A Nationalism without Politics?
The illiberal consequences of liberal institutions in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT   *This paper examines the relationship between developmental and cultural nationalism through an extended case study of the Sri Lankan conflict. It highlights, in particular, the deeply political process of the construction of nations in which the usual opposition between politics and an anti-political realm of the nation or culture itself plays an important role. The conflict, it is argued, has to be understood first of all in political terms, as the outcome of a specific history of electoral politics which, from the 1930s on, was structured along 'ethnic' lines. Appeals to the national or the cultural, which often appear in rhetorical opposition to the divisive forces of everyday politics, are nevertheless themselves products of the very political processes they claim to transcend.*

In 1983 everything changed in Sri Lanka.[1] I was in my second year of old-style anthropological fieldwork, living in the grounds of the Buddhist temple in a rather poor and out-of-the-way village in Sabaragamuva Province, doing the rounds of paddy fields, weddings and funerals, and I was beginning to get a strong sense that I was living in a world with too much politics. That view was more widely voiced. One day I stopped by at a tea-shop in the centre of the village. The proprietor, by then a good friend of mine, had his head in a fat and rather glossy pamphlet. The title of the pamphlet was *Kavuda kotiya?* (Who is the Tiger?), and it was one of a series of Sinhala pamphlets, produced and circulated around this time by a leading ultra-nationalist minister in the United National Party (UNP) government called Cyril Mathew. 'Ah', I said to my friend, 'I didn't know you were interested in politics' (*desapalanaya*). 'Oh, this isn't politics', he replied, 'this is about the national question' (*jatika prasnaya*). A few months later, thousands of Tamils were killed in a pogrom in the south of the island. And after this came civil war.

This paper seeks to make sense of my friend's odd distinction. It proceeds from a quite specific ethnographic problem—what is this local sense of

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'the political' which apparently avoids any link to 'the national'—and then tries to use this as a heuristic to make better sense of a wider pattern. The removal, or attempted removal, of the national question from the messy amorality of politics is in fact a familiar move, not only in South Asia. Politicians, political observers and not a few 'ordinary people', often seek to bracket off the dirty world of politics from the transcendent community of the nation. But the Sri Lankan case offers a particularly illuminating perspective on the role of the political in the production of national allegiances and national antagonisms. It is a case in which the spatial arithmetic of late colonial representative structures skewed state-level politics towards ethnic symbols and ethnic allegiances from the very start, and it is a case in which democratic procedures have apparently flourished alongside a rising tide of political violence. Thus my subtitle: the illiberal consequences of liberal institutions.

In terms of the wider argument in this volume, Sri Lanka would seem to present an anomaly. It is not so much that nationalisms in Sri Lanka have not had a developmental phase in which egalitarian aspirations are embodied in visions of state-led economic growth. It is that the official imagery of development has, from the 1930s at least, been steeped in the symbolism of a more narrow, culturally defined nationalism. Large-scale state-sponsored agricultural development from the 1930s to the 1980s, for example, was envisaged and represented as the restoration of the glories of a pre-colonial order, an order which was Buddhist and Sinhalese, not Tamil, Muslim, Hindu or Christian. At the same time, appeals to horizontal solidarities usually stopped at the imagined boundaries of the linguistic or religious community. The most charismatic trade union activist of the 1920s, AE Goonesinha, was among the first to exploit the fear of the alien in modern political discourse, scapegoating Indian labourers in particular.[2] Radical youth politics, as embodied from the 1970s on in the Sinhala Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), failed to transcend the divisions of language and community. In each case the shared language of distributive justice they invoked was yoked to a vision of ethnic division and cultural exclusion. This pattern has a distinctive political dynamic which, I suggest, stems from the peculiar circumstances in which mass electoral politics were introduced to the island. In this bigger picture I leave behind my narrow ethnographic sense of the political and turn instead to the institutional structure of modern mass politics.

The argument that follows draws on a larger and more ambitious project which has occupied me on and off since that first encounter with an unruly nationalism in the early 1980s. As a fledgling anthropologist I found little in my theoretical toolkit to help me interpret the spectacle of local politics in Sri Lanka. The book that I draw on for my core argument in this contribution attempts to put this right.[3] It is a book about politics and culture, about the local interpretation of postcolonial political structures, and about the proper ambition, and limitations, of an anthropology of actually existing democracy. In the conclusion to this article I briefly survey some of the ideas I have found most helpful in this work: arguments that point to the

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strong connections between democratic institutions and what Michael Mann calls 'the dark side of democracy', and arguments drawn from some of the strongest (and therefore politically most unsavoury) critics of liberal democratic theory.[4] These connect in unexpected ways with some of the arguments about comparative nationalisms found elsewhere in this volume. First though, I need to set out the story of illiberal democracy in Sri Lanka since the 1930s.

A political history of two nationalisms

The basic story of the Sri Lankan catastrophe is relatively easy to tell. It starts with the first elections based on universal suffrage 70 years ago, and culminates in the civil war between the Colombo government, perceived by many to be dominated by the majority Sinhala population, and the secessionist LTTE, based among the Tamil population of the island's North and East. Unlike its large neighbour to the north—India—Sri Lanka never developed a mass anti-colonial nationalist movement out of which Nehruvian developmental nationalism emerged. Instead, it was the site of one of Asia's earliest experiments with universal franchise, an experiment that was memorably opposed—because 'the people' were unready for such a responsibility—by the more vociferous elements of the only plausible nationalist party, the elite-dominated Ceylon National Congress (in terms of numbers, popular support and political impact at the time a very pale shadow of its Indian namesake). In 1927 Sidney Webb, the Colonial Secretary, sent a Special Commission from London to investigate possible political reform in the colony. The Ceylon National Congress, in its appearance before the Commission, argued forcefully for a strict income restriction on the franchise: 'If they went a grade lower, the delegation asserted, there was the danger that they might get a class of persons who would not use their votes with any sense of responsibility and whose votes might be at the disposal of the highest bidder'. Worse still, some of the Congress leaders—apparently unaware of the expectations raised by the label 'nationalist'—refused to endorse a move towards self-government as a reasonable political goal.[5]

The Commission ignored them, and recommended the introduction of a new constitution, partly modelled on the structure of the then London County Council, with elections based on universal adult suffrage. While independence was not granted until 1948, the new constitution already set in place the patterns of a vertical political mobilisation within ethnic communities and obviated the need for any broad horizontal mobilisation based on common opposition to the colonial presence. Independence, when it came, came without such mobilisation. The combination of a first-past-the-post electoral system, and a population distribution in which the Tamil minority was heavily concentrated in a few districts in the north and east of the country, set in train a dynamic in which Sinhala and Tamil politicians only looked to their own community, and formed parties almost entirely contained within that community, with no structural pressure to bring the

two groups together in a single campaign (like the Quit India movement elsewhere in the subcontinent) or a single party. Tamil politicians in the north boycotted the first elections under the new system in 1931, while elite Sinhala politicians, like the young and ambitious SWRD Bandaranaike, quickly shed their Christian upbringing and re-presented themselves as what became known (after the politician who gave his name to the constitution) as 'Donoughmore Buddhists'. Reflecting on the position of these elite politicians, hastily adjusting to a new form of mass politics, it is hard to think of a more apt illustration of Tom Nairn's description of that moment in the birth of the political modern when the bourgeoisie suddenly discovered a need 'to invite the masses into history' with an invitation written 'in a language they understood'.[6] The 'language they understood', as it emerged and coagulated in the Sri Lankan political rhetoric of the 1930s, was a language of linguistic and religious identity, laced with experiments in xenophobia directed at different minorities: Indian Tamil labourers on the tea estates and Malayali immigrants in Colombo in particular. The distribution of population, and the constituency-based system of representation, resulted in two political zones: a zone of permanent opposition in the north, where Tamil parties dominated, and a zone of competition in the south, where (mostly Sinhala) politicians fought for the votes that would get them close to government. Without these early experiments in electoral democracy, it is possible that local political leaders would have had to join forces in a convincingly united front to force concessions from the British colonial rulers. This never happened; instead the fault lines established in the electoral politics of the 1930s became the disputed borderlands in the civil war 50 years later.[7]

I doubt that any serious analyst would claim that the 'stuff' of cultural nationalism in Sri Lanka was simply made up in the political crucible of 1930s mass politicking. Some of it was quite old, some quite new, and quite a bit was borrowed from elsewhere. What interests me most about this now, however, is not the increasingly arid arguments about the relative antiquity of some sense of Sinhala Buddhist identity—arguments which have dominated the sub-literature on the Sri Lankan crisis since the mid 1980s; I am rather more interested in the ways in which a sense of what it means to be Sinhala or Buddhist or Tamil or Muslim was transmuted in the new circumstances of mass politics, and the curious mixture of self-interest and transcendence, agonism and community, that is braided so tightly in the so-called 'politics of identity'.[8]

None of this happened in a vacuum. The postcolonial state in Sri Lanka has been rightly praised for its achievements in health and education. These were based on a distinctive political economy. In the first four decades after independence the state was able to act as a benefactor to most—but by no means all—sections of the population. Revenues generated in the export-oriented plantation sector were redistributed across the population, especially through new schools and expanding health services.[9] Other state rewards, especially access to higher education and white-collar employment in the state bureaucracy, became the focus of greatly increased competition. In the

1950s competence in Sinhala became the official route into government employment (even though English remained the *de facto* language of power); in the 1970s quotas were introduced to open up higher education to young people from relatively disadvantaged parts of the country. These two measures were felt hardest by Tamils from the Jaffna peninsula for whom English-language education, and professional qualifications from the universities, had long been the main escape route from the limited economic opportunities in their home area. In processes like this competition for scarce state resources was itself experienced through key markers of identity like language: political economy transmuted into cultural struggle. The first gestures of violent insurrection in the Tamil north followed closely on the introduction of so-called 'standardisation' in university entrance in the 1970s. Perceptions of distributive injustice have been important sources of anti-state insurrection among both Sinhala and Tamil youth since the 1970s, but their perceptions of relative advantage and disadvantage have again been almost always structured along ethnic lines.

Nevertheless, my crucial point is that, up to the 1980s at least, the history of 'identity politics' in Sri Lanka is first and foremost a *political* history. In 1956 the UNP (successor to the old Ceylon National Congress) was defeated in a wave of Sinhala Buddhist populism. Supporters of the incoming Sri Lanka Freedom Party celebrated with the impeccably democratic slogan *Ape anduva*, 'our government'. Within months there was open violence, for the first time in modern history, between groups simply identified as 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil'. In 1958 an attempted compromise between the government and the main Tamil party (the so-called 'Bandaranaike – Chelvanyakam Pact'), which addressed the growing Tamil sense of exclusion, was abandoned in the face of opposition from powerful Buddhist figures. From then till the 1970s minority bitterness increased while governments oscillated between the politics of Sinhala populism and a succession of half-hearted attempts to address Tamil grievances. Tamil politics moved from non-violent protest and calls for federalism to guerrilla attacks on symbols of the Sinhala-dominated state in the name of separatism.

The first of these attacks took place in 1975, two years before the election of JR Jayewardene's UNP in a landslide victory in 1977. By then a number of small militant groups were operating in the Jaffna peninsula, attacking mainstream Tamil politicians and policemen. Jayawardene's initial response to the call for devolution was the introduction, in 1980, of new District Development Councils. But this rather feeble attempt at devolution exploded in his face with the disastrous local election campaign of 1981 which ended with the destruction by government forces of the Jaffna library, and a wave of anti-Tamil attacks in selected towns in the south. The violence in Jaffna, allegedly initiated by attacks from the militants of the LTTE, was mostly the work of the police and army; the destruction in the south was almost entirely the work of a faction within the UNP led by the Minister for Science, Cyril Mathew.

Two years later, in 1983, the same dynamic was played out but on a much wider scale. The LTTE ambushed an army convoy outside Jaffna, killing 13

soldiers. Tamil houses and businesses were torched across Colombo and many (but not all) parts of the south. The UNP were especially heavily involved, with busloads of party supporters, equipped with copies of the electoral register, systematically seeking out Tamil houses for destruction. Many Tamils fled the island altogether, joining friends and relations in Toronto, Melbourne and London where their remittances became the material base for the later success of the LTTE. Younger men, and later some women too, joined the LTTE. What had been a containable security problem became, within a couple of years, a full-scale civil war.

And so it went for the best part of 20 years, punctuated by occasional ceasefires and gestures at negotiation. Indian troops arrived to police one ill-judged settlement in 1987, but left a few years later with nothing substantial achieved. A change of government in 1994 looked likely to produce a settlement but within months the war restarted, if anything even more viciously than before. Finally, the combination of years of behind-the-scenes work by Norwegian diplomats and the election of a new government in 2001 initiated the ceasefire which still held when this paper was first drafted, despite a further change of government, a major split within the militants of the LTTE, and a continued, low but persistent, level of assassinations and attempted assassinations, apparently by the LTTE and targeted at their remaining Tamil political rivals.[10] The new government of 2005, led by Mahinda Rajapaksa, very quickly raised the level of confrontation with the LTTE. By the spring of 2007 most observers agreed that the ceasefire had become all but meaningless, as the country stumbled back into war.

1983: the brink of civil war

Back to the moment when my friend defended his choice of reading, when the national question, allegedly, still stood separate from politics as normal. As 1983 moved on, things started to get weirder and weirder. The president, JR Jayewardene, had won a second term of office in the country's first presidential election the previous October, and immediately followed this with a victory in a highly dubious referendum, called to extend the life of the existing parliament (with its huge ruling-party majority) for a further term, without any need for the mess and uncertainty of a regular parliamentary election.[11] In the first half of 1983 various rumours, some of them obviously coming from the president's office itself, were floated in the pro-government press. Perhaps the president was about to call on friendly elements in the opposition parties (including the Tamil opposition) to join a government of national unity. Perhaps the president, who had famously requested all his MPs to submit undated letters of resignation for him to hold on file, would sack the more obviously unpopular members of his own government. More than once I remembered a huge headline that had appeared on the front page of one pro-government newspaper immediately after the referendum: '"I can do anything"—JR'.[12]

One reason for this sense of omnipotence was the political machine which Jayewardene had helped create in the second half of the 1970s, and which had delivered his victories in the two polls of 1982. The UNP had local organisers

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in every village in the Sinhala heartlands in the South and Centre of the island; it had established its control over key trade unions; and it had enmeshed a substantial stratum of potentially influential people—from new business elites to more humble village schoolteachers and minor officials—in a skein of patronage and obligation. In late 1982 and early 1983 it became apparent that this machine was not entirely under control. The 1982 referendum result had involved unprecedented use of intimidation and fraud. ('If only the polls had stayed open a few more hours, we could have taken the "yes" vote here over 100%', as one local organiser was widely quoted to me.) The gangs of young men who had delivered the vote in the referendum so spectacularly—'thugs' or 'goondas', as they were usually described—were causing unease. Senior judges were abused by them, veteran cultural figures roughed up. In May Jayewardene staged a series of by-elections in problem constituencies in the south—and again the opposition complained of even more outrageous use of violence against them.

While this was happening a rather different variation on the theme of the political was playing out in the northern city of Jaffna. When Jayewardene won his landslide victory in 1977, the main Sinhala opposition party all but disappeared as a parliamentary presence, leaving Amirthalingam's Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) as the official opposition. While this gave Tamil demands greater prominence in national politics, it also provided hard-line chauvinists in the government with endless opportunities to push their own anti-Tamil case. The pamphlet my friend had been reading in the opening scene of this paper was an extended attack on Amirthalingam and his party, produced and distributed by a cabinet minister through the agency of his ministry. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s Amirthalingam trod an uneasy line between his own relatively moderate constitutional programme and the far more radical appeal of the young separatists of the LTTE. In early 1983 Amirthalingam veered between attending to overtures— or apparent overtures—from the government, and striking occasional radical poses to placate his own constituency in the north. The 'Who is the Tiger?' pamphlet presented one—ultra Sinhala-nationalist—view of Amirthalingam's role during Jayewardene's first term: as a front or apologist for the violent separatists of the LTTE. The TULF had not fielded a candidate in the presidential election in 1982 (on the grounds that it was impossible for a minority candidate to win), and also stood back from the referendum. But, while the south was having its by-elections in May 1983, local council elections were scheduled for Jaffna. The militants called for a boycott. The TULF and UNP put up candidates. After the assassination of two candidates, the UNP withdrew but Amirthalingam's TULF stood its ground against the militants because it saw the very existence of local councils as a rare tangible gain in the long struggle for devolution. Then, mid-campaign, the LTTE simply took over a TULF rally in Jaffna, masked youths wresting the microphone from the speaker with words to the effect that his kind had had their day. The next day the TULF glumly announced that it too was boycotting the elections, in deference to the heroic sacrifices of Tamil youth. Although worse indignities were to follow over the years for the TULF, that

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day might be reasonably described as the moment that the political died in northern Sri Lanka.[13]

I've dredged these events from my memory because they seem to me to exemplify the themes I want to explore here: the relationship between two abstractions—the political and the national—and, behind that, the relationship between the institutions of liberal democracy and the production and reproduction of nationalist attachments. The implication of my friend's casual remark was striking: the 'national question' which, even then, dominated national political argument was somehow not part of 'politics' or 'the political' as he understood it. But how *did* he understand it? He was, after all, distancing himself—and his reading matter—from politics. So politics was not thought to be morally desirable. There is nothing in the word itself to suggest this; etymologically it refers to 'protection of the country' and it sounded to me like a relatively recent neologism which had been taken up in village speech to denote a very specific form of life.[14] Let me list some of its local characteristics. It was not 'about' nationalism and the national question, as my friend's comment makes clear. Nor was it something that people readily admitted to being active in: it was always one's opponents who were involved in politics, rarely oneself. And it was identified with division and trouble within the community. One of the first pieces of advice I had been given when I arrived in the village came from a minor government official who asked what aspect of life I intended to study. He quickly answered his own question, 'You don't want to study politics. That is not a good thing.' In late 1982 during the months of campaigning for the election and referendum, again and again people would apologise to me for the unseemly side of the village I was witnessing: this was all because of politics, and once the elections were over the village's troubles would end.

During the last months of 1982, in parallel with the elections, the village was absorbed by an extraordinary case of spirit possession involving an adolescent Muslim girl, who had been possessed by a host of Sinhala demons which demanded that she be treated by Sinhala exorcists.[15] Some people felt the demons were responsible for the village's political troubles; others felt the trouble created by politics had rendered the village susceptible to demonic attack; still others thought the whole thing a fraud perpetrated by the Muslims in order to get money out of their Buddhist neighbours. The girl's case was taken up by a maverick Buddhist monk who prescribed a daily hearing of protective Buddhist verses (*pirit*) to keep the demons away; a few of her Buddhist neighbours came round every day to chant these in unison. On the day of the election I called round to see how the case was progressing. I found only one neighbour there and asked him why no-one had come to chant *pirit*. These days, he explained, because of the politics in the village, people's minds are bad (*hita honda nä*); for *pirit* to succeed, those involved should be clean, pure (*pirisiduvin*) and good. In other words, for this man, and I think in my other examples too, the political could be seen as a zone of collective moral disorder.

Similar complaints and similar evaluations could be heard in all parts of society at this time. In the second half of the 1980s many young people in the

south took part in a violent rising under the aegis of a leftist-nationalist party called the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front. The full story of the JVP rising, and the waves of terror and counter-terror that accompanied it, remains to be written. (It is probably best known to non-specialists now as the backdrop to Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*.) Under the cloak of a youth uprising in the name of the Sinhala Buddhist nation, many old political scores were settled, and not a few new grievances created. Much of the violence followed the capillaries of local political alignment—a village UNP organiser and his family might be killed, and their obvious local enemies subsequently targeted for reprisal. But the JVP's own use of violence had some kind of appeal to a place beyond the political: the killing of minor and major political figures—invariably described as 'traitors' to the nation—was presented as a kind of cleansing of the nation from the murk of the political.[16]

The Jaffna episode is part of a much longer history of tension between 'moderate' Tamil politicians and those committed to armed struggle against the Sri Lankan state—a history in which, up to now, the gun has almost invariably prevailed. Yet the history of the Tamil LTTE has similar sociological roots to the Sinhala JVP, a superficially similar blend of social justice and ultra-nationalism in its appeal to its supporters, and a shared vocabulary of 'traitors' and 'treachery' to describe more conventional politicians. In an interview in *The Week* in 1986 the LTTE leader Prabhakaran described the TULF as 'power hungry politicians who have been cheating our people due to their selfish political ambitions'.[17] Three years later Amirthalingam was murdered by the LTTE in Colombo. After the assassination of the well known academic and TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam in 1999, LTTE sources in the diaspora were again quick to brand him a 'traitor'. Many other Tamil politicians have been killed, while the survivors have made their own uneasy accommodation with the militants. Most of this bloodletting can be explained by the LTTE's insistent demand that it be seen as the 'sole legitimate representative' of the Tamil people, but this in turn can be interpreted as another variant on the theme of politics and its antithesis, the divisive world of the political versus the transcendent unity of the nation.

The national and the political

That is the heart of my argument. In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 many commentators succumbed to the temptation to picture a world divided between liberalism, pluralism, tolerance and peace on the one hand, and illiberalism, intolerance and violence on the other. The stark choice for the world, we were told, lay between democracy and terror. But, in this case, I would argue that the origins of the 'ethnic' divide between Sinhala and Tamil, and much of the peculiar nastiness of the past 20 years of conflict, lie in the institutional structure and working dynamic of representative democracy in Sri Lanka. This raises both comparative questions and more immediate political issues. The obvious comparison is with the rise of the Hindu right in India, which some commentators have seen as integrally

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linked to the increasing engagement by hitherto marginalised sections of the population with electoral politics—a process sometimes referred to as the 'democratisation of Indian democracy'.[18] Politically my analysis raises questions about the problems confronting the peace process, still stumbling along in Sri Lanka, and the forms of sovereignty and political engagement that we might hope would emerge from the ashes of the conflict.

There are several reasons for focusing on the political developments of 1983. One, which needs another kind of research to be properly developed, is the need to make sense of a moment when, to all intents and purposes, a democratic government declared war on a section of its own population. A full analysis of this probably requires a detailed study of the internal competition, jockeying for position, and increasing recourse to violence within the ruling UNP in the early 1980s—a study which will be hard to conduct so long as the UNP's role in the 1983 violence remains publicly unacknowledged in Sri Lanka itself. A second, which relates to the theme of a transition from developmental to cultural nationalism, is the interesting temporal location of 1983 in the history of Sri Lanka's *two* strands of culturalist nationalism. Academic writing in the aftermath of the 1983 violence concentrated heavily on the strong orientation to the past in Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, as if it were history (or some aberrant version of history) rather than politics that killed the victims. But 1983 now stands as a foundational moment in the emergence of a new, authoritarian, militaristic, but also deeply radical, Tamil nationalism. In that respect we need to take a prospective stance towards the events of that year: what possibilities for collective imagination and collective action were *created*, or at least made possible, by the violence, as well as what avenues were closed off?

It is obvious from the story I have told so far that the Sri Lankan case cannot be easily shoe-horned into a standard tale of a move from development-oriented nation-building, to more 'cultural' or past-oriented kinds of nationalism. There is nothing in recent Sri Lankan history which is comparable with the gross contrast between the Nehruvian regime of the 1950s and early 1960s and the more recent Bharatiya Janata Party rulers in India, not least because in Sri Lanka there never was a direct equivalent to Nehruvian developmentalism and secularism in the first place. Instead, Sinhala (and Tamil) politicians appealed to voters in terms of their Sinhala-ness (or Tamil-ness) almost from the start of modern mass politics. If anything, the experience of war has taught some Sinhala politicians (as well as some Sinhala voters) to be more wary of the rhetoric of 'culture' and 'identity', while the rationale for peace on both sides of the negotiations has often emphasised the economic and development costs of continuing war. For the LTTE the politics of constant struggle provided a useful cover for the haziness of their developmental blueprint for the new world of Tamil Ealam; with the ceasefire, there are signs that their minds are turning to issues of development (at least, if an interest in control of a huge influx of reconstruction funds indicates an interest in development) and occasionally to issues of 'culture' too.

But a close look at the years up to 1983 can yield some interesting insights into the relationship between the politics of development and the politics of

culture. The post-1977 government summed its mission up in two slogans, an 'open economy' (*nidahas arthikaya*) and a 'righteous society' (*dharmista samajaya*). Its propaganda combined appeals to a fledgling consumerism—fuelled by newly available foreign consumer goods like cars, fridges and TVs—and extravagant use of Buddhist imagery harking back to the symbols and stories of pre-colonial kingship. The two themes combined in the regime's biggest development project—the Accelerated Mahavali Scheme—which promised cheap electricity and new paddy land for the poor, while recreating the landscape and values of the Buddhist kings of the distant past.

Jayewardene brought his own personal history to this administration. In his past he had been an occasional Sinhala hard-liner, as well as a dedicated anti-communist in the immediate period after independence. In the late 1940s he was involved in an extended controversy with leading members of the newly politicised Buddhist clergy about the role of monks in public life, and after his electoral victory in 1977 he set about plans to push the Buddhist monks into his preferred, 'non-political' mould. Both phases of the story are well told in Abeysekera's fascinating recent monograph on Buddhism and identity in Sri Lanka.[19] What comes across most strikingly is the consistency of Jayewardene's lifelong ideological labour, in which the themes of the political, the cultural/ethnic/national (especially the Buddhist), and the economic are combined, separated and recombined in different ways.

Jayewardene's post-1977 project involved at once an attempted infusion of Buddhist culture into mainstream political symbolism, a cleansing of the political from the body of Buddhist monks, and the opening of the economy to international capital at its most ruthless ('Let the robber barons come!' as he told an interviewer at the time). The results were not as anticipated: in the course of Jayewardene's presidency Buddhist monks were drawn into ever more public political roles, and many were killed at the height of the late 1980s violence; the rhetoric of a politics in the style of the *dharma* coexisted with an everyday world increasingly saturated by the political; and the economy was opened to international capital at its most ruthless.

But, amid all this, 'politics' and 'culture' were not different and separate 'things' to be brought together or separated as circumstances demanded. 'Culture' was a central symbolic resource in unprecedented levels of intra-regime political competition. Would-be successors to the ageing Jayewardene competed with each other in 'cultural' terms: the minister of lands had the Mahavali scheme, with its pageants, elephants and dam-openings; the equally ambitious minister of trade had his *mahapolas* ('great markets'), huge open-air events with popular singers and entertainers; the prime minister had his Village Awakening scheme that would rejuvenate the rural areas through the creation of new model villages; and nothing happened without a phalanx of Buddhist monks, an oil lamp, and as often as not a 'cultural show' of some sort or another to mark the opening, the closing, the turning of the first furrow in the new paddy field, the planting of the new coconuts, or whatever material success was there to be celebrated.

Anthropologists working in different parts of the island in the early and mid-1980s documented and analysed the rituals and symbols that

accompanied the state's development works. Teams of public officials carefully planned the elephants and fireworks that marked the opening of major construction projects. Villagers in the remotest areas quickly mastered the official idioms of 'development' (*sanvardhana*) and nationalism.[20] It goes without saying that the rituals and symbols employed in these idioms were almost invariably Sinhala and Buddhist, just as the recipients of new land and new opportunities were more often than not also Sinhala and Buddhist. The ubiquity of these 'cultural' accompaniments to the state's development efforts was not without its material bases, however. One of the first moves by the Jayewardene regime was to sign an agreement for the introduction of the island's first TV service (a gift from the Japanese, of course), which became one key medium for the reproduction of images of culture and images of development. The state TV channel sponsored one-off dramas based on particular new development projects, while similar messages, in the form of advertising supplements and reports of politicians' speeches, flooded the radio and newspapers too. Overseeing the government's media presentation was a man called Anandatissa de Alwis who, before his elevation to the position of Jayewardene's minister of state, was better known as an early director of the Sri Lankan arm of the J Walter Thompson advertising agency.[21]

Economic liberalisation and political decay

Within a decade of the launch of Jayewardene's 'open economy' Sri Lanka had become a place of death-squads and disappearances as the Indian Peace-Keeping Force fought the LTTE in the north and east while the government faced a radical Sinhala group called the JVP in the south. What can Sri Lanka tell us about the connection between neoliberalism, ethnic polarisation and political decay? Three plausible arguments have been advanced about the political economy of the conflict, each bearing on a slightly different phase of its history.

The first, put forward by the Marxist sociologist Newton Gunasinghe, argues for a strong link between the post-1977 economic policies and the 1983 anti-Tamil violence. In particular, he claimed that the liberalisation of imports by the Jayewardene regime had disadvantaged a stratum of Sinhala small businessmen, who had successfully exploited a niche within the previous import substitution regime, and who blamed rival Tamil business-men for their post-1977 decline. In support of his argument he cites examples of various well known Tamil businesses which were specifically targeted in the 1983 violence.[22] There are some obvious counter-arguments to Gunasinghe's case, which only makes a limited contribution to the explanation of the 1983 events. If some Sinhala businesses were weakened by liberalisation, many clearly profited, and the 1980s saw the emergence into public culture of new kinds of Sinhala entrepreneur, and a partial revalorisation of the previously despised figure of the trader (or *mudalali*).

Gunasinghe's argument was carefully considered some years ago in a scrupulous essay by Mick Moore. In assessing the relationship between

liberalisation and political decay in Sri Lanka, Moore made two crucial points. The first was a cautionary warning about treating the Sri Lankan case as a straightforward example of 'liberalisation' or 'structural adjustment'. It is true that the Jayewardene government freed up access to foreign exchange and foreign goods while lowering (but by no means removing) state expenditure on welfare measures. But, at the same time, these measures were rewarded by huge aid inflows mostly directed to the big development projects discussed earlier and easily transformed into jobs and contracts which could be handed out to political supporters along the usual channels of party-based patronage. In other words, beneath the rhetoric of liberalism and rolling back the state, Sri Lanka experienced a minor Keynesian boom based on public works, all bankrolled by international aid flows. Because the aid subsidised this expansion of public works—and public spectacle—politicians and the politically connected prospered as never before. A change of regime, or even a minor electoral reversal, threatened the gravy train, and *this* is the most plausible link between the economic policies of the period and the gradual erosion of political pluralism: those profiting from their political position fought harder, and nastier, in order to retain power. Their motive, as Moore puts it, was the 'elemental desire to stay in clover'.[23]

This argument has been expanded in a more recent piece by Ron Herring which focuses more narrowly on the role of aid in fuelling the ethnic conflict.[24] From the late 1970s onward donors rushed to support this small, and therefore affordable, exemplar of free-market liberalism in South Asia. On the whole aid was given in a politically or ethnically 'blind' way, donors preferring to look at the imposing new dam and not think about the symbolic implications of the Buddha statue erected alongside, still less enquire too deeply into who was getting the contracts to hire the labourers to build the new infrastructure. Not much was built in the north or the east, while the big irrigation and hydroelectric schemes were perceived by many Tamils as devices to alter the population balance of areas of the country where they had previously been the largest identifiable group. This was, too, the era of the Kirkpatrick distinction between 'totalitarian' (bad) and 'authoritarian' (OK, especially if they're on our side) regimes and, with one eye on their Southeast Asian neighbours' experiments in authoritarian growth, there was much talk from the government of investors' need for stability and continuity in economic policy. In the course of the 1980s the major donors grew increasingly itchy about the country's appalling reputation for human rights' violations, but never so itchy as to cut off the funding that kept the regime going. A thoroughgoing and critical analysis of the political consequences of donor interventions in Sri Lanka since the 1970s would make interesting reading, and it is a genuinely open question whether in the long run more has been gained politically from donor pressure on human rights, than was lost in bankrolling an increasingly bloody regime.

The third argument about the political economy of the conflict started to be heard in the mid-1990s as the war dragged wearily on. I first heard it from the anthropologist Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, whose reports and analyses from the margins of the battle have been among the most provocative and insightful contributions to our understanding of the

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conflict.[25] By the 1990s, the argument goes, the war was not an 'ethnic' war (if it ever had been); if the war was 'about' anything, it was about its own continuation. Vested interests on both sides had much to gain from the continuation of the war, and much to lose from its end. On the government side there were kickbacks and sweeteners on defence contracts, not to mention the employment bonanza of a growing army. For the LTTE the struggle, with its attendant symbolism of martyrdom and transcendent death, had become its own *raison d'etre*.

In contrast to this war-as-functional-system argument, there is the counter-argument from the Colombo business community about the costs of war—an argument which has had some popular success in the changing political atmosphere of the South.[26] Meanwhile the same donors that bankrolled the country's political collapse in the 1980s have been eager to pump money into an exemplary post-conflict situation where (unlike troublesome places like Iraq and Afghanistan) they might expect immediate tangible signs of reconstruction, and even, possibly, displays of gratitude. By 2007 even the most generous of international donors began to show signs of frustration at the breakdown of the ceasefire and the increased brutality of the tactics employed by both sides: several European countries blocked or withdrew support that had been pledged earlier.

In Sri Lanka, as in so many other countries, the experiment with liberalisation does not easily fall within the stereotypes of neoliberal orthodoxy.[27] In the first years of liberalisation government expenditure *rose* as a proportion of GDP and it has held steady at just below 30% in the years that followed. Some of this has gone into supporting the war effort but this too has created employment, especially for young men in poorer rural areas. Although some highly visible welfare measures were withdrawn in this period, new ones like the populist Janasaviya programme have been introduced by Sinhala politicians looking to their own support base. On the whole the economy has grown steadily, if unspectacularly, through the war years, but growth itself, and consequent benefits, have been unevenly distributed. Western Province, which includes Colombo, has boomed, with the rest of the country trailing far behind; incomes have increased most quickly among the already prosperous, with much smaller gains for the lowest earners. The most disadvantaged areas are the war zones in the north and east (unrepresented in many sets of official statistics), and the estate sector.[28]

Culture and politics

According to Partha Chatterjee (and others in his wake), nationalism in India remained 'derivative' because of its attachment to a European model of politics and political development. Indians responded by creating a hard division between the 'outside' of politics, the state and the modern, and an 'inside' of culture, the home and the spiritual. While the distinction between the political and the cultural, or equivalent terms, is *ideologically* alive in South Asia (and elsewhere) and would be relatively easy to document in Sri Lankan political discourse, I think Chatterjee takes the distinction at face

value. Instead of a real difference between two different 'things', established early and continuing to some extent into the present, I would speak of an ideological field, or a structure of feeling, stretched between two polar clusters of values—the political and its antithesis, the anti-political, the cultural, the national. On the one hand, the agonistic, the amoral pursuit of individual interest; on the other, the collective, the transcendent, what Chatterjee invokes as the 'narrative of community'.[29]

What my opening examples from the political spectacle of the 1980s point to is the co-production, and interdependence, of self-conscious categories of the 'cultural' and the 'political' in the context of an often illiberal democracy. The contrast between the political and the cultural in these examples is, in some old-fashioned sense of the term, an *ideological* distinction, one which systematically obscures the umbilical link that binds them together. Jayewardene's attempt to mark off the field of 'politics' from the field of 'religion' in the 1940s was itself a response to existing political gestures, in particular the increased public visibility of leftwing monks from one of the country's major monastic colleges. (It bears an uncanny resemblance to Tony Blair's recent enthusiasm for the propagation of what he has defined as 'real Islam' in Britain.) The version of 'Buddhist culture' Jayewardene articulated in his intervention (and throughout his long career) was neither logically, nor temporally, prior to the political: if anything, it was a *product* of the political.

Let me explain and elaborate. Both the valorisation of 'the political' as something at once appalling and fascinating, *and* various kinds of effort to separate off the world of 'community' (or 'nation') from the murk of politics, are widely reported across South Asia (and, again, far beyond). To take one especially vivid example, the anthropologist Arild Ruud in the opening months of his fieldwork in West Bengal in the early 1990s was persistently berated on the topic of 'politics':

> Politics was referred to as being dirty, meaning unprincipled, as something unsavoury that morally upright people would not touch, a sullied game of bargaining and dishonesty...Politics, it was held, represented a continuous social disturbance that caused unease, brought disharmony to society, and ruined its elaborate design and calm stability.[30]

If Ruud has provided one of the richest accounts of the moral problem posed by the political in South Asia, Thomas Hansen, in his general writings on Hindu nationalism and especially in his ethnographic analysis of the performative politics of Shiv Sena in Mumbai, has been the most systematic explorer of the ideological work involved in trying to maintain a distance between the agonistic world of the political and the transcendent promise of the nation. As he puts it, 'To denounce *rajkaraan* (politics), to separate the nation and its cultures from the realm of rational statecraft, and to adopt a moral, antipolitical critique of political leaders is possibly the most legitimate and the most common oppositional stance in contemporary India'.[31]

As Hansen makes clear, the use of a rhetoric of antipolitics as the ground for certain political interventions has a long history in South Asia, most

obviously in the example of Gandhi (a key figure in Chatterjee's earlier analysis of the shortcomings of Indian nationalism).[32] And Hansen is, I think, attempting to deal with the same broad problems as Chatterjee. The crucial distinction is in the relationship each posits between the political, the cultural (or community, in Chatterjee's terms) and the nation. For Chatterjee the nation and the political are aspects of the same project, exemplified in Nehruvian state developmentalism, and the cultural or the community stands in opposition to both. The analysis is, in fact, rather anachronistically rooted in the classic ideological divide between Nehru's technocratic modernism and Gandhi's romanticisation of the village community. Hansen, in contrast, is writing from the point of view of India in the 1990s, when the idea of the nation has been long fused with the rhetoric of community by Hindu nationalists. His actors try to work strategically in a political field defined by the polar opposition between dirty politics and imaginary anti-politics. One aspect of this opposition is its constant productivity—new leaders constantly seek new ways to take the politics out of politics, yet each attempt ends in a different kind of failure as the amoral world of the political inexorably tarnishes the shiny new possibilities. My phrase 'taking the politics out of politics' comes from a satirical response to the 1980s Social Democratic Party in Britain—a further reminder that none of what I describe is unique to Sri Lanka or South Asia.

We can connect this argument to two further theoretical points: one from recent work on nationalism, the other from recent work on liberal democracy. Andreas Wimmer's recent monograph is based on the following linked points (handily bulleted in the original):

- Nationalist and ethnic politics are not merely by-products of modernisation; rather modernity itself is structured according to ethnic and nationalist principles, because
- modern institutions of inclusion (citizenship, democracy, welfare) are systematically tied to ethnic and national forms of exclusion. Correspondingly,
- ethnic conflicts and xenophobia/racism are integral parts of the modern order of nation-states.[33]

What interests me in Wimmer's formulation is the centrality he grants to forms of political modernity. To rephrase it in my own crude terms, democracy, as rule by the people, necessarily requires some formulation of who 'the people' *are*, and this in turn means setting them off against some counter-image of others who are *not* 'the people'. In this sense we are edging uneasily towards Schmitt's famous dictum that the 'specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy'.[34]

In even alluding to Schmitt's argument, I am gambling on the assumption that it is possible to acknowledge the force of Schmitt's critique of liberal assumptions, *without* in any way endorsing Schmitt's own taste for the most oppressive kinds of authoritarian regime. Good arguments have recently

been advanced against the wisdom of a move like this.[35] Elsewhere I have made a more extended argument, linking the village view of dirty politics to recent work in critical democratic theory, such as Chantal Mouffe's reworking of Schmitt's case for the agonistic core of the political.[36] Agonism is a necessary, and often rather fascinating, feature of modern electoral politics, but it is not always a comfortable one. The widespread moral disapprobation of the political, found in my opening example, can serve as the ground for the development of a florid rhetoric of anti-politics in which it is 'culture', 'tradition' or 'the nation' which is valorised. The logic of the friend/foe distinction in mass political rhetoric can take more or less muted marks of difference and turn them into something altogether harder and more implacable. There is nothing peculiarly Sri Lankan, or indeed, peculiarly South Asian in this process, but the ethnographic encounter with everyday politics can, if nothing else, serve to remind us of a number of things. Mass politics are inherently conflictual, and this is not always (or often) a pretty sight. Political conflict operates in the first instance with the simplest of oppositions—us and them, friend and enemy. And the political provides a key context for the production, transmutation and reproduction of social identities.

Wimmer complains about the way in which the 'historic and systematic logic tying democracy to nationalism has . . . become eradicated from our memories'. Thus it has become conventional wisdom to *oppose* nationalism, and nationalist violence, to liberal democracy, despite the umbilical cord that conjoins them in European, and much other, history.[37] In Sri Lanka, I would contend, it is simply impossible to tell the story of nationalism as anything but a story of the illiberal consequences of liberal democracy. The chronology of the conflict is itself a political chronology, with elections heightening antagonism, and parties providing the foot-soldiers for attacks on the other—a landslide electoral victory for a party campaigning for a 'Sinhala-only' language policy in 1956 is quickly followed by the first serious Sinhala – Tamil violence of modern times, the emergence of a Tamil separatist party as the main opposition in 1977 is also followed by an immediate wave of anti-Tamil violence; the same party thugs who had attacked their local political opponents in 1982 were sent out to attack their imagined ethnic opponents in 1983. But I have also tried to suggest that the other side of the conflict, the young militants of the LTTE and JVP, might be seen as local manifestations of what Hansen calls the 'antipolitical', those who define their goals *against* the tawdry disappointments of actually existing politics.

At every stage in the editing of this paper, events have overtaken my analysis. The short period since the election of the Rajapaksa government in 2005 has coincided with a serious brutalisation of the conflict. Political opponents, students, academics, journalists, NGO workers, have all been the victim of unexplained murders and abductions. Once again there is talk in the south of a possible 'military solution' against the LTTE. Huge numbers of the most vulnerable people, many of them already victims of the 2004 tsunami, have been displaced by military action. The prospects for peace look as remote as ever.[38] The story, yet again, is a political one.

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Notes

1 A better sense of context for these opening illustrations can be found in J Spencer, *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. In returning to the events of the early 1980s, I have found Hoole's encyclopaedically detailed account of the long decay of Sri Lanka's political institutions an extremely helpful mnemonic. See R Hoole, *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power—Myths, Decadence and Murder*, Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), 2001.

2 K Jayawardena, *Ethnicity and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Sanjiva, 1985.

3 J Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Political Violence in South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

4 A Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; and M Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Cf C Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996 (first published 1932).

5 KM de Silva, 'The history and politics of the transfer of power', in de Silva (ed), *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, 3: From the Beginning of the 19th Century to 1948*, Peradeniya: University of Ceylon Press Board, 1973, pp 493, 494.

6 T Nairn, 'The modern Janus', in Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, London: Verso, 1981, p 340.

7 Kumari Jayawardena has documented the anti-minority rhetoric of the 1930s, while Jane Russell's monograph on the politics of that period brings out the way in which ethnic fault lines emerged almost as soon as the new constitution was in place. Jayawardena, *Ethnicity and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*; and J Russell, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931–47*, Colombo: Tissa Prakasakayo, 1982.

8 For critical approaches to the arguments from history, see P Jeganathan & Q Ismail (eds), *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995; and J Spencer (ed), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, London: Routledge, 1990.

9 M Moore, *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

10 For an excellent overview of the post-ceasefire situation in Sri Lanka, see J Goodhand & B Klem *et al*, *Aid, Conflict and Peace-Building in Sri Lanka, 2000–2005*, Colombo: Asia Foundation, 2005. For a complementary emphasis on the local implications of conflict and peace, see M Mayer, D Rajasingham-Senanayake & Y Thangarajah (eds), *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*, Delhi: Macmillan, 2003.

11 The referendum drew on a clause in the 1978 Constitution which was intended to make it hard for future governments to interfere with the regular cycle of elections. The same Constitution had also introduced a system of proportional representation which made it almost impossible for any future government to muster on its own the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed for constitutional amendments. Four years further into his reign Jayawardene seems to have found these safeguards a rather less attractive option, and used his lawyerly ingenuity to turn the referendum requirement into a device for evading electoral responsibility.

12 Or, in a mildly qualified version of the same, he often claimed the only thing he couldn't do as president was turn a man into a woman. A Abeysekara, *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity and Difference*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p 94.

13 Amirthalingam and his fellow MPs were effectively removed from parliament by the anti-separatist amendment to the constitution enacted a few months later. He himself was assassinated by the LTTE in Colombo in 1989. As a prerequisite for the current ceasefire between the government and the LTTE, his party, the TULF, signed up in 2001 to a new alliance of Tamil constitutional parties which explicitly acknowledged the LTTE as the sole legitimate representative of the Tamil people.

14 The history of the term *desapalanaya* would bear further investigation. It does not appear in Carter's late 19th-century Sinhala–English Dictionary, or in Mendis Gunasekera's early 20th-century Dictionary, but it was already a frequent, if still rather malleable, point of reference in arguments

about the relationship between 'Buddhism' and 'politics' in the mid-1940s. C Carter, *A Sinhalese – English Dictionary*, Colombo: MD Gunasena, 1965; AM Gunasekera, *Sinhalese – English Dictionary*, Balapitiya: Jwanadarasaya Press, 1915; and Abeysekera, *Colors of the Robe*, pp 67 – 108.

15 I have given a fuller account of this case in J Spencer, 'Fatima and the enchanted toffees: an essay on contingency, narrative and therapy', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3 (4), 1997, pp 693 – 710.

16 Moore has provided one of the most judicious analyses of the JVP rising. Since that was published the party has reinvented itself (for at least the third time) and has played an increasingly central role in the breakdown of the 2002 ceasefire. M Moore, 'Thoroughly modern revolutionaries: the JVP in Sri Lanka', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27 (3), 1993, pp 593 – 642. Cf J Uyangoda, 'Social conflict, radical resistance and projects of state power in southern Sri Lanka: the case of the JVP', in Mayer *et al*, *Building Local Capacities for Peace*, pp 37 – 64.

17 Interview, *The Week* (India), 13 March 1986, reproduced on Eelamweb, at http://www.eelamweb.com/ leader/interview/in_1986/, accessed 30 July 2004.

18 For a useful recent survey of this process, and its links with Indian variants of neoliberalism, see S Corbridge & J Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000. For a contrasting view, see R. Desai, 'Forward march of Hindutva halted?', *New Left Review*, 30, 2004, pp 49 – 67.

19 Abeysekera, *Colors of the Robe*.

20 S Tennekoon, 'Rituals of development: the accelerated Mahavali development program of Sri Lanka', *American Ethnologist*, 15 (2), 1988, pp 294 – 310; J Brow, *Demons and Development: The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village*, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1996; and M Woost, 'Nationalizing the local past in Sri Lanka: histories of nation and development in a Sinhalese village', *American Ethnologist*, 20 (3), 1993, pp 502 – 521.

21 S Kemper, *Buying and Believing: Sri Lankan Advertising and Consumers in a Transnational World*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

22 N Gunasinghe, 'The open economy and its impact on ethnic relations', in D Winslow & M Woost (eds), *Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004, pp 99 – 114.

23 M Moore, 'Economic liberalization versus political pluralism in Sri Lanka?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 24 (2), 1990, pp 341 – 383.

24 R Herring, 'Making Ethnic Conflict: The Civil War in Sri Lanka' In M Esman & R Herring (eds) *Carrots, Sticks, and Ethnic Conflict: Rethinking Development Assistance*, Michigan: Ann Arbor, 2001.

25 D Rajasingham-Senanayake, 'The dangers of devolution: the hidden economies of armed conflict', in R Rotberg (ed), *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999.

26 For an attempt to count the economic cost of the conflict, see S Kelegama, 'Economic costs of conflict in Sri Lanka', in Rotberg, *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka,* pp 71 – 87.

27 This summary is heavily dependent on D Sriskandarajah, 'Towards a political economy of Sri Lanka's "ethnic" conflict', *Domains*, 3, 2005. See also D Sriskandarajah, 'Development, inequality and conflict in multi-ethnic developing countries', DPhil thesis, Oxford, 2005; and S Bastian, *The Economic Agenda and the Peace Process*, Colombo: Asia Foundation, 2005.

28 World Bank, *Sri Lanka Poverty Assessment—Engendering Growth with Equity: Opportunities and Challenges*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007.

29 P Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp 238 – 239. Cf Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London: Zed, 1986.

30 A Ruud, 'Talking dirty about politics: a view from a Bengali village', in C Fuller & V Beni (eds), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, London: Hurst, 2001, p 116. Cf A Ruud, *Poetics of Village Politics: The Making of West Bengal's Rural Communism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.

31 T Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, p 229.

32 Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

33 Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict*, pp 4 – 5.

34 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p 26.

35 Mark Lilla provides a helpful, if highly critical, guide to the recent Schmitt revival. M Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, New York: New York Review of Books, 2001.

36 J Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State*. Cf C Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso, 1993; and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso, 2000.

37 Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict*, p 60.

38 See the gloomy assessment in J Uyangoda, 'Sri Lanka: back to square one?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42 (24), 2007, pp 1800 – 1801.