



FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, ENEMIES, STRANGERS: AGGRESSOR AND VICTIM IN CIVILIAN ETHNIC RIOTS

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QUERIES

A searing question that seems repeatedly to be voiced by victims of violence in various parts of the world in the course of recent ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflicts is how is it that persons known to them, persons who had been their neighbors and sometimes reckoned as friends, with whom they had shared various kinds of exchanges and reciprocities, could suddenly turn upon them and inflict terror and violence—arson, homicide, torture, rape, mutilation, robbery, displacement and flight—upon them?

This is also an urgent and terrifying question to others, including academic investigators and interpreters, who try to sort out the nature of the pre-existing relationships between aggressors and victims in periodic eruptions usually labeled “ethnic riots.” In this essay I shall sort persons according to the categories of friends and neighbors on the one side and strangers and enemies on the other in order to attempt answers to certain issues. Some beginning issues are: to what extent do friends and neighbors become the aggressors (against the grain of our common sense expectations) or, in the opposite direction, provide help, shelter, protection, and succor to their endangered counterparts? To what extent are the aggressors strangers or outsiders who are mobilized or congregate to invade and intrude upon the targeted victims against whom they can direct and unleash violence with greater ease precisely because they are strangers with whom they are not related by previous links of sociality and social exchange? Questions relating to preexisting relations between aggressors and victims can of course be further differentiated, broken down and finessed, but what I find most compelling to ask and address even if adequate answers to them cannot be given are these issues: to what extent in a quantitative or distributional sense are the aggressors neighbors and friends, and to what extent are they strangers and outsiders? In the case of neighbors and friends, how do we explain the differences between those who did and those who did not turn aggressors? Among the latter, what differentiates those who provided assistance and protection from those who stayed neutral and uninvolved? How do

we understand the shift and the dynamics by which friends and neighbors are “suddenly” transformed into enemies and aggressors? How do we account for the fact that aggressors seem to resume their “normal” everyday life after rioting? In what manner do those victims who are not permanently displaced or expelled, but return in time to their previous sites of residence and work, pick up the threads of their lives again?

It would be somewhat of a relief to the investigator struggling to interpret if the aggressors and victims are strangers, outsiders, and stereotyped essentialized enemies. For example, consider the logic of hiring the out-of-town killer and the efficacy of contract job assassination as described by a former member of the Capone gang:

It's one thing...to go up to a guy you don't know. You've been told he'll be wearing a dark-gray hat and coat, and so forth. You walk up to him in a crowd and put the gun up against his belly and you let him have a couple and fade off. That's doing a job. But if the killer knows the other guy, when he puts it up against his belly he suddenly looks up and sees his face, he knows his wife, he's taken his kids to the ball game, he knows that if he pulls that trigger there's going to be a widow, kids without a father, there'll be tears, there'll be a funeral—then it becomes murder. It isn't a job anymore, and he's going to hesitate, and maybe not even do it. That was the reason they used out-of-town killers (Alinsky, 1979).

A difference between this account of an individual committing homicide as a cold-blooded contract job, and killing, even by strangers, in the course of ethnic conflict is that the latter violence is usually done by actors participating in groups or collectivities, and done with the show of and in the grip of animus, anger, rage and cursing, and even jubilation. But the similarity between them is that the marauding ethnic crowds, when killing or terrorizing or raping “strangers,” do seem, in the manner of the mafia killer, to depersonalize the victim/enemy, and to perform “in the manner of an animal killing its prey,” as the saying goes.

But the issues raised become more difficult to penetrate when, in the course of civilian ethnic riots or ongoing ethnic wars conducted by armed soldiers and insurgents, persons previously known to victims as acquaintances, friends, or neighbors have disconcertingly turned aggressors. There are of course

instances in the aforementioned conflicts when neighbors and persons who have had previous interactions, but of a negative or grievance experiencing sort (e.g. fights over unneighborly conduct, business disputes, and invidious social comparisons, etc.), can and actually have used the riots to pay off old private scores. There are cases of slum landlords and developers who have used the occasion of riots to evict tenants, raze slums in order to build anew, institute new projects and so on. But what about other actors against whom such accusatory fingers of grievance or advantage of greed cannot be pointed?

Evidence from Sri Lanka, India and elsewhere shows that in the Colombo riots of 1983 or the anti-Sikh riots of Delhi in 1984 there was a certain amount of planning and direction of the mass violence: local politicians and leaders of criminal gangs mobilizing crowds, distributing liquor, and kerosene or petrol for arson, providing riot crowd leaders with addresses and names of the ethnic victims' businesses and homes, and with government-owned voting lists and lists of registered businesses. In such cases some neighbors and co-residents and acquaintances have provided information for targeting the victim and have served as guides to mobilized and invading riot crowds. However, this sliding scale of implication and participation in aggression meets more intractable situations when none of the above connections between aggressor and victim have applied. Some neighbors and acquaintances, despite previous friendly links, have been swept into the riots and have participated in the aggression, while others, critical of the violence, even appalled by it, engaged in heroic acts of giving shelter to local victims, extricating them from the aggressors, and rendering them aid at great risk to their own persons and property. On what basis can we distinguish aggressors from succorers? What kind of information do we need, and can get, that will answer this question?*

*One grave problem is that in the case of civilian riots, while it is easy to identify victims and possible to interview them, it is most difficult to track or identify riot participants, and even more difficult to engage with them in dialogue to describe and "explain" their intentions and actions which carry the smell of "criminality," even where the larger community to which the aggressor belongs considers the violence as legitimate, warranted, redressive and in defense of collective values and interests.

†This paper also discusses the relevance of writers such as E.P. Thompson, George Rudé, and Natalie Davis for the study of riots by crowds. An exhaustive treatment of this issues is to be found in my book *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (1996), University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

THE DELHI RIOTS OF 1984: NEIGHBORS AND OUTSIDERS

I have already published a sketch of the Hindu-Sikh riots that occurred in Delhi in 1984 (Tambiah, 1990).† Readers may consult it to get a fuller picture of the events triggered by Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination by two of her Sikh guards. That account describes the phases through which the riots went, the identity of participants, "the faces in the crowd," the sites and kinds and scale of violence, the role and conduct of the police and security forces, the evidence regarding prior planning and design, and so on.

The following details from the above-mentioned account are pertinent to the questions raised earlier about the nature of the roles played by friends and neighbors on the one side and strangers and outsiders on the other in the enactment of ethnic violence.

As in other cases of South Asian riots (and this observation is not necessarily limited to South Asia), the Delhi mobs were almost exclusively composed of male attackers, mostly young men and mature adults. The vast majority of those killed in the Delhi riots were males, husbands and sons, mostly youth and young men, many of them students or job-holders, and male adult household heads who were usually the main breadwinners. The evidence shows that some women and children were also killed in the outlying settlements, and that some women were raped by packs of men.

To kill and reduce the male population is to reduce the occupational and working strength and the fighting capacities of the enemy. To rape and degrade their women, to burn their homes and loot their property is to further invade their inner social space, violate family life, and disorient their sense of sociocultural continuity. A further consequence of such a pattern of killing is to create for women both hardship and peril in their positions as relatively young widows, incoming wives and daughters-in-law in the deceased husbands' households, and as mothers of dependent children. In general, ethnic violence is frequently directed towards reducing the enemy's alleged economic well-being and margin of advantage, leveling and reducing the enemy's status while violating and appropriating its property, and reducing the means by which the enemy produces and reproduces its social and cultural distinctiveness.

Who were the participants in the Delhi Riots? It is tempting and comforting to say that the aggressors were strangers and enemies and not friends and neighbors. No such neat binary contrast quite fits the case in point. It can, however, be said that the more mob violence moved toward the active mobilization of people, equipping them with the means of destruction and inciting them to violence, the greater was the likelihood of a guiding role by

conspiring "outsiders," aided by informers and collaborators within.

Among the residents of the settlement colonies, while many neighbors and friends, both Hindu and Muslim, gave shelter, refuge, and protection to the beleaguered Sikhs as far as it was possible and safe to do so, there is ample evidence that colony residents in the shape of Congress (I) activists and block leaders (*pradhan*), and the lower echelons of the Congress (I) Party, were involved. Local Congress offices were frequently the sites for mob assemblies, for burning bodies, and for launching raids. These people, connected to the Congress (I), mobilized their local clients and thugs, provided them with liquor, and directed sellers of kerosene oil, whose sale was restricted to permit holders, to distribute the fuel for arson. They also provided information about the targets—Sikh houses, business establishments, schools, and *gurdwaras*. When such organized mobs went into action, local "low caste" elements, for example, the *bhangis* and *chamars*, appear to have been readily available as supporters of Congress (I).

Another set of participants in the arson and looting were the Gujjar and Jat farmers from the villages bordering settlement colonies such as Trilokpuri, Mangolupuri, and the trans-Jamuna colonies. Much of their land had been taken over as sites for resettlement colonies, and they had their own scores to settle.

Still another set of participants, willing or forced, were bus drivers, such as those who worked for the Delhi Transportation Corporation (based in South Delhi). The evidence is solid that public vehicles were used to transport rioters from place to place, especially on the second day. These mobile gangs, spreaders of rumors, shouters of slogans, instigators of violence among the public, and themselves strike forces, were a critical element in the rapid sparking and spread of violence at key junctions of the city.

A list compiled by the authors of *Who are the Guilty?* gives the occupations of some of the persons identified by informants as those who participated in the rioting, arson, and murder in the settlement colonies (*Who are the Guilty?* 1984). This list gives some specificity to the faces in the crowd, most of them belonging to the ordinary gainfully employed citizens who constituted the majority of the local populace, including shop owners, Congress (I) *pradhan*, Congress (I) workers, prosperous land owners, low wage workers, small businessmen and artisans. The occupational spectrum was wide. All told, the riot participants, the vast majority of them Hindus, were representative of a cross-section of the inhabitants one may expect to find on the periphery of India's large cities.

The interesting question is, if we are to follow the language used by the Report of the Misra Commission, how crowds that had formed spontaneously after being traumatized by a national tra-

gedy came to unleash riots that by the next morning (November 1) took the shape of organized and purposive violence that systematically committed arson, looting, and killing (Report of Justice Ranganath Misra Commission of Inquiry, 1986). (Indeed, the Parliamentary announcement, in setting up the Official Misra Commission, unproblematically referred to the phenomenon as "incidents of organized violence.") During the second day, the riots exploded in various parts of the city, and vented their most destructive fury in the settlement colonies at the periphery. These settlements are described as the poorer sections of Delhi. They contained both Sikh and non-Sikh dwellers who made their living mainly as urban workers, artisans, small businessmen, and lower echelon workers of the Congress (I) Party; they also harbored the so-called "criminal elements." But we should not infer that they were people without property, assets, incomes, and savings, as the scale of destruction and the targets of attack demonstrated.

The destruction that was wrought in a few days was awesome. The Delhi Administration reported to the Misra Commission that a total of 180 *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) and 11 educational institutions run by members of the Sikh community were affected by arson, looting, and burning. That places of worship, storehouses of community goods, and educational institutions and equipment were targeted indicates the purposiveness of the intent to diminish the collective assets of the Sikh community.

At the level of individual Sikh families and households, the loss of property was widespread. The *Report of the Citizens' Commission* states that many Sikh houses, large and small, were burned, and that vehicles of transportation—trucks, taxicabs, scooters—were burned by the hundreds: "Factories and business premises, together with machinery and stock-in-trade, were looted, damaged, or destroyed" (Report of the Citizens' Commission, 1984).

The *Report of the Misra Commission* did in passing refer to the question of the identity of rioters as regards their being "local people" or outsiders:

The Commission accepts the evidence... that most of the mobs were from areas different from where they operated and only a few local people had joined such mobs to facilitate the operations. In some areas, however, local people had also organized riotous activities. In the mobs both types (not being Sikhs) did join (Report of Justice Ranganath Misra Commission of Inquiry, 1986).

While admitting that "In these mobs people with sympathy for the Congress (I) and associated with party activities appear to have also joined in good number," the Report goes out of its way to suggest that such participation is not to be attributed to their Congress (I) party affiliation, but to those belonging to the party "at the lower level" being motivated by an "avenging attitude" caused by the

assassination of their leader or "by the allurements of acquiring property by fishing in troubled waters" (Report of Justice Ranganath Misra Commission of Inquiry, 1986). The latter oblique reference to looting also includes the fact that local landlords and small businessmen see in the riots opportunities to acquire real estate and to displace business rivals belonging to the ethnic enemy. The Report points its finger at "the anti-social elements [who] monitored the activities of the mobs and played the principal role in killing, looting and also arson... The change in the pattern from spontaneous reaction to organized riots was the outcome of the take-over of the situation by anti-social elements." My own documentation shows that the story is much more complex and the attribution of all sinning to "anti-social elements" is an unconvincing alibi.

Nangki Bai of Kalyanpuri, one of the outlying settlements, when asked who the rioters were who had burnt her husband and family had this to say: "All the people who came here during the *danga* [riot] were from Kalyanpuri." She did identify two or three persons, including the infamous Dr. Ashok [a local doctor who was a Congress (I) Party Councillor] and explained her inability to give more names thus: "It all happened so suddenly, how could we know they were going to kill us? ... trying to flee... we were sweating with fear" (Chakravarty and Haksar, 1987).

In this context she did not mention the participation of Gujjar farmers from the neighboring village of Chilla who had been the accomplices of local residents who terrorized and rampaged. But she did, in her horrible tale of woe, mention that members of her family had been hidden for a while in the homes of some *dhobis* (washermen), and there were others from Kalyanpuri (and Trilokpuri) who spoke of seeking refuge in the homes of sympathetic neighbors.

It is worth quoting *in extenso* these passages of appreciation in one of the reports of inquiry:

The only signs of courage and initiative in an otherwise ominous landscape were demonstrated by those Hindu and Muslim neighbors who helped Sikh families in the affected areas. We came across a large number of Sikh inmates in the relief camps who told us repeatedly that but for these neighbors they would have been butchered.

In a makeshift camp opposite the Kalyanpuri police station on November 3, we met a Hindu family, whose house was burnt down by the miscreants because he had given shelter to his Sikh neighbors.

A postal employee living in Bhogal told us how his house was damaged and partly burnt because he helped two Sikhs. With army assistance he moved the Sikhs to his village in Faridabad.

Members of a voluntary organization traced two Sikh families who were given shelter by Hindus in Khichripur on November 3. Defying a belligerent mob that stood at the entrance of the lanes, a local Hindu youth led the members to the house and rescued the families who were being sheltered by a poor Hindu family. The next day, the

volunteers following a request by a mother in a relief camp went to trace her daughter in Trilokpuri who was being looked after by a Hindu family. The latter restored the daughter to the volunteers, and kept with them two other Sikh children whose parents were still untraced. "It is our responsibility to look after them," they said.

Near Azadpur, a Hindu factory owner hid a Sikh inside the factory premises. When the Hindus surrounded the factory demanding that the Sikh be handed over to them, the factory owner persuaded the Sikh to shave his hair and beard, gave him a bicycle which helped him to pass through the crowd and escape.

On the GT-Karnal Road, Hindus saved a Gurudwara and a Sikh doctor's clinic from being burnt down. In the same area, from November 1 to 5, Delhi University teachers and students kept vigil around the entry points to lanes where Sikhs lived.

Hindus from Munrika village and residing in Munrika colony provided protection in their own homes to ten Sikh families.

Thirty Sikh families residing in Mayur Vihar were guarded all through the period by young Hindu neighbors who resisted attempts by outsiders to raid the compound.

According to a rough estimate based on information gathered from different sources, at least 600 Sikhs were saved by Hindus of Trilokpuri. According to an army officer posted in Shahadara, of the Sikh families he rescued from different parts of the area, at least 70% were sheltered by Hindus (Who are the Guilty? 1984, pp. 15-16).

In a lower key, the *Report of the Citizens' Commission* made this fourfold categorization of the general attitudes and reactions of non-Sikh neighbors and friends (Report of the Citizens' Commission, 1984, p. 38):

1. Hindu neighbors actively assisting Sikhs under attack to the extent of giving them shelter at the risk of endangering their own lives and property. Some cases of loss of or damage to property suffered by Hindus doing this came to our notice.
2. Hindu neighbors, while refusing shelter to Sikhs so as to safeguard their own security, did not join in attacking them either.
3. In some cases, especially in congested areas, Hindu neighbors acted against the Sikhs to the extent of pointing out Sikh homes to miscreants.
4. In the poorer areas, Hindu neighbors by and large joined in the attacks on the Sikhs, though here also we were told of some neighbors extending shelter.

Mala Ram, a local community leader (*pradhan*) in Trilokpuri, which was a principal site of the Delhi riots, related this incident that took place in Block 24. It is a fitting concluding commentary on the role and visibility of friends and neighbors:

There was a *lala* [shopkeeper] there called Hansraj and there were... some Sardars [Sikhs] living near his house whom he tried to save. People got angry with him and attacked him for trying to save the Sardars and set his house on fire. We thought to ourselves that if we tried to do anything much our houses might get burnt, so we decided to stay quietly inside our houses (Chakravarty and Haksar, 1987, p. 414).

Later on in this conversation, in reply to the question that various people from among the *harians* (the "outcasts"), the *gujjars* (caste of cattle herders), the *jats* (caste of farmers) living in the vicinity had participated as rioters, Ram replied:

See there are good people as well as *goondas* [thugs; persons of bad reputation] in a village...the *goonda* type of person regardless of which group of persons he may belong to, were identified and the whole community was named [collectively branded] because of them. The *goondas* are well known so that they [are] easily identified, whereas no one can make out the *sharif log* [decent people]. The *sharif* people saved the Sardars but no one can identify them so they don't get mentioned (Chakravarty and Haksar, 1987, p. 416).

This remark is most perceptive: the thugs and their leaders are conspicuous and visible, especially during occasions of violence—political elections, riots, business wars. The friendly neighbors, sympathetic to victims' plights and frightened for their own safety and possessions, are many, less visible, and less well remembered, especially after the turbulence, when recriminations are made and blame assigned.

THE RIOTS OF 1983 IN COLOMBO: BRIDGES ACROSS THE ETHNIC DIVIDE

The riots of 1983 in Sri Lanka launched by Sinhalese against Tamils have already been described and discussed elsewhere (Tambiah, 1985). We are primarily interested here regarding the issue of the relations between aggressors and victims in terms of the categories friends, neighbors, strangers, and enemies. Before I address this theme, a brief sketch of the scale and course of the riots is necessary to provide context and frame.

Let me summarize what we know of the locations at which the arson and violence took place and the kinds of participants—"the faces in the crowd."

The 1983 riots began in Colombo, the capital city, on July 24 and lasted until August 5. They spread to other parts of the country from this point of origin, especially to the towns of Gampaha, Kalutara in the southwest; Kandy, Matale and Nuwara Eliya in the central tea plantation districts; and Trincomalee in the eastern province. The death toll was between 350 (the government figure) and 2000 (Tamil estimate). Large numbers of refugees fled their homes: in Colombo itself the number of refugees ranged from 80,000 to 100,000. Arson and property destruction were extensive. In this account I shall limit myself to happenings in Colombo, because the worst damage was done there.

The proximate triggering event was the ambush of an army truck carrying eighteen (Sinhalese) soldiers in North Sri Lanka, and the traumatic and highly charged cremation of their dismembered bodies at Colombo's chief cemetery at Borella* (Buddhism Betrayed? 1992).

Soon after the mortuary rites, violence broke out in Borella, Thimbirigasyaya, Nugegoda, Wellawatte and Bambalapitiya, in the form of street thuggery, stopping traffic, and physical attacks, and almost a whole day passed before the army and police were called upon to intervene. Subsequently the riots took a form that was decidedly more destructive and homicidal and showed firm evidence of planning and direction, of participation of politicians, government employees (minor staff, laborers, technicians), and of the use of government vehicles and buses.

A conspicuous feature of the 1983 riots was that the mob violence, especially from the second day onward, was organized and for the most part purposeful. The crowds came armed with weapons, such as metal rods and knives, and carrying gasoline that was frequently confiscated from passing motor vehicles. Evidence of the rioters' prior intent and planning was their carrying voter lists and addresses of Tamil owners and occupants of houses, shops, industries, and other property. Moreover, the gangs frequently had access to transportation; they arrived mostly in government-owned trucks and buses or were dropped off at successive locations by the Colombo coastline trains.

The following is a list of the locations and the kinds of property methodically burned, destroyed, and looted in Colombo:

1. Tamil houses in Colombo's middle and lower class residential wards of Wellawatte, Dehiwela, Bambalapitiya, and Kirillapone;
2. Tamil shops—groceries, textile shops, tea boutiques—lining Colombo's principal waterfront thoroughfare, especially in Bambalapitiya, and also in well-established residential and business zones like Borella and Kotahena. In the most dense shopping district, called Pettah, Tamil shops and shops of Indian merchants, selling principally cloth and wholesale food stuffs, were targeted. Moreover, shops located in the city's newer and expanding residential areas such as Thimbirigasyaya and Nugegoda were also affected;
3. textile mills, garment factories, rubber goods factories, coconut oil distilling plants at Ratmalana, Ja-ela, and Peliyagoda, at the edges of the city, owned and managed by Tamil entrepreneurs and large businessmen; and
4. the Indian Overseas Bank, the principal bank of Sri Lankans of Indian origin, and of Indian citizens in Sri Lanka.

*The next seven paragraphs are excerpts taken from my account of the 1983 riots (Chapter 9) in my book *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (1992), University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

The victims in Colombo were Tamil shopkeepers; Tamil homeowners, especially of the middle class and administrative, clerical, and professional categories; large Tamil business capitalists and entrepreneurs; and Indian merchants, both Tamil and non-Tamil.

These facts clearly indicate that the locations affected were central market and business zones, sites of new industrial development stimulated by the new "liberalization policy" in economic activities initiated by the Jayawardene government in 1977, and middle class residential areas. Arson in slums and working class residential zones was practically absent.

We now turn to the all-important question of the participants. At the most general level the rioters on the Sinhalese side were all male and virtually drawn from the urban population of Colombo and its suburbs. Those who engaged in acts of aggression, arson, property destruction and looting as well as those who actually took human lives and inflicted bodily injury, were typically drawn from the urban working class, particularly those in government factories, the laborers, small businessmen, and others employed in the congested bazaars and markets, secondary school students and recent school dropouts, the urban underclass of unemployed and underemployed, and the residents of shanty towns.

It would be a mistake to exclude from the list of participants those whose involvements were less "visible" but important in the initiation, organization, and direction of the riots. Certain Sinhala politicians and their local managers and bosses, entrepreneurs of organized crime and smuggling, small businessmen (the *mudatalis*) and their henchmen, figured prominently as the directors and manipulators of mass violence. Some of them could be described as "riot captains" who were experts at arousing a mob. We cannot ignore the role of some militant Buddhist monks in inciting crowd action, sometimes as active witnesses and orators. Nor can we discount the calculated support rendered by some businessmen who took this opportunity to eliminate their business rivals. Finally, it has been well attested that many members of the police force and security forces stood by during the 1983 riots—unwilling to restrain the rioters, showing sympathy for their actions, and in a few instances actively participating in the work of destruction.

THE NARRATIVES OF MIDDLE CLASS TAMIL VICTIMS

Detailed information concerning the relationships between aggressors and victims is not ample. The

only information available to me is one published essay focusing on the detailed narratives of four victimized families (Kanapathipillai, 1990).* I shall document here some narratives I have myself collected. As in the above-mentioned essay, so in my narrations, the voices are those of certain middle class Tamil victims.

As can be gleaned from the above sketch of the riots, unlike in the case of the Sikh-Hindu riots in Delhi, where the majority of the violent attacks took place in the poorer settlement communities and their nodal bazaars, in Colombo, aside from the businesses and industries targeted, a *conspicuous category of victims were middle class families*. While a certain number of physical injuries to persons, including homicide, and more rarely rape, did take place, the chief targets were homes and possessions, which were looted, disfigured and burned. This accent on family property parallels the destruction of Tamil-owned industries, factories and businesses, and both actions confirm that, along with the physical and spatial displacements of Tamils, the main objective of the Sinhalese aggressors was the reduction, and elimination if possible, of the economic assets of the Tamils according to the perverse levelling down logic of "affirmative action" on behalf of the majority.

As noted above, middle and lower middle class Tamils in certain of Colombo's residential wards, where they were *a prominent segment while co-residing with Sinhalese residents of similar social status*, were a primary target of violence and arson. At the same time, we should keep in mind a fact of urban ecology: namely, that shanty towns and enclaves of "slums" are ubiquitous and intermingle in Colombo as elsewhere in cities of the third world, whether it be Bombay, Calcutta or Bangkok.

This last point is especially relevant in the case of the Colombo riots of 1983, wherein most middle class Tamil residents uniformly spoke of waves of rioters, often arriving in vehicles, as "outsiders" and organized "thugs." Some narrators did also refer to "local thugs" in their vicinity as being complicit with the invaders. It is widely accepted by Colombo's intelligentsia, both Sinhalese and Tamil, that mobs, armed with Tamil addresses and names and with crude weapons, and mobilized and *empowered by certain government politicians and their retinues, and given access to government-owned transport, wreaked the greatest amount of damage*. The narratives of Tamil victims are replete with themes of blackmail and bullying talk by "thugs," mobs breaking into houses, then looting, destroying, and setting afire homes while the victims fled in panic, hid upstairs, or scaled walls running into Sinhalese neighbors' gardens, seeking shelter in their homes. In the midst of this general indictment of attacks by outsider mobilized marauding mobs aided by some local "thugs," there were remember-

*The author reports that she conducted a total of 30 in-depth interviews, and some of her concluding remarks draw from this larger pool.

ances and recognition of heroic acts of protection and support by some local "slum" dwellers.

Middle class Tamil narratives frequently complain of the lack of police action to prevent mob attacks on property and person, as well as police tardiness to accept urgent telephone calls, let alone respond to their pleas.

In contrast, one matter which middle class Tamil narratives underscore is the help rendered them by many of their Sinhalese friends and/or neighbors: from giving them shelter and food until they could find their way to refugee camps, go by ship to Jaffna, or relocate themselves elsewhere. Sinhalese friends helped to transport Tamil friends under curfew conditions. Among Sinhalese benefactors and concerned folk, Sinhalese Christians, especially the Methodists, figure conspicuously, sheltering both fellow Christians and others. Most Sinhalese landlords similarly harbored their Tamil tenants, even if the latter's movable property were relinquished to mobs.* These Sinhalese benefactors took personal risks in doing what they did.

This would therefore be an appropriate place not only to salute and celebrate the charitable and heroic conduct of Sinhalese friends and neighbors to their Tamil counterparts, but also to make an important observation. Most accounts in discussing conflict between two or more opposed ethnic communities tend to do so in a language that globalizes the communities as though they are monolithic, single-minded, homogenized entities, all of whose members are mobilized to think in dichotomous terms as "we" against "them." This temptation to aggregate and collectivize (which has a certain rhetorical and argumentative effect and has applicability to crowds on the rampage) should be corrected, relativized and humanized, by salutary descriptions of *differentiation* within ethnic communities and categories. This differentiation takes three distinct forms: differentiation with respect to involvement with, and belief in, the ethnically phrased political issues; differentiation with respect to continuing solidary social exchanges and friendships with persons in the "other" ethnic collectivity with whom they might *politically disagree*; and differentiation with respect to conceiving of politics in "class" rather than in "ethnic" terms.

A certain theoretical and interpretive distinction—whose status is not without a grounding in our own empirical experience in everyday life—is relevant here. In Sri Lanka (as in other societies of multiple ethnicities), especially among the urban intelligentsia filling certain occupations, such as the professions, administrative services, and more newly

created higher echelon positions in corporations, etc., there occurs a fair amount of transethnic or cross-ethnic socializing in clubs and associations, a shared lifestyle in dress, food, and entertainment up to a point, though this camaraderie is not to any large degree translated into intermarriage and ethnic mixing.

A two-layered distinction to consider is this: while there exists between these multi-ethnic middle classes certain solidary patterns of social interaction and friendship, many of these same agents might, in a situation of competitive politics that is increasingly phrased and mobilized in emotive and visceral ethnic terms, actually *vote* and support political parties with ethno-nationalist agendas. Unifying under an ethnic banner in the context of "democratic" mass politics, especially at election times, for the maximal acquisition of resources, occupational chances and cultural capital for one's own "ethnic community" does not erase or make invalid interpersonal and interethnic social links, friendships, and gift exchanges that operate in the local world of quotidian family, kinship and friendship practices and sentiments. Middle class Tamils find Colombo the most congenial city to live in at the present time when the civil war in the north and east is at its fiercest.

I am here of course speaking of those relatively "milder" or less fraught everyday conditions of both multi-ethnic tensions and multi-ethnic collaborations and understandings out of which at certain boiling points riots like the 1983 riots in Colombo or the 1984 riots in Delhi erupted, followed by an intense agony of a few weeks to a gradual settling down to an unsteady state, which holds the possibility of a new eruption at some unforeseeable time. The relations and understandings between friends and neighbors of different ethnic "identity" and "affiliation" frequently can, and do, change dramatically in the direction of forced exclusiveness, mutual recriminations, and collective stereotyping, when ethnic conflict previously manifest as discontinuous riots deteriorates to a state of relatively *enduring civil war* between armed and paramilitary forces of a government on the one side, which also claims to represent the views and interests of a majority ethnic category, and, on the other side, the armed insurgents and resisters or self-styled "liberation fighters" of a minority ethnic group, which sees itself as victimized and endangered. We therefore need to explore somewhat different interpretive ideas than we have suggested so far to make comprehensible the current politics of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina between Serbs, Croats, and Slav Muslims, in northern and northeastern Sri Lanka between Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese, in the Punjab between Sikhs and Hindus, and in Kashmir between Hindus and Muslims.

*As one case study presented by Kanapathipillai (1990) shows, there were cases of landlords using the occasion of the riots to try and oust tenants with rights, so that they could charge higher rents to more ethnically "acceptable" tenants.

With these preliminary remarks in mind, let us now review narratives of some victims of the 1983 riots in Colombo.

THE VOICES OF SOME MIDDLE CLASS VICTIMS

Mr. Nathan's narrative

Mr. Nathan (a fictitious name that the author has substituted), who was 51 years old in 1983, worked as a Senior Accounts Clerk in a Colombo firm that was an overseas branch of a British company. He was additionally the honorary warden of the hostel of Hindu College, a school patronized by Tamil children, located in a suburb of Colombo called Ratmalana. A number of middle class Tamil families lived in Ratmalana and it was one of the sites of extensive arson. Mr. Nathan, who became the warden in 1975, lived in a house on the school grounds. His family consisted of his wife, a son, 21 years old, and two daughters, 18 and 16. Nathan and his family had lived in Ratmalana since 1966 and they were fairly well known in the area.

The following narrative account was given the author by Mr. Nathan in July 1985 in Colombo. He spoke in English interspersed with a Tamil phrase or sentence to amplify a point. This kind of "bilingual" speech is quite common among middle class Tamils.* It was an open-ended interview at which I asked him to recount what happened to him and his family during the riots of 1983 and afterwards. I would ask an occasional question, but on the whole he spoke freely, and I wrote down what he said.

On the 24th of July I felt some tension in the air. My son went with his friend on a motorcycle to the Ratmalana market, and there some Sinhalese shopkeepers advised him to return home because trouble was anticipated. The bodies of 13 soldiers killed in Jaffna were being landed at Ratmalana Airport.† So my son returned home via the airport road, and there he saw the polythene bags containing the bodies of the soldiers being unloaded. He said there were about two or three thousand people witnessing the scene at the airport.

There were at the Hindu College hostel in my care 30 students, all boys aged between 10 and 19 years, and four resident teachers. When I heard the news from my son I immediately phoned the principal of the college, who also lived in his quarters on the grounds, and I discussed the situation with him.

In fact we had warning of trouble a month earlier, when on July 10, Neptune Pharmacy, owned by Mr. Rajadurai [a Tamil] was burned, and a government apothecary, Mr. Ganesharajah [also a Tamil], was murdered. So I had already dispatched two suitcases and some valuables to the house of a Sinhalese friend for safe-keeping. I also

took the jewelry of my wife and daughters and deposited it in the office safe of the firm where I worked.

The strategy we planned was that in case of trouble all of us at the hostel would take shelter in the upstairs floor of the school.

A day later, on the 25th of July, news reached us at 4:30 a.m. that shops were being attacked and set ablaze in Narempita and Maradana. Two or three parents came and took their children away. The school principal, around 10:00 a.m., also removed his family to Wellawatte [a ward in Colombo where Tamils are concentrated]. I kept constantly telephoning to get more news of happenings.

Around noon I went to a shop to buy cigarettes, sugar and some other articles. The shop was owned by a Malayali man [from Kerala, South India] who was married to a Sinhalese woman. While at the shop I saw three buses with alien route numbers [meaning that they were not buses which regularly ran on local routes] loaded with people pass by. While returning to the hostel, I became conscious of people looking at me. I saw a house on Fourth Lane belonging to Mr. Muthiah [a Tamil] smoking. I hastened to the hostel.

At Tenth Lane I saw a big crowd of about 200 people assembled. Some of them wore sarongs, others wore trousers. At the hostel I quickly gathered the children, the teachers, the cook, my wife and two daughters, and took them to the upstairs floor of the hostel. I then went to the principal's quarters and from there I could see a mob. I telephoned the Mount Lavinia Police Station and asked for the Officer-in-Charge, a Mr. Miskin. His assistant answered me in Sinhalese [the point here being that Mr. Nathan, a Tamil, spoke in English, and the policeman replied in Sinhalese]. Three houses in the neighborhood were on fire and a crowd was collecting and I was making frantic calls to the police.

I saw on First Lane the crowd attacking the house of Mr. Ponraj [a Tamil]. So I tried to run back to the hostel with a teacher friend who was with me, but we were cut off, so we hid among some thorny bushes in a marsh. We could hear and see the crowd attacking the school: doors and windows were smashed, but the crowd did not go upstairs. Then the crowd went to the hostel and broke up the furniture.

Hindu College Square is close to the Ratmalana industrial belt where are located factories such as that owned by Maharaja making polythene pipes (S-Lon Pipes), and Ponds Cosmetics. They too were attacked and there was much smoke in the air, and pieces of paper were flying.

Between 3 and 4 p.m. there was a lull, but I and the teacher did not move from the bushes. Then around 4:30 p.m. a second mob arrived at the school. There is a temple in the school called Nadesan Kovil: the mob broke it up, including its statues. Then this mob climbed the stairs, and I became desperate and began to weep, and my fellow teacher kept me by force. I saw them emerge from the school building and feared the worst.

But later, around 5:30 p.m., we heard noises coming from the hostel... we heard Tamil speech. We saw the students and we rejoined them and my family. My wife told me that a group of some seven or eight Sinhalese boys who lived in the neighborhood found their way upstairs. They found the children hiding in the Science Room. They had no intention of murdering them. They led them down the stairs, past the office which was burning, and took them to their hostel.

Just then another Sinhala crowd came back to the hostel, and said, "You have no place here." A few decent ladies

*A parallel speech with Sinhalese expressions mixed with English is common among middle class Sinhalese.

†This was the incident that was said to have triggered the 1983 riots. See Tambiah, 1985, pp. 15-16. Ratmalana is the location of Colombo's airport which is still in use for internal flights.

suggested that we'd better go to the Army Camp. I quickly got together bundles of clothes, bed sheets, and pillows. The Army Camp in question is the Kotelawela Army Training Academy [named after a former Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawela whose constituency was Ratmalana, where he had a large estate and home]. This camp was only a quarter of a mile from our school. Some of the local Sinhalese boys accompanied us, but we were nevertheless scared. The army sentry at the camp refused to take us in: he said he had no orders to admit us. Then the same boys suggested that we all try and find shelter in a nearby mosque called Talaiyan Bawa Shrine. On the way to the mosque my local Sinhalese friends smiled in recognition—perhaps they were forced smiles.

At the entrance to the mosque I met Mahasena Kotelawela, son of George Kotelawela, Member of Parliament for Avissawella, and nephew of Sir John. Mahasena is 27–28 years old; he is a friend of mine. When he saw me he exclaimed, "Uncle, what has happened to you?" He got the mosque opened, and my wife and two daughters were put in a small room inside (in the *samathi*).

I then offered 100 rupees to the Sinhalese boys who accompanied us to buy food for us (the hostel boys and teachers were with us). But they refused to take money from us, and went away promising to bring us food. They brought raw rice, *dhal* [lentils], and tins of sardines, and told us to cook some food. They also brought us tea and tins of condensed milk.

Soon afterwards Mahasena Kotelawela also returned. He had got tea made for us at his home, and also brought with him Carolis (Sir John's former chauffeur) and his wife to cook food for us. At about 11 p.m. the food was ready, and we had a meal. The local Sinhalese people also helped to serve the food to us. My son, who on the morning of this day had left early for work, managed to rejoin us at the mosque.

Actually some hours before our dinner, while Mahasena was with us, a Sinhala mob did come to chase us from the mosque. But Mahasena scolded them and said that he would use his gun with 12 rounds of ammunition if anyone dared to attack us. He declared, "I am here to look after them. I don't care if you kill me." Some of his friends backed him when he took this stance. Mahasena then took with him my wife and daughters, and they stayed overnight at his house as his guests.

I stayed at the mosque with my son and the students. I must have dozed off. At about 3 a.m. I was awakened by four men armed with sticks who were about to beat me. I screamed in fright, and some Sinhalese friends came running, and told them to leave.

Then early morning at 5 a.m. news reached me that the Ratmalana Airport had been declared a refugee camp. After some tea was given us at the mosque, I went with my party to the camp. The authorities there met us and took us in.

At the camp I saw about 400 other Tamils seeking refuge. The refugees ranged from people of top status, like doctors, engineers, accountants, and managers, to ordinary folk. There were also cases of Tamil men married to Sinhalese women and one or two instances of Sinhalese men with Tamil wives. This was the morning of the 26th of July.

On this day at the camp vans arrived to sell tea and bread and biscuits to the refugees. At about noon, a Government Milk Board van came and distributed milk. The Port Authority distributed parcels of rice and curry for dinner, but I was unable to eat because of stress. The

Member of Parliament for Ratmalana, Mr. Athulathmudali [also a Government Minister], paid us a visit.

On the 27th morning the Red Cross arrived. This was the day when refugees poured in—in CTB buses, police jeeps and trucks. Some of the refugees were injured. At night two of the airport hangers had filled up with people.

By Thursday, the next day, there were about 900 refugees. A Swedish Save the Children Organization, called Redd Barna, took charge of the arrangements at the camp. . . . Another organization that also did relief work was Mr. Ariyaratne's *Sarvodaya*. Both organizations provided facilities and provisions to make tea. CARE supplied biscuits and milk powder for distribution. Also on this day one had ready access to drinking water. From now on food parcels prepared by the Port Authority were distributed twice a day. Mr. Noel Titawela was the chief coordinator for the Government.

I stayed in the Ratmalana camp until August 3, but in the meantime I was able to send my wife and daughters to Jaffna by the first refugee ship which left Colombo on July 29. I was then transferred with my son to another camp at St. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. The Old Boys of the School, with the help of the Minister of Agriculture and Food, Mr. Jayasuriya, organized this camp. For the first time in days I was able to have a bath. There were about 800 refugees at this school. I was well looked after: they gave three meals and served tea.

While at this camp I decided to go back to work with my firm on the 8th of August. Passes to go out were given to those who wanted to resume work. The number of refugees at St. Thomas' was diminishing because many of them were leaving by ship for Jaffna or by train for Trincomalee and Batticaloa [that is, the northern and eastern provinces where most of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees originated].

So when this camp closed two weeks later, I transferred to a camp located at Saraswathie Hall in Bambalapitiya, behind the Hindu temple. Since I was afraid of living outside, I continued staying in this third camp until the 6th of November [for a month and a half]. The camp was safe because it was guarded by army sentries outside and by police inside. Most of the refugees went daily to work like me. When a person's employer gave a letter of employment, the employee could get a pass subject to monthly renewal that permitted him or her to be absent from camp from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Even after I went back to work none of my co-workers at my firm visited me in camp, although many of them asked me about my circumstances. But my Sinhalese friends (none of them from the firm) did visit me at camp. My company, however, gave me a month's salary as compensation. I had lost property worth one-and-a-half lakhs of rupees; but fortunately my car, which I had sent for repairs before the riots, was safe, except for the battery which was stolen.

On the 6th of November I decided to leave camp and live at the house of a Tamil friend in Dehiwela which had escaped damage during the riots. My eldest daughter came from Jaffna to join me. My son who too was working went to live with his friends.

Although I had returned to work, I was still very unhappy about the riots and uncertain and fearful for the future. I therefore resigned my position with the firm, and went back to Jaffna. I was there for three months but I couldn't find work. In desperation I went to Malaysia to find work and residence. I was actually born there [many Jaffna Tamils have for many decades starting with British rule found employment in Malaya]. But in Malaysia and Singapore too, after searching for a job for four months, I

was unsuccessful. I was ineligible in Malaysia because I was not a citizen and I was not competent in the Malay language. For employment in Singapore I did not have proper professional qualifications. So I returned to Sri Lanka on January 19, 1985, and was able to find the job of cashier in a firm different from my former company. While my wife and second daughter are still in Jaffna, my son, eldest daughter and I are living in Colombo as lodgers in separate homes. I don't know when my family can regroup.

Mrs. Sekaram's narrative

My informant for the next two cases is Mrs. Sekaram (a fictitious name). She is a relative of my sister's husband, and on July 1985 I met her at my sister's house in Colombo, and she related to me these episodes that had happened.

Mr. Sekaram, his wife, and three daughters, 17, 13, and 12 years old, lived in an annex which they rented from a Sinhalese landlord who lived in the main house. The landlord, Mr. Navaratne, was a retired school teacher. The house was located in a lane in Dehiwela on the side overlooking the beach. Mr. Sekaram works as an executive in a firm that deals in the export of tea and rubber.

On Sunday July 24, 1983, the Sekaram family went in the morning by bus to Hendela, a town a few miles north of Colombo, to visit relatives. It was there that they heard about the killing of the 13 soldiers in Jaffna, and that trouble was brewing in Colombo.

The Sekarams then returned to Colombo, attended the evening service at Kollupitiya Methodist Church (Colombo's best-known Methodist Church where Christians of all nationalities worship together), and returning home by bus, saw much agitation among the crowds attending the Vel Festival. (Although this festival is staged at the Hindu Temple and is attended by many Tamils, it has in past years attracted many Sinhalese worshippers who ask for favors and break coconuts before the God, a manifestation of Skanda. The riots occurred at the time of the festival which was abruptly stopped by the police. The festival was resumed two years later.)

The next morning, as Mrs. Sekaram was getting her children ready for school, a neighbor brought the news that rioting had already begun at Narempita and that she should not send her children to school. She took her advice. Fearing that curfew may be declared soon, she was preparing to buy provisions, when another neighbor who had been out informed her that some of the shops in Dehiwela junction were ablaze, and that they should all take preventive action.

Mrs. Sekaram told the author:

The first thing I did was to pray. My husband, who had gone to work, rushed back home in his office van, and we debated what to do. He said he had seen the burnings at Dehiwela junction. We decided to stay at home. Then as the van left, we saw the mob coming up the lane from the beach end. They were mostly young men, say 20 to 25

years of age, and there were about 25 to 30 of them. They came armed with sickles for cutting grass and sticks. Our house was the first at the beach end, near the railway line. My husband, children and I quickly left our annex and sought refuge in our landlord's house.

Although our house was owned by a Sinhalese landlord, the first three houses on the opposite side of the lane were owned by Tamils.

The mob went past our house, and broke the windows and wrecked two of the Tamil houses; in the third house there was a young woman alone; she was recently married. The crowd extorted 2000 rupees from her and left the house intact because a Sinhalese family had rented a portion of that house.

Not only us, but many of the Tamils down our lane took refuge in our landlord's house. Altogether there were six adults and eight children. Mr. Navaratne treated all of us very well; he went marketing and had food cooked for us. He let the refugees stay in his house for some two or three weeks, and when the train service resumed, we left for Jaffna. We were able to return to our annex unharmed and all our possessions were intact.

Mrs. Sekeram, who told me of her family's experience in the narrative recorded above, also related to me the experiences of some close relatives of hers who lived in a small so-called "colony" in Alwis Town, Hendela, a town north of Colombo with a predominately Sinhalese population.

In a complex of three adjoining houses lived four Tamil families. Let us call them (1) the Samuels, (2) the Handys, (3) the Gurusamys and (4) the Mahendrans (all fictitious names). Mr. and Mrs. Samuel lived in one house with two sons. Their married daughter and son-in-law, the Handys and their two daughters, lived in a large upstairs house, with Mrs. Gurusamy and her two sons; her husband was away working in the Middle East. The Mahendrans had two children, a boy and a girl, and lived in the third house.

A person living in the neighborhood brought the news around 12:30 p.m. that he had seen a mob of about 300 people collected at the top of their street, and he had to detour in order to reach his home.

Mr. Samuel, his son, and son-in-law who had gone to work on July 25 had been quickly sent back home by their employers. On hearing that a crowd was coming their way, all four families abandoned their homes—they did not pause to collect any articles—and ran for shelter to the house of the nephew of Mrs. Samuel, who lived at some distance from the main road. Let us call the nephew Navaratnam. In fact, the crowd never got to this safe house.

After the mob had come and done their work and gone away, the families returned to see that the mob had broken window panes, windows, doors and set fire to their houses, after looting the jewelry. Three motor cars and one motor bike were also burned. In the debris of one of the houses they found some molten gold (from the jewelry that had been among the burning goods). The Samuels' daughter and son-in-law, who had lived upstairs,

were able to salvage some clothes, but the others were left with nothing.

The immediate Sinhalese neighbors told the victims that they had tried to put out the fire, but had been warned and threatened by the mob that if they intervened they would be given the same treatment. Some members of the mob were recognized as being of the area.

After a few days of staying at the nephew's house, the Samuels went to a refugee camp and from there took a ship to Jaffna. (In July 1985 they were still there.) The Mahendrants also ended up in Jaffna in their ancestral property at Manipay. The Handys have been fortunate: they had insured their house, and had by July 1985 rebuilt it and reoccupied it, with Mr. Handy at his previous job. The Gurusamys, who, like the Samuels, had not insured their house, are rebuilding it with some government compensation. They hope to resume their former life in Wattala.

Other narratives concerning victims of the 1983 Colombo riots

The next three narratives concern the experiences of three families who were victims of the riots. Their experiences were related by a close female relative of mine, who knew the families, had visited them, and heard the stories from the victims themselves.

The Ratnam family lived in their own house in Wellawatte (This is a ward in Colombo where a large concentration of middle class Tamil families lived. Wellawatte was the focus of much burning and looting of houses in 1983.) Mr. Ratnam was an accountant; he and his wife had a daughter and two young nephews living with them (their son was away in England engaged in studies).

The first intimation of attack was when a crowd of about 200 people armed with knives and mamoties and carrying cans of petrol attacked the house of their neighbor, situated behind their own house, and set it ablaze. These neighbors, also Tamils, owned Brighton Hotel, and the lady of the house got into her car and managed to flee to the hotel.

The Ratnams—husband, wife, daughter and two nephews—left their own house and hid behind a water tank in the garden, and put the two boys inside it. The mob set fire to their house, and, seeing the fire spread, the family ran down the lane. The shanty dwellers living in the vicinity on municipality land laughed and jeered at them while they ran. Then a slum boy tapped the shoulder of Mr. Ratnam and asked them to follow him. This boy who had been a playmate of their son, now in England, proved to be their savior. He took them to his wooden hut, pushed them inside and padlocked it. The family remained shut up until 10 p.m. that night. Mrs. Ratnam fainted three times.

Late that night their rescuer came and let them out so that they could ease themselves and wash

up. He then locked them up again. He then brought them cooked rice, dhal and dry fish curry and coffee.

Their house was entirely burned out—in fact all the houses on Ramakrishna Terrace where they lived—were similarly destroyed. They were taken to refugee camp, and then they left for Jaffna (in the north, their birthplace) by ship. Some months later they returned to Colombo. There was one small room intact in their former house. They were living in this room and attempting to rebuild the house. The two little boys slept on mats on the ground.

Mr. X worked as an accredited accountant at the Colombo branch outlet of a famous Indian manufacturer and distributor of footwear. He lived in Mount Lavinia, a ward of Colombo, on the city's main thoroughfare called Galle Road. He, his wife, two sons, aged 14 and 12, and a daughter, nine, lived in the main house, while Mrs. X's retired parents, the father a heart patient and the mother with disabled limbs, lived in an attached apartment.

On July 25, the first day of the full-scale riots (which had begun the previous night), a truck full of thugs arrived at the house. The three children took flight and ran down the road to the home of a Sinhalese friend. Mr. X stood in the rear of the house, and Mrs. X, solicitous for her mother, put her in the bathroom and stood guard inside.

The thugs broke up everything, piled up the furniture and burned it. Debris was falling on the disabled mother and Mrs. X tried to shield her head with towels. Mr. X tried to stop them from their rampage of destruction, and they physically attacked him. They then found Mrs. X and stripped her of her clothes. She was in the last stages of menstruation, and so the thugs slapped her and she passed out. The family lost all their possessions and the house, and they all subsequently migrated to Australia. (The family of Mrs. X's brother, a surgeon employed in Kandy, also emigrated with them.) Mrs. X's father died soon afterwards.

Mr. Nayagam was the Controller of Exchange, a superior administrative position in the Sri Lanka government. He and his wife had two daughters, aged 18 and 21, and a son, aged 14. His house was located in Narempita (not far from Kanatte cemetery where the riots started on the night of July 24 after the exposure of the dismembered bodies of soldiers flown from Jaffna). The Nayagams owned their house, and their immediate neighbors were Mrs. Nayagam's own parents and unmarried sister who also owned their house. Let us call this sister Chandra.

In the morning on July 25, the Nayagams suddenly heard the noise of shattering glass. Mr. Nayagam had left for work. The Nayagam children and their mother fled the house and were given shelter by a family living in a shanty. The crowd smashed up their house and effects but did not burn it. Mrs. Nayagam's mother, an old lady, hid

on the roof of the garage. Chandra then tried a ruse on the attackers by claiming to be a Muslim and not a Tamil. The crowd leaders then replied: "Alright, we will not do anything to your house now, but we will check your identity and if you are a Tamil, we'll burn your entire house." The crowd returned later and did precisely that.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This essay has merely dealt with certain delimited issues bearing on the complex and many-stranded phenomenon of ethnic conflict and collective violence. I have elsewhere summarized the bundles of issues that need to be investigated under three broad rubrics, namely the anthropology of collective violence (especially civilian riots and chronic civil war), the anthropology of displaced persons (primarily refugees in camps), and the anthropology of suffering (the experiences and coping patterns of victims and survivors) (see Tambiah, 1990, pp. 741–742).

One of the striking features that emerges from this essay on assailants and victims in Delhi (1984) and Colombo (1983) is the heterogeneity in the experiences of persons labeled as "victims" and "aggressors." The micro-details and local contours of the solidary and negative exchanges between persons assigned to, or identified as belonging to, opposed ethnic groups loosen up and make more nuanced the usual characterization of ethnic conflict in terms of totalized telescopic macro-divides. These portraits inevitably picture the conflict as a collision between two bounded collectivities, pursuing goals that simultaneously benefit or protect community interests, and viewing each other in terms of generalized stereotypic characterological attributes. In certain contexts, for example at times of national political elections, when politicians, the media, and propagandists combine to sharpen group issues, sentiments and identities, totalizing processes of this kind are ascendant. When riots break out, mobs and crowds do move as if they are homogenized mass entities. But it is clear that while such formations in specified contexts do temporarily crystallize, the webs of interpersonal relations between persons of different ethnic identity breach the

boundaries of ideologically imputed collectivities. It is these cross-cutting links and sympathies that guarantee the possibility of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic civil societies and polities living in peace and resolving their differences without recourse to violence.

It is clear that, in order to strengthen my submissions, many more narratives regarding interpersonal exchanges and experiences of persons caught up in the turbulences of ethnic conflict—victims and assailants, helpers and onlookers, neighbors and friends, strangers and ethnic opponents, persons of mixed descent and partners of interethnic marriages, persons of different economic well-being, occupations, education, persons of different age groups and generations, policemen and soldiers, and so on, have to be collected and interpreted.

It is also necessary to monitor and study the scale and efficacy of governmental programs for paying compensation to victims and for effecting their speedy rehabilitation.

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