme of religious liberty was for a long time the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) which was enacted by the U.S. in 1998, and which had a mandate to sanction states on violations of religious freedom. The IRFA entails that the US itself monitor the situation of religious freedom all over the world, and that countries can either be classified as "countries of particular concern" or they can be put on the "watch list". While Sri Lanka has been put on neither of these lists, an eventual passing of the anti-conversion bill could jeopardise the situation for Sri Lanka, and as Berkwitz notes

"[Sri Lanka] can ill-afford to be reprimanded and sanctioned by the U.S. government under the IRFA, which could result in the delay or cancellation of official and state visits to the U.S., the reduction or termination of certain assistance funds, and the imposition of targeted or broad trade sanctions" (Berkwitz 2008b: 214). However, this punitive approach has also been heavily criticised:

> This essentially punitive approach deepened the existing perception abroad that American policy was simply an example of cultural imperialism, designed to undermine majority religious communities and pave the way for American missionaries. (Farr and Saunders 2009: 964)

Several of my Buddhist informants were critical to how the American Embassy intervened in the anti-conversion debate, and how they had threatened with sanctions if it passed. The Embassy not only held public meetings with Sri Lankan stakeholders, but was also engaged in direct communication with important figures in relation to the political process. The U.S. launches annually an International Religious Freedom Report on different countries, and it has reported from Sri Lanka since 2001. Rather than reporting a list of incidents the reports are more holistic in scope discussing the latest progress and decline of the situation of religious freedom in Sri Lanka, as well as new administrative and bureaucratic amendments. Moore observes how the reports written under the aegis of IRFA have followed genres, both structurally and thematically, from the human rights discourse, where the reports are more than a simple statement of facts, but written to create a sense of urgency and embattlement (Moore 2011). However, in contrast to the majority of the Christian monitoring bodies, the IRFR also reports more widely from all of the different religious organisations in Sri Lanka. It can be read from the report that the highest level of U.S. interventions and advocacy was reached during the climax of the anti-conversion legislation debate, in the years 2003–2006.

The evangelical Christian community acknowledges how the anti-conversion bill proposals highlighted the case of 'persecuted' Christians to greater international awareness, and that the international pressure and advocacy on the matter were an advantage to the practice of their religious activities. Thus, the anti-conversion

legislation became a golden opportunity for them to act upon their aggravating situation, and claim international support for their case. The Jubilee Campaign argues:

> Although the attacks have been going on for years, international attention only became focused on Sri Lanka with the introduction of the anti-conversion bills. Before that time, religion-based violence was overshadowed by the twenty-year-long ethnic conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or Tamil Tigers. Several of the people we interviewed, including a fair number of the evangelical pastors, expressed concern that the apparent defeat of the anti-conversion legislation would lull the government and the international community into thinking that the problem has been solved. (Jubilee Campaign, 25th of March, 2005)

While the anti-conversion proposals were a source of anxiety and fear, they nevertheless acted as a catalyst of international attention to their situation, and this international scrutiny helped them as their monitoring efforts were then acknowledged and used as a basis for further advocacy. With the subsequent failure of the anti-conversion legislation, many Christians fear that the decreased international attention will give the Buddhist extremists more room to navigate discriminatory regulations and violent attacks upon the Christian community in Sri Lanka.

If we return to the initial question of the trustworthiness of the 'truthteller' we see that all these monitoring bodies are deeply embedded with Christian interests, some even with specific congregational Christian interests. Consequently, they can be arrested upon their coterminous mixture of 'fact' and 'political interest'. The truthteller is the key persona in the conflict. This is a major challenge to the Christian monitoring bodies, and as long as such monitoring bodies curtail intimate ties with one specific religion, or even religious congregation, critique of their biased nature can be easily levelled. Hence, the various reports written by these monitoring bodies are not seen as authoritative by the Buddhist nationalists, and the consequence is that they are neither debated nor challenged on their provisions of factual truth or interpretation, but simply refuted as running political errands. The reports and monitoring do not bring the antagonistic parties to a common, but instead a contested,

platform. Rather the reports are used as an internal mobilsation for the greater Christian community both nationally and internationally, and are used as an instrument for further advocacy in relation to western nation-states and political formations, such as the EU and the UN.

The production of many small, but frequent, reports on the situation of religious freedom among the Christian minority in Sri Lanka is probably due to their intention of keeping the intensity of their pressure at a high level. Instead of providing the comprehensive truth of the situation for Christians in Sri Lanka, the frequency of these reports attests to the urgency of the matter and the demand for swift action and pressure against the Sri Lankan government. The reports draw upon relevance of the political facts provided, and beckon further action on the matter from the international society, and the frequent and urgent reports from Christian organisations are supposed to bear witness to the calamities involved.

Buddhist documentation: The grand commissions on 'unethical conversions'
The 2002 Report of the Presidential Commission on the Buddha Sasana included one chapter to discuss the various external threats to Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and three sources of concern were revealed; the inculturation of terminology and rituals by the Catholic Church, the subversive methods employed by Muslims in regard to acquisition of land and marriage, and last, but not least, the imminent threat of unethical conversions in rural areas. The report observes:

> They [the fundamentalist Christian groups] settle or "plant" outside Christians among the Buddhists in rural areas. Then, under the guise of social service, they build a close relationship with the Buddhist inhabitants there and systematically convert them into Christianity. (The Report of the Presidential Commission on the Buddha Sasana 2002: Article 9.23)

The report argues that Christian fundamentalist groups and/or NGOs are lined up to destroy Buddhism, and that there are no means of monitoring their activities in Sri Lanka. Thereafter the report provides a list of dubious activities of Christian groups/NGOs in various parts of Sri Lanka. Complaints are either cast over the

various subversive methods employed by Christian missionaries/aid workers, and also supposed illegitimate preschools/churches/house churches are identified by address. While some of the facts revealed allude to various local disputes over the use of Christian worship sites, many of the allegations are quite general in scope. The report warns that local conflicts have led to violence, and that the Sri Lankan state should take immediate steps, preferably through the means of a law, to ban subversive practices of conversion. The Report of the Presidential Commission on the Buddha Sasana's findings was used as evidence for the need of an anti-conversion bill in 2003 and 2004, and the Supreme Court determination alluded to these 'factual truths'. However, after the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur in 2005, she concluded "that the allegations of 'unethical' conversions have rarely been precise and largely overestimated" (Jahangir 2005: 21). This lack of acknowledgement on behalf of the 'Buddhist' report to soundly deliver evidence and factual truth outraged many among the Buddhist nationalists. Gamini Perera, a prominent Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist and the leader of the Joint Committee of Buddhist Organisations (JCBO) counters the allegations by Asma Jahangir on the inadequate evidential proofs supplied by Buddhists on unethical conversions. First, he claims that proof of forced conversions was given to the Special Rapporteur, and that she at that time did not comment upon the inadequacy of these reports. Countering these claims of missing direct testimonies, Perera states in *The Buddhist Times* in June 2005[124]:

> Tsunami relief. Again it would be too optimistic to expect confirmation of allegations without physically sitting for a few days disguised as a refugee in a camp that is exposed to the machinations of these faith based groups. (Perera 2005)

Gamini Perera further alludes to the testimony given by the German journalist Christian Eckert, who also made a contribution to the June edition of *The Buddhist Times*. Eckert gives testimony of certain episodes he himself came across during the post-tsunami recovery phase; of scientologists trying to find widows to marry in order to obtain residence visa, tsunami victims who are suddenly receiving sewing

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[124] Gamini Perera's statement was issued in relation to the statements Asma Jahangir gave after her visit in May 2005, and not upon her report which was released later that year.

machines after attending prayer sessions and another victim who had to hand back his received items when he refused to join a Christian congregation permanently (Eckert 2005). One year later the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) established a committee to look into the factual evidence related to unethical conversions.

In 2006 the leader of All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) appointed a commission to "inquire and report into the conversion of Buddhists in Sri Lanka by immoral and fraudulent means to other religious orders" (ACBC 2012: intro). The appointment was held at Mihintale, a Buddhist holy place of worship where Buddhism is said to have first set root in Sri Lanka, on the 11th of June 2006, the Poson Full Moon day in the Buddhist era of 2550. The committee consisted of Sarath Gunatilake, past judge of the high court, 10 commissioners[125] and a secretary, Jaliya Nammuni, a retired Major-General. The commission was initially supposed to deliver their report within six months, but it was not submitted to the ACBC until the 5th of October 2008, nearly two years later. The report was first published in its Sinhalese version in 2009, and later published in an English translation in May, 2012. Some of the issues the commission received mandate to inquire into were:

a) To gather information enabling the identification of organisations which are directly or indirectly involved in converting Sri Lankan Buddhists to other religions, with regard to their constitution and their activities;
b) To investigate the sources of funding of these organisations
c) Are there facts to confirm the resources which, the religious organisations, non-governmental organisations, voluntary organisations which are incorporated in Sri Lanka, those who carry-on projects in Sri Lanka with Board of Investment approvals and foreign charitable organisations receive, are by fraudulent means diverted directly or indirectly to organisations which engage in converting Buddhists to other religions?
d) To investigate the most popular strategies used in persuading people to convert to other religions, especially simple village folk and the urban population;

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[125] The 10 commissioners were: Dr. Ariyaratne Lankachandra (past director of education), Dr. Panngadasa Gardiye Punchihewa (past member of the civil service), Herbert Gamini Gunawardena (past senior deputy inspector-general of the police), Dissanayaka Mudiyanselage Jayatillake Dissanayake (past director of education), Somaratne Kariyawasam (past commissioner of Buddhist Affairs), Budhgoda Arachige Don Alfred Wijewardena (past deputy inspector-general of the police), Katriarachige Srimathie Chitra Wijesekera (past Sri Lanka education administrative service), Watuthanthrige Hubert de Alwis (Past commissioner of excise), Samaratunge Dewage Chandradasa (Past Sri Lanka administrative service) and Sinnakarupan Suppiah Rajalingam (Buddhist social service).

e) To investigate for evidence to confirm that local as well as foreign voluntary organisations were, on the pretext of helping the victims of the tsunami disaster of 2004, in fact engaged in conversions;

The list of questions by the inquiry demonstrates that the commission looked in particular for structural patterns, not directly related to the act of conversions per se, but rather at the opportunities of the source, be they religious organisations, non-governmental organisations or voluntary organisations, to conduct 'unethical' conversions. The factual reporting as a whole is not incident-based, but accusatory levelled against the potential perpetrators. The commission presupposes that Christians have a grand conversion strategy against Buddhists, and from this conversion strategy the commission infers that Christian organisations, especially those who perform social service, conduct 'unethical conversions'. The majority of evidence in the ACBC-report concerns itself with the link between Christian international networks, proselytism intents and general characteristics of improper methods of proselytisation allegedly taking place in Sri Lanka. Hence, when the commission report provides a list of 379 different "NGOs engaged in religious conversion" (ACBC 2012: 162-176), the mere listing of these bodies in itself is taken to attest to the range and scope of unethical conversions taking place in Sri Lanka today.

The contents of the ACBC-report can be divided into four different topics; (1) the intent and cunning tactics of proselytism by Christian organisations, (2) the improper means and methods of religious organisations in converting Buddhists, (3) on various attempts to bring disrepute upon the Buddha Sasana in general and Buddhist monks in particular, and (4) the obligation of the Sri Lankan state to confirm its patronage relations regarding Buddhism as the foremost religion in the country. The complaints against Christian organisations target the invasive manner of behaviour by many evangelical groups, especially their subtle entry into village areas, how they take undue advantage of ignorant and disadvantaged folk, and conversions by various gifts of allurement (employment, promotion, promise of money or housing or school admittance). Other complaints include incidents of symbol denigration, either narratively delivered against Buddhist precepts and tradition, or the actual

destruction of physical religious items, such as religious tokens or statues. However, many of these complaints are anecdotal and vague in nature, and the commission-report fails to bring the factual truth of their evidence beyond the accusatory level. But again, contrary to acts of violence and legal proposals, to acquire actual proof and evidence of 'unethical' conversions and improper proselytisation is no easy task, and requires extensive contextualisation of the local agency in each case.

The ACBC-report was launched almost 5 years after the anti-conversion bill proposal was forwarded. It is reasonable to believe that many Buddhist nationalists believed that the 2002 Report of the Presidential Commission on the Buddha Sasana offered the necessary evidential material to convince the Sri Lankan parliament to enact anti-conversion laws, especially when the Supreme Court condoned their material. However, Christian activism led to the production of several fact-finding reports on the situation for Christians in Sri Lanka, and they were able to provide convincing evidence to the international society that the Christian minority in Sri Lanka faced discrimination and hardships, both legally and by violent repercussions. The verdict of the UN special rapporteur Asma Jahangir was that she found the Christian monitoring of the situation precise and reliable, while the Buddhist testimonies both lacked precision and seemed to be exaggerated. I would like to argue that the launching of the ACBC commission to inquire and report on the conversion of Buddhists in Sri Lanka to other religions by immoral and fraudulent means was arguably a direct response to the verdict made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the lack of substantialised evidence. The commission report is then an attempt to provide such evidence of 'unethical' conversions in Sri Lanka, and thus articulate their concerns and anxieties on how they perceive missionary (mis)conduct. Even if the commission report cannot be said to fulfil the requests of valid documentation of 'unethical' conversions, the Buddhists have arguably learned the importance of providing factual truth when uttering complaints about violations upon their religious freedom. The policy-work around their issues has at least been taken to a new level.

While the Christian monitoring organisations issues many small, but frequent reports on the status of religious freedom and discriminatory violence against Christians in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist side concentrated their efforts upon one grand

and voluminous publication. The late blossoming of the Buddhist frenzy to report on 'unethical' conversions, in addition to the substantial amount of time taken to submit the findings in the report, caused the ACBC-report to have insignificant political implications. The evidence was provided too late in the process, even though the anti-conversion bill was coming up for another reading in parliament in early 2009. I would argue that the differences in style of the voluminous ACBC-report in comparison with the many small Christian monitoring reports indicate that these reports had very different functions. While the Christian reports counted incidents and violations of their religious freedom in Sri Lanka, their reports had no ambition to provide a full account of the situation of the Christians in Sri Lanka, but provide evidence and interest among the different policy makers and stakeholders in international political bodies. The frequency of these reports intended to keep their advocacy pressure upon these stakeholders warm, and indicate the urgency of the matter.

The ACBC commission report was written with the main intent to persuade politicians nationally to enact protective measures for Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and the report was less intended for the international public. Thus, the report came initially in a Sinhalese version in 2009, but it was published in English in 2012, and it was not before this that it had the potential to gain international political impact. However, the report is still available only in its printed form, and not through the internet. The ACBC-report (2012: 178) claims that there are close links between evangelical activism for proselytisation and the U.S. foreign policy on religious freedom, especially the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), and that human rights are understood accordingly. The ACBC-report states: "We believe that this background would help to understand the views and monetary transactions of NGOs active in Sri Lanka. One has to understand that Ms. Asma Jahangir, UN Special Co-ordinating Officer, has stated "The evidence available in Sri Lanka on conversion of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims to Christianity is inadequate" (ACBC 2012: 178). The ACBC commission hence claims that the UN intervention by the UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir in 2005 was already committed to a particular policy on the matter of interpreting Article 18 of the ICCPR, namely that missionary activity was entailed in

the phrasing 'to manifest religion'. The ACBC-report thus attempts to undermine the validity of the statements made by Asma Jahangir in 2005 on the basis that she had a biased understanding of the situation before her intervention in Sri Lanka.

The ACBC-report uses the first 5 chapters of the report to provide the background of the Buddhist identity of the Sri Lankan state and the historical background of unethical conversions. The intention of the report is not only to document instances of 'unethical' conversion but also to confirm the patronage relations between Buddhism and the Sri Lankan state: "Over the centuries Buddhism received state patronage. Royal patronage was necessary for Buddhism to flourish and also to safeguard the traditions" (ACBC-report 2012: 54). The present demands of special state patronage to Buddhism can be attested in the following statement in response to the objectives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs[126] established in 2005:

> The declaration of the Ministry of Religious Affairs that its mandate is to treat all religions with equality sets aside the foremost place assigned to Buddhism as guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Such declaration constitutes an outright breach of the Constitution. Although all Religions shall be guaranteed their constitutional freedom and rights, such guarantee shall be subject to the responsibility of the State to ensure the foremost place to Buddhism. All religionists shall obtain a clear understanding of the legal and constitutional position. (ACBC 2012: 30)

My argument is that the grand nature of the All Ceylon Buddhist Organisation's *Report of The Commission Appointed to Inquire And Report On The Conversion Of Buddhists In Sri Lanka to Other Religions by Immoral and Fraudulent Means* (2012/2009) not only aimed to document factual evidence of 'unethical' conversions in Sri Lanka, but that an aim with equal parity was to demand a re-instigation of the close patronage linkages that Buddhism and the state enjoyed in the past. Many Buddhist activists claim that these patronage linkages are safeguarded by Article 9 in the Sri Lankan constitution guaranteeing 'the foremost place' to Buddhism. The

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[126] The ACBC-report quotes a statement of the Ministry of Religious Affairs: "In as much as the Constitution provides for the protection and fostering of the Buddha Sāsana and for the development of an economy based on Buddhist values so shall all religions be treated with equality and a society be built where all religions and ethnic groups could live safely" (ACBC 2012: 30).

report was ceremoniously released in 2009, carried forth by ornamented elephants, in a manner which the public perceived this as an official publication, rather than one commissioned by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. Further still, while the report made little immediate political impact on the demand for anti-conversion legislation, many of the activists I interviewed read the report with zest and enthusiasm because of how it demanded stronger involvement of the state in protecting Buddhism in the country. The grand and voluminous nature of the report is precisely intended to persuade Sri Lankan politicians to acknowledge and protect the Buddhist heritage of the country, a Buddhist heritage that currently, in their perception, is under severe stress from the impact of foreign conspiring missionaries.

Independent interventions: Human rights and monitoring bodies

The conflict over 'unethical' conversion not only mobilised the different communities involved, but it also attracted the attention from independent monitoring organisations, especially those with an agenda of human rights or freedom of religion. One organisation that had an interest in the situation of religious freedom in Sri Lanka in this period was the Law & Society Trust, which annually releases a report on the state of human rights in Sri Lanka. While these annual reports cover all aspects of human rights, the right to religion posits a rather marginal position within the greater human rights situation in Sri Lanka within the last decades. However, it was first and foremost the anti-conversion bill in 2004 that evoked the interest of the Law & Society Trust, and the report *Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights 2005* carries a comprehensive discussion of the legal technicalities of not only the latest anti-conversion bill, but also the three incorporation cases from 2001–2003. While violence against Christian churches is barely mentioned in the report, it notes NCEASL's list of 135 attacks between 2003 to January 2004, the report gives a testimony that they have taken steps to appoint a Special Rapporteur to inquire into the matter of Human Rights and conversion (Goonesekere 2005).

The role of thematic rapporteurs in the UN is humanitarian, and not judgemental in a legal sense. Their area of external monitoring lies outside the

traditional UN judiciary, and is one form of "quasi-judicial monitoring mechanisms established by convention, and in an area today known as extra-conventional and ad hoc human rights machinery" (Danchin 2002: 149). The procedures have come to include country visits where the rapporteur interview government officials, as well as members of the judiciary, NGOs and other key persons according to the situation at hand. However, the visit is not a fact-finding mission alone, but draws upon evidence and documentation provided by a wide-range of actors, such as governmental agencies, NGO groups and organisations, where the rapporteurs determine whether the uncovered facts implicate state responsibility or not in their recommendations.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir visited Sri Lanka from the 2nd to the 12th of May, 2005, and later published a report where she summed up the latest tensions of religious intolerance in Sri Lanka. One of the key issues in the report was the precision and documentation of evidence provided before the Special Rapporteur, and she concluded the following on the validity of the factual truth she was given as documentation for the alleged grievances:

> Incidents of inappropriate methods of conversion and proselytizing by some "non-traditional" Christian groups were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur. These incidents were usually vaguely described and unclear with regards to circumstances. Despite repeated requests, the Special Rapporteur did not meet any person who had changed his or her religion because of allurement or other form of inducement. She has also not received any substantiated cases of conversion that would constitute a violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief, such as forced conversions. (Jahangir 2005: 10)

And, her verdict concerning the documentation of violence against religious minorities concluded:

> Before, but also during and after her visit to Sri Lanka, the Special Rapporteur received numerous reports of attacks and other acts of religious intolerance committed against religious minorities, in particular Christian groups. She notes that these reports are usually very well documented and are precise as to the factual circumstances of each case submitted. They come from different sources, some religiously affiliated, some not. (Jahangir 2005: 15-16)

As we see, the UN special rapporteur is decisive in her verdict of the different monitoring efforts taken to produce evidence of 'unethical' conversions in relation to religion-based violence and discrimination. The factual truths submitted to her regarding violence and discrimination was succinct and contextualised, while the reports on 'unethical' conversions did not probe the matters succinctly. Jahangir also observes the inherent difficulty in monitoring conversions, and she poses this as one of the main difficulties with an eventual enactment of an anti-conversion bill. First, it is difficult to assess the genuineness of a conversion, and to probe that an eventual gift or other similar promise caused the actual conversion. On the other hand, she argues, "A mechanism designed to monitor conversions and thus the reasons and purposes behind them could constitute a limitation on freedom of conscience" (Jahangir 2005: 15). While Jahangir did voice concerns over some aggressive proselytisation in Sri Lanka, her wording was that she condemned the attacks on religious minorities and advised against any anti-conversion legal mechanisms.

The intervention by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, here represented by Asma Jahangir, is the closest we come to an independent inquiry of authenticating the 'truth' when it comes to monitoring religious freedom. The moment she uttered her verdict upon the anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka, the political realities of such a mechanism to be enacted was reduced drastically. At that juncture, the Sri Lankan parliament had to contravene the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur, a political manoeuvre that would not go on unnoticed. In other words, the UN Special Rapporteur can be seen as the ultimate professional truthteller, guaranteeing impartiality, integrity, independence, the final arbiter of authenticating truth. Nevertheless, despite the unprecedented status of the UN Special Rapporteur, her authority does not stand uncontested.

Danchin (2002) observes how NGOs have established themselves as the principal monitors of human rights violations. While the UN lacks the sufficient resources to attain credible and extensive information by themselves, different NGOs are increasingly taking the role of experts and witnesses in documenting such violations (Danchin 2002: 160). Danchin argues further that the thematic rapporteurs

in particular are subject to one major weakness, in that there has been no attempt within the UN system to formalise fact-finding procedures, which may result in a risk of inconsistency in the procedures of documentation. Moreover, the growth of extra-conventional and ad hoc monitoring mechanisms within the UN have increasingly led to a NGO-isation of the UN organisation, where the methods and procedures of such NGOs have enabled a strengthened form of 'activism' on behalf of the UN, with 'exposure' as a major political tool, not to mention to a situation where several NGOs have specialised in forms of monitoring human rights violations, like many global Christian NGOs dedicated to documenting religious persecution. Thus, when Buddhist nationalists accuse Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur, of nurturing close links with evangelical activism for proselytisation, U.S. foreign policy and religious freedom, we see that these alleged 'complicit relations' are structural determinants in how 'religious freedom' is documented and negotiated through ad hoc monitoring mechanisms of the UN. If NGOs, and global evangelical monitoring mechanisms in particular, are able to co-opt the procedures and documentation of the fact-finding mission of the Special Rapporteur, and thus able to subvert the authority and legitimacy of the UN, complaints over 'complicit relations' should be a legitimate concern of the thematic rapporteurs. Taken to the extreme, it could implicate that only groups with the capacity to kindle these structural determinants of supplying 'truthful' facts are able to garner support from the UN Special Rapporteurs.[127]

A third body that was attracted to come to Sri Lanka on a fact-finding mission was the Norwegian-based Oslo Coalition on freedom of religion or belief, which defines itself as an international network of representatives from religious and other life-stance communities, NGOs, international organisations and research institutes. Their fact-finding mission in January 2006 aimed to inquire into the relations of proselytising and human rights:

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[127] Another challenge is that the dynamics of monitoring religious freedom end up where each religious community only monitors violations against their own 'flock'.

> Very often it is those who want to proselytize who complain about restrictions in this area. In the last decade or so the complaints of those targeted by various missionaries have also become more vocal. The question is thus: to what extent is proselytizing a human right protected by the UN covenants on human rights, and to what extent has this right to be qualified in order not to violate the integrity and human rights of others. (Oslo Coalition 2006: 2)

Rather than a mission to provide hard facts of either religious discrimination or 'unethical' conversions, the Oslo Coalition fact-finding mission discusses principles and concerns in relation to missionary activities, and pieces of this work were later made into another publication, *Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities* (2009),[128] which is a brief text that discusses the basic ground rules for individual codes of conduct in relation to missionary activity. Hence, while many of the other monitoring bodies have attempted to provide 'hard' facts, either as an advocacy measure on behalf of their own religious group, or as an attempt to authenticate the true matters of religious freedom in Sri Lanka, the Oslo Coalition uses the fact-finding mission in Sri Lanka to enlarge the debate and discourse around proselytism and human rights, and used their fact-finding mission as a basis for explication of new recommended ground rules for missionary activities.

Monitoring religious freedom in post-conflict Sri Lanka

The only monitoring body that has a comprehensive scope from all religions in Sri Lanka, including a systematic design over the various discourses present in the various instances of religious violence, is the recent report (2013) from Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) entitled *Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka*. Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is a Sri Lanka bound independent and non-partisan interest/research body that makes interventions into the public policy debate nationally, both through public critique and, as their name would

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[128] This publication of ground rules has later been translated into several languages: German, Arabic, Russian and Bahasi Indonesia.

suggest, offering alternative policies. This report saw its inception at a CPA hosted workshop held in the aftermath of the Dambulla Mosque attack in April 2012, in which a key challenge of the documentation of religious hostilities was identified by the participants, among them a Government representative.

By approaching the various representatives from each religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity), the report draws a coherent picture not only of the particular grievances experienced among the different religions, but it is also able to offer a systematic analysis of the various trends in the occurances of religious violence in post-war Sri Lanka. The formula used to ascertain the various situations for the respective religions follow a systematic pattern; List of Attacks on Christian Places of Worship, Trends in Attacks and Related Incidents, Other Perceptions of Threat and Insecurity and Response to Attacks. This structure opens up for a broader analysis than from the mere listing of incidents and attacks, and the report also includes other perceptions of threat that inform the understanding of how relations between religious bodies are played out in contemporary Sri Lanka:

> The second relates to developments and perceptions of threats which are not necessarily violent in nature but are seen as a source of insecurity by members of a religious community. For example, the construction of a religious symbol such as a cross, a Bo tree, or even a religious school would eventually turn into a place of worship, affecting the predominant local religious community has been raised in a number of areas, including the North and the East, but also in the South. These fears have led to religious exclusivity in some areas and fears of encroachment by one religious group into the traditional areas of another. Some of the direct and indirect attacks are also linked to issues of recognition and control of religious groups over matters of their own faith. For example, the difficulties some groups have in registering new places of worship, military intrusion into prayer and memorial services in some parts of the country, the removal or relocation of religious symbols without consultation of the community involved. (CPA 2013: 16)

Thus, the report goes beyond a numerical list of attacks, and delves into the insecurities and concerns of each of the 'religions,' and various denominations within the respective religious traditions. The report is not confined to the attacks only, as would be indicated by its title, but the report is much closer to a total assessment of the conditions for religious worship in Sri Lanka, especially for vulnerable groups.

However, the report does not claim to be a total assessment: "While there are a variety of aspects that need to be looked at in order to assess current challenges relating to religious freedoms, this report focuses on one of these dimensions - violence against places of worship" (CPA 2013: 16). As the report on one hand goes beyond the confinement of actual attacks and into other concerns of insecurity, it also uses a rigid definition of what is identified as an attack: "as physical violence towards a religious place, such as the building or items within the building are damaged in some way and/or persons in the religious place are injured or killed" (CPA 2013: 16). The parameters used in the CPA report for monitoring the 'religious' violence are transparent and fixed, and this conceptual clarity combined with the broad range of contextualisation of the cases and concerns of the religious traditions (based on meticulous data collection), makes this form of reporting ideal as a basis for further discussions upon the issue of religio-political violence in Sri Lanka.

Political facts and religious freedom

The documentation of grievances related to religious freedom has become imperative for religious groups to prove their vulnerability. Hence, in order to prove the facts of such vulnerability, the religious group should be able to acquire the institutional backing to launch a fact-finding inquiry. This paradox shows that many cases relating to religious freedom are grounded upon the patronage abilities of providing the relevant evidence and political facts to prove their victimisation. Thus, an informed debate is dependent upon information, but not every religious group may have the ability to acquire such information all by themselves. The importance of documentation of violations reshuffles the power-relations when it comes to monitoring religious freedom in Sri Lanka; while the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists have a good standing with the political elites within the nation-state, their experience with the freedom of religion monitoring industry is novel. Hence, the monitoring efforts launched by the Buddhist nationalists were started from the beginning, and no apparatus gathered data and information on a continual basis. The evangelical Christians, on the other hand, had less political backing within Sri Lanka, but they

had an international and professionalised religious freedom monitoring industry that was able from the beginning to gather and structure the reported incidents in a systematic way.

The institutional differences in how the monitoring efforts were conducted may have impact upon the salience of the political facts provided. Many large and professional Christian organisations have internationally specialised in monitoring religious freedom and work continuously to document facts and incidents, and local and national Christian bodies may easily connect to these organisations to report and document their grievances. They already have an institutional advantage in documenting the facts, but these organisations are also specialised in transforming these scattered incidents into political facts that can be ordered into coherent stories of religious persecution. They have the skills and repertoires for making their reports and statements 'truthful,' they know the idiom in which to formulate their documents, they are acquainted with the jargon used in international religious freedom discourse. Thus, while the Christian minorities may wield little political acumen by themselves, the larger Christian monitoring industry comes to assist and guide the process, producing reliable documentation of political facts. Moore argues, on the International Religious Freedom (IRFA) dataset, that "researchers must be alert to how culturally structural discourse can affect reporting on 'facts'" (Moore 2011: 250). The advantage of Christian monitoring mechanisms should not be underestimated, and it is imperative to understand the dynamics of these structural determinants, and how they are implicated in the procedural findings of the UN Special Rapporteur.

The discourse on 'persecution' also has a powerful sway over the dynamics of public and political debate. Castelli argues that the discursive relations of human rights, religious freedom and persecution are highly effective in curtailing political debate that have "a distinctive power to clear the room of any other view" (Castelli 2006: 19). Whenever Christians are 'persecuted,' this impervious suffering silences any critique or debate, and confines Christians to the position of victims, but never as perpetrators. Castelli describes the Christian persecution complex as a "discourse entity impervious to critique, self-generating and self-sustaining" (Castelli 2007a:

174). Hence, the narrative locus of 'persecution' is indeed a powerful one, as any dissent or debate becomes trivial in the face of persecution. If we turn to how Tamboukou asserts "the performative work of narratives" (Tamboukou 2008: 73), we see not only how persecution is an important locus of evangelical political identity, always threatened by 'extremist forces,' but also how an effective use of the persecution narrative, well documented and condoned by the UN Special Rapporteur, mediates the political marginality of evangelicals in Sri Lanka into a global patronage network of protective agents from the international society. Hence, when Tamboukou discusses how different conditions may alter specific narratives as marginal vis-à-vis dominant, we see how the politically marginalised position of evangelicals in Sri Lanka, can, by the means of powerful narrative devices, be transformed into wielding considerable political acumen.

Buddhist nationalists should receive credence for their attempts to document instances of "unethical" conversions, despite the fact that their evidence does not meet the standard required by the international monitoring industry. Hopefully, their new-gained experience in monitoring and documenting facts relating to religious freedom will give them an added impetus to instigate fact-based inquiries at an earlier stage in other political processes. What counted as sound evidential material in the hands of the Sri Lankan Supreme Court was determined by the UN Special Rapporteur to be lacking in tangible proof. The regime of documentation in relation to religious freedom internationally suggests that the institutional differences of the skills and repertoires between different religious groups worldwide should be bridged. The advantages currently enjoyed by the Christian monitoring industry can jeopardise the authenticity of monitoring efforts if these monitoring organisations achieve a (near-)monopoly on providing political facts of religious freedom.

The act of monitoring religious freedom implicitly carries with it certain ways to define religious freedom. While some monitoring bodies explicitly discuss their definitions of religious freedom, many reports take such definitions for granted. Moore (2011) observes how the reporting under IRFA has been favourable to 'proselytising traditions,' and how 'religion' is produced as a specific category through the genres of reporting and documenting religious freedom, procedures

which rarely provide any background information other than the mere statement of incidents. Thus, the tout court of monitoring efforts report on laws and incidents of violence, as such political facts are both easy to ascertain and document, but also because they have a direct relation to the topic in question. However, other issues are harder to bring into the fold of religious freedom, and the difficulties in monitoring 'unethical' conversions are but one example, both because such documentation needs extensive contextual fleshing, but also because monitoring conversions can violate the personal rights of *forum internum*.

What is religious freedom? Most simply it is a right entailed in Article 18 of the ICCPR. We looked into the discourse and the complexities of this right in chapter 9 ("The Aporias of Proselytism: Freedom of Religion and the Anti-Conversion Bill in Sri Lanka"), especially at how there is tensions in how to understand proselytisation in relation to the specific formulations in Article 18. However, what we see through these monitoring efforts is that religious freedom is not only a right, but also an instrument of measurement, as to whether religious adherents within a given nation-state are entitled to, and in fact conduct peacefully, certain practices of worship. Monitoring mechanisms are practically negotiating which practices count, and which do not count, as religious freedom. This then determines which events and incidents are reported. By the process of inclusion and exclusion certain elements of religious practice are either condoned or excluded from such monitoring, which has important implications for which practices count as 'religion' or not. Moreover, religious freedom should not merely be conceptualised as a particular right, but also as a rhetorical device, as the concept of religious freedom relates to powerful discourses of morality, legality and legitimacy. There are still those who believe that human rights stand above the political, as an ivory tower of moral standing and ethical impetus, yet the authority and legitimacy of human rights are not fixed, but constantly negotiated and contested by various agents.

Both Christians and Buddhists have alluded to religious freedom as a rhetorical device to attain authority and legitimacy for their positions and demands, yet we also saw that evangelicals had more intimate knowledge of the international monitoring mechanisms relating to religious freedom and that these structural

determinants were imperative for them to secure backing from the UN Special Rapporteur. However, Buddhist organisations have strained themselves to accommodate the political repertoires needed to satisfy human rights discourse, both when it comes to the articulation of anti-conversion bill, as well as the way in which they enacted monitoring efforts to provide evidence for 'unethical' conversions. 'Narrative competence' becomes a key issue in relation to religious freedom, in how to frame certain events and incidents as violations of this right, and we have seen how the narrative competence of the evangelicals was able to transform their political marginality in Sri Lanka to one of wielding international impetus through international backing. However, as I have already noted, Buddhist nationalists have shown a great sense of political innovation in relation to the anti-conversion bill, and we will follow further developments of political repertoires among Buddhist nationalists in the next chapter. Here we will see how regulating religion in Sri Lanka is done by indirect laws, bureaucratic procedures and other structural complicities that hinder religious groups conducting their practices.

12. Political Repertoires and Religious Freedom

This chapter will look at several other laws and bureaucratic endeavours that inform how religious pluralism in Sri Lanka should be understood. The public attention surrounding the anti-conversion bill proposal has increased the national awareness of the 'improper' methods used by cunning missionaries, but other measures have also been taken to curb the activities of evangelical Christians. A bureaucratic notice to register all sites of worship has been effective in curtailing evangelical practice of house churches, and the noise pollution law has been effectively used to stop noisy worshipping by evangelical Christians. While the anti-conversion bill has been negotiated through the notions of religious freedom, the last part of this chapter will discuss how various political repertoires have unfolded, and how religious freedom has been used as a rhetorical device to tap into a powerful discourse of morality, legality and legitimacy.

The modalities of regulating religion

A study into the modalities of regulating religion should not focus upon the specific religion involved, but rather on how the religious economy in a particular setting is circumscribed by powerful interests, both in relation to the position enjoyed by a religious tradition, as well as in how religious actors may influence the policy process. Gill observes:

> When it comes to determining how religious groups will be regulated in society – and hence the level and nature of religious liberty – all of these interests [political survival, fiscal resources and social unrest] come into play. Politics is a game of trade-offs, and regulating (or deregulating) the religious economy will depend on how well such regulation enhances the survival and well-being of politicians. The process is never straightforward, and the path of religious liberty runs forward and back. (Gill 2008: 228)

Christian opposition against the anti-conversion bill was less about the specific formulations of the bill and more about how the bill would create religious discrimination in Sri Lanka. In other words, the bill should not be read alone, but in tandem with other mechanisms of regulating and restricting religion, in particular religious minorities. While Buddhism is far from having a 'religious monopoly' in Sri Lanka, it has achieved a hegemonic position in contemporary times, in that Buddhist actors demand special privileges from the state, and wield substantial informal influence in many localities. However, as I have argued in my thesis, the failure of the anti-conversion bill also shows the limitations of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and claims of 'Buddhist hegemony' in Sri Lanka should be articulated with precision, as politicians will not enact any proposal coming from Buddhist nationalists. The extent and reach of this hegemonic position is under constant negotiation, and the political process concerning the anti-conversion bill, and similar laws and mechanisms, attests to the delineations, both its privileges and limitations, in present-day Sri Lanka. Similarly, the situation for religious minorities in a country needs to be assessed, not only regarding their rights entailed in the constitution, but also in how their actual practice of worship is subject to various regulations, restrictions and control. While the anti-conversion bill was never enacted, this chapter will examine other methods, and other laws, that have been used to curtail religious activity in Sri Lanka, and how we can understand the relation between political Buddhism and religious freedom through such examples.

By scrutinising the wider modalities of regulating religion, I will show how evident and not-so-evident regulations are played out between the 'hegemonic' Buddhism and religious minorities in Sri Lanka. Proposing and enacting laws are always public acts, and often prone to scrutiny from scholars. Laws dealing directly with religion would most certainly be evaluated whether there was a limitation on religious freedom or not. However, many laws only target religious behaviour indirectly, in ways that only religious activists, or legal personnel, can foresee. Laws may also be subtle mechanisms. Gill notes: "Conceiving of liberty as a multidimensional concept subject to numerous regulatory restrictions reveal that liberty is not simply a dichotomous variable – that is, something you either have or

don't have" (Gill 2008: 11). While numerous attempts have been made to suggest indices of religious freedom (see Gill 2008: 11), Gill is critical of such attempts as he find such schematising inadequate, as they often fail in revealing a comprehensive scope of the possible dimensions of religious liberty. Hence, in order to find the various regulatory mechanisms guiding the situation in a country, one would both need to look at the negative restrictions as well as the positive endorsement of certain religious practices and religious groups.

According to the religious market structure model, bureaucratic decisions will often privilege majority groups, and thus bring a positive endorsement upon adherents of the majority religion. Bureaucratic registrations and circulars that in principle assign equal status to all religious groups, in practice often privilege the stronger actors to the disadvantage of lesser actors. However, bureaucratic bias is hard to prove, and difficult to convert into political facts for further mobilisation. It is a form of tacit regulation. Social control, such as how local inhabitants and 'big men,' patrol and regulate religious minorities may also be a form of subtle regulation. Incidents and events of religious discrimination, such as exclusionary violence, are potentially public and easily attract political attention depending upon the scope of such events. However, other forms of discrimination may not attract the same form of attention. The concomitancy of discriminatory laws and exclusionary violence is evidence par excellence when one argues that a situation of religious persecution exists. Especially if the laws and the exclusionary violence can be traced to the same originating source, as in the case with the anti-conversion bill and the exclusionary violence directed against evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka, which both allegedly stemmed from Buddhist nationalists. Hence, before I address other laws and bureaucratic circulars in the wake of the anti-conversion bill, I would like to explore whether the mere proposal of the anti-conversion bill had much the same regulatory effects as it would have had if it had been enacted.

The regulating mechanisms of the anti-conversion bill proposal

Legally speaking, the anti-conversion bill was a failure, as it lapsed together with the parliament in 2010. However, when I conducted interviews among Buddhist nationalists in the period 2011–2013 they told me that they were less concerned by Christian, especially evangelical, activity than before. "The situation is under control" was a common statement, and one of my interviewees, a prominent Buddhist nationalist and editor of a Buddhist national newspaper, claimed that they should do more to protect the Hindus in the north of Sri Lanka:

> Hindus are for more affected by evangelism than Buddhists. I visited a kovil [Hindu temple] in the north, and it was full of evangelical posters. Swami said: "Hindus are so innocent that they don't open their eyes". Massive conversions are going on in the Northern Province. We need to save the Hindus. In that way we now see a difference – people are more aware of the situation with evangelicals. The evangelicals would face more opposition. Now they are more cautious. Before they were knocking on the door. (Interview, 25th of November 2011)

Despite the fact that the anti-conversion bill not was legally enacted, the public attention generated by the proposal brought awareness of the problem among the population. Buddhist nationalists were confident that people would expose the workings of evangelicals when they met them. The regulatory effects of the anti-conversion bill proposals contributed to the issue as a form of educating the public in being more sceptical towards evangelicals. Thus, the public attention generated by the anti-conversion bill and the debate on 'unethical' conversions had in itself a regulatory effect as a catalyst in wielding additional social control over evangelicals. Activities of evangelicals were closely scrutinised, and reported to various organisations among the Buddhist nationalists.

While the proposal of establishing inter-religious councils was initially accepted by many interested parties, Buddhist nationalists were later against the idea when they launched the ACBC-report in 2009 [2012]. The idea of inter-religious councils was already proposed by the Buddha Sasana Report in 2002 as a solution to deal with the increasing distrust between the religious groups in Sri Lanka. In fact, the idea of such inter-religious councils generated wide support, both from Christian

groups, in particular the Catholic Church, but also from the UN Special Rapporteur: "The Special Rapporteur considers that alternative mechanisms such as an inter-religious council would have the advantage of promoting an interreligious dialogue, which is the only way to address such tensions" (Jahangir 2005: 22). A Catholic theologian notes that "the Sri Lanka Bishops Conference in its statement in response to the anti-conversion bill proposed that there should be an inter-religious commission" (Dias and Gamble 2009: 33). However, the proposal of inter-religious councils did not receive unanimous support, and both evangelical Christians and Buddhist nationalists voiced their concerns. Several of my informants in evangelical Christian interest organisations were concerned that these councils only would accommodate officially recognised churches, and that the evangelicals would be excluded from the fold of the councils. In a meeting with several persons involved in the writing of the ACBC-report, they were highly sceptical to the idea of inter-religious councils:

> They, the Christians, are not honest. All these inter-religious councils to solve any dispute among religions. To solve them? But what about unethical conversions? They [the Christians] are not sincere, they will only try to sidestep the issue. (Group interview, 2nd of November 2011)

Their inherent scepticism to such a mechanism can further be found within the ACBC-report, where the report directly criticises the proposal from the Buddha Sasana report in 2002 to establish such mechanisms:

> Buddhists fell into such a helpless and difficult situation that they, in order to preserve their identity and conserve their right to practice their Religion freely, were even induced into proposing, that they come to terms with these crusading religionists. This is evident by the proposal made by the Buddha Sasana Commission of 2002, paragraph 9.53, to establish Interfaith Councils.[129] (ACBC-report 2012: 36)

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[129] The paragraph 9.53 of the Buddha Sasana Commission report of 2002 is following cited: "Inter-Religious Advisory Council": An "Inter-Religious Advisory Council consisting of representatives of various religions shall be appointed to resolve any problems by discussion which may arise affecting a religion. This Council shall be vested with the responsibility of settling any problem brought before it by any party where the actions of any religion become detrimental to other religions. The approval of this Council shall be obtained prior to registering any new missionary or fundamentalist organization. This commission [the Buddha Sasana

From 2001 to 2011[130] there was a remarkable change of attitude among the Buddhist nationalists regarding the question of inter-religious councils. It has become an issue which is no longer being discussed so frequently, despite numerous 'religious' issues receiving widespread political and media attention, such as the halal issue, cattle slaughter-debate, unethical conversions, contested worship sites and other related issues. When my informants among the Buddhist nationalists stated that 'the situation was under control,' they did not only refer to the fact that the attention generated by the debate around the anti-conversion bill and 'unethical' conversion had made Buddhists in general more keen on social control. Rather, they were also alluding to the fact that they could regulate Christian minorities through these new initiatives of bureaucratic control.

The bureaucratic circular

A salient concern among my evangelical informants was the enactment of a bureaucratic circular, issued in September 2011, which in practice made worship hard for many evangelical congregations. A representative for the NCEASL and a leading evangelical pastor were particularly worried about this trend, but most of my evangelical informants similarly noted these recent changes. One of my NCEASL-informants stated:

> Now recently we had a circular from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Any construction or maintenance of a site of worship needs approval from the ministry. Churches have been asked to close down. If there not is an approval, that place is deemed illegal. Missionary visas are issued to the Catholic Church and to the NCCSL [Protestant churches]. But they do not issue to NCEASL. We can only have them as guest speakers. (Interview, 13th of December, 2011)

Commission of 2002] recommends that the number of members of this Council shall be in proportion to the numerical strength of each religion. We recommend that the representation of Buddhists shall be through the *Uttarītara Sangha Sabhā* [Supreme Ecclesiastical Council] or with its consent." (As cited by the ACBC-report 2012: 36).

[130] The original ACBC-report was published in Sinhala in 2009, and the English version is only a translation.

An evangelical pastor in a major congregation was also disturbed by these new bureaucratic requirements:

> Lately there have rather been some administrative efforts to curb the activities of the churches. The Ministry of Christian Affairs now needs approval to build or amend any religious building or place of worship. Only the Catholic Church and the NCCSL are not affected by this. They use this as a direct attack on the [evangelical] churches. A pastor in Kaluthara has had a marriage register for many years, but now he needs an approval for this. We have the right to practice and worship religion, but we cannot erect a building for these purposes. (Interview, 14th of December, 2011)

The most prevalent concern for my informants, especially among the evangelicals and the independent churches, was the new bureaucratic requirements of approval of any construction or maintenance of a site of worship that was issued in September 2011. In 2012, the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), which is a worldwide evangelical initiative, released a 'Colombo Statement on the Church in Sri Lanka' where they called for the recognition of NCEASL as a representative body of the evangelical churches in Sri Lanka. Further, the statement demanded that the Sri Lankan government will not pursue anti-conversion legislation nor arbitrary regulations by imposing compulsory registration of places of worship, and an end of violent attacks on clergy and places of Christian worship. The International Religious Freedom Report for 2011 observes that the "number and severity of attacks reportedly diminished somewhat during the year". While the report notes the renewed attempt in late 2011 by JHU to re-invigorate the anti-conversion legislation, most of their discussion is concentrated upon the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs circular that was issued in September 2011 which directed that the ministry must approve construction or maintenance of a place of worship. The IRFR report (2011) observes:

> Some Christian groups, in particular newer denominations, reported an increase in complications obtaining local permission to construct church buildings. A Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs circular issued in September directed that the ministry must approve construction and maintenance of a place of worship. Such approval often was difficult to obtain for evangelical Christian groups in majority Buddhist towns and villages. There were credible reports that several evangelical

> Christian churches received letters and verbal instructions from local authorities ordering their closure because they did not procure approvals to build churches or maintain existing places of worship, and at least two had closed. Places of worship of other Christian denominations, including Catholic and Anglican, did not receive such orders. (IRFR 2011)

Sites of religious worship have been increasingly contested in recent years, and often subject to both political and legal dispute. Several high-profile cases in recent years are Dambulla (see Heslop 2014), Dighavapi (see Spencer et.al. 2015) and Kuragala.[131] Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) released a brief note in 2012, the "Legal Framework Governing Places of Religious Worship in Sri Lanka" (CPA 2012), which was followed by more extensive documentation in a report launched on religio-political violence in 2013 (CPA 2013). In practice, the bureaucratic circular has made administrative obstacles especially to the evangelical branch of churches, which lack formal recognition and legal status within the Ministry of the Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs fold. Consequently local authorities have ordered the closure of several churches on the basis that they could not procure approval for building new places or maintaining their existing places of worship.

Sri Lankan Christians, evangelical branches in particular, have in the last decade faced a diverse array of regulatory practices, from the lack of state recognition, systematic intimidation and violence by non-state actors with regulatory intentions. However, a brief, but decisive circular from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs, has in practice curbed much of the activity of smaller churches, and encouraged the policing of religious boundaries among the committed non-state actors. The issue of discrimination of evangelical Christians has changed from a legal and political issue, which is from the spheres of the momentous and visible, to the uneventful and tedious world of bureaucracy. Regulation of Christians, especially fringe groups, has shifted from the high-pitched legal proposal of the anti-conversion bill together with waves of anti-Christian violence into an uneventful and invisible regulation through bureaucratic sanctions. Other measures were also used to

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[131] Ven. Medhananda (2005), the former leader of JHU, has published a book on sacred Buddhist sites in the north and east, particularly in areas affected by the civil war.

restrict and curb Christian activities, again all of bureaucratic origins, and new laws were proposed which, while carrying a veneer of religious discrimination, could not be directly linked to the purpose of regulating religious minorities.

The noise pollution law

Most of my informants referred to the the 'noise pollution law', and further investigation suggests that the noise pollution regulations were issued under National Environmental (Community Noise Control) regulation laws,[132] after a Supreme Court directive[133] stated that: "the use of loudspeakers and sound amplification is prohibited for eight hours at night, between 10 pm and 6 am. In the case of special religious functions and special events, a police permit is required in order to use loudspeakers and amplification, but permits will be issued only after consultation with residents living in the area". In addition, noise levels exceeding 63 decibels (dB) are prohibited by law. The most interested parties in the regulation are religious groups and the entertainment industry, and one of my informants among the Buddhist nationalists, a powerful *bhikkhu* from a national NGO, told me how this mechanism serves to curb the activity of evangelical churches:

> When evangelical groups play loud music, people will complain through this law. If a house is illegally turned into a church, then measures will be taken. Police will come there, but the Christians would claim their right to pray to god. But they do invite people as if as a church. Noise and sound disturb the people in the area. Not a direct law, but we use this indirectly. (Interview, 30th of October 2011)

The monk revealed that the Buddhist nationalists had a larger repertoire of laws and regulations by which they made complaints of other religious groups. In addition to the noise pollution, he highlighted Criminal Act No. 392, which prohibits harm to any

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[132] Many claimed that this directive was a JHU-law, yet I fail to find any such links, and JHU themselves deny any such connection. However, while the directive was issued by the Central Environmental Agency (CEA), which was under Minister Udaya Gammanpila (JHU), I would suggest that this alleged relation stems from this fact.

[133] This directive was issued after a dispute between two mosques, where the police only issued a permit for one of the mosques to use a loudspeaker.

religious objects, and the Buddhist opposition to cattle slaughter. One evangelical pastor, a leading figure in National Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka (NCFSL), complained against this new strategy by the Buddhist nationalists:

> They have changed from violent attacks to legislative attacks. It is a different strategy. There are a lot of legal cases against pastors. Section 81: Maintenance of the peace – Noise Pollution Law. A lot of churches have been brought in by these Buddhists. Buddhist monks will not be arrested. (Interview, 3rd of January, 2012)

The pastor describes a new situation for the evangelical Christians, not so much feeling violence and physical harassment, but increasingly targeted by complaints about violations of laws and bureaucratic regulations. Thus, these subtle regulations had a greater effect in curbing evangelical activity, and made it harder to mount political leverage on the issue of religious discrimination. Another pastor stated that "the anti-conversion bill is a device in a general armoury. If they do not achieve [results] here, they will try in other areas" (Interview, 14th of December, 2011).

Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the technologies of a 'culture of legality' have been conducive of a form of lawfare: "lawfare – the resort to legal instruments, to the violence inherent in the law, for political ends – becomes most visible when those who 'serve' the state conjure with legalities to act against its citizens" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006: 36). It is an international trend to negotiate the political contestations in courts and through regulations in order to "launder power in a wash of legitimacy" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006: 37). Thus, the modalities of regulating religion in Sri Lanka have followed these international trends, and we increasingly see how politics, especially politics around religion, have been subject to a process of judicialisation in Sri Lanka.

While the Christians, evangelicals in particular, have faced new hardships, the pastor quoted above was wrong in stating that Buddhist monks are never arrested. Schonthal (2014a) comments a case of controversy after a monk was arrested. The arrest and trial of Ven. Pannala Pangnaloka Thera under the noise pollution regulation is one of the modern controversies of sangha – Supreme Court relations in Sri Lanka. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court directive on noise pollution, three

people were reprimanded for violating court order, among them Ven. Pannala Pangnaloka Thera, who failed to meet before the court. Subsequently, when the monk met in court 5 days later for motion regarding bail, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Sarath Silva was met with a large group (75 – 100 in numbers) of Buddhist monk attendees in the courtroom who failed to rise when the justices arrived. However, after the Chief Justice asked the monk's defendant to request the monks to exit the courtroom, they so did, and the bail was dismissed. This episode created an outcry in Sri Lanka, and led to a public debate on the role of Buddhist monks as 'informal sovereigns,' and on how they should appear in public settings, especially the courts. While the Chief Monk (Mahanayake) of Asgiriya Chapter, Ven. Udugama Buddharakkhita Thero stated that no one was above the law, the then JHU-leader Ven. Ellawella Medhananda Thero stated that while monks need to have respect for the law, monks have been respected by heads of state and courts throughout Sri Lankan history. President Mahinda Rajapakse even suggested separate rooms for monks in court, to avoid such scenes in the future. Schonthal (2014a) describes this as a standoff, where all subjects are expected to rise when judges enter the courtroom, and that monks, due to their "spiritual superiority" should never rise to greet lay people, judges included. One online newschannel stated:

> Buddhist monks, as was said earlier, have a privileged position in this society and deserve respect. But, it behoves them to avoid, in dealing with State institutions, situations that cause embarrassment and affront the latter's dignity and authority. They should have known better than to enter the Supreme Court and conduct themselves in such a way as to disregard the age-old norms and customs governing the affairs of the judiciary. Their conduct on Friday, in our book, smacked of hubris and a misguided sense of respect of their social position. A court of law is not a place for protests religious or otherwise. (The Buddhist Channel, 8th of September 2008[134])

The privileged position of monks is also negotiated in courts, but in this particular case it attracted special attention. The enchanted status of monks is mediated and negotiated in many contexts, and as political subjects, their political repertoire

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[134] http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=43,7086,0,0,1,0#.Vdg3N_mqpHw [22.08.2015]

certainly differs from that of 'common' people. In addition, this case bears witness to the aspect of positive endorsement; their enjoying certain informal privileges. The enchanted status of monks may cause privileged treatment in several links of the chain including community support/opposition of certain issues, dealing with the police and courts, and in dealing with politicians.

Animal welfare bill

Another issue that has received long and intense focus by the JHU is the issue of animal welfare. Three of the most vocal monks in JHU, Ven. Omalpe Sobhita, Ven. Ellawella Medhananda and Ven. Athureliye Rathana have been deeply committed to animal welfare issues. In December 2005, Ven. Ellawella Medhananda called for stricter control on cattle slaughter in the country, and it has been an ambition for JHU to revise the current law regulating animal welfare,[135] *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance*, No. 13, 1907, as they claimed it was antiquated. By 2006 the law commission of Sri Lanka was reported to have handed over an animal welfare authority bill to the Sri Lankan President, which would establish a National Animal Welfare Authority (NAWA) to control and monitor the enforcement of the law. One year later, in 2007, the animal welfare bill was reported to have been gazetted, and presented in Parliament by Ven. Athureliye Rathana Thera in February 2009, yet that bill also lapsed with the dissolution of the assembly.

In autumn 2010 the issue was again brought to the fore, and a public meeting was hosted by Olcott Gunasekera and his Dharmavijaya Foundation to petition the President to enact the animal welfare bill. The prelude to the public meeting was the mass slaughter of fowl and goats at the Munneswaram Kovil in Chilaw, where hundreds of animals are annually slaughtered in a ritual occasion. This annual event attracts great opposition from Buddhist monks and other religious interest

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[135] During my first visit to Sri Lanka in 2009 I met Udaya Gammanpila during his election campaign, where he ran under the slogan: "Clean and Clever – Now or Never!" Their other prominent layman, Champika Ranawaka, also served as the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, and later as the Minister for Power and Energy and Technology.

organisations,[136] and while not directly stated, this event is among those ritual events which the proposed bill sought to prohibit. The bill carried an element of religious antagonism against ritual slaughter, but the animal welfare bill, drafted by attorney-at-law Senaka Weeraratna, also entailed wider provisions for animal transport, the establishment of the National Animal Welfare Authority (NAWA), regulations upon which animals that can be legitimately slaughtered, and cruelty against animals. One of my informants, a prominent Buddhist monk, explained his stance on animal slaughter:

> The killing of cows is a big problem, and it is mostly done by the Muslims. Some take the Buddhist opposition to this practice to be against Muslims, as some Muslims feel antagonised by this. Buddhists have asked the government to prevent the killing of cows. In Chilaw, in a Hindu Temple, there is a sacrifice of animals – goats. There is also Buddhist pressure against this. (Interview, 30th of October 2011)

The Buddhist opposition against animal slaughter has a long history,[137] and the intervention launched by the Buddhist monks thus belongs within a deeper genealogy. During my fieldwork, I was invited by Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thero, while he was the leader of JHU, to watch a ceremony to release 74 cows that he had bought from butchery. The monk had received donations from a patron in Singapore, and occasionally Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thero would conduct such ceremonies of cattle-release. The cattle were ceremoniously released in the field, and were later given to poor farmers in the area. This intervention on behalf of the cattle was seen as an act of nonviolence and care for the animals. While JHU have become publicly known for their support of the war against LTTE and the anti-conversion bill, they have also invested their energy into environmental issues.

The issue of cattle slaughter took an unexpected turn with the self-immolation of the monk Ven. Bowatthe Indrarathana Thera in May 2013. The place and date was

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[136] The second attempt at enacting the animal welfare bill has also attracted international attention, and pressure to enact the Bill has been channelled through Dharma Voices for Animals (DVA) and World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB).
[137] Some of the Buddhist activists for the animal welfare bill mention five Buddhist kings in Sri Lanka which completely banned the killing of animals: 1) Amanda Gamini (79 – 80 AD), 2) Voharika Tissa (269 – 291 AD), 3) Silakala (524 – 537 AD), 4) Agga Bodhi IV (658 – 674 AD) and Kassapa III (717 – 724 AD).

not coincidental; he set himself on fire outside the Temple of the Tooth, the most revered temple in Sri Lanka, at the 24th of May, the day of the Vesak celebration. Ven. Bowatthe Indrarathana was a former member of JHU, who had just recently been expelled, and he was currently participating in an activist group named Sinhala Ravaya (Voice of Sinhala). His reasons for committing suicide by self-immolation were as a protest against cattle slaughter and improper religious conversions in Sri Lanka. This is the first example of self-immolation in Sri Lanka, a phenomenon that has occurred more frequently among monks in Tibet. His action was widely debated in Sri Lanka, not least among the monkhood. While the great majority of the monkhood seemed to resent his action, certain elements among the Buddhist nationalists, in particular the Sinhala Ravaya, have tried to use his death for political mileage. Sinhala Ravaya is a Buddhist nationalist group, reckoned as smaller and less significant than Bodu Balasena, but still able to attract national attention. However, Ellawella Medhananda Thero (JHU) stated that self-immolation not will bring an end to the problem of cattle slaughter, and that this 'extreme act' should not be used to create other issues. Nevertheless, the act of self-immolation tests issues of Buddhist monk's political repertoire, and the forms of legitimate and illegitimate ways of acting politically.

When we discuss the modalities of regulating religion, we need to take into account several layers of regulation both along formal and informal lines. While the Sri Lankan state has been reluctant to enact an anti-conversion bill, a conglomeration of other related laws have provided an impetus for Buddhist nationalists to regulate unwanted behaviour by evangelical Christians. Describing the societal position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka as 'hegemonic' should be done with caution, as such a description is subject to many nuances. By alluding to official, formal and informal state patronage, we see that the Buddhist tradition receives many privileges and endorsements not available to other religious communities (such as constitutional priority and influential channels of informal patronage), but that these privileges do not have an unlimited reach. In many aspects although the Buddhist nationalists failed in securing formal state patronage for an anti-conversion bill, they have still

been able to adapt their political repertoires by using other channels of influence in regulating religious minorities.

The repertoires of political Buddhism

I argue that the period between 2001–2011 has seen a restructuring of political repertoires among Buddhist activists in Sri Lanka, where earlier political repertoires were developed and refined, as well as engaged in novel forms of religio-political activism which have mimicked (evangelical) Christian political mobilisation. Political repertoires can both be seen by how certain individuals, in particular Buddhist monks, tap into a distinct space of manoeuvrability, as well as how Buddhist activists as a group have the skills and means to employ various political repertoires. The same is valid for Christian groups.

The issue of 'unethical' conversions has mainly been negotiated through legal contestations, both through the various incorporation cases, and later in the anti-conversion bill, and its treatment both in the Supreme Court and by the UN Special Rapporteur. The act and process of conversion is suddenly dependent on various legal definitions, and what is remarkable with the policy process surrounding the anti-conversion bill is how the issue has been negotiated by drawing on various legal frameworks. Gunn, a legal scholar, remarks:

> Legal definitions do not simply describe the phenomenon of religion, they establish rules for regulating social and legal relations among people who themselves may have sharply different attitudes about what religion is and which manifestations of it are entitled to protection. (Gunn 2003: 195)

The rhetorical and narrative repertoire of legal formulations is of utmost importance to religio-political activists, especially when they are drafting proposals for new laws. What is remarkable is how legal instruments are given the authority to decide on religious practices, not only how to formulate the various articles in the bill, but if the bill was enacted, to decide what constitutes proper and improper conversion. Gunn laconically comments: "While academics have the luxury of debating whether the

term 'religion' is hopelessly ambiguous, judges and lawyers often do not" (Gunn 2003: 191). The realm of legitimacy is played out at different levels of legality, and laws, and bill proposals, are also subject to various forms of contestation.

The combination of lawfare and violence against religious minorities in Sri Lanka was seen by international society as indicative that the situation was not mere regulation, but also carried of discrimination. Hence, the context in which the anti-conversion bill was proposed, amidst a period of frequent acts of exclusionary violence, made it susceptible to interpret the intents of the bill as discrimination. In addition, some of the vague propositions entailed in the law made it even more susceptible to wield as a form of religious discrimination. Evangelical Christians were particularly adept in transforming these trends into evidence of political marginality, and how they faced discrimination and 'persecution' in Sri Lanka. By monitoring efforts, the evangelical Christians were able to invert their political marginality in Sri Lanka into wielding considerable political impetus through international actors, perhaps most notably the U.S. (and the IRFA-mechanisms). Violence against Christians was documented and put into a narrative storyline of Christian persecution that brought stories of violent mobs, monks and environments all hostile to the religious practices of evangelical Christians.

Here it is necessary to revisit the political repertoires wielded by Buddhist monks, as political subjects with qualities different from that of all other subjects. Through the monkhood the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have potential access to a plethora of different temples across the island, and such networks are easily activated to disseminate information for varying purposes. Such networks enable the workings of social control to be effective and widespread, and they have been used to identify where Christian groups have tried to settle without authorisation. In addition, the exclusionary violence committed in Sri Lanka originated both from local opposition, so-called Buddhist strongholds, but also from various Buddhist vigilante groups which travelled long distances to 'take the law in their own hands'. These groups are endorsed with impunity, and very few arrests have been made in cases involving harassment, threats or violence against Christian groups. This attests to their privileged position especially for the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka.

That Buddhist monks have a privileged position in Sri Lanka is uncontested, but this privileged position is under constant negotiation. Buddhist monks are less prone for arrests, and can employ considerable pressure upon local police officers, and even judges. As we have seen, one such standoff took place after an arrest of a monk due to the 'noise pollution law,' where a collective gathering of Buddhist monks failed to rise before the judge, an act several commentators described as hubris on behalf of the monks. The privileged position of monks in Sri Lanka also makes them susceptible to employ extreme measures in their political activism. In some ways the beginning of the anti-conversion bill was initiated by a fast-unto-death by two monks, Ven. Omalpe Sobhita and Ven. Rajawappe, and the self-immolation by Ven. Indrarathana marks an act of frustration regarding the failure to enact anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka.

The voluminous report by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC 2012) shows how Buddhist activists have mimicked certain repertoires learned from their evangelical Christian counterparts on the pivotal role of documentation and political facts. While certain practices are available only to certain figures, such as Buddhist monks, other repertoires are more easily transportable from group to group. While Buddhist monks have developed and refined certain political repertoires, especially on how to enact exclusionary violence, tapping into their distinct space of manoeuvrability, the period between 2001-2011 witnessed how Buddhist activists begun to capitalise on legal methods and mechanisms in their political mobilisation, and learned new ways of monitoring grievances against their community. While Buddhist activists still operate mainly through temporary political organisations, these new political skills will be carried forward by the many agents that have been involved in Buddhist activism in this period.

Despite the Buddhist nationalists' failure to bring about a law on anti-conversion in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist activists were able to change their techniques for curbing Christian, especially evangelical, activity. While the combination of law and violence is an effective means to curb religious groups and religious activity, this also attracts international attention and suspicion of religious discrimination. Hence, by changing the way religion is regulated to the more subtle means of bureaucratic

mechanisms, the Buddhist nationalists were also more successful in curbing evangelical activity. In addition, these subtle mechanisms, which also were dependent upon active social control by the Buddhists, were harder to use by evangelicals as ways of political mobilisation to highlight their grievances. While the idiom of religious freedom has been imperative for understanding the unfolding conflict over 'unethical' conversions and the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, we also see how Buddhist activists have adapted to the codes and mechanisms of 'religious freedom' and changed their repertoires of regulation to forms that evoke less international attention.

Religious freedom and political repertoires

I would like to argue that we need to understand the concept of religious freedom in new ways, and not merely treat it like a certain right, or as a subsequent measurement of that particular right, but also how the concept of 'religious freedom' engage in different modalities of power. While the study of religious freedom is often grounded in policy-oriented approaches, I would place my own work in the growing body of critical literature on the concept and politics of religious freedom (see Mahmood and Danchin 2014a for a collection of articles). In recent decades several monitoring mechanisms, both from interested NGOs but also several research centres, have emerged to document violations of religious freedom, defined as the right guaranteed in Article 18 of the ICCPR, where these mechanisms can rank the level of religious freedom enjoyed in a given country (see in particular Grim and Finke 2013). The writings of Gill can also be placed within this tradition, whereas his argument is that any measurement of religious liberty in a given country must take into account the multi-modality of how religious agency both are restricted and endorsed by particular political authorities (Gill 2008). However, what some of these writers seem to forget is that the very concept of religious freedom itself is a modality of power that needs to be understood in multiple ways. Hence, religious freedom is not only a given political right (Article 18 of the ICCPR), or the subsequent measurement of this particular right, but a concept imbued into powerful discourses of morality, legality

and legitimacy. The implications are considerable by expanding the notions of Article 18 from that of authoritative legality to the wider realm of these discourses of power of morality, legality and legitimacy. Bielefeldt, the present Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stated in a recent article: "Thus, in the long run, human rights could even end up becoming mere rhetorical tools arbitrarily used by different sides in various ideological battlefields" (Bielefeldt 2013: 66). Perhaps in such ways as we have seen with the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka? There is a growing literature that questions the alleged universality and neutrality of religious liberty in favour of a re-reading of religious freedom within the contingency of historical and political circumstances. In a recent article Mahmood and Danchin (2014) argue that the present articulation of the right to religious liberty is imbricated in a specific conceptual architecture of how 'religion' is pending between a status of immunity and various regulative approaches:

> The conceptual architecture of the right is in this respect premised on a paradox. On the one hand, it is said to be neutral toward specific religious beliefs, and indeed neutrality is the leitmotif of modern religious liberty discourse whether in moral, legal, or political contexts. On the other hand, the right to religious freedom, as a technology of modern state and international legal governance, is deeply implicated in the regulation of religion. This tension between inviolability and regulation is internal to the concept of religious liberty itself and serves to generate the distinctive antinomies and contradictions that arise in struggles over its meaning, justification and realization. (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 4)

The tension between inviolability and regulation is arguably the same tension we witnessed in our discussion of the legal validity of anti-conversion legislature. The aporias of proselytism in international legal instruments make it possible for religious nationalists to mobilise for anti-conversion laws under the aegis of protecting religious freedom, as it is possible to interpret Article 18 of the ICCPR both in favour and in disfavour of proselytism. Thus, while evangelical Christians argued in favour of the *inviolability* to regulate proselytisation (as it is inherently a manifestation of belief), Buddhist nationalists argued that the practices of improper proselytisation fall under the regulative scope open to the state. This is precisely an example of how the dynamics of religious liberty serve to generate 'distinctive antinomies and

contradictions that arise in struggles over its meaning, justification and realisation' (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 4). The question of how to approach practices of alleged 'improper' conversion is still an unresolved issue, except for the various 'codes of conduct' articulated by particular organisations. However, as we saw in India, various anti-conversion laws have been passed, and the justification for these interventions has been to allude to the notion of 'public order'.

The relation between the concept of public order and religious freedom opens an avenue where state apparatus may impose regulation upon the right to manifestation of religion. Mahmood and Danchin argue "public order is a complex and amorphous concept that accords the modern state the right to intervene in the private domain of religious belief while maintaining that it is a place of autonomy from state regulation" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014b: 135). As Osuri argues about the case in India, the Supreme Court restrains forcible conversion due to a hypothetical breach of public order, and through this manoeuvre is able to regulate, within the ambit of Article 18 of the ICCPR, in favour of the Hindu nationalists (Osuri 2013: 33). Moreover, Osuri reveals the paradox of this rationale in that public order should restrain communal strife, while historically it is the Hindu nationalists, and not proselytising agents, that have been responsible for such communal disturbances. Thus, we are left with a situation where the state apparatus rhetorically redefines the articulations of Article 18 to protect the majority of the population in India at the expense of the minorities. However, following Mahmood and Danchin, religious liberty should not be viewed exclusively as a moral principle, but as a technology of state governance, and their studies reveal how the regulative approaches of modern states show "a consistent pattern of protecting state-sanctioned traditions or dominant religions and a correspondingly insensitivity to and denial of the claims of minority, non-traditional, or unpopular religious groups" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014b: 154). The notion of religious freedom then may not only safeguard against state interference in religious practices, but also enable the state apparatus to use the notion of religious freedom as a mechanism to justify oppressive regulations of religious minorities.

The notion of religious freedom can be used by state apparatuses to justify oppressive mechanisms against religious practices. But in the case of Sri Lanka we have seen that the state abandoned the idea of regulating proselytisation after international pressure about the issue of religious freedom. This brings us back to the point that religious freedom needs to be seen as a modality of power understood in multiple ways. While a given state apparatus can rhetorically re-describe religious freedom through concepts such as 'public order', we can also understand religious freedom as a powerful discourse of morality, legality and legitimacy, where particular religious groups may tap into this discourse as a rhetorical device. As we have seen, religious freedom is somehow trapped within its own 'antinomies', that of inviolability and regulation, and therefore is blind to the workings of its own modalities of power. Expanding the notion of religious freedom from strict legality, where the UN mechanisms are the prime authority, means also viewing it as a discourse of power, and this would have serious implications, in particular upon how the authority of the UN is negotiated. The realm of human rights is not above, on the moral high ground, but among the dirty field of politics on the ground. It means that the human rights also can be used as 'rhetorical tools' by different sides in various ideological battlefields. As we have seen in the case of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, religious freedom has not merely been a right, but much more often a rhetorical device, in how particular groups have been able to portray themselves as victims of human rights violation.[138] This is not to underplay the calamities of violence against Christians in Sri Lanka, but to state that the attention received by Christian groups in Sri Lanka hinges on an effective use of religious freedom as a rhetorical device, which evangelical groups in particular have perfected as a political repertoire. Other targets of political violence, particularly the victims of the ethnic conflict, did not, in comparison, receive similar attention for their grievances.

Treating religious freedom as a powerful discourse also enables us to examine how the definitional powers work in different ways after particular genres of

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[138] Moore (2011) also argues how the form and content of the IRFA need to be understood as a genre of religious freedom, inspired by human rights documentation in general, where the listing of particular events and incidents is a vital part.

violations. How are the different political repertoires either endorsed, or evaded, in relation to the modalities of power of 'religious freedom'? When the combination of exclusionary violence and discriminatory laws increased the attention generated by UN mechanisms, the UN decided to send the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to Sri Lanka in 2005. However, we see that other forms of curtailing (evangelical) Christian activity do not evoke the same amount of reactions from the UN or the international society in general. Thus, while Buddhist activists have become more subtle and sophisticated in the way they regulate unwanted religious behaviour and specific religious groups,[139] we see that such mechanisms of regulations are harder for (evangelical) Christians to fit into the 'persecution narrative' upon which the genres of religious freedom often rely upon, where events and incidents bear witness of particular grievances (see Moore 2011). On one hand the Buddhist activists failed to invoke the moral discourse of religious freedom, in the way they called for protection against 'unethical' conversions, yet, throughout the period of 2001–2011 we see that the Buddhist activists have not only wielded freedom of religion as a rhetorical device to attain legitimacy for the anti-conversion bill, but also tuned their political repertoires into a space of manoeuvrability that mutes the alarm bells of 'religious freedom', when curbing evangelical activity through bureaucratic measures and not through laws and exclusionary violence.

The politics of religious freedom is either inherently trapped in antinomies of inviolability and regulation, but is also blind to its own exclusions in its working as a modality of power. Mahmood and Danchin argue that the contradiction of immunity and regulation is "not a corruption of the right to religious liberty, but this antinomy is internal to the conceptual architecture of the right itself" (Mahmood and Danchin 2014a: 5). The phenomenon of proselytisation and the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka is subjected to the same antinomy, but in contrast to India, Sri Lanka decided not to regulate religion through an allusion to 'public order'. Despite this, we have also seen how different regulative measures have been put in place against

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[139] Woods (2013) observes that despite heavy regulations many house churches are still able to operate as an amorphous, subversive underground movement.

evangelical Christians, and other minorities, through various mechanisms. Evangelical Christians have been most adept in using the genres of religious freedom as a rhetorical device for tapping into the different modalities of power set in play by the concept of 'religious freedom'. Mahmood and Danchin conclude their introductory essay with the following quote, which probes the difficulties of the conceptual architecture of religious freedom as a mere legal right versus its political implications:

> The challenge we are left with is a *political* problem: how to conceive and institute the pragmatics of religious liberty in ways that do not reify the categories and operations of the Leviathan and its regulatory powers (Mahmood and Danchin 2014: 8).

The case of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka has put in motion many of the same questions of both the interrelations and irregularities between legal and political modalities of power. A strict legal reading of the anti-conversion bill would place it within the aporias of conversion in the international human rights mechanisms. However, my aim has been to supplement this legal understanding with a political context for how various political repertoires have unfolded in relation to the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka.

13. Conclusion

Through a micro-levelled analysis of the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka, my aim has been to unravel how the policy process of a particular legal proposal has been marked by how agency, affiliations and networks have coalesced into various political repertoires. By putting the anti-conversion bill as the focal point of analysis, my subject has been to investigate the various encounters that have taken place between various (religious) actors, and how a religious issue, 'unethical conversion,' has been mediated and negotiated through various 'non-religious' institutions, in particular different legal arenas. This thesis has focused on agency, encounters and political repertoires with regards to how the policy process of the anti-conversion bill has unfolded. Religious traditions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of power in social, legal, and political realms, and agency is embedded within period-specific social capital. The period of 2001-2011 has seen how political repertoires have been enacted along existing networks of affiliation and patronage, and how such political repertoires have been continually developed and refined. Thus, the nature and form of these repertoires contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the broader swathes of ideology, religious nationalism and religious pluralism. Moreover, the thesis argues how religious freedom is negotiated on the ground not only as a particular legal right, but also a narrative device connected to powerful discourses of morality, legality and legitimacy.

The dispute over the anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka has commonly been portrayed as a dispute between Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians (Berkwitz 2008b, Matthews 2007, Nanayakkara 2007, Perera 1998), yet my findings suggest that the debate on 'unethical' conversions and the anti-conversion bill also mobilised other religious communities. Other religious communities were in fact also some of the major stakeholders in the attempt to pass anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka. One of the first findings of this thesis was the issue that the anti-conversion bill involved several actors from various religious groups, and that these

constellations could have had a decisive impact on the outcome of the anti-conversion bill. While Buddhist nationalists had been discussing the need of anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka since the 1990s, it was T. Maheshwaran, the Minister for Hindu Affairs, who actually brought forward a written proposal of an anti-conversion bill for the first time, which eventually led to the formation of a Hindu-Buddhist committee to work out an anti-conversion draft in Sri Lanka. This process of a Hindu-Buddhist alliance would probably have continued had it not been for the sudden death of Ven. Soma and the subsequent political mobilisation among Buddhist nationalists, especially by Jathika Hela Urumaya. This new formation of Buddhist nationalists in many ways co-opted the process of drafting an anti-conversion bill, and resulted in two different anti-conversion bills being brought forward in parliament. The sudden ascension of Buddhist nationalism as a political force in Sri Lanka, spearheaded both by their agenda to launch anti-conversion legislation, as well as their opposition towards the Norwegian-led peace facilitations, altered the taste for the anti-conversion bill for other religious groups in Sri Lanka. From then on several religious communities perceived Jathika Hela Urumaya more threatening than proselytising missionaries. The All Ceylon Hindu Congress (ACHC) who had been an active partner in the first drafting process of an anti-conversion bill even petitioned the 'JHU-bill' on the grounds that it secured Buddhism as the 'foremost religion' in the preamble. Hence, rather than securing wider support from other religious communities with equal concerns of 'unethical' conversions, Jathika Hela Urumaya transformed the issue of anti-conversion legislation from that of protection of religious practioneers irrespective of denomination to the issue of state protection of Buddhism.

While the anti-conversion bill proposed by Jathika Hela Urumaya was perceived as a mechanism guaranteeing Buddhism as the 'foremost religion' in Sri Lanka, other religious groups had a salient role both in the beginning of the draft process, as well as at the end of the process. In 2006 the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion* bill, called the 'JHU-bill' was referred to a Standing/Select Committee who tried to find a solution in how anti-conversion legislation could be enacted in Sri Lanka by formulations of mutual consent. Hence, informal negotiations

took place between lawyers representing Buddhist and Christian interests the following year, yet no final agreement was settled upon. This ambiguity of support and opposition towards the anti-conversion bill was something that frustrated the Buddhist nationalists:

> Another matter that warrants mention is, that the clergymen representing the Catholic Church too joined Buddhists and Ven. Monks in demonstrations, in order to highlight their grievances that Evangelist groups are casting their bait upon devotees of the Catholic Church as well. Yet after the Bill was presented in Parliament these very clergymen expressed their opposition to the Bill. (ACBC 2012: 325)

The inability of the Buddhist nationalists to garner wider support for their anti-conversion proposal enabled evangelical Christians to capitalise on their argument that the anti-conversion bill was a mechanism of political Buddhism, which they could characterise as 'radical,' 'militant,' and 'extremist' (see Berkwitz 2008b). Anti-conversion legislation has a dubious reputation worldwide for being patronising towards the majority religion in the respective country of enactment. The JHU-bill, when solely backed by Buddhist nationalists, was perceived as another anti-conversion legislation developed for oppressive purposes (see Osuri 2013, Fernandes 2010, Jenkins 2008). The combination of laws and violence made it possible for evangelical Christians to label themselves as 'persecuted' and claim that their religious freedom in Sri Lanka was threatened.

Buddhist nationalists show a deep concern for how 'unethical' conversions may prove critical to destabilise the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. The political manoeuvres, formulations in the JHU-bill and the argumentation used to legitimise the enactment of such legislation, both around the defence of the bill and in the ACBC-report, argue for the need for 'speedy remedial action' from the state to protect the Buddha Sasana. Conversion is a problem, not so much because of the way it may threaten individual integrity, but rather how conversion is political. Conversion is seen as a destabilising activity which alters demographic patterns and religious and social texture of Buddhism alike. It is these issues which are at stake when Buddhist nationalists mobilise in favour of the anti-conversion bill. Thus, the anti-conversion bill is a mediating mechanism between the official state patronage

enjoyed through Article 9 and the supposedly destabilising effects ('unethical') conversion poses to demographical patterns and Buddhist social texture in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist nationalists argue that the official state patronage promised in Article 9 should be formalised and substantialised through the anti-conversion bill, as the practice of 'unethical' conversions are seen to bring an immediate danger to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. If Article 9 of the constitution is not substantialised and formalised by additional measures, the provisions promised in the article are no more than a symbolic gesture and remain a dead letter to the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka. The anti-conversion bill is the link between official and formal state patronage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

The visit and report by Asma Jahangir (2005), the UN Special Rapporteur of freedom of religion and belief, was a powerful intervention that without doubt defended the rights of the Christians in Sri Lanka when it came to the proposed anti-conversion legislation. Her concerns that some Christians used subtle methods in approaching the Sri Lankan population became parentheses in comparison. Despite attempts by Buddhist nationalists to document cases of forced and unethical conversions in the ACBC-report (2012), it was the Christian monitoring organisations that were able to capitalise upon arguments of religious freedom, a move that brought international support for the Christians and considerable international opposition against an eventual enactment of the anti-conversion bill. Hence, the international pressure against the anti-conversion bill prevented the Sri Lankan government to bring forth the legislation, as such a move could have jeopardised Sri Lanka's standing internationally and in relation to the human rights situation in the country, something they could ill-afford due to the ongoing civil war (Berkwitz 2008b, Matthews 2007). Nevertheless, while the anti-conversion bill was never passed in parliament, it was not rejected either. Instead, it was kept in political limbo for six years in a tightrope balancing act that would neither provoke the international community and the Christians, nor the Buddhist nationalists. The Buddhist nationalists demanded state patronage for Buddhism, arguing that Buddhism was in threat. The government needed their support in the final stages of the civil war against the LTTE, and needed to maintain relations both with the Buddhist

nationalists and the international community. This resulted in effectuating the ambiguous relations of the state towards the anti-conversion legislation.

My argument is that anti-conversion legislature originates from a threefold objective. First, the dislike of religious gifts in particular and proselytisation in general makes anti-conversion legislation a potent issue, not only for political mobilisation among religious nationalists, but also as an issue which draws general concern across various religious denominations in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, various groups were open to discuss anti-conversion legislature, yet when Jathika Hela Urumaya co-opted the political process, these groups withdrew their support for such a bill. The second objective is that anti-conversion laws can be effective regulatory mechanisms against religious minorities, in particular evangelical Christians or other groups engaged in zealous missionary efforts. Third, most anti-conversion legislations make a tacit assumption of state patronage, with the result of privileging the majority religion. Hence, the issue of anti-conversion legislation elucidates a potent dynamic between religious nationalists, religious minorities and the Sri Lankan state, and can be seen as an adjudicator for how religious pluralism is negotiated within a given nation-state. However, the anti-conversion bill was never enacted in Sri Lanka, but eventually lapsed with the dissolution of parliament in 2010. This showed the interests of the government to neither pass it nor reject it. Thus, in a period of 'saffronisation,' where many of the ideological narratives of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism were adopted by the government, general political support for the bill was lukewarm. In many ways the failure of the anti-conversion bill, a symbol of prestige for Jathika Hela Urumaya, attests to the limits of the political influence wielded by Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka.

Political repertoires and religious freedom

One of the most remarkable features of the anti-conversion bill proposed in Sri Lanka is how it has instigated a wide variety of different repertoires of political action. Buddhist monks have been at the forefront of the demand to ensure anti-conversion legislation, and have used their distinguished political position to elucidate the grave

concern 'unethical' conversions give them. However, while extravagant political repertoires of Buddhist monks, such as fast-unto-death and self-immolation, have brought attention to the cause of 'unethical' conversions, it is the political repertoires wielded by Buddhist nationalist groups, as well as evangelical mobilisation through national and international networks, which has been the *modus operandi* in the anti-conversion debate. However, we also see that these repertoires are entangled in the discourse of religious freedom, understood both as a narrative device drawing on the conceptual links to morality and legitimacy, but also as protected rights guaranteed by Article 18 of the ICCPR.

Anti-conversion legislation does not seek to ban proselytisation, but to regulate forms of improper proselytism. While the phenomenon of proselytisation is contested in international human rights instruments, anti-conversion legislation has been ill-received by UN Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief due to their vague formulations which can generate oppression of religious minorities. It is in particular the concept of 'allurement' that is contested, and how this provision seeks to criminalise any exchange of religious gift-giving. However, it is precisely such gifts of allurement, the combination of beneficiary items or services combined with religious instruction which is found provoking. While most Christian organisations have their own code of conduct regulating behaviour, proselytisation and conversion is still a contested issue in many parts of the world, especially in South Asia. One explanation for this is that religion is a vital part of national political identity, where acts of conversions also are seen as transfers of political allegiance. Some even view conversion as a form of mutiny where the source of authority not only changes, but goes from support to opposition. However, 'unethical conversions' involve a set of interrelated concerns, not only limited to issues of religio-political identity, but also of perceived cultural condescension and acceptable conduct vis-à-vis proselytisation. The formulations in Article 18 of the ICCPR are ambiguous on the topic of conversion and proselytisation, attesting to the aporias of proselytism. These ambiguities generate frustration and antagonism, as well as various forms of political mobilisation surrounding the anxieties of conversion and proselytisation.

While anti-conversion legislation in Sri Lanka has tried to embrace the rhetorical authority of religious freedom, the extra-judicial verdict of the UN Special Rapporteur has been that anti-conversion legislation is seen as oppressive mechanisms that may enable religious discrimination. Jahangir (2005) noted that the evidence given by Christian groups was 'truthful,' while the evidence received from the Buddhist nationalists was 'inadequate,' a statement which eventually led to a voluminous publication (2009/2012) by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress on the evidence of 'unethical conversions,' in an effort to copy the methods of monitoring 'religious freedom'. When the evangelical machinery of monitoring religious 'persecution' of Christians was able to portray how Buddhist nationalists forwarded anti-conversion legislation amidst a wave of attacks against Christian churches, these monitoring organisations capitalised on the concomitant relation of law and violence as twin measures of discriminating (evangelical) Christians. Castelli observes how evangelical Christians use the narrative discourse on 'persecution' as an effective method in curtailing political debate, and that the Christian persecution complex is a "discourse entity impervious to critique, self-generating and self-sustaining" (Castelli 2007a: 174). Thus, through these monitoring efforts evangelical Christians transformed their political marginality in Sri Lanka into one of political acumen. In garnering international pressure and support, they transformed the contents of the anti-conversion bill to be seen exclusively as a mechanism of oppressive intentions.

The anti-conversion bill failed, and the Buddhist nationalists were unable to garner formal state patronage for Buddhism, but they were still able to capitalise on their informal patronage networks. These informal patronage networks enabled Buddhist nationalists to enact exclusionary violence against Christian churches with impunity. They also enabled Buddhist monks to act as patrons, as 'informal sovereigns', to wield considerable potency in various relations, mediating political demands, both locally and nationally. However, as violent efforts proved counter-effective, in that they were reported as violations of religious freedom in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist nationalists changed their methods of regulation. Rather than enacting violence and harassment, they now capitalised on legal and bureaucratic patrolling,

which proved particularly effective due to the large network of Buddhist nationalists throughout the island.

The Buddhist nationalists changed their repertoires of regulating evangelical Christians to more subtle means, and through supposedly neutral laws and regulations, such as the 'noise pollution law' and the bureaucratic circular regulating worship sites. The Buddhist nationalists were able to curb Christian activities to a great extent through these measures. These forms of regulations do not attract unwanted attention in the same way as violent and legal actions, but operate under the radar of 'religious freedom.' Nevertheless, Woods (2013) argues that most house churches operate under the radar of the Buddhist nationalists. Thus, this dynamics reveal how both groups engage in subtle mechanisms of regulation, either through legal and bureaucratic patrolling of evangelical practices (Buddhist nationalists) or effective monitoring (evangelical Christians) and subsequent international pressure if violent incidents occur. In this way, both parties engage, in various ways, in the discourse of religious freedom both as a centre of authority, but also as an unfinished project of control and subordination. Hence, we have explored how religious freedom is both a particular right guaranteed in Article 18 of the ICCPR, and a concept imbued in powerful discourses of morality, legality and legitimacy. The dynamics in Sri Lanka have led to a situation where two religious groups engage in a stalemate of paranoid regulation of one another, navigating the vistas of complex and murky contingencies of affiliations. The regulating potency of religious freedom has become something either to embrace or to avoid. If anything, the discourse of religious freedom has only hardened the lines between Buddhist nationalists and evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka, and the question whether a sound legislation on improper conversion is possible to achieve is still an unresolved issue.

List of Interviews

1. Catholic theologian, 4th of May 2011
2. Representative of a Christian ecumenical institute, 1st of September 2011.
3. Scholar in Buddhist studies, 3rd of September 2011.
4. American missionaries, central Sri Lanka, 21st of September 2011.
5. Scholar in Sociology, 23rd of September 2011.
6. Representative of a Buddhist development organization (Dharmavijaya Foundation), 25th of September 2011.
7. Scholar in Sri Lankan history, 3rd of October 2011.
8. Scholar of Buddhist studies, 14th of October 2011.
9. Representative of a Buddhist development organization (Sarvodaya), 15th of October 2011.
10. Buddhist monk and participant of a Buddhist development organization (SUCCESS), 30th of October 2011.
11. Group interview with All Ceylon Buddhist Congress commission report group, 2nd of November 2011.
12. Buddhist monk at major temple, central Sri Lanka, 20th November 2011.
13. Human rights activist, 23rd of November 2011.
14. Buddhist monk, near historical site, western Sri Lanka, 24th of November 2011.
15. Buddhist activist, 24th of November 2011.
16. Buddhist nationalist, 25th of November 2011.
17. Editor of Buddhist national newspaper, 25th of November 2011.
18. Catholic clergy, 28th of November 2011.
19. Baptist clergy, 28th of November 2011.
20. Editor of Buddhist national newspaper, 3rd of December 2011.
21. Buddhist activist(s), 4th of December 2011.
22. Buddhist monk from Jathika Hela Urumaya, 5th of December 2011.
23. Catholic clergy, 5th of December 2011.
24. Catholic clergy, 5th of December 2011.
25. Researcher at Christian institute, 5th of December 2011.
26. Representative of Hindu Development Organization, 6th of December 2011.
27. Catholic clergy and law expert, 8th of December 2011.
28. Researcher on development issues, 8th of December 2011.
29. Human rights lawyer and activist, 9th of December 2011.
30. Buddhist monk from Jathika Hela Urumaya, 10th of December 2011.
31. Junior monks at Buddhist temple, southern Sri Lanka, 10th of December 2011.
32. Representative from NCEASL, 13th of December 2011.
33. Pastor from a major evangelical church, 14th of December 2011.
34. Buddhist lawyer, 17th of December 2011.
35. Buddhist monk from Jathika Hela Urumaya, 21st of December 2011.
36. Representative from NCC, 26th of December 2011.
37. Buddhist monk, southern Sri Lanka, 27th of December 2011.
38. Hindu lawyer, 28th of December 2011.
39. Editor of Christian magazine, 2nd of Januray 2012.

40. Representative of the independent churches (National Christian Fellowship (NCF), 3rd of January 2012.
41. Researcher on religion and politics, 4th of January 2012.
42. Catholic lawyer, 4th of January 2012.
43. Researcher at independent research institute, 5th of January 2012.
44. Buddhist lawyer, 9th of January 2012.
45. Buddhist activist, 4th of July 2012.
46. Buddhist interest organization ACBC, 5th of July 2012.
47. Muslim independent scholar, 16th of July 2012.
48. Buddhist monk (Bodu Bala Sena), central Sri Lanka, 30th of March 2013.
49. Buddhist monk, central Sri Lanka, 30th of March 2013.
50. Burmese Buddhist monk, central Sri Lanka, 31st of March 2013.
51. Buddhist activist, western Sri Lanka, 2nd of April 2013.
52. Christian lawyer (National Christian Council), 3rd of April 2013.
53. Editor of Buddhist national newspaper, 3rd of April 2013.
54. Buddhist monk (Sinhala Ravaya), 4th of April 2013.
55. Buddhist activist, western Sri Lanka, 4th of April 2013.
56. Muslim Scholar, 5th of April 2013.
57. Buddhist monk (Bodu Bala Sena), 6th of April 2013.
58. Buddhist monk (Jathika Hela Urumaya), 15th of July 2013.
59. Buddhist monk, southern Sri Lanka, 21st of July 2013.
60. Buddhist activist, lawyers and civil society actors (group interview), 23rd of July 2013.
61. Buddhist activists (Bodu Bala Sena), western Sri Lanka, 23rd of July 2013.
62. Buddhist activist (Bodu Bala Sena), with political background, 25th of July 2013.

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