

Violence, Identity, and Alterity

Post-War Rhetoric of Sri Lanka's Bodu Bala Sena

By

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ABSTRACT

The Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Strength Army) is a Sinhalese nationalist movement led by Buddhist monks that recently came to international prominence following a 2014 anti-Muslim rally that erupted into deadly violence. The Bodu Bala Sena is set apart from earlier nationalist movements in that its hostility is primarily directed towards Sri Lankan Muslims instead of Tamil separatists. Despite this difference I argue that the Bodu Bala Sena is best considered as a new development in this existing tradition of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, and that the re-orientation of the Bodu Bala Sena's hostility from Tamils to Muslims reveals the extent to which Sinhalese nationalist conceptions of their own identity are built around various interpretations of a particular "identity narrative." This identity narrative, which has its genesis in anti-colonial interpretations of the *Mahavamsa*, casts the Sinhalese people as defenders of a sacred island (the *dhammadipa*) against impious foreign invaders who threaten its unity and sanctity. The case of the Bodu Bala Sena demonstrates both the ongoing relevance of this identity narrative in the post-war era and, importantly, the availability of the narrative for contextual re-interpretation. The identity narrative model, which incorporates both mythic origins and contextual interpretation, helps to bridge some of the existing debates on the nature and origins of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka which tend to favour either one or the other.

namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ACJU The All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, a Muslim religious authority in Sri Lanka.
- BJP Bodu Jana Peramuna, the Bodu Bala Sena's newly formed political party.
- DN. The *Digha Nikaya*, or long discourses of the Buddha.
- ICES The International Centre for Ethnic Studies, hosts of a conference at which Dilanthe Withanage gave an impromptu lecture on the "Muslim Threat."
- JHU Jathika Hela Urumaya, a nationalist party led by Buddhist monks.
- JVP Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, a nationalist organisation that was involved in armed uprisings against the government during the 1970s and 1980s, and is now involved in democratic politics.
- Mhv. The *Mahavamsa*, a significant non-canonical Pali text that chronicles the history of Sri Lanka from mythical origins on through historical monarchs.
- NSRV. The New Standard Revised Edition of the Holy Bible.
- LTTE The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a Tamil separatist movement that engaged in a civil war against the state from 1983-2009.
- SLFP Sri Lanka Freedom Party, one of Sri Lanka's two major political parties founded by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1951 and currently led by President Maithripala Sirisena.

GLOSSARY OF PALI AND SINHALA TERMS

<i>Arahant</i>	(P.) one who has attained <i>nibbana</i> .
<i>Avihimsa</i>	(P.) “absence of cruelty or violence,” the Buddhist obligation towards nonviolence.
<i>Bala</i>	(S.) adj., “powerful” or “mighty,” as in Bodu Bala Sena.
<i>Bhikkhu</i>	(P.) an ordained Buddhist monk, plural <i>bhikkhavo</i> .
<i>Bodu</i>	(S.) “Buddhist,” as in Bodu Bala Sena.
<i>Buddhasasana</i>	(P.) “order or doctrine of the Buddha.” Used in Sri Lanka to refer to the Buddhist religion.
<i>Cakkavatti</i>	(P.) “he who sets rolling the Wheel (of Dhamma),” a just and pious monarch.
<i>Candibhava</i>	(P.) “state of fierceness;” the opposite of <i>sitibhava</i> .
<i>Cetana</i>	(P.) intentionality.
<i>Dhamma</i>	(P.) the teachings of the Buddha.
<i>Dhammadipa</i>	(P.) “the island or place of the <i>dhamma</i> .”
<i>Kamma</i>	(P.) “the doing, deed, work;” causality.
<i>Mahavihara</i>	(P.) “great monastery,” in Sri Lanka the name given to the principal monastery of Anuradhapura described in the <i>Mahavamsa</i> .
<i>Marakkala</i>	(S.) derogatory term for Muslims.
<i>Paraya</i>	(S.) derogatory term for foreigners.
<i>Sangha</i>	(P.) the Buddhist monastic community.
<i>Sitibhava</i>	(P.) “state of coolness;” the opposite of <i>candibhava</i> .
<i>Sena</i>	(S.) “army,” as in Bodu Bala Sena.
<i>Yakkha</i>	(P.) non-human being of great power, spirit or demon.

1 INTRODUCTION

Each chapter of the *Mahavamsa*, the “great chronicle” of Sri Lanka, ends by asserting that it was “compiled for the serene joy and emotion of the pious.”¹ Over the last 150 years this text has become a central legitimisation for nationalist ideology among Sinhalese Buddhists, raising the question of whether the many violent and heinous acts committed by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists were similarly “for the serene joy and emotion of the pious.” Is this a useful way of thinking about Buddhist violence in Sri Lanka? While much has been written in answer to this question, and on the interaction between religion, politics, and violence during Sri Lanka’s Civil War period (1983-2009), the end of hostilities between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) does not mean the end of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, or of religious legitimisations for violence against Sri Lanka’s minorities by state or non-state actors.²

I am interested in how some nationalists have attempted to deal with a very specific problem: if a group defines its own national identity through violent alterity, how can it respond to the loss of that alterity? Leading up to and during the civil war, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists constructed what I call an “identity narrative” that characterised the Sinhalese nation as historic defenders of their sacred homeland from impious Tamil invaders. In many ways, the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 represented the conclusion of this narrative: the Tamil threat was destroyed, Sri

¹ *The Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, trans. Wilhelm Geiger (London, UK: The Pali Text Society, 1980). This edition is used for all references to the *Mahavamsa*, abbreviated as Mhv.

² The consideration of state actors is important, as Patrick Mason argues in “Religious Violence and State Violence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, ed. R. Scott Appleby, Atalia Omer, and David Little (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015). He claims that too much of the existing literature on religion and violence assumes that “the state is a neutral or unmarked category, while non-state activists are the religiously motivated purveyors of violence” (248). Sri Lanka may be an exception to this, with much of the literature focussing on how religious actors treated state violence during the Civil War; see for one such example Daniel Kent, “Onward Buddhist Soliders,” in *Buddhist Warfare*, ed. Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Lanka was saved, and Sinhalese Buddhism remained, victorious, in its “foremost place.” However, with the conclusion of this narrative, the narrative itself became irrelevant. How were nationalists to define Sinhalese identity if they had no threat to defend against, and thereby to define themselves against? Some nationalists, including a monk called Galagoda Gnanasara, saw the solution to this problem in the identification of a new threat. While the *substance* of this new threat (the manner in which it threatens Sinhalese Buddhism) may be different from that posed by the LTTE, it would serve the same *function* of providing an “Other” against which pious Sinhalese Buddhists could defend their homeland. By constructing a new interpretation of the identity narrative that targeted this new threat in place of the LTTE, these nationalists are attempting to remake existing violent Buddhist nationalism into a form suitable for the post-war era.

I focus on a relatively new (and ongoing) development in Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, a group founded in 2012 called the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Army). The Bodu Bala Sena, a splinter group of the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), is led by monks and considers itself to be a religious organisation that is also active in politics, as have many Buddhist nationalist groups in Sri Lanka. What differentiates the Bodu Bala Sena from existing nationalist movements is their insistence that in the post-civil war era the most salient threat to Sinhalese Buddhism is not the Tamil separatists of earlier years but rather extremism among Sri Lanka’s minority Muslim population.³ The Bodu Bala Sena initially campaigned on issues like the abolition of *halal* certification and the banning of headscarves as a security risk, but came to international prominence in 2014 when an anti-Muslim

³ The long history of Islam and Muslims in Sri Lanka is covered by Lorna Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony 900-1915* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Lanka Islamic Foundation, 1994). It should be noted that attacks on Muslims by Sinhalese nationalists is not novel in itself: K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijatha Yapa Publications, 2005). Rather, it is the Bodu Bala Sena’s focus on Muslims as the *primary* threat to Sinhalese Buddhism that makes them unique.

rally near Aluthgama turned violent, leading to several deaths and considerable destruction of property.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

My study has two main objectives, which I refer to as the particular and the broad.

The particular objective is to present an explanation for the case of the Bodu Bala Sena and their fixation on a new threat to Sinhalese Buddhism when, with the 2009 defeat of the LTTE, the nationalist agenda had effectively been concluded.

While much has been written on the nature, history and future of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism generally, the Bodu Bala Sena is a recent enough development to have so far had little written substantially on its position within this nationalist tradition and its relationship with its forebears. Nira Wickramasinghe has mentioned the group in her two most recent “year in review” articles for *Asian Survey*, both times in a fairly descriptive (if characteristically detailed and informative) manner.⁴ Ameer Ali goes further, arguing that the Bodu Bala Sena’s antagonism towards Muslims is driven by the “validation” for Sinhalese nationalism offered by the 2009 victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).⁵ Oshan Fernando mentions them as an example of Buddhist opposition to Christian evangelism in Sri Lanka, while Rohan Jayasekera compares them to Burma’s 969 as a warning of how “devalued” Buddhism can become.⁶

⁴ Nira Wickramasinghe, "Sri Lanka in 2013: Post-War Oppressive Stability," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 1 (2014); "Sri Lanka in 2014: Cracks in the Edifice," *Asian Survey* 55, no. 1 (2015). She also briefly mentions them, in historical context, in *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2006), 401-2. Hendon and Hines also briefly mention the group in a similar summary of contemporary affairs: David W. Hendon and Jason Hines, "Notes on Church-State Affairs," *Journal of Church and State* 55, no. 3 (2013).

⁵ Ameer Ali, "The End of the Road," *South Asia Journal*, no. 9 (2013).

⁶ Oshan Fernando, "Religion's 'State Effects': Evangelical Christianity, Political Legitimacy and State Formation," *Religion* 44, no. 4 (2014): 574; Rohan Jayasekera, "Narratives of Hate," *Index on Censorship* 42, no. 2 (2013).

Very few academic publications have focussed on the Bodu Bala Sena itself as a primary subject of discussion, with two notable exceptions being Michael Jerryson's "Buddhists and Violence" and James John Stewart's "Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka." The latter paper analyses the rhetorical devices of two prominent anti-Muslims groups in Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena and the Sinhala Ravaya, and concludes that the activities of such groups are "simply an extension of... past anti-Tamil, anti-other political platforms."⁷ I build on Stewart's analysis in Chapter 3, analysing Bodu Bala Sena discourse more generally to support his argument that they are best understood as a new development in an existing tradition of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Jerryson includes the Bodu Bala Sena in his own article as part of a broader discussion of the relationship between Buddhism and violence both in Sri Lanka and abroad. He describes one of the principal means by which the Bodu Bala Sena constructs Sri Lankan Muslims as posing a threat to Sinhalese Buddhism: by situating the Sinhalese as a minority (and so endangered) within a global context, regardless of their majority status within Sri Lanka itself.⁸ I build on this, and on similar means by which the Bodu Bala Sena constructs Muslims as a threat, in Chapter 4.

My particular objective is contributing to this existing scholarly knowledge of the Bodu Bala Sena. Behind this lies my more general interest in the relationship between politics, violence, and religion. As I will argue in Chapter 5, much of the writing on religious violence today is dominated by secularist assumptions of a fundamental disconnect between "the religious" and "the political." My more general objective with this thesis is to demonstrate, through the case of the Bodu Bala Sena, that this assumption has little grounding in reality and is not analytically

⁷ James John Stewart, "Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *South Asia Research* 34, no. 3 (2014): 256.

⁸ Michael K. Jerryson, "Buddhists and Violence: Historical Continuity/Academic Inaccuracy," *Religion Compass* 9, no. 5 (2015): 114.

useful. Buddhism is not a fixed, unchanging, apolitical and non-violent “whatever”⁹ that is either the sole cause of violence or an unwilling partner to it, but a dynamic and multivalent tradition that is ultimately defined only by ideologies, actions, norms, and customs of Buddhists themselves, developed in response to ever-changing social, spiritual, and political contexts.

The case of the Bodu Bala Sena demonstrates the continuing relevance of “religion,” religious ideas, and religious actors to Sri Lanka’s political development in the post-war era. Susan Hayward claims that Sri Lanka’s intercommunal conflicts should not be considered religious conflicts “in the sense of a dispute between competing religious beliefs,” but rather as conflicts “over access to political power, economic and social well-being, and minority rights.”¹⁰ I disagree with this. As the case of the Bodu Bala Sena represents, the religious “framing” of these issues makes Sri Lanka’s political situation a religious concern, and makes intercommunal conflict and violent undeniably religious violence. Religious violence is not a dispute between competing religious beliefs, but nor is it purely political violence given a post hoc religious legitimisation. In Sri Lanka, violence is contextualised and legitimised by religious actors within a religious framework, making it simultaneously political and religious, not one or the other.

1.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has two primary limitations. These are the relative scarcity of English-language primary resources on the Bodu Bala Sena, and my inability (due to time,

⁹ I borrow this term from Obeyesekere, who uses it to (somewhat dismissively) refer to scholarly conceptions of sovereignty in pre-colonial Sri Lanka: Gananath Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Ethnicity, and Identity: A Problem in Buddhist History,” in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (New York, USA: Routledge, 2006), 137.

¹⁰ Susan Hayward, “The Spoiler and the Reconciler: Buddhism and the Peace Process in Sri Lanka,” in *Between Terror and Tolerance*, ed. Timothy D. Sisk (Washington D.C., USA: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 183.

funding, and language skills) to do the substantial fieldwork that I see necessary for an in-depth study of how Buddhism in Sri Lanka has responded to the end of the civil war. Even with these limitations, I have managed to gather enough primary resources (from news media, video recordings, and internet sources) to construct a picture of the Bodu Bala Sena's key ideologies and motivations that allows me to use them as a case study in a more general discussion of religious violence and Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka.

1.3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

I support these arguments primarily through analysis of the publically available discourse of the Bodu Bala Sena, supplemented by interviews conducted by academics and journalists. This choice of methodology is partly pragmatic, in that I do not have the resources available to, for example, gather ethnographic data or conduct interviews myself. Discourse analysis does however promise several unique insights that cannot be gained through other means, and is not necessarily a "lesser" alternative to other forms of research.¹¹ The central concern of discourse analysis is to trace the attempted connections between reality and discursive space.¹² This produces insight in both directions: the state of the discourse-producer's world as it is and as they would want it to be.¹³ In the case of the Bodu Bala Sena, given the success of their discourse in attracting supporters and mobilising them to action (as in Aluthgama), an analysis of their rhetoric will also allow us to understand the mindset of the audience; that is, we can consider Bodu Bala Sena discourse to be representative of a certain subset of Sinhalese Buddhist

¹¹ Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston, USA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 189-90.

¹² Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992).

¹³ Frans Wijsen, "Discourse Analysis in Religious Studies: The Case of Interreligious Worship in Friesland," *Anthropos* 105, no. 2 (2010): 541.

nationalism, and so draw conclusions about the state of nationalism in Sri Lanka more generally based on their (the Bodu Bala Sena's) discursive practices.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 will set out the theoretical framework for my argument. In this chapter, I will introduce the “identity narrative” concept of Margaret Somers and argue that the adoption of Muslims as a salient threat in lieu of the LTTE (defeated and so no longer a credible threat) demonstrates the necessity of such a threat to nationalist identity. I will argue that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists have by this point so heavily entrenched a conception of their own identity in opposition to a threatening other – an “impious invader” – that the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 necessitated for some the identification of a new threat, lest this defining feature of their identity be lost.

In Chapter 3 I will attempt to situate the Bodu Bala Sena within existing literature on Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. I will argue that while there are significant differences between the Bodu Bala Sena and earlier nationalist movements, the Bodu Bala Sena is best understood as a successor to earlier nationalist movements and a part of the broader phenomenon of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. The points of departure from these earlier movements then beg the question: why has the Bodu Bala Sena reinterpreted existing nationalist ideology in these ways?

Chapter 4 focusses on the most significant new development in Bodu Bala Sena ideology, the construction of Muslims as a new threat to Sinhalese Buddhism. I will explore the rhetorical construction of this threat through the “securitisation” framework of the Copenhagen school, and argue that in constructing Muslims as a threat the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to re-interpret the existing nationalist conceptions of Sinhalese identity into a form relevant to the post-war era.

Finally in Chapter 5 I will argue that analysing the Bodu Bala Sena's violent discourse as an exercise in identity politics (and the narrative of violence between "us" and "them" that frames Sinhalese Buddhist conceptions of identity and alterity) highlights a common problem in discussions of religious violence in Sri Lanka and beyond. I will identify a secularist dichotomy in existing literature on religious violence, and suggest that contrary to the assumptions of this dichotomy agents like the Bodu Bala Sena can be understood to operate simultaneously within the "religious" and "political" spheres.

1.5 THREE THEMES: VIOLENCE, IDENTITY, AND ALTERITY

In this section I will briefly introduce and discussion the three key themes of my thesis. My first conceptual theme is violence: I am interested in how religious actors, in this case the Bodu Bala Sena, understand violence within a religious framework. I do not use "framework" to imply an explicitly cosmological or otherworldly conceptualisation of violence, as Juergensmeyer does, though this can be, and often is, an important component of religious violence.¹⁴ Rather, I consider the incorporation of violence into a religious framework to be the process by which violence becomes a normalised part of religious belief or practice, through which the violence is given some particular religious meaning.¹⁵ This may be inclusive of

¹⁴ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: the Global Rise of Religious Violence* (California, USA: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁵ What exactly "religious meaning" constitutes is perhaps outside of the scope of this thesis. I assume, for the purposes of this project, that there are certain phenomena (such as the Catholic mass, Orthodox iconography, the Hindu practice of *darśan* etc.) that are "religious" and that in some traditions certain acts of violence come to be considered similarly "religious." There is a respectable amount of literature that seeks to understand how and why some violence is given religious meaning, including Walter Burkert, Rene Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Violent Origins: Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (California, USA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Maurice Bloch, *Prey Into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Bruce Hoffman, "Holy Terror: The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 18 (1995); Thomas Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence: A Friendly Critique of the Interpretive Approach," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 1, no. 1 (1997); Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, USA: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs: the Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism,"

everything from explicit calls to holy war in the name of God to the hosting of soldiers in a Buddhist *wat* in Southern Thailand.¹⁶ This approach, as I will argue in Chapter 5, is based on a post-secularist understanding of the relationship between what constitutes “religious practice” and “political action.” In a secularist understanding these are mutually exclusive categories, an assumption that I disagree with.¹⁷

In this case, I examine the manner in which the Bodu Bala Sena contextualises violence (against Muslims) in its religious framework in order to legitimate that violence. In order to unravel this framing of violence in religious terms, I ask the following questions: what might have caused the Bodu Bala Sena to incorporate violence in its religious framework? How do they go about this incorporation? What rhetorical devices do they use in order to communicate this to their supporters, and to legitimise violence against Sri Lankan Muslims?

My second conceptual theme is identity, and the relationship between identity and religious violence in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is a fascinating case study in the interaction of religion and identity because of the close relationship that religion and ethnic or national identity have come to assume. Sri Lankan Muslims are, as a result of certain historical developments, a minority “nationality” in Sri Lanka that are primarily identified by their religion; in their case, religion *is* nationality.¹⁸ As I expand on in Chapter 2, and largely as a result of the nationalist project begun in the colonial era, the national identity of the Sinhalese has been similarly defined by the

in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom*, ed. Ami Pedahzur (New York, USA: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁶ As in Michael K. Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ I acknowledge the influence here of William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (North Carolina, USA: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ See, for example, Bart Klem, “Islam, Politics and Violence in Eastern Sri Lanka,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2011).

majority religious identity of Buddhism. The relationship between this religious identity and violence has been a central theme of many significant works on violence in Sri Lanka, and this relationship continues to be relevant in the post-war era and to my study of the Bodu Bala Sena. Identity as a concept straddles the boundaries of both politics and religion, and is particularly useful for undermining secularist assumptions about the relationship between religion (belonging to the apolitical “religious sphere”) and politics (belonging to the areligious “secular sphere”), a task I attempt in Chapter 5.

My final conceptual theme is alterity, a fundamental component of identity. Gingrich and Baumann tell us, “Identity is part of difference insofar as its own formation is subject to the basic relation with a powerful and distinct “Other” whose gaze defines the terms.”¹⁹ The creation of alterity, or Otherness, is central to an analysis of the Bodu Bala Sena as their principal innovation in the nationalist tradition is their definition of their own identity in opposition to Muslims rather than Tamils. Why has the Bodu Bala Sena established Muslims as their “Other,” and what implications does this have for their construction of their own identity as Sinhalese Buddhists?

1.6 THE BODU BALA SENA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Much of the Bodu Bala Sena’s genesis is not immediately clear. Many contradicting accounts can be found in English-language media, and the Bodu Bala Sena itself does not help matters thanks to its frequent establishment and abandonment of official websites.²⁰ The following information is therefore not intended as a

¹⁹ Andre Gingrich, “Conceptualising Identities,” in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, ed. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (New York, USA: Berghahn Books, 2006), 11.

²⁰ Bodubalasena.net, a Sinhalese language website, was in use at the start of 2015 but was removed in the early part of the year when bodubalasena.co, an English-language alternative, was launched. As of August 1, 2015, bodubalasena.net re-directs to a new Sinhalese-language site at bodubalasena.info, with its original content now posted under bodubalasena.com (which can also be reached through bodubalasena.org). As of August 1, 2015, bodubalasena.co, the English-language domain referenced frequently throughout the following pages, has expired and been suspended awaiting restoration and fees payment.

comprehensive history, but as a brief introduction to the group that will inform the discussion to come.²¹

The Bodu Bala Sena was formed in 2012 as a breakaway from the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU).²² The original founders were four monks, including Galagoda Gnanasara, Kerama Wimalajothi, and two unnamed others, as well as lay Buddhist Dilanthe Withanage. Wimalajothi, the Bodu Bala Sena's founding President, has since renounced the organisation, leaving Gnanasara as General Secretary (and de facto leader) and Withanage as CEO. These two are the main spokespeople for the Bodu Bala Sena, and their press conferences, speeches, and interviews form the basis of my analysis. Gnanasara claims that they are supported by "almost 80%" of monks in Sri Lanka. While this seems an exaggeration, the Bodu Bala Sena does enjoy considerable monastic support, as the following image demonstrates:



Figure 1: Monks in the audience of the Bodu Bala Sena's 2014 conference.²³

Withanage, the Bodu Bala Sena's CEO, has never been ordained or, in his own words, formally trained in Buddhism. His background in is IT, which he studied in

²¹ The information in this section, unless noted otherwise, was kindly provided by Michael Jerryson, who had a series of unrecorded conversations with Withanage June 26– 28, 2014, as well as formal interviews with both Withanage and Gnanasara on June 25.

²² Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 401.

²³ From facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena (accessed November 1, 2015).

the Soviet Union during the 1980s. His LinkedIn profile states that he holds an MSc from the Georgian Technical University, and that he began working towards a PhD in artificial intelligence.²⁴ He returned to Sri Lanka and began working in IT and computer literacy before turning to policy and public service in the 2000s. In 2011 he served as advisor to the Minister of National Language and Social Integration and assisted in developing a programme for engaging Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims in joint development projects before transferring to the now-defunct Ministry for Consumer Welfare. He has known Gnanasara since at least 2011, when they were both members of the Sinhalese Buddhist delegation to a Norwegian conference on post-war reconciliation.²⁵ In 2012 he, along with Gnanasara and Wimalajothi, co-founded the Bodu Bala Sena. In 2013 the Ministry asked for his resignation, and he has since worked full-time as CEO of the Bodu Bala Sena.²⁶

Gnanasara, despite being the spiritual leader of the Bodu Bala Sena and its most outspoken leader, is harder to find concrete information on. Jerryson puts him in his late 30s, and from his name we can assume that he was either born near or ordained at Galagoda temple south of Kandy. Withanage claims that Maduluwawe Sobhitha, a senior nationalist monk,²⁷ has a “soft spot” for Gnanasara, and also that Gnanasara was partly inspired by Gangodawila Soma, a university monk and social reformer.

²⁴ <https://lk.linkedin.com/in/dilanthel> (accessed September 27, 2015).

²⁵ The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Sri Lanka, "Statement Regarding the Alleged Connection Between Bodu Bala Sena and Norway," http://www.norway.lk/News_and_events/News/Statement-regarding-the-alleged-connection-between-Bodu-Bala-Sena-and-Norway/#.VgdSZRuqpBc (accessed on September 27, 2015).

²⁶ Jerryson notes that “during his short speech at the ICES [International Centre for Ethnic Studies], Dilantha said that... no one was paid, it was all volunteer work.” This raises the question of how Withanage has been working full-time for the Bodu Bala Sena for the past two years.

²⁷ "Sobhitha Thero Suspects Moves to Stop Him," *BBC Sinhala Online*, October 7, 2010.

The Bodu Bala Sena's early campaigns included a protest against *halal* food certification and Muslim dress codes, but they came to international prominence in mid-2014 after a public rally of theirs devolved into violence near Aluthgama, resulting in Tamil and Muslim deaths.²⁸ This short extract of the speech gives a sense of Gnanasara's inflammatory language:

"Dharga town... I think that this name should also be changed... I saw Aluthgama Muslims are being protected with special task forces and police as in Nandikadal. What is this?! What is this?!

I would like to say that it is a Sinhala police in this country, and the army in this country is a Sinhala army. Hereafter, if a *marakkalaya* [Muslim; derogatory] or any other *paraya* [foreigner] lays so much as a hand on a Sinhala person, let alone a monk, it would be the end of this person!

We must tell this: there is a leader for *marakkalayas*. There is a leader for Tamils. But we Sinhalese have no leader. Sinhalese have no leader. Sinhalese have no leader [*sic*; repeated three times]. There is a person called Diyawara Nilame.²⁹ He calls himself leader of Buddhists. We are in an unfortunate era when no Buddhist leader speaks for the rights of the Buddhist. Sinhala Ministers who holler on stages in the name of Buddhism say that we [the BBS] are racists and extremists. Our own *sakkily* [derogatory term] ministers. Yes we are [extremists and racists]!

...the problem we have is that the police and the politicians have created a mythical fear in their heads. All of these fellows [gestures at police surrounding the rally] with their bayonets and rubber bullets are getting prepared to attack us. That is wrong! Police should remember this.

There was an incident in Badulla, and in other places. We would like to ask if a single monk or a Sinhala person has attacked anyone. Not

²⁸ "Sri Lanka Shaken by Religious Violence," *Al Jazeera English*, June 16, 2014.

²⁹ The Diyawadana Nilame is the chief lay attendant to the Śrī Dalaga Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth), a temple in Kandy housing a significant Buddhist relic.

because we are unable! We would like to lovingly remind that we should get organised. It is time to stop loitering. We should unite and determine to fulfil our duty for the time. If not, future Sinhala generations would curse us definitely. We should unite to save us from that curse. Our forefathers saved the heritage of this country for us. They did so by sacrificing their eyes, heads, blood, sweat and lives. Now enemy forces have mobilised to loot that heritage.”³⁰

This last section illustrates the Bodu Bala Sena’s sense of continuity, a theme I will discuss further in Chapter 3. They see themselves as fulfilling a historical duty to save the heritage of Sri Lanka and of Sinhalese Buddhism from impious foreign invaders. In post-war Sri Lanka, these invaders (according to the Bodu Bala Sena) are Muslims, but this is only the most modern incarnation of a historical threat. Sinhalese Buddhism nationalists framed their fight against the LTTE as defence of the sacred heritage of Sinhalese Buddhism against impious foreign invaders, a fight that they claimed had its origins with the invasion of Elara described in the *Mahavamsa*. In the following chapters I will trace the development of this particular belief and argue that the Bodu Bala Sena understands itself to be fulfilling the same role.

1.7 TERMINOLOGY

For consistency’s sake, and following Fernando,³¹ the island in question is referred to as “Sri Lanka” throughout, as are the various political entities (Ceilão Português, Nederlands-Zeylan, British Ceylon, Independent Ceylon, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam) that have laid claim to its full or partial governance. This convention is employed for simplicity and continuity even when such use is anachronistic. Similarly I have used “Sinhalese” and “Sri Lankan” as

³⁰ "This is What Sri Lankan Monk Think About Muslim, Tamil Hindu, Dalit and White People," (FataasTV, 2014).

³¹ Jude Lal Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka: The Politics of the Interpretation of Nationhood* (Berlin, Germany: Lit Verlag, 2013), 1.

adjectives and demonyms throughout, with the exceptions of quotes and proper nouns (Portuguese “Chinghala;” “Sinhala Maha Sabha”), while I use “Sinhala” to refer to Sinhalese language.

I transliterate Sinhala words largely following the systems described by Dileep Chandralal,³² with two exceptions. First, I use neither diacritics nor double vowels: for example, I transliterate both අ and ආ as “a” instead of “aa” or “ā.” Second, I transliterate ඇ as “ä” instead of “æ.”

I make exceptions from Chandralal’s system for Sinhala names when the individual is known to prefer an alternate spelling, or when (as in the case of Dharmapala) the alternate spelling is so widely known that not using it would be confusing.

I transliterate Pali words following the system of the Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary, again dropping the diacritic markings.³³

I do include diacritic markings in the spelling of European words that would normally employ them (in other words, when it the official spelling of the word in the native alphabet, rather than a transliteration or Romanisation). An example used infrequently is “Ceilão Português.”

Following Seneviratne,³⁴ I omit the title of “Venerable” that conventionally precedes the names of monks in English (and the equivalent suffix “thero”). This is for concision and to avoid unnecessary repetition, and is not intended as a mark of disrespect.

While Sanskrit terms are often used in literature on Sri Lanka, most likely due to the familiarity of some common terms (*karma; dharma; ahimsa*), I use Pali throughout

³² Dileep Chandralal, *Sinhala* (Amsterdam, Nederland: John Benjamins B.V., 2010), Chapter Two.

³³ T.W. Rhys Davis and William Stede, eds., *Pali-English Dictionary* (Pali Text Society, 2009).

³⁴ H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Illinois, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

(*kamma; dhamma; avihimsa*). This is in an attempt to remain faithful to the practice of Sinhalese Buddhism, in which Pali is the liturgical language, but does result at times in some inconsistency between my own writing and direct quotes from other authors who have used Sanskrit.

Finally, all Dutch surnames, and surnames of Dutch origin, are capitalised and ordered according to Dutch convention: K.M. de Silva, for example, is listed in my bibliography as “De Silva, K.M.” under the letter “S.”

2 NARRATIVE, IDENTITY, AND EMPOWERMENT

In this chapter I will set up the broader theoretical framework of my argument. If the Bodu Bala Sena is, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, a successor of earlier Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist movements, why might they be attempting to recast Sinhalese Buddhism as being under threat from a new group? This indicates to me that the presence of a credibly threatening “Other” is in some way important to nationalists, and that the loss of the LTTE as such a credible threat necessitated, for the Bodu Bala Sena, the identification of another to take its place. In this chapter I will argue that this is due to the particular “identity narrative” that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism has adopted, which casts the Sinhalese as a uniquely pious Buddhist nation that has historically defended Sri Lanka against impious outsiders. The LTTE provided an “Other” against which Sinhalese Buddhists could defend the *dhammadipa*, and the Bodu Bala Sena is responding to the loss of this “Other” by constructing Muslims as a new alternative. Their hostility towards Muslims is best understood as an attempt to create a new narrative of Sinhalese identity that will be relevant in the post-war era.

I will begin this chapter, in §2.1, by explaining the narrative framework I use to analyse identity. This is largely based on Margaret Somers’ concept of an “identity narrative.” The “identity narrative” framework is particularly well-suited to discussing identity politics in Sri Lanka because of the powerful influence of historical narratives (particularly from the *Mahavamsa*) on the development of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism.

In §2.2 I will identify various identity narratives constructed and maintained by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists and argue that the differences between these narratives are primarily driven by changing political and social contexts. In each incarnation of the identity narrative, nationalists have attempted to re-interpret the

story that they tell about Sinhalese Buddhism to adapt to new social and political climates. Significantly, new interpretations of the narrative have always favoured appropriating and adapting existing tropes rather than inventing complete novelties. These attempts at maintaining continuity lend the new narratives some of the legitimacy of the old. This section will also provide some historical background for the more detailed discussion of 20th century Sinhalese nationalism (and the Bodu Bala Sena's reinterpretation of its key themes) in Chapter 3.

Finally, in §2.3 I will examine broader literature on the role that violence can play in reifying and legitimising identity narratives, and argue that the Bodu Bala Sena's hostility towards Muslims is best understood as such an attempt at reification.³⁵

2.1 NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

In this section I will introduce and define the concept of an "identity narrative" as a tool for analysing the historical development of nationalist claims about Sinhalese identity. The narrative approach to identity assumes that group identities are not "fixed, singular, bounded, internally harmonious, distinct from others at [their] boundaries, and marked by historical longevity, if not rooted in nature,"³⁶ but rather relational and contextual. An individual holds any number of group affiliations (such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or political views) that may at various times and in various contexts be more or less salient for that individual.³⁷ An individual living in Sri Lanka, for example, might simultaneously be a citizen of that country, a Sinhala speaker, ethnically Sinhalese, a pious Catholic, a male, a heterosexual, and a cyclist, among many other things, any of which might at various times form the

³⁵ I use the term "reify" (to make real or to bring into being) to refer to nationalist attempts to make their particular identity narratives appear true and salient.

³⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (2001): 866.

³⁷ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2006), 18.

basis for a sense of group identity with others who share those characteristics.

Individuals and groups may attempt to create a particular interpretation of group identity that emphasises some of these shared characteristics above others (such as Sinhalese ethnicity over Catholic religion, in our example).³⁸ Narrative analysis, I will now argue, is a particularly useful way to examine the way in such identity interpretations are constructed and maintained.

I use the term identity narrative to refer to a particular interpretation of group identity which is articulated (implicitly or explicitly) in narrative form. Margaret Somers first introduced this concept as the “emplotment” of a group, and its relationships with other groups, in a particular time and place.³⁹ Narrative approaches to identity have since been considered in fields like political science and social psychology. Narratives, according to Funk and Said, are “the stories that members of social and political groups tell about themselves and their relations with selected “Others,” to create or reinforce a sense of collective identity and shared purpose.”⁴⁰ This definition is useful because it sets identity against alterity. Narratives allows group members to identify one another, but also to identify members of the “Other.”

In order for a particular identity narrative to be persuasive in defining identity to members of a group, it must be reified through engagement. Engaging with the narrative allows group members to identify one another and to differentiate

³⁸ Wickremaratne discusses the manner in which Sinhalese Christian leaders “exulted in being Sinhalese” following the July 1983 riots: Ananda Wickremaratne, “Historiography in Conflict and Violence,” in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁹ Margaret Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 616.

⁴⁰ Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, “Islam and the West: Narratives of Conflict and Conflict Transformation,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 3.

themselves from outsiders who do not engage with the same narrative.⁴¹ Narrative engagement may involve a re-enactment of actions, situations or affective states described in the narrative, all of which strengthen the participant's self-identification with the narrative itself.⁴²

Muna Güvenç provides a case study in narrative engagement through her analysis of public architecture in Diyarbakır, Turkey. She examines the "Kurdification" of public spaces in the city, notably including many references to the Medes, believed to be the historical ancestors of the modern Kurdish people.⁴³ She suggests that the naming of public spaces after this ancestral group (such as "Medya Park" or the entertainment centre "Medland") serves to create a narrative linking the Kurdish people, distinct from Turks, to the land through their ancestors. This constructs the area as historically "Kurdish."⁴⁴ The narrative constructed by public architecture allows the Kurds to engage with and strengthen their sense of historical identity "in their everyday practices: in parks, protests, prayers, hunger strikes, marches, funeral gatherings, house meetings and so on... the everyday experience of urban space, which transforms citizens and enables them to practice as a community and reinvent their identity and culture."⁴⁵

As well as demonstrating a practical means by which groups can engage with an identity narrative, Güvenç's study also reveals why such narratives might be deliberately constructed by interested groups. Kurds are a marginalised group in Turkey, and in response to this some Kurds have constructed a narrative of their

⁴¹ J. Bruner, "Life As Narrative," *Social Research* 54, no. 1 (1987); Phillip Hammack and Andrew Pilecki, "Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 33, no. 1 (2012): 77-8.

⁴² Suzanne Keen, "Narrative Empathy," in *Toward a Cognitive Theory of Narrative Acts*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (Texas, USA: University of Texas Press, 2010), 70.

⁴³ Muna Güvenç, "Constructing Narratives of Kurdish Nationalism in the Urban Space of Diyarbakır, Turkey," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 35.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

own identity that emphasises their alleged descent from the Medes, a civilisation of high status and significance. This serves as a counter-narrative through which Kurds may construct their identity in more positive terms than the identity narrative constructed by the Turkish state for the Kurds which seeks to assimilate them into the Turkish nation.⁴⁶

In this section I have defined the concept of an identity narrative with reference both to general literature about narrative approaches to identity and the case study provided by Güvenç. The features of the narrative approach that are most salient moving forwards are its focus on interpretation (and re-interpretation), and the role that engagement with the narrative plays in reifying it (making it convincing to members of the group it is intended to define the identity of). These two features form the respective foci of my following two sections. In §2.2 I will examine the narratives constructed for Sinhalese identity from the colonial era through to the 20th century, and argue that differences between them reflect their different social and political contexts. In §2.3 I will look at how these narratives – and particularly the narrative of the Bodu Bala Sena – have been reified, and argue that the Bodu Bala Sena's hostility towards Muslims is best understood as an attempt to engage with and thereby reify their narrative.

2.2 IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN SRI LANKA

The purpose of this section is to outline the historical development of significant identity narrative in Sri Lanka.⁴⁷ I say “significant” because this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every possible interpretation of Sinhalese identity that has been offered since the colonial era. I identify five narratives that I consider to be

⁴⁶ Derya Bayir, "Representation of the Kurds by the Turkish Judiciary," *Human Rights Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2013).

⁴⁷ An early draft of this section was presented at the New Historians Conference at Victoria University of Wellington in September 2015, and I am grateful for the insightful questions posed by conference participants and university staff.

representative of the organisations and movements that constructed them: that of the Portuguese and Dutch (which are similar enough to be discussed together); the British; Sinhalese nationalists opposing colonial rule; Sinhalese nationalists during the civil war against the Tamils; and finally the Bodu Bala Sena.

SINHALESE IDENTITY NARRATIVES CONSTRUCTED BY SUCCESSIVE GROUPS

The Portuguese and Dutch Empires	“The inhabitants of Sri Lanka are heathens to be converted and controlled.”
The British Empire	“The Sinhalese are a once-great civilisation now in decline that will benefit from British colonial rule.”
Sinhalese nationalists seeking independence from the British	“The Sinhalese are an independent nation with a rich and significant history that has a right to self-governance.”
Nationalists leading up to and during the civil war	“The Sinhalese are a pious nation who have historically defended the <i>dhammadipa</i> from impious Tamil invaders.”
The Bodu Bala Sena	“The Sinhalese are a pious nation who have historically defended the <i>dhammadipa</i> from impious invaders.”

I will discuss the first four of these narratives in the following subsections, and make two main arguments about them. First, all of the identity narratives I will examine share several key features, the most notable of which is their common reliance on the *Mahavamsa* for historical legitimisation. Second, and more significantly, they differ from one another in crucial points, each of which represents an attempt by the groups in question to redefine Sinhalese identity to suit their own political agendas, and more broadly to suit the political and social context in which each group operates. This will set the background for my discussion of change and continuity in the Bodu Bala Sena’s narrative in chapters 3 and 4.

While a historical survey of this sort may seem tangential to my study of a contemporary group, two quotes, from Fernando and Kemper respectively, convince me of the necessity of this historical context. Fernando, in his book on the potential for reconciliation in the early post-war era, wrote that often, “The answer to the question ‘who are we?’ is given by the answer to the question ‘who were we?’”⁴⁸ He argues that it is impossible to understand contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism without addressing its origins in the colonial era. Similarly, Kemper states that “the scholarly inability to take nationalism on its own terms derive[s] from portraying nationalism as absolutely discontinuous with the past... nationalism, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, is simply the most recent stage in the ongoing construction of the past.”⁴⁹ Before turning, in Chapter 3, to the Bodu Bala Sena and its links to civil war era nationalism, I wish to trace this particular methodology of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism (“the ongoing construction of the past” as an identity narrative) and demonstrate that it has its origins considerably further back than the 1970s.

2.2.1 Pre-Colonial Identity

Before embarking on a discussion of the historical construction of identity narratives in Sri Lanka, I wish to briefly address the question of pre-colonial Sinhalese identity. Nationalism, and the concept of a national identity, have their origins in modern Europe and were only exported to the rest of the world, including South Asia, through the mechanism of colonialism.⁵⁰ Prior to the introduction of such ideas through colonial invasion, occupation, and governance, and contrary to the popular primordialist beliefs of many Sinhalese nationalists, the modern

⁴⁸ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 258.

⁴⁹ Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 15.

⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, UK: Verso, 1983).

Sinhalese (Buddhist) national identity simply did not exist.⁵¹ While an awareness of the cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic distinctions between Sinhalese and other groups did exist in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, such divisions existed only among “a plethora of other identities such as kin group, caste, village, occupation, gender and so on.”⁵²

Primiordialists and nationalists aside, scholars increasingly agree that constructions of a Sinhalese national identity⁵³ had their genesis in European ideas introduced through successive Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisations. The first European narratives of Sinhalese identity were designed to legitimise and facilitate colonial rule, but the development of an indigenous Sinhalese nationalism led to the construction of alternate narratives that redefined Sinhalese identity in terms.

2.2.2 The Portuguese and Dutch Narratives

The identity narratives constructed and imposed by the Portuguese and the Dutch share several key features and so can be treated together. Both homogenised

⁵¹ Kemper, *The Presence of the Past*, 108.

⁵² Lakshmanan Sabaratnam, *Ethnic Attachments in Sri Lanka: Social Change and Cultural Continuity* (New York, USA: Palgrave, 2001), 9-10. Some authors have argued that literate elites in pre-colonial Sri Lanka did attempt to “mobilise the whole ethnic group against external threats” from South India: C.R. de Silva, quoted in R.A.L.H. Gunawardena, “The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography,” in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathan Spencer (New York, USA: Routledge, 1990), 67; H.L. Seneviratne, *Buddhism, Identity, and Conflict* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2002), 5, 13. Gunawardena disagrees with this, arguing that such ethnicity-wide actions were motivated by personal ties of loyalty, obligation and expectation of reward, not by specific calls to a “national” identity that superseded all others: Gunawardena, “The People of the Lion,” 67. Dharmadasa in turn disagrees with Gunawardena, believing the existence of a distinct Sinhalese language as early as the 5th century is evidence of Sinhalese identity that has remained contiguous from this point onwards: K.N.O. Dharmadasa, “The People of the Lion: Ethnic Identity, Ideology, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 15 (1989).

⁵³ The emphasis here is on *national* identity, in the modern sense of “nations” and “nationalism.” This is not to deny that group identity in various configurations was significant in the pre-colonial era or in the Kandyan kingdom: see John D. Rogers, “Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53:1 (1994); John Clifford Holt, *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: Buddhism, Art, and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2004).

Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims into a common, non-Christian, and uncivilised people who would benefit from European rule, although both simultaneously and perhaps unintentionally created the beginnings of distinct and divisive Sinhalese and Tamil identities through the pragmatic implementation of administrative divisions on linguistic lines. Local narratives, particularly those that reinforced a non-Christian (and therefore potentially problematic) aspect of Sri Lankan identity, were actively targeted for re-interpretation by missionaries in an attempt to reify this identity narrative.

The Portuguese encountered Sri Lanka in the early 16th century and gradually expanded their rule inland from their initial port of Colombo. Early writings describe the native people of Sri Lanka with only a secondary consideration for their ethnic and religious diversity. Duarte Barbosa, writing around 1516 from the distance of Kerala, describes the natives as only either “Moors” or “Heathens.”⁵⁴ Dom Afonso de Noronha, Viceroy in the mid-16th century, mentions the *Chingalas* (Sinhala) but is generally more concerned with political divisions on the island between the kingdoms of Kotte and Sitawaka, a dynastic rather than ethnic or cultural distinction.⁵⁵ Almost a century later, Constantino de Sá de Miranda discusses the beliefs of gentiles, Moors and *Chinghalas*, who are considered universally Buddhist.⁵⁶

In all of these accounts the distinction is between (presumably, though not explicitly in the older accounts) Buddhist *Chinghalas* and Muslim Moors. The implication is that the term *Chinghala* was used to those perceived to be native to the island, while the Moors were Arab Muslims who had settled later. No mention is made by Holt’s

⁵⁴ Duarte Barbosa, extract from “the Book of Duarte Barbosa” [c. 1550] in John Clifford Holt, ed. *Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (North Carolina, USA: Duke University Press, 2011), 154.

⁵⁵ Dom Afonso de Noronha, in *ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁶ Constantino de Sá de Miranda, “*Formas de todas as fortalezas de Ceilão*” [1638], in *ibid.*, 172.

writers of its ethnic Tamil population or of Śaivism as a third religion alongside Buddhism and Islam, despite many encounters with and eventual conquest of the Northeastern Jaffna Kingdom. Fernando suggests that to outsiders like the Portuguese, the island appeared almost a singular homogenous entity (presumably other than the Heathen-Muslim distinction noted above).⁵⁷ The Portuguese, with dual missions to convert and control, were primarily interested in practical categorisations: who was subject to which kingdom, and how easily they could be converted to Christianity.⁵⁸ The only distinction between Sinhalese and Tamil in this conception was a pragmatic one, with linguistic dominance determining administrative divisions in the Portuguese portions of the island.⁵⁹

The imposition of this homogenising narrative on Sinhalese and Tamils was achieved in part through what Houtart calls a systemic replacement of the existing Buddhist “system of meanings” that underpinned Sri Lankan society with a Catholic system. This was achieved through conversions, the claiming of Buddhist temples as government or even Church land, and finally through direct reinterpretation of existing narratives.⁶⁰ Constantino de Sá de Miranda, a Catholic missionary, argued that the local belief that the Buddha stood on Adam’s Peak and left his footprint there was clearly false, and that the footprint instead must have been left by St. Thomas the Apostle. Though he offers little evidence to support his belief that the Apostle visited Sri Lanka and left his footprint there, he is hasty to apply Western

⁵⁷ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 134.

⁵⁸ Francisco Rodriguez de Silveira argued in 1599 that Portugal should have focussed more attention on Sri Lanka than Goa as “it is populated by gentiles who would be much easier to convert than the Moors [who dominated Goa]” (167). This attitude helps to explain the apparent conflation in Portuguese accounts of Buddhism with Śaivism – both were considered to be in the same category of heathen religion that was only worth mentioning in relation to the more difficult task of converting Muslims. Francisco Rodriguez de Silveira, “*Reformaço da Milicia do Estado da India Oriental*” [1599], in Holt, *Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*.

⁵⁹ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 142.

⁶⁰ Francois Houtart, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka* (Bangalore, India: TPI, 1967), 152-6.

geometry and science to demonstrate the poor logic behind the Sinhalese account.⁶¹

De Sá de Miranda's argument represents a deliberate attempt to undermine a particular Sinhalese narrative linking the religion to the land (through the Buddha's visit to and sanctification of the island) and replace it with a Christian one.⁶²

The most significant change between the Portuguese and Dutch periods was the change of state religion to Protestantism and the subsequent persecution and repression of Catholics.⁶³ The Dutch strategy was twofold: maintain political and social discipline through military hegemony and religious conversion; and ensure the economic decline of the independent and now landlocked Kandyan Kingdom.⁶⁴

The latter was largely accomplished by the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company; VOC), who acted as the "King's Middlemen" and "His Majesty's Servants" in Kandy while using their monopoly both to control Kandyan interaction with the outer world and to promote the association between Protestantism and material wealth.⁶⁵ The Dutch maintained the segregation of Sinhala and Tamil speakers in separate administrative sectors, again primarily for pragmatic reasons.⁶⁶

The narrative of the Portuguese and Dutch was primarily one of homogeneity and religious inferiority. Sinhalese and Tamils were conflated by this narrative into one heathen identity group, primarily defined by their lack of Christianity (whether Catholic or Protestant). This identity narrative served the interests of the Portuguese and Dutch colonists by dismissing the native inhabitants of Sri Lanka as

⁶¹ De Sá de Miranda, "*Formas de todas as fortalezas de Ceilão*," 172.

⁶² The Buddha's three visits to Sri Lanka are the subject of the *Mahavamsa*'s first chapter: "thus the Master of boundless wisdom, looking to the salvation of Lanka in time to come... visited this fair island three times... therefore this isle, radiant with the light of truth, came to high honour among believers" (Mhv. I:84).

⁶³ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 140.

⁶⁴ Holt, "The Dutch: An Introduction," in Holt, *Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics*.189.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 190; see also Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka c. 1780-1815: Expansion and Reform* (PhD proefschrift, Leiden Universiteit, 2006).

⁶⁶ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 142.

a group to convert and to be made useful to the colonial project, thereby legitimising colonial rule.

2.2.3 The British Narrative

In this subsection I will outline some key features of the British narrative of Sinhalese identity, particularly noting differences from the earlier European narratives described above. The British narrative generally is more nuanced than those of the Portuguese and Dutch, but their most significant innovation was the use of the *Mahavamsa* as historical evidence that they interpreted to support their particular narrative. I consider this to be the most significant innovation because subsequent identity narratives – including that of the Bodu Bala Sena – have similarly drawn on interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* as supporting evidence. I will argue that this shared reliance on the *Mahavamsa* reflects a deliberate attempt by early Sinhalese nationalist to co-opt the methodology of the British and use it to legitimise their own alternate interpretation of Sinhalese identity.

The British, more so than the Portuguese or Dutch before them, were interested in learning about, and thereby effectively ruling, their new subjects.⁶⁷ In keeping with the historical and anthropological methods of the time, the British sought out Sinhalese ancient texts to shed light on their history and provide evidence for the identity narrative that they (the British) constructed for the Sinhalese.⁶⁸ This practice of supporting identity narratives through reference to ancient texts, particularly the *Mahavamsa*, was later adopted by Sinhalese nationalists and became a defining feature of modern Sinhalese identity.

⁶⁷ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 26.

⁶⁸ The greatest example of this was George Turnour's translation of the *Mahavamsa* and its various commentaries: George Turnour, *The Mahawanso in Roman Characters with the Translation Subjoined; and an Introductory Essay on Pali Buddhistical Literature*, vol. 1 (Sri Lanka: Cotta Church Mission Press, 1837).

The British narrative of ancient Sinhalese civilisation was that of the rise and fall of a great nation, analogous to Greece and Rome. To British historians, Sinhalese civilisation was a thing of the past: “its achievements [to be] celebrated, but nonetheless a dead end.”⁶⁹ The only way forward for Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese nation was through European enlightenment and the renunciation of historical traditions that, while they may have served well in the past, only held Sri Lanka back from the present. The *Mahavamsa* was understood by the British to be a literal and historical account of this rise and fall, and the various histories of Sri Lanka published by British writers during this period used it as a primary source. These histories interpreted the content of the *Mahavamsa* in modern terms of nationhood, with the conflicts depicted explained in national terms and the British narrative at the fore.⁷⁰

Several British scholars published histories of Sri Lanka with both the colonial intent of understanding the new subject and the academic intent to document another strand of the human story (and place it into the broader understanding of the time). Two of the principal nineteenth-century histories of Sri Lanka, Knighton’s *History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (1845) and Tennent’s *Ceylon* (1859) both used the *Mahavamsa* as source material.⁷¹ In both texts Sri

⁶⁹ John D. Rogers, “Historical Images in the British Period,” in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathan Spencer (New York, USA: Routledge, 1990), 102.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 91-2.

⁷¹ Knighton’s first chapter tells us that “having thus assumed the character that future ages willingly assigned to him, he [the Buddha] passed over to Ceylon, then inhabited by a race called Yakkhos, or evil spirits, at whose capital Mahawelligam (near the modern Binturine) he [the Buddha] propounded those doctrines which the inhabitants of the island have ever since received as the revelations of the Almighty.” William Knighton, *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London, UK: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longman’s, 1845), 8. This is taken, he tells us in a footnote, from “Ceylonese history,” but it matches closely enough to Mhv. I to identify this as the source. Tennent devotes an entire chapter of his book to discussing the “Mahawanso,” exceptional for disproving the long-held belief that “Singhalese [*sic*] annals, like those of the Hindus, were devoid of interest or value as historical material:” James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: an Account of the Island Physical, Historical, and Topographical with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities, and Productions* (London: Spottiswoode & co., 1860), 342.

Lanka's history was contextualised in present terms – Sinhala Buddhists had a distinct identity that conformed to modern notions of nationality, and disputes with other parties were phrased as national conflicts.⁷²

The British attempted to shape and control what it meant to be “Buddhist” as they did “Sinhala.” David Scott describes the efforts of British administrators and academics to document an “authentic” Buddhism derived from scripture and separate it from “inauthentic cultural practices” like “demon-worship.”⁷³ This process was also carried out by individuals not officially representing the British Empire, most notably Henry Steel Olcott. Olcott's Protestant influence on Dharmapalite reforms have been discussed by a number of academics,⁷⁴ and I interpret this here as another mechanism through which the colonial power imposed its narrative of Sinhalese Buddhist identity onto Sinhalese Buddhists.⁷⁵

The British constructed a narrative of Sinhalese identity that suited their colonial ideology. They defined the Sinhalese as a once-great civilisation mired in pre-modern traditions that required enlightened Western intervention (in the form of the British Empire) in order to progress. This narrative was supported by reference to Buddhist texts, particularly the *Mahavamsa*, which quickly became established as the primary source of Sinhalese history (and therefore of Sinhalese identity, as it was interpreted by the British). This narrative was not, however, accepted wholeheartedly by the Sinhalese. As I will document in the following subsection, the

⁷² Rogers, "Historical Images in the British Period," 91-2.

⁷³ David Scott, *Formations of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil* (Minnesota, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), particularly 159.

⁷⁴ Stephen Prothero, *Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and the Construction of Protestant Buddhism* (Massachusetts, USA: Harvard University, 1991); George D Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1992); Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and Protestant Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1995); Michael Roberts, "For Humanity, For the Sinhalese: Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 4 (1997).

⁷⁵ Olcott was himself American, not British. I include him here as an “unofficial representative of colonialism” because his influence on the Buddhist revival was made possible through British colonialism, and because this influence was representative of the British approach to defining Buddhism and Sinhalese identity more generally.

Sinhalese took the British narrative, and the methodology that the British used to support this narrative, and constructed their own counter-narrative that redefined Sinhalese identity on Sinhalese terms.

2.2.4 The Sinhalese Counter-Narrative

In this subsection I will outline key features of what I call the Sinhalese counter-narrative. By this I mean alternative definitions of Sinhalese identity that nationalists in the colonial era put forward to support their project of independence. These nationalists, I argue, deliberately adopted the British methodology of using the *Mahavamsa* as historical evidence in order to make the counter-narrative as convincing as possible on British terms.⁷⁶

The central ideology of the British Empire was that a civilised nation had the right (and indeed the obligation) to rule over less civilised people for the benefit of those “lesser” people, making it hardly surprising that many of their colonial subjects would absorb this concept and declare themselves what Ninian Smart calls “counter-nations” in their own right.⁷⁷ Tambiah argues that the current conception of what it is to be “Sinhalese,” with linguistic, ethnic and religious components, is entirely a construction of this period. While these elements did exist earlier, it was only through exposure to European ideas about national and racial identity that

⁷⁶ I will note that Sinhalese resistance to European colonial rule did not begin in the British period. My focus on anti-colonial nationalism under the British is due to the deliberate adoption of British historical methodology by nationalists in this period, which is, I will argue, crucial to the ongoing development of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism that has today resulted in the Bodu Bala Sena. Early “nationalism” was not framed in terms of religious contrast with the Moors or the ethnical contrast with the Tamils, but rather against the political opposition to the Portuguese: Sabaratnam, *Ethnic Attachments in Sri Lanka: Social Change and Cultural Continuity*, 40; Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 10; Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 136-7. Wickremaratne argues that Buddhist nationalism, as we understand it today, did originate in the Portuguese period: Ananda Wickremaratne, *Buddhism and Ethnicity in Sri Lanka: A Historical Analysis* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1995), 170-71. It is worth noting that in the same book Wickremaratne maintains that Tamil invaders of Sri Lanka had the minds of pygmies and “destroyed what they could not understand” (162), somewhat undermining his credentials as a serious historian.

⁷⁷ Ninian Smart, “Religion and Nationalism in India and Sri Lanka,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (1984): 6.

they coalesced into their current form.⁷⁸ This fits with Anderson's model of modular nationalism: "once created, [nationalism becomes] modular, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations."⁷⁹ Fernando notes that the assertion of nationalism, a concept taken from the British themselves, would have been a source of pride for a people otherwise downtrodden by their masters.⁸⁰ The British conception of nations and nationalities, once introduced to Sri Lanka, became the primary means of self-identification among Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors alike, and soon thereafter became the primary means of asserting the right to independence.

The religious dimension of the developing Sinhalese sense of national identity is best explained by G. Aloysius's model of "emancipatory religion," originally used to describe Tamil Buddhists in South India. He argues that transformations of religion under colonialism from traditional to emancipatory forms occurs when there is both consciousness of oppression and a desire for a change in social praxis, which together alter every "lens of social life," including the religious.⁸¹ A change in social orientation necessitates some change in religious orientation to accommodate the now-perceived injustices of the material world and to set the religion against the dominant ideology of the oppressor.⁸² The central belief of this new interpretation of the religion becomes some variation on "emancipation as salvation," which then becomes projected as "a socio-cultural principle... from antiquity guiding and governing the life of the community... the pulse behind the collective heritage of the

⁷⁸ Stanley Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 131.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 4.

⁸⁰ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 190.

⁸¹ G. Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among the Tamils under Colonialism* (New Delhi, India: New Age International Publishers, 2000), 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

group.”⁸³ Most crucially the new interpretation of identity is contextualised as having always been present in the history of the group and as essential for the continuation of that legacy; the religious, emancipatory, and identity narratives become conflated into one historicised understanding of what it means to be Sinhalese.

This historicised understanding was, in Sri Lanka, supported by the evidence of the *Mahavamsa*, the same text that the British had used to support their own interpretation of Sinhalese identity. Prior to British interest in the *Mahavamsa*, the text was not well-known by the average Sinhalese or even by the *sangha* (as it was not a liturgical text, but primarily a chronicle of Buddhism in Sri Lanka).⁸⁴ This was not so after the British histories of the Sinhalese people drew on the *Mahavamsa* as an authoritative source. James D’Alwis (1823-78) was a Sinhalese historian who, following earlier British writers, asserted that Sinhala civilisation possessed a “remarkable” continuity with its North Indian origins.⁸⁵ These Northern origins, distinct from the South Indian roots of the Tamils, were emphasised in D’Alwis’s later works on the linguistics of Sinhalese, which he believed preserved “Indo-Aryan purity” thanks to the “the implacable hatred of [Sinhalese] forefathers towards their Dravidian neighbours which induced [the Sinhala language] to repel their advances.”⁸⁶ While D’Alwis’s primary motive in this study was presumably to advance the prestige of Sinhala as an Indo-Aryan language, and the prestige of the Sinhalese people more generally, his work also served to distance the Sinhalese from the Tamils and set the two up as historically antagonistic nations.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Rogers, "Historical Images in the British Period," 89.

⁸⁵ James D’Alwis, "Introduction," in *The Attanagaluvasa, or the History of the Temple of Attanagalla* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: 1866), v.

⁸⁶ In Rogers, "Historical Images in the British Period," 94.

Sinhalese nationalists countered the European construction of their identity by developing their own narrative of what it meant to be Sinhalese, drawing on the historicised *Mahavamsa* and incorporating a religious dimension. The use of the *Mahavamsa* is particularly significant, as it represents a deliberate appropriation by the nationalists of the means by which the British supported their colonial narrative. The anti-colonial narrative's origins in the colonial, and the form that it took as a result, is what led Qadri Ismail to claim that "the fundamental struggle of the Sinhalese narrative is to repair the damage done by centuries of colonial rule."⁸⁷ This narrative provided the basis for Sinhalese claims of nationhood and the right to self-governance in the early twentieth century, and it was this narrative that was called upon by nationalists opposing Tamil separatism later in that same century.

In this section I have traced the historical development of Sinhalese identity narratives, from colonial constructions through to nationalist-counter narratives. In the following chapter, I will discuss some of the key themes of 20th century Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, which drew on these earlier narratives and re-interpreted them for their own purposes during the Civil War. Before this, I will first discuss the role that violence has played, and continues to play, in establishing and maintaining these narratives of identity.

2.3 IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE

In this section I will argue that violent alterity has come to play a key role in nationalist identity narratives, and that the Bodu Bala Sena's violence against Muslims is best understood as an attempt to construct and maintain their own interpretation of this narrative. The Bodu Bala Sena has, on more than one occasion, offered their own explanation of their hostility towards Muslims. Gnanasara has

⁸⁷ Qadri Ismail, *Abiding By Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place, and Postcolonality* (Minnesota, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 34.

claimed in interviews that the Bodu Bala Sena became interested in the Muslim threat after only after “moderate” Muslims brought this threat to the attention of the Bodu Bala Sena.⁸⁸ Withanage has similarly claimed that “one Muslim group came and said... we [the Bodu Bala Sena] were talking only about protecting Buddhism, but you [also the Bodu Bala Sena] have to protect Islam also.”⁸⁹ Bodu Bala Sena hostility towards Muslims, in this explanation, is essentially altruistic (it is on behalf of the moderate Muslim community) and limited to just those “extremist” Muslims who pose a threat to Sri Lanka and to the Sinhalese. This explanation, offered in interviews to foreign press and academics, seems somewhat unconvincing in light of Gnanasara’s speech at Aluthgama and the deadly riots against Muslims and Tamils alike that following. In this section I will offer my own explanation for the Bodu Bala Sena’s hostility against Muslims: that violence, and the legitimisation of violence against an alleged enemy, serves a particular social function for the Bodu Bala Sena and for its supporters. Through legitimising and carrying out acts of violence against Muslims, the Bodu Bala Sena attempts to reify their particular narrative of Sinhalese identity, which is based on the civil war narrative but re-interpreted to account for the loss of the LTTE as the salient other. Carrying out, or threatening to carry out, violence is one of many behaviours that members of a group may engage in. There is a deep reciprocal connection between group identity and group behaviour: a group’s understanding of its own nature, and of its relationship with other groups, influences and is influenced by the manner in which it behaves towards members of those other groups. If a group member accepts a particular understanding of what it means to be a member of that group (an interpretation of identity, which I present as a “narrative of identity”), this understanding to some degree dictates what behaviour is appropriate for that

⁸⁸ Galagoda Gnanasara, interview by Pranay Sharma, August 25, 2014.

⁸⁹ Dilantha Withanage, interview by Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014.

group member. In particular, if the group member accepts an understanding of the relationship between their own group and another group this understanding will help to determine how that group member interacts with members of the other group. Identity is not just descriptive, but normative.

Simultaneously, as the behaviour of group members conforms to an identity narrative, the narrative appears more persuasive to other members of the group and so becomes more widely and deeply accepted. If an identity narrative describes a group as engaged in a historical conflict with another group, then acts of violence by group members against that other group will serve to reify the narrative, making it appear more real to members of that group.

The reciprocal relationship between identity and behaviour is my explanation for the Bodu Bala Sena's hostility towards Muslims in post-war Sri Lanka. The defeat of the LTTE signalled the end of Tamil separatism as a credible threat (at least for the immediate future). This created an identity crisis for Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists: without the LTTE as an "Other" to defend the *dhammadipa* against, as their narrative of Sinhalese identity told them was their historic national duty, how were they to act out and reify this narrative?

The Bodu Bala Sena's solution to this potential crisis was to shift the "Other" of the narrative from Tamils to Muslims, allowing them to continue defending the *dhammadipa* as the previously existing narrative required. The Bodu Bala Sena's mission might be best understood as the promotion and reification of this new narrative of Sinhalese identity: similar in many ways to the existing anti-Tamil narrative of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, but re-interpreted to remain relevant in the post-war era. Their hostility towards Muslims and their construction of Muslims as a threat to Sinhalese Buddhists are attempts to reify their own narrative that sets Sinhalese Buddhists against Muslims.

The relationship between identity and behaviour, particularly violent behaviour, has been discussed in literature. Bush and Keyman, writing on the Copenhagen School's concept of "societal security," consider the construction of threats as integral to or even generated by the construction and maintenance of group identity:

"...complete security – that is, the complete absence of threat or danger – even if it were possible, would destroy a necessary precondition for politicised group identity. If the absence of threat challenges a group's sense of identity... the construction of threat may also consolidate identity."⁹⁰

They explain that the construction of threats helps to "mobilise" group identity by making certain axes of identity (such as ethnicity, gender, class, language, or religion) more salient.⁹¹ The Bodu Bala Sena responded to the "complete absence of threat or danger" following the collapse of the LTTE by constructing a new threat, through which they sought to consolidate Sinhalese Buddhist identity in the post-war era.

Tobias Theiler argues, "Group members seek to align their actions and beliefs with what they perceive to be dominant group norms," and that group members can "enhance [their] valuation of the ingroup and thus of the self not only by *perceiving* outgroups in a discriminatory way but also by *treating* them in this way."⁹² Theiler's two claims have significant implications. First, it suggests that identity is normative. If the identity narrative of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists portrays Sinhalese Buddhists as "defenders of the *dhammadipa*" then Sinhalese Buddhists who accept

⁹⁰ Kenneth D. Bush and E. Fuat Keyman, "Identity-Based Conflict: Rethinking Security in a Post-Cold War World," *Global Governance* 3, no. 3 (1997): 312-13; cf. Sen, *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny*, 19.

⁹¹ Bush and Keyman, "Identity-Based Conflict: Rethinking Security in a Post-Cold War World," 317-19.

⁹² Tobias Theiler, "Societal Security and Social Psychology," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 261. Emphasis in original.

the narrative will seek to emulate this role. Without an enemy to defend against, they have no means of aligning their actions with the group norm, and this undermines their sense of identity. Theiler's second claim, that valuation of the group identity is enhanced by participation in discriminatory action against outsiders, including intergroup conflict, further underlines this point. The narrative of the Bodu Bala Sena provides a means by which Sinhalese Buddhists might still engage in discriminatory action against the salient other by re-interpreting Muslims as that other.

In this section I have suggested that the Bodu Bala Sena's hostility towards Muslims might be understood as an attempt to reify their new narrative of Sinhalese identity. With the end of the civil war nationalists lost the LTTE as a credible threat and as an "Other" against which to define Sinhalese identity. This necessitated reinterpretations of Sinhalese identity that would remain relevant in the post-war era. For some, this may have involved the construction of a new identity narrative that downplayed alterity and the role of violence in reifying the narrative, but the powerful relationship between identity and alterity made this difficult. The Bodu Bala Sena's solution was to instead redefine the Sinhalese "Other" as Muslims, a threat made credible by global fears of Islamist extremism, and they have attempted to reify this narrative and make it persuasive as a definition of Sinhalese identity through the violence that they inspire and carry out.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER TWO

Why, to paraphrase former Minister Senaratna, did the Bodu Bala Sena abandon their "Tamil sickness" in favour of a "Muslim sickness?" They did so because Tamil separatism no longer posed a credible threat to Sinhalese Buddhism, and so could no longer function as the designated "Other" of the nationalist interpretation of Sinhalese identity. For over a century now, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists have

defined themselves, and their nation, as a people under siege, who have fought for generations to preserve their sacred land from impious foreign. For the Bodu Bala Sena, Sri Lankan Muslims now serve as that invader, and by fighting against this “new threat” the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to reify their new narrative and so redefine Sinhalese identity.

3 CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: BUDDHIST NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA

My aim in this chapter is to locate the Bodu Bala Sena as a new development in a broader history of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism by discussing change from, and continuity with, earlier movements. I will critically examine existing literature on Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and argue that in many significant ways the Bodu Bala Sena continues this tradition. This is not to say that the Bodu Bala Sena is identical to earlier movements, as its ideology does include significant novel developments. My objective here instead is to demonstrate that the Bodu Bala Sena has a place in academic discussion about Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism broadly conceived. Locating the Bodu Bala Sena in existing nationalist tradition serves two purposes: first, it allows us to bring existing discussions of this tradition to bear on the Bodu Bala Sena (which I will do in this chapter); and second, it raises the questions of why and how the Bodu Bala Sena diverges from these earlier movements (the focus of Chapter 4).

Many authors have attempted to “explain” Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, by which I mean they have attempted to answer some of the following questions: What role does religion play in enabling or even motivating violence against minorities? Why do Sinhalese Buddhist authorities make it their business to legitimise such violence on Buddhist grounds? Is ethnic violence an inevitable result of the state of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism, or can Sinhala-minority relations improve regardless of, or perhaps even thanks to, the current religious position? By locating the Bodu Bala Sena in this tradition, we can begin to assess existing explanations for Buddhist nationalism in light of the new development of the Bodu Bala Sena, which I will begin to do in this chapter and in those following.

In §3.1 I will consider the role that the *Mahavamsa* has played in nationalist discourse. The *Mahavamsa* is referenced in almost every major scholarly work on the relationship between violence and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and I will argue that while direct references to the *Mahavamsa* are relatively scarce, indirect references to the content and to popular interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* are very present in Bodu Bala Sena discourse. This suggests that the *Mahavamsa* has come to occupy such a central position in nationalist ideology that even groups which do not directly reference it are influenced by readings of the text.

In §3.2 I will discuss the phenomenon of what De Silva calls “Buddhist Fundamentalism,” an imagination of an ideal moral past and an imperative to restore this morality in contemporary Sri Lanka. I will discuss the genesis of this imagined past and its influence throughout 20th century nationalist ideology, before arguing that it continues to influence the Bodu Bala Sena’s ideology today.

3.1 THE *MAHAVAMSA* IN NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

The *Mahavamsa* has historically played a significant role in Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology. While the Bodu Bala Sena appears to make few direct references to the *Mahavamsa* itself, in this section I will argue that this text continues to influence their ideology as it has earlier movements. Interpretations of the *Mahavamsa* have influenced Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism to such an extent that any such group, including the Bodu Bala Sena, will bear traces of these interpretations even when they do not directly employ the *Mahavamsa*’s content in support of their position. I will give some background on the *Mahavamsa* and its historiography before turning to the Bodu Bala Sena’s rhetoric.

The *Mahavamsa* is a text originally compiled in the 6th century from earlier oral and written traditions, including the *Dipavamsa* ("island chronicle").⁹³ This represents Chapters I-XXXVII of the Geiger translation, culminating in the reign of Mahasena, but a number of "updates" to the *Mahavamsa*, often referred to as the *Culavamsa* ("lesser chronicle") have since been written. The most recent of these updates was produced in 1978 under then-President J.R. Jayewardene.⁹⁴ The *Mahavamsa* primarily served as a history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, or as Fernando puts it, "the official history of the state written with a sectarian perspective,"⁹⁵ an important development on the earlier *Dipavamsa*, which was "a straightforward account of the dynasties of kings."⁹⁶ The *Mahavamsa* turned this earlier history into a narrative that constructed an essential political order for Sri Lanka consisting of "a king, a people, and a religion bound together in symbiosis."⁹⁷

The influence of this political order, and of the *Mahavamsa* more generally, on Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka is undeniable. Three sections in particular have been used to support nationalist claims of priority over minorities: the visit of the Buddha to Sri Lanka (Mhv. I); the arrival of Prince Vijaya and the founding of the Sinhalese race (Mhv. VI-VII); and finally the Dutugāmunu epic (Mhv. XXI-XXXII). These accounts together form the basis of the *dhammadipa* doctrine: the belief that Sri Lanka is a sacred island set apart for the preservation of Theravada Buddhism,

⁹³ Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Myth of the Human Sacrifice: History, Story, and Debate in a Buddhist Chronicle," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 25, no. 1 (1989): 78. This makes the *Mahavamsa* post-canonical, but it is still highly authoritative in Sinhalese Buddhism: Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, "Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, ed. Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 1998), 4-5.

⁹⁴ Steven Kemper, "J.R. Jayewardene, Righteousness and *Realpolitik*," in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathan Spencer (New York, USA: Routledge, 1990).

⁹⁵ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 122. Fernando was in turn referencing Peter Schalk, ed. *Buddhism Among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Ilam: Part One (Prologue), the Pre-Pallava and the Pallava Period* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2002).

⁹⁶ Obeyesekere, "The Myth of the Human Sacrifice: History, Story, and Debate in a Buddhist Chronicle," 79.

⁹⁷ H.L. Seneviratne, "Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present," 5.

and that the Sinhalese are tasked with this defence.⁹⁸ Any threat to the unity of Sri Lanka, or to the dominance of Sinhalese Buddhists and Sinhalese Buddhism, is, according to this understanding, a threat to this sacred task that must be resisted by pious Buddhists.⁹⁹

The *Mahavamsa* also provides an example of how such threats might be resisted in the Dutugāmunu account. Throughout these chapters the *Mahavamsa* stresses the piety of Dutugāmunu: he fixes a relic of the Buddha to his spear (Mhv. XXV:1) and marches with the company of 500 *bhikkhavo*, who were “blessing and protection” for his army (Mhv. XXV:3-4). However, after slaying all of his foes and uniting Sri Lanka for the first time under a Sinhalese Buddhist king, Dutugāmunu still “knew no joy, remembering that thereby [his victory] was wrought the destruction of millions” (Mhv. XXV:103). Eight *arahanto* then console him:

“From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. *Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts*. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!” (Mhv. XXV: 109-111).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Neil DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, Policy Studies 40 (Washington, DC, USA: East-West Center, 2007), 29-30; Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*. *Dhammadipa* is usually translated by scholars as “island of the *dhmma*” and is used in reference to the nationalist understanding of Sri Lanka as consecrated for the protection and preservation of Buddhism. I use the term similarly, although I will note that Peter Schalk disagrees with this translation of *dhammadipa*, suggesting that this is only a “Sinhala-tva” (nationalist) interpretation and that this interpretation is at odds with canonical usage of *dhammadipa*: Peter Schalk, “Semantic Transformations of the Dhammadipa,” in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London, UK: Routledge, 2006).

⁹⁹ Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Emphasis my own.

Deegalle, who is critical of the *Mahavamsa* treatment of violence, suggests that this may have been a “rehabilitation strategy” or “an instance of skill-in-means” by the *arahants*:

“In the long run, it would not help the Buddhist monastic community keeping the victorious king in remorse or in a depressed condition... The monastic community as a group could not change his [Dutugāmunu’s] past karma, but as a community who believed in the free-will and individual effort, it was possible for them to direct and channel the king in a positive direction: their rehabilitation strategy was to identify that positive dimension, a sphere of potential growth and creativity. However, the unforeseen consequence of that strategy was a ‘gross calculation’ of the victims of war as ‘only one and a half human beings’ and ‘unbelievers and men of evil.’”¹⁰¹

Regardless of the monks’ intentions, the model of Dutugāmunu fighting for the “glory of the doctrine” became central to Buddhist nationalist ideology in the 20th century, with many nationalist groups constructing the civil war against Tamil separatists as a modern re-enactment of the Dutugāmunu-Elara conflict. The post-colonial state came to be seen as an accomplishment of the project begun by Dutugāmunu, and defence of that unified state became the highest priority for pious Buddhists.¹⁰²

Bartholomeusz argues that this account is used by nationalists to consider *avihimsa* (non-violence) as a *prima facie* obligation, one that is “ineradicable but over-ridable” if a greater moral duty (such as the defence of the *dhamma* itself) presents itself.¹⁰³ She bases this largely on a moral logic that she sees in the consolation of Dutugāmunu by the *arahants*, in which devastation is justified “in order that the

¹⁰¹ Mahinda Deegalle, “Is Violence Justified in Theravada Buddhism?,” *Current Dialogue* 39 (2002): 9.

¹⁰² Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 204. See also Kemper, *The Presence of the Past*, 69-78.

¹⁰³ Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*, 72.

dhamma might prosper.” Her summary of this moral logic in a just war (*dhamma yuddhaya*) framework is that

“Buddhists have imagined a past that was protected by warrior kings, legitimated by Buddhist symbolism, including the sangha, and whose violence was justified given its awesome role in defending the pacific faith. In sum... the need to protect a pacific Buddhism can legitimise violence.”¹⁰⁴

The idea that violence is legitimate when carried out in defence of the *dhammadipa* remains influential in Bodu Bala Sena ideology, even though the text itself is only rarely cited.¹⁰⁵ Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, an “ally” of the Bodu Bala Sena,¹⁰⁶ has said, “Since the time of King Dutugāmunu, they [the *sangha*] have taken the leadership in all struggles to protect the country.”¹⁰⁷ The Bodu Bala Sena, which primarily consists of monks, similarly takes leadership in their own struggle to protect the country from the Muslim threat (which I will discuss in the following chapter).

The Bodu Bala Sena is also increasingly attempting to take a leadership role in democratic politics. Before the 2015 presidential elections, Gnanasara expressed his hope that it might result in the installation of a “Sinhala Buddhist king.”¹⁰⁸ Presumably, unless the Bodu Bala Sena has more radically revolutionary tendencies than they have indicated elsewhere, he does not desire to literally replace the presidential system with a monarchy and is using the term “Sinhala Buddhist king”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁵ Rohini Mohan claims that Gnanasara has made a reference to a “historical king” who had defended Sri Lanka from Tamil invasion, presumably Dutugāmunu: Rohini Mohan, “Sri Lanka's Violent Buddhists,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2015. This is the only direct reference to the *Mahavamsa* by the Bodu Bala Sena that I have been able to find.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; “Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 20, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Mahinda P Liyanage Galle, “Sangha Played Historic Role During War: Defence Secretary,” *Sri Lanka Daily News*, 11th March 2013. This is a reference to Mhv. XXV:3, “Give us, that we may treat them with honour, *bhikkhu* who shall go on with us [to war], since the sight of *bhikkhu* is blessing and protection for us.” See also Rahula’s claim that “when monks accompany the army the war appears to be of religious nature:” Walpola Rahula, *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (New York, USA: Grove Press, 1974), 152, note 1.

¹⁰⁸ “Bodu Bala Sena Silenced?,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, December 16, 2014.

in a more general sense. A number of Sri Lankan presidents, including Jayewardene and then-incumbent Rajapaksa, have attempted to present themselves as *cakkavatti* (he who sets rolling the Wheel [of *dhamma*]; a just and faithful king)¹⁰⁹ and I interpret Gnanasara's comment similarly. In "the history," the Bodu Bala Sena claims that monks "guided [kings] to the throne" and that their purpose today is "to produce lay persons who can guide and provide leadership."¹¹⁰ Monks and kings, in this conception, together have a dual role in leading the Sinhalese nation. This has strong parallels to the "economic monk" model discussed by Seneviratne, who was characterised by "status-yearning, his desire to be king, and the symbolic superiority of the monk over the king in the Buddhist tradition."¹¹¹ It appears that this element of earlier nationalist ideology remains relevant to the Bodu Bala Sena. The *dhammadipa* doctrine in general terms also remains relevant to Bodu Bala Sena ideology. Wimalajothi has claimed that Sri Lanka is "not a multi-cultural country but rather a nation for the Sinhala Buddhists."¹¹² His claim that Sri Lanka is "for" Sinhalese Buddhists clearly points to the *dhammadipa* interpretation of the *Mahavamsa*. Gnanasara has also referred to the "sacred Sinhala franchise" that supported former president Rajapaksa.¹¹³ This reference to the Sinhalese franchise as "sacred" implies that either the Sinhalese are themselves a sacred group or possibly that those Sinhalese who are not members of the political franchise (in this case, those who do not support Rajapaksa) are not sacred. Again, this is drawn from the *dhammadipa* understanding of the Sinhalese having a clear (sacred) purpose, as well as rightful ownership over Sri Lanka.

¹⁰⁹ Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*, 37; Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, New and Revised ed. (New York, USA: Berghahn Books, 2011), 304.

¹¹⁰ "Rajapaksa is the Genuine Common Candidate: Bodu Bala Sena," *Adaderana*, October 28, 2014; "Bodu Bala Sena to Enter Politics," *Adaderana*, October 21, 2014.

¹¹¹ Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 93.

¹¹² "Buddhist Monk to Fight Jihad Threat," *Al Jazeera English*, September 28, 2014.

¹¹³ Qadijah Irshad, "Buddhist Party for Ban on Halal Food," *Khaleej Times*, February 18, 2013.

Gnanasara often uses the terms “nation” and “religion” seemingly interchangeably: his aim is to “unite all forces that believe in Buddhism... to protect Sinhala and Buddhist rights” and the Bodu Bala Sena is both “working to protecting our nation” and providing “necessary protection to our religion.”¹¹⁴ Withanage translated the interview himself, giving these word choices particular significance. This again suggests that in Bodu Bala Sena ideology, as in earlier interpretations of the *Mahavamsa*, Sri Lanka is a consecrated island for the *dhamma* and for the Sinhalese as defenders of that *dhamma*.

These points together indicate that the *Mahavamsa* remains a significant influence on Bodu Bala Sena ideology. This influence is not, however, manifested in entirely the same manner as it was in previous nationalist movements. While Bartholomeusz argued that nationalists during the civil war relied on the text to provide a moral logic that would legitimise violence against the LTTE on Buddhist grounds, the Bodu Bala Sena does not appear to directly use the *Mahavamsa* for this purpose. The Bodu Bala Sena’s ideology does draw on the *dhammadipa* doctrine derived from nationalist readings of the *Mahavamsa*, suggesting that the text continues to indirectly influence their movement even when not explicitly referenced. This may also indirectly co-opt some of the moral legitimacy of the civil war, even when the explicit justifications for the Bodu Bala Sena’s violence do not directly reference this logic. I will discuss the Bodu Bala Sena’s own justification for violence against Muslims further in Chapter 4. In summary, while the Bodu Bala Sena only rarely directly refers to the *Mahavamsa*, their ideology is clearly derived from a nationalist reading of its contents and demonstrates the extent to which interpretations of this text have dominated nationalist ideology in Sri Lanka.

¹¹⁴ Gnanasara, “Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka.”

3.2 REFORMING AND RESTORING THE *SASANA*

Throughout the 20th century nationalists argued that the *sangha* had been disempowered by colonialism and that a “restoration” of Buddhism to its pre-colonial state was necessary for the ongoing benefit of Sri Lanka. I will argue that the Bodu Bala Sena continues this rhetoric, arguing that monastic education in particular is a concern that must be addressed for the well-being of Sri Lanka as a whole.

This fits the Bodu Bala Sena into De Silva’s definition of a “Buddhist Fundamentalism.” He describes this as having three key features:

1. The distant past, depicted in the *Mahavamsa*, is believed to have been an idyllic and utopian period, in which people lived simple and moral lives;
2. The *sangha* played a key role in the polity, both as advisors to the ruler and as moral guides for the laity; and
3. If the relationships within and between the *sangha*, laity, and polity can be restored (in that order), then this moral utopia will return.¹¹⁵

Nationalist belief in a utopian past that might yet be restored originated with the Anagarika Dharmapala, who was allegedly the first person to consistently use the term “Sinhala-Buddhist.”¹¹⁶ Dharmapala believed that colonialism had had a negative impact on the Sinhalese¹¹⁷ that he sought to reverse through cultural and religious reform.¹¹⁸ The revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka was the first crucial, step towards the restoration of the Sinhalese to their “ancient glory.”¹¹⁹ He wrote,

¹¹⁵ Chandra R. De Silva, “The Plurality of Buddhist Fundamentalism: An Inquiry into Views Among Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka,” in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, ed. Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 1998), 54.

¹¹⁶ Gunawardena, “The People of the Lion,” 76.

¹¹⁷ Michael Roberts, “Stimulants and Ingredients in the Awakening of Latter-Day Nationalisms,” in *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Michael Roberts (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Marga, 1979), 223-24.

¹¹⁸ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 171-72; Gunawardena, “The People of the Lion,” 76.

¹¹⁹ Anagarika Dharmapala, “The Western Invasion and the Decline of Buddhism,” in *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays, and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed. Ananda Gurugé (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Government Press, 1965), 494.

“Practices which were an abomination to the ancient noble Sinhalese have today become tolerated under the influence of the Semitic sociology... in the days of the Sinhalese kings and under the Buddhist rule no liquor was sold, no animals were slaughtered, land was not sold... now the Sinhalese, once the lord of the soil, is but a stranger in his land,”¹²⁰ and asked instead that “the Mahavansa [*sic*] be a guide, and... the learned elderly Maha Theros of the different parts of the island be asked to advise the government as to the best means to be adopted for promoting the material and moral welfare of the Sinhalese Buddhists.”¹²¹ Dharmapala imagined a utopian past, lost to colonialism, and planned to re-create it in his own contemporary Sri Lanka, a pattern that would be followed by nationalists in the 20th century, and by the Bodu Bala Sena in the 21st.

Dharmapala’s imperative to reform and restore Buddhism was later taken up by Walpola Rahula, whose 1946 book *On the Heritage of the Bhikkhu* “influenced the monkhood more than any other [text] in the recent history of Sri Lankan Theravadan Buddhism.”¹²² Building on Dharmapala, Rahula described in both the *Heritage* and in his earlier work *The History of Buddhism in Ceylon* a mutually beneficial relationship between the *sangha* and Sinhalese kings stretching back into the 3rd century and broken only by colonial rule.¹²³ The interruption of this relationship led to the decline of both the religion and of the Sinhalese people, a decline that could only be prevented or reversed by the reinstatement of the *sangha* as guides and guardians of the new “kings” of the modern (independent) Sinhalese state. The political role that Rahula demanded for monastics in Sri Lanka was not, in

¹²⁰ Ibid., 495.

¹²¹ Ibid., 496.

¹²² Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 135.

¹²³ Patrick Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2009), 86-7.

his understanding, a novel development, but rather the reinstatement (and perhaps a modern updating) of an existing relationship between monk and politics.¹²⁴

Throughout the 20th century, political leaders increasingly adopted Rahula's calls for a necessary reform of the *Buddhasasana*.¹²⁵ Bechert claims that this is due to "the continued effectiveness of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of the responsibility of the state for the reform of the *sangha*,"¹²⁶ although I suspect that it would be naïve to ignore the political expediency of publically supporting the majority religion. Although no government came quite so far as to declare Buddhism the official state religion, it has been an expectation of any government that they publically affirm their support for the religion in keeping with its position as "foremost" in Sri Lanka.¹²⁷ Buddhism, Holt argues, was throughout the 20th century "invoked as a trope for the means to establish a social and religious condition modelled on an idealised image derived from the *Mahavamsa*."¹²⁸ This trope continues to influence

¹²⁴ Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 29. Seneviratne argues that Rahula's manifesto is fundamentally "a justification for monks to arm themselves with qualifications" and "be active [in] the defence of religion and nation," an end that would permit even violence: Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 178.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Howard Wriggins, "Ceylon's Time of Troubles, 1956-1958," *Far Eastern Survey* 28, no. 3 (1959); I.D.S. Weerawardana, *Ceylon General Election 1956* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1960); Heinz Bechert, "S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the Legitimation of Power Through Buddhist Ideals," in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Pennsylvania, USA: ANIMA Books, 1978); Kemper, "J.R. Jayewardene, Righteousness and Realpolitik."; Josine van der Horst, *Who is He, What is He Doing? Religious Rhetoric and Performances in Sri Lanka During R. Premadasa's Presidency (1989-1993)* (Amsterdam, Nederland: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam Drukkers, 1995); John Clifford Holt, "The Persistence of Political Buddhism," in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, ed. Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 1998); Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minnesota, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jakob Rösel, "Discourse and Practice of Sinhalese Nationalism: Role of Local Knowledge and Decentralisation," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 30 (2002); P.D. Premasiri, "A 'Righteous War' in Buddhism?," in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London, UK: Routledge, 2006); Neil DeVotta and Jason Stone, "Jathika Hela Urumaya and Ethno-Religious Politics in Sri Lanka," *Pacific Affairs* 81, no. 1 (2008).

¹²⁶ Heinz Bechert, "Contradictions in Sinhalese Buddhism," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Pennsylvania, USA: ANIMA Books, 1978), 192.

¹²⁷ Holt, "The Persistence of Political Buddhism," 192.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

the Bodu Bala Sena, who like Rahula and Dharmapala before them see the restoration of Buddhism to be a vital step in repairing the damage of colonialism.

The Bodu Bala Sena's mission statement "would line up the four Buddhist congregations – Bhikkus, Bhikkunis, Upasaka and Upasika – to lead the nation in protecting, safeguarding and sustaining Buddhist social values in the face of dynamic global trends of change."¹²⁹ The mention of "Buddhist social values" immediately recalls the moral past of Dharmapala, a connection underlined by Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Bodu Bala Sena's strongest public supporter in the Rajapaksa regime. Rajapaksa has said that the Bodu Bala Sena's mission was to "restore" Buddhist values and the "age old" social traditions of the country. This suggests the continued influence of the first fundamentalist belief listed by De Silva: that the distant past was an idyllic and utopian period, in which people lived simple and moral lives. The Bodu Bala Sena, like Dharmapala and Rahula before them, claims that its primary goal is to restore the morality of that time.

The second of De Silva's features of Buddhist fundamentalism is that in this ideal time, monks are believed to have played a key role in the polity as both moral guides and as political advisors. The Bodu Bala Sena similarly see themselves as rightfully playing a key role in the governance of the contemporary Sri Lanka polity. In "the history," the Bodu Bala Sena claim that monks "guided [kings] to the throne" and that their purpose today was "to produce lay persons who can guide and provide leadership."¹³⁰ This suggests that monks and kings (sovereigns) together have a dual role in leading the Sinhalese nation, perhaps explaining the Bodu Bala Sena's increasing interest in Sri Lanka elections. Leading up to the 2015 Sri Lanka presidential elections, the Bodu Bala Sena initially refrained from supporting any

¹²⁹ Bodu Bala Sena, "About Us," www.bodubalasena.co/about-us.html (accessed on April 1, 2015).

¹³⁰ "Rajapaksa is the Genuine Common Candidate: Bodu Bala Sena," *Adaderana*, October 28, 2014; "Bodu Bala Sena to Enter Politics," *Adaderana*, October 21, 2014.

particular candidates. This was not, in their own words, because they saw no role for themselves in politics, but because they believed that none of the candidates would fulfil the role of a “Sinhala Buddhist king” that they desired.¹³¹ Once Maithripala Sirisena, the common opposition candidate, announced that he would limit the powers of the Executive Presidency if elected, the Bodu Bala Sena immediately began to publicly voice support for the incumbent President Rajapaksa.¹³² Following Rajapaksa’s defeat by Sirisena, the Bodu Bala Sena then launched their own political party to (unsuccessfully) contest the general elections. This increasing involvement in the political process, seemingly motivated by frustration over the failure of political candidates to embody the righteous Sinhalese Buddhist kings that the Bodu Bala Sena desires, strongly suggests that the second of De Silva’s features of Buddhist fundamentalism continues to influence the Bodu Bala Sena.

De Silva’s first and second features of Buddhist fundamentalism are rooted in a particular interpretation of the past: in the pre-colonial era there was an ideal and moral social order maintained by an ideal political order (a relationship between monks and polity). The breakdown of this political order under successive colonial regimes, according to De Silva’s fundamentalists and to the Bodu Bala Sena, led to a loss of the moral social order. This leads to De Silva’s third point: by restoring the relationships within and between the *sangha*, the polity, and the people, the moral values of the ideal past can also be restored. The Bodu Bala Sena, similarly to some earlier nationalists,¹³³ sees education, both of the *sangha* and the laity, as an essential part of this reform and restoration. Withanage explains:

¹³¹ "Bodu Bala Sena Silenced?," *Sri Lanka Mirror*, December 16, 2014.

¹³² "Executive Presidency Should Remain," *Daily Mirror*, January 21, 2015; "Manifesto Will Affect SL: BBS," *Daily Mirror*, January 6, 2015.

¹³³ The Buddhist schools of the Theosophical Society, with their emphasis on “rational Buddhism,” come to mind: Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 8. Similarly, Jayewardene’s history book, based on the *Mahavamsa* and intended for high schoolers,

“We were running this education system in this country focussing on value first. Now the British came into this system with Western – you know, scientific revolution and everything.... They changed our structures and introduced that knowledge is the main focus. Now why we are having problems in our society is because I do not understand you, you don’t understand me, but we have this much of knowledge and you have that much of knowledge, we have knowledge but our hearts are not; so this is the primary problem... what I am trying to say [is that] we had our own health [care] system, education system, we had our own systems. So now, the British legal system, Dutch law, then the British schools... their music system. So the Buddhist monks have to go through this [European] education system... now, with Marxist philosophies and British structures, government and all these legal systems, Buddhist monks *are nowhere*. And the... violence... destroyed the peaceful means of Buddhist clergy in this system. And as a result, today we ended up with a set of Buddhist monks who are seen as fighters, not as good Buddhist monks who preach the *dhamma*.”¹³⁴

There are several claims here to unpack. First, Withanage claims that prior to colonial intrusion Sinhalese education was value-oriented.¹³⁵ Education, in his understanding, reinforced the moral values of the ideal past. Second, the introduction of European education (alongside legal, healthcare, and musical systems) disrupted this traditional values-based approach and in doing so, displaced the *sangha*. This displacement, and the subsequent loss of the “peaceful means” of the *sangha*, led to the violence that has since plagued Sri Lanka.

Withanage’s solution to this problem is to reform the education system,

discussed in Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities*, Chapter Two: Producing Sri Lanka from Ceylon. This book’s introduction begins, “Let us speak of Buddhism – the Buddhism of the Great Theras [Theravada] which, surviving unchanged through a hundred vicissitudes, is a shining beacon for all mankind” and continues to describe a history of Sri Lanka that rises and falls with respect to this shining beacon: J.R. Jayewardene, *Golden Threads* (Sri Lanka: Department of Government Printing, 1986), 3.

¹³⁴ Withanage, interview by Michael Jerryson, June 25, 2014. Emphasis Jerryson’s.

¹³⁵ Earlier in the same interview, he explained that while Western education was focussed on knowledge, then skill, then attitude, traditional Sinhalese education prioritised attitude, then knowledge, and then skill.

reintroducing the traditional values of the past and training Buddhist monks with “better organised” monastic education.¹³⁶ Withanage acknowledges that Sri Lanka “is not the same world, it’s a globalised world,” and so suggests that instead of “go[ing] back to history,” the Bodu Bala Sena seeks to restore and improve the educational system, and thereby society as a whole.

The Bodu Bala Sena also seeks to restore Buddhism through the restoration and preservation of Buddhist places of worship, both contemporary and historical. Temples are, in the Bodu Bala Sena’s vision, to be centres of social development, those experiencing hardship are to have their conditions improved, and archaeologically significant sites are to be identified, promoted and safeguarded by legislation.¹³⁷ This is a particularly contentious political issue, as the “reclamation” of sacred space for Buddhism has been a recurring theme of Sinhalese nationalist movements and has often occurred at the expense of Tamil and Muslim communities. The reclamation of Anuradhapura from the “desecrating effects of colonial rule” shortly following independence is one such example.¹³⁸ In 1942 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, then Minister for Local Administration, created the Anuradhapura Preservation Ordinance that led to the eviction of the old town’s residents and the burning of its colonial buildings to better showcase the ruins of the historical capital of Dutugāmuṇu as described in the *Mahavamsa*.¹³⁹

Reclamations of sacred space continued throughout the civil war period, often with similar ties to the *Mahavamsa* history. As recently as 2010, a stupa previously believed to have been the tomb of the Tamil King Elara was declared to instead

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Bodu Bala Sena, “About Us.”

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Nissan, “History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 25 (1989): 65-6.

¹³⁹ The negative impact of this on Muslim and Tamil landowners is noted in Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 155.

belong to his killer, Dutugāmunu.¹⁴⁰ The Bodu Bala Sena has continued in this fashion, targeting a 10th century mosque in the Kuragala cave complex which they maintain has “taken over” the historically Buddhist place of worship and destroyed evidence of a greater Buddhist heritage.¹⁴¹ In this manner the Bodu Bala Sena continues the existing nationalist practice of “reclaiming” sacred spaces, although it is perhaps notable that in this example they target a Muslim mosque rather than a Tamil stupa. I will discuss this specific case further in §4.3.

The Bodu Bala Sena also claims that the restoration and empowerment of the monastic orders themselves is an essential step towards the Buddhist society that they hope to build. The Bodu Bala Sena seeks to establish an “independent and brave society of bhikkhus who have no involvement in party politics, no dependency on political patrons and parties, but with [*sic*] the ability of guiding them [the political patrons and parties] all in the right direction.”¹⁴² They also seek to modernise Bhikkhu education, re-establish the Bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka, and support Buddhist social development and entrepreneurship. These objectives, particularly the modernisation of Bhikkhu education, all have strong parallels to Rahula’s project and so might be interpreted as a similarly self-interest attempt at furthering the interests of the Bodu Bala Sena’s monastic leaders.¹⁴³

The Bodu Bala Sena’s adoption of the fundamentalist imperative to restore the utopian past may have some implications for De Silva’s original argument. He observes, following Marty and Appleby, that fundamentalism is both “selectively traditional and selectively modern.”¹⁴⁴ The Bodu Bala Sena seems to confirm the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 398.

¹⁴¹ "Sri Lanka's Buddhist Extremists Vow to Remove Muslim Mosque in Kuragala," *Colombo Page: Sri Lanka Internet Newspaper*, March 18, 2013.

¹⁴² Bodu Bala Sena, "About Us."

¹⁴³ Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 23-26.

¹⁴⁴ De Silva, "The Plurality of Buddhist Fundamentalism," 59; Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Accounting for Fundamentalism* (Chicago, USA: Chicago University Press, 1994), 825.

truth of this, with Withanage's call for reform tempered by his admission that the world is increasingly globalised and that monastic education must reflect this.¹⁴⁵

In this section I have demonstrated that there has been an imperative to reform Buddhism and restore the moral values of an imagined utopian past throughout the history of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. The influence of this ideal past continues on into Bodu Bala Sena ideology, and much of their rhetoric (and even their official mission statement) revolves around the need to restore Sri Lanka to this imagined past, which they plan to do through the reformation of the *sangha* and of education in Sri Lanka.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter I have discussed two major themes that scholars have identified in Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist: the moral logic of the *dhammadipa* as read in the *Mahavamsa* and the belief in an ideal moral past that must be restored. Both of these themes remain relevant to the ideology and rhetoric of the Bodu Bala Sena, albeit with some minor differences that reflect the changing socio-political context of 21st century Sri Lanka. In the following chapter I will turn to the major point of departure from these earlier nationalist movements, which is the Bodu Bala Sena's construction of Muslims, rather than Tamils, as the salient threat to Sinhalese Buddhism that must be violently defended against. Why, given the strong links that this chapter has demonstrated the Bodu Bala Sena shares with prior nationalist movements, has such a major shift in alterity taken place in Bodu Bala Sena ideology?

¹⁴⁵ Withanage, interview by Michael Jerryson, June 25, 2014. Cf. De Silva, "The Plurality of Buddhist Fundamentalism," 69.

4 CONSTRUCTING THE NEW THREAT

The previous chapter identified points of change and continuity between the Bodu Bala Sena and the existing tradition of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, and argued that the Bodu Bala Sena is best considered to be a new development in this tradition. In this chapter I will focus on the principal difference between the Bodu Bala Sena and earlier nationalist movements: their misoislamist rhetoric.¹⁴⁶ I will argue that while the Bodu Bala Sena may identify a new threat to Sinhalese Buddhism, and attempt to legitimise their claims about this threat in novel ways, the construction of the threat itself reveals that it serves some important function for the Bodu Bala Sena's conception of Sinhalese Buddhist selfhood. Muslims are to the Bodu Bala Sena as Tamils were to earlier nationalist movements, and the lengths that the Bodu Bala Sena goes to in order to maintain this alterity suggests that it is fundamentally important to their sense of identity.

I will analyse the Bodu Bala Sena's rhetoric through the securitisation framework of the Copenhagen school of security studies, which places its emphasis on how and why authorities construct phenomena as security threats. §4.1 will briefly outline this framework. In the following sections, I will introduce the principal claims that the Bodu Bala Sena makes about the nature of the Muslim threat, and argue that in order to make these claims persuasive they have selectively appropriated and reinterpreted rhetoric from the existing tradition of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka and from global misoislamist discourse. The addition of these new articulations of threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist "vocabulary" should not be seen as a radical departure from securitisation projects of the past but rather as

¹⁴⁶ I borrow the term "misoislamia" from Amir Hussain, a neologism he uses to identify not just a *phobia* of Muslims but an outright hostility towards them: Amir Hussain, "Confronting Misoislamia: Teaching Religion and Violence in Courses on Islam," in *Teaching Religion and Violence*, ed. Brian K. Pennington (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

a new development that reflects the rapidly globalising world that Sinhalese Buddhism finds itself in.

I will address in turn four major claims that the Bodu Bala Sena makes about the Muslim threat to Sinhalese Buddhism: that Muslims pose demographic threat to Sinhalese Buddhists through conversion to Islam, high birth rates, and polygamy (§4.2); that they are engaged in what Gnanasara calls “cultural assassination,” or the undermining of Sinhalese cultural dominance (§4.3); that Muslims have an unfair economic advantage over Buddhists (§4.4); and finally that Islamic extremism poses a political threat through terrorism, criminal activity, and the institution of *shari’ah* (§4.5). In each of these sections I will identify and discuss individual claims made by the Bodu Bala Sena that construct Muslims as posing each form of threat, before suggesting why these particular claims might have been made and what makes them persuasive to the Bodu Bala Sena’s supporters.

4.1 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: SECURITISATION ANALYSIS

In this section I will briefly outline my methodological framework, which I take from the Copenhagen school of security studies.¹⁴⁷ The Bodu Bala Sena, as I will demonstrate in the following sections, is attempting to establish a new threat for Sinhalese Buddhism in the post-war era. The process of constructing a threat is the focus of Copenhagen securitisation analysis, described by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde as an effort to understand “who securitises [constructs a threat], on what issues, for whom, why, with what results, and, not least, under what

¹⁴⁷ The Copenhagen school is, along with the English, French, and Welsh schools, one of the new critical approaches to security studies that emerged towards the end of the Cold War. Its three main contributions to security are the concepts of “securitisation,” discussed here, “regional security complexes,” and “security sectors.” Sectors and regions are, according to Wæver, primarily sites in which securitisation may be analysed: Ole Wæver, “Aberystwyth, Paris, Copenhagen: New Schools in Security Theory and their Origins Between Core and Periphery,” paper presented in *International Studies Association* (Montreal, 2004).

conditions.”¹⁴⁸ This is a thoroughly constructivist approach to understanding security and the constructions of threat, and it is the ideal analytical framework for discussing the Bodu Bala Sena’s attempts to construct Islam as a credible threat to Sinhalese Buddhism, as I will do in the following section.

Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde identify three units of securitisation analysis: referent objects, securitising actors, and functional actors.¹⁴⁹ Functional actors only indirectly affect the dynamics of securitisation, and the key relationship (and distinction) for BWV is between referent objects and securitising actors. A referent object is something with a legitimate claim to survival (traditionally the state) which the securitising actors declare to be existentially threatened. Securitising actors rarely use themselves as referent objects. More commonly actors are “political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups”¹⁵⁰ who attempt to persuade others that a given referent object is under threat, that this threat is beyond the ability of normal politics to respond to, and that extra-political measures are therefore necessary to make the referent object secure. Jonathan Bright considers these extra-political measures (“rule-breaking”) to be one of the defining characteristics of securitisation, and discusses British “control orders” as a prominent example that arose out of the War on Terror securitisation.¹⁵¹

I consider the Bodu Bala Sena to be attempting an act of securitisation, and in the following sections I will discuss how they go about constructing Muslims as a threat to Sinhalese Buddhism (their referent object). I am using this framework for three

¹⁴⁸ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Colorado, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 32. This book is the primary source of all information in this section, unless otherwise cited.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Bright, "Securitisation, Terror, and Control: Towards a Theory of the Breaking Point," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 4 (2012).

reasons. First, securitisation is defined as a speech act, and so securitisation analysis is well-suited for analysing Bodu Bala Sena rhetoric. Second, securitisation analysis is not concerned with the validity of security issues and alleged threats, only in the means of their construction.¹⁵² No matter how far-fetched they are, I do not think that it is a productive exercise to engage with the accuracy of the Bodu Bala Sena's claims about Muslims. What is more interesting to me is the manner in which they make these claims and the motivations lying behind them, which is the focus of securitisation analysis. Finally, the success or failure of securitisation is determined by its acceptance by its audience: "the existential threat has to be argued and... gain enough resonance for a platform to be made from which it is possible to legitimize emergency measures of other steps had the discourse not taken the form of existential threats, point of no return, and necessity."¹⁵³ Securitising actors, including the Bodu Bala Sena, therefore aim to make their claims as persuasive as possible, else the extra-political actions that they desire may not be viewed as a legitimate response to the alleged threat. The Bodu Bala Sena's rhetoric varies considerably depending on their audience, which demonstrates how deliberately they are attempting to be persuasive.

To international audiences, including foreign academics or media interviews, they deny allegations of racism and maintain that they are only opposed to "extremist" Islam, and that "[the] Bodu Bala Sena is not against Muslims or Tamils or any other ethnic group. We [the Bodu Bala Sena] are only against those who spread hatred, religious extremism among citizens."¹⁵⁴ Withanage has also claimed that the Bodu Bala Sena wants to protect "moderate, traditional Muslims from this scourge [of

¹⁵² "Commentators on security at least as far back as Arnold Wolfers have noted the security can be approached both objectively and subjectively... our argument is that securitisation, like politicisation, has to be understood as an essentially intersubjective process." Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 30.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁴ "BBS Warns Again on Sharia Law," *Legal Monitor Worldwide*, September 10, 2014.

extremism].”¹⁵⁵ Withanage and Gnanasara have both stated on separate occasions that their focus on the threat of Islam only arose after moderate Muslim groups in Sri Lanka came to the Bodu Bala Sena and requested that they protect Muslims from extremists and terrorists.¹⁵⁶

The use of the words “extremist” and “terrorist” both suggest that the Bodu Bala Sena is trying to appeal to existing international narratives, drawing on these terms to make their own behaviour appear acceptable and their claims of Muslim threat appear plausible to international audiences. As early as 1977 Edmund Leach argued that the label “terrorist” is used by authorities to illegitimise and dehumanise those “Others” to which the label is applied.¹⁵⁷ The distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” Muslim, with the latter conflated with the dehumanising “terrorist,” is the central narrative of the US-led War on Terror.¹⁵⁸ Gnanasara draws on this narrative to add legitimacy to his claims of Muslim threat, maintaining that the Bodu Bala Sena is fully supportive of a diverse and peaceful Sri Lanka,¹⁵⁹ and that they are only opposed to “terrorism” and “extremists” but not the Muslim community as a whole.¹⁶⁰ Ashin Wirathu, the leader of Myanmar’s 969 movement and ally of the Bodu Bala Sena, spoke at their annual conference of the threat that Buddhists around the world face from jihadists: “there is a jihad against Buddhist monks.”¹⁶¹ Finally, in an open letter to then-President Rajapaksa the Bodu Bala Sena

¹⁵⁵ “New Government, Old BBS,” *Tamil Guardian*, February 13, 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Gnanasara, “Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka.”

¹⁵⁷ In Jeffrey Sluka, Noam Chomsky, and David Price, “What Anthropologists Should Know About the Concept of Terrorism: a Response to David Price,” *Anthropology Today* 18, no. 2 (2002); see also Erin Steuter and Deborah Willis, “‘The Vermin Have Struck Again:’ Dehumanising the Enemy in Post 9/11 Media Representations,” *Media, War and Conflict* 3, no. 2 (2010).

¹⁵⁸ Barry Buzan, “Will the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ be the New Cold War?,” *International Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2006).

¹⁵⁹ Gnanasara, “Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka.”

¹⁶⁰ “BBS To Support President Rajapaksa,” *Adaderana*, November 27, 2014.

¹⁶¹ “Buddhist Monk to Fight Jihad Threat,” *Al Jazeera English*, September 28, 2014.

made appeal to “the principals of democracy.”¹⁶² By associating themselves with “democracy,” “diversity,” and “peaceful society,” and Sri Lankan Muslims with “terrorism,” “extremism,” and “jihad,” the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to appropriate the pre-existing global securitising narrative of the War on Terror and make their claims appear more persuasive.¹⁶³

In the Bodu Bala Sena’s public rallies, with an audience of their supporter, this sort of language is completely abandoned. While to international audiences they maintain that they are only concerned with “Islamic extremism,” in addresses to domestic audiences the distinction between extremist and moderate is replaced with phrases like, “Hereafter, if a Muslim or any other *paraya* [foreigner; derogatory] lays so much as a hand on a Sinhala person, let alone a monk, it would be the end of him.”¹⁶⁴ Here all Muslims, extremist or moderate, are considered *paraya* and are subject to threats of reprisal should they dare to stand against Sinhalese Buddhists. The contrast between the language chosen for international audiences and this quote, as with many of those from the following sections, demonstrates how deliberately the Bodu Bala Sena crafts its rhetoric to appear persuasive.

In the following sections, I will use the securitisation framework outlined above to analyse the means by which the Bodu Bala Sena attempts to construct a new group, Sri Lankan Muslims, as an existential threat to Sinhalese Buddhism. By doing so, the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to create a sense of societal *insecurity* for Sinhalese

¹⁶² "Set Up Commission To Probe Foreign Interventions, BBS Tells President," *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 6, 2015.

¹⁶³ Despite their stated mistrust of the international community, the Bodu Bala Sena has expressed concerns about both Tamils and Muslims using their global diasporas to “slander” Sinhalese Buddhists, suggesting that they are indeed concerned with their international reputation: "BBS Apologises From Prostitutes," *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 4, 2015; "Who is Behind Sri Lanka's Religious Violence?," (Al Jazeera English, 2014), from 6:05.

¹⁶⁴ "This is What Sri Lankan Monk Think About Muslim, Tamil Hindu, Dalit and White People."1:13-1:33.

Buddhists: a “situation in which significant groups within a society feel threatened, feel their identity is endangered by immigration, integration, or cultural imperialism, and try to defend themselves.”¹⁶⁵ By creating this sense of insecurity, the Bodu Bala Sena stands to legitimise both their campaign of violence against Muslims and their particular interpretation of Sinhalese Buddhist identity.

4.2 MUSLIMS AS A DEMOGRAPHIC THREAT

In this subsection I will discuss the demographic threat that the Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims pose to Sinhalese Buddhism. The Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims, although currently a minority in Sri Lanka, threaten the dominance of Sinhalese Buddhists through the allegedly high birth rates of Muslims, through practicing polygamy, and through proselytization and conversion to Islam. While nationalists expressed concerns about Christian proselytization in the colonial period and beyond, civil war-era nationalists did not express concerns about the demographic threat that Tamils posed, and the Bodu Bala Sena’s claims about the demographic threat of Muslims appears to be entirely novel to the Sri Lankan case. I suggest that there are two possible origins for this rhetoric: the Bodu Bala Sena may be trying to play on existing cultural fears of Christian dominance (which could not be applied to the Tamil Other during the civil war) and redeploy them against Islam, or they may be drawing on similar misoislamic rhetoric from the Hindutva movement in India and Myanmar’s 969.

The Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims have a higher birth rate than Sinhalese, and that while Muslims are currently a minority in Sri Lanka this may change in

¹⁶⁵ Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1995), 67.

future.¹⁶⁶ When Michael Jerryson asked Withanage about this in an interview, Withanage replied:

“There is... an NGO supporting reducing Sinhala Buddhist households, and abortions, but Muslims will not do that. So we had the family plan [*sic*] to improve, [but] those are only for Sinhala. The Muslims, the churches, the mosques, won’t do that. So we started this anti-family improvement [against the] slogan that ‘the small family is a golden family,’ we said don’t do that [don’t limit family size]... we have to have more children. But the problem is that government and economic structures and everything, it is very difficult for Sinhala families to have more children. Because of education, because of employment, but we are promoting that... we demand some population control for Islam.”¹⁶⁷

There are several significant points in this response. First, Withanage claims that while Sinhalese Buddhists make use of family planning services, Muslims as a group have rejected them.¹⁶⁸ The reference to “the mosques” seems to imply that this is a religious prohibition on contraception: Islam itself is to blame, in this view, for the high birth rate of Muslims in Sri Lanka. Second, the relatively low Sinhalese Buddhist birth rate is due to a number of factors (in Withanage’s account): government, economic structures, education, and employment. This provides an

¹⁶⁶ Withanage has claimed that “when Sinhalese families have a child or two, minorities have half a dozen or more:” “Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, 20th January 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Withanage, interview with Michael Jerryson, August 25, 2014.

¹⁶⁸ This appears to be somewhat credible, at least historically. Kodikara argued that while Buddhism has no specific restrictions on birth control, other than a popular belief that contraceptive use leads to promiscuity and a loss of self-control, Islam does explicitly prohibit contraceptive use: S.U. Kodikara, “Family Planning in Ceylon,” in *The Politics of Family Planning in the Third World*, ed. T.E. Smith (London, UK: George Allen and Unwin, 1973). This was supported by a later study, which found that of all ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lanka, Muslims had the lowest rate of contraceptive use: K. Radhakrishna Murty and Susan De Vos, “Ethnic Differences in Family Planning in Sri Lanka,” *Studies in Family Planning* 15, no. 5 (1984). These trends may not have continued beyond the 1980s in Sri Lanka, although a more recent study focussing on Indian Muslims concluded that popular attitudes towards contraception have resisted reform attempts: Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery, and Craig Jeffery, “Disputing Contraception: Muslim Reform, Secular Change and Fertility,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 2/3 (2008).

interesting contrast. According to Withanage, there are many non-religious factors influencing the low birth rate of Buddhists, while the major factor influencing the high birth rate of Muslims is simply their religion. One implication of this contrast is that while the factors limiting Buddhist birth rate might be altered or improved upon, the “problem” of high Muslim birth rate cannot be dealt with without addressing Islam itself and its prohibitions on contraception. This implication is reflected in the Bodu Bala Sena’s proposed remedies. As well as simply improving the economic situation of Buddhists (which I will address in a later subsection), allowing them to support larger families, Withanage also “demands” population control for Muslims. For Withanage, the religious prohibition on contraception in Islam is so fundamental that no solution short of enforced birth rates can be effective in limiting Muslim population growth. Interestingly, the Bodu Bala Sena has also made claims that Muslim store owners have secretly fed contraceptives to unwitting Buddhist women, a claim that was not repeated to Jerryson.¹⁶⁹

There is little precedent of Sinhalese nationalists expressing similar concerns about the high birth rates of other minorities. During the civil war period, the explicit objective of the LTTE was control over territory in which Tamils were already the majority population, not population growth and expansion into other areas. This would have limited the effectiveness of claims about Tamil population growth, had civil war-era nationalists wanted to make them, as they would not have been consistent with the nature of the LTTE threat. The Bodu Bala Sena, unlike these earlier nationalists, is not so limited by explicitly stated objectives of their designated threatening Other, and so are free to make claims about the threat of Muslim population growth.

¹⁶⁹ Harini Amarasuriya and Jonathan Spencer, "With That, Discipline Will Also Come to Them: the Politics of the Urban Poor in Postwar Colombo," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 11 (supplementary) (2015): 7.

These claims are strongly paralleled by Hindutva claims about Muslim population growth in India. Hindutva nationalists have claimed that Muslims enjoy high birth rates while the Hindu race is “dying out.”¹⁷⁰ The Bodu Bala Sena has acknowledged the influence that Hindutva has had on their ideology,¹⁷¹ and it seems likely that they would be aware of these claims and their effectiveness in rallying misoislamic sentiment in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (not to be confused with the Bodu Bala Sena’s Bodu Jana Peramuna political party) has used these claims to construct a “myth of permanent invasion” of India by Muslims that bears similarities to Bodu Bala Sena rhetoric.¹⁷² It seems possible that the Bodu Bala Sena is deliberately attempting to replicate the success of the Hindutva “myth” through appropriation of their claims about Muslim birth rates.

Another claim of the Bodu Bala Sena, again shared with Hindutva nationalists, is that Muslims pose a demographic threat through their practice of polygamy. Sri Lankan law permits up to four wives for Muslim men and Withanage has argued that this will reduce the dating pool for Sinhalese males, further contributing to the decline of the Sinhalese ethnic group.¹⁷³ This is illustrated on the Bodu Bala Sena website in the following infographic:

¹⁷⁰ Some of these claims are surveyed in Sumanta Banerjee, “Hindutva: Ideology and Social Psychology,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 3 (1991); Pradip Kumar Datta, “Dying Hindus: Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal,” *ibid.* 25, no. 28 (1993): 1305, 08, 10-11, 13.

¹⁷¹ “Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 20, 2015.

¹⁷² Alok Rai, “Religious Conversions and the Crisis of Brahminical Hinduism,” in *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, ed. Gyanendra Pandey (New York, USA: Viking Books, 1993), 228, 31.

¹⁷³ Dilanthe Withanage, “One Country, One Law: Let’s Defeat the Conspiracies to Establish Sharia Law in Our Country Secretly,” Bodu Bala Sena, <http://www.bodubalasena.co/one-country--one-law-.html> (accessed on 1st April, 2015).

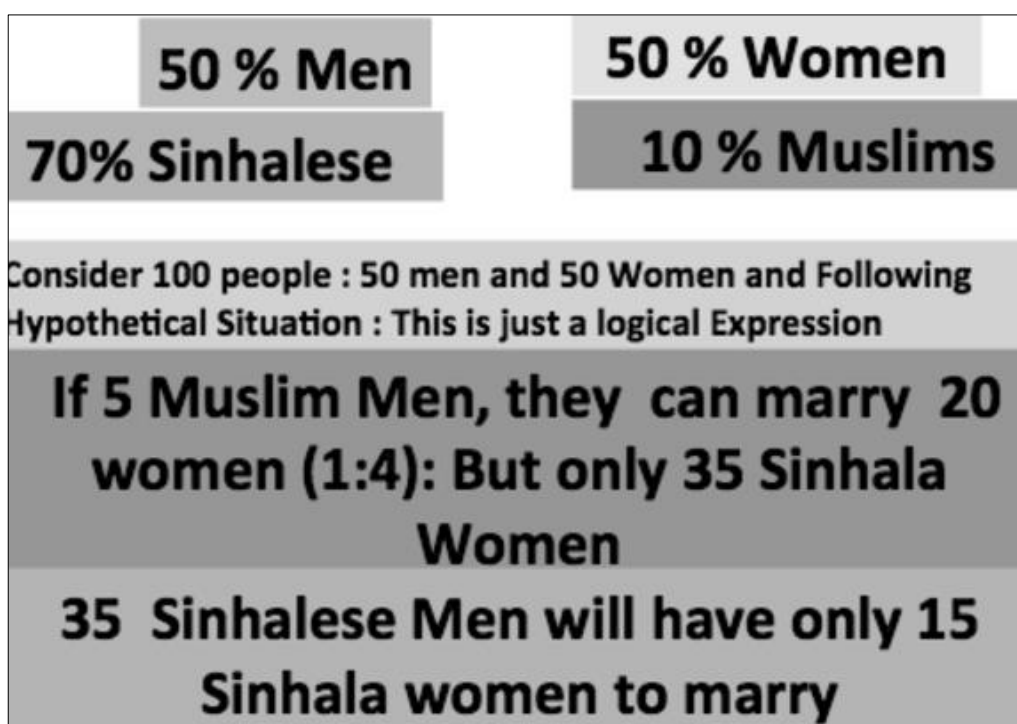


Figure 2: From "One Country, One Law," published by Dilanthe Withanage on a now-defunct Bodu Bala Sena website.¹⁷⁴

In this image, Withanage attempts to demonstrate logically that if Muslim men do indeed take up to 4 wives each, then some of those wives must necessarily be Sinhalese women. This will deprive Sinhalese men of potential wives themselves and so further contribute to the "dying out" of the Sinhalese race. Again, concerns about Muslim polygamy, and the threats that it poses to the majority, are paralleled in Hindutva rhetoric.¹⁷⁵

The Bodu Bala Sena has also expressed concerns about the status of Sinhalese women who marry into Islam. A popular belief in both Sri Lanka and Myanmar is that Buddhist women who marry Muslim men are forced to convert to Islam, or that

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Geetanjali Gangoli, "Anti-Bigamy Bill in Maharashtra: Wider Debate Needed," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 29 (1996); Narendra Subramanian, "Legal Change and Gender Equality: Changes in Muslim Family Law in India," *Law & Social Inquiry* 33, no. 3 (2008); Goldie Osuri, "Secular Intervention / Hinduized Sovereignty: (Anti) Conversion and Religious Pluralism in Jodhaa Akbar," *Cultural Critique* 81, no. 1 (2012).

they will become “captive” to *shari’ah* and Muslim cultural norms.¹⁷⁶ Withanage has said in an interview that “[if] a Sinhalese women marries a Muslim man, her right is not protected because she has to marry under the Muslim law. So she comes under the Quazi courts. And then she cannot get back to the normal legal system because she is... under the Muslim law.”¹⁷⁷ Myanmar’s 969 movement, a public ally of the Bodu Bala Sena,¹⁷⁸ shares similar concerns about “inter-faith marriage, polygamy, religious conversion, and unequal population growth,” and again it seems likely that the Bodu Bala Sena was inspired by the 969’s success with this rhetoric in their own country.¹⁷⁹

More generally, the Bodu Bala Sena has repeatedly claimed that Muslims pose a threat through proselytization. Withanage has claimed that Sri Lanka “face[s] threats from Muslims and other minorities who are actively engaged in conversions.”¹⁸⁰ Gnanasara has called the continuation of “unethical conversions” a failure of the Ministry for Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs, which he claims is unable to “safeguard Buddhism” against this threat.¹⁸¹

The language of “unethical conversions” is drawn from the rhetoric of the JHU, the political party from which Gnanasara split in 2012. The JHU deployed this term against Christian proselytization, and managed to pass a bill prohibiting such

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin Schonthal, “The ‘Muslim Other’ in Myanmar and Sri Lanka,” in *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim-Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, ed. Melissa Crouch (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2016), n.p.

¹⁷⁷ In *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Wickramasinghe, “Sri Lanka in 2014: Cracks in the Edifice;” “Buddhist Monk to Fight Jihad Threat,” *Al Jazeera English*, September 28, 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Roewer and Amalie Weinrich, “The Symbolic Politics of Power – A Framework for Understanding the Strategy Behind Myanmar’s ‘Race and Religion Protection Laws’” paper presented in *Asia Pacific Sociological Association Conference* (Chiang Mai University, Thailand, 2014).

¹⁸⁰ “Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 20 2015.

¹⁸¹ “Protect Buddhist Sasana, Buddhism: BBS to Authorities,” *Daily Mirror*, November 1, 2013.

unethical conversions.¹⁸² Neil DeVotta and Mahinda Deegalle both attribute the success of the JHU in mobilising anti-Christian and anti-conversion sentiment to their effective harnessing of public mourning at the death of Gangodawila Soma, a prominently anti-Christian monk.¹⁸³ Withanage has acknowledged that Soma was an “influence” on Gnanasara and on the Bodu Bala Sena’s ideology.¹⁸⁴

Popular use of the term “unethical conversion” has, since its introduction by Soma and the JHU, been expanded to include conversions to Islam, as the website “Unethical Conversion Watch” makes clear:

“This site provides information on unethical conversion of Buddhists to Christianity *and Islam* in Sri Lanka.

Forced conversions have been taking place since 1505 when Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was colonised by the Portuguese, who were followed by the Dutch and the British. Unethical conversions since independence have escalated since the late 1970s often taking advantage of the internal armed conflicts that racked the country for 30 years.

While conversion from one religion to another through conviction is the human right of an individual, modern day evangelists primarily use a variety of psychological and economic tactics to swell the numbers of their churches... It is this type of conversions that are carried out with the specific objective of Christianizing Sri Lanka to change its cultural identity that we object to.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Mahinda Deegalle, “Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 5, no. 2 (2004): 86; Schonthal, “The ‘Muslim Other’ in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.”

¹⁸³ Mahinda Deegalle, “JHU Politics for Peace and a Righteous State,” in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 239; DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, 27-28.

¹⁸⁴ Unrecorded conversation between Michael Jerryson and Withanage, June 26-28, 2014.

¹⁸⁵ Unethical Conversion Watch, “About Us,” <http://unethicalconversionwatch.org/about-us/> (accessed on September 10, 2015). Emphasis added.

This webpage is illustrative of the appropriation mechanic that the Bodu Bala Sena also engages in. While the webpage begins by specifically mentioning Islam as a culprit of unethical conversions, the evidence that it goes on to present is entirely focussed on Christian conversions and the history of Christianity in Sri Lanka. I suggest that this is because while Sinhalese nationalism has a long tradition of rhetoric concerning Christian conversion,¹⁸⁶ the inclusion of Islam as a culprit is a relatively recent development only being employed by select groups like the Bodu Bala Sena and the Unethical Conversion Watch. The relative novelty of these claims of Muslim proselytization means that these groups are forced to appropriate existing claims about Christian proselytization and reinterpret them to include Islam. Hindutva nationalists also make claims about forced or unethical conversions of Hindus to Islam in India,¹⁸⁷ as does the 969 in Myanmar.¹⁸⁸

In this subsection I have discussed three interrelated claims that the Bodu Bala Sena makes about the demographic threat of Muslims to Sinhalese Buddhism: that Muslims have a higher birth rate than Buddhists; that Muslim polygamy threatens the availability of wives to Buddhists; and that Muslims engage in unethical conversions of Buddhists to Islam. In these three ways the Bodu Bala Sena attempts to construct Muslims as posing a threat to the demographic dominance of Sinhalese Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This is, I have suggested, a relatively novel feature of

¹⁸⁶ Houtart argues that conversion to Christianity was an active British policy by which they hoped to replace the existing Sinhalese Buddhist “system of meanings” with their own ideology: Houtart, *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, 152-56. Rahula critiqued the British for this, claiming that they sought to “divide and rule” Sri Lanka through conversions, the development of Quisling monks, the weakening of *sangha* institutions, and the indoctrination of converts to “look down upon and despise Sinhala culture, language and literature:” in Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 22, 27-28. See also Bruce Matthews, “Christian Evangelical Conversions and the Politics of Sri Lanka,” *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 3 (2007); Neena Mahadev, “Conversion and Anti-Conversion in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Pentecostal Christian Evangelism and Theravada Buddhist Views on the Ethics of Religious Attraction,” in *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, ed. J. Finucane and R.M. Feener (Singapore: Springer, 2014).

¹⁸⁷ Rai, “Religious Conversions and the Crisis of Brahminical Hinduism.”

¹⁸⁸ Schonthal, “The ‘Muslim Other’ in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.”

nationalist rhetoric, certainly with respect to Muslims. To make this claim persuasive, the Bodu Bala Sena has drawn on similar claims made about Muslims by their allies and influences in India and Myanmar, as well as existing Sinhalese fears about Christian conversions, and appropriated them to construct Sri Lanka's Muslims as a similar threat.

4.3 MUSLIMS AS A CULTURAL THREAT

In this subsection I will present claims made by the Bodu Bala Sena about the "cultural threat" that Muslims are alleged to pose, which Gnanasara once memorably referred to as "culture assassination and the destruction of [Sinhalese] civilisation."¹⁸⁹ The Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims are engaged in an active campaign to undermine the historic character of Sinhalese culture and to "Islamify" Sri Lanka. I will examine two specific examples given by the Bodu Bala Sena of alleged attempts at Islamification, namely *halal* certification (the issue on which the Bodu Bala Sena first came to national prominence) and the desecration of sacred (Buddhist) space. I will suggest that the construction of Muslims as a cultural threat to Sinhalese Buddhism plays into public fears of what BWW call "horizontal competition" from neighbouring or space-sharing cultures that threatens to change or dilute the "essence" of the referent cultural identity.¹⁹⁰

BWW only consider the possibility of a minority culture fearing assimilation from a majority culture. This does not appear, at first glance, to fit the Bodu Bala Sena's attempts to play on fears of a minority culture, Islam, threatening the majority Sinhalese culture. Despite this, I still see the horizontal competition dynamic at play in the Bodu Bala Sena's attempts to construct Muslims as a cultural threat. One of BWW's three predicted responses to such threats is the use of government and

¹⁸⁹ "Sri Lankan Buddhists Promise to Carry Out The Law," (Al Jazeera English, 2014), 0:21.

¹⁹⁰ Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 121.

legislation to preserve one culture at the expense of the other. Sinhalese nationalists have a long tradition of using legislation and policy to protect their own culture at the expense of minorities, most notoriously with the 1956 Language Act and the constitutional assertion of Buddhism's "foremost place" among Sri Lankan religions.¹⁹¹ This might be explained by Tambiah's diagnosis of the Sinhalese as a "majority with a minority complex."¹⁹² While the Sinhalese are the majority in Sri Lanka, they have historically considered themselves a minority in the global context, leaving them susceptible to fears of horizontal competition and the construction of minorities as credible threats to their cultural dominance.

One significant issue that the Bodu Bala Sena has used to draw on these fears of horizontal competition is *halal* certification.¹⁹³ The Bodu Bala Sena's first prominent national campaign in 2013 was against *halal* certification, which they saw as a strategic move by Muslims to "destroy Sinhalese and Buddhist food habits and culture by replacing them with *halal* culture."¹⁹⁴ *Halal* certification in Sri Lanka was at the time carried out by the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), which describes itself as "the apex religious body of Islamic theologians, that provides religious and community leadership to the Sri Lankan Muslim community."¹⁹⁵ The original objection of the Bodu Bala Sena to *halal* certification in Sri Lanka was that the practice inflated the price of consumer goods, and that this helped to fund Islamic religious activities. When the ACJU later offered to transfer control of *halal*

¹⁹¹ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 191-94, 95-99; Benjamin Schonthal, "Constitutionalising Religion: the Pyrrhic Success of Religious Rights in Postcolonial Sri Lanka," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 3 (2014).

¹⁹² Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 33.

¹⁹³ "Sri Lanka's Hardline Sinhalese Buddhist Group Calls for Halal Boycott," *Asian News International*, February 18, 2013; Irshad, "Buddhist Party for Ban on Halal Food," *Khaleej Times*, February 18, 2013. The Bodu Bala Sena was not alone among Sinhalese nationalist groups in protesting against *halal* certification, as Stewart notes: Stewart, "Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 253-56.

¹⁹⁴ Gnanasara, "Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka."

¹⁹⁵ All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, "About Us," acju.lk/about (accessed on September 10, 2015).

certification to government agencies, the Bodu Bala Sena called for a complete boycott of certified products until the entire practice was abolished.¹⁹⁶

The Bodu Bala Sena's rejection of the ACLU's proposed transferral of control to the government tells us that the Bodu Bala Sena were not, despite their initial objections, primarily concerned with how or by whom the practice was managed. Instead, they were attempting to construct the very practice of certifying foods as *halal*, appropriate for Muslim consumption, as a threat in itself. Withanage has claimed that the practice of *halal* certification is a "force" by which Muslims try "to penetrate into the society [*sic*]." ¹⁹⁷ In his interview with Michael Jerryson, he elaborated on this:

"The *halal* affects the culture of the society. Every shop: *halal* food, *halal* restaurant... they are only ten percent of the people. But if you look at it [Sri Lanka?], if someone comes here, *it looks like a Muslim country*. So therefore we thought that it is... a part of Islamification. This is the first step in Islamification."¹⁹⁸

For Withanage, a major problem with certifying products as *halal* is that this makes the country appear less Sinhalese and more Muslim. This, for nationalists like the Bodu Bala Sena, is a visual symbol of the dominance of the minority culture over the majority: the threat of horizontal competition.

Gnarasara has also claimed that *halal* certification is part of a "strategic plan" to Islamify Sri Lanka:

"They [Muslims] wanted all Sinhalese business people to have these certificates for their products. They managed to get all the hotels, restaurants and others to buy these *halal* certificates and made a lot

¹⁹⁶ The government ultimately refused the offer, stating, "Extremist elements were trying to make it an excuse to create communal disturbances." Zacki Jabbar, "Govt. Rejects ACJU Call for Taking Over Issuance of Halal Certificates," *The Island*, 28th February 2013.

¹⁹⁷ In Schonthal, "The 'Muslim Other' in Myanmar and Sri Lanka."

¹⁹⁸ Dilantha Withanage, interview with Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014. Emphasis my own.

of money through them. They are trying to destroy Sinhalese and Buddhist food habits and culture by replacing them with *halal* culture. That is what we tried to stop and that is the reason why they [Muslims] are against us.”¹⁹⁹

Here Gnanasara is claiming that the threat posed by *halal* certification is not merely the result of natural competition between neighbouring cultures, but part of a deliberate strategy to change the dominant culture in Sri Lanka. This, according to the Bodu Bala Sena, will ultimately transform the island from a *dhammadipa* into an “Arabian kingdom.”²⁰⁰ This rhetoric about the alleged dangers of *halal* certification Islamifying Sri Lanka plays into a nationalist understanding of Sri Lanka as a sacred space set aside for the Sinhalese and for Buddhism, which I will discuss shortly.

I will first discuss another claim that the Bodu Bala Sena makes about Muslims as a cultural threat, that they are engaged in the desecration or occupation of sacred (Buddhist) space in Sri Lanka. The Bodu Bala Sena has repeatedly claimed that Muslims establish mosques and residential areas near or on Buddhist religious sites and that Muslims destroy images of the Buddha, both of which (similarly to the *halal* issue) minimise the physical and visible presence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.²⁰¹

Withanage has expressed concerns about the relative numbers of Buddhist places of worship against churches and mosques, which he attributes in part to the destruction of many Buddhist temples by the Portuguese and Dutch.²⁰² The encroachment of Muslims on what, according to the Bodu Bala Sena, should rightly be Buddhist space, is not held to be a historical phenomenon but an ongoing

¹⁹⁹ Gnanasara, “Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka.”

²⁰⁰ Schonthal, “The ‘Muslim Other’ in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.”

²⁰¹ One result of this campaign, along with the efforts of other misoislamic nationalist groups like the Sinhala Ravaya, is the restriction (both through regulation and through social pressure) on the construction of new Muslim places of worship: “Attacks on Places of Religious Worship in Post-War Sri Lanka,” (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Center for Policy Alternatives, 2013), 59-60.

²⁰² Dilantha Withanage, interview with Michael K. Jerryson, 25th June 2014.

process. Wickramasinghe gives an example of a mosque built as recently as 1922 in a large cave at Kuragala, believed to have been the home of a Sufi saint in the 12th century.²⁰³ Since the 1970s, a number of nationalists have claimed that the cave was actually an ancient Buddhist archaeological site dating back to the 2nd century that the Sufis had merely appropriated for their own use.²⁰⁴ The Bodu Bala Sena has taken up this campaign, threatening to demolish the mosque at Kuragala “brick by brick” to stop “infidel Muslims from running riot.”²⁰⁵ This is a part of their more general resolution to intervene “to protect vulnerable Buddhist heritages [and] archaeological sites worldwide,” a key point in their “Memorandum of Understanding” with Myanmar’s 969 movement.²⁰⁶ During a presentation to the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Withanage showed the following slides to illustrate the alleged growth of mosques at the expense of Buddhist temples:

²⁰³ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 43.

²⁰⁴ This shares several key similarities with the 1946 “scientific discovery” by the Archaeological Department that the Dakkhina thupa did not contain the remains of Elara but rather of Dutugāmunu: Gananath Obeyesekere, “Dutthagamani and the Buddhist Conscience,” in *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia: India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*, ed. Douglas Allen (Conneticut, USA: Greenwood Press, 1992).

²⁰⁵ “New Government, Old BBS,” *Tamil Guardian*, February 13, 2015.

²⁰⁶ “Full Text: Wirathu and Gnanasara Sign Agreement,” *Colombo Telegraph*, October 1, 2014.



Figure 3: Slide 10 from Withanage's presentation to the ICES. Reproduced courtesy of Michael K. Jerryson and Mahinda Deegalle.

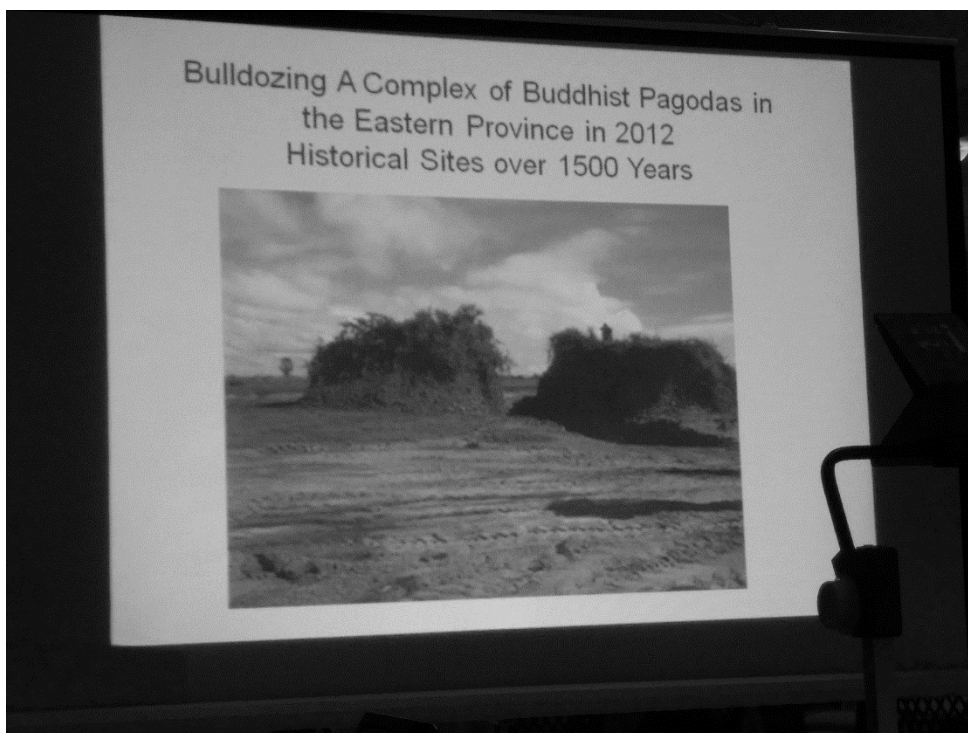


Figure 4: Slide 41 from Withanage's presentation to the ICES. Reproduced courtesy of Michael K. Jerryson and Mahinda Deegalle.

This second slide claims to show the former site of a demolished Buddhist thupa in the Eastern provinces. The Eastern provinces traditionally have a significant Muslim population, implying Muslim fault for the bulldozing.

The Bodu Bala Sena has also expressed support for a similar message from the British nationalist group Britain First. Britain First protested against the building of a “mega-mosque” in Dudley, England, and the Bodu Bala Sena shared the promotional material for this protest on their own Facebook page:

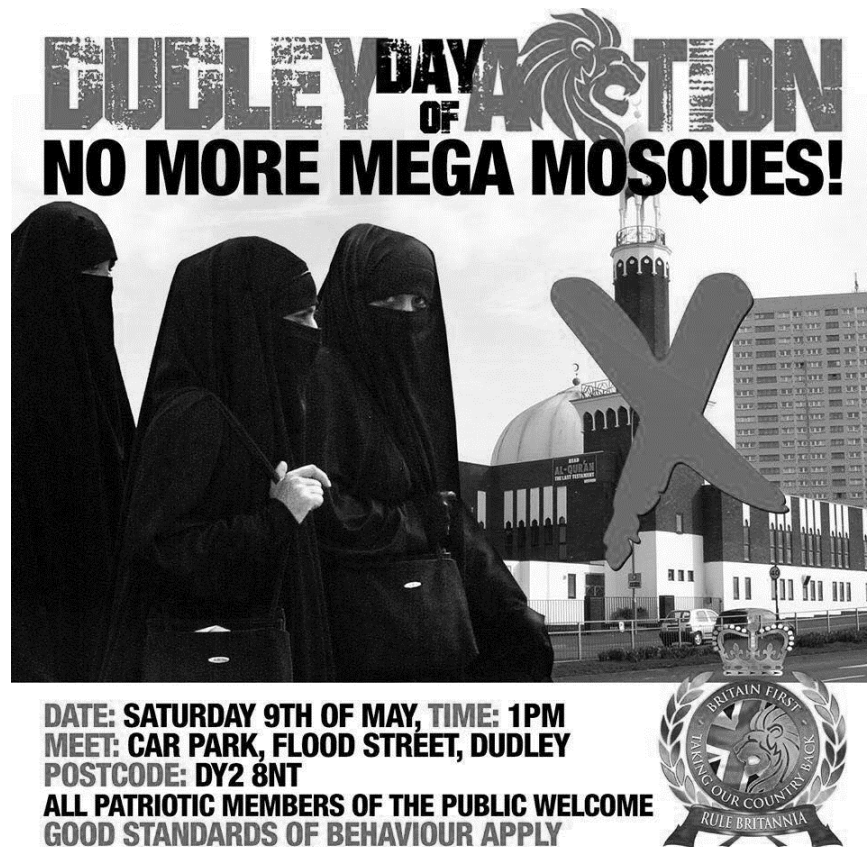


Figure 5: A promotional image from Britain First, shared (without context) on the Bodu Bala Sena Facebook page.²⁰⁷

While the Bodu Bala Sena did not post any text with the image to provide context, we can infer that this was intended as a gesture of support or even empathy for Britain First.

As well as encroaching on physical space, the Bodu Bala Sena also claims that Muslims (as well as Christian evangelists) routinely destroy Buddhist statues or otherwise profane them.²⁰⁸ One website, that affiliates itself with the Bodu Bala

²⁰⁷ From www.facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena (accessed on October 19, 2015).

²⁰⁸ Dilantha Withanage, interview with Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014.

Sena, claims that the “destruction of ancient history and idols is part of what Islam’s iconoclasm is all about... through all conquests Islamic rulers [have] destroyed churches, kovils, and Buddhist temples.”²⁰⁹ This website goes on to suggest that this alleged destruction of temples, along with *halal* certification and the building of mosques, is a part of a broader strategy of “soft usurping of Sri Lanka’s Buddhist civilisation.”

I find this to be an excellent summary of the way in which the Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims threaten Sinhalese Buddhist culture. Islamification, whether of cuisine or of Buddhist sacred space, is a credible threat because Sinhalese Buddhists understand their culture to be both unique and very fragile, and so very much at risk of usurpation or horizontal competition by Sri Lanka’s minorities. Withanage has said that “although we are... a majority in this country, we are [a] minority in the global context. A very small minority. Because if something happens to Sinhala Buddhists, we wouldn’t have anyone to complain [to]. But if something happens to Muslims, they will tell all Muslim countries and we realised that *that* is the danger.”²¹⁰ Foreign funding for other religious groups and for the Tamils, which I will discuss in more detail in a later section, is a particular concern.²¹¹ Gnanasara claims that countries like Saudi Arabia are funding extremist groups in Sri Lanka, leading him to the statement that Sinhalese live “in a global society that is

²⁰⁹ "Bodu Bala Sena," http://kwelos.tripod.com/bodu_bala_sena.htm (accessed on October 17, 2015). This website does not identify its authors, and is published on a popular host without an independent domain name. It also refers to the Bodu Bala Sena in third person, suggesting that its authors are likely not official representatives of the group. I include it because of the overwhelmingly positive description of the Bodu Bala Sena that it begins with: “Bodu Bala Sena is a non-political Buddhist social, cultural and animal-welfare organization in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). Bodu Bala Sena promotes Buddhist philosophy and well-being, as well as Sinhala culture and heritage. In recent years it has attracted attention for its opposition to the aggressive tactics of jihadists operating within Sri Lanka, who, like all jihadists, are particularly hostile to Buddhism.”

²¹⁰ Dilantha Withanage, interview with Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014. Emphasis Jerryson’s.

²¹¹ "Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS," *Sri Lanka Mirror*, 20th January 2015; "This is What Sri Lankan Monk Think About Muslim, Tamil Hindu, Dalit and White People."6:28.

structured by global funding, global politics and also global terrorism, all of which [is now working] against global minorities.”²¹² The following slide, again from Withanage’s presentation to the ICES, illustrates this:



Figure 6: Slide 3 from Withanage’s presentation to the ICES. Reproduced courtesy of Michael K. Jerryson and Mahinda Deegalle.

Nationalist fears of horizontal competition long predate the Bodu Bala Sena, and I suggest that by constructing Islamification as a salient threat the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to tap into these existing concerns about Sinhalese assimilation into “global majorities.” Tambiah has called Sinhalese Buddhists a “majority with a minority complex,”²¹³ and Fernando observes that Sinhalese nationalists during the civil war stressed the South Indian origins of Tamils and sought to frame Tamil separatism as a form of Indian expansionism.²¹⁴ This rhetoric, similarly to the Bodu Bala Sena’s rhetoric about the global majority of Muslim, set up the threat (then of Tamil separatism) as not an assertion of selfhood by a group within Sri Lanka, but

²¹² Gnanasara, "Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka."

²¹³ Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 33.

²¹⁴ Fernando, *Religion, Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, 214.

rather an attempt to absorb part of Sri Lanka into a much larger global entity. Both Tamil separatism and Islamification (both understood by nationalists as assimilation into a larger global majority) thereby threaten the *Mahavamsa* understanding of Sri Lanka as *dhammadipa*, an island set apart for Sinhalese Buddhism in which other ethnicities and religions may only be tolerated guests.²¹⁵ Islamification, through *halal* certification and encroachment on sacred space, undermines the cultural dominance that, according to *dhammadipa* understanding, Sinhalese Buddhism ought to enjoy, through visually and spatially transforming Sri Lanka from Buddhist to Muslim.²¹⁶

In this section I have discussed how the Bodu Bala Sena uses *halal* certification and the protection of sacred space as evidence to support its claims that Muslims pose a cultural threat to Sinhalese Buddhism. This cultural threat, which Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde would call a fear of horizontal competition, is made possible despite the majority status of Sinhalese Buddhists because of the “global minority” that they have historically perceived themselves to be. The Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to play on these fears of cultural usurpation by Sri Lanka’s minorities by presenting *halal* certification and encroachment on sacred space as a part of a deliberate strategy by Muslims to Islamify Sri Lanka and replace elements of Sinhalese culture with their own.

4.4 MUSLIMS AS AN ECONOMIC THREAT

In the preceding section, I mentioned that both Gnanasara and Withanage, when talking about the “global majority” status of Muslims, claim that this gives Muslims

²¹⁵ This understanding, already covered in §3.1, is discussed in Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma*, 13-14.

²¹⁶ Wickramasinge argues that such material transformations are particularly significant as “Materiality makes them [understanding of identity] appear neutral as mere traces of history... they become naturalised:” Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 398.

access to “global funding.”²¹⁷ In this section I will explore what they mean by “global funding,” and how they use this term to construct Muslims as an economic threat to Sinhalese Buddhists. The Bodu Bala Sena’s rhetoric, although including some modern language, is not entirely novel in its construction of Muslims as an economic threat, and I suggest they are attempting to draw the historic successes of earlier securitisations in their own rhetoric.

The Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims, as part of a “global diaspora” with links to the Middle East, enjoy an unfair advantage over Sinhalese Buddhist business owners. According to Gnanasara, this “global funding,” along with “global politics and also global terrorism” are working against “global minorities,” including Sinhalese Buddhists:

“...most of them are from the Middle East and Saudi Arabia. These are the countries that fund Muslim extremist groups here... I don’t think that this is something that we should allow to happen. These are attempts to destroy the culture of our country... they [Muslims] are a minority in number but if you look at their economic power and their international network, they are not a minority.”²¹⁸

In this quote, the economic advantage that Muslims are alleged to enjoy is not constructed as problematic in itself, but rather as problematic through its relationship to the funding of extremists (which I will discuss in the following section) and attempts to destroy the culture of the country (discussed in the preceding section). Withanage has also claimed that “foreign money plays behind” both conversions and Muslim birth rates, the issues discussed in §4.2.²¹⁹ However, the alleged economic advantage of Muslims is not merely an epiphenomenon to other issues, as the Bodu Bala Sena takes the promotion of Buddhist entrepreneurship as

²¹⁷ Withanage’s presentation to the ICES; Gnanasara, “Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka.”

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ “Hardline Lanka Buddhists to Launch Party, Say Inspired by BJP, RSS,” *Sri Lanka Mirror*, January 20, 2015.

one of its key objectives. Of these 12 objectives, 3 might be considered economic in nature:

8. To set up organizations that support the development of Buddhists and network those organizations
 - a. To identify and strengthen the organizations work [sic] genuinely for the Buddhist social development
 - b. To identify the need to set up Buddhist organizations and setting up of new organizations
 - c. To network the Buddhist organizations operating locally as well as internationally for better coordination and cooperation.
9. To set up funds for Buddhist development
 - a. To work for the identifying the need of monetary resources for the Buddhist social development
 - b. Setting up of funds for Buddhist social development and taking actions to raise funds
 - c. To prepare a mechanism that ensures transparency and accountability of the funds and managing securities
 - d. To establish a Buddhist Development bank
10. To build and safeguard Buddhist entrepreneurs and enterprises
 - a. To work for the identifying Buddhist businessmen/entrepreneurs
 - b. To organize and network of Buddhist businessmen
 - c. To find and implement solutions for the problems and situations faced by the members of the Buddhist business community
 - d. To take necessary actions to promote new especially young Buddhist businessmen and entrepreneurs²²⁰

For an organisation comprised mainly of monks, dedicated to the establishment of a “Buddhist society,” and known for violence against minorities, to include such a list of economic concerns among its key objectives suggests that the alleged economic disadvantage of Buddhists, relative to Muslims, is highly significant to the Bodu Bala Sena’s understanding of contemporary Sri Lanka. If the global funding of Muslims was only a concern because of its potential links to extremism or cultural

²²⁰ Bodu Bala Sena, "About Us."

usurpation, why would the Bodu Bala Sena consider, for example, the establishment of a Buddhist development bank to be a crucial part of their proposed reform?

Stewart points in particular to objective 10, the safeguarding of Buddhist entrepreneurs, and suggests that this takes on a “more sinister tone” in light of the history of economically motivated attacks against Muslims in Sri Lanka.²²¹

The most significant conflict between Sinhalese Buddhist and Muslims prior to recent events occurred in 1915. The parallels between this violence and that at Aluthgama in 2014 are somewhat chilling: in response to Muslim noise complaints during a Vesak celebration in Kandy, a group of Sinhalese men stormed a mosque, sparking off riots that left 25 Muslims dead, 189 wounded, and four known to have been raped.²²² The violence was not spontaneous, but erupted from a village meeting (similar to Gnanasara’s rally at Aluthgama) in which a provocative speech was made, concluding with “the Tambies [Muslims; derogatory] are insulting our nation and our religion, we must harass the Tambies, and they must be driven out of Ceylon!”²²³ Several authors, including Stewart, considered the ethno-religious overtones of the 1915 riots to be “merely a piece of propaganda that hid the real economic agenda... a desire to eliminate business rivals, who just happened to be Muslims.”²²⁴ The causality of economic factors in the 1915 violence is not uncontested, as Michael Roberts has argued that the “religio-cultural threat from

²²¹ Stewart, “Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” 247.

²²² Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, 124. I say that only four Muslims were “known” to have been raped because of the high likelihood, especially in the dangerous days following the riots, of other victims being unwilling or unable to report their own attacks.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Stewart, “Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” 243. This in turn is Stewart’s summary of De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*. I remain somewhat sceptical of De Silva’s credibility as a historian, as he has elsewhere claimed that only with the arrival of the Portuguese “bigotry and religious intolerance... were introduced into an island whose Buddhist society was well-known for its religious tolerance,” as well as other romantic statements about Sinhala history: *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* (London, UK: Penguin, 1998), 69.

the Moors” played an equally important role in motivating the violence.²²⁵ However, economic tensions between Sinhalese Buddhists and Muslims remains significant to some degree in all accounts.

These historical tensions provide the context for what Stewart calls the “sinister tone” of the Bodu Bala Sena’s construction of Muslims as an economic threat.²²⁶

Gnanasara specifically mentioned Muslim NGOs with Middle Eastern funding in his speech at Aluthgama,²²⁷ although, as in the 1915 speech, this did not form the centre of his rhetoric. I suggest that by claiming that, among the other ways in which Muslims supposedly threaten Sinhalese Buddhism, they have some unfair economic advantage, Gnanasara and the Bodu Bala Sena were attempting to some degree to replicate the circumstances of the 1915 riots. By this, I do not mean that Gnanasara was specifically attempting to re-enact this historical event, but rather that he was attempting to draw on sentiments that he knew had been historically successful in securitising Muslims and inciting violence against them.

In this section I have outlined the economic threat the Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims pose to Sinhalese Buddhists, and suggested that this is not a novel claim but one that has a history stretching back to the 1915 anti-Muslim riots. By making claims about the supposedly unfair economic advantage of Muslims over Sinhalese in Sri Lanka today, funded by a global diaspora with roots in the Middle East, the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to persuade their audience that the threat of 1915 continues today, albeit in a slightly different form.

²²⁵ Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka, Politics, Culture and History* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), 204.

²²⁶ Stewart, "Muslim-Buddhist Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 247.

²²⁷ "This is What Sri Lankan Monk Think About Muslim, Tamil Hindu, Dalit and White People."

4.5 MUSLIMS AS A POLITICAL THREAT

In this section I will address the political threat that the Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims pose to Sri Lanka. A political threat, as defined by Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, is a threat to state sovereignty, which is both the broadest in substance and the most pressing of all threats previously discussed. This section covers claims that the Bodu Bala Sena makes about Muslim criminal activity, ranging from arson and smuggling to terrorism, to the potential takeover of the Sri Lankan state by “creeping *shari’ah*” and Islamic extremism. The Bodu Bala Sena constructs these threats with, nominally, the state, but I will argue that in reality their referent object is their own particular conception of the state, which is fundamentally Sinhalese and Buddhist.

The Bodu Bala Sena has claimed that Muslims are engaged in a variety of criminal activities in Sri Lanka. They have campaigned for a ban on the wearing of niqabs, as they say that these can conceal identities or even hidden weapons and drugs.²²⁸ These weapons and drugs, they went on to say, are smuggled by Muslims to fund terrorist activity (which I will discuss below), along with human trafficking. Drug smuggling and human trafficking are among the two most commonly securitised transnational crimes in Asia, according to a report by James Laki, and he suggests that this may be a result of domestic ethnic, religious, or minority groups within weak states to undermine the state apparatus.²²⁹ Withanage has also alleged that some Muslim shop owners commit arson for insurance fraud: “Sometimes Sinhala Buddhists also set fire, but Muslims escalate the situation. Why: they can get foreign funding, they can get insurance.”²³⁰ These criminal activities that the Bodu Bala

²²⁸ “New Government, Old BBS,” *Tamil Guardian*, February 13, 2015.

²²⁹ James Laki, “Non-Traditional Security Issues: Securitisation of Transnational Crime in Asia,” in *IDSS Working Paper Series* (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Security Studies, 2006), 4.

²³⁰ Dilantha Withanage, interview with Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014.

Sena claims that Muslims are engaged in are constructed as a challenge to the state's sovereignty.

The Bodu Bala Sena also claims that Muslims present a more direct threat to the state through terrorist activity. They have claimed that Muslim communities in Sri Lanka might provide an "environment for al-Qaeda and jihad to thrive,"²³¹ and that "while the majority of Muslims are innocent... once they come under the influence of Muslim extremists, they can easily fall into smuggling, illegal weapon handling and even terrorist activities."²³² These terrorist activities, which Gnanasara claims that even previously innocent Muslims might engage in if under the influence of extremism, pose a direct challenge to the security of the state. In today's international politics labelling an enemy as "terrorist" marks them out as an existential threat above all others, requiring extraordinary measures to defend against.²³³

By casting Sri Lanka's Muslims as terrorists or potential terrorists, Gnanasara is very clearly trying to draw on these post-9/11 security narratives and so legitimise his campaign against them. The Bodu Bala Sena has consistently tried to connect its own rhetoric with the global War on Terror, evidenced by some of the images posted on their official Facebook page.

²³¹ "New Government, Old BBS," *Tamil Guardian*, 13th February 2015.

²³² Gnanasara, "Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka."

²³³ K.M. Fierke, "The 'War on Terrorism:' A Critical Perspective," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2005).

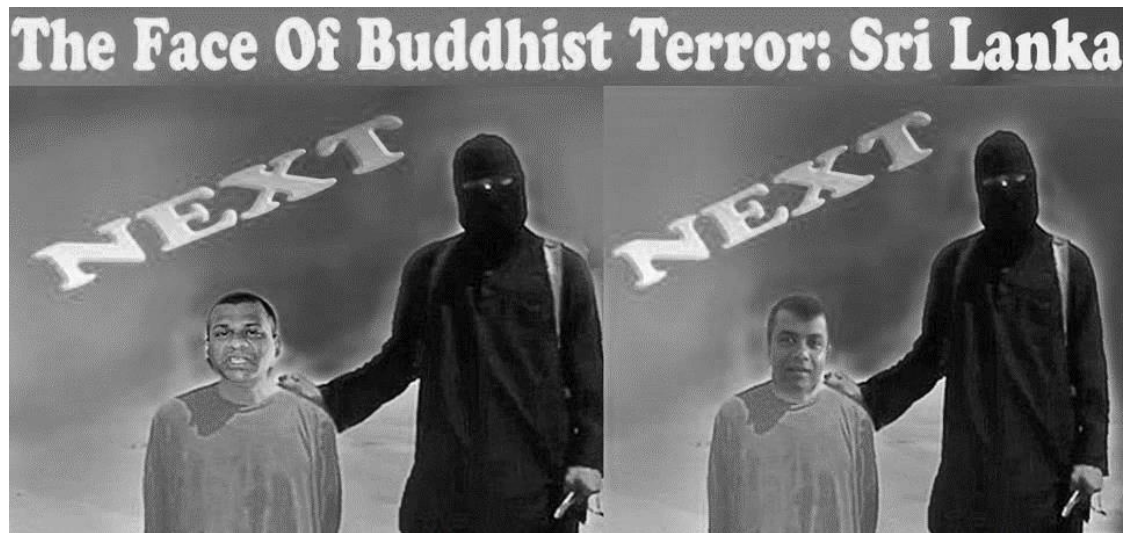


Figure 7: An image from the Bodu Bala Sena's Facebook page, featuring Gnanasara (left) and Withanage as Islamic State execution victims.²³⁴

The image above is one example of this. This image features an Islamic State militant and execution victim, doubled, with the head of victim replaced in either image by the heads of Gnanasara and Withanage and the word “next” printed above. This image presumably is intended to indicate that, because of their outspoken resistance to Islamic extremism and terrorism in Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena’s leaders risk retaliation from the Islamic State. The image is titled “The Face Of Buddhist Terror: Sri Lanka,” presumably an ironic reference to the edition of Time magazine, banned in Sri Lanka, that gives this title to the Bodu Bala Sena’s Myanmar ally Ashin Wirathu. Through images like this, and through the application of the label “terrorist” to Muslims in Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena draws on the legitimacy of the global War on Terror narrative and appropriates it for their own ends.

Simultaneously, the Bodu Bala Sena also appears to be drawing parallels to the earlier Tamil threat. The label “terrorist” was frequently applied to Tamil separatists by civil war nationalists in what Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah see as a

²³⁴ From www.facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena (accessed on October 19, 2015).

deliberate attempt to delegitimise the LTTE.²³⁵ Gnanasara has directly linked the Muslim threat to the earlier Tamil threat on at least two occasions. In a press statement warning about *shari'ah* law, Gnanasara claimed that "Muslim extremism could be far worse than LTTE terrorism if authorities do not take necessary measures to prevent it from spreading."²³⁶ This represents a deliberate attempt to construct Muslims as an even greater threat than Tamils ever were. Rohini Mohan also claims that Gnanasara, at a 2012 rally, suggested that the Muslim threat was a direct successor to the Tamil:

At a rally in 2012, the B.B.S. leader Mr. Gnanasara likened the Sri Lankan military's victory to the ancient conquest of a Tamil chief by a beloved Sinhalese king. The spectators knew the story and cheered at the comparison. 'Tamils have been taught a lesson twice,' he said; so would other minorities if they tried to 'challenge Sri Lankan culture.'"²³⁷

Here Gnanasara references what we can assume is the Dutugāmunu epic of the *Mahavamsa* (the Tamil chief being Elara, whom Dutugāmunu killed) but explicitly extends the character of the invading threat to include Muslims ("other minorities"). Civil war nationalists took this section of the *Mahavamsa* and used it as a historical justification for contemporary conflict against a Tamil enemy (the LTTE), and the Bodu Bala Sena appears to be trying to do the same for their Muslim enemy. Labelling Muslims as "terrorists" or as successors to the LTTE constructs them as a direct, potentially violent political threat to the Sri Lankan state. The Bodu Bala Sena also claims that Sri Lanka's Muslims pose a less direct political threat through the introduction of "creeping *shari'ah*." Muslims, according to the Bodu Bala Sena, are attempting to introduce *shari'ah* to Sri Lanka through a conspiracy involving

²³⁵ Suthaharan Nadarajah and Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, "Liberation Struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005).

²³⁶ "BBS Warns Again on Sharia Law," *Legal Monitor Worldwide*, September 10, 2014.

²³⁷ Mohan, "Sri Lanka's Violent Buddhists," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2015.

cultural and economic dominance (as discussed in §4.3 and §4.4), because “they have no good land [outside of Sri Lanka], so people fund to establish their Islamic kingdom, their centre.”²³⁸ The Bodu Bala Sena has attempted to call attention to this alleged conspiracy on a number of occasions, including at the meeting advertised in this image:



Figure 8: "Let's Defeat the Conspiracy to Establish Sharia Law Secretly in Sri Lanka," a meeting called by the Bodu Bala Sena.²³⁹

The Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslim personal law (including exceptions on the prohibition of polygamy and a lowered marriageable age) represents a first step towards the imposition of *shari'ah* upon the general population of Sri Lanka.²⁴⁰ *Shari'ah* is, in turn, a step towards the total dominance of Islamism over Sri Lankan politics, which, according to former Bodu Bala Sena president Wimalajothi, “threatens to topple the government” unless checked.²⁴¹ This arguably provides the

²³⁸ Galagoda Gnanasara, interview by Michael K. Jerryson, June 25, 2014.

²³⁹ Facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena, accessed October 20, 2015.

²⁴⁰ Schonthal, "The 'Muslim Other' in Myanmar and Sri Lanka."

²⁴¹ "Buddhist Monk to Fight Jihad Threat," *Al Jazeera English*, September 28, 2014.

foundation for all other Bodu Bala Sena claims of Muslim threat, as any avenue of Muslim dominance – demographic, cultural, or economic – might conceivably lead to greater political control and the overthrow or undermining of Sri Lanka as a state.

This concern is itself not entirely divorced from the question of Sinhalese self-identity. The Bodu Bala Sena may construct Muslims as a threat to the state of Sri Lanka, but their interpretation of the state is very particular. Sri Lanka, again according to Wimalajothi, is "not a multi-cultural country but rather a nation for the Sinhala Buddhists."²⁴² When the Bodu Bala Sena expresses concerns about the threat that Muslims may pose to the Sri Lankan state, we must bear in mind that for them this is primarily a threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist state.

In this section I have addressed the political threat that the Bodu Bala Sena claims that Muslims pose to Sri Lanka, and more specifically to the Sinhalese Buddhist state as the Bodu Bala Sena understands it. This threat includes the alleged criminal activities of Muslims, the threat of terrorism akin to both international threats like al Qaeda or to the LTTE, and finally the political dominance of Islamism through "creeping *shari'ah*."

4.6 CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter has examined the means by which the Bodu Bala Sena constructs Muslims as a threat in Sri Lanka, considering the demographic, cultural, economic, and political aspects of that threat. In each case, the Bodu Bala Sena appears to very deliberately craft its rhetoric to best persuade audiences, both in Sri Lanka and internationally, of the legitimacy of their claims. I have demonstrated that this often

²⁴² Ibid. Though Wimalajothi may no longer be associated with the Bodu Bala Sena, they have reaffirmed this view in more recent statements. They opposed the election of now-president Maithripala Sirisena, for example, because he was "against the Sinhala Buddhist state concept:" "Manifesto Will Affect SL: BBS," *Daily Mirror*, January 6, 2015.

includes the appropriation of existing narratives of threat: from prior nationalist movements, from the Bodu Bala Sena's allies and inspirations in India and Myanmar, and from the global War on Terror. The purpose of this appropriation is to contextualise the "Muslim threat" of the Bodu Bala Sena in these pre-existing narratives and so borrow their legitimacy.

By making their claims about Muslim threat appear credible, the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to construct Muslims as a threat as salient to Sri Lanka now as Tamil separatism was to Sri Lanka during the civil war period. Indeed, they make an active effort to draw parallels between these two, with Muslims being "taught a lesson" as the Tamils were, and Muslim extremism having the potential to be "far worse than LTTE terrorism."²⁴³ This suggests to me that while the substance of the threat, and some of the rhetorical mechanisms by which it is constructed, may differ substantially from that of earlier nationalist movement, Muslims serve a similar *function* for the Bodu Bala Sena and their brand of Sinhalese Buddhism nationalism as Tamils once did for others.

As I argued in Chapter 2, alterity is often a significant component of identity. With the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists lost their "Other" as a credible threat, necessitating some shift in their conception of Sinhalese Buddhist identity. For some, this might have involved a downplaying of alterity's role in the identity narrative. I suspect that given Sinhalese nationalists' long history of orienting themselves against an "Other," this would be a radical development, and one that would not be readily persuasive. The Bodu Bala Sena is offering another alternative: an adaption of the identity narrative that still retain the orientation against a threatening, impious, foreign Other. They have attempted, as this chapter has discussed, to construct Muslims as a credible replacement for the LTTE in their

²⁴³ "BBS Warns Again on Sharia Law," *Legal Monitor Worldwide*, September 10, 2014.

post-war narrative. In other words, the underlying drivers of the Bodu Bala Sena's campaign against Muslims are conceptions of identity and alterity, and the desperate attempts of nationalists to find new enemies against which they can defend the *dhammadipa*.

5 BEYOND “CAUSE” OR “EPIPHENOMENON:” A POST-SECULARIST APPROACH

I have argued that violence against minorities by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists, most recently including the Bodu Bala Sena, is best thought of as an exercise in identity interpretation and re-interpretation. This does not conform to more general theories about religious violence that have been offered in recent years, nor to much of the writing specific to Sri Lanka. In this chapter I will argue that these general theories reflect what I consider to be a false dichotomy in studies of religion and violence, and that they are problematized by the case of the Bodu Bala Sena. This false dichotomy has led to an ultimately futile debate about whether religion is best considered a “cause” or an “epiphenomenon” to violence, and it is a product of Western assumptions about the exhaustive and exclusive natures of the “religious” and “secular,” with overlap between these categories (“religion turning violent” or “religion being corrupted by politics”) considered a dangerous and unwanted phenomenon.

In §5.1 I will introduce Tambiah and Kapferer’s respective arguments about the relationship between religion and violence as representative of a broader debate about whether or not religion is best considered a “cause” or an “epiphenomenon” of violence. I do not intend this section to be primarily a critique of either author, but rather to set up the debate about the nature of religious violence that I believe the Bodu Bala Sena problematizes. In §5.2 I will argue that this debate ultimately arises from Western assumptions about the proper relationship between “the religious” and “the secular,” with politics, nationalism, and violence properly occupying the latter and not the former. I will criticise this assumption, using the case of the Bodu Bala Sena to problematize what I see as a false and unhelpful dichotomy. Finally, in §5.3, I will suggest that by considering religious violence in terms of identity politics we can break down the secularist dichotomy and move

beyond discussion of whether religion is a cause of or an epiphenomenon to violence.

5.1 RELIGION AS CAUSE OF OR EPIPHENOMENON TO VIOLENCE

In this section I will discuss the respective arguments of Tambiah and Kapferer and argue that while they represent opposing sides of a debate on religious violence during the civil war, both are the product of the same secularist assumptions about the relationship between religion and “the secular.” Tambiah’s *Buddhism Betrayed* traces the historical process by which Buddhism became “betrayed” through appropriation by political agendas and ultimately became a tool for legitimising violence in Sri Lanka. Kapferer, in *Legends of People, Myths of State*, argues that the violence is instead caused by a powerful cosmological hierarchy, found in Buddhist myth and ritual, that cast Tamil separatism as “demonic fragmentation” that required violence resistance. Both of these arguments, despite their differences, assume that “the religious” properly occupies a distinct sphere from politics, nationalism, and violence (which are properly “secular”), and that the intrusion of religion into “the secular sphere” is dangerous and unnatural.

Tambiah examines Buddhism “through the eyes and practices of Buddhist actors situated in history.”²⁴⁴ He traces the origins of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism by giving a chronological narrative of key figures throughout its history, and demonstrates throughout that Sri Lankan Buddhism has tended to reflect and incorporate contemporary social and political concerns: “the substantively soteriological, ethical, and normative components of doctrinal Buddhism qua religion were weakened, displaced, even distorted, while the religio-political associations of Buddhism as set out in the monkish chronicles... assumed

²⁴⁴ Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 3.

primacy.”²⁴⁵ He argues that the Sinhalese Buddhism nationalism encountered during the civil war period is a product of the ongoing legacy of interaction between Sinhalese political concerns and religion stretching back into the colonial era, and that ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is primarily social and political conflict, with religious dimensions incorporated *post hoc* in a “betrayal” of the essentially apolitical and non-violent principles of Buddhism, co-opted here by a nationalist agenda.²⁴⁶ Tambiah assumes that the religious dimensions of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka are secondary to more tangible political concerns, and that the appropriation of naturally apolitical religion for these political ends constitutes a “betrayal” of that religion.²⁴⁷

Kapferer, in his earlier work, saw the *Mahavamsa* as more directly motivating the violence of the civil war. His central assumption was the myths, including the myth of the *Mahavamsa*,

“have force and an emotional power... because their logic or reasoning connects with the way that human beings are already oriented in their realities... mythic event may be as much legitimated by the world as it legitimates lived reality.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 58.

²⁴⁶ Tambiah actually states in his introduction that he is not interested, unlike “Pali text puritans” in characterising historical changes as deviations from a pristine essential form: *ibid.*, 3. It is difficult to reconcile this statement with his discussion of Buddhism’s “betrayal” in Sri Lanka.

²⁴⁷ This position is not unique to Tambiah, but is very common amongst scholars writing on Sri Lanka’s ethnic violence. Examples include, but are not limited to Michael M. Ames, “Religion, Politics, and Economic Development in Ceylon: an Interpretation of the Weber Thesis” (paper presented at the Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion, Seattle, USA, 1963); Gananath Obeyesekere, “Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1970); Holt, “The Persistence of Political Buddhism.”; Peter Schalk, “Operationalising Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Sinhalatva,” in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, ed. John Hinnells and Richard King (London, UK: Routledge, 2007); DeVotta and Stone, “Jathika Hela Urumaya and Ethno-Religious Politics in Sri Lanka.”; Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*.

²⁴⁸ Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington, USA: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 46.

This understanding of the relationship between myth and lived experience bears strong similarities to Mark Juergensmeyer's later argument that images of "divine warfare" feature in all religious traditions and that they "provide the content and the themes that are played out in the grand scenarios behind contemporary acts of performance violence."²⁴⁹ Kapferer argues that the *Mahavamsa* reveals to Sinhalese Buddhists a divine order (which Juergensmeyer would call a "cosmic hierarchy") that makes sense of the world around them. This order is derived in part from the accounts in the *Mahavamsa* of the subsequent arrivals of the Buddha and Vijaya in Sri Lanka, and is also, according to Kapferer, revealed and reinforced in ritual practices, particularly the demonic exorcisms that were the basis of Kapferer's earlier studies.²⁵⁰ Kapferer argued that this divine order, revealed in both myth and ritual, was a major force behind the Black Friday riots and mass killing of Tamils by Sinhalese:

"The rioting... may be likened to a gigantic exorcism. Tamils, the agents of evil, set to break the overarching unity of Sinhalese state, are rooted out... and by doing so [the Sinhalese] resubordinate and reincorporate the Tamil demon into the hierarchy."²⁵¹

This violent exorcism is, in Kapferer's understanding, directly inspired by the *Mahavamsa*. Among the Buddha's first acts in Sri Lanka was the exorcism of the *yakkha* from the island, accomplished by striking terror to their (the *yakkha*'s) hearts through storm and fire, and later banishing them to the *giridipa* (Mhv. I:24; 29; 30).²⁵² Kapferer argues that in fighting against Tamil separatists, who sought to

²⁴⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 149.

²⁵⁰ Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State*, 65.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 101.

²⁵² Geiger explains in a footnote that *giridipa* means "place of the highlands," based on a more general interpretation of *dipa* as simply "place," suggesting that the Buddha banished the *yakkha* to a geographical location within Sri Lanka. Kapferer, in his own footnote, takes *dipa* to mean "island," and that the *giridipa* should instead be interpreted as a parallel reality called the island of Giri: *ibid.*, 224.

disrupt the established hierarchy, pious Sinhalese Buddhists were re-enacting this first exorcism of the *yakkha* by the Buddha.

I have framed Tambiah and Kapferer as opposing extremes of a debate about the relationship between religion and violence. On the one side (represented by Kapferer) religion is understood to be a *cause* of violence, a potentially dangerous force which must be kept in check and out of the public sphere lest its violent tendencies be unleashed. On the other side (represented by Tambiah), religion is understood to be an *epiphenomenon* of violence, something applied post hoc to rationalise or legitimise pre-existing conflicts. Both of these arguments, despite their apparent differences,²⁵³ are based on the same basic assumptions about the relationship between the religious and the secular, which I will outline here and then critique in the following section.

The classic history of the secular begins with the Wars of Religion in Europe, and describes “the process by which sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.”²⁵⁴ In this understanding, religion once dominated the public sphere in Europe, but has been successfully privatised, leaving behind only the areligious “secular.” Casanova summarises refers to this as the “emancipation of the secular spheres – primarily the state, the economy, and science – from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialisation of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.”²⁵⁵ Religion’s involvement in politics, economics, or science, understood by secularists to properly belong to the secular, is therefore viewed as regressive, parochial, undesirable and perhaps even dangerous. Until recently, this understanding of the

²⁵³ Tambiah’s book was partly written in response to Kapferer’s: Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 170-81.

²⁵⁴ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, USA: Anchor, 1967), 106-07.

²⁵⁵ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

secular and the religious as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive halves of a dichotomy, rightly existing in public and private spheres respectively, had “paradigmatic status within the social sciences.”²⁵⁶ This understanding is what I argue lies behind both “cause” and “epiphenomenon” explanations of religious violence.

Both sides of the “cause” or “epiphenomenon” debate tend to characterise, in differing ways, the “religion” of religious violence as being out of place. For those who see religion as a “cause” of violence, religion (inherently prone to violence) is intruding on the rightfully secular domain of politics and political action. Religion, a dangerous force, must be confined to the private sphere and kept away from politics by the peacekeeping secular state.²⁵⁷ For those who see religion as an “epiphenomenon” of violence, religion has been co-opted from its naturally peaceful (or at least apolitical) state into serving the ends of violence. Here religion is understood to rightfully exist in a private, apolitical, and non-violent sphere, and its presence in the public, political, and violent sphere of the secular is an aberration that must be explained away. In either case, the mixture of religion with politics, nationalism, or violence is understood to be a deviation (intrusive and unwanted) from the natural habitat of the religious, which is (by secularist definition) entirely separate from the secular sphere of politics, nationalism, and violence.

In this section I have introduced what I consider to be the dominant theoretical debate about the nature of religious violence, and argued that it reflects secularist assumptions about the existence of a religious-secular dichotomy. In the following

²⁵⁶ Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “Comparative Secularisms and the Politics of Modernity,” in *Religion and Politics: European and Global Perspectives*, ed. Johann P. Arnason and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 73.

²⁵⁷ William T. Cavanaugh, “‘A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House:’ the Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State,” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (1995): 325-26.

section I will criticise these assumptions, both in general terms and with respect to post-war Sri Lanka and the Bodu Bala Sena, before providing an alternative in §5.3.

5.2 PROBLEMATIZING SECULARIST THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

If religion does properly inhabit a distinct sphere from politics, nationalism, and violence, as secularists believe, then the “blame” for religious violence might indeed have to fall at the feet of one or the other: either religious violence in Sri Lanka is inspired by religious mythology, as Kapferer argues, or it is fundamentally a political phenomenon that uses religion as a post-hoc legitimisation, as Tambiah argues. In this section, I will demonstrate that contrary to secularist assumptions, the religious-secular dichotomy is unfounded, and that approaches to understanding religious violence based on this dichotomy are therefore ultimately futile. I will problematize the dichotomy with reference to general literature on secularism, the critiques of Ananda Abeysekara, and finally the case of the Bodu Bala Sena.

One of the most prominent early criticisms of the religious-secular dichotomy came from Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who claimed that “religion as a discrete category of human activity, separable from culture, politics, and other areas of life, is an invention of the modern West.”²⁵⁸ It might be anachronistic to characterise Smith as a proto-post-secularist, but his deconstruction of “religion” provided a foundation for later critiques of the alleged relationship between the religious and the secular.²⁵⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, I will not go quite so far as Smith in deconstructing “religion” itself. I introduce his criticism to problematize assumptions about the inherent separation and difference of the religious and the

²⁵⁸ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York, USA: New American Library, 1964), 61.

²⁵⁹ He is directly referenced, for example, in Cavanaugh, “‘A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House:’ the Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State.”

secular, not to question whether or not Buddhism should be considered a religion at all.

Scholars have since built on Smith's critique of "the religious" and problematized the nature and genealogy of "the secular." Talal Asad and Charles Taylor, among others, have both argued that the secular is a historical product of a religious context (post-Reformation Europe) and of the religious ideologies of that context.²⁶⁰ Craig Calhoun has argued that instead of understanding the secular in negative terms (the absence of religion), we should instead consider it as a constructed presence.²⁶¹ Building on this, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, José Casanova, and Erin K. Wilson all discuss secularism as an ideology, the function of which is to build and maintain the constructed "areligious" secular sphere.²⁶² Finally, Robert Bellah suggested that while "religions" may have been banished to the private sphere in secular countries, religious functions remain public in what he called civil religion.²⁶³ Together these critiques problematise the secularist dichotomy by suggesting that the distinction between religious and secular may not be quite so clear.

If, as I have argued in §5.1, theories about religious violence are based on secularist assumptions, then post-secularist challenges might necessitate a rethinking of our approach to religious violence. Cavanaugh argues that the concept of religious

²⁶⁰ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (California, USA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, "Western Secularity," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan van Antwerpen (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁶¹ Craig Calhoun, "Rethinking Secularism," *The Hedgehog Review* 12, no. 3 (2010).

²⁶² Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 2007); José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularisations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan van Antwerpen (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Erin K Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁶³ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967); cf. William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Michigan, USA: Eerdmans, 2011).

violence itself is problematic due to its inherent secularist assumptions.²⁶⁴ He demonstrates that there is no functional difference between religious and secular violence, and suggests that the concept of religious violence (considered particularly dangerous) is a product of secularisation and of the developing nation-state's drive to monopolise legitimate violence.

The critique of secularism, particularly as it relates to religious violence, that I have outlined above forms a theoretical background to Abeysekara's critiques of approaches to political religion and religious violence in Sri Lanka. Abeysekara analyses scholarly, monastic, and political attempts to construct particular relationships between Buddhism and politics as "authentic" or not, which typically (Abeysekara argues) revolved around an understanding of this relationship as being historically constructed (in contrast to the supposedly apolitical pre-colonial Buddhism).²⁶⁵ "Violent Buddhism" was similarly the subject of authenticity debates, again based on assumptions that an authentic and essential "Buddhism" could be identified and defined normatively.²⁶⁶ Crucially, these debates about the nature of an authentic Buddhism all revolve around Buddhism's relationship to, or separation from, "public" politics or violence. Debates of authenticity are therefore another means by which religion is discursively "located" in its proper sphere.

This abstract problematization of the secular-religious dichotomy is made concrete by the case study of the Bodu Bala Sena. The Bodu Bala Sena, I argue, does not conform to the secularist dichotomy, and to consider them exclusively from a religious *or* political perspective simplifies the more subtle dynamics of their operation. The Bodu Bala Sena and their follows are best understood as simultaneously religious

²⁶⁴ This is the central argument of Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*.

²⁶⁵ Ananda Abeysekara, *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference* (South Carolina, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 69.

²⁶⁶ Abeysekara, "The Saffron Army, Violence, Terror(ism): Buddhism, Identity and Difference in Sri Lanka," *Numen* 48, no. 1 (2001).

and political actors. This problematizes the secularist dichotomy and suggests the need for a new framework through which we might view the relationship between religion and politics in Sri Lanka.

The Bodu Bala Sena is, on the one hand, a Buddhist (religious) organisation. When asked what the Bodu Bala Sena stood for, Gnanasara replied, "It stands for the forces of Buddhist power. It is to unite all forces that believe in Buddhism."²⁶⁷ The Bodu Bala Sena is led by monks, including Gnanasara, who are religious authorities in Sri Lanka. By this I mean that the role of the monk in Buddhist community is to act as an authoritative source of knowledge for the lay community: "to teach the *dhamma* that is 'lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely in the end,' 'for the benefit and happiness of the many, out of sympathy for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men.'"²⁶⁸ The Bodu Bala Sena's followers, as Sinhalese Buddhists, are members of that lay community. In his speech at Aluthgama, Gnanasara addressed his audience as "Sinhala" and "Buddhist" interchangeably.²⁶⁹ The relationship between the Bodu Bala Sena monks and their lay followers is therefore the fundamental relationship of the Buddhist *sangha*, and the knowledge transmitted from monks to lay followers (even when this knowledge concerns political or economic issues) should be considered within this framework. The Bodu Bala Sena's authority comes from its monastic leadership, and this authority cannot be overlooked when discussing its violence against Muslims.

Simultaneously, the Bodu Bala Sena is also a political organisation. As Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated, the Bodu Bala Sena operates as a political actor:²⁷⁰ it has

²⁶⁷ Gnanasara, "Muslims Pose a Threat in Sri Lanka."

²⁶⁸ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86.

²⁶⁹ "This is What Sri Lankan Monk Think About Muslim, Tamil Hindu, Dalit and White People."

²⁷⁰ I do not find it coincidental that Hannah Arendt's influential, if dated, definition of a political actor, in the words of Jennifer Ring, is of an individual who "depends on the sequestration of his lesser within the *oikia*... there, they [the political actor's lessers] prepare

clearly articulated political goals, it engages in mass action to achieve those goals, it concerns itself with matters of policy, and most recently it has launched its own political party, the Bodu Jana Peramuna, in order to more effectively operate in the political sphere.²⁷¹

Most prominently, the Bodu Bala Sena's use of violence and the threat of violence against Muslims is a political act. Richard Devetak tells us that "violence becomes political when bodily harm is caused in pursuit of, or even as, a political end."²⁷² The Bodu Bala Sena claims that it is acting as the "unofficial police" in Sri Lanka, stepping in to protect Sinhalese Buddhism when existing laws are unable to do so.²⁷³ This statement frames "the protection of Buddhism" as a desirable political end: a task which should properly fall to the justice system, but which the Bodu Bala Sena has taken upon itself to pursue through violent means. The Bodu Bala Sena is therefore engaging in political violence, according to Devetak's definition, and so is operating in the political sphere.

The Bodu Bala Sena cannot be understood as either a religious or a political actor; they are both simultaneously. This problematizes the common approaches to explaining religious violence, in which religion serves as either a "cause of" or an "epiphenomenon to" violence. To consider the Bodu Bala Sena's religious identity as the root cause of their violent actions overlooks their significant political concerns, and the role that changing social and political contexts have had on shaping that

him for his daily journey to the *polis*, presented by Arendt as a thoroughly distinct place from the household:" Jennifer Ring, "The Pariah as Hero: Hannah Arendt's Political Actor," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (1991): 434. Again we see a clear distinction between the public sphere, in which the political actor operates, and the private sphere (the *oikia*), to which the non-political is confined. Arendt would doubtless not approve of the Bodu Bala Sena's free movement between *oikia* and *polis*.

²⁷¹ "BJP Sri Lanka Joins Active Politics," *Sri Lanka Mirror*, June 25, 2015.

²⁷² Richard Devetak, "Globalisation's Shadow," in *The Globalisation of Political Violence*, ed. Richard Devetak (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2008), 10.

²⁷³ "Sri Lankan Buddhists Promise to Carry Out The Law.," Irshad, "Buddhist Party for Ban on Halal Food," *Khaleej Times*, February 18, 2013.

religious identity. However we cannot dismiss their religious identity as merely an epiphenomenon to the real, political causes of their hostility towards Muslims. The Bodu Bala Sena is not a group of political actors dressing their ideology up in religious legitimisation: they are monks, legitimate religious authorities of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, leading a movement of self-identified Buddhists in actions that are simultaneously religious and political.

5.3 RELIGION AS IDENTITY; IDENTITY AS POLITICAL

In the preceding section I argued that the Bodu Bala Sena, as a simultaneously religious and political organisation, problematizes the religious/secular dichotomy, and that the dominant approaches to understanding religious violence are therefore inadequate to explain the Bodu Bala Sena's violence towards Muslims in post-war Sri Lanka. This is not, I suspect, a problem specific to Sri Lanka and to the Bodu Bala Sena, but a problem for our approach to explaining religious violence generally. In this section I therefore aim to construct an alternate approach to explaining religious violence, based on the case of the Bodu Bala Sena but which might also provide a more general explanation for the relationship between religion, politics, and violence.

I have argued that constructions ("narratives") of identity and alterity are the key drivers behind the Bodu Bala Sena's violence towards Muslims, and that this violence is best understood as a means by which the Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to make their new construction of Sinhalese identity persuasive. In this section I will suggest that this focus on identity can also help us to overcome the secularist dichotomy I have criticised above by bridging the apparent distance between "the religious" and "the political." Religion plays an important role in constructions of identity, as I have argued above, but identity is itself a political concept, and identity politics are an established area of disciplinary inquiry. Using identity as a focus for

analysis allows examination of both its religious and its political dimensions simultaneously, which I will demonstrate is a useful and productive approach to explaining religious violence.

Religion is a major factor of identity. By this I mean that among the many different ways in which we might define ourselves (gender, occupation, language, caste, and so on), our religion or lack thereof tends to feature prominently. Durkheim famously believed that religion is the primary means by which groups might identify themselves: "the god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing more than the clan itself."²⁷⁴ For Durkheim, religion was the sacralisation of group identity.

More recent scholars have also discussed the relationship between religious identity and group identity. Lilly Weissbrod has argued that "the role of religion is to provide values that delineate national identity."²⁷⁵ Pamela Ebstyne King, writing about youth identity formation in North America, argues that religion provides powerful ideological, social, and spiritual foundations for identity.²⁷⁶ Claire Mitchell explores "the variety of ways in which religious practices, ideas, doctrines, values, and structures help [to] construct ideas about self and others" in Northern Ireland.²⁷⁷ Amartya Sen has written in more than one paper about the relationship between religion and nationalism.²⁷⁸ Finally, writing specifically about Sri Lanka, Rogers discusses the role of religion in historical constructions of identity.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, UK: Allen and Unwin, 1915), 206.

²⁷⁵ Lilly Weissbrod, "Religion as National Identity in Secular Society," *Review of Religious Research* 24, no. 3 (1983).

²⁷⁶ Pamela Ebstyne King, "Religion and Identity: the Role of Ideological, Social, and Spiritual Contexts," *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003).

²⁷⁷ Claire Mitchell, "Behind the Ethnic Marker: Religion and Social Identification in Northern Ireland," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 1 (2005).

²⁷⁸ Amartya Sen, "Violence, Identity, and Poverty," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 1 (2008); "Is Nationalism a Boon or a Curse?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 7 (2008).

²⁷⁹ Rogers, "Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities."

These scholars all consider religion to be an important component of identity. Despite this, and the secularist paradigm that separates religion from politics, identity is an established political object. Mary Bernstein, presenting an overview of research on identity politics, discusses the relationship between personal experience and political stance; why identities might be understood or portrayed as essential or constructed; the “strategic dilemma” of basing political action on contested identities; and the cultural and political goals at which identity politics are aimed.²⁸⁰ We might expect that religion, as a significant factor of identity, would feature in this framework, but it is mentioned only twice, both times in discussions of other authors.²⁸¹

This should not be the case. Religion, as a factor of identity, is profoundly political. The Bodu Bala Sena, for example, fit into Bernstein’s outline perfectly: they clearly relate religious identity with political objectives, identifying themselves as a force of Buddhist power that seeks political reform; they present a definition of essential and authentic Sinhala identity (inseparable from religious identity); they take strategic action to support this interpretation of identity, as I have discussed in Chapter 4; and they have clear cultural and political goals. The Bodu Bala Sena is therefore unquestionably a movement of identity politics, in which “identity” has a distinctly religious character.

What does this mean for our understanding of religious violence? Cavanaugh has argued that we should understand religious violence no differently from “secular” violence.²⁸² In many ways I agree with this. The intersection of religion and politics is not necessarily more prone to violence, nor is this violence somehow more

²⁸⁰ Mary Bernstein, “Identity Politics,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 31, no. 1 (2005).

²⁸¹ Specifically Alain Touraine, “Sociology Without Society,” *Current Sociology* 46, no. 2 (1998); and Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

²⁸² This is the central argument of Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*.

dangerous than violence that has no relationship to religion whatsoever.²⁸³ This means, as Abeysekara suggests, that discussions about whether the root cause of violence is political *or* religious are misdirected. Distinguishing the religious from the political is a futile exercise that can only succeed through arbitrary limitations of either category.

A more productive approach to understanding and explaining religious violence is to view it in the light of these identity politics. We might ask questions like: how has group identity been historically interpreted and re-interpreted so as to include violent components? How have religious beliefs and practices been interpreted to authorise this interpretation? By what authority is violence legitimated? These questions, I believe, will provide valuable insights into the enduring nature of religious violence, far more so than any questions which assume a clear distinction between “the religious” and “the secular.”

This is not, I will stress, to dismiss religion entirely or to subsume it into a more general “political” heading. The term religion is a flawed attempt to corral a vast range of beliefs, practices, rituals, and more into one defined category, but acknowledging this does not necessarily diminish the impact of these phenomena on politics. Similarly, identifying “gender” as a political category does not diminish our understanding of, or appreciation for, the significance of gender identity.²⁸⁴ The

²⁸³ Whether or not violence, or any other political phenomenon, can ever be truly separate from the ill-defined but all-encompassing category of “religious” is an interesting question, but one to take up elsewhere.

²⁸⁴ A brief, and by no means exhaustive, bibliography of gender as a political identity might include Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, trans. Alec West (New York, USA: International Publishers, 1975); Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard Madison Parshley (London, UK: David Campbell, 1993); Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London, UK: Hart-Davis, 1971); J.B. Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Oxford, UK: Martin Robertson, 1981); Craig Calhoun, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (New York, USA: Blackwell, 1994); Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela Di Leonardo, *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy* (New York, USA: Routledge, 1997); Terrell Carver and Veronique Mottier, *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship* (New York, USA: Routledge, 1998); J. Squires, *Gender in Political Theory* (Massachusetts, USA: Polity Press, 1999).

Bodu Bala Sena's interpretation of Buddhism, and of their Buddhist identity, may be a product of historical political forces, but this does not mean that it can be explained away or overlooked in a study of their ideology and methodology.

In this section I have begun to outline an alternate approach to explaining religious violence. I have suggested that in place of the religious/secular dichotomy I argued against in the preceding section, a more productive approach to understanding religious violence might be to view it as a product of identity politics, and to consider how religion shapes, and is shaped by, the politics of identity.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER FIVE

The Bodu Bala Sena, and the branch of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism that they represent, are on the one hand a religious community operating under monastic authority and primarily identified (both by themselves and by others) as a religious group – they are, above all, an organisation of monks leading a community of Buddhists. Their identity as a group is a religious identity, and the steps that they take to protect and empower that community (including their violence against minorities) are religious actions. However, as I argued in §5.3, a religious identity is simultaneously a political identity. To be Sinhalese, according to the Bodu Bala Sena and their supporters, is to be Buddhist – there is no distinction between the ethnic/national identity and the religious identity. The Bodu Bala Sena operates in the political, “secular” sphere as freely as it does the religious: they respond to political circumstances in a pragmatic manner; they frame themselves as members (citizens) of a nation-state and interact with the political structure of that nation-state; and they attempt to construct themselves as a political authority alongside their religious authority as a monastic organisation.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ "BBS to Contest in the General Election," *Asian Tribune*, June 30, 2015.

Operating simultaneously as religious and political actors, the Bodu Bala Sena problematizes the secularist binary assumed by much of the general writing on religious violence. They fit as comfortably into Juergensmeyer's explanation of "violence inspired by religious thinking" as they do into that of "violent [political] situations demanding religious justification."²⁸⁶ Neither of these explanations alone suffices to explain the relationship between religion and violence manifest in the Bodu Bala Sena, as I hope that I have demonstrated in preceding chapters. Religion is not exclusively cause *or* epiphenomenon of violence: rather, the violence of the Bodu Bala Sena is rooted in their conception and interpretation of their own identity as Sinhalese Buddhists, and is both a religious and a political act. In this manner they problematize the religious/secular dichotomy that has influenced so much of the writing on religious violence generally and operate as simultaneously religious and political actors.

²⁸⁶ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 164.

6 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This chapter serves three purposes. First, I will briefly summarise the individual arguments made in the preceding chapters, with particular reference to my overarching argument about the nature of the Bodu Bala Sena and Sinhalese Buddhism nationalism in the post-war era more generally. Second, I will outline some avenues for further study which I believe are highlighted by my examination of the Bodu Bala Sena. Finally, I will attempt to draw some broader conclusions about the three key themes of my study (violence, identity and alterity), the relationship that they might have to religion more generally, and the policy measures that might then arise in Sri Lanka and further abroad.

6.1 SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

My central argument has been that the Bodu Bala Sena's targeting of Muslims as a new threat to Sinhalese Buddhism is best thought of as an attempt to adapt nationalist narratives of Sinhalese Buddhist identity for the post-war era.

Nationalist narratives of Sinhalese identity have, since at least the British colonial period, been of a "nation under siege," defending a sacred land from impious foreign invaders: first the Chola army of Elara described in the *Mahavamsa*, then European colonialism and Christian proselytization, and then Tamil separatism and the LTTE. The 2009 defeat of the LTTE fulfilled this last narrative, but as much as it was cause for celebration it also left nationalists with a crisis of identity. Without an enemy to defend against, how were they to fulfil the role of "defenders of the *dhammadipa*" that they had convinced themselves was a fundamental part of their identity? The Bodu Bala Sena is attempting to address this crisis by adapting the narrative and providing a new threat, Sri Lankan Muslims, against which nationalists can continue to frame their conceptions of Sinhalese Buddhist identity.

In Chapter 2 I outlined the theoretical background to my argument. I established that alterity often plays a significant role in conceptions of identity, and that violence can be empowering for groups who might otherwise feel disempowered. I also traced the development of nationalist conceptions of identity (using a narrative framework) from the colonial era onwards, to demonstrate that the historical disempowerment and disenfranchisement of this period ultimately led to the construction of a chauvinistic and violence narrative of Sinhalese Buddhist identity by some nationalists.

In Chapter 3 I surveyed existing literature on this particular period of nationalism, particularly on the use of the *Mahavamsa* as a legitimising historical record and the imperative to restore the idealised moral past. I discussed how each of these themes in turn were relevant to a discussion of the Bodu Bala Sena, and concluded that although there are several significant points on which Bodu Bala Sena ideology diverges from that of earlier movements, they ought still to be considered in the context of this existing nationalist tradition.

In Chapter 4 I turned to the major novelty in the Bodu Bala Sena's ideology from earlier movements, namely their hostility towards Sri Lankan Muslims. Using the securitisation framework of the Copenhagen school of security studies, I analysed how they go about constructing Muslims as a credible demographic, cultural, economic, and political threat to Sinhalese Buddhists. I then argued that this construction of a new threat in lieu of the LTTE suggests that such a threat is in some way important to the Bodu Bala Sena and their conception of Sinhalese Buddhist identity.

In Chapter 5 I used the case of the Bodu Bala Sena to undermine what I see as a secularist assumption underlying writing on religious violence in Sri Lanka and more generally. I addressed two major works on religious violence and argued that

they represent two alternatives: either religion is a “cause of” or an “epiphenomenon to” violence, a division that I find unsatisfactory. I suggested that this is due to secularist assumptions of a fundamental disconnect between the religious and the political (properly in the areligious domain of the secular), and that these assumptions are unfounded and unhelpful in analysing religious violence. Examining religious violence in terms of identity politics, I suggested, is a more productive approach that may help to overcome this artificial distinction between religious and political.

6.2 AVENUES FOR FURTHER STUDY

I have attempted in this thesis to outline some of the most relevant features of the Bodu Bala Sena and position them within the tradition of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism more generally. Given the increasing activity of the Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka’s political sphere, including the launch of their own political party modelled after India’s Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh,²⁸⁷ and the resulting increase in international awareness of the group and their activities, I feel that this study has been a timely discussion of a significant development in Sri Lankan religion and politics. However the rise of the Bodu Bala Sena as a new incarnation of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is only one of a range of developments in the post-war era, and there are many perspectives that could be taken on this phenomenon that for reasons of scope and relevancy I have not considered. This raises several potential avenues for further study, which I will outline briefly below before turning in my next section to what I consider the most significant area of exploration that stems from this subject: the implications of this case for a more general understanding of the relationship between religion, politics and violence.

²⁸⁷ "BBS to Contest in the General Election," *Asian Tribune*, June 30, 2015.

6.2.1 Peacebuilding Movements in the Post-War Era

The Bodu Bala Sena is a fascinating case study of the continuation of violent Buddhist nationalism after the war – that is, after the “Other” of civil war nationalism, Tamil separatism, ceased to be a credible threat. However my focus on the Bodu Bala Sena should not be taken as a dismissal of other Buddhist responses to the end of the war, particularly those that focus on peacebuilding, intercommunalism and reconciliation.²⁸⁸ A comprehensive study of the relationship between Buddhism, politics and violence in the post-war era would not be complete without consideration of both legitimisation and opposition to violence by Sinhalese Buddhists and within the framework of Sinhalese Buddhism, and future studies will hopefully address this divergence of attitudes. How do such diametrically opposed political positions fit into the same framework of Sinhalese Buddhism? And how do advocates of either position engage with the other’s interpretation?

6.2.2 Reception of the Bodu Bala Sena by Sinhalese Buddhists

This study has focussed on the discursive output of the Bodu Bala Sena, operating on the assumption that this discourse has been “successful” in convincing Sinhalese nationalists of its truth because of the mass action it has helped to inspire (the Aluthgama riot). This assumption has served my purposes well, but the extent to which Bodu Bala Sena discourse has been convincing to Sinhalese Buddhists broadly needs testing. The Bodu Bala Sena and its supporters, notorious as they are becoming in international media, *may* be representative of a numerically significant development in Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, but it may be nothing more than a vocal and active fringe group. It is obvious from even a simple search on social media networks that there exists a large, and similarly vocal, population of Sinhalese Buddhists who actively oppose the Bodu Bala Sena and deny that they

²⁸⁸ I am indebted to Shivani Bothra for her comments on this subject.

represent authentic Sinhalese Buddhism.²⁸⁹ A large-scale study of receptions of the Bodu Bala Sena's particular brand of nationalism by Sinhalese Buddhists might have implications for my understanding of the nature of Buddhist nationalism in the post-war era, and such a study is surely necessary generally in the post-war era.

6.2.3 The Political Response to Religion in Sri Lanka

I have focussed on religious discourse (that is, discourse created by religious authorities) that deals with traditionally political subjects – legitimate violence and the construction of identity and alterity. What has been absent from my study is a significant consideration of the political response to the actions of the Bodu Bala Sena. I have mentioned several times the tacit support that the Bodu Bala Sena was believed to have enjoyed under the Rajapaksa government, including direct support from Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, defence secretary under his brother President Mahinda Rajapaksa. With Rajapaksa now ousted by his rival Maithripala Sirisena and the Bodu Bala Sena's BJP party unsuccessfully contesting the recent general elections, political tensions might continue rise between nationalists and government. Parallels might be drawn to the Buddhist-Socialist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in the 1970s and 80s, whose repression by the state (partially for their inciting of violence against minorities) led to armed uprisings. With this in mind, a detailed look at how the Rajapaksa and Sirisena governments have attempted to deal with nationalist movements like the Bodu Bala Sena in the post-war era might be both timely and crucial to providing the Sirisena government with options going forward.

6.2.4 Buddhist Nationalism as a Non-Secular Phenomenon

I argued in Chapter 5 that the Bodu Bala Sena is a simultaneously religious and political actor, which undermines secularist assumptions about the relationship

²⁸⁹ The group "Anti Bodu Bala Sena" ([facebook.com/PureSriLanka](https://www.facebook.com/PureSriLanka)), for example, has over 13,000 supporters on Facebook.

between religion and politics. Post-secularist literature has been prolific in recent decades, but much of it focusses on the relationship between religion and politics in the West, with some notable exceptions.²⁹⁰ The “historic role of monks” as both religious authorities and as political advisors in Sri Lanka suggests another potentially valuable criticism of secularism, though not *post*-secularist (referring to Western scholarship that has moved *beyond* secularist assumptions) but *non*-secularist (as such assumptions were never present in Sri Lanka or in Buddhist history more generally).

6.2.5 Religious Authorities in Securitisation Analysis

Securitisation analysis has traditionally, though not explicitly, been concerned with the state or similar political authority as securitising actor.²⁹¹ In this thesis I have argued that the Bodu Bala Sena, primarily (if not, as I argue above, exclusively) a religious authority, can be considered as a securitising actor, and that this consideration can lead to valuable analysis. Given this, what implications does this have for securitisation analysis more generally? This suggests a broader range of applications of this analysis than the primarily political studies offered by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde in their original book, and these religious applications might well form the basis of further study. Securitisation might even have applications in pure theology: might we argue that God was performing a security act in Jer. 5-17 when He tells the people of Israel of the “distant nation” of “mighty warriors” who threaten to devour and destroy?²⁹²

6.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

I have explained the presence of “violence” in Sinhalese Buddhism as the product of a particular formulation of identity and alterity. More specifically, I argued that the

²⁹⁰ Such as Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*.

²⁹¹ Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 40-42.

²⁹² NRSV.

historical development of Sinhalese national identity led to a particular “narrative” of what exactly that identity was: a nation entrusted with the sacred task of defending Sri Lanka from incursion by impious foreigners, a task which it has carried out throughout its history and which it must continue to carry out today, even in the post-war era. By identifying Sri Lankan Muslims as yet another enemy threatening the integrity of the *dhammadipa* and of Sinhalese Buddhist generally, the Bodu Bala Sena has allowed nationalists to continue to discharge that duty and reify the narrative of their religious and national identity.

I do not presume that such a description would fit all incidents of religious violence universally, but I do suspect that this analytical approach might be valuable in other contexts. Many theories of religious violence, as I have argued in Chapter 5, tend to consider it as an aberration, an unwelcome co-option of religion for political ends or intrusion of religion into the “secular” political domain. This has led to policies, both domestic and foreign, that demonise and seek to suppress such aberrations (such as Islamism) or that forcibly maintain the division between church and state. I suggest that a more useful (given the goal of mitigating and avoiding religious violence) approach to such “political religions” or even to “violent religions” might be to look to how their actions interact with their particular narrative of identity, and to ask how policy might re-shape or re-direct this narrative of violence.

This may be difficult to put in practice, but I suspect that such an approach would be, at worst, no less successful than current policies towards religious violence. Coercive suppression of violent or political religion seems to only strengthen its resolve, particularly when it has adopted a “siege mentality” as a result of colonial proselyting. Egypt might be an excellent example of this, with its Muslim Brotherhood winning the first elections held since independence by a landslide – here the violent suppression of conservative Islam by Nasser and his successors

served to reify the Muslim Brotherhood's self-identified role as defenders of tradition in the face of secular modernity, in a narrative that I suspect might hold interesting parallels to that of the Bodu Bala Sena.²⁹³ On the other end of the spectrum, as my thesis has demonstrated, fulfilling the agenda of such a group may do little to mitigate their hostility, as they may simply identify a new threat to defend against.

If violence serves to empower identity, then the objective of policy-makers should be to provide alternatives. In economic terms, the Bodu Bala Sena offers one means by which Sinhalese Buddhists might empower their sense of group identity: reifying the nationalist narrative and defending the *dhammadipa* against the Muslim threat. It is the task of policy-makers to offer preferable competition in identity-maintenance, undermining the nationalist cause by giving their supporters another means of building identity. Alternative narratives of Sinhalese Buddhist identity that do not rely on violence and defence against the other need to be constructed, and socioeconomic factors that contribute to a sense of disempowerment must be addressed.²⁹⁴ If these alternatives are not available, or if violent nationalists like the Bodu Bala Sena can continue to exploit a sense of disempowerment among Sinhalese Buddhists, then nationalists may continue to move from target to target indefinitely and continue playing the role of defenders of the *dhamma*.

I began this thesis by quoting the *Mahavamsa*, which ends each chapter by stating that it was compiled "for the serene joy and emotion of the pious." I suggested that

²⁹³ Scott W. Hibbard, *Religious Politics and Secular States* (Maryland, USA: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), "The Rise and Decline of Egyptian Secularism."

²⁹⁴ This recalls the advice of the *Kutadanta sutta*, in which a king whose realm is similarly troubled by violence is advised not to punish violent individuals, but to be generous and increase the overall prosperity of the realm. When this advice is following, then those men, following each his own business, will no longer harass the realm; the King's revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, please one with another and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors" (D. 5:11). The *Kutadanta sutta*, in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davis, 3 vols., vol. 1 (UK: Pali Text Society, 1995).

due to this text's association with violent nationalism during the 20th century, we might consider that violence to also have been carried out for that serene joy and emotion. In the 21st century, and under the new government of Maithripala Sirisena, we must hope that new narratives of Buddhist identity arise, in which piety no longer means chauvinism and it is instead religious tolerance that evokes such serene joy and emotion.

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