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What Policies Cannot Express: An Examination of Sri Lanka's Continuing Inability to Bridge the Sinhala-Tamil Ethnolinguistic Divide through National Policies and Programs

An Honors Paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies
By Lillian Ann Eckstein

Bowdoin College, 2018
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*For Ginger,
whom we lost when I was first in Sri Lanka but has inspired every adventure since.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the Sinhala lexicon, the words for “opposition” (*ediriya*), “obstinate” (*murandu*), “fight” (*poraya*), and “revenge” (*paliya*) are naturalized and derived from the modern Tamil language.¹ They are considered to be “loanwords,” otherwise known as “words which are adopted or borrowed, usually with little modification, from another language.”² According to Sinhala tradition, the Sinhalese language, of the Indo-Aryan language family and the Tamil language, of the Dravidian language family, are thought to have first interacted sometime after 544 BCE, the year when Buddha’s followers arrived to the island – now known as Sri Lanka – on the southeastern tip of India.³ With separate alphabets, different etymological lineages, and little relation to international languages like Portuguese, German, or English, both Sinhala and Tamil proved challenging to learn, both for the other linguistic community and the colonial powers of Portugal, Belgium, and England. Thus, the words that were “loaned” to the Sinhala from the Tamil language are more likely related to war, conflict, and division. These words ultimately speak to the storied relationship between these two languages in Sri Lanka: they have more often been juxtaposed in opposition to each other than in harmony, used to demonstrate differences rather than similarities, and cited as reasons of competition, conflict, and ongoing struggles between Sri Lanka’s ethnolinguistic communities.

Historian K.M. de Silva argues that three matters of identity have been the most common causes of conflict, unrest, and violence in Sri Lanka—religion, ethnicity, and language.⁴ These

¹ *Tamil Language Lists: Tamil Loanwords in Sinhala, List of English Words of Tamil Origin, Loan Words in Sri Lankan Tamil*, (Colombo, Sri Lanka: General Books LLC, 2010).

² "The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199658237.001.0001/acref-9780199658237-e-806>.

³ James W Gair, *Studies in South Asian Linguistics: Sinhala and Other South Asian Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

⁴ K. M. de Silva, "Sri Lanka in 1948," in *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. John Cifford Holt (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 591-98.

three areas of division have accounted for all of the major uprisings against the Sri Lankan Government and the 30-year war from 1983 to 2009, but the origins of these divisions and their continued implications on the efforts of reconciliation and unity in the nation are not as clear. The current Constitution of Sri Lanka codifies the country's Official Languages as Sinhala and Tamil, and the National Languages of Sri Lanka as Sinhala and Tamil. Despite this, language remains a significantly complicated, divisive matter. Usage of Tamil in administrative and legal settings is in practice restricted to Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern Provinces, where the Tamil-speaking population of the island-nation lives almost exclusively, and the public schooling system still lacks capacity in many areas to foster non-mother tongue language learning. The recorded literacy rates from the 2012 Census of Population and Housing concluded that, when accounting for multilingual citizens, 80% of the nation's population is literate in the Sinhala language, 26% in the Tamil language, and 31% in the English language.⁵ Considering that 76% of citizens' first language is Sinhala, and 24% of citizens' first language is Tamil,⁶ the literacy rates demonstrate, at the most basic level, the potential for difficulties in communication between Sri Lankans.

The linguistic divisions relate to the ethnic and religious communities in the nation and in turn, to the political divides along the lines of nationalism between linguistic groups. In 2012, the Sri Lankan Census of Population and Housing reported that 70.1% of the population is Buddhist, 12.6% Hindu, and 9.7% Muslim. In addition, 74.9% of the population is Sinhalese, 11.2% is Tamil, 9.3% is Sri Lankan Moor, 4.1% is Indian Tamil, and 0.5% is "other." With the pairing of the Sinhala ethnolinguistic identity with Buddhism, and the Tamil ethnolinguistic identity with

⁵ Ministry of Policy Planning and Economic Affairs Department of Census & Statistics, "Census of Population and Housing," (2012).

⁶ Ethnologue: Languages of the World, (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2016), <http://www.ethnologue.com/country/LK>.

Hinduism, these groups hold loyalty to their linguistic and religious communities, creating even stronger potential ties of nationalism within Sri Lanka.⁷

In the present, however, language may be the singular dominant symbol of division in the nation, with the other ethnic traits, including religion, serving as secondary symbols.⁸ In every interview or conversation with Sri Lankans about the status of languages, the interviewee or casual conversationalist remarked about the continued ethnolinguistic divide in the nation. A Sinhala-English translator at the Ministry of Public Administration, Chulananda Samaranayake, said, “As [Nelson] Mandela once told, ‘If you talk to a person, in a language which he can understand, then you talk to his head. If you talk to a person, in his own language, you are talking to his heart.’ Still we are not talking to the heart of other people.”⁹ Language is contentious; in the case of Sri Lanka, it has been the impetus for many years of civil unrest and war. As Paul Brass argues, “Language becomes not merely a means of communication, but a priceless heritage of group culture.”¹⁰ In an interview with a lecturer at the University of Peradeniya in the central region of the country, Mahendran Thiruvarangan plainly said, “Language is an emotive issue,” emphasizing the deep, personal importance that language holds in a person’s life.¹¹

⁷ In this thesis, I will predominantly focus on the ethnolinguistic tension in the frame of language divisions as they relate to linguistic policies, while excluding specific questions of religion, for the sake of clarity and focus. I choose to focus on the language question specifically because of the history of legality of language in the country but I know that within Sri Lanka, there exists complex political and social circumstances which contribute to the ongoing ethnolinguistic divides. In reality, the relationship between language and religion in the country, especially as it relates to the past and ongoing conflict, is exceedingly complicated and well-deserving of consideration and future investigation.

⁸ Robert N. Kearney, "Language and the Rise of Tamil Separatism," in *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. John Cifford Holt (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 493.

⁹ Chulananda Samaranayake, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

¹⁰ Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Newbury Park, Calif; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), 22.

¹¹ Mahendran Thiruvarangan, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

In using language as a study for analysis of continued division in the nation despite recent government policies designed to remedy, or at least ameliorate, such, this thesis explores the implications of the linguistic divisions in Sri Lanka. To do so, it uses a framework for analyzing linguistic policies to understand how state tradition and the language regime of Sri Lanka continue to impact the reconciliation of, and cohesion in, the nation. The following argues that the past and current politics of language policy, which are aimed at creating a multilingual, equal society, especially those in the realms of education and employment, are neither sufficient nor effectively implemented to be able to counteract the past policies of linguistic discrimination and the history of ethnolinguistic divisions in Sri Lanka.

Question, Hypothesis, and Methodology

Question and Hypothesis

When I first arrived in Sri Lanka in August 2016, I knew of the 30-year civil war and ethnic conflict, but not of the depth of ethno-nationalist allegiances that would slowly show themselves in conversations with my hosts and professors. I knew of the existence of two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil, but not of the inability of the vast majority of Sri Lankans to speak to each other across mother tongue divisions. Similarly, I knew of the efforts of post-conflict reconciliation supported by the international community, but not of the complacency, disinterest, and distrust held by apparently all Sri Lankans, albeit for diverse reasons, for the process. Throughout my semester studying at the University of Peradeniya, one of the country's oldest and most elite public universities, which is located in the Central Province, I slowly learned to hear the differences between the Indo-Aryan Sinhala and the Dravidian Tamil. I observed the divisions of students along ethnolinguistic lines expressed in more subtle ways: the large groups of students dressed in Western-style clothing chattering excitedly in Sinhala, the students on motorbikes riding to the top of the mountain on their way to the Hindu *kovil*, and the groups of women in burqas sitting around a communal plate of rice and curries in between classes. Throughout my time, I wondered how, in a nation with a literacy rate of approximately 91%¹², could the greater Sri Lankan population not be able to communicate with each other? And, if this inability to properly communicate between ethnolinguistic communities continued to be true, how was the nation ever going to reconcile from the 30-year civil war?

¹² UNICEF, "Sri Lanka: Statistics," (2013).

Thus, the motivating questions this research addresses are: 1) Why do people in Sri Lanka not talk to each other? 2) What perpetuates such polarization between language groups, and what institutional arrangements and policies caused these continued effects?

Both the Sinhala-language and Tamil-language speaking groups of the nation lack the appropriate access and resources to gain sufficient language-skills to communicate with the other language group. This is because there are no real incentives to learn either the opposing non-native official language or English. In this thesis, I hypothesize that this lack of incentive is directly linked to three factors: inefficiencies of government policies enforcing the employment of bilingual civil servants; provincial divisions restricting mobility in employment; and, the primary and secondary education system that establishes these early linguistic divisions between students and the tertiary education system that perpetuates these divisions through its three-language tracks of Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical and historical baseline for the exploration of these questions and the related hypotheses regarding the continued ethnolinguistic divisions in Sri Lanka. Chapter Two examines Sri Lanka's education and language policies over the past 70 years, with specific examination of the university admissions policies and changes in the proportions of ethnolinguistic communities admitted. Chapter Three analyzes data collected through national surveys and in-person interviews, as well as a further exploration of the implications of certain governmental policies during and after the recent Sri Lanka civil war, including the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987, the Official Languages Commission Act of 1991, and government circulars 03/2007 and 07/2007. The conclusion considers the possibility of new conflicts arising from the continued linguistic division in Sri Lanka, and the potential for

effective reconciliation within the nation in consideration of the current status of the linguistic divide.

Methodology

The research that examines Sri Lanka's extensive linguistic divide and its relation to the state traditions and language regimes, was executed both through extensive secondary research and a three-week *in situ* research initiative conducted between December 2017 and January 2018 in the cities of Colombo, Jaffna, and Kandy. In an effort to answer the motivating questions behind the research endeavor, the field research effort aimed to explore questions about national communication and interactions between the ethnolinguistic groups. I inquired about the ability of different ethnolinguistic groups to communicate and the potential of future interactions between these groups, about the institutional arrangements and policies implemented by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), that have perpetuated these divisions, and about the possibility of future reconciliation through linguistic connection. In addition, I investigated how admissions policies and the separate language tracks in the education system, especially in the universities, affect the interethnic dynamics amongst students, and whether these have changed since the 1987 Peace Accord and the subsequent institutions that were created as a result. Finally, I inquired about the continued ethnolinguistic polarization and the motivations behind these divisions as they relate directly to the language and education policies that were implemented in the past 70 years post-Independence.

A series of interviews were conducted with members of Sri Lankan political, academic, and civil society spheres. The interview subjects were identified and chosen from their presence in literature as having the optimal potential to represent the status of various broad-based, cross-nation societal elements, and resulting interviews were conducted in Colombo, Kandy, and Jaffna. These three cities were chosen due to their respective representation as the nation's

capital and center of political and economic activity, ethnolinguistic group diversity, and center of Tamil political and sociocultural organization. The subjects were politicians from Colombo and Jaffna, academics from the University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya (Kandy), and University of Jaffna, and researchers and policy analysts from the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo and the Centre for Policy Research in Jaffna. The length of the interviews varied depending on the time constraints of the interview subjects, and thus, the resulting span of subjects that each interview addressed also varied.

The questions were organized and designed to prompt responses from interviewees about their perceptions of government policies and their beliefs about the implications of the past and future state traditions and language regimes. Furthermore, the questions for the interviewees were modified based on their professional backgrounds and personal experience, but they were intended to prompt honest, critical consideration of the ethnolinguistic realities and relationships in the nation, as well as the state's past, present, and future language policies (Appendix 1).

Due to the array of interviewees and their respective professional and personal experiences, the answers to the questions were expected to be varied based on the positions and personal investment in the language effort held by each interviewee. The expectation was that academics might give more plausible responses about the feasibility of implementing language-learning programs or creating intra-nation engagement activities. As might be expected, answers from politicians and government employees, especially those directly related to branches of the Ministry of Education and the Official Languages Commission, embodied more of the government's current and future policies, as well as obvious restriction in candid responses. Interviews with persons who were not connected to either the academic or political/civil sphere are considered to more effectively represent the public opinion of language initiatives, and the

future feasibility of engaging Sri Lankan citizens in language learning as a mechanism to connect the country, especially in regards to ongoing efforts of reconciliation. The data collected through interviews was useful for testing the hypotheses presented above, and is used to prompt further topics and raise questions of the ethnolinguistic division in the nation.

The data was collected through notes and recordings, and is entirely qualitative. The data was examined for both common topical themes and unique points. Albeit a small sample size of interviewees, the interview methods employed enabled a relatively in-depth and nuanced understanding of local perceptions of linguistic policy, politics of language in the nation, and identity politics in the nation. The interviewees and organizations selected cannot be seen as representative of all perceptions of linguistic policies and the ethnolinguistic division in Sri Lanka, but they are employed to illustrate and deepen the understanding of the politics of language policy there.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics of Language: Analytical Framework

The basis of the thesis' hypothesis is grounded in the following theoretical literature regarding the politics of language and language interaction in ethnolinguistically diverse nations. As is examined, the policies that were enacted by the Sinhalese-majority governments before, during, and after the civil war period demonstrate the conceptions of language and language use in a manner that created ongoing academic, professional, and social challenges for the Tamil-speaking population. Furthermore, the colonial legacy, growth of nationalism, and current institutional regime within the Sinhala and Tamil groups contribute to the continuing conflict between these ethnolinguistic groups today, especially when examined through the lens of language as a “hypercollective good” and right.

In an attempt to connect the disparate realms of language analyses in the field of political science, Linda Cardinal and Selma Sonntag posit a model of focus on the impact of historical institutions on the current language regimes of a nation.¹³ In *State Traditions and Language Regimes*, they propose a framework for analyzing language policy choices of governments. The framework combines the concepts of “state traditions” and “language regimes” as a means to argue the path dependency of language policy choices. State traditions are the historical institutions of politics in a nation, but do not explicitly predetermine its language policies. The study of state traditions is the study of the “institutional and normative baggage and patterns of state action.”¹⁴ Language regimes, defined as “language practices as well as conceptions of language and language use as projected through state policies and as acted upon by language users,” are directly influenced by these state traditions and together, they form the basis for

¹³ Linda Cardinal and Selma K. Sonntag, *State Traditions and Language Regimes* (Montreal;Kingston;: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

analyses of language policy choices.¹⁵ Furthermore, analysis of language regimes allows for analysis of power relations in a nation, especially in the political and social spheres. Cardinal's and Sonntag's framework provides a tangible means to understand the confluence of history and present power structures in national governments that continue to create and enforce changing language policies.

In Sri Lanka, language policies have been employed to unite, control, and establish boundaries between different language groups. Analyzing the question of language politics and policies in Sri Lanka through this framework proves critical because of the importance of both state traditions and language regimes in the country's past and present. The pre-colonial and colonial history of Sri Lanka demonstrates the state tradition regarding language as one which, both by nature and by purpose, implemented preferential policies towards either the English-, Tamil-, or Sinhala-speaking populations. The "baggage and patterns" of the state language traditions that have been carried through to the post-Independence period are increasingly apparent in parallel consideration with the language regimes that emerged, especially that of the Sinhalese in the mid-1950s.

Language as "Hypercollective Good"

Abram de Swaan argues that languages can be considered as "goods" that can either allow the persons who master them to gain economic advantages or determine the comparative disadvantages of smaller language groups in a nation. The nature of languages as "hypercollective goods" allows for the explanation that languages are "learned 'upwards:' from the small to the large language, from the little to the great tradition, from the poor to the rich language groups, from the subjugated to the dominant nation."¹⁶ de Swaan emphasizes that

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Abram de Swaan, "The Political Economy of Language Constellations," in *Words of the World* (Massachusetts, USA: Polity Press, 2001), 25.

persons will “choose to learn the language that they expect will benefit them more than another language” if all efforts of learning are equal.¹⁷ Despite these trends of language learning and the inherent hierarchical nature of languages in a nation as commodities, however, de Swaan acknowledges that loyalty to one’s own language can be seen as “an extreme case” of consumer loyalty. Persons are likely to respond to economic motivations to learn a language and yet, there are other aspects of languages – such as identity and group-loyalty – that impact the likelihood of language acquisition in a nation.

de Swaan’s economic perspective of language allows for a type of quantitative comparison of different language groups through a social science approach, and, enables an analysis of the comparative perspective of the Tamil and Sinhala languages in Sri Lanka. While one would expect Tamils to learn the more economically-valuable majority language of Sinhala, the concept of consumer loyalties with respect to language explains why the Tamil population in Sri Lanka would be inclined to continue to pursue education and employment in their mother-tongue, instead of in Sinhala, especially in the context of the civil war fought on the basis of ethnolinguistic divisions. We also would not expect the Sinhalese to learn Tamil, because of the lack of economic benefits to doing so. Furthermore, the possible conflicts created by the valuing of language as an economic good are obvious when considering the conflicts created by the British-enforced English language usage in government and civil service offices during the colonial era, pre-Independence. As English proved to be more economically advantageous both for the Tamil and Sinhalese populations at the beginning of the period of capitalism during colonial occupation of the nation, both populations would naturally have been inclined to pursue English-language studies initially. In the globalized world, English continues to be of greater

¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

importance in economic spheres beyond the nation, which explains why neither the Tamil nor Sinhalese population has indicated any real social- or economic-based desire to learn the other national language.

Language and Rights

Beyond the question of the economic, market-based value of language, language theory questions the viability of rights-based analyses of languages in a nation, especially in relation to politics, education, and territory. As Alan Patten and Will Kymlicka outline in *Language Rights and Political Theory*, the different dichotomies of language rights include tolerance versus promotion-oriented rights, norm-and-accommodation versus official-languages rights regimes, personality versus territoriality rights regimes, and individual versus collective rights.¹⁸ If language rights can take many forms, and, are related to various aspects of politics and civil society, they can help in understanding the differing types of language policies implemented in Sri Lanka. Conflicts and questions addressed by, and related to, language rights in policy include internal communication, public services, courts and legislatures, education, private language usage, immigration, naturalization, and official declarations.

J.A. Laponce argues in *Languages and Their Territories* that a language must have its own territory in order to survive. Furthermore, he claims that the achievement of unilingualism in a state is the most effective way to guarantee a sufficient territory for a language and the subsequent survival of this language. In asserting the need for a territory to protect a language, Laponce analyzes bilingualism, multilingual states, multi-ethnic languages, ethno-linguistic conflicts, and the language rights associated with these conflicts. Laponce argues that there is an inevitable power dynamic established in multilingual societies, creating a consciousness of a

¹⁸ Will Kymlicka and Alan Patten, "Language Rights and Political Theory" (Oxford;New York;, 2003).

minority language group to the importance of its language.¹⁹ He executes explicit analyses of five sociological, rather than linguistic, factors that explain the “evolution of languages, of their successes and their failures.”²⁰ These five factors are: number of speakers, cultural strength, economic strength, wealth, and military strength. The tensions between linguistic groups in a multilingual society oftentimes drive the desires for ethnolinguistic groups to obtain exclusive control of a territory and independence from other, potentially more overpowering linguistic groups. In Sri Lankan society, the number of speakers of Tamil is fewer than even one-fourth of the country’s population, which creates the conditions for the Tamil linguistic group to seek their own territory for the purposes of survival of their minority language. Laponce’s theory further explains the Tamil resistance to Sinhalese assimilation and the desires from the Tamil population to secede from the Sinhala-majority nation.

Laponce argues that the most dangerous situation for separatism in a multilingual, multi-ethnic nation occurs when the minority language experiences moderate pressures of assimilation from the majority language, but not necessarily overtly or violently.²¹ In the context of Sri Lanka, the conflict produced by Sinhala pressure on Tamils to adopt the Sinhalese-language triggered international support for the Sri Lankan Tamils, both from other nations and from the diaspora population scattered throughout the world. Conflicts that would produce separatist movements are most often from a minority linguistic group’s lack of access to the rights to speak, to understand and be understood, to education in one’s own language, and to language as identity. In this situation, the outbreak of warfare led by the Tamil groups was not only supported by Tamil-speaking persons in the nation, but also by the greater global Tamil community.

¹⁹ J. A. Laponce, *Languages and Their Territories* (Buffalo; Toronto;: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

Laponce again argues that in order to protect itself, a minority language must concentrate geographically; only once the minority group is concentrated geographically can it be granted its rights. By considering the Sinhalese as occupying the role of the minority language in the context of the greater international community – despite the majority population also being the Sinhala – Laponce’s theories provide additional support for why the Sinhalese-coalition initially pushed for a “Sinhala Only” policy in 1956. The Tamil desire for secession of the Northern and Eastern Provinces from the rest of the nation was a result of the backlash from the colonial period that caused the Sinhala population to explicitly discriminate against the Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans, thus causing the Tamil push for independence from these constraints.

Stephen May presents language and ethnicity in *Language and Minority Rights* as they exist in a situational context, fluid, malleable and “instrumental” in mobilizing a people to “particular political ends.”²² He claims that language is a “contingent marker of ethnic identity,” but that viewing ethnicity and its link to language as situational “cannot account adequately for the often-prominent role that historically-associated languages play in the identity claims and the political mobilization of many minority movements.”²³ Furthermore, language is not just culture, it is “political fact,” which is deeply influenced by politics and power interplays in a nation-state.²⁴ May further emphasizes the implications of the politics of language in nations through the claim that these politics are a “contest for linguistic control of the nation-state”²⁵ Citing Fernand de Varennes, he argues that language-based conflict does not occur when language rights are recognized, but instead, when they have been “avoided, suppressed, or ignored.”²⁶

²² Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*, Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

Denying legitimate minority language rights, after recognizing them, has been the principal cause of language-based conflicts, especially in Canada, Belgium, and Sri Lanka.²⁷

As argued by Cardinal and Sonntag in their proposed analytical framework, considering the linguistic policies as part of the state tradition and language regimes of Sri Lanka is imperative to understanding the outbreak of the civil war in 1983, and the effect of the peace and reconciliation processes of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The question of competing nationalisms arises as an aspect of the state traditions and language regimes in Sri Lanka, especially as the nationalist sentiments in the Sinhala and Tamil groups led to great divides between the two ethnolinguistic communities.

In Sri Lanka, throughout the early Independence period the development of two competing nationalities divided along ethnolinguistic lines is observed. In *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Karl Deutsch explores the premise that if nationalism is a uniting factor in a nation, it will arise through complementarity of social communication and the eventual linguistic assimilation in a modernizing nation.²⁸ Unification through language did not occur in Sri Lanka, however, due initially to the focus on English-language education, and later because of the linguistic policies implemented by the Sinhalese-majority GoSL; these policies were a response to colonially-inspired inequalities. Thus, the linguistic ties in Sri Lanka isolated the respective ethnolinguistic groups more significantly, instead of binding the nation together.

Donald Horowitz, a scholar of ethnic conflict within nations, argues that matters of group comparison and entitlement in ethnic groups serve as potential sources of conflict. Horowitz claims that group comparison of ethnic groups by the colonial powers created a system of

²⁷ Ibid., 242.

²⁸ Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: The Technology Press of The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1953).

“backward” and “advanced” ethnic communities in many colonized nations, including Ceylon. Horowitz argues, “Colonial rule made it easier to compare group attributes and simultaneously made ethnic identity a more important matter than it might otherwise have been...As a result, new standards of group evaluation emerged that carried over long after colonial departure.”²⁹ When used in tandem with other theories of language in multiethnic societies, Horowitz’s claims provide explanation of the relationships between the Sinhala and Tamil ethnolinguistic groups. Thus, Horowitz’s theories contextualize the impact of the colonial era on the continuing conflict between these ethnolinguistic groups in Sri Lanka, especially in relation to the initial policies implemented by the Sinhalese-majority government post-Independence.

Cardinal and Sonntag’s analytical framework of the politics of language policy in nations through the consideration of state tradition and language regime allows for thoughtful consideration of the present realities of language division and the potential for linguistic connection. The literature presented regarding nationalism, territorial control, issues of secession and language rights, and the colonial legacy is increasingly important to the analysis of the impacts of the state tradition and the state’s language regimes. Furthermore, these theories are applied to answering the question of the future of communication and unity in Sri Lanka, especially as the GoSL implements reconciliation efforts that are being supported by the international community.

²⁹ Donald L. Horowitz, "Group Comparison and the Sources of Conflict," in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 149.

CHAPTER 1: Listening to the Past, Conversing in the Present; a Brief History and the Growth of Nationalism

*Pre-Colonial Period*¹

Although many consider the ongoing ethnolinguistic conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil groups to have begun post-Independence, much of the division started as a product of pre-colonial religious group dynamics based on national origin stories and the diversity of economic realms. The religious divides later aligned with ethnolinguistic divisions, as the colonial policies implemented by the Dutch, Portuguese, and British exacerbated these divisions and inequalities. As Richard Spencer argues, “The history of the conflict has been essentially a political history, in which particular cultural resources have been deployed to suit the interests of key political actors.”² An analysis of the pre-colonial realities and colonial era policies is necessary to understand the full implications of the religious divides in the nation which, when paired with the pre-colonial and colonial governments and the related policies, led to the 30-year civil war and the continued current ethnolinguistic division.

Early political organization in Ceylon began officially with the Anuradhapura Kingdom (377 BCE-1017 CE), and, continued through the Polonnaruwa Kingdom (1017-1310 CE), Cola Kingdom (1017-1070 CE), and Kandy Kingdom (1594-1815 CE) in the central region, and Jaffna Kingdom (1215-1624 CE) in the northern region. The Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Kingdoms served as the most significant centers of Sinhala-Buddhist civilization. The *Mahavamsa*, the most sacred epic poem written in the Pali language, is considered to be written about the Kings of this era, outlining the political relationship between Buddhism and the pre-

¹ Between 1948 and 1972, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was an independent country named “Ceylon” after the British Colony of Ceylon was granted independence in 1948. For the remainder of this paper, the name “Ceylon” will be used to describe the nation pre-1972, and the name “Sri Lanka” will indicate the nation post-1972, when the country’s name officially became such.

² Jonathan Spencer, ed. *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London, England: Routledge, 1990), 12.

colonial polity. This text continues to serve as the primary justification for the *sangha*—the Buddhist community of monks, nuns, and laity—to claim the island of Ceylon as the home of the Buddhist people and state.³ The themes of Buddhism interwoven with political institutions continue throughout the remainder of Ceylon’s history. In contrast to the post-colonial era of Independence, though, the Buddhist nature and history of dominance in these texts of the Kingdom did not impose religiously-justified control over non-Buddhists of the island.⁴

Although language was a dividing aspect of Ceylonese society in this pre-colonial period due to conflicts of communication and geography, religious differences also existed between the hierarchical polities of the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa Kingdoms and the Jaffna Kingdom. These ultimately served as the significant differentiator between what is now considered as two distinct ethnolinguistic groups. In the northern region, the Jaffna Kingdom of the Tamil Hindus ruled from 1215-1624 CE, in contrast to the Buddhist Kingdoms of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and later Kandy. This ended only in the late 16th century when the Portuguese colonialists enforced their power through political and educational encounters, especially by way of missionary establishments. Initially, the ethnic divisions in Ceylon were not equated with linguistic groups.⁵ In reality, the differences between the Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking groups, especially that of religious practice, were not as divisive in the pre-colonial era, and related conflicts only began to arise due to policies implemented during the colonial occupation. During this period, scholar K. Indrapala argues, “The Tamils of Ceylon evolved as a second ethnic group. Their evolution was parallel to that of the Sinhalese.”⁶ After the British occupation from

³ Cathrine Brun and Tariq Jazeel, ed. *Spatialising Politics: Culture and Geography in Postcolonial Sri Lanka* (California: Sage Publications, 2009), 10.

⁴ Spencer, 5.

⁵ K. Indrapala, "Tamil Identity in Ancient Sri Lanka," in *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. John Cifford Holt (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

1815 to 1948, the divisions between the two different ethnic groups were magnified due to inequalities implemented through legislation and positionality of groups.

Even after the Polonnaruwa Kingdom was dominated by the Colas, and Buddhism momentarily lost its position as the “state religion” in approximately the thirteenth century, large-scale, significant conflicts between the Sinhala and Tamil communities did not exist. Due to the modern partisan conflicts between these populations, many scholars have argued that the consecutive Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Kandy Kingdoms served exclusively to benefit the Sinhala-Buddhist population.⁷ As Elizabeth Nissan and R.L. Stirrat note, however, even in these historical centers of Sinhala-Buddhist civilization, there is architectural and sculptural evidence of Tamil-speaking groups living in these centers, and Tamil-speaking soldiers serving for Sinhala kings.⁸ Furthermore, although de Silva does observe that Tamil-speaking Ceylonese were more likely to support the invasion by the Hindu powers from South India, including the Colas, which challenged the Polonnaruwa Kingdom from 993-1070 C.E., there were “harmonious social relations between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and strong cultural and religious ties” for long periods of time.⁹ The narrative of the two opposed national groups that is imposed by “present-day Tamil and Sinhala rhetoricians,” will apply only later in the instance of the analysis of the violence and conflict post-Independence in 1948.¹⁰ Before the colonial era, although divisions between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups existed based on religion and language, such divisions did not inspire comparable levels of conflict—especially due to the

⁷ See R. Kearney, *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon*; M. More, *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka*; G. Obeyesekere, “The vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity through time and change;” M. Roberts, “From southern India to Lanka;” V. Samaraweera, “The evolution of a plural society;”

⁸ Elizabeth Nissan and R.L. Stirrat, “The Generation of Communal Identities,” in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathan Spencer (London, England: Routledge, 1990), 23.

⁹ K.M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 21.

¹⁰ Stirrat, 24.

greater geographic separation of groups and ethnic communities—as arose during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Colonial Period and Ethnic Conflict

As argued above, if the Kingdoms of the pre-colonial era of Ceylon did not explicitly perpetuate divisions between communities, except in religious practices and state support of religion, what then are the origins of the ethnolinguistic conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations? Whereas Sinhala-Tamil divisions did not cause significant, obvious conflict in the pre-colonial era, the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505, followed by the Dutch in 1640, and continued by the British in 1802, created the beginnings of the complicated and eventually violent ethnolinguistic divisions that continue to today. An examination of the applicability of Horowitz's theories on ethnic conflict to the political policies and actions of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial governments from 1505-1948 allows for a clearer understanding of the beginnings of the state tradition and language regime of the Ceylonese state.

The most significant colonial impact to create and perpetuate divisions between the Sinhala and Tamil ethnolinguistic groups occurred during the period of British dominance. The influence of missionaries in the country, and the resulting education system paired with the priorities of the British government, established the basis for the privileging of the Tamils over the Sinhalese. In 1813, the American Missionary Society founded an extensive English-language schooling system in the Northern Province of Jaffna, which provided English-language skills for the Tamil population. While the Tamil population in the Northern Province benefited from this education system by happenstance, these opportunities allowed for the Tamil population to be conditioned as an “advanced” group, one that was later able to assume positions in the colonial

government and commercial houses.¹¹ The highest rates of literacy in Ceylon in the 19th century were in Jaffna, and because of this, there were increasingly higher numbers of internal migrants to the North to fill the clerical posts and government positions.¹² This increase in potential Tamil employees simultaneously created competition for these government positions, a phenomenon that in turn created competition among the ethnolinguistic groups; this is analyzed subsequently using Horowitz's theory of competition.

As the Tamil community became categorized as the "advanced" group because of its access to English-language education, and subsequent employability and employment in the civil services, the Sinhalese earned the label of "backwards." The Tamil were increasingly perceived by the British as meritorious and "deserving" of these positions of employment in the government, while the Sinhala were perceived as indolent, docile, and unintelligent.¹³ The Colebrooke-Cameron Commission of 1833, which made recommendations for administrative, financial, economic, and judicial reform for the colony, even recommended that the Tamil élites of Ceylon be hired as higher public servants.¹⁴ As the Tamil population became more valuable to the British colonial government, Tamils moved throughout the country, living in provinces and regions that historically had been predominantly Sinhalese. As Horowitz observes:

Colonial views of group virtues and vices added a crucial evaluative dimension to ethnic differences. So enduringly influential were these views, that to appreciate the full impact of group juxtapositions on ethnic conflict, it is as necessary to understand the relations of the respective groups to the colonial power as it is to grasp their relations to each other.¹⁵

As the population of English-speaking Tamil persons in the country increased, especially in direct comparison to the Sinhalese population, the Tamil community began to gain strength

¹¹ Horowitz, 156.

¹² De Silva, 368.

¹³ Horowitz, 169.

¹⁴ Laksiri Jayasuriya, "The Evolution of Social Policy in Sri Lanka 1833-1970: The British Colonial Legacy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 46 (2001): 6.

¹⁵ Horowitz, 160.

economically and politically, especially as they became increasingly employed by the British in the civil service. Furthermore, the Sinhalese population not only faced economic challenges from the Tamil's placement in government positions, but also, they perceived the potential for "swamping" by the increasing Indian Tamil population in the plantations of the central mountain region, as brought by the British, and the existence of a large number of Indian Tamils on the mainland. The explicit privileging of one ethnolinguistic group over the other in Ceylon during the 19th and 20th centuries by the British undoubtedly created the grounds for eventual conflict between the Tamil and Sinhala.

In addition, in 1833 the British established the Legislative Council with nominated Ceylonese members; the ability to speak English was a pre-requisite. This challenge was not met until 1835, at which time a Sinhalese, Tamil, and Burgher were nominated to serve as representatives of their respective ethnolinguistic groups on the Council. B.H. Farmer credits this as the beginning of communal representation in the nation, but in the mid-1800s, there were few conflicts between the representatives from the different ethnolinguistic groups because the Council was "little more than a sounding board for the Executive."¹⁶ In initially forming the Council, and then reforming it in the early 1900s, however, the British did not consider proportional representation of the overall communities in Ceylon; after they implemented certain reforms in 1912, membership was comprised of four Sinhalese, versus three Tamil, representatives. The primary legacy of this council was to institutionalize representation by communal group.

Horowitz notes that in countless examples of post-colonial nations, the "so-called backwards" groups are more frequently the groups initiating conflict against the "advanced." The

¹⁶ B.H. Farmer, "Four Hundred and Fifty Years of Foreign Rule: The British in Ceylon," in *Ceylon: A Divided Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 53.

“backward” groups are forced to compete against the “advanced” groups, which have received more of the economic and educational opportunities from the colonizers.¹⁷ Furthermore, the “backwards” group perceive the “advanced” group to be more cohesive, better organized, and willing to mutually collaborate, a phenomenon that adds further dimensions of fear and competition between the two groups. These fears are undoubtedly apparent in the rhetoric and organization of the Sinhala political groups in the 1940s and 50s, creating further incentive for the Sinhala ethnolinguistic group to achieve dominance over the Tamil community.

At the same time that the Tamil population was reaping the benefits of their English-language ability, the British were further removing the Sinhala population from power by way of religious restrictions in the government. The British viewed the Sinhalese as docile, but also as holders of cultural status, and later, of a historical claim to eventually become the authentic rulers of Ceylon following British departure. Whereas the Buddhist religion received special benefits and protections during the pre-colonial era and in some parts of the Portuguese and Dutch eras, the British pushed for the dominance of Christianity and the removal of privileging Buddhism in the state government.¹⁸ By 1844, the Secretaries of State James Stephen and Early Grey had formally “called upon the colonial government to sever the state’s connection with Buddhism.”¹⁹

This explicit challenge of Sinhala Buddhist religious hegemony by the British colonial government in the 19th century serves as another aspect of Horowitz’s theories on the sources of conflict between ethnic groups: group entitlement. Horowitz argues that group entitlement, “conceived as a joint function of comparative worth and legitimacy...[explains]...why the

¹⁷ Horowitz, 169.

¹⁸ De Silva, 267.

¹⁹ Ibid.

followers follow, accounts for the intensity of group reactions, even to modest stimuli, and clarifies the otherwise mysterious quest for public signs of group status.”²⁰ For an ethnolinguistic group that received religious and political privileges for hundreds of years, the new policies implemented by the British were undoubtedly challenging to the Sinhala Buddhists’ expectations of entitlement. Also, by allowing only for English-language employment, the colonial policies of the British created exclusion in the government of the Sinhalese-speaking working class, further complicating the realities of access to, and community rights of, the Sinhala ethnolinguistic group.

The legacy of the English language in Sri Lanka post-English colonial occupation was obvious across government, economic, and social realms. English was the language of the government and its civil service operations, therefore requiring all employees to have English-language capabilities. With the Tamil population having a higher degree of English-language knowledge and better opportunities at pursuing English-language education, the Tamil population was initially privileged in its ability to access government employment. Furthermore, this opportunity to access government employment, and related opportunities, directly advanced the Ceylon Tamil-language group economically. During this era, particularly in the years leading up to Independence in 1948, few opportunities for economic advancement outside of national and local-level government-supported employment existed. The policies implemented by the British to privilege the English-speaking population of the nation exacerbated the grievances of the Sinhala population as they faced limitations on their abilities to access economic opportunity and state-granted benefits.

²⁰ Donald L. Horowitz, "Group Entitlement and the Sources of Conflict," in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 226.

Post-Independence and Ethnic Conflict

With the exception of the 1915 riots between the Sinhalese and Moor populations, the era of British rule saw no explicit outbreaks of violence. However, as Farmer notes, “It is wrong to assume that because the first few years of [I]ndependence were peaceful the communal problem had been solved.”²¹ As will be examined, the divisions along the lines of ethnolinguistic grouping created and perpetuated in Ceylon by the colonial powers served as the foundations for future conflict and violence between groups.

The question of “belonging” and nationalism at the time of Independence in Ceylon is an explicit aspect of Horowitz’s theory on group entitlement and sources of conflict. Horowitz explains:

The gradual transfer of power from foreign to Ceylonese hands quickly created concern for the relative political strength of the various communities. The basic assumption upon which this concern rested was that the share of political power held by members of one community would be used for the exclusive benefit of that community or the detriment of other communities.²²

Initially, the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities agreed to *swabasa*, the plan for recognition of both Sinhala and Tamil as national languages. In late 1955, however, Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala publicly pronounced a constitutional provision for “parity of status for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages;” the Sinhalese population responded with immediate hostility and protests.²³ The anger from the Sinhala ethnolinguistic group was inherently linked to what then would be the equal privileging of the Sinhala and Tamil languages within the government. Many Sinhalese expected that once they were in power post-Independence as the majority, the Buddhist faith was to be privileged and sacred, as supported by the state and with government policies; thus, the Sinhala language was to be exclusively used to ensure economic and social power for the Sinhala community, which had not been the case under the rule of the British.

²¹ Farmer, 58.

²² Horowitz, 188.

²³ K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 501.

To the pleasure of many in the Sinhala community, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike succeeded Kotelawala as Prime Minister, and introduced the Official Language Act of 1956. The Official Language Act and its relation to government policy is explored subsequently in Chapter 2, but the general impact of these actions ensured the now elevated status of the Sinhalese language, and the advancement of Sinhala nationalism, as equivalent to Ceylon nationalism.

Bandaranaike's Official Language Act is seen as an instrumental policy, implemented to gain the explicit support of the Sinhalese community. Within this, the support of the *sangha*, the community of Buddhist monks and nuns who receive particular power and influence in politics as an explicit extension of the pre-colonial relationships between Buddhism and the polity granted by the *Mahavamsa*, was assured.²⁴ In a period of increasing pressure from the Sinhala-speaking population to regain full economic opportunity and political control, the possibility of explicitly privileging the Sinhala language was pressed upon the newly elected Sinhala leaders. Bandaranaike needed the Official Language Act to appeal to these constituents – whose focus was on obtaining full economic opportunity and political control – and establish himself as a leader of the majority population. He made this politically-expedient choice over continuing the dual language primacy policy of his predecessor, which would have been a more equitable distribution of power between the Sinhala and Tamil population post-Independence.

The emergence of Sinhalese nationalism and nationalist identity, as expressed initially in the push against the dominance of Christianity and British power, and then later expressed through the enactment of the Official Language Act, further cultivated the colonialist-prompted ethnolinguistic division.²⁵ As a result of British language-preference policies in Ceylon that had privileged the Tamil population, the Sinhalese population thus perceived the Tamil-speaking

²⁴ Spencer, 6.

²⁵ Jayasuriya, 22.

groups to be a threat to the potential of majority rule. The fear of “swamping” continued to consume the Sinhalese population. Relatedly, the Sinhalese not only wished to establish themselves definitively as the group in power, but also, they wished to permanently quell any possible challenges from the Tamil-speaking population, especially in the Northern and Eastern regions.

As the British promoted English throughout their 19th and 20th century rule, the Sinhalese feared the extinction of the Sinhala language, especially since Ceylon was one of the only nations at the time to have a Sinhala-speaking population; this contrasted markedly to the Tamils, who only had to look to their northern neighbors in South India for protection. Anderson argues that language diversity lessened as capitalism spread, creating language groups based on the national identity and the territorial location of the groups within the nation. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson posits that the common element in nationalist ideologies stresses the “primordial fatality of *particular* languages and their association with *particular* territorial units.”²⁶ Furthermore, linguistic fatality occurs when one language group is empowered over another through capitalism, technology of communication, and control of the nation-state, a fear that appeared among the Sinhalese-speaking community. As the Tamil ethnolinguistic group benefited from their territorial location on the Island near the center of English education and the economic opportunities of employment in the civil service, the Sinhalese ethnolinguistic group was religiously, economically, and socially threatened.²⁷

Anderson’s theories of nationalist divisions and Horowitz’s theory of group entitlement were undoubtedly apparent in Ceylon in the 1950s as the Sinhalese-dominated government began to exert even greater dominance over the political, economic, and social spheres. Initially,

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, “The Origins of National Consciousness,” in *Imagined Communities* (1991), 43.

²⁷ Horowitz, 151.

Bandaranaike did not wish to permanently exclude the Tamil language from all political and social realms. Bandaranaike argued with his parliamentary colleagues, who urged the government to adopt strictly Sinhala-only policies, and said that being unreasonable about inclusion of the Tamil language in certain regions “was a sure way to lose the entire country.”²⁸ The fears of swamping among the Sinhalese community created the pressure on Bandaranaike’s government to ensure the protection of the Sinhala ethnolinguistic group, even at the cost of the greater potential of division and conflict in the nation.

As Horowitz would argue, the legitimacy and worth of the Sinhala ethnolinguistic group were heavily reliant on preferences in education and employment, practices of political exclusion, and the achievement of ridding the group of the “backwards” group connotation.²⁹ Due to the British policies during the colonial period, the Sinhalese perceived the need to counteract the economic, political, and social privileging of the Tamil population, and promote the strength of the Sinhalese. The Official Language Act was a symbol of domination, one that allowed the Sinhala majority government to not only exert complete control on the educational and economic opportunities of the Tamil population, but also, to guarantee Sinhalese dominance of the political structure. Furthermore, the Official Language Act introduced more significantly defined segregation into the education system along language lines, creating the critical juncture for enforcing a language divide among children and youth.³⁰ Whereas the British education system allowed for Sinhala and Tamil students to be co-educated in the later years of schooling in English-language schools, the new education system under Bandaranaike explicitly segregated

²⁸ Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 77.

²⁹ Horowitz, 213-15.

³⁰ Camilla Orjuela, *The Identity Politics of Peacebuilding: Civil Society in War-Torn Sri Lanka* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 85.

students along linguistic divides throughout their schooling. Neil DeVotta argues, however, that Bandaranaike only later realized that the emerging political structure he helped create with the Official Language Act also simultaneously advanced Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism with strict restrictions on any possibilities of compromise with the Tamil community. This effectively created the grounds for the civil unrest of the 1950s and 1960s, and the eventual civil war between the Ceylonese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

“Sinhalization,” promoted simultaneously through political, economic, and education-based initiatives, was a direct backlash to the English period of colonialism and the former privilege in the government held by English-speaking persons. It is imperative to consider the impacts of post-Independence period linguistic policies in Sri Lanka as the following analysis seeks to understand the current matters of ethnolinguistic division in the nation. As Camilla Orjuela argues, there were five aspects of “Sinhalization” of the Sri Lankan state: 1) the throwing out of colonial heritage through disenfranchising Indian Tamils; 2) exertion of Sinhalese linguistic hegemony through the Official Language Act of 1956; 3) restriction of educational opportunities through changes to the university admission system; 4) control of Tamil land access through Sinhalese resettlement in Tamil territories; and, 5) privileging of the Buddhist religion through the 1972 Constitution.³¹ An examination of these five policy decisions demonstrates the effects of the post-Independence period of policy-making in Sri Lanka, through application of the Cardinal and Sonntag framework of state tradition and language regime.

The current state tradition and language regime of policy, rights, and realities in Sri Lanka draws directly from the colonial period in Ceylon. Due to the policies under colonial rule, contrasting nationalist identities began to develop in the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

³¹ Ibid., 71-2.

Historian K.M. De Silva writes, “The Tamils, for their part, developed an inward-looking ethnic nationalism of their own, although this, like its Sinhalese counterpart, lacked cohesion or even the touch of authenticity till language became, after Independence, the basis of these rival nationalisms.”³² During the Colonial Period in Ceylon, the middle class Tamil population had a greater representation in Parliament and other administrative opportunities than their population share, but under the new Sinhala-majority government, the Tamil-speaking population’s opportunities for employment, civic engagement, and political representation were greatly restricted.³³ Language became the basis of opposing Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms, and by 1956, the year of the Sinhalese Only Act, these tensions entered the national debate. When the British granted sovereignty to the nation of Ceylon in 1948, the newly-instated Sinhalese-majority government passed three acts that spoke to their fear and distrust of both the indigenous and Indian Tamil populations. These acts—the Citizenship Act of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents Citizenship Act of 1949, and the Parliamentary Elections Act—restricted access to voting, public service employment, and other aspects of democracy for Tamils.³⁴ By enacting this legislation, the Sinhalese were able to restrict Tamil access to the country’s political institutions and thus, were able to ensure dominance and control of the country post-Independence.

In 1958, the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28 allowed all Tamil-speaking persons to access education, public service entrance exams, and administration in their mother tongue in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. At the same time, however, the Tamil-speaking population continued to be challenged by the Official Language Act, and the Sinhala-

³² Silva, 496.

³³ Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "Construction of Tamil and Sinhalese Identities in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Pakistan Horizon* 63, no. 3 (2010): 36.

³⁴ Silva, 496.

dominated government's refusal to amend it to declare Tamil an official language.³⁵ The Tamils, enraged and provoked by the Official Language Act, were only to become further isolated by the passage of the 1972 Constitution, a document noted by De Silva to have given "validity and confirmation" to the "second-class citizenship" of the Tamils.³⁶ In addition to the problems of the 1972 Constitution, in 1974 the Admissions Standards of the Sri Lankan university system were changed, making it more challenging for students of the Tamil ethnolinguistic group to access the university system.³⁷ The Tamil population's later separatist, territorial-based movements emerged from the backlash of the Official Language Act, as well as the impact of the subsequent legislation; this phenomenon is examined in subsequent chapters. As analyzed previously in context of Horowitz's theories on ethnic conflict, the actions taken by the British during the colonial period created significant divisions between the Tamil and Sinhala populations, especially in relation to economic and political opportunity. These state traditions carried to the early years of Independence and created the basis of a new language regime under the Sinhalese-majority government.

Changes to the Constitution of Sri Lanka in 1978 served as the first instance of the national recognition of Tamil as a language. Article 19 of the 1978 Constitution of 1978 declared Sinhala and Tamil to be the national languages of Sri Lanka, and Article 26 abolished the distinction between citizens by descent and citizens by registration. Article 19 ensured more representation and access for the Tamil-speaking population, while Article 26 removed the stigma of second-class citizenship for Indian Tamils.³⁸ Sreemali Herath argues, however, that

³⁵ "Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28," (1958).

³⁶ , 550.

³⁷ Chandra Gunawardena, "Ethnic Representation, Regional Imbalance and University Admissions in Sri Lanka," *Comparative Education* 15, no. 3 (1979).

³⁸ Silva, 560.

although the 1978 Constitution recognized formally that Tamil would be a national language, the divisions between the two ethnolinguistic populations had already formed too deeply.³⁹ As a response, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—the separatist Tamil ethnolinguistic and religious identity group headquartered in the Northern Province—countered the continued ethnolinguistic discrimination by introducing Tamil Only policies within its ranks and community. The LTTE argued that only by creating a separate nation-state for the Tamils could the mother tongue be rightfully empowered.⁴⁰ Whereas English was historically the language of “high culture,” the LTTE viewed Tamil as the language of the state of Tamil Eelam, an expression of freedom from oppression, and a mechanism to reclaim the true home of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka.⁴¹ These tensions and the eruption of violence between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military is examined later in the context of education and language policies implemented by the GoSL.

Without the beliefs that a nation would continue to experience multilingualism, there has historically been no apparent reason for investigating the politics of language policies. From this, we see an absence of critical investigation into the direct relationship between language policies implemented by state institutions and the relationships between different ethnolinguistic groups in a nation. Thus, the history of ethnolinguistic conflict in Sri Lanka must be connected to the language policies implemented before, during, and after the 30-year conflict.

³⁹ Sreemali Herath, "Language Policy, Ethnic Tensions and Linguistic Rights in Post War Sri Lanka," *Language Policy* 14, no. 3 (2015): 253.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ke. En. O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 242.

CHAPTER 2A: Language and Education, in Peace and in War

History of Language and Education Policy in the Context of the War

Histories of Sri Lanka often reference the education-related aspects of the linguistic divisions in the country, but do not usually provide explicit timelines or narratives tracing the relationships between national language policies and education initiatives. Through the following outline of the language policies of the nation in the 20th and 21st centuries, the trends of the government's education policies are examined with specific focus on those implemented in the past 70 years post-Independence. The 30-plus year civil war between the Sinhala and Tamil ethnolinguistic groups was based in longstanding inter-ethnic tensions established by the British. However, the continued failures of the Sri Lankan government to enact policies to alleviate these tensions, especially regarding language related to economic, academic and social opportunities exacerbated them. Through analyses of the history of language-based conflict in Sri Lanka and the specific case studies of policies related to the university system, the following chapter argues that although the government's admissions policies were eventually successful in creating proportionally representative populations of ethnolinguistic groups in the universities by 2000, the government's overall failure to implement effective ethnolinguistic policies across the country served as the foundation of the conflict perpetuated by, and the continued grievances of, the Tamil ethnolinguistic group,.

Early education policies and systems in Sri Lanka, or the nation known as "Ceylon" until 1972, were predominantly established and controlled by the colonial powers. This subsequently created schooling systems in the English medium, which did not allow for instruction in the indigenous languages of the colonized nation. In 1813, the American Missionary Society founded an extensive English-language schooling system in the Northern Province of Jaffna, which provided the English-language skills for the Tamil population until a change in the 1930s

to education in the vernacular languages. By geographic concentration and chance, due to the missionaries' choice of focus, the Tamil population in the Northern Province benefited from this education system, allowing them to be conditioned to be an "advanced" group; this led to their ascending to privileged status as English speakers who later would be able to take jobs in the colonial government and commercial houses.¹ The highest rate of literacy in Ceylon in the 19th century was in Tamil-dominated Jaffna, and because of this, there were increasingly higher numbers of internal migrants in the country to fill the clerical posts and government positions needed by the British.²

During the years leading up to Independence, the Sinhalese and Tamil groups simultaneously began to push for more native-based education systems, including specific policy shifts for the changing of the languages of instruction. In the North, the Jaffna Youth Congress, an organization of Tamil youths who, beginning in the 1920s, fought for the reemergence of Tamil traditionalism and the independence of the nation began to challenge the impacts of the schools established during the British colonial era and the spread of American missionary schools. Whereas the dominant language of the Northern Province, especially in politics and education, was English, the Youth Congress began holding lectures and meetings in Tamil on literature, secular, and political matters.³ Furthermore, until 1956, many of the Jaffna schools taught Sinhalese in "hope that it would help national integration."⁴ With increasing economic opportunities and capabilities – without ties to the British – the community both could fight for

¹ Horowitz, 156.

² De Silva, 368.

³ R. Cheran, *Pathways of Dissent: Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Thousand Oaks, Calif; New Delhi, India;: SAGE, 2009), 239.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

Tamil rights, and support the overall efforts for independence and Ceylonese regaining control of the Island.

Many of the sentiments expressed in the majority Tamil areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces were similarly expressed in the Sinhalese populations in the rest of the country during the years leading up to Independence. Historian KNO Dharmadasa notes that during the 1920s and 1930s, there were increasing “nativistic” sentiments originating predominantly in the community of politically active Buddhist monks. In 1926, the *Debates of the Legislative Council* records show the first resolution to make Sinhalese and Tamil the media of instruction in all schools; by 1932, another resolution was adopted to enforce vernacular language proficiency in appointments and promotions in the administrative service.⁵ This drive from the Sinhalese population simultaneously came with the desire for all to prove their “nationalist allegiance” through promoting the uses of vernacular language throughout the nation.⁶ During the 1920s and 1930s, it was apparent that the focus of both the Sinhalese and Tamil language groups was on restoring the education systems to vernacular language instruction in the whole country rather than on any competition between these two vernacular languages, especially with the common enemy as the British colonialists.

The 1940s in Sri Lanka saw subtle shifts in national-level language policy leading up to Independence in 1948. In 1944, Sinhalese congressman JR Jayawardene, an eventual leader of the United National Party as Prime Minister and President of the country in the 1970s, proposed to the State Council that Sinhala be the only medium of instruction in schools; this was one of the first proposals that would lead to the future enactment of the 1956 Official Language Act

⁵ KNO Dharmadasa, "Language Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1981): 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

(“OLA”).⁷ At this time, the Cabinet was all-Sinhalese, and these proposals inspired a significant amount of backlash from the Tamil representatives in the Congress.⁸ V. Nalliah, a Tamil congressman, countered this proposal with an amendment that proposed the establishment of both Sinhala and Tamil as the sole mediums of instruction in schools; this was subsequently adopted.⁹ A few years later in 1947, in legislation known as the Free Education bill, universal education was legally guaranteed for all students through government-funded and organized education programs from kindergarten through university.¹⁰ At this time, however, the education system was still divided throughout the Island predominantly along the lines of religion and language, with the Sinhalese-speaking groups attending Buddhist schools and the Tamil-speaking groups attending Hindu or Muslim schools, a reality which did not bother the Sinhalese population or policy makers.

In the pre-Independence period of Ceylon, tensions between the Tamil and Sinhala ethnolinguistic groups built as the power shifted from the British to the Ceylonese. In his analysis of group entitlement and sources of conflict among ethnic groups, Horowitz argues, “The fear of ethnic domination and suppression is a motivating force for the acquisition of power as an end. And power is also sought for confirmation of ethnic status.”¹¹ With the lingering imbalance between the Sinhala and Tamil groups from the colonial era, the fears of domination by the Tamil arose in the Sinhalese population, inspiring action in the linguistic policies as a mechanism for the exclusion of Sri Lanka’s Tamil-speaking population. Although both

⁷ Devanesan Nesiah, *Tamil Language Rights in Sri Lanka*, ed. The Centre for Policy Alternatives (Sri Lanka: Globe Printing Works, 2012), 14.

⁸ Farmer, 57.

⁹ Nesiah.

¹⁰ “Education First Sri Lanka,” ed. Policy and Planning Branch (Battaramulla, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education, 2013), 16.

¹¹ Donald Horowitz, “Group Entitlement and the Sources of Conflict,” in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 187.

communities initially agreed upon universal education in the respective mother-tongue, the opportunities afforded, and outcomes redounding, to both language groups differed and thus, has served as an ongoing source of conflict.

Independence and War, 1948-2009

As the nation transitioned to independence after February 4, 1948, the tensions between the Sinhala and Tamil populations became increasingly fraught. To many Sinhalese, especially their political and religious leadership, the Tamil population increasingly benefited disproportionately from the British system and continued access to the country's political, economic, and educational systems. From 1942 to 1960, Tamil students attended the University of Ceylon (later to become the University of Colombo) in higher proportions than their representative population. Tamils constituted "more than 30%" of the students, while the Sinhalese constituted "only 60%."^{12, 13} The proportion of Tamils in the nation between 1942 and 1960 was approximately 11%, while Sinhalese comprised approximately 70%, thus indicating the significantly higher levels of representation of the Tamil population in the University system as compared to that of the Sinhalese.¹⁴ The presence of a greater number of Tamil students proportionately to Sinhalese students at the University of Ceylon was due to their qualification based on merit, and not on proportionally representative numbers; by the early 1970s, the government attempted to fix this disproportionality by legislation, and implementation of related policies, that mandated representation based on quotas.

¹² Dharmadasa, 49.

¹³ In 1942, the only two national universities were the University of Ceylon and the University of Peradeniya. The University of Sri Jayewardenepura and Kelaniya were established in 1959, University of Moratuwa in 1972, University of Jaffna in 1974, University of Ruhuna in 1978, Open University of Sri Lanka in 1980, Eastern University in 1981, South Eastern, Rajarata, and Sabaragamuwa Universities in 1995, Wayamba University in 1999, and Uva Wellassa University and the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in 2005 ("University Grants Commission — Sri Lanka," <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/universities-and-institutes/list.html>.)

¹⁴ "The Population of Sri Lanka," in *World Population Year*, ed. Committee for International Coordination of National Research in Demography (United Nations Organisation, 1974), 44.

Leading up to the passage of the OLA, there was an increasing ethnicization of the nation, apparent through the changing structures of political control. After the Sinhalese came into power post-Independence, the policies enacted resulted from the “dominant notion that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese-Buddhist country, and therefore pride of place within the state has to be given to the identity of the majority community.”¹⁵ By the time S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the candidate from the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lanka Freedom Party, won the elections for Prime Minister in 1956 on the platform of elevating the Sinhalese culture through preferential policies, especially related to language, education in vernacular languages throughout the country had become increasingly dominant over education in English.

In 1956, the OLA was proposed by Bandaranaike and accepted by the Sri Lankan Parliament within 24 hours of his instatement as Prime Minister. The Act was a symbol of domination, one that allowed the Sinhala majority government not only to exert complete control over the educational and economic opportunities of the Tamil population, but also, to guarantee Sinhalese dominance of the political structure. Furthermore, the OLA introduced even stricter segregation into the education system along language lines, cementing the critical juncture for enforcing a language divide among children and youth.¹⁶ The OLA was the first official language policy enacted in Sri Lanka post-Independence that effectively disenfranchised the Tamil population, and subsequently laid the groundwork for the future conflicts between the Sinhala-speaking and the Tamil-speaking populations. In 1958, the government attempted to rectify the OLA’s impact, and the increasing restrictions on Sri Lanka’s Tamil-speaking population through the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28. With this

¹⁵ M. Somasundram, ed. *The Third Wave: Governance and Public Administration in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1997), 116.

¹⁶ Orjuela, 85.

legislation, Parliament granted the Tamil-speaking population in the Northern and Eastern Provinces Tamil-language access in education, public service entrance exams, and administration.¹⁷ Although this policy allowed greater access for the Tamil-speaking population in these important areas, the majority of government-provided services were still offered almost entirely in Sinhala, especially in the capital of Colombo and the Southern Provinces.

The ramifications of the language policies of the late 1950s can be observed in the changes to the education system of Sri Lanka. By 1959, the university education system had begun to make education available in Sinhala and Tamil, but the initiatives of the early 1960s were focused on unifying the remainder of the education system in the country.¹⁸ In 1960-61, Parliament initiated a complete “take-over” of the education system, which was subsequently the start of significant changes along the lines of admissions policies, medium of instruction, and opportunities for students from across the country. Furthermore, the number of students applying to universities increased astoundingly from 5,277 in 1960, to 30,445 in 1970, due to the changes in language policy that allowed for more students to study in their mother tongue, creating greater competition between the Tamil and the Sinhala populations for overall available spots.¹⁹ Furthermore, the increase of more than 25,000 new students applying per year over the course of ten years allowed for the GoSL to have greater control over a larger population of youth in the nation; it served as an impetus for the building of new universities in the 1970s, such as the Universities of Moratuwa and Ruhuna, two universities in majority-Sinhala regions.²⁰ These changes directly enabled more Sinhalese to pursue a tertiary education, and enabled them to be

¹⁷ "Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28."

¹⁸ N. Wickramasinghe, "Democracy and Entitlements in Sri Lanka: The 1970s Crisis over University Admission," *South Asian History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2012): 83.

¹⁹ S. Anuzsiya, "Standardization in the University Admissions and Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 57 (1996): 801.

²⁰ "University Grants Commission — Sri Lanka".

increasingly eligible for professional employment such as in the civil service. Thus, the nature of Sinhalization in the nation empowered Sinhala youth to pursue university studies and created greater competition in fields that the Tamil had historically dominated during the time of the British.

All public denominational schools experienced reforms under the national system by an effort that the Ministry of Education cites as “another landmark towards establishing a national system of education.”²¹ The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was established primarily to develop science and mathematics curricula. The fields of science and mathematics became increasingly critical as the Tamil were turned away from government service and had to find alternative means of employment – due to the Sinhala-proficiency requirement. The government control of education and the civil service allowed for Sinhala-focused growth in math and science. In the following years, the branch focused on developing curricula in all subjects as well as building capacity of teachers in the nation. In all subjects, changes to the education systems proposed and implemented by the national government focused more significantly on providing Sinhalese students with greater access to educational opportunities in their mother tongue, instead of continuing to focus on the English-medium, as was the policy under the British during the colonial era.

Due to these changes in the late 50s and early 60s, youth protests in the Tamil populations became increasingly prevalent, as they began to directly experience the adverse impact of these policies, especially in regards to socioeconomic opportunities post-education. As Fazeeha Azmi notes:

While political issues in Sri Lanka, before the 1960s were centered on socio-economic stratification and ethnic identities, repeated violent political actions in the late 1960s affected a whole generation of youths. Discrimination was felt based on class, ethnicity, religion, ideology, place of origin, education and

²¹ "Education First Sri Lanka," 15.

employment, resulting in youth uprisings against the socioeconomic and political order of the country that continued during the 1970s and 1980s.²²

The protests and unrest, which began as a direct response to these policy changes, only grew as the Sinhala-majority government continued to push policies, both in the economic and educational realms, that privileged the Sinhalese population over the Tamils.

The 1970s saw the first outbreak of explicit violence related to ethnicity and education, fueled in part by the economic opportunities or lack thereof as access to education for the Tamil-speaking population became even more challenged. By 1970, the national government adopted a two-language system in which the universities could individually decide whether to use Sinhala or Tamil in the science, engineering, and medical faculties. This policy deviated significantly from the English-medium standards that had been used since the chartering of these universities, because the “equal-access” system that the English-language afforded to both Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking students was rendered moot.²³ In addition, segregation along linguistic lines in these areas by definition led to restrictions in post-graduation job opportunities for the Tamil-speaking population.

To complicate these emerging tensions, the Sinhala perceived the actual admissions process, which was merit-based, to be rigged to favor the Tamil because of a rumor that spread through the population, thus infuriating the Sinhala. The fall-out from this policy change was even greater than the segregation based on the medium of instruction. According to S. Anuzsiya:

On the eve of the release of the 1970 year Engineering course admission, a rumor was started that, of the 160 students who had qualified, 100 were Tamils. On the basis of this rumor, a massive campaign was mounted by the Sinhala Buddhist lobby under the aegis of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, for the merit system to be abandoned.

²² Cathrine Brun and Ragnhild Lund Fazeeha Azmi, "Young People's Everyday Politics in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 1 (2013): 111-2.

²³ Anuzsiya, 801.

The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress and the majority of Buddhist politicians at the time, all of whom were Sinhalese, proposed and implemented policies to counteract the perception that Tamil-language applicants were being admitted to the country's universities in unfairly high numbers. Understandably, these affirmative action policies in favor of the Sinhalese only resulted in additional negative consequences to those who wished to study in the Tamil medium. Thus, the rumor of unrepresentative proportions of Tamils admitted to the universities, paired with the rising polarization between the two language groups, caused the Sinhalese-majority government to enact language policies in attempts to standardize the policies of admission; these policies later would be credited with creating much of the basis of Tamil grievances that led to the country's future civil war.

In 1971, the Admissions Standards of the Sri Lankan university system were changed, making it more challenging for students of the Tamil ethnolinguistic group to access the university system.²⁴ These changes "forced" Tamil medium students to score higher aggregate marks on their admission qualifications examinations than the Sinhalese students in order to gain admission to the nation's universities.²⁵ The Cabinet of Ministers enacted this policy to create adjustments to the university admissions system in an attempt to render the student population more proportionally representative of the national population. Many considered this "affirmative action" policy to be explicitly racist, and blatantly discriminatory, against the Tamil-speaking population; many protests erupted, along with further civil unrest in the population.²⁶ The marks required by the 1971 policy change were:

²⁴ Gunawardena.

²⁵ Deshal de Mel and Shakya Lahiru Pathmalal, "Political and Economic Policy Priorities in Supporting Post Conflict Peace and Development in Sri Lanka," (The World Bank, 2009), 3.

²⁶ Devanesan Nesiah, "A Review of Quotas in University Admissions," *Groundviews* 2012.

Table 1. Marks Required for Admission to University, 1971²⁷		
	Sinhala Marks	Tamil Marks
Medicine and Dentistry	229	250
Physical Science	183	204
Bio-science	175	184
Engineering	227	250
Veterinary Science	181	206
Architecture	180	194

Source: C.R. De Silva. "Weightage in University Admission: Standardization and District Quotas in Sri Lanka" in Modern Ceylon Studies. Vol. 5, No.2, July 4, 1972, 156-157.

The Tamils were further isolated by the enactment of the 1972 Constitution, a document noted by De Silva to have given “validity and confirmation” to the “second-class citizenship” of the Tamils because of its explicit privileging of the Sinhalese language and the Buddhist religion.²⁸ As a direct result of the 1972 constitutional changes, the Public Service Commission became completely incorporated, and under the control of, the cabinet of the government; this significantly impacted the autonomy of public servants, including teachers. With the centralization of the public service system, teachers became increasingly reliant on politicians for their appointments, promotions and transfers, and as a result the subjects taught became increasingly politicized.²⁹

Much of the Tamil population’s ongoing discontent, especially among youths, was based in the university admissions policies but also was directly linked to the lack of economic opportunities available to the Tamil population post-1956. Whereas the Tamil community relied heavily on state employment before Independence, with university education serving as the

²⁷ Anuzsiya, 802.

²⁸ Silva, 550.

²⁹ Angela W. Little, "Education Policy Reform in Sri Lanka: The Double-Edged Sword of Political Will," *Journal of Education Policy* 26, no. 4 (2011): 503.

direct connection to this employment, post-Independence policies that linked service in the public sector and language usage changed the viability of this area of employment for Tamils.³⁰ Trends of employment in the state sector began to increasingly indicate preference for the hiring of Sinhala-speaking persons over Tamil-speaking persons, especially as the policies of the 1950s and 1960s became more strongly incorporated into the government system. At the time of Independence, the “geo-economic conditions in the predominantly Tamil areas were not conducive to any other source of employment and so the public service remained the main employer.”³¹ The following table depicts the decline of Tamil recruitment to the state sector between 1956 and 1970:

Table 2. Percentage of Tamils Employed in the State Sector³²			
Services	1956	1965	1970
<i>Sri Lanka Administrative Services</i>	30%	20%	5%
<i>Clerical</i>	50%	30%	5%
<i>Professions</i>	60%	30%	10%
<i>Armed Forces</i>	40%	20%	1%
<i>Labor</i>	40%	20%	5%

Source: Satchi Ponnambalam. Sri Lanka, National Conflict and the Liberation Struggle, 1983

From this, it is apparent that by the 1970s, the national government’s language policies greatly influenced the percentage of Tamils who were employed in the civil service. Due to these changes, the Tamil youths perceived the policies to explicitly exclude large proportions of “otherwise eligible Tamils” from being able to access state employment, even after graduating from state universities. These grievances were expressed not only by the national political parties like the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), but also by radical youth and students’

³⁰ Pathmalal, 12.

³¹ Gamini Samaranyaka, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1971-1987* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008), 151.

³² U Phadnis, "Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia," *India Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1979): 348.

movements like the Tamil Students Assembly (TSA). Similar to the majority of these youth and student movements, the TSA was predominantly comprised of middle class youth, those who ordinarily would have qualified for entrance to the universities, and later for state employment opportunities. Standardization – a form of affirmative action – was created to address the imbalance in the specific professional fields that had been dominated by minority Tamils.³³ These policies directly impacted the middle-class youths and in the subsequent years, these same middle-class youths were also those who were most active in uprisings, protests, and issuing demands to the Sinhalese-majority government. As R. Cheran observes, “It should, however, be emphasized that the spurt enjoyed by Tamil nationalism which manifested in secessionist demands and youth militancy had essentially been middle class in character.”³⁴ Later, as the conflict progressed, the majority of those deeply invested in, and responsible for, the Movement of Tamil Youth Militancy were directly from the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level students who had not been granted admission to the national universities, as well as those who had graduated, but were unemployed due to their language abilities.³⁵

In response to the unrest and the ongoing protests, the Admissions Standards for the universities were changed again in 1974 to be based on a district quota. This was an attempt to rectify the adverse implications of the linguistic standardization policies. The quota system was reworked to standardize based on the principles of developed and undeveloped regions, “aiming at providing a fair share of the educational opportunities to students from undeveloped regions whether they be Sinhalese speaking or Tamil speaking.”³⁶ The policies were focused to alleviate the differences between students applying to universities from urban and rural secondary

³³ Cheran, xxxvi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxii-xxxiii.

³⁵ Anuzsiya, 804.

³⁶ Dharmadasa, 65-6.

schools, which had apparent differences in their abilities to ready students for university admission, especially in the sciences and English medium.³⁷ Although the quota system sought to change the language-based discriminatory impacts of the policies of standardization, many still perceived the quota system to grant unfair admission to certain ethnic groups based on the proportions of population distribution in the regions. The overall impact of these admission policy changes can be observed through an examination of the actual percentages of Tamil students admitted to the universities in the years 1969 through 1974³⁸:

Faculty	1969	1970	1972	1973	1974
Medicine	50%	43.3%	41.4%	38%	27.3%
Dentistry	42.1%	57.5%	55.3%	49%	27.5%
Agriculture	51.4%	42.5%	41.4%	52.3%	15.3%
Bio-science	70.6%	25%	37%	13.6%	0%
Biology	-	-	-	15.1%	13%
Physical science	28.4%	29.6%	30.1%	35%	34.9%
Architecture	-	-	-	16.7%	23.7%
Engineering	48.3%	42.2%	36.3%	26.2%	28.5%

Source: Release by the Division of Planning and Research, University Grants Commission, 1983. Cited in Lanka Guardian, November 1983, 10.

The changes to the admissions standards continued to challenge Tamil youths who desired admission to the nation's universities. As observed in the data presented above, the percentages of Tamil students of the total admitted to universities in the first few years of these revised admissions policies only decreased. By 1976, the admissions standards for the universities were based on two categories: 70 percent of admissions were to be on marks, and 30 percent, on district basis. Of this 30 percent, at least 15 percent was reserved for "backwards"

³⁷ Wickramasinghe, 86.

³⁸ Anuzsiya, 802.

districts. This meant that the Sri Lankan government not only could manipulate precisely the admissions marks that then were required, but also, they could determine precisely which districts would be identified as “backwards,” and thus confer special admissions status upon these districts. These policies held through the late 1970s but by 1979, the current policy that governed admissions to Sri Lanka’s universities was implemented, affording 30 percent for admission on merit, 55 percent on district, and 15 percent on “backwards” districts.³⁹

Despite these changes, the TULF, one of the major political parties representing the Tamil population, released a manifesto in 1977 that detailed many of their complaints with the policies enacted by the government independently, and through the 1972 Constitution. *The Manifesto of the Tamil United Liberation Front* declared that whereas Sinhalese students in the nation’s Southern and Central Provinces had enjoyed the same benefits of the colonial-era education systems as had the Tamil students in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the education system post-Independence was favoring the Sinhalese students and not providing equal opportunity for the Tamil students. The Manifesto declares, “As a result, Tamil students in several areas are compelled to study through the Sinhala medium,” especially as the new schools under construction and supported by the government were Sinhala Buddhist schools.⁴⁰ It continues and declares that the “gravest injustice was perpetrated against the Tamil speaking students” by way of the standardization policies of university admissions in 1970, which required Tamil students to obtain 250 marks to be admitted to the medical or engineering faculties while the Sinhalese only needed to obtain 229 and 227 marks, respectively. The TULF claimed:

For the last 7 years this standardization has been in operation in various guises and in every faculty of the university, the number of admissions of Tamil students has been going down... Could anyone deny that the

³⁹ Ibid., 802-3.

⁴⁰ "General Election Manifesto," Tamil United Liberation Front, http://www.sangam.org/FB_HIST_DOCS/TULFManifesto77.htm.

Sinhalese reign that has been responsible for the grave injury should be ended if this generation of youth is to live as human beings brimming with self-confidence.⁴¹ Even after the standardization policies were technically replaced with the District Quota system implemented in 1974, the TULF's Manifesto demonstrates the continued impact of these policies.

Not long after the publication of the TULF's Manifesto, the admissions policies once again changed and access to the tertiary education system shifted with them. In 1977, the United National Party was reelected under the leadership of J.R. Jayawardene, and shortly thereafter, the national government made a significant change to its admissions policies and a new Constitution was adopted. As a result, the pre-1970 standards of admission, wherein the sole criterion was the aggregate marks scored by the candidate, was reinstated. Jayawardene made this change directly due to the significant negative impact of the admissions system on ethnic relations, and the related increasing destabilization, on the Island.⁴² Although the government was motivated to revert to the 1970s admissions policies in the hopes of resolving the conflict with, and rioting by, the Tamils, the Tamil population did not perceive these policy changes grant sufficient rights or remedies to them. As is analyzed later, rebel groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam grew in numbers and strength as the government's manipulation of the admissions policies were perceived to continue the disenfranchisement of Tamil youth.⁴³

The 1978 Constitution, which was introduced at a time of continued volatility and unrest in the nation, did not change the status of official languages and maintained Sinhala as the only Official Language. The new constitution, however, for the first time did declare Tamil as a "national language;" as Dharmadasa notes, in Sri Lanka's political history, this was the first

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Wickramasinghe, 89.

⁴³ Dharmadasa, 316.

official recognition of the existence of the Tamil community as a separate nationality.⁴⁴ The 1978 Constitution also impacted further policy-making in the nation with a concentration of powers in the presidency, leading to a greater focus on the personal policy goals of the elected president. As a result, future education policy and linguistic rights became much more dependent on the policies of the president, instead of the majority policies of Parliament. The most significant impact of the 1978 Constitution, however, was Article 21's guarantee of the right of an individual to be educated through the medium of either of the national languages. Under the [new] Education Ordinance, the rights of a Tamil person to be educated in the Tamil language was "subjected to the regulations relating to the medium of instruction."⁴⁵ However, the government did not effectively implement these changes under the Education Ordinance, as was made apparent by the need for, and later publication of, the 1981 "white paper" on Education Reform in Sri Lanka. The Reform called for the explicit restructuring of the education system for greater efficiency and the equality of quality education, including consideration for the question of languages and equal opportunity in all mediums of instruction.⁴⁶

The early 1980s were host to numerous riots by both the Sinhalese and Tamil populations. The growing power of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), formed in 1975 by Tamil youths for the purpose of carrying out an armed struggle for the establishment of a separate state on the island, Eelam, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, ensured that these riots not only represented a physical uprising in the regions but also necessitated policy responses from the national government.⁴⁷ In 1979, the national government passed the

⁴⁴ Dharmadasa, 63.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁶ S. Dharmawardena Weining Chang, Molly Teas, "A Study of the Principal under Education Reform in Sri Lanka," (USAID, 1988), 5.

⁴⁷ Dharmadasa, 316.

Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allowed for the national security forces to take punitive actions in the North that served to progressively alienate the Tamil population over time.⁴⁸

Following this, elections for the District Development Councils in the Northern Province were disturbed by Tamil insurgents; in retaliation, the national forces that were deployed in response burned the Jaffna Public Library, destroying a building of immense pride and value to the Tamil population in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. As discussed above, many of these riots by the Tamil insurgent forces were led by the youths who either had been denied admission to the universities or employment in government service upon graduation.

The conflict escalated throughout the mid-1980s as the LTTE gained more control over the public spheres of life in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Zachariah Mampilly asserts, “The history of the Tamil movement in Ceylon reveals a clear slide away from a policy of responsive cooperation led by an integrationist political party to territorially defined autonomy demands and finally an all-out secessionist war led by a violent insurgent group.”⁴⁹ The political spheres shifted from control of the national and local government structures to the militarism of LTTE control. At this time, Tamil youths were expected to join the LTTE, and if they refused, many were explicitly targeted directly or through familial ties. Due to their exclusion from the ranks of the LTTE and the overall hostility in the Northern and Eastern Provinces against the Muslim population, the Muslim youth were driven to join the formal political sphere, either through supporting the Sri Lanka Freedom Party or the United National Party.⁵⁰ In 1983, riots, later part of the “Black July,” erupted in Colombo from July 24-August 5, caused initially by an

⁴⁸ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 75.

⁴⁹ Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers : Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (Ithaca, United States: Cornell University Press, 2012), 101.

⁵⁰ Fazeeha Azmi, 112.

ambush led by Tamil insurgents, but followed by days of Sinhalese retaliatory rioting, especially through the looting and destruction of Tamil businesses and homes.⁵¹ As for the motivation for these Sinhalese riots, Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah argues, “The riots perpetrated by the Sinhalese upon the Tamils in 1981 and 1983 were a result of the collision between an emphatic, but still unsatiated Buddhist Sinhala nationalism...and a rising, desperate, and confrontational Tamil nationalism.”⁵²

From 1984 through 1987, the national army and government security forces engaged in armed conflict with the Tamil militants in the North and the East, especially as the militants continued to take direct aim at Sinhalese civilians and cultural sites. In May 1985, the LTTE carried out one of the more extreme attacks, in Anuradhapura, the cultural capital of the Buddhist population in Sri Lanka. An estimated 146 people were killed in Anuradhapura, including bhikkus.⁵³ Furthermore, the Sacred Bo Tree, one of the holiest, most revered Buddhist temples and bodhi trees in the country, was attacked by the LTTE, enraging Sinhalese throughout Sri Lanka.⁵⁴ The war between the LTTE-backed Tamil population and the government-backed Sinhalese population continued through small skirmishes and larger attacks but did not break into full-blown warfare until the later years of the conflict, from 1983–2009. In 1987, the Sri Lankan government signed the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, which was the international community’s hope to end the conflict. Due to the exclusion of representatives from the LTTE and other Tamil political groups in the peace talks, however, the peace agreed upon in the

⁵¹ Tambiah, 75.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵³ Sinhalese Buddhist term for monks

⁵⁴ Dharmadasa, 317.

Accord lasted for only a few months, and from 1987-1990, 55,000 Indian peacekeeping troops were sent to occupy the Northern and Eastern Provinces in an attempt to quell the violence.⁵⁵

The enactment of the 13th Amendment during the early period of occupation by the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) included a significant change to the status of Official Languages. The Amendment introduced the Provincial Council system, which was a direct response to the calls from the Tamil political leadership and population for an overall devolution of power in the government. It also established Sinhala and Tamil as Sri Lanka's two Official Languages, with English serving as the link languages. The system of devolution of national power to the Provincial Councils changed the "powers of implementation of education reforms to the provinces and increased the number of political actors who could assume the right to influence implementation, especially at school level."⁵⁶ Furthermore, codifying Tamil as an Official Language is considered to have served as the groundwork for future equality and parity of Sinhala and Tamil in the nation. As is later examined, however, these hopes have not been fully realized, either in the realm of education or Sri Lanka as a whole. As a mechanism of enforcement of the 13th Amendment, the Official Languages Commission Act was enacted in 1991 to establish the Official Language Commission with the purpose to support, promote, and ensure the following of the policies related to the Official Languages of Sri Lanka.⁵⁷ As a corollary, the National Education Commission was established as the primary body to formulate all national policy on education in conjunction with the national government.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tambiah, 76.

⁵⁶ Little, 502-3.

⁵⁷ Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, "Official Languages Commission," (Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1991).

⁵⁸ "Education First Sri Lanka," 15.

At the time of these policy initiatives, the supposed ceasefire between the Tamil insurgent groups and the Sri Lankan government had broken down, to the consternation of the Indian government and the international community. By 1989, the newly-elected President Ranasinghe Premadasa and the LTTE had worked in a coordinated effort to push the IPKF out of the nation. The IPKF pulled out in March 1990, and within three months, the LTTE resumed fighting in what is considered to be the “Second Eelam War,” which was subsequently carried on until January 1995. This outbreak of conflict only ended when Chandrika Kumaratunga came into power as the newly-elected President in 1995, with the signing of another ceasefire agreement on January 9, 1995.⁵⁹

During the years of Chandrika Kumaratunga’s presidency in the late 1990s, two significant education and language-policy initiatives were implemented. The first created the National Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education (NIE), the Provincial Ministries of Education, and the Divisional Offices of Education. The second occurred in 1997, with language-specific reforms of the education system. Kumaratunga’s Presidential Task Force recommended, and later implemented, that beginning in Grade I, the language of communication—meaning the language that the students used in interactions with their classmates and teachers—was to be English, while formal instruction of English as a subject was to commence at Grade III with encouragement, not requirement, of the use of national language for children. For students in Grades 6-9, children would be strongly encouraged to continue the use of the National Language other than their own in “play and activities.”⁶⁰ In the formal subjects, Sinhala and Tamil as a second language of study was only to be optional and not required, universally requiring students to study English as a subject while not requiring the

⁵⁹ Mohan K. Tikku, *After the Fall: Sri Lanka in Victory and War* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11-2.

⁶⁰ “Reforms in General Education, 1997,” (Sri Lanka: National Education Commission), 15.

study of the other Official Language of the nation. All of these bureaucratic structures enabled the comprehensive and ambitious reforms of 1997 in education throughout the nation but ultimately, they failed to address what many consider “the most critical and controversial issues in education,” which included the question of the medium of instruction in all schools.⁶¹

While these language and education reforms were being implemented, the third Eelam war began, only 100 days after the Kumaratunga ceasefire was implemented in 1995. Mohan Tikku notes, “The national mood during the post-Premadasa phase was in favor of ethnic reconciliation even if that meant granting a degree of devolution to the Tamils. But with the fighting continuing, that opportunity too was wasted.”⁶² The third war ended in 2002, with a ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL); this agreement also subsequently was broken by both the LTTE and the GoSL.⁶³ The fourth and final LTTE war began after a stalemate between the two parties in 2003 and eventually came to an end on May 18, 2009, simultaneously with the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the infamous leader of the Tigers.

Since the start of the 21st century, the GoSL has promoted various education policies, especially as the government transitioned from the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga to Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005. During Kumaratunga’s presidency, the University Grants Commission (UGC) changed the admissions requirements from determining the cut-off score for university admissions by raw scores to determining by standardized z-scores. The UGC advocated this policy as a mechanism for the admissions process as of 2001, after the students were required to sit for four subjects in the G.C.E. Examination instead of the prior requirement

⁶¹ Little, 505.

⁶² Tikku, 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 13.

of three. Due to the inability to compare the raw scores from those students who sat for three subjects in 2000 and those who sat for four in 2001, the UGC changed to using the z-score equivalent of the raw scores as a mechanism of standardization.⁶⁴

Both presidents represented the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and published similar policy goals surrounding the question of education and language. In 2003, Kumaratunga's government released the "Proposals for National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka," which although not currently accessible, was cited in almost every subsequent education policy document released by the national government.⁶⁵ Although there were no explicit programs implemented by this policy document, it has been the framework for education-related policies in the past fifteen years since its release.

In 2008, one year before the end of the war and at the height of devastation in the Tamil regions of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the Ministry of Education's Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit released the "National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions." The goal of this framework was to create lasting changes to the education system throughout the nation as a means to promote social cohesion and peace. The third of the framework's seven strategic areas focuses specifically on the "strengthening" of the second national language "through the development of a clear policy on 2NL and the establishment of a specific National College of Education for 2NL teachers."⁶⁶ The policy acknowledges that although the reforms specify the teaching and learning of a Second National Language, there is no guarantee that the actual number of schools offering Second National Language programs

⁶⁴ Yajni Warnapala and Karishma Silva, "Z-Score Demystified: A Critical Analysis of the Sri Lankan University Admission Policy," *Journal of Case Studies in Education* 2 (2011): 2.

⁶⁵ "Education First: Education Sector Development Framework and Programme," (Battaramulla, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education, 2012), 37.

⁶⁶ "National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace," ed. Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit (Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education, 2008), iv.

will increase, and therefore the provinces will need to implement specific policies to incorporate these programs. The specific objectives of the framework include an increase in the number of students taking a Second National Language evaluation, an increase in the number of competent teachers to teach the Second National Language programs, the production of “innovative learning materials” for the teaching of the Second National Language, and the increase in the number of bilingual persons.⁶⁷ The framework envisioned that greater cross-cultural understanding would arise through the promotion of unity in diversity and creation of a bilingual population.

The end of the war in 2009 left the Sri Lankan Tamil population devastated and the physical, political, and economic infrastructure of the Northern and Eastern provinces completely destroyed. The war was considered to be a definitive military victory for the GoSL and subsequently, the Tamil population for the most part has been better supported in its recovery from the diaspora population living primarily in England, Germany, and Canada than it has by its own national government. Ahilan Kadirgamar, a Sri Lanka economic analyst and democracy activist, believes that the nature of the end of the war left the Tamil community too devastated for another insurgency but the sentiments of separatism and Tamil nationalism persisted.⁶⁸ Thus, although the period of the 30-year war was scattered with the proposal and implementation of various linguistic and education policies, the nature of the end of the war, with the fall of the LTTE leadership and the victory of the Sri Lankan military, and the failure of these policies to instate equal rights for the Tamil-speaking population, established the basis for ongoing ethnolinguistic conflict in the nation.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁸ Ahilan Kadirgamar, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

Post-War, 2009-Present

In his first year as President, Rajapaksa released the “Mahinda Chinthana,” an all-encompassing policy document serving as a “ten-year horizon development framework.” With respect to general and higher education, Rajapaksa’s government identified the key problems as “the need to improve achievement levels in the first language,” and the “absence of a consistent overall policy for higher education, on such issues as, admissions, medium of instruction and location of universities.”⁶⁹ Strikingly, the Mahinda Chinthana recognizes – almost as an afterthought – the greater issue of the lack of a “consistent overall policy for higher education” within the national government. Contextualizing this statement within the overall structure of national-level policy documents, which seem to outline policy goals about education, demonstrates a continuing process of language learning in the nation and the discrepancies between proposed policy and actual implementation. The Mahinda Chinthana later proposes strategies to implement the proposed policies in general and higher education, including the need to promote harmony through education through “organizing selected schools in multi-ethnic communities to provide education in the Sinhala and Tamil media,” as well as “introducing conversational Sinhala for Tamil students and conversational Tamil for Sinhala students.”⁷⁰ The Mahinda Chinthana, however, does not propose any specific implementation mechanisms and evidence of large-scale implementation of these policies in this ten-year period is not widely documented.

Yet, following the Mahinda Chinthana, the National Institute of Language Education and Training (NILET) was established by Act Number 26 to aid implementation of these policies. NILET’s charter includes the creation of programs for the “extensive training in the Sinhala,

⁶⁹ “Mahinda Chintana: Vision for a New Sri Lanka,” (Panaluwa, Padukka, Sri Lanka 2005), 142, 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

Tamil and English languages,” with the goals of creating a stronger pool of competent persons to teach Sinhala, Tamil, and English in the nation, support of research and studies on matters relating to language training, and the long-term undertaking, assistance, and promotion of linguistic research activities in Sri Lanka.⁷¹

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) published a report in 2011 with many recommendations for changes to promote reunification of the nation and the rebuilding of Sri Lanka’s infrastructure in the governmental and sociocultural spheres. The Commission argued that the government was responsible for promoting “equitable distribution of education facilities,” and that it must enact a proactive policy to encourage schools with both Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking students.⁷² In regards to the tertiary education system, the Commission implored, “Steps must be taken to ensure public universities have ethnically mixed student populations with a choice of courses offered in all three languages. Until recently, it appears that most Tamil-speaking undergraduates were confined to the North and the East.”⁷³ The LLRC’s report echoed prior policies to promote reconciliation and reconstruction in the country, a trend consistent with many nations post-conflict. The policies suggested, however, were not necessarily implemented in a consistent or efficient manner, which that undoubtedly has had an adverse impact on the overall reunification efforts.

By 2011, the Government of Sri Lanka, in a joint effort with the World Bank, established a program for “The promotion of social cohesion through education in Sri Lanka,” which has worked to implement the goals of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit’s framework. At the time the report was released, only 45% of all schools in the nation offered Second

⁷¹ "National Institute of Language Education and Training Act, No. 26 of 2007," ed. Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Department of Government Printing, 2007), 2, 4.

⁷² Nesiiah, *Tamil Language Rights in Sri Lanka*, 53-4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

National Language programs. Perhaps even more strikingly, by the time of the report, 16,000 students sitting for their O Level Examinations completed the test for Sinhala as the Second Language while only 3,000 students tested for Tamil as the Second Language.⁷⁴ The impacts of these policy initiatives and the partnership between the World Bank and the Government of Sri Lanka have not yet been fully evaluated but, they demonstrate the GoSL's initiatives in the years immediately following the war to address the insufficiencies in second national language acquisition in schools.

The most recent policy initiatives proposed and implemented by the government were pursuant to the Education Sector Development Framework and Program for 2012-2016, which was extended through 2017. The second theme of this framework, "Improve the quality of primary and secondary education," included the promotion of learning second languages among students.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the policy also continued to note the importance of mother tongue education and the strengthening of students' abilities in their mother tongues. Within the goals for improving the first and second national languages, the "main activity" to promote the learning of these two subjects is through the proposal of holding language competitions at school, divisional, zonal, provincial and national levels.⁷⁶ Other activities proposed include special literacy programs and assessments, additional reading materials, student assessments, teacher trainings, student language camps, and learning achievement programs in the social sciences and humanities.⁷⁷ Although these programs have been proposed by the Ministry of

⁷⁴ The World Bank report did not indicate the total numbers of students sitting for O Level Examinations, a number which would better indicate the gravity of the discrepancy between the numbers of students pursuing tertiary education in the Sinhala medium versus those in the Tamil medium.

"The Promotion of Social Cohesion through Education in Sri Lanka," in *South Asia Human Development Sector* (The World Bank, September 2011), 13.

⁷⁵ "Education First: Education Sector Development Framework and Programme," xxvi.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

Education and are supported by working groups in the World Bank, the Wonders of Asia initiative, and the Mahinda Chinthana policies, the implementation scheme has failed to widely promote effective, long-term second language education schemes in the primary, secondary, and tertiary schools in the country.

Analysis of the GoSL's policies and progress reports can only speak to the bureaucratic matters of the ongoing ethnolinguistic conflicts in the country. In the next part of the chapter, I will investigate the general trends in university admission as a means to understand the changes over time of the aforementioned policies as well as examine public opinions and perceptions of these policies to understand the actual impact that these changes made.

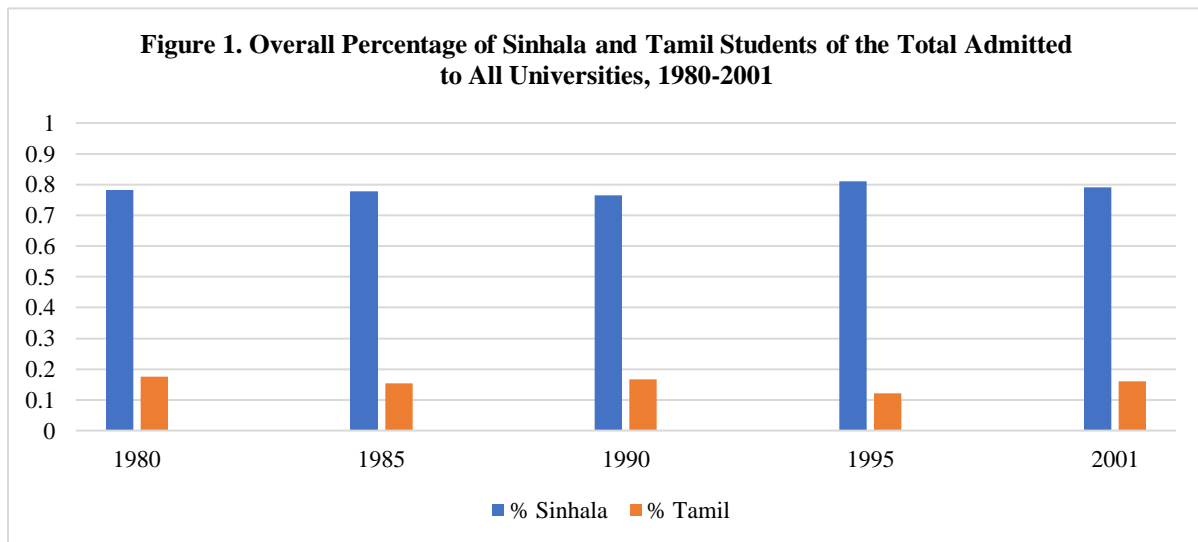
CHAPTER 2B: General Trends in University Admissions and Opinion, Post-Standardization

Analyses of the overall trends in university admissions, post-standardization policies demonstrate that even when the overall proportions of students from each ethnolinguistic group stabilized to be representative of the proportions of each such group in the country in 2000, the stabilization process was not always constant; similar results are seen from analyses of specific cases of the University of Colombo, the University of Peradeniya, and the University of Jaffna. After the policies of standardization were replaced with the merit- and district-based admissions eligibility system, the enrollment percentages of the Sinhala and Tamil populations still continued to fluctuate. During the late 1960s and 1970s, enrollment of the Tamil population in the nation's universities declined. Further examination of the admissions numbers throughout the war, from 1983 to 2009, continue to demonstrate the restrictions on Sri Lanka's Tamil youth, especially with respect to university admissions and greater employment opportunities.

The university admissions numbers for Sinhala and Tamil students in the 1960s and 1970s are noted below. By 1974, the admission percentages of Tamil students dropped, on average, from 48.5% of all students admitted in 1969, to just 21.3% in all faculties. The significant decreases in numbers of Tamil students admitted created unrest in the population and continued to serve as one of the primary grievances of the youth insurgency groups, especially as Tamil youths faced economic difficulties throughout the 1970s. The changes to the standardization policies of the late 1970s only exacerbated these problems for the Tamil students who sought admission, and the significant increase in riots and outbreaks of violence corresponded to these changes. By the 1980s, armed conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military forces affected many parts of the country. When considered in isolation, the admission rates in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s demonstrate the effectiveness of the GoSL's

policies to curtail admissions to proportional representation of the greater population numbers. However, as is examined subsequently, the Tamil community continued to express disdain for these policies, which they perceived to be disenfranchizing for all members. In the context of these grievances, continuation of the conflict, and the policies implemented by the government, shows the overall ineffectiveness of these admissions policies to address any of the sources of conflict from the Tamil ethnolinguistic community. The following charts and tables, with data obtained from the University Grants Commission in Colombo, express these trends in the admissions of Sinhala and Tamil students from 1980 through 2001, with specific data points at 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2001¹:

Year	Total Sinhala	% Sinhala	Total Tamil	% Tamil
1980	3665	78%	826	18%
1985	3920	78%	780	15%
1990	5443	76%	1194	17%
1995	5941	81%	884	12%
2001	9450	79%	1908	16%



¹ The remaining percentage of students admitted to universities from 1980-2001 not indicated in the tables or figures would be the percentage of Muslim students which will be excluded from the analyses for the purpose of this study.

In 1981, the only year prior to 2001 before the census was conducted in Sri Lanka during the war, 74% of the total population identified as Sinhala, and 12.7% identified as Tamil.² As seen through the data, in the University Grant Commission's first ten years, the percentages of Sinhala and Tamil students admitted remained relatively representative of the overall percentages of the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups in the nation. From 1980 to 1985, the percentage of Tamil students admitted to university decreased, but the proportion of Tamils admitted still was higher than that of Tamils in the national population. Since 1978, according to historian K.M. de Silva, "There has been, as a matter of deliberate policy, a reduction in the number of arts/humanities students entering Sri Lankan universities. The ultimate objective is to provide for a clear majority of students in the science-based faculties in the universities."³ Due to the war and the shift in primary and secondary education using the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction, second language acquisition, especially that of English, was challenging for the Tamil-speaking population of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The policy for the deliberate reduction of the number of arts and humanities students admitted to the University System, especially in the late 1970s, affected the number of qualified Tamil-speaking students for university admission. This could serve as an additional explanatory variable in the significant decrease of Tamil-speaking students in 1985 as compared to 1980.

By 1995, a significant decrease in the number and percentage of Tamil students admitted is observed, while simultaneously observing an increase in the number and percentage of Sinhala students admitted. These shifting proportions occurred during the years of severe restrictions on movement of Tamil persons on the island, especially as the attacks by the LTTE increased.

² "Census of Population and Housing, 1981," (Sri Lanka: Department of Census and Statistics—Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1981).

³ K.M. de Silva, "A University Grants Commission in a South Asian Setting: The Sri Lankan Experience," *Higher Education* 13, no. 5 (1984): 565.

Furthermore, in 1995, the South Eastern University and the Universities of Rajarata and Sabaragamuwa all began accepting students. These three universities are in Sinhala-dominated districts (see Appendix 3), which would, as is standard in the University Grants Commission policies, indicate that these three universities are dedicated more to Sinhala-medium education and Sinhala-focused programming. Thus, the increase in the numbers of Sinhala students admitted was enabled by the opening of these additional universities, regardless of the admission of fewer Tamil students overall due to the ongoing war.

By 2001, a shift back to a higher proportion of Tamil students admitted to the universities is observed, but the proportion of Sinhalese students continued to remain disproportionately high compared to the overall representation in the country, as well. In part, this increase of Tamil students admitted can be attributed to the restoration of some peace between the LTTE forces and the Sri Lankan military due to the agreements and ceasefires. Additionally, between 1995 and 2001, the only additional university chartered was Wayamba University, in Kurunegala, another significantly Sinhala-dominated district which could account for the continued high numbers of Sinhalese admitted. The fluctuations of Sinhalese and Tamil students admitted demonstrates that even if the Tamil population was trending towards more accurately proportional representation in the university system, the actual system of admissions continued to be unreliable, with numbers of Tamils admitted fluctuating between 826 in 1980, decreasing to 780 in 1985, increasing to 1,194 in 1990, decreasing again to 884 in 1995, and finally increasing in 2001 to 1,908 students.

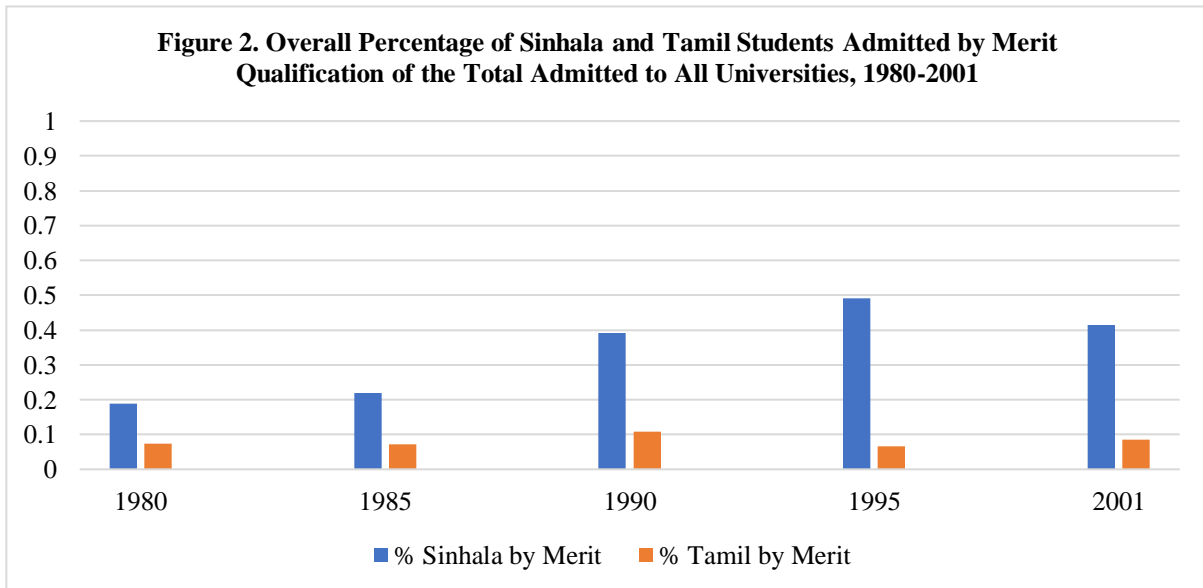
Interestingly, during this period, the group that appeared excluded from the admissions pools almost entirely was the Muslim population, which, along with resulting lack of economic opportunities, potentially could explain the Sinhala-Muslim conflicts in the nation that have

occurred in the 2000s. Although many Muslim persons acquire Sinhala language skills much more frequently than Tamils, the majority of the Muslim population admitted to university still pursue studies in the Tamil or English language. Thus, bearing in mind the Muslim population as a periphery group related to the question of linguistic accessibility and potential conflicts is important in the context of the analyses of admissions trends, even if this will not be a focal point of inquiry for this thesis.

Focusing analysis on the overall percentages and proportions of students admitted according to ethnolinguistic groups, however, loses sight of the impacts of the admissions policies at the time, especially those that the government had created in attempts to increase representations of students from all regions of the nation. As noted previously, the admissions policies changed from the explicit standardization of admissions, to admission based on quotas of merit and district. The policy allows for the top 30 percent of students to be admitted based on an all-Island merit list for the aggregate of marks attained, 55 percent of students admitted based on a district and population basis, and 15 percent of students admitted based on “educationally underprivileged areas.”⁴ For the groups admitted by district and population as well as those in the underprivileged areas, the aggregate of marks required for admission varied depending on the district from which the applicant was applying. These new policies, implemented in 1974, are expressed in the following charts and data tables with specific data points at 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2001:

⁴ Ibid., 564.

Year	Total Sinhala by Merit	% Sinhala by Merit	Total Tamil by Merit	% Tamil by Merit
1980	887	19%	343	7%
1985	1109	22%	359	7%
1990	2789	39%	766	10%
1995	3605	49%	487	6%
2001	4959	42%	1011	8%



Comparing the overall percentage of Sinhala students admitted by merit qualification to that of the Tamil students exposes a trend that also focuses around the year 1995. By 1995, of the total students admitted to universities, the percentage of Sinhala students accepted by merit was 49%, while the percentage of Tamil students accepted was 6%, both the highest and lowest percentages of the years, respectively. In 1990, 1995, and 2001, a total of 7,122, 7,331, and 11,946 students, respectively, were admitted to the combination of universities. The change from 1990 to 1995 was only an increase of approximately 200 students and yet, the differences in the proportions of Sinhala and Tamil students admitted by merit varied much more drastically than

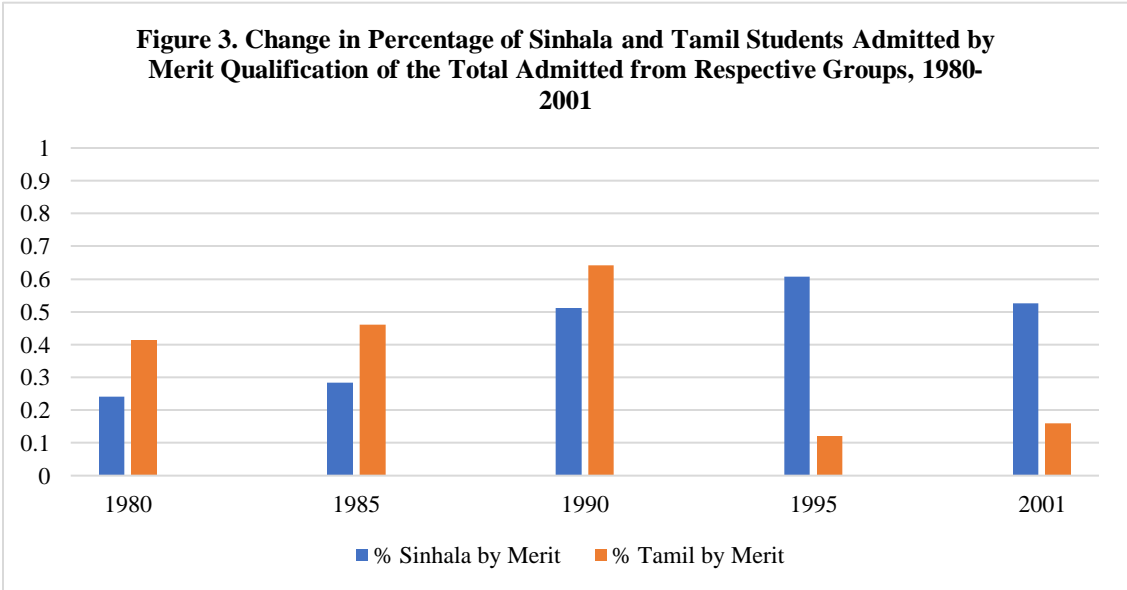
this admission count change, with the number and percentage of Tamil students decreasing, and those of Sinhala students increasing, significantly.

One possible explanation for the return to a more proportionally representative admission group by 2001, compared to that of the 1980s and 1990s, was the chartering of South Eastern, Rajarata, and Sabaragamuwa Universities in 1995. All three of these universities, located in predominantly Sinhala regions of the nation, undoubtedly drew a much larger Sinhalese applicant pool. Although initially counterintuitive perhaps to argue that the opening of universities in Sinhala-dominant regions would cause a resetting of the proportions of Sinhala and Tamil students admitted in total, the opening of these three universities could have opened admissions spots at the other universities that were more accessible for Tamil students, and less desirable for Sinhala students, especially with the availability of the new universities. These universities that would draw larger numbers of Tamil students include those that teach in the Tamil-medium, especially in the Faculty of Arts. With a greater pool of Sinhalese applicants accepted and attending the three new universities by 2001, the Tamil population of applicants could have had higher acceptance rates in their application process to universities like Colombo and Peradeniya, which historically had accepted greater proportions of Tamil students.

Examining trends of merit-based admission specifically within the ethnic groups themselves demonstrates the significantly altered proportions of students admitted for each ethnic group. The following charts and data tables express the trends of admissions, with specific focus on the impacts of the merit and district quota policies implemented in 1974 on the admissions percentages within the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups, with specific data points at 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, and 2001:

Table 6. Distribution of Sinhala and Tamil Students Admitted by Merit Qualification of the Total Admitted from Respective Groups, 1980-2001				
Year	Total Sinhala by Merit	% Sinhala by Merit	Total Tamil by Merit	% Tamil by Merit
1980	887	24%	343	42%
1985	1109	28%	359	46%
1990	2789	51%	766	64%
1995	3605	61%	487	12%
2001	4959	53%	1011	16%

The extreme drop in the proportion of the Tamils admitted by merit in 1995 as compared to 1990 is the most striking change in this collection. The lower percentages of Tamil admitted by merit of the overall population of Tamils admitted continues in 2001, although not as extreme as the percentage in 1995. With the decrease in the proportion of those admitted by merit in the Tamil applicant pool, the proportion of those admitted by district increased, undoubtedly creating increased grievances among the middle class and elite Tamil population, especially in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which were an explicit target of the district policies. A Tamil individual from the North with the same high marks in 1995 as in 1990 might be rejected



because of competition with the growing numbers of qualified Sinhalese students from other regions of the nation and with the lower-qualifying Tamils from the less advantaged regions. Thus, the competition for university admissions between the Sinhala and Tamil intellectual elites grew as an effect of the joint-pressures of the merit and proportional representative restriction policies. With the confluence of the heightening tensions of the war and the attempts by the government to increase the regional representation of Tamil students in the universities, the proportion of applicants admitted by merit decreased. Considering the differences between admissions based on merit and district quotas is important to understanding the grievances of the Tamil youths, particularly those from the elite social class of the Northern Province, when they were denied admission to the universities in increasingly greater numbers throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These trends can explain the continued warfare, rioting, and general distrust of the Sinhala-majority national government perpetuated by dissatisfied and disenfranchised Tamil youths.

CHAPTER 2C: Admissions to University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, and University of Jaffna as Case Studies

For this study, the Universities of Colombo, Peradeniya, and Jaffna were chosen as cases to examine the specific impacts of the education, language, and admissions policies implemented post-Independence. The University of Colombo (formerly known as the University of Ceylon and founded in 1921), and the University of Peradeniya (founded in 1944), located in the Southern and Central Provinces, respectively, are the two oldest universities in Sri Lanka offering degree programs (see Appendix 3). As the university in the capital of the nation, the University of Colombo has continuously been considered Sri Lanka's top university in the nation. The University of Peradeniya is also highly revered, and has historically received students from more regions of Sri Lanka due to its central location and its more numerous Faculties taught in all three linguistic mediums. Both universities, because of their academic histories and locations, have historically served as the bases for the country's academic elites. The University of Jaffna was established in the Northern Province in 1974 (see Appendix 3). The University of Jaffna has consistently provided education predominantly for the Tamil populations of the Northern and Eastern Provinces; it also is considered a top-tier institution for its science and medical faculties, all of which are taught in the English medium. These three universities vary in quality based on department and mediums of instruction, as well as explicitly as to which ethnolinguistic groups they serve.

Admissions and enrollment statistics for all three universities from the original collection were examined for the percentages of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students in the years 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2001, 2010, and 2015 in the Faculty of Arts. From 1980 to 2015, the overall enrollments for the University of Colombo increased from 784 to 2,270 students, at the University of Peradeniya from 1,451 to 2,917 students, and at the University of Jaffna from 513

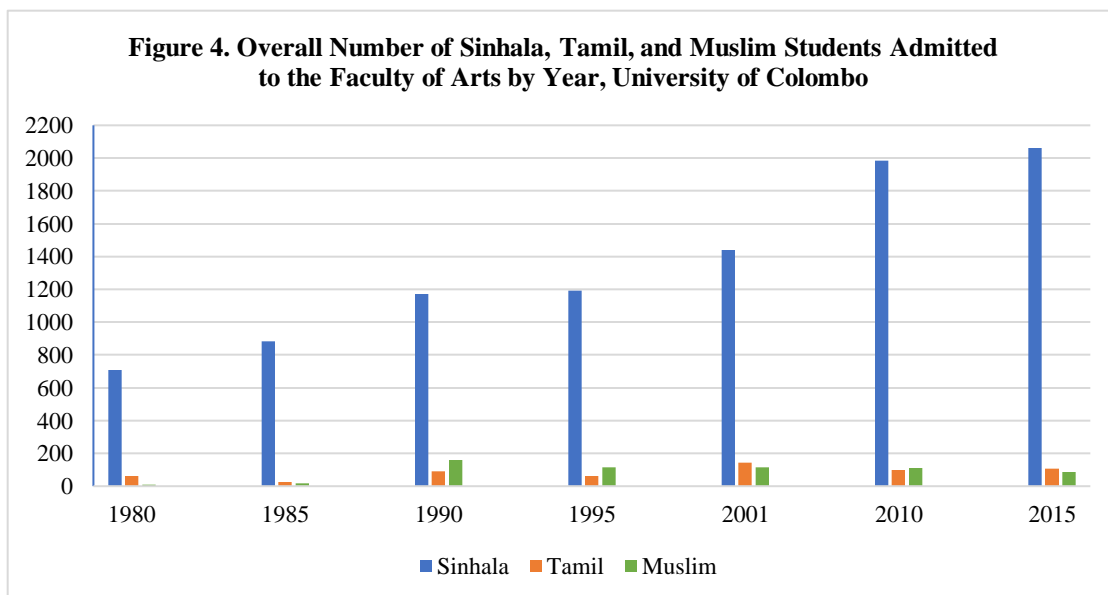
to 2,359 students.¹ The increases in enrollment indicate the growing proportions of youths pursuing tertiary education at these three universities and the growing competition between these youths for admissions. By examining these changes in the context of the war and changing admissions policies, especially of the 1980s and 1990s, the following cases will demonstrate that much of the ethnolinguistic conflict persists throughout these institutions and the country, even in spite of the possibility that the overall proportions of ethnolinguistic groups admitted to all universities became approximately representative of the national numbers. Additionally, the increase during the war period and continuation of conflict after the war will be contextualized in the context that the Tamils themselves did not desire for the proportionally representative numbers because of the precedent of disproportionality, in their favor, of the admissions numbers in the immediate years post-Independence.

¹ "Basic Statistics on University Education in Sri Lanka," ed. Division of Planning & Research (Colombo, Sri Lanka: University Grants Commission, 1982). "Sri Lanka University Statistics 2001," ed. Management Information Systems (Colombo, Sri Lanka: University Grants Commission, 2001).

University of Colombo

At the University of Colombo, the elite and most prestigious university of the nation, admissions of students from the Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim groups demonstrates the preferential placement Sinhalese students received from the University Grants Commission and helps to explain the perceptions of disenfranchisement and grievances held by the Tamil population. Although the numbers of Sinhalese students admitted to the University of Colombo continued to increase each year from 1980-2015, the numbers of Tamil and Muslim students admitted fluctuated. The following expresses the trends of admission from 1980-2015 at the University of Colombo:

Table 7. University of Colombo						
Year	Sinhala Total	% Sinhala	Tamil Total	% Tamil	Muslim Total	% Muslim
1980	709	90%	63	8%	8	1%
1985	885	95%	26	3%	19	2%
1990	1170	82%	90	6%	158	11%
1995	1191	87%	61	4%	115	8%
2001	1441	84%	142	8%	116	7%
2010	1983	90%	99	4%	112	5%
2015	2062	91%	108	4%	88	4%



In the Tamil case, the total number admitted drops dramatically from 1980 to 1985, with only 26 admitted in 1985, whereas 63 were admitted only five years prior. In those five years, the conflict between the LTTE and other Tamil insurgency groups with the Sri Lankan government forces escalated, and the Tamil citizens from the North and the East were increasingly restricted in their movements throughout the country. In 1990, the numbers spike again to 90 admitted, but by 1995, similar to the overall trends in Tamil admits in all universities, the numbers decrease again. The admissions process for the applicants of 1990 would have occurred during the occupation by the IPKF, and in the period after the 1987 Peace Accord. The increased policy focus by the GoSL to create a better-connected nation and to allow the Tamil population greater access to tertiary education facilities is seemingly expressed in these higher rates of admission. By the time of 1995, however, the admissions numbers once again decrease, almost certainly related to the outbreak of war throughout the early 1990s until the ceasefire agreement of 1995. The continuation of violence by the LTTE after the IPKF was removed from the Island led to a new level of hypervigilance in the Sri Lankan military throughout the country. This caused difficulties for many Tamil students, especially those who wished to travel from the Northern and Eastern Provinces to Colombo for university, and these difficulties continued in their day-to-day lives while in Colombo.

In an interview, Udhayani, a woman who currently works in the Women's Development Office of the Northern Province, spoke about the restriction of Tamil movement in Colombo during her time studying at the University of Colombo. Udhayani recounted that when she was a student, and later even when she worked in the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Colombo throughout the 1990s, she faced harassment through interrogation by military personnel when leaving her apartment or while on buses. The police and military personnel were able to identify

her ethnicity because her national identification indicated her home province. Furthermore, when she would travel throughout Colombo, she was required to register her movement with local police forces in many areas.² The continued violence by the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military created long-term restrictions for the Tamil population, which were supported by mutually-suspicious perceptions of the opposing group in the nation, and thus, the Tamil population continued to be restricted from pursuing studies at the most prestigious institution in the country.

The impact of the GoSL's education policies, or lack of implementation thereof, do not seem to have impacted the Muslim population as significantly as the Tamil population. The admissions statistics for 1990 also show the highest numbers of admission for Muslim students throughout this entire 30-year period, perhaps further indicating that restriction of movement and prejudice against the Tamil population were more likely to affect admissions numbers than specific policy changes employed by the government and the University Grants Commission. After 1995, the admissions numbers for the Muslim population stabilized for the following 15 years and then only decreased by 2015. These trends follow the trends of conflict in the country, especially as the conflict increased primarily between the Tamil and Sinhalese ethnic groups, and decreased in relation to the Muslim ethnic groups.

The Tamil population, however, only experienced an increase of admission in 2001, but then a significant decrease of almost fifty students by 2010. Although no conclusion can be made about the nine years between these two data points, the trends demonstrate a significant decrease in the number of Tamil students admitted in 2010, as compared to 2001, because of the possible correlation with the final years of the war. During this period, the conflict was extreme and the movement of Tamil persons throughout the Island freely even more greatly restricted. As the

² Udhayani, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

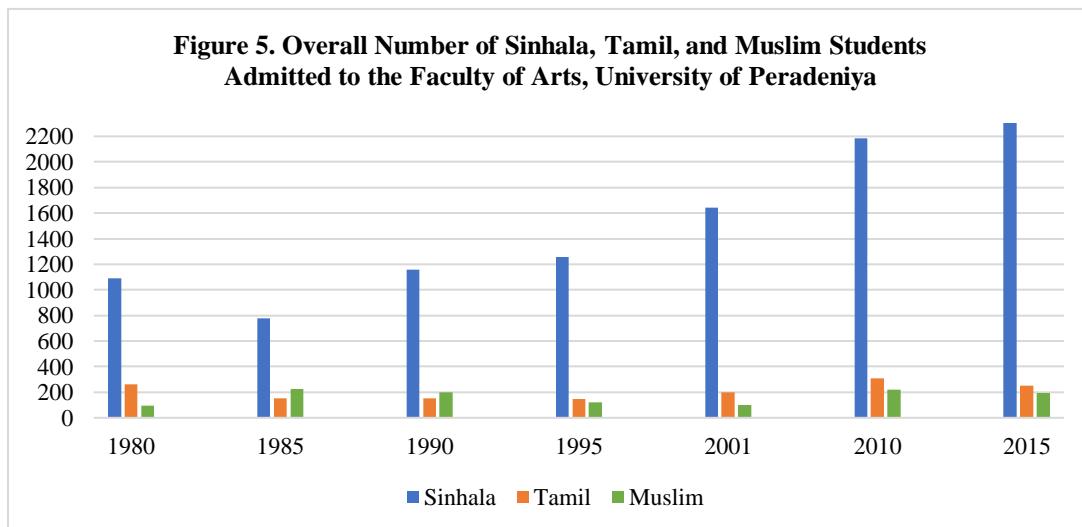
government heightened its offensive against the LTTE, and the nearly-30 years of the war increasingly impacted all areas of the country, especially in public infrastructure like the educational system in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, both the physical abilities to attend, and the likelihood of admission to, universities in the outside regions diminished for the Tamil students.

The admissions numbers for the University of Colombo demonstrate that throughout the war and post-conflict, the university system continued to disproportionately admit Sinhala students over Tamil students. While the trends of admission to the University of Colombo for the Tamil and Muslim populations fluctuated possibly in relation to the increase of war and conflict in the nation, the trend of admission for Sinhala students to Colombo continued to increase. Although the chartering of the University of Jaffna in 1974 demonstrates that higher numbers of Tamil students overall had the opportunities to pursue tertiary education during the 30 years of conflict, as is demonstrated later, they were greatly restricted to the lesser university of the three. Even in interviews with students and faculty members in 2017, all indicated that pursuing an education at the University of Colombo increases a graduate's likelihood of government and civil sector employment, a profession that continues to be one of the most pursued by students today. For these trends, it would be interesting to observe if the continued increase in Sinhala students would be linked to the possible history of expansion of the university and the types of studies and departments offered only in the Sinhala language. Regardless, the trends demonstrate that even in Sri Lanka's leading university, the proportions of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students did not represent the greater population proportions of the nation as a whole, signifying a failure of the tertiary education system and the UGC to provide equal opportunities for students at the University of Colombo.

University of Peradeniya

Admission trends at the University of Peradeniya are different from those of Colombo in relation to the overall increase in the proportions of Sinhalese students and the fluctuations of Tamil and Muslim students admitted between years 1980 and 2015. The University of Peradeniya serves as an interesting case for the study of how the GoSL’s policies continued to exclude the Tamil population, even when accessibility to the university would not have proved as challenging for Tamil students as it would have for the University of Colombo. Peradeniya demonstrates how the exclusion of Tamils from access to education at the nation’s second-most elite institution contributed to the ongoing conflict and distrust between the ethnolinguistic groups of the nation. The following expresses the trends of admission from 1980-2015 at the University of Peradeniya:

Table 8. University of Peradeniya						
Year	Sinhala Total	% Sinhala	Tamil Total	% Tamil	Muslim Total	% Muslim
1980	1090	75%	262	18%	94	6%
1985	779	67%	154	13%	226	19%
1990	1156	77%	150	10%	200	13%
1995	1259	83%	145	9%	119	7%
2001	1642	84%	199	10%	100	5%
2010	2183	80%	309	11%	219	8%
2015	2470	85%	250	9%	193	6%



In 1980, the proportion of Tamil students represented is greater than the national proportions by approximately six percentage points, while that of the Sinhalese is proportional. By 1985, the numbers of students admitted overall to the University of Peradeniya decreased by 287 students. This trend, however, does not appear in the overall counts of university admission of students, nor specifically at the University of Colombo or the University of Jaffna. The number of Sinhala and Tamil students admitted in 1985 compared to 1980 decreased respectively by approximately 300 and 100, while the number of Muslim students accepted increased by approximately 130 students. Although an explanation for this could be linked to the fact that by 1985, the national budget was being more heavily allotted to defense expenditure and less to other infrastructure expenditures, we would expect to see a decrease across all universities in admissions.³ In addition, in 1985, the proportions of Sinhalese and Muslim students were the least representative of the national proportions. By 1990, the proportions amongst the Sinhalese had reset to be representative of the national distributions, but the Muslim population was still overrepresented as compared to the national proportions. Interestingly, the number of students admitted changed by an increase of approximately 400 Sinhalese students, while the number of Tamil admitted decreased only by four, and Muslim by 26. This significant increase in Sinhalese, in direct contrast to the decrease in Tamil and Muslim, students admitted populated the campus with more students who continued to contribute to the Sinhalese dominance on campus.

The proportions of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students are seen to stabilize from 1990 to 2001, to approximately 84%, 10%, and 6%, respectively. Although much of the initial riots and violence during the 1970s period of JVP insurrection occurred in Kandy, home to the University of Peradeniya, the outbreak of fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military

³ Samaranayaka, 349.

did not significantly affect the city or university. Aside from a decrease of five students between 1995 and 2001, the number of Tamil students admitted to the University of Peradeniya continued to increase through 2010 before falling again by approximately 60 students in 2015. The number of Muslim students admitted throughout the 30-year period fluctuates more significantly every five years, with numbers of students admitted jumping from 94 in 1980 to 226 in 1985, before dropping every five years from 1990 to 2001, and then increasing again for 2010 and 2015. Furthermore, the numbers of Sinhalese students continued to increase each year after 1985, demonstrating the continued growth of the university-educated Sinhalese population in higher numbers than those of the Tamil and Muslim populations.

Throughout the 30-plus years of admissions data, the proportions of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students never reach proportionally representative numbers for the University of Peradeniya, although they did get close with the overall distribution of 74%, 13%, and 10%, respectively. The opening of other universities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces worked to alleviate these trends in the overall percentages of students admitted from each ethnolinguistic group, but the numbers of students from the Tamil and Muslim populations still affected the overall perception of equal opportunity and access for youths. These numbers are especially insufficient when the relative prestige of the universities considered. The University of Peradeniya, in its own publications, describes itself as “the most comprehensive University in Sri Lanka today.”⁴ For Tamil and Muslim students to be proportionally excluded from both the University of Peradeniya and the University of Colombo, as examined previously, indicates that even if these populations were admitted to other institutions, they were not granted access to the most elite institutions. Exclusion of Tamil and Muslim students, the group which speaks Tamil

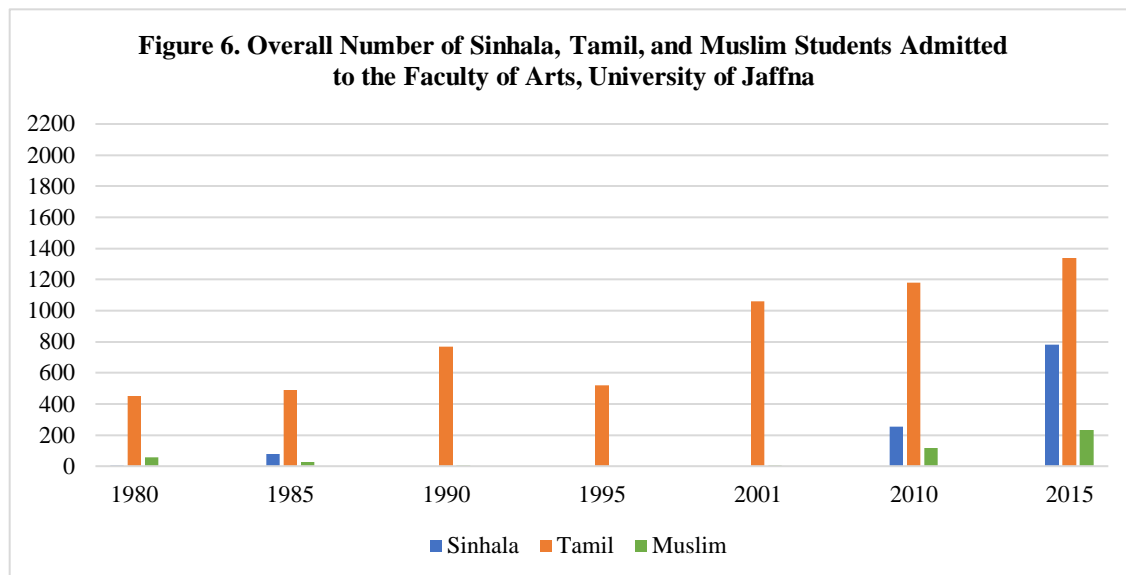
⁴ "About the University of Peradeniya: History 1978-Present," <http://www.pdn.ac.lk/about/history/history-78-today.php>.

and would more likely pursue Tamil-medium education, created an imbalance both in the University itself, and later in the professional sectors most likely to employ university graduates, especially the public, governmental sector.

University of Jaffna

In direct contrast to the University of Colombo and the University of Peradeniya, the University of Jaffna since its chartering, has been dominated by Tamil students. The trends observed for the approximately 30 years of admissions at the University of Jaffna demonstrate the significant changes in the environment and the interethnic relations of the Island throughout this period. It is important to note that although the University of Jaffna is considered to be the top institution for Tamil students, especially those who wish to study in the Tamil medium, the University itself still does not receive the same levels of respect or reverence from the nation as do the University of Colombo or the University of Peradeniya. Thus, even though overall increasing numbers of Tamil students admitted to the University of Jaffna between 1980 and 2015 are observed, the benefit to the Tamil community by means of educational and future professional and economic opportunity is not as great as it would have been for the other two universities. The following expresses the trends of admission from 1980-2015 at the University of Jaffna:

Table 9. University of Jaffna						
Year	Sinhala Total	% Sinhala	Tamil Total	% Tamil	Muslim Total	% Muslim
1980	1	0.1%	452	88%	59	11%
1985	79	13%	490	82%	28	5%
1990	0	0.0%	769	99%	1	0.1%
1995	0	0.0%	519	100%	0	0.0%
2001	0	0.0%	1058	99%	3	0.3%
2010	254	16%	1182	76%	117	8%
2015	780	33%	1338	57%	231	10%



In 1980, only a single Sinhala student was admitted, while the remainder of the incoming class was 88% Tamil and 11% Muslim. By 1985, just over ten years after the chartering of the university, the number of Sinhalese admitted increased to 79, while the number of Tamil increased by approximately 40 students and the number of Muslim decreased by 30. During this period, the interethnic relations between the Tamil and Muslim populations grew exceptionally hostile, with many members of the Tamil community, both in the LTTE and in Tamil political groups, calling for the complete expulsion of the Muslim populations from the Northern and Eastern Provinces. As the adverse impact of these extremist Tamil policies against the Muslim population grew significantly along with the presence and influence of Tamil militants in the country, the numbers of Sinhalese and Muslim students admitted to the University of Jaffna dwindled effectively to zero between 1990, 1995, and 2001.

The complete shift to the exclusive admission of Tamil students during the most violent periods of the war, between 1990 and 2001, can be attributed both to the inaccessibility of the university during the times of fighting and occupation by the Sri Lankan military, as well as the lack of desire of any Sinhalese to study at the University of Jaffna during this period. The outbreak of violence undoubtedly also affected the population of Tamil youth, and contributed to

the decrease in the total numbers of Tamil students admitted, as observed in 1995, down approximately 250 students from 1990. Furthermore, we continue to observe no Sinhala students admitted, similar to 1990 and later to 2001. By 2001, the numbers of Tamil students admitted increase, however, by approximately 500 students. In the overall trends of admission in all universities, the decreases in numbers of Tamil students occurred throughout the nation, but unlike the increase in the numbers of Sinhala students admitted nationwide, the increase in Sinhala students admitted to the University of Jaffna only occurs by 2010.

Although the language in education policies of the late 1990s could have had significant impact in the admissions of 254 Sinhalese and 117 Muslims in 2010, the more likely explanation for the significant increase in students from these populations at the University of Jaffna relates to the end of the war in 2009. By 2015, there were 780 Sinhalese, 1338 Tamil, and 231 Muslim students admitted, shifting the proportions of each ethnic group most significantly away from the Tamil-dominated admissions groups of the prior 30 years.

With the restrictions on the Tamil population both in terms of movement outside of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the decisions of the UGC in admissions trends, the Tamil population was primarily directed to enroll in the University of Jaffna. From one perspective, it can be argued that the ability to access tertiary education in their mother tongue, instead of Sinhala or English, was empowering to the Tamil-speaking youths, especially during an era where there was a cultural shift for secession of Tamil Eelam. In contrast, however, the restrictions placed on the Tamil population disenfranchised the youths from accessing the most prestigious education available in the country, and perpetuated a culture of division between the majority Sinhala students and the minority Tamil and Muslim students.

CHAPTER 2D: Public Opinion of the GoSL's Policies in the Context of the University System

At the universities of Colombo, Jaffna, and Peradeniya, both obvious and discrete aspects of campus demonstrate the ongoing linguistic divisions in the academic realm and in the country as a whole. For three weeks in December 2017 and January 2018, interviews of professors, university administrators, and students were conducted in an effort to understand the ethnocultural dynamics among students at these three universities. Many of the interviewees noted the importance of examining the university system in the context of the government policies post-Independence, especially in regards to language in the nation. Premakumara de Silva, Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Colombo, argued that the universities serve as microcosms of the larger Sri Lankan society; one can understand the university system only in the context of understanding the larger structure and dynamics of Sri Lanka.¹

The disparities between the offerings of medium of instructions and overall navigability by language at all three universities are apparent. At the University of Colombo, the library post signs are written only in English and Sinhala. At the University of Jaffna, students noted that because all of their classes in the Faculty of Arts were taught in Tamil, they had no Sinhalese students in their classes, and thus, no real connection to that cohort. NR Dewasiri, professor of History at the University of Colombo, lectures in English but lamented that even with Tamil and Sinhala students interacting in classrooms with a common language, they do not have the proper language skills to actually communicate with each other.² If first-language Tamil students are struggling to comprehend the lectures or are unable to write sufficiently in Sinhala or English,

¹ Premakumara de Silva, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

² NR Dewasiri, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

they can receive special lecture notes, sit for examinations, or submit papers, in Tamil. In these cases, the professors are almost always only proficient in Sinhala or English, so they rely on Tamil graduate students to grade these materials due to a lack of translation services at all universities. Although conjecture, this is likely to provide a greater sociocultural distance between the Tamil student and the faculty, perhaps resulting in less rewarding or educational outcomes and continued frustrations in the Tamil-speaking population.

Although, by the UGC admissions numbers, the numbers of students admitted from each ethnolinguistic group is seen to have stabilized to proportionality since the early 2000s, professors, politicians, and students all noted that the reality of connections between these groups is still challenged. Maneesha Wanasinghe, Senior Lecturer in the Department of International Relations at the University of Colombo, noted the challenges of communication between the students was the fault of not receiving proper second national language education as youths.³ The divisions begin at an early age, she argued, due to the hostility in Sinhala communities towards learning Tamil, and the lack of sufficient teachers in both communities to teach the other languages. She has observed less suspicion now among groups to learn the other's language, but still sees that the lack of enough teachers in the nation's primary schools, and then later the lack of language learning programs in universities, challenging the abilities of students to learn the other national language. The government, many argued, has been attempting to make all students bilingual, but without sufficient teachers, resources, and most important, incentives, noticeable changes in the linguistic capabilities or interests of students have not occurred.

Basic communication between students can vary based on the students' own backgrounds, education, and the medium in which they are studying. From both students' and

³ Maneesha Wanasinghe, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

professors' observations, students oftentimes will only associate with those who have similar identity markers, including ethnicity, religion, and language. At all three of the universities visited, many departments hosted initial Sinhala/Tamil connection activities in attempts to bridge the ethnolinguistic divisions among students. These programs seemed primarily to occur at the beginning of the first year of a class, but in all instances, students and professors alike noted that they did not continue past the initial orientation period. Furthermore, although the initial connection activities occurred in attempts to connect students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, they were executed in English, thus restricting students to communicate in a language that they oftentimes did not have sufficient ability to speak.

When students were placed in universities in provinces of the country where the dominant language spoken was not their primary language, they oftentimes learned to understand basic phrases and terms of the other language, but could not speak or write the language themselves. One student interviewed was a Sinhalese woman who attended Eastern University, a university just outside of the main city of the Eastern Province, which is predominantly Tamil. She studied in the Faculty of Management in the English medium, and although she did not perceive conflicts between her and the Tamil students, she said she primarily had Sinhalese friends. Furthermore, even though she could understand Tamil, a latent ability, she felt no incentive to learn to speak or write because of the stigma in her own family against the Tamil language.

The most interesting aspect of these divisions at all universities, however, is that many students either did not feel bothered by them in the same way expressed by professors, or they did not consider them to be notable divisions. This was especially apparent in the cohort of Sinhalese students that were interviewed, as only a few acknowledged any divisions or

difficulties communicating between the two language groups. This, of course, is undoubtedly attributable to the lack of need or desire of the Sinhala-speaking students to acquire another language, or to have to be concerned with the inaccessibility of their own mother tongue. Tamil and Muslim students tended to acknowledge the division, but only expressed complaints if they had difficulty accessing services specifically because of their linguistic abilities. Overall, students did not perceive conflicts in communication due to the differences in national language because, as they argued, they would be much more likely to communicate with their colleagues in English than to use a national language to do so. As related to the timeline of implementation of the second national language policies, the students currently pursuing their tertiary education would not have been as likely to have attended schools that emphasized serious studies of the second national language; thus, they would be more likely to use English as a means of communicating with others who did not speak their national language if such communication were at all required.

Despite these realities of division on campuses and the lack of effective second national language education, many interviewed disagreed with the government's requirement to learn a second national language. Instead, many believed that the ability for students to study in their mother tongue was oftentimes cited as an important right that must be honored and that the learning of a second national language would prove too challenging, outweighing any potential benefit. The reality of this support of mother tongue learning in practice, however, as observed in the analysis of UGC admission statistics, is that students are possibly restricted due to pursuing primary and secondary educations in a certain mother tongue. When they apply for tertiary education, they must define either their university or field of study based on their preferred language learning medium. They are required to either attend universities where they are able to

pursue their desired course of study in the medium of their first language, or they are placed in universities that define their course of study because of the variable availability of the language mediums offered in each department.

In the case of university admission in Sri Lanka, the failure of the different legislation and government policies to address the inequalities of the admissions process to the two elite institutions, University of Colombo and University of Peradeniya, is evident. Furthermore, at the University of Jaffna, the dominance of Tamil students mirrors the dominance of the Sinhalese students at the two other universities. Although due to the GoSL's policies, by 2015 the overall percentages of students by ethnolinguistic group admitted to universities across the country are proportionally representative, the disproportionately low numbers of Tamil students admitted to the elite institutions of University of Colombo and University of Peradeniya resulted in adverse impact to the Tamil population, even as these youths experienced increased admissions at other universities. If the policies had been effective, the mobility of Tamil youths, their possible areas of study, and their employment opportunities, would have been greater throughout the past 40 years. Instead, the admissions to the universities, as controlled by the UGC and the GoSL, enforce controlled segregation, both in terms of educational and future economic opportunity. The formalized equality performed by the admissions process of the University Grants Commission masked the actual reality of equality between the different ethnolinguistic groups, and thus, education policy reforms failed to have a positive impact on resolving the grievances of the Tamil population and the conflict between groups.

CHAPTER 3: Public Opinions on the Silence of All Policies

As examined in the prior chapters, the state traditions and language regimes of Sri Lanka have influenced inter-ethnolinguistic group relations and continue to structure the daily lives of Sri Lankans, especially in the educational and economic spheres. Analyses of public opinion surveys and *in situ*, in-person interviews with Sri Lankan politicians, civil servants, academics, and ordinary citizens crystallizes the actual impact of post-Independence government policies on Sri Lankan society; although over the 70-year period these policies might have alleviated some of the entrenched inter-ethnolinguistic conflict, the Tamil-speaking population continues to be constrained in linguistic opportunities, both educationally and economically.

Between Independence and the present, the Sri Lankan government has implemented various policies, rewritten and revised the Constitution and other legislation, and created new institutional structures all related to the question of language in the nation. Public opinion and the perception of the national government has evolved following implementation of these ethnolinguistic and education-related policies. Furthermore, the end of the war in 2009 marked a shift in the dynamics of the country, challenging first the Mahinda Rajapaksa government and presently the Maithripala Sirisena government to respond to international pressures for reconstruction of Sri Lanka and reconciliation between the ethnolinguistic groups.

In this study, the outcomes of these policies are considered in the context of public opinion surveys and interviews with politicians, public servants (including the military), academics, university students and other citizens. The surveys examined are the Asian Barometer's State of Democracy in South Asia Survey, conducted in 2005 and 2013, and the Asia Foundation's National Values Survey, conducted in 2011. The questions considered are: 1) public trust; 2) discussion of and interest in politics; and, 3) equality of different ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious groups. As a means to explain these trends and to gain further insight on

current dynamics in the nation, personal interviews conducted in 2017 - 2018 are analyzed. As a case study, the question of inter-ethnolinguistic group dynamics in the universities is examined, with consideration of their potential for representation of the dynamics in Sri Lanka as a whole.

CHAPTER 3A: State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA), 2005 and 2013

The State of Democracy in South Asia survey was executed in Sri Lanka in 2005 and then again in 2013. The first wave, completed in 2005¹, occurred four years before the end of the nation's civil war, while the second wave, in 2013², was completed four years afterwards. The sandwiching of the end of the war between the completion of each of these two surveys provides significant perspective on the impact of, and the status of relations between ethnic groups in the nation pre- and post-, conflict. Although both waves of the survey contained questions predominantly focused on the state of democracy in the nation, many of the questions express trends in the population related to perceptions of the government, civil society participation, and human rights.

The surveys were analyzed based on the overall trends in responses from the entire population of Sri Lanka, but in an attempt to understand the difference of opinions between the different ethnolinguistic groups, the responses were later analyzed based on lines of religious affiliation. Due to the outcomes of the survey, the most accurate divisions of persons were based on religious affiliation due to apparent collection error³ related to the question of mother tongue and languages spoken. The 2005 survey interviewed 2,243 persons, of whom 71% were Buddhist, 12% were Hindu, 10% were Muslim, and the remaining 6% were Christian. The 2013 survey recorded answers from 1,703 persons, of whom 51% were Buddhist, 25% were Hindu, 15% were Muslim, and the remaining 8% were Christian. For the purposes of this thesis, the

¹ "South Asian Barometer Survey, Wave 1," in *The State of Democratic Governance in Asia*, ed. Asian Barometer (2005).

² "South Asian Barometer Survey, Wave 2," in *The State of Democratic Governance in Asia*, ed. Asian Barometer (2013).

³ Neither codebook for the SDSA Wave 1 nor Wave 2 indicated "Sinhala" as a possible mother tongue or primary languages. This was quite odd considering Sri Lanka was one of the five and six countries surveyed in 2005 and 2013, respectively. Unfortunately, this omission of Sinhala caused many respondents to indicate "other" in their identification of their mother tongue or primary language and thus, for the purposes of this study, language could not be used as a case for analysis in the groupings of respondents.

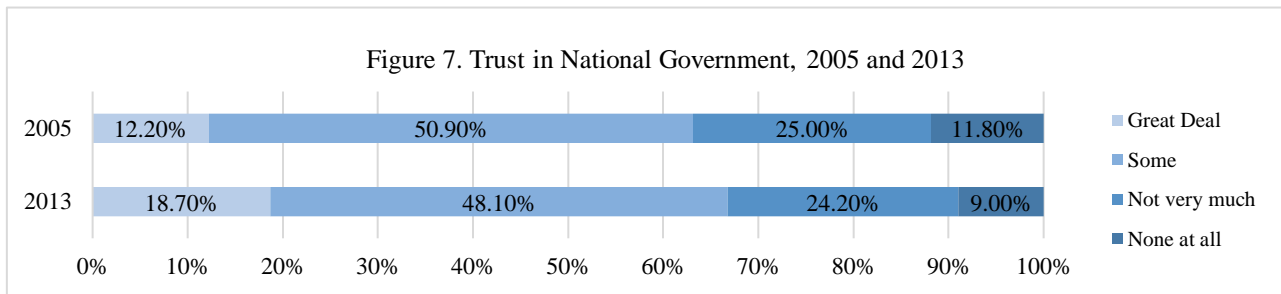
analyses of the differences between the isolated religious groups solely focuses on the Buddhist and Hindu responses. These groups represent the vast majority of the ethnolinguistic division in the nation. Furthermore, because the Muslim and Christian religious groups have members who speak both Tamil and Sinhala, especially depending on their home regions, these groupings are excluded due to the inability to isolate the religious affiliations from the mother tongues.

Although the SDSA surveys are differently representative based on religious affiliation from 2005 to 2013, an analysis of both of them as a collection of overall responses, and through isolated responses from the Buddhist and Hindu groups, provides for an understanding of the opinions in the nation from 2005 to 2013.

In an evaluation of the citizenry's state of trust of the GoSL, R. Ramesh at the University of Peradeniya noted, "Citizen trust in public institutions is an indication of successful governance as it has often been viewed as an important element of good governance. Citizen distrust in government and its institutions considerably affects the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies and their implementation."⁴ Such evaluation of citizens' trust of the government is critical to understanding not only the perceived abilities of government institutions but also, to recognizing where different ethnolinguistic groups consider their positionality in relation to the structure of the government. Both waves of the SDSA addressed the question of trust in the central government, local governments, and Parliament. The respondents were asked, "How much trust [do] you have" in the "Central/National government," "Local government," and "Parliament," among other various institutions of the state.

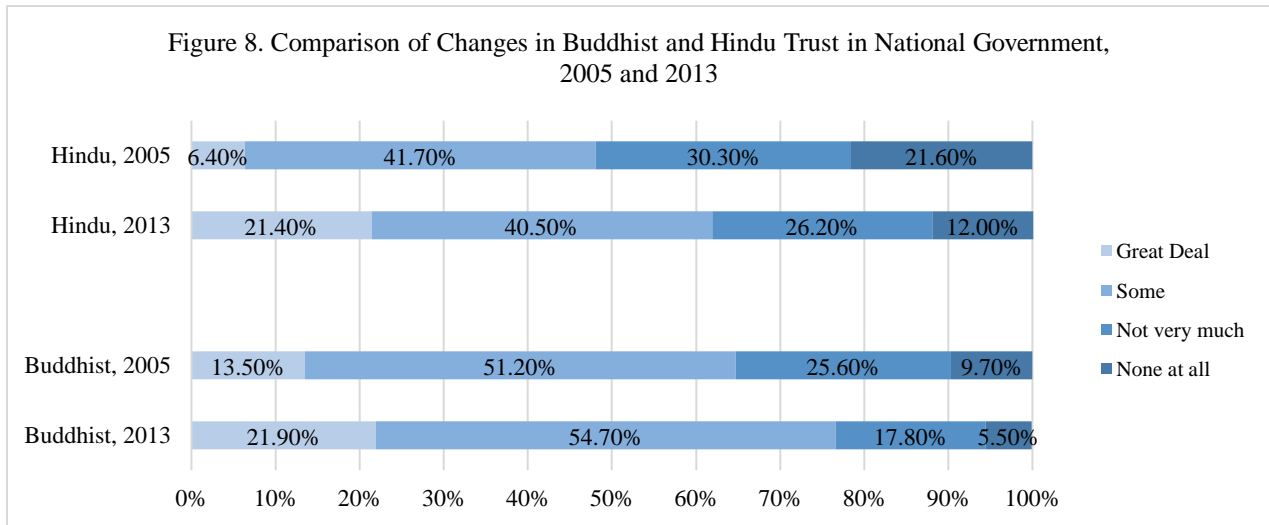
⁴ R. Ramesh, "Does Trust Matter? An Inquiry on Citizens' Trust in Public Institutions of Sri Lanka," *Millennial Asia* 8, no. 2 (2017): 123.

Throughout the country, the results from the 2005 and 2013 surveys indicated an overall increase in trust of the national government over the time period. The results from 2005 show that out of the 2,243 respondents surveyed, approximately 12.2% had a “great deal” of trust in the national government while 50.90% had only “some” and 36.80% had “not very much” or “none at all.” By the second wave conducted in 2013, out of the 1,703 surveyed, 18.70% had a “great deal” of trust in the Central/National government, 48.10% had “some” and 33.20% had “not very much” or “none at all.”



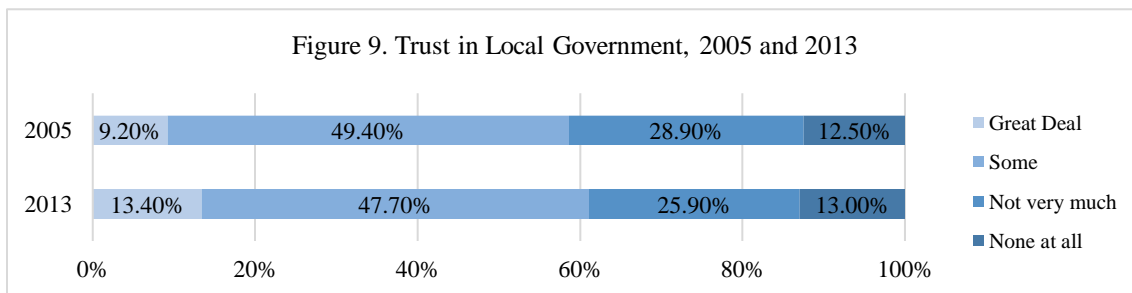
Among all governmental institutions in Sri Lanka, the national government structure continues to be responsible for all education and language-based policies that are implemented throughout the nation. As noted in the two prior chapters, especially in cases ranging from the OLA to the 1978 Constitution, the policies proposed and implemented by the national government offices and ministries caused conflicts, as well as served as the bases of the GoSL’s hopes for reconciliatory changes, between the ethnolinguistic groups. The overall increase in trust of the national government by Sri Lankans was approximately 4%, indicating that between 2013 and 2005, the numbers of Sri Lankans who held a “great deal” or “some” trust in the national government rose as the civil war ended and the institutional structures of the government discontinued their counterinsurgency initiatives against the Tamil populations of the North and the East.

As has been examined, however, the impact of the policies on the Sinhala and Tamil groups was variable, especially in the realms of education and economic opportunity. Specific investigation into the isolated religious groups’ trust in the national government indicates that overall, both in 2005 and 2013, the Buddhist (Sinhala) population held much greater trust than the Hindu (Tamil) group. Although the increase in trust was higher for the Hindu group between the two survey years (13.8%), the Buddhist population continued to indicate higher levels of trust in the national government overall. These trends match with the expectations that due to the history and the composition of the national government during 2005 and 2013, and the legacy of the civil war, the Hindu population would be less inclined to trust the national government and its institutions.



Responses to the questions of trust in the local government indicated decreased variability between the two survey years. The results from 2005 indicated that 9.20% of Sri Lankans had a “great deal” of trust in their local government, while 49.40% had “some,” and 41.40% had “not very much” or “none at all.” The second wave in 2013 indicated that 13.40% of Sri Lankans had a “great deal” of trust, 47.70% had “some,” and 38.90% had “not very much” or “none at all” for their local government. The changes between these two surveys indicated only

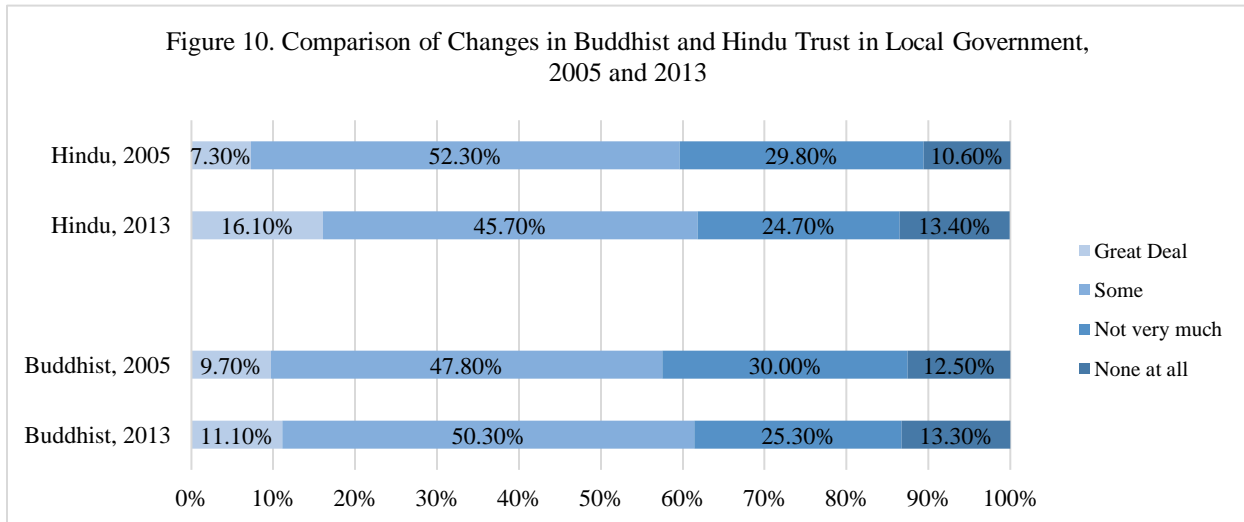
an increase of approximately 2% for those with a “great deal” or “some” trust in the local governments. While the overall national leaderships structures changed between 2005 and 2013, the local governments within all provinces tended to remain strongly affiliated with the majority population. For example, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, even during the period of continued warfare, the civil administration and services almost always were governed by Tamil politicians, civil servants, and staff persons.⁵ Thus, this continuation of leadership in the local governments is likely to have contributed to the fairly stable levels of trust in the comparison of responses from 2005 to 2013. Due to this, we observe an expected small increase of approximately 2% more respondents indicated they held a “great deal” or “some” trust in the local governments.



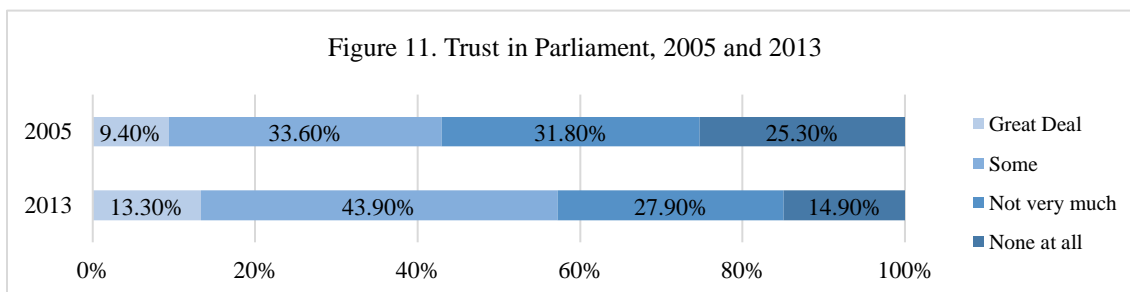
The question of trust in the local government among the isolated Buddhist and Hindu religious groups indicates the continued support that each population holds for the local institutions and their abilities to regionally support the respective groups. In contrast to the responses to trust in the national government, the survey respondents indicated almost comparable trust in the local governments between the Hindu and Buddhist populations. Furthermore, between 2005 and 2013, the trust in local government held by the Hindu and Buddhist respondents increased approximately 2.2% and 3.9%, respectively. These increases

⁵ Mampilly, 112.

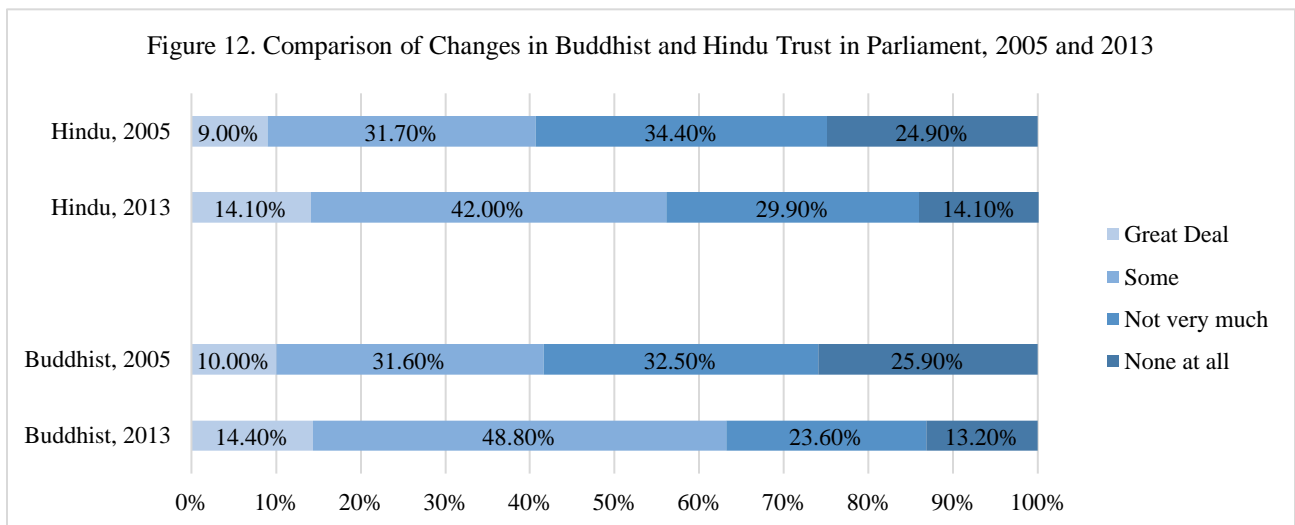
seem to indicate that throughout the eight years between the surveys, the capacities and public perception of the local government institutions remained relatively consistent.



Whereas the actions of the local government and its institutions do not affect the greater population of Sri Lanka either in policy or enforcement, Sri Lanka’s Parliament serves the entire nation and carries out almost all of the legislative duties of the country. The 2005 survey, in response to the question of trust in the Parliament, indicated that 9.40% of Sri Lankans had a “great deal,” 33.60% had “some,” and 57.10% had “not very much” or no trust at all in the Parliament. The 2013 survey indicated that 13.30% of Sri Lankans had a “great deal” of and 43.90% had “some” trust in the Parliament while 42.80% had “not very much” or “none at all.” The percentage of those with a “great deal” or “some” trust in the Parliament increased by approximately 14% between 2005 and 2013.



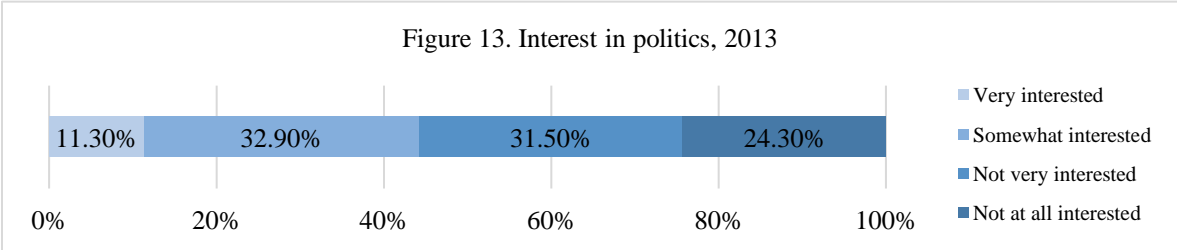
Given that Parliament is the major legislative body in the nation, the overall increase in trust of it by both the Hindu and Buddhist populations is significant. This indicates the citizenry's support of the legislative changes proposed and implemented in the years leading immediately up to the end of the war and in the four years immediately following it. Examining the levels of trust in Parliament further by religious groups, however, indicates that the trust in the Parliament held by the Buddhist population increased more than that of the Hindu population. While the increase in the Hindu population was approximately 15.4%, that of the Buddhist population was approximately 21.6%. In addition, the overall level of trust in the Buddhist population of Parliament as compared to the Hindu population is greater. This difference in increase indicates the potential that the Tamil population still holds distrust for the Parliament due to its perceived inability to implement effective legislation to aid the Tamil population.



In all three of the above categories surveyed by the SDSA, the levels of trust in the central/national government, local government, and Parliament increased. The overall increase of the citizenry's affirmations of trust in all three of these governmental institutions indicates the greater trend of a gain of trust in the overall governmental structure of Sri Lanka. The breakdown

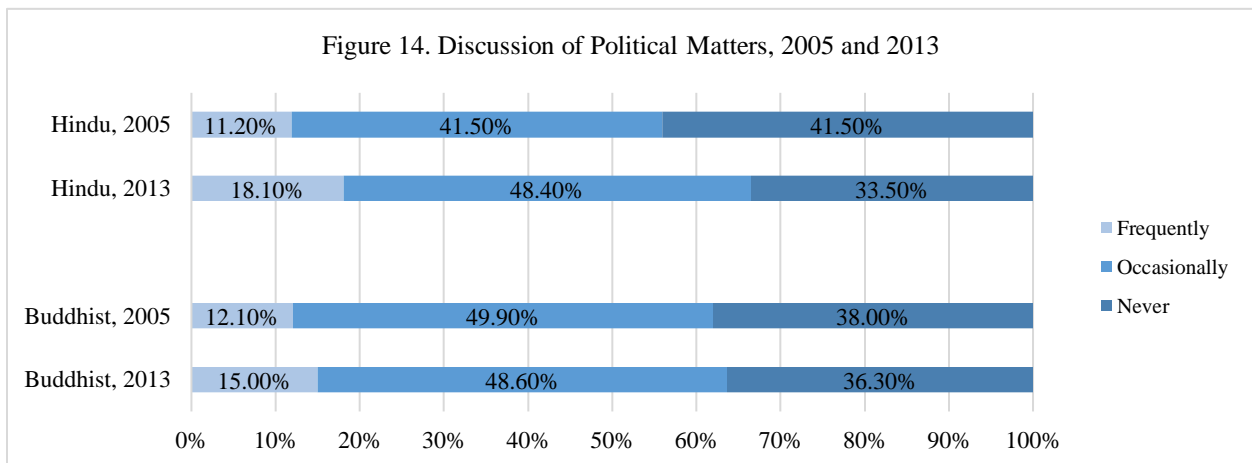
by religious affiliation, however, demonstrates that even if the Tamil-speaking Hindu population’s trust for the government and its institutions has increased over the years, it still does not demonstrate as high of levels of trust in the government as the Sinhala-speaking Buddhist population’s. Further examination of Hindu and Buddhist public opinions must be considered in the context of the SDSA surveys. As is explored later through the examination of commentary by academics, politicians, and civil servants, the policies proposed by the national and local governments as well as Parliament to both resolve the thirty-year ethnolinguistic conflict and address the question of linguistic division in the nation are oftentimes not considered to be effectively implemented, perceptions which could work to explain the trends of trust indicated by the surveys.

Beyond the question of trust in government, the two waves of the SDSA survey indicated other opinions of Sri Lankans regarding questions of politics and the state. The second wave of the survey in 2013 prompted persons to indicate their general interests in politics. The survey asked, “How interested would you say you are in politics – very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?” The respondents indicated that only 44.2% of Sri Lankans were “very interested” or “somewhat interested,” whereas 55.8% were “not very interested” or “not at all interested” in politics. Between the two religious groups, no significant differences in the indicated interests in politics were apparent, signifying that neither group seemed more interested (or disinterested) than the other in the question of political matters.



Despite the overall disinterest indicated in the 2013 survey, the percentage of respondents who indicated they discuss politics with family members or friends increased from 2005. In 2005, only 13.20% of Sri Lankans “frequently,” and 47.50% “occasionally,” discussed political matters with family members or friends; however, by 2013, the survey’s respondents indicated that 16.40%, and 49.80%, respectively discussed political matters “frequently” and “occasionally”.

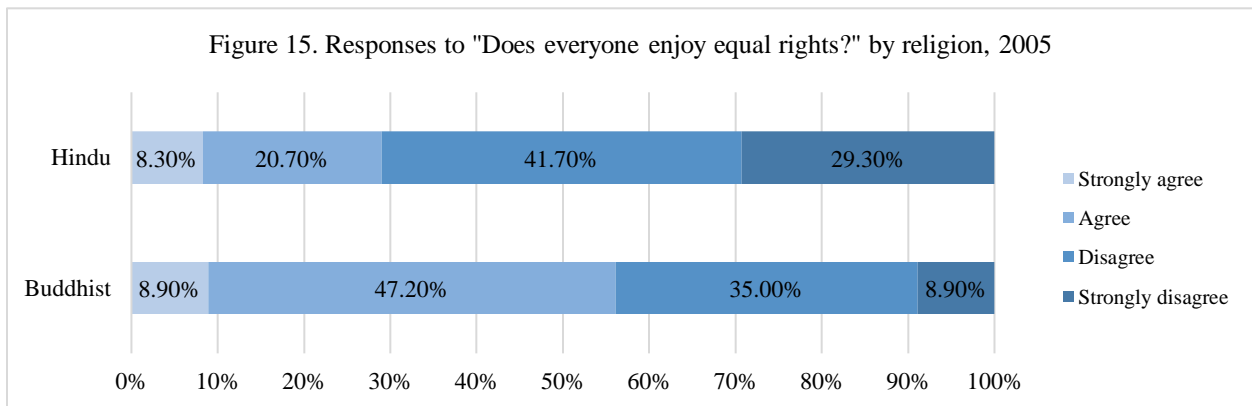
Within the Hindu and Buddhist religious groups, however, the Hindu group presented a higher increase in the discussion of political matters as compared to the Buddhist respondents. From 2005 to 2013, the Hindu group experienced an increase of 8% of people indicating frequent or occasional discussion of political matters, whereas in the Buddhist group, there was an increase of only 1.7% of people indicating frequent or occasional discussion of political matters.



After the war, it is likely that Hindu respondents felt increasingly comfortable indicating that they discussed political matters, especially as they faced fewer threats from the Sinhalese Buddhist population, government, and military. In addition, the overall increase in the discussion of political matters in spite of the decrease in interest could potentially correspond to the

increasing importance of political institutions in Sri Lanka, especially in relation to the end of the war and the beginning of the reconstruction process post-2009.

Perhaps the most compelling question asked in 2005 was that of the perception of different group’s accessibility of equal rights. Respondents were prompted to answer the question, “Does everyone enjoy equal rights?” The discrepancies between the responses of the Hindu and Buddhist groups is worth examining as an example of the perceptions of rights for both groups. The Hindu group indicated that only 29% of the population “strongly agree” or “agree” that everyone enjoys equal rights in Sri Lanka, while greater than the majority (56.10%) of Buddhists responded “strongly agree” or “agree.” These perceptions expressed can serve in part to explain how, in a country with a history of ethnolinguistic conflict based on the lines of grievances by minority groups, the Sinhalese as the majority ethnolinguistic group, can continue to perpetuate the inequalities even without even fully realizing their actions.



The results of the SDSA surveys in 2005 and 2013 examined above indicate the Sri Lankan community’s gain of trust and interest in the affairs of the government and its institutions, a trend that implies an increasingly positive perception of the government and its actions taken in the 8 years between the two waves of the survey. As noted, however, the Buddhist population still continues to be more trusting of the national government and its

institutions than the Hindu population while both populations continue to place great trust in their local government institutions. In his assessment of the importance of trust of public institutions in Sri Lanka, R. Ramesh, political scientist at the University of Peradeniya, argues, “The Sri Lankan case shows that in ethnically diverse societies, building citizens’ trust in public institutions (institutional trust) continues to be a challenge due to ethnic, religious, linguistic and political divisions.”⁶ The results of the SDSA surveys collected in 2005 and 2013 demonstrate that the ethnolinguistic differences continue to be expressed as tensions in the political and social spheres of the nation. These trends will be important to consider in the context of the following analyses of the National Values Survey of 2011 and interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018, especially as the grievances of the Tamil community continue to affect the ethnolinguistic community’s day-to-day realities.

⁶ Ramesh, 142.

CHAPTER 3B: National Values Survey, 2011

Analysis of the National Values Survey provides additional data on public opinion in Sri Lanka in the immediate years post-conflict. In 2011, the Asian Foundation conducted a survey to “gain a more grounded understanding of people’s perceptions of religious beliefs and practices, influence of religious leaders, inter-religious relations, and tolerance for religious expression.”¹ The survey indicates the opinions of Sri Lankans on the basis of religion, distinguishing between Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Catholic populations in the responses. The significance in these results, however, to the study of the language policies and the politics of language in Sri Lanka is due to the relationship between language and religion in the nation. As established in an earlier chapter, for the Buddhist population, Sinhalese is almost always the primary national language used, although Buddhists living in city-centers like Colombo or Kandy occasionally will learn English first. The Hindu population, which includes the Sri Lankan Tamils from the Northern and Eastern regions and the Indian Tamils, who live predominantly in the mountainous central region, uses Tamil as the primary national language. The Muslim population predominantly speaks Tamil, although some living in the Sinhalese-majority regions also will speak Sinhalese fluently.

To gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between ethnicity, language and religion, consider the results of the 2001 Census, the last complete census taken by the Sri Lankan government. The literacy rates in Sinhala, Tamil, and English of the major ethnic groups are:

¹ "National Values Survey, Sri Lanka 2011," (Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Asia Foundation), 1.

Table 10. Literacy rates in Sinhala, Tamil and English of major ethnic groups, 2001²

Ethnic group	Language		
	Sinhala	Tamil	English
Sinhalese	92.3% (12,932,830)	1.8% (252,211)	16.2% (2,269,901)
Sri Lankan Tamil	31.4% (701,357)	78.5% (1,753,395)	24.1% (538,303)
Indian Tamil	15.7% (134,871)	72.7% (624,531)	11.0% (94,495)
Sri Lankan Muslim	38.5% (601,335)	84.2% (1,315,128)	24.0% (374,858)

When considering the size of the religious and ethnolinguistic groups in the nation, it is apparent from these statistics that the sheer size of the Sinhalese-speaking population considerably outnumbers that of the Tamil. As introduced through de Swaan and Anderson’s analyses of the inherent values of languages and the likelihood of language learning, the Tamil population undoubtedly has a significantly higher advantage to learning Sinhala than vice versa. These dynamics, due to the size of linguistic population, color the experiences of all ethnolinguistic groups, especially as the dynamics continue to perpetuate the advantages for the Sinhalese-speaking population. Furthermore, from these numbers, we observe that the English-speaking populations from all ethnic groups are not significantly high enough to merit English’s place as a sufficient link-language to connect the Sinhalese- and Tamil-speaking populations, a phenomenon that is explored subsequently in interviews. In Sri Lanka, the sizes of the linguistic populations, when combined with the inherent religious divisions between the Buddhist, Tamil, Muslim, and Christian groups, contribute to the perceptions of group-worth and inter-ethnolinguistic dynamics in the country.

The National Values Survey was conducted in 2011 to study these distinct ethnolinguistic dynamics of the nation. Among the questions asked of the survey’s respondents, the most

² Marie Perera, "Building Bridges: National Integration through the Teaching of the Second National Language," in *Language and Social Cohesion in the Developing World*, ed. Hywel Coleman (Colombo, Sri Lanka: British Council and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2015).

compelling were those regarding the perception of Sri Lanka's general development. The respondents were asked if they believed the nation to be "moving" in the "right" or "wrong" direction. The study noted that those who believed the nation to be moving in the "right" direction cited infrastructure improvements and the end of the war as positive aspects of government action. On the other hand, however, those who believed that the country was moving in the "wrong" direction cited the increasing prices of goods, corruption, and bribery as the continued and increasingly prevalent matters of the nation. Although the majority of all religious groups believed that the nation was moving in the "right" direction, the breakdown of those who believed that it was moving in the "wrong" direction skewed disproportionately to the Hindu and Muslim populations. The report observed, "Nearly twice as many Muslims (21%) and Hindus (23%) as Buddhists (12%) believe the country is moving in the wrong direction."³

Although many respondents cited the end of the war as one of the reasons the nation was moving in the "right" direction, only 32% of all Sri Lankans believed that the end of the war brought an end to the ethnic conflict in the country. Within the Hindu group of respondents, however, only 21% believed the ethnic conflict was ended by the end of the war, whereas 40% believed it only has reduced the conflict, 16% that it has not changed any ethnic conflict, and 6% that it has worsened the ethnic conflict. The Buddhist responses indicated the strongest belief that the end of the war brought either a complete end to the ethnic conflict (34%) or a reduction of the conflict (57%).⁴

The discrepancies in beliefs between the Buddhist and the religious minority groups are increasingly apparent through examination of questions specifically focused on minority rights in the nation. The responses from the minority religious groups expressed that minorities "believe

³ "National Values Survey, Sri Lanka 2011," 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

that protection of the rights of their respective groups have improved at least to some degree over the last five years;” however, Buddhists are more likely to reference and believe these improvements have been substantial.⁵ Furthermore, ethnically- and religiously-inspired violence is cited significantly more by Hindus, Muslims, and Catholics, than by Buddhists.⁶ Many respondents within the minority religious groups also believe that these acts of violence have increased, while the protection of the rights of ethnic and religious groups has decreased in the five years before the survey was conducted. Approximately 51% of the Hindu respondents indicated that the protections are either “much better now” or “somewhat better now,” whereas 26% that protections are “unchanged,” 8% that they were “somewhat worse,” and 4% that they were “much worse.” In addition, of the Muslim respondents, 25% believed that the protections are either “unchanged,” or have become “somewhat worse.”⁷

The trends observed in the National Values Survey indicate that as a group, the Sinhalese Buddhists are more likely to believe that the Sri Lankan government has made significant, effective changes since the end of the conflict. The Tamil Hindus and Muslim ethnoreligious groups, however, are not as confident that there has been an actual cessation of the conflict, let alone animosity between and among all ethnic groups in the nation. Whereas the Sinhalese Buddhists believe that the end of the conflict simultaneously alleviated tensions between the ethnic groups along with the government’s provision of more rights to the nation’s minority groups, the Tamil Hindus and Muslims, a sizable minority, do not perceive these same positive changes. The outcomes of both the State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA) survey and the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ Ibid., 20.

National Value Survey indicate that grievances continue to affect primarily the Tamil ethnolinguistic and religious communities, even post-conflict.

CHAPTER 3C: Interviews

The analyses of the ongoing ethnolinguistic divisions in relation to the Sri Lankan government, its institutions, and its policies were conducted both quantitatively through the above surveys, and qualitatively through interviews with a diverse range of representatives. From the analyses of the SDSA and World Values surveys in comparison to the individual interviews, it is apparent that while aspects of trust in the government have increased, individual opinion from politicians, academics, community leaders, and citizens of the government's actions in relation to rights and civil protections over the past 15 years remains overall negative, especially among the minority communities. A greater understanding of the connection of these trends to the question of language and education policies must be examined through perceptions of the policies and the state of inter-linguistic group relations on the island. Although legislative changes were made to the national language policies throughout the war – and even post-conflict – especially in the realm of language as it relates to educational opportunities, it is important to examine the actual impact of these revised policies on public opinion and community relations. An analysis of individual interviews with politicians, civil servants, academics, and current university students, as well as other citizens provides such a lens for consideration.

The interviewees were prompted with multiple questions about various topics related to the government and its policies, the university system of admissions and inter-group relations in the universities, and the perceived outcomes of the policies. Some of the questions asked specifically about the dynamics of the universities, and others prompted respondents to reflect on how the ethnolinguistic divisions on campuses reflect the greater Sri Lankan society. In addition, questions focused directly on specific policies and government-implemented changes, both in the university system and in the nation as a whole, and how these potentially impacted ethnolinguistic relationships post-conflict. More often than not, I found that people were

pessimistic about the potential of bridging the ethnolinguistic divide with the current government policies today. As would be expected, academics from all three universities, civil servants, and politically active persons from the Northern Province were more inclined to criticize the government and its policies than were politicians and public administrators from Colombo and the Central Province. Almost all persons interviewed, save for the few whose nature of employment seemed most connected to the national language policies and their implementation, noted that there continue to be insufficient resources, both human and infrastructural, for the implementation of the second national language initiatives or for the effective use of English as a “link” language in the country.

The Policies

When the impacts of the linguistic policy changes to the University system are examined, the perceptions of the policies themselves are also an important consideration. The 1956 One Language Act (“OLA”) was almost always the first policy referenced by interviewees when discussing linguistic division in the nation. In an interview of four leaders of Tamil cultural protection movements in Jaffna, Suveeharan Nisshanthan, Jeyaratram Janarathanan, S. Gufanthan, and T. Vijayasangar argued that the OLA was the “first time they have touched Tamil language.”¹ A number of interviewees argued that after the OLA, the effective prohibition of Tamil-speakers from employment in the civil service was an obvious example of the discrimination and disenfranchisement that Tamils faced due to this significant and wide-reaching change to the language laws. Dewasiri argued that the OLA was also one of the first structural changes that demonstrated the initially subtle bias in favor of the Sinhalese and the “true ethnicization” of the state.

¹ Suveeharan Nisshanthan, Jeyaratram Janarathanan, S. Gufanthan, T. Vijayasangar, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

Many also credit the OLA as the first in a series of changes that permanently and adversely affected the language learning aspects of the education system. Interestingly, K.T. Rajasingham, a journalist from the Northern Province, noted that in his experience before 1956, all schools in the North offered Sinhala language as a subject to study but post-1956, all schools in the North moved to stop teaching Sinhala and English completely.² To him and others who referenced this shift, it was both a pulling away from the dominance of British rule and an early defense of the emerging Tamil nationalism in response to the state's preferential placement of Sinhalese. Whereas the Tamil case initially demonstrated that when the group was not forced to learn Sinhala, the language spread by "stealth" throughout the pre-Independence period because of economic incentives, once the Sinhalese-majority Independence government began enforcing the language policies, the Tamil community withdrew from the practices of learning Sinhala. Rajan Hoole, former professor at the University of Jaffna and a leader of the University Teachers for Human Rights movement throughout the war, echoed these sentiments and argued that after the enactment of the OLA, Tamils no longer had desire for the deliberate learning of Sinhala. He believes, "The failure to rectify [the Act] is largely in the government...but they are not doing it."³ These trends in the Tamil population towards a resistance of the expression of Sinhalese nationalism can be explained by David Laitin's theory of "reactive nationalism" in minority groups. Laitin argues that regional groups may "seize the opportunity to demand that administration and education be conducted in the regional language. Of course, given the power and resources of the center, it would be madness to abjure from learning the ruler's preferred language, but regional elites may come to prefer linguistic resistance to linguistic domination."⁴

² K.T. Rajasingham, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

³ Rajan Hoole, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

⁴ David D. Laitin, "Language Games," *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 3 (1988).

Thus, the GoSL's enforcement of the acquisition and usage of Sinhala in the Tamil regions provoked reactive nationalism within the Tamil minority group, creating further division between the two ethnolinguistic groups.

The OLA undeniably had the greatest impact of any post-Independence policy and legislative change related to language usage in the nation; it is credited with creating the direct link between ethnic and linguistic tensions in Sri Lanka. The OLA also inspired a new wave of nationalism that is considered to have been supported by the Sinhalese-majority government since 1956. Jayadeva Uyangoda, political scientist and former professor at the University of Colombo, argues, "The making of Sinhala, the language of the majority community, the official language in 1956 was the most important public policy measure initiated by the [*Mahajana Eksath Peramuna*] government in implementing the radical Sinhalese nationalist agenda."⁵ In an interview with Uyangoda, he admitted that although the government attempted to counteract OLA's broad impact with further legislation like that of 1958 Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, 1972 and 1978 Constitutions, and the 1987 Indo Lanka Accord, the nationalist sentiments validated and supported by the OLA created the basis of the continued divisions and tensions today surrounding the ethnolinguistic question.⁶

The 1987 Indo Lanka Accord was initially considered by the government and the international community to bring an end to the conflicts of language by making Tamil an official language, and creating the provincial councils as institutions of the devolution of power in the country. In reality, however, many perceived the 1987 Accord to only create further conflict, especially when the LTTE and other Tamil groups decided to continue the armed struggle for

⁵ Jayadeva Uyangoda, ed. *State Reform in Sri Lanka: Issues, Directions and Perspectives* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists' Association, 2013), 39.

⁶ interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

independence. Due to the fact that there were no education reforms proposed with the 1987 Accord, among those interviewed, many did not believe that the legislative and administrative changes proposed or implemented actually created lasting change. Rajiva Wijesinha, Chairman of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission and former Secretary-General of the Sri Lankan Government Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, argued that the reforms of the 1987 Accord had no actual impact on the nation's language question. Many others interviewed agreed with Wijesinha's sentiments, citing the lack of a direct link between the 1987 Accord and any attempt to repair the relationship between the Tamil and Sinhala language communities.

In the context of the politics of language, Stephen May argues, "...ethnolinguistic vitality is based on a combination of the following components: economic status, self-perceived social status, sociohistorical factors and demographic factors (including institutional support)."⁷ By failing to implement education reforms in conjunction with the 1987 Accord, the GoSL allowed for the use of the Tamil language but did not require the study of language amongst the greater population. Thus, the decline of Tamil among the Sinhalese population was ensured. Although the recognition of Tamil as a national language was considered a victory by the international community and the majority of the Tamil population, the economic status, self-perceived social status, sociohistorical factors and demographic factors of the Tamil ethnolinguistic group were all challenged by the GoSL's failure to support the status of Tamil as an official language. Even if the government had been attempting to promote Tamil as an official language of the nation, there were no proposals for the reasonable bilingualism of future Sri Lankans.⁸

⁷ May, 161.

⁸ Rajiva Wijesinha, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

In 2007, circulars No. 03/2007 and 07/2007 mandated allotment payment incentives for public service officers hired before 2007 who had acquired a second official language, and the requirement of the acquisition of a second official language within five years for those who were hired after 2007, respectively. Many of the public servants who were interviewed for the instant study were eager to speak about these policy changes implemented under the guidance of the Official Language Policy.

Currently, the national competitive examination to qualify for public sector employment is administered in both languages, and one objective of the two 2007 circulars was to improve these opportunities for all language communities. Chandana Kumarasinghe, Director at the Ministry of Public Administration and Management and Member of the Board of the National Institute of Language Education and Training, argued that with these two circulars, there were officially no barriers for Tamil-speaking persons to enter public service in any sector.⁹

Wijesinha, however, countered this claim, by arguing that government employment was still limited for the Tamil-speaking population because certain departments in the national and even local government offices can only function in Sinhala by nature of their set-up and leadership. This disagreement appeared many times throughout the interviews. Many individuals struggled to crystallize the conundrum of the government's enactment of legislation and implementation of policies designed to reduce ethnolinguistic-based conflict and economic impediments, within the reality of the very nature and operation of the Sri Lankan government and its institutions, which seemingly continue to privilege Sinhala-speaking over Tamil-speaking employees. The dichotomy of perspective appeared to run along both ethnolinguistic and professional lines. For example, government representatives like Kumarasinghe, a Sinhalese man working in a position

⁹ Chandana Kumarasinghe, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

directly related to the national language implementation scheme, portrayed an employment process that is equitable and fair to all ethnolinguistic groups. In contrast, Wijesinha and academics voiced what they claimed to be “more realistic” views of the process of policy implementation, especially in relation to language and employment opportunity in the civil service; in their reality, the Sinhalese-majority continued to be privileged from a professional and economic opportunity perspective.

An examination of the actual perception of the implementation of these two circulars shows an almost-surprisingly high level of skepticism from the government employees who themselves are involved directly in the development and implementation of policy related to Sri Lanka’s official language question. In the Department of Official Languages, one of the high-level officials (who requested anonymity), believed that the government’s efforts to implement the Official Language Policy is “much appreciated,” but is not successful because people themselves are not willing to learn the other official language. Furthermore, the person argued, “It is unfair to press government officers to learn another language because it is difficult.”¹⁰ To have a government officer who holds significant status at the Official Language Commission argue that requiring persons to learn a second official language as an aspect of a job could be unfair due to difficulty is significant. This response demonstrates that even within the offices expected to address the question of the implementation of the Official Language Policy, there are people responsible for the implementation who do not fully believe in the viability of the government’s policies and actions on the subject.

¹⁰ “Anonymous” Department of Official Languages, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

The Tamil-Speaking Reality

In the Northern Province, the hard reality of the implementation of these circulars is increasingly apparent. Patrick Diraljan, Commissioner of the Local Government Office in the Northern Province, noted that in the Local Government Office, instead of using English as the “link language,” civil servants generally use Tamil when interacting with local persons but translate all communications to Sinhala for official contact with the central government.¹¹ Although on official terms, Diraljan would not disclose his personal opinions of these methods employed within his office and by the national government, he did cite the lack of sufficient translation services and the ongoing difficulties that even officials in the Northern Province face when attempting to communicate with the central government.

As an example of this difficulty in other regions that operate primarily in the Tamil-language, Gurukularajah, a former civil servant and political appointee to the Ministry of Education, noted that even in the current Ministry, almost all who are appointed and employed are only conversational – rather than fluent – in English; thus meetings, even if begun in English, will revert to Sinhala. When representatives from the local governments or Provincial Councils of the Northern and Eastern Provinces meet with the Ministry of Education or other offices in the central government, the tendency of these meetings to be conducted at least partly in Sinhala causes communication and participation difficulties. This indicates that not only are Tamils oftentimes excluded from selection to a Ministry appointment or the ability to serve in creating and implementing language policies, but also, they are still in practice excluded even in the meetings or planning sessions that they attend. As many who were interviewed expressed, this reality creates significant concerns that if the high-level officials and administrators cannot even communicate in a universal language or work in a language that all can functionally access, the

¹¹ Patrick Diraljan, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

lower-level offices will continue to operate outside of the regulations of the 2007 circulars. It also demonstrates the continuing, long-term impacts of adjusting the civil service institution to operate exclusively with Sinhalese employees as a result of the university admissions policies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Many argued that in reality, it is only those from the Tamil-speaking population who are learning to communicate in Sinhala due to the ineffectiveness of the government's policies and attempted implementation of the 2007 circulars, rather than Sinhala-speakers learning to communicate in Tamil. These observations signify that the policies that all persons should learn a second national language are failing to be implemented throughout the greater population. Whereas the national policies attempt to place equal responsibility on both linguistic populations to learn a second national language, the responsibility actually redounds to the minority language group, the Tamils. Ahilan Kadirgamar is a Tamil who has worked both in Jaffna and in Colombo as an activist and economic researcher. He believes that most Tamils learn Sinhala only for practical reasons due to the economic incentives and resulting benefits, but the change is not occurring fast enough nor is the Sinhala population facing the same pressures.¹² Arivagunrajaha Selva, an independent journalist who covered the conflict in the Northern Province during the civil war, and the ongoing development of the region since then, believes that despite the circulars, not only are the Sinhalese not incentivized to learn, but also the government does not actually promote learning of, Tamil.¹³ Selva, referencing the Sinhalese political leadership and civil servants, said, "These people, maybe they are not ready."

In addition to perceiving that they are carrying the burden of learning Sinhala without the Sinhalese having the corollary to learn Tamil, the Tamil-speaking interviewees provided many

¹² Kadirgamar.

¹³ Ariyagunrajaha Selva, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

examples of the adverse-impact on daily life of being predominantly Tamil-speaking in Sri Lanka, in spite of the various government policies. Accessing certain services proves challenging to Tamil-speaking persons throughout the island. For example, the court system in the Northern Province is mandated to operate in English but oftentimes, as Selva notes, those involved in the cases themselves cannot understand English. One professor at the University of Peradeniya recounted the story of his sister, who had been hospitalized in Colombo; their mother, who only spoke Tamil, could not communicate with the doctors or nurses, who only spoke Sinhala or English. Even in one of the major hospitals in Colombo, there translators were not available for the family and thus, they had to hire an outside translator.¹⁴ In another example, a Tamil-speaking woman who worked in public service for many years explained that many of the illustrative examples in textbooks used for schoolchildren of all ages depicted a Tamil person as causing a problem, a Sinhala person as being hurt by the problem, and a Muslim person as being the mediator of the problem.¹⁵ All of these examples are simple anecdotes of the perceived realities of Tamil-speaking persons in the Northern Province and throughout the nation; however, these underlying sentiments parallel themes addressed in all of the interviews with the Tamil-speaking cohort, as well as many even of the Sinhala-speaking cohort.

Ideals and the Future

Consideration of the responses to the SDSA and National Values surveys in the context of these responses provides an understanding of, and explanation for, the contrast between the surveys' evidencing an overall gain of interest and trust in the government between 2005 and 2013 and the individual opinions held by interviewees. Many of the most recent policy changes related to language, education, and national unity that have been examined, especially the 2007

¹⁴ Thiruvarangan.

¹⁵ Udhayani.

language requirements for public servants, the second national language education programs in primary and secondary schools, and the proposals from the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation, indicate that there should be noticeable, meaningful, and positive change. When prompted, however, almost all of the interviewees expressed skepticism, even if they were representing different sides of the ethnolinguistic divide. Many interviewed attributed the ongoing discrimination against, and the disadvantages to, the Tamil-speaking population to be the fault of a failure to implement the language policies. Ranga Kaluoampitiya, a professor of English at the University of Peradeniya, said, “In policy, we have wonderful things. But still, whether that has really translated on the ground-level is something to be seen.”¹⁶ In an interview in the Northern Province, Udhayani echoed these sentiments: “There are so many beautiful laws but the implement part is zero.” The frustrations with the ineffectiveness of the policies implemented in the past 70 years post-Independence were apparent in the interviews. As the government continues to expand its institutional capacity on the grounds of the implementation of the Official Language Policy, however, it does not appear that the actions being taken are entirely effective.

The growth of the availability of translation resources, however, is one aspect of implementation of the Official Language Policy that in recent years has shown effectiveness and ongoing promise. Often referenced in the interviews, the lack of translation services in all sectors of the nation, especially in the universities and branches of the government, creates obstacles to major and substantive communication between persons and departments, all of which effectively communicate in only one official language. In an attempt to address the increasing demands for translation services to meet the regulations established by the Official Language Policy and subsequent policies, though, the University Grants Commission has begun to establish

¹⁶ Ranga Kaluoampitiya, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

Translation Studies departments at various universities. Since the 2013/2014 academic calendar, the University of Kelaniya, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, and the University of Jaffna have all offered degrees in Translation Studies.¹⁷ Saminadan Wimal, Professor of Sinhala and Tamil Translation Studies at the University of Jaffna, is one of the only professors who teaches translation studies in the nation. He noted that overall, the implementation and effectiveness of language policy in the mother tongue and the second national language are very weak, especially in the primary school level.¹⁸ Although he teaches Sinhala to Tamil-speaking students at the University of Jaffna, he laments that university-level students and especially government-level administrators are not at the proper age to acquire a new language (i.e. they are too old). Wimal also believes that the government's work plan to teach Sinhala and Tamil as a second national language is "very insufficient" and "not very genuine." Instead, he proposes that education policy must be connected with language policy in the nation in order to create the basis for more effective implementation of the language policies and meaningful instruction of second national languages beginning in primary schools.

In an interview with a number of Professor Wimal's students, almost all expressed that they were pursuing a degree in Translation Studies because they perceived it as a means to gain government employment upon completion. All students cited interest in becoming Sinhala-to-Tamil translators either in the Northern Province or in Colombo. Although they were learning Sinhala, due to the nature of the Faculty of Arts at University of Jaffna offering instruction exclusively in the Tamil-medium, none of the Tamil-speaking students had significant connections to Sinhala-speaking students or communities. Without the ability for the Translation

¹⁷ "University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka Thirty-Sixth Annual Report," (Sri Lanka: University Grants Commission, 2014), 24.

¹⁸ Saminadan Wimal, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

Studies programs at these three universities to teach the second official language both to Sinhala-speaking and Tamil-speaking students alike, the department is limited in its potential impact in creating meaningful connections between students from different ethnolinguistic groups. Their future work in the field of translation, however, could potentially lead to better connections between Sinhala-speaking and Tamil-speaking persons on a micro-level, and will certainly improve the forms of communication between the government and all linguistic communities.

All interviewees were prompted to consider what, in their opinion, would constitute the ideal for language and ethnolinguistic relations in the nation. As addressed above, many mentioned that they were disappointed with the government's lack of initiative in implementing the policies proposed in the past 70 years. Chulananda Samaranayake, an English-to-Sinhala translator for the Ministry of Public Administration, argued, "Many things are to be done to establish Tamil as an Official Language of the nation but still the government fails to open avenues."¹⁹ Rajiva Wijesinha also acknowledged that the current government was failing to implement the language policies of the nation. He proposed that in order to accomplish his ideal—a nation where everyone is bilingual in two of the three national languages—schooling must be sectarian and universal.

Professors Wimal, Wanasinghe, and de Silva all provided answers to the question of the ideal for the nation, and called for connections between the different ethnolinguistic groups. Wimal argued that Sri Lankans must have a universal understanding of each other and a desire to learn. He warned, "Without that connection, our own life will be darkness." Wanasinghe believed that people should not be required to learn another language but they must at least work for "acceptance in every form," especially regarding others' rights to speak their mother tongue.

¹⁹ Samaranayake.

de Silva's proposal was simple: "Unity with diversity." Although possibly overly idealistic, these three professors' sentiments expressed the hopes of a few in the academic communities for the eventual healing of the ethnolinguistic divide.

The responses from the Tamil-speaking interviewees were harsher towards the government, and more hopeful of linguistic independence from Sinhala. The collective of Tamil community leaders argued that in order to gain full recognition of the Tamil-language and rights to language for the Tamil-speaking people, there must be "freedom from Sinhala politicians, not from Sinhala people." Ranga Kaluoampitiya argued, "Language is how one relates to the state" and thus, minority language groups must be recognized by the state in order to gain full rights and citizenship in Sri Lanka. Ahilan Kadirgamar extended the position of rights-tied-to-language by emphasizing the direct link of language to economic opportunity. As income inequality grows in the nation, he asserted, the government must not only be responsible for providing equal rights to use one's mother tongue but also, to related economic opportunities; to wit, the policies cannot divorce the ethnolinguistic question from the economic question.

In consideration of the results of the interviews regarding the education system, it is apparent that despite the supposed efforts to change linguistic and education policy, meaningful outcomes are not apparent. In the 30 years since the 1987 Indo-Lanka Peace Accord that established the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, and the 1987 Provincial Councils act, which made Sinhala and Tamil the Official Languages of the nation and created the Provincial Council system, respectively, the tertiary education system has become more linguistically polarized despite these legislative mandates and other linguistic liberalization policies. Students from different linguistic groups do not generally interact with each other outside the required classroom participation. Because the tertiary education system is almost entirely public

education, and the fifteen universities are directed by the national government, the system serves as an example both of how government policies have challenged linguistic connection in the nation and how these supposedly liberalizing policies have changed the linguistic connections between communities in the nation.

In his book on the relationship between the government and the ongoing ethnolinguistic conflict in Sri Lanka post-war, M. Somasundram argued, “There is no single factor or one single ‘truth’ which explains this conflict. There is also no given sequence of policy changes in order to resolve the ethnic conflict.”²⁰ As the previous chapter has addressed, Sri Lankans currently raise a variety of complaints with the actions taken by the Sri Lankan government in the past seventy years since Independence. Whether the overall increasing levels of trust in the government or the perception of challenges for the Tamil-speaking population to access public services, the surveys in comparison and contrast to the interviews indicate the ongoing struggle in Sri Lanka related to the ethnolinguistic divide. Furthermore, they express the tensions between citizens, students, academics, civil servants, public administrators, and politicians from both ethnolinguistic groups because of the differing opinions of the possible solutions to the ethnolinguistic conflict and the potential responsibility of the government to address this divide.

²⁰ Somasundram, 120.

CONCLUSION

Less than two months after an outbreak of rioting against the Muslim community in Sri Lanka's Central Province left two dead and 465 houses, business establishments and vehicles destroyed or damaged in February 2018, a smaller, but perhaps more situationally-terrifying violent episode occurred in the town of Ampara in the Eastern Province.¹ Farsith Atham-Lebbe, a Muslim restaurant owner, was beaten nearly to death after responding affirmatively to a Sinhalese man who had asked if the owner had put sterilization pills in his curry dish.² The customer recorded this affirmation, and within minutes, electronically shared the footage with what turned into a furious crowd of Sinhalese rioters, who beat Atham-Lebbe. The tragic truth? Atham-Lebbe had not, and had never, put illicit medication into any of his dishes, but instead, simply had not been able to understand the Sinhalese customer's question – which he had asked in Sinhala – because Atham-Lebbe could only speak Tamil.

Many say the recent outbreak of hate-fueled violence between Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Muslim communities mirrors the beginning years of the conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. This time, however, instead of rumors spread just by word-of-mouth claims, rumors are posted, sent, and shared via social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. As in other parts of the world, in Sri Lanka, these websites and communication platforms are perceived to be as reliable of information sources as traditional news media. With the heightened tensions, fear, and anxiety in the nation because of the ongoing ethnolinguistic divisions, one wonders if the policies that the government implemented in the years leading up to, and after, the end of the civil war have been at all effective in addressing or preventing future ethnolinguistic conflict.

¹ Tisaranee Gunasekara, "Sri Lankan Muslims: The New 'Others'?", *Himal Southasian* 2018.

² Amanda Taub and Max Fisher, "Where Countries Are Tinderboxes and Facebook Is a Match," *The New York Times* 2018.

At present, Sri Lanka still struggles to unify and reconcile post-civil war. Many of these questions of post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding are related to the realities of communication in the nation, and ability for connection between the different ethnolinguistic groups. The most basic communication obstacles between members of Sri Lanka's ethnolinguistic groups in turn affects the ability of high-level exchange about the implications of the post-Independence conflict, and the opposing groups' views on the impact of the war. In the past 20 years, the Sri Lankan government has engaged in numerous attempts to establish reconciliation and transitional justice mechanisms. These mechanisms began in 2001 with the Presidential Truth Commission on Ethnic Violence, and followed in 2006 with the Commission of Inquiry, which respectively focused on the ethnic-based conflicts from August 2005 until the end of the war in 2009, and serious human rights violations committed during the war's final years.³ Due to its extensive responsibilities, the Commission of Inquiry, an International Independent Group of Eminent Persons, was established a few months after its commissioning in 2006; the latter was tasked with upholding the accountability, transparency, and success of the Commission. Many Sri Lankan citizens, as well as members of international monitoring groups, believed the Commission was inefficient, and misreported "facts" because of perceived biases by the politicized judicial system and the Sinhala-dominated government.

In response to concerns raised by both Sri Lankans and the international community, the GoSL established the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in 2010. In its final press report, the LLRC stated:

The Commission examined the progression of the conflict that afflicted Sri Lanka as well as looked ahead towards an era of healing and peace building in the country. It endeavored to analyze submissions as well as other published reports, both local and international, relevant to its mandate in order to draw lessons, and

³ Anonymous, "Against the Grain: Pursuing a Transitional Justice Agenda in Postwar Sri Lanka," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5 (2011): 38.

make recommendations based on an analysis of the course of the conflict and its causes with a view to redressing grievances while taking the country forward to an era of reconciliation and peace building.⁴

Despite these claims, after the conclusion of the research and presentation of the LLRC in 2011, many international organizations, including the U.N., continued to voice intense concerns about the truthfulness of the LLRC's reports. In addition, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government faced numerous allegations that its actions were neither truthful nor sufficient to bring peace and understanding to Sri Lanka, and to begin the necessary process of reconciliation in the nation.⁵

In many of the conversations and interviews I conducted, both while living in Sri Lanka in 2016 and later during my research during the winter of 2017-2018, I oftentimes asked people if they felt hopeful about the possibility of eventual reconciliation between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda argued that due to the military victory of the war, which heavily favored the Sinhala-dominated government, and the fact that the support of and impetus for reconciliation efforts primarily had come from the international community, rather than from within Sri Lanka itself, he sees “no actionable desire for reconciliation.”⁶ Sivakanthan, Lecturer at the University of Jaffna, echoed these sentiments and stated, “The Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Reconciliation have failed to take adequate steps—the policy seems to just be in paper.”⁷ These are just two of the many responses regarding hopes for reconciliation in the nation, some outright pessimistic and others lukewarm, even from government employees or politicians.

When the war ended in 2009, the structures of the Sri Lankan state did not change. As analyzed, the victory claimed by the Sri Lankan military enabled the Government of Sri Lanka to

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sri Lanka, "The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission," <http://www.mfa.gov.lk/index.php/media/news-archive/3146-the-lessons-learnt-and-reconciliation-commission-llrc-concludes-its-work-the-final-report-will-be-handed-over-to-the-president-on-20-november>.

⁵ Anonymous.

⁶ Uyangoda.

⁷ Sivakanthan, interview by Lillian Eckstein, 2018.

maintain its bureaucratic structure, perpetuate the dominance of the Sinhalese parties in the national government and Parliament, and preserve the structure of the education system, especially its mechanisms of language learning requirements and medium of instruction. Now, it seems that the tensions in the country are shifting from between the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities, to between the Sinhalese Buddhist and the Tamil Muslim groups.

The question of reconciliation in Sri Lanka is undoubtedly linked to the question of addressing the ethnolinguistic division in the country. Only approximately 31% of Sri Lankans are literate⁸ in English, according to surveys conducted in 2012; thus, the island-nation's "link" language currently cannot feasibly serve as the bridge between the different communities. The examination of the implications of Sri Lanka's state traditions and language regimes as they relate directly to language policy and the future of reconciliation efforts, has demonstrated that the Sinhalese's continued dominance in the government, especially after its victory in the war, raises questions as to the likelihood of future success of post-conflict institutional policies to address the country's ethnolinguistic divisions.

If English continues to fail as an effective "link" language, and the government's past policies to address the Sinhala-Tamil divide have not created the proper infrastructure for the learning of a second national language, will a bridging of the ethnolinguistic divide between the Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking population ever be possible?

Through examining the state traditions and language regimes of the nation, this thesis has argued that although the Tamil population's grievances were seemingly addressed by policies implemented by the GoSL both during and after the war, especially in relation to education and

⁸ In reality, the literacy rate is an imperfect measurement of the ability of persons in Sri Lanka to communicate with one another. Ideally, I would use a combined rate of speaker ability and literacy rate for the English language in-country because in order for English to be an effective "link" language, Sri Lankans would need the ability to speak, write, and read in a professional sense. Unfortunately, this data does not currently exist for the population.

public services, inequality still persists between the different ethnolinguistic groups. This inequality is the source of grievances for the Tamil-speaking population, and now, it is apparent in the increasing levels of conflict between the Sinhalese and Muslim populations. As the Sinhalese-majority struggles to hold definitive political, economic, and social power in the country because of a struggling economy and continuing structural matters, the economic successes and growth of the Muslim population, due primarily to their legacies as merchants and shop owners, as well as their connections to the Middle East, are increasingly perceived as a threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist hegemonic structure. The outbreak of Sinhalese-Muslim violence in the last few months presents most simply as a new iteration of old ethnolinguistic divisions in the nation. Due to the failure of the GoSL to effectively implement policies of language education or successfully execute initiatives to promote the acquisition of a *lingua franca* for all Sri Lankans, the ethnolinguistic conflict inevitably will continue, even if it presents between and among different groups in the nation over time. Until there is a means for all to communicate and share social, religious, and cultural experiences – to move towards a greater and true understanding of others – these tensions will persist.

Almost ten years after the end of the war, the literature about Sri Lanka continues to lack proper analyses and commentaries on the state of relations between the country's ethnolinguistic groups, especially in the context of continued linguistic division. With a heavy heart given the ongoing and recent manifestations of the problems exacerbated by the nation's ethnolinguistic divisions, I sincerely hope that the recent outbreak of violence between the Sinhalese and Muslim communities will spur future scholars and policy-makers to examine these continuing conflicts in the context of the failures of reconciliation and rebuilding in the nation, and to drive for effective and lasting actions that change the paradigm and the results, for the benefits of the

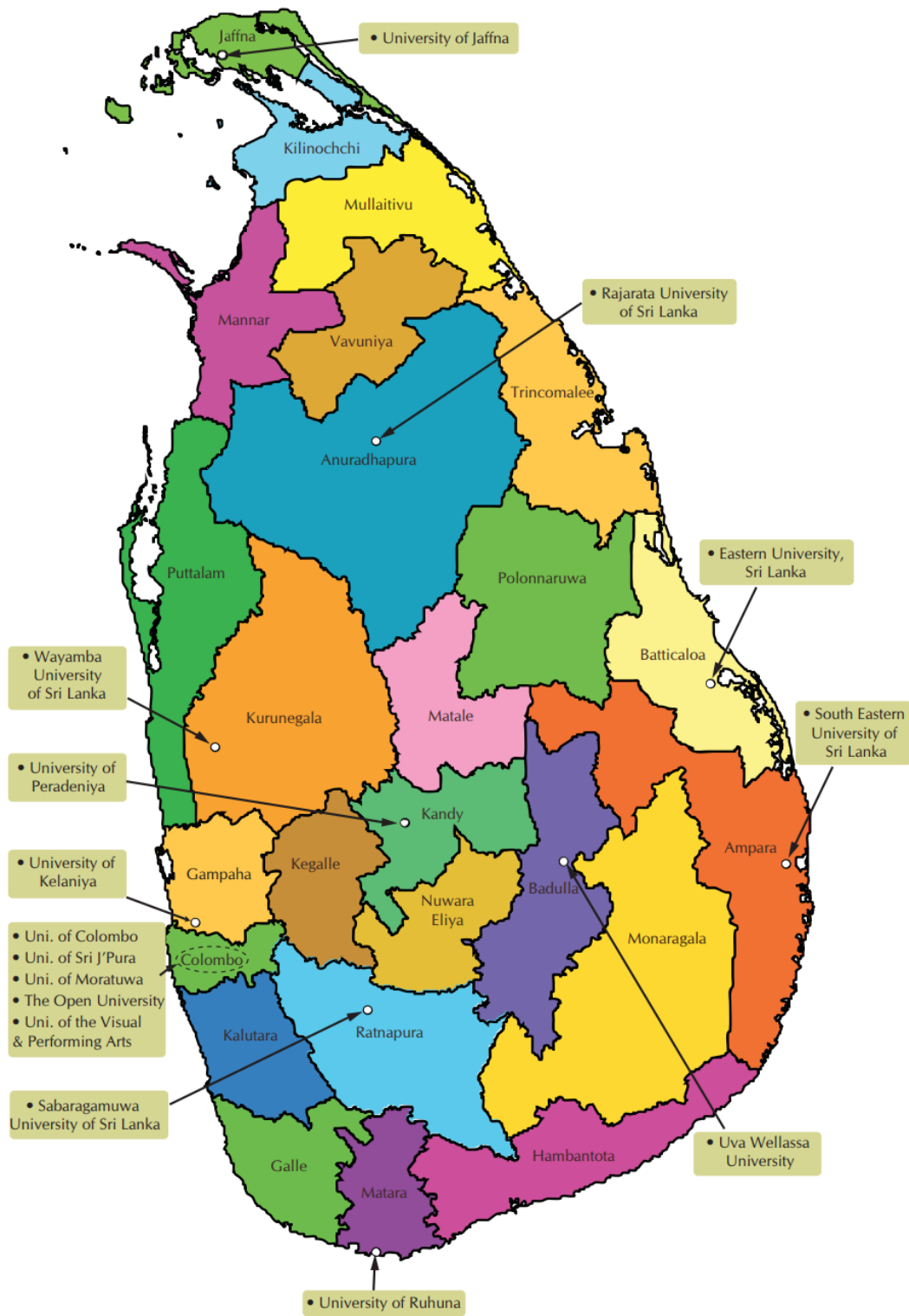
citizens and future of Sri Lanka. This is especially important as the Sri Lankan government appears to be losing interest in these second-language initiatives, and the international community, faced with other pressing problems around the world, no longer is placing pressure on the GoSL to address the country's ongoing ethnolinguistic tensions.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

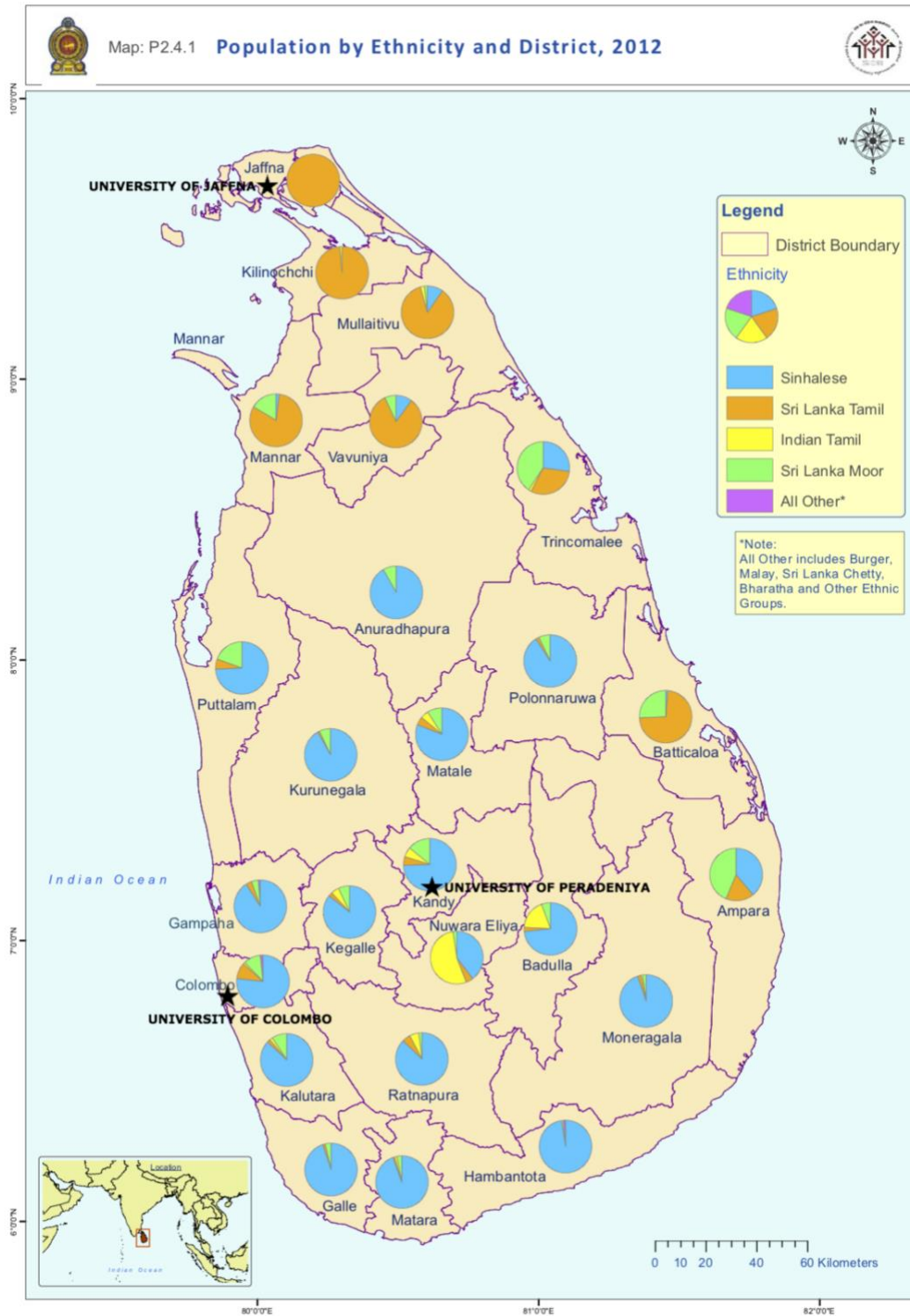
1. How do you think the different linguistic communities of students interact at the universities?
 - a. Do you think there is polarization between the linguistic communities of students at the university?
 - i. If so, do you think this polarization is better or worse than it was before the 1987 Peace Accord and 13th Amendment?
 1. How do you see polarization manifest? Specific examples?
 2. Do/did you participate in any campus organizations that had non-[Tamil/Sinhalese] members?
 3. Did any friends of yours who did *not* go to university participate in community organizations with non-[Tamil/Sinhala] members?
 4. Did your parents participate in any organizations that had non-[Tamil/Sinhala] members?
 - ii. If not, do you think that there was once polarization on campuses?
 1. *Independence to 1987* (Sinhala Only Act to Peace-Accord/Constitutional Amendment)
 2. *Civil War period* (Tamil/Sinhala education tracks, provincial councils, issues of reconciliation)
 3. *Post-War period* (increased interest in equalizing access to quality education, renewed focus on English-medium schooling, more efforts to reconcile?)
2. Are there efforts conducted in the universities to build connections between the different linguistic communities?
 - a. If so, are these efforts a new initiative? Who is sponsoring them?
 - b. If not, do you think there should be these efforts?
3. Are students' linguistic capabilities influential in their opportunities for future employment?
 - a. If so, how do you think this impacts the overall linguistic divide in the nation (especially considering the sectors that graduates are potentially employed)?
 - b. If not, do you think there are any sectors in Sri Lanka which are inaccessible to certain language-speaking potential employees?
4. How do you perceive the overall changes of linguistic divisions in the country in the last 30 years?

Appendix 2: Location of Universities in Sri Lanka, 2018¹



¹ "Sri Lanka University Statistics 2016," (University Grants Commission, 2016).

Appendix 3: Location of the Universities of Colombo, Peradeniya, and Jaffna Depicted on Map of Population by Ethnicity and District²



² "Population by Ethnicity and District," in *Population Atlas of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka, 2012).

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