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'Deeper Hegemony': The Politics of Sinhala Nationalist
Authenticity and the Failures of Power-Sharing in Sri Lanka
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Abstract

Through a case study of Sinhala nationalism and its impact on ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, this article explores the idea that the study of ethno-national conflict management as well as the wider field of nationalism studies tend to render nationalism as epiphenomenal and explicable through other underlying political and socio-economic dynamics. The article contends that nationalism studies needs to take on board lessons learnt in the social sciences from ontological, post-Gramscian and Foucaultian studies of power that do not disqualify nationalism as a channel for political mobilisation. In the case of the literature on Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka, the predominant tendency has been to explain these dynamics as a consequence of elite instrumentality. In contrast, what is contended here is that it is the 'deep hegemony' of Sinhala nationalism, demonstrated in the mobilisation of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, that has impacted profoundly on the recurrence of ethnic conflict and the consistent failure of attempts to broker peace.

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Introduction

Since independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has witnessed the escalation of violent conflict between the state and Tamil nationalist movements. What has also occurred from independence to the present is the pursuit, but consistent failure of, attempts at managing these ethnic tensions through forms of consociational ethnic accommodation, power-sharing and devolution frameworks (including discussions of potential federal models) (Edrisinha and Welikala, 2008; Edrisinha et al., 2008; Roberts, 1994:249-268). At their conceptual core, these attempts at power-sharing and ethnic accommodation share the idea that the nationalist conflict that has plagued postcolonial Sri Lanka can be tamed through the provision of limited autonomy to Sri Lanka's minority communities. As we will see through the discussion below, this conceptual core was premised on taken-for-granted background assumptions about nationalism and its modalities in Sri Lanka. What was assumed in this 'common sense' background is that firstly, nationalism is an epiphenomenal and surface manifestation of dynamics which lie below, but ultimately determine, its reproduction; and, secondly and relatedly, that nationalism is a feature of the political landscape in Sri Lanka which is ultimately mobilised and therefore reproduced by a narrow strata of political elites.

What will be contended here is that such perspectives fail to understand the hegemonic potency of Sinhala nationalism. Furthermore, without an appreciation of this hegemonic depth, we cannot understand the consistent failure of past attempts at state reform, accommodation and peace-building and the recent military solution that was imposed upon the island through an illiberal counter-insurgency strategy (Goodhand, 2010; Lewis,

2010), leading to massive loss of civilian life and the ongoing absence of a political settlement. However, before turning to the issue of how these omissions have played out in mainstream scholarly understandings of nationalism in Sri Lanka, we first need to address the way in which an understanding of the hegemony of nationalist effect is neglected not just in understandings of nationalism and conflict in Sri Lanka, but in a sense reside epistemologically in much of the broader literature on nationalism.

Theorising nationalism

Although a comprehensive survey of the ethnic and nationalism studies literature is beyond the scope of this article, what will be contended here, through a focus on some seminal and paradigm-shifting perspectives on nationalism, is that the majority of the literature on the subject remains unable to transcend a series of dichotomies which reside in dualistic epistemologies, including overlapping universal-particular, subject-object, matter-idea, structure-agency and elite-mass divisions (Goswami, 2002, 2004; Kapferer, 1999 [1988]; Rampton, 2010). Many of these conceptual dichotomies feed into a dominant tendency to relegate ethnic and nationalist frameworks of socio-political community and identity to purely epiphenomenal levels which are then explained by objective and or structural elements and factors which underlie their surface manifestation. The overall impact of this tendency is to ignore the extent to which nationalism and ethnicity are themselves one amongst many channels of political and socio-cultural mobilisation that agents pursue and reproduce through practices and in so doing are both hegemonised by, and simultaneously hegemonise, the social field. In this way

moreover, ethnic and nationalist affect and practices are abstracted and decontextualised from the world of power as their significance is always located elsewhere. Put in plain terms, the grounds of knowledge for understanding nationalism in mainstream approaches are located in underlying dynamics rather than the surface-level manifestation of nationalist discourse itself.

Turning first to some of the seminal accounts of nationalism, this approach to the analysis of identity and community is clearly apparent in Ernest Gellner's classic *Nations and Nationalism*. For Gellner, nationalism is the subjective manifestation of the objective conditions of industrial modernity (Gellner, 1983:40). It is the processes of industrial modernisation that act as the homogenising dynamics through which segmented societies gradually assume a cohesive form. Moreover, the subjective dimensions of nationalist mobilisation, despite the fact that Gellner concedes that it is 'nationalism that engenders nations and not the other way round' (1983:55), are ultimately a form of 'false consciousness' which leads to the triumph of elite-led high scriptural forms over folk traditions (1983:124-9). In this way, Gellner remains trapped in an analysis wherein it is conceded that the subjective force of nationalism produces generative effects whilst the thinking of nationalism itself is rejected as false because the dynamics of nationalism lie elsewhere, namely in the objective processes of industrial modernity. There is evidently a clear disjuncture here between the subjective and objective dynamics and between the world of thought and ideas on the one hand and that of material reality on the other.

Consequently, we are left with little understanding of how the discursive practices of nationalism are engaged in a constructive relationship with the world that they seek to shape, transform and 'engender'. Indeed, these discourses remain an elite-led cipher floating above the real world without explaining how agents play an active role in constituting the landscapes and political and socio-cultural communities we inhabit. Finally, Gellner's tendency for objectivism also interweaves with a profoundly universalising thrust in which Europe's foray into industrial modernity becomes the universal truth of the development of the rest of the world, an evidently Eurocentric perspective which also fails to account for the differences in nationalisms from context-to-context and the fact that nationalism rather than necessarily being a consequence of industrial modernity may also be a vehicle for its attainment.

Partly, as an attempt to link this unbridged fact-value, subject-object and universal-particular divide, both Benedict Anderson and Tom Nairn from New Left perspectives, attempted to provide constructivist accounts of nationalism that on the surface at least sought to challenge the failures in both liberal and Marxist thinking on the question of nationalism. Indeed, both of their works represent a leap forward beyond the matter/idea dualism that had plagued both liberal and Marxist thinking which either mechanically reduced the phenomenon to a socially internal 'growth stage' in the formation of bourgeois classes, national market societies and industrialisation or for idealists became an expression of a local-national *volksgeist* (Nairn, 1981:331-334).

For Nairn, nationalism cannot be reduced to a singular 'archetype' which displays the hidden truth of nationalism in any final sense. It is instead a 'protean' phenomenon and an 'autonomous mode of socio-political organization' which cannot therefore be explained through recourse to mechanistic underlying social and political dynamics (1981:347). Nevertheless, despite the claimed challenge to epiphenomenal reductionism, Nairn's account of nationalism is ultimately reduced to the universal and objective political economy of 'world development'. It is to counter their unequal place in this uneven order that elites, from the peripheral states of the world system ('the marchlands and the countryside') (Nairn, 1981:334), articulating in a nationalist register that is accessible to the lower orders, seek to 'propel themselves forward to certain kinds of goals...' And they do this, through 'a certain sort of regression – by looking inwards, drawing more deeply upon their indigenous resources, resurrecting past heroes and folk myths...' (Nairn, 1981:348). It is this 'Janus-faced' nationalism, that for Nairn, becomes a vehicle for subaltern nations to navigate the unevenness in global developmental inequalities.

In that sense, an internalist reductionism centering on internal socio-economic forces of production is merely switched for the external progression of the world system of development, thereby reproducing the villainy of linear stages that Nairn first identified as problematic. Moreover, whilst the populist power of nationalism is certainly identified, Nairn's theorisation still remains elite-centred in as far as it is elites that engage in an instrumental populism out of necessity in both their relation to the subaltern classes and in reaction to the uneven development of the world system (Nairn, 1981:339-341).

Clearly, therefore, the demons of dualism still reside in the detail of Nairn's argument and the moment wherein an understanding of nationalism as hegemony could be grasped, is passed over.

In the same way that Nairn, on the surface at least, attempted to challenge the epiphenomenalism of nationalism studies, Anderson also sought to directly challenge Gellner's tendency to reduce the phenomenon to the false consciousness of industrial modernity (1991:5-7). For Anderson, rather what should be stressed is nationalism as a 'cultural artefact' and as a moment of 'imagining' and 'creation' (1991:4-6). For Anderson, the processes and discourses of nationalist narration are not merely dismissed as a false subjective expression of objective dynamics, but are given significance as the 'style' of anonymous mass society which, whilst imagined as 'limited' and 'sovereign', also generates a space in which human beings connect across the anonymity of the modern in a shared 'community' (1991:6-7). Yet, in the same way that Nairn's perspective ultimately falls back on universal and objective dynamics underlying nationalist discourse, Anderson has also been accused (with some justification) of an ongoing 'sociological reductionism' (Chatterjee, 1986:21-22), by explaining nationalism through universal sociological dynamics, operative across political and socio-cultural contexts.

These dynamics are located firstly in the 'print capitalism' that facilitates a shared linking through vernacular communication and hence reproduction of 'community' across modern anonymity (Anderson, 1991). Secondly, Anderson also stresses top-down dynamics emergent from colonial and postcolonial governmental logics in which society is mapped, enumerated and administered, producing a transformation of the significance of borders,

identity categories and social structures and narratives which increasingly take on a nationalist hue (1991:163-185). Through these generalisable, cross-contextual dynamics, nationalism reproduces the replacement of a dominant spiritual cosmological time by a secular, co-temporal and universalising 'homogeneous empty time' (Anderson, 1991:24; Benjamin, 1973:243). As a result, Anderson, despite his transcending of the false consciousness and epiphenomenal models, returns to universalising and objective dynamics that operate as the underlying drivers of nationalist discourse across contexts. It is these drivers that remain the universal features in his otherwise plural model of nationalism, consisting of 'Creole' anti-colonial nationalism in America, the 'linguistic nationalism' of nineteenth century Europe and the 'official nationalism' of twentieth century British imperialism and of Russia (Anderson, 1991). The modular framework merely creates a series of templates for the export and derivative mimicry of nationalism by colonised societies and late developers seeking the emancipation and protection that nationalism provides. They are in that respect mere variations on the same universalising theme.

Anderson attempted to specifically respond to the charge of universalism and to dispose of such bogeys as 'derivative discourses' and 'imitation' in his later work, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998:29). However, rather than understanding the way in which the particular and universal are fused in nationalist discourse, which is contended here, he opts instead to split the world of collective identity into dichotomous spheres. Firstly, a universalising, open-to-the-world 'unbound seriality' born of print capitalism linking together a family of nations across global space encompassing anarchists, nationalists and bureaucrats and such bodies as the UN. Secondly,

the governmental world of 'bound seriality' operative through elections and censuses and which reinforces ethnic identity (Anderson, 1998: 29-45). In this dichotomy, Anderson specifically attempts to demarcate ethnicity (a 'bound seriality') from nationalism (an 'unbound seriality') as clearly as possible in so far as the former is wholly particularistic and finite and the latter universal and open according to the schema. As will be explored below, the problem is that this dichotomy becomes unworkable in a number of areas. This is manifest in the evident seepage firstly, between nationalism and ethnicity, including nationalism's own projection of frontiers of inclusion and exclusion. Secondly, in the fact that the logic of governmentality is as evident in nationalism as it is in ethnicity and in ethno-nationalism, which rather than being a rarity, is commonplace at differing degrees of intensity in a myriad of nationalist forms. As will be argued below, it is precisely dualist thinking that makes this model untenable and which can only be overcome through a reappraisal of the relation between the aforementioned dichotomies.

Consequently, scholars writing from the global south, including Goswami and Chatterjee have emphasised Anderson's failure to confront the tension between the objective/subjective and universal/particular. This omission tends to reduce nationalism in the colonial and developing world to a moment of derivation or 'path dependency', in which the agency of colonial and postcolonial societies is elided (Chatterjee, 1993:238; Goswami, 2002:778, 2004). For the same reason, such approaches fail to account for the irreducible difference to nationalist forms across diverse contexts and ultimately relegate the significance of nationalist discourse in the generation of political and developmental order to at best a marginal level (Kapferer, 1999

[1988]:vii-ix; 3-4). Although I have only focused here on some of the seminal accounts of nationalism, it is clear that a tendency to define a 'point of origin' or determining driver in explanations of nationalism has not dissipated (Calhoun, 2007:47). In that sense, we can see a continuing proclivity to seek core generalisable historical-sociological-political determinants or drivers to the phenomenon. So, for example, some approaches have located the key to nationalism in state capture or state formation (Tilly, 1990; Breuilly, 1993), in an identifiable and finite typology of routes to modernity (Greenfeld, 1992). Or, where, scholarship has attempted to be as wide as possible in the identification of psychological, territorial, cultural, political and territorial varying dynamics (e.g. Guiberneau, 2007), it has still failed to explore the deeply interwoven relationship between the universal and the particular and between nationalism and modern power, which is the crux of the argument pursued here. Where a confrontation with this issue has been ventured, the tendency has again, like Anderson, been to split the universal and particular asunder.²

Epitomising this position is the groundbreaking work of Partha Chatterjee who sought to restore agency to anti-colonial nationalism by challenging the universalising account of nationalism that renders nationalism a mere derivative pursued by colonial and postcolonial actors (1986, 1994). For Chatterjee, Indian anti-colonial nationalism is characterised by a split between two discursive spheres. Firstly, a material 'outer' sphere, which encompasses the universalising dynamics of capital and western disciplinary power/knowledge. Secondly, a sovereign, spiritual 'inner' sphere of anti-colonial nationalism, which is potentially autonomous of the former sphere and is capable of mounting a counter-discourse to conceptions of political

community tied to the disciplinary mechanisms of state and capital (Chatterjee, 1986, 1994). This counter-discourse lends itself to more fluid forms of identification in which the tendency for the marginalisation of 'minorities' as a result of majoritarian nationalism is challenged and overcome through a broader conception of community unfettered by state logic (Chatterjee, 1994). However, this potential for reconfiguring and challenging the meaning of political community in India beyond the 'single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation' is, for Chatterjee, suppressed in the struggles for hegemony which result in the triumph of capital, western reason, statecraft and discipline in the Indian nationalist movement (1994:234-239).

Once again in Chatterjee we see a sharp division between the universal and the particular and the ultimate triumph of the former over the latter in India's recent past. What is neglected is the extent to which nationalism, as a fusion of the particular and universal, always already produces difference. Furthermore, it is this fusion between a universalising power implemented by colonialism and the way that the engagement with colonised society always produces difference which precludes the space for an 'inner', autonomous conception of community in the colonial encounter. As Gayan Prakash has noted in relation to India, conceptions of community in the colonial world during the modern period were always already infected by the governmental, biopolitical and disciplinary mechanisms of modern power (2002:28-34).

Aside from some recent interventions that expressly explore the interweaving of the subjective and objective, the universal and particular and which have informed the approach undertaken here (e.g. Goswami, 2002, 2004), there is little understanding of how and why nationalism has become

socially pervasive and hegemonic to the extent that this social logic of nationalism must inevitably encompass, but also take us beyond, analyses which remain restricted to the state form and statecraft. Instead, we need an understanding of nationalism as a discursive formation that impacts profoundly on the representation of the social and the political and, in the process, on the reproduction of subjects and the 'life process' itself. It is in only through such an understanding that we can grasp the inextricable interweaving of the universal and particular, of subjective and objective in the tendrils and apparatuses of modern power and both the political gravity and the affective and emotional charge of a socially diffuse nationalism which has not abated in recent times. It is through such a focus that we will understand the specific intensity of Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka which takes forms that are not replicated in the same way or to the same degree in other contexts. The point here is not to lapse into a relativism that claims that parallel dynamics are absent or that nationalism is to be understood only through internal dynamics. It is precisely to delineate the way in which nationalism is thoroughly modern and that it is a consequence of interweaving and not dichotomous dynamics, which are produced and experienced across multiple contexts, that is the departure here. However, before turning to the manner in which such dynamics unfold in Sri Lanka, the theoretical understanding of nationalism deployed here must first be ventured in more detail.

What is contended here, then, is that nationalism must be understood as the profound imbrication of universal and particular dynamics. This interlocking of dynamics operates at the interface between dominant modes of power and knowledge and local structures and frameworks of identity. It is

through this interface that nationalism acts as an exemplary vehicle for the furthering of channels of modern power that target the 'life process' itself (Arendt, 1958[1998]:45). Using Foucaultian and Laclauan conceptions of governmental/biopolitical, disciplinary and hegemonic power as frameworks for understanding this shift, we can locate the 'modern' as the point at which the targeting and transformation of the conduct of subjects is intensified in its regularity. The source of such power is not entirely novel and has a longer genealogy in both household and religious pastoral' power. A power over human conduct once confined to a restricted economic sphere and to religious authority (including the latter's moral and disciplinary authority over a collective), that becomes more diffuse and colonises the practices of the state and a wide array of social movements and organisational dynamics (Foucault, 1994a, 1994b).

The intensification of disciplinary and governmental power marks the point at which the political structure is no longer predicated on a sovereignty, which seeks as its chief targets territory, its acquisition and maintenance and the use of people in that territory as a resource for the extraction of taxation to fund, for instance, war. Instead, power is mobilised and disseminated at diverse sites through military, educational, health, welfare and development apparatuses, through the taxonomic ordering of bureaucratic power, through social and religious practices and mobilisation; processes and practices which both include but also exceed the state form. Foucault's point is that although state practices are colonised by governmental and disciplinary logic (Foucault, 1994b:220), power operates heterogeneously and centrifugally in the social field but has as its target and aim the bearers of 'life', populations, bodies and

the regulation, control and transformation of the conduct and identities of subjects. Indeed, for Foucault, modern power must be theorised beyond sovereignty to the extent that an analysis of the social field must seek to 'cut off the king's head' in recognition of the diffuse, fissiparous and heterogeneous character of power (Foucault, 1980:121).

Having said this however, the clarion call to decapitate our frameworks of power, may be overhasty, in so far as power is subject to modes of centripetal articulation, reterritorialisation and concatenation which reproduce a centre, a *hegemon*, with the social imaginary of nationalism and the nation providing a classic example of this logic. There is little doubt that Foucault's understanding of governmentality and biopolitics demonstrated an understanding of the profound relevance of this mode of power to taxonomic and identity frameworks relating to race, nation and ethnicity and the impact of this nexus on the field of conflict and war (Foucault, 2003 [1976]; Foucault, 1990 [1978]:137; Duffield, 2006). Moreover, the works of Arendt, and Donzelot, have all pointed to the way in which modern power and knowledge practices converge to define, map and reproduce 'the social' (e.g. Arendt, 1958[1998]; Donzelot, 1997[1979]). Yet what is missing here is how the 'social' comes to be represented in ways that fix diffuse discourses to a centre such as 'nation' or 'people', a process through which taxonomic orders pertaining to populations, identity and community are hierarchised, with nationalism frequently assuming its mantle at the apex of such an order.

The post-Gramscian works of Laclau and Mouffe, then, do provide a model, missing in Foucault, for a more rigorous understanding of the way in which the 'social' is reproduced in this way and impacts profoundly on the

generative force of nationalist vehicles (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau 2005). For Laclau and Mouffe, the 'social' is, at one level, a site of irreducibly different heterogeneous and multiple demands and differences and any attempt to fix its meaning in any final sense is therefore impossible (1985:111-122). However, this logical impossibility does not preclude a concatenation of forces which attempt to reproduce dominant representations through the logic of modern political mobilisation. For Laclau and Mouffe, populist political projects are produced through the positing of a constantly shifting Schmittian frontier established between friend and enemy (e.g. between the colonised and the coloniser), with a political demand, ideology or discourse acting as the equivalential axis for the dynamics of socio-political mobilisation (e.g. nationalist emancipation). Whilst a particular demand or subject position may act as the focal point and discursive surface of this mobilisation, this demand in turn begins to react back over the multiple forces involved to the extent that it begins to act as their ground and eventually loses its particularity, thence becoming a floating or empty signifier detached from its beginnings in the original demand or subject position (Laclau 2005:93).

It is precisely through the articulation of these forces that hegemony and the attempted fixing of the social field is achieved. As Laclau has stated it is the case that 'once a particular social force becomes hegemonic, it remains so for a whole period' (2005:115). Clearly then, despite the utility of this model for an understanding of populist thought and practices, its value for deepening our understanding of nationalism (as a populist variant) cannot be denied. What is also pertinent to nationalism are the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the positing of frontiers which separate friend from enemy, insider from outsider

and citizen from helot. In turn, this frontier of inclusion and exclusion informs a whole range of practices from policing to development and welfare which impact on biopolitical nationalist divisions of access to resources significant to the life process. These processes produce a profound fusion of the aforementioned universal dynamics of modern power with the particularity provided by existing social structures, relations, identities and forms of community which become radically transmogrified in the process of fusion. These dynamics become clearer when investigating the case study employed here, which provides an exploration of how this fusion operates on the ground and the way in which a number of recent approaches to understanding either nationalism or the dynamics of power in Sri Lanka have neglected this hegemonic and socially diffuse character of nationalism.

Understanding Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka

What I intend to demonstrate here is the extent to which the traditional accounts of Sinhala nationalism and its genealogy in Sri Lanka are flawed and reproduce the dualistic thinking that was criticised in the general literature on nationalism. With some nuanced differences, the traditional mainstream account of the trajectory of Sinhala nationalism explain it as a result of continuous elite-led instrumentalisation of nationalist dynamics (whilst the consequences of this are the centralised and increasingly Sinhalsed postcolonial character of the state and the growth of a reactive Tamil nationalism marginalised from the state). The focus on elites and the idea of Sinhala nationalism as a manifestation of a 'crisis of state' are mutually reinforcing. What is contended here is not that this picture is 'wrong'. Indeed, the role of elites and the state are not denied in the reproduction of Sinhala

nationalism in Sri Lanka's postcolonial history. However, they are only a partial and frequently static account and one which renders nationalism as epiphenomenal to underlying elite and state actors who use nationalism as an instrument. What needs to be recognised and which gets left out of this picture is the gradual but incremental hegemonisation of the social field by Sinhala nationalist dynamics so that it is no longer solely elites who share this social imaginary of Sri Lankan space as Sinhala Buddhist or the state vehicle which drives nationalism. Sinhala nationalism is increasingly apparent in diverse apparatuses which invest the social field but which achieve a discursive unity through processes of hegemonisation. Indeed, what I intend to do here is to completely challenge the thesis that nationalism or power can be understood as purely instrumental to elite interests. This will require engaging with some of the relevant literature on Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka.

A number of works on nationalism in Sri Lanka have reproduced the tendency for rendering nationalism epiphenomenal by locating its dynamics in the instrumental mobilising discourses of elites or ruling classes, and in the subsequent institutional decay and crisis of political institutions of state that are colonised by these discourses. Such an approach is evident in those scholars who sought to 'unmake the nation' by exposing and deconstructing the mythic proportions of nationalist discourse (Jeganathan and Ismail, 1995). This approach is a reiteration and indeed conflation of two key overlapping problems in the nationalist literature identified above. Firstly, they frequently emphasise the mythic and 'superfluous' properties of nationalism (Jeganathan and Ismail, 1995:2-3), and in so doing, merely reproduce the fallacies of the 'false consciousness' and epiphenomenal perspectives that seek the

explanation for nationalism in 'true' socio-political dynamics, which are elided by nationalist discourse. Secondly, nationalism becomes the province of elite instrumentality. As Jeganathan and Ismail put it 'the nation – to be precise, those with the power to act in its name – has always suppressed its women, its non-bourgeois classes and its minorities' (1995:2-3). As we will see, such an analysis is completely lacking in an understanding of hegemony and the way that subaltern forces themselves may be drawn into and proactively reproduce nationalist discourse. This approach also neglects, by stressing the 'superfluosity' of nationalist discourse, the clearly generative, constructive and integrative force of nationalism.

This tendency has also been reproduced in recent works scrutinising the dynamics of 'ethnic outbidding' amongst mainstream political actors. For example, DeVotta's 'Blowback' (2004) locates the significance of Sinhala nationalism in Sinhala language policy from the 1950s onwards (which itself ignores the heterogeneous sites of nationalist reproduction) and the accompanying deterioration of once effective state institutions. DeVotta (2004), Stokke (1998) and Bush (2003), also tend to place the locus or drivers of Sinhala nationalism with the elites, ruling classes or political leadership, divining the dynamics as emergent from processes of 'ethnic outbidding' or 'intra-group' competition between Sri Lanka's mainstream parties, the United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), in which these elites attempt to outdo each other in the pursuit of Sinhala nationalist goals (DeVotta, 2004; Bush, 2003). Or that the story of Sinhala nationalism is really about a ruling class imposition from above ventured in the search for political legitimation (Stokke, 1998). This also tends to dovetail with the understanding

of the state, its institutions and their utilisation as a channel for the reproduction and dissemination of nationalist discourse so that the story of nationalism in Sri Lanka can be reduced to a 'crisis of the state' and of governance, which is really about elite politicians getting access to government and thereby to a range of other resources (e.g. Goodhand et al., 2005:25).

Such approaches therefore tend towards a rationalistic instrumentalism about how rather cynical elites take the shortest calculated route to power. However, this fails to address questions as to how and why both elite (and as I contend) non-elite groups have gradually come to share broadly aligned and similar conceptions of what constitutes the social totality represented by projections of the Sinhala nation.³ What is not being denied here is that elites are frequently at the vanguard of nationalist mobilisation, but what is being ventured is that the populist effect of nationalism frequently overflows its elite genesis and this is precisely what we witness in the Sri Lankan context. As a result, Sinhala nationalism cannot be regarded as 'superfluous', as merely the machination of elites or as a 'crisis of state;' it is clear, as I will demonstrate below, that Sinhala nationalism has become increasingly hegemonic, socially diffuse and is operative and reproduced from diverse areas of the social field and not merely through the vehicle of Sinhala language.

Sinhala nationalism must be understood as a socio-political representation of Sri Lanka, in which the territory, state and nation of the island compose a bounded unity revolving around a majoritarian axis of Sinhala Buddhist religion, language, culture and people (Rampton, 2010). A social representation furthermore which consistently reproduces a hierarchy evidently placing the Sinhala nation at the apex with Sri Lanka's minority communities in

a position of subordination (Kapferer, 1999 [1988]:114). These social representations gradually and unevenly emerged through the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through two imbricated currents in which the universalising thrust of colonially introduced governmental and biopolitical power on the one hand and the pre-existing identities found in Sri Lankan space on the other, fused, the one current impacting upon the other, to create the specific features of both colonial rule and in turn, Sinhala nationalism.

Although the more extensive detail of these transformations cannot be ventured here for want of space, what is clear is that these processes produced a radical paradigm shift in the frameworks and structuring of identity in Sri Lanka. Numerous social scientists (particularly in the field of social anthropology) have referred to the way in which more fluid, fuzzy, galactic and even 'schizoid' modes of social and political interaction between the different identity groups were apparent before the advent of modern power frameworks tended in general towards more compartmentalised, rigid and discrete divisions between religious, linguistic, caste and kinship communities (Nissan and Stirrat, 1990; McGilvray, 2006; Tambiah, 1992, 1986, 1976; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:208-209; De Silva Wijeyeratne, 2007).⁴ In this way one could find, for example, bilingual Tamil communities becoming Sinhalsed in the Southwest, Sinhala communities being Tamilised in the East, Muslim communities being given land grants and service roles by Buddhist kingdoms, Sinhala nobility writing in Tamil script, Tamil Kings ruling over Buddhist kingdoms and the potent interlocking of religious rituals and kinship tradition as illustrative of this pattern. Indeed, what was clear is that the whole logic of the

socio-economic and the political was very different to the extent that one's relationship to the state did not depend on one's identity but on one's service in a manner that was entirely accepting of difference in the realm of culture, religion, status, language etc. And, moreover, that that acceptance of difference did not preclude a vibrant interaction between these communities. Political relationships were also founded on tribute and looser relationships between a multiple range of political sites, kingdoms, fiefdoms and communities in which the logic of unified sovereignty, clearly demarcated borders and a bounded society were, if not absent, then at least marginal (Scott, 1999:23-52; Tambiah, 1992:173, 1986).

Such a picture of the socio-cultural, political and economic mosaic in Sri Lanka before the colonial intervention into colonised society took hold, is completely resonant with the work of Sudipta Kaviraj, who has emphasised the prevalence of 'fuzzy communities' in India prior to the colonial state's transformation of the way identity and politics operated (1991). Kaviraj has portrayed the early colonial period as one in which the colonial state occupied the high ground in a circle of relatively autonomous but interactive and tributary circles of power and community (1991). This was not a paradigmatic breach with existing pre-colonial practices as it did not in any way challenge the relative autonomy of communities and their fuzzy, non-denumerable logic. Being a member of one community did not entail one's exclusion from another as increasingly became the case in the modern period. Kaviraj, Scott and other scholars have also described the shift in colonial power itself as it moved from a tributary to socially penetrative and generative logic (Kaviraj, 1991; Scott, 1999:23-52). In the case of British colonial rule, this was ideologically justified

through utilitarian logic wherein a purportedly backward colonial society had to be inculcated into a civilised and civilising ethos which produced a new field of socio-cultural, political and economic mapping and practices (Scott, 1999:23-52; Rampton, 2010).

The colonial intervention thus produced an ethnicised and racialised biopolitical and governmental mapping and enumeration of Sri Lankan society through orientalist historiography and philology, through education, through the creation of a press, through the colonial census and through the politicisation of ethnicities as a result of ethnic representation in the Legislative Council (Nissan and Stirrat, 1990; Gunawardana, 1990; Rogers, 1990; Wickramasinghe, 2006; Scott, 1999).

Orthodox constructivist accounts (e.g. Nissan and Stirrat, 1990; Scott, 1999), tend to place the agency for the 'generation' of these ethnicised identities almost wholly in the actions and governmentality of colonial power. Yet, what is also apparent but seldom understood is that the colonial state was extremely uneven in its legitimacy and its capacity to introduce and disseminate modern frameworks of power at wider social levels. Colonial records from the latter half of the nineteenth century indicate the poor participation in the novel colonially-introduced educational and legal institutions and norms amongst the wider population in many districts (Rampton, 2010:49-83). Such a picture indicates that the implementation of the governmental and disciplinary frameworks was at best partial and uneven and did indeed remain elite-focused. What is indicated here and which is frequently missed in existing Foucaultian understandings of Sri Lanka politics and society (e.g. Scott, 1999), is the extent to which Sinhala nationalist mobilisation itself took on and

furthered the governmental, biopolitical and disciplinary logic of modern power at exactly the point at which nationalist elites also sought to counter colonial authority at another level. Nationalism itself became the vehicle through which these modes of power were reproduced and more effectively disseminated to the wider social strata amongst the Sinhala community. This was first mobilised in the nineteenth century through the confrontations with Christian missionaries of the Buddhist Revival, the Buddhist Theosophical Society and the labour agitations mounted against the colonial state and British commercial interests which continued into the early twentieth century (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988; Seneviratne, 1999; Jayawardena, 1972; Malalgoda, 1976). The discourses produced in these movements also began to adopt some of the Schmittian dynamics of nationalist inclusion and exclusion that we associate with nationalism (Rampton, 2010; Haddad, 2008).

So, for instance, from the late nineteenth century Sinhala nationalism began to demarcate itself aggressively through positive and negative representations operating on a frontier of authenticity. This frontier placed the Sinhala peasant and the traditional rural economy of the smallholder rice and *chena* farmer on the 'inside' as the moral backbone of the nation and at the same time demarcated a series of fluctuating threats to that nation on the outside which included the coloniser and the colonial plantation economy (Moore, 1989), Christianity, Muslims, Tamils, Indian traders and Hinduism as examples (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:213; Tambiah, 1992:7-8). Movements like the Buddhist Theosophical Society also began to adopt the proselytising and organisational tactics of Christian missionaries, to promulgate renunciatory disciplinary codes of daily living and to banish

syncretic practices (e.g. from Hinduism) and influences of spirit religion from Buddhism, to the extent that Buddhist modernists such as Dharmapala and DC Vijayavardhana would even claim Buddhism as a philosophy or even science rather than religion (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:222-224; Dharmapala cited in Guruge, 1965:658-659; Vijayavardhana, 1953:637). These movements disseminated these practices and discourses through the *Sangha*, through Buddhist schools, Buddhist Sunday schooling, print media, through the temperance movement, through union activities and Sinhala cultural associations such as the Buddhist Theosophical Society and, later, the Sinhala Maha Sabhas.

What was produced by these discourses was a social representation of the island of Sri Lanka as quintessentially Sinhala Buddhist tying together the Sinhala people, the Sinhala language, the Buddhist religion and the conception of the unitary polity and integral territory of the island into a monolithic space in which minorities were to be subordinate. These discourses were thus thoroughly invested with a biopolitical and governmental logic focused on a hierarchy of populations with Sinhala Buddhists at the apex. Unlike the Congress-led anti-colonial nationalist movement in the Indian context, what was never effectively mobilised in a sustained way in Sri Lanka prior to Independence, was the creation of an effective all-island identification. This produced a lack in the conception of Ceylonese nationalist identification, which could encompass the island's communities and identities on a more equitable footing and with a cross-cutting diversity of nationalists symbols and referents (Bose, 1994:45; Rampton, 2010:87-90).

Given this lack, what occurred in the run up to and aftermath of independence was the political salience of ethnic identities and of a Sinhala majoritarianism still swollen with anti-colonial force. Although, these discourses were well underway at the end of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, Sinhala nationalist hegemony would only be achieved once these discourses began to dominate the logic of political and social articulation in a more profound way. It is widely recognised that SWRD Bandaranaike's MEP election victory of 1956 mobilising through the forces and platforms provided by the *Buddha Jayanthi* celebrations, the 'Sinhala Only' language policy and the mobilisation of vernacular-educated and rural forces, represents a landmark moment in the hegemonisation of Sinhala nationalism (Roberts, 1994:297-316; DeVotta, 2004:52-91; Tambiah, 1992:42-57).⁵ It was after this point that one sees the profound permeation of Sinhala nationalism into diverse practices of both state and society. It also represented a linking up of the novel nationalist-oriented policies in the fields of education, language policy and state recruitment with existing nationalist practices in the field of citizenship and development policies. So for example, the Sinhala Only language provisions along with changes to education introduced between the 1950s and 1970s prioritised the Sinhala vernacular over and above the Tamil language and at the same time excluded wide swathes of society from accessing English as a potential link-language and as an ongoing *lingua franca* of the elites.

Although, these were novel policies, they also complimented existing but ongoing practices that were clearly nationalist in orientation. This included the disenfranchisement in 1948 of the Upcountry Tamil population working on

plantations in the central highlands of the country. This was a measure that has often been described as an 'instrumental' tactic to rid the Marxist Left of a proletarian constituency but which cannot be divorced from the biopolitical and governmental logic of ethnic marginalisation and majoritarian consolidation which was clearly apparent in the excision of practically a whole community and 11.7 per cent of the population in 1947 from citizenship and the franchise (Devaraj, 2008:20; DeVotta, 2004:10; Roberts, 1994:22). This also dovetailed neatly with the fears amongst the political elites as to the swamping of the Kandyan peasantry by the Tamil estate workers and the political aim of securing instead a firm UNP constituency in the Kandyan and Upcountry areas (Kanapathipillai, 2009:56; Wickramasinghe, 2006:172-3). This perspective was further entrenched by elite fears of Indian designs on Sri Lanka buttressed by India's coerced absorption of Indian principalities into the Union (Kanapathipillai, 2009:69). Again the interweaving of the logic of political expediency on the one hand and that of Sinhala nationalism on the other is difficult to maintain for processes that are so profoundly interwoven and inextricable.

When one scrutinises state-led development policy between the immediate post-Independence period and the 1980s a similar biopolitical nationalist logic becomes apparent. Successive governments pursued the settlement of predominantly Sinhala colonisers into areas of Tamil and Muslim demographic concentration in the Dry Zone of the Eastern Province. From the inception, the politicians implementing this development strategy articulated its objectives as the reclamation in the present day of ancient Sinhala Buddhist hydraulic kingdoms (Moore, 1985:45; 1989). It was also profoundly entrenched

in the reproduction of the Sinhala smallholder farmer as the moral core and symbol of the Sinhala nation (Moore, 1989). Finally, it also served an increasingly strategic purpose of introducing demographic change and Sinhala 'frontiersmen' into the Eastern Province and thereby undermining the political and socio-cultural claims of Tamil nationalists who have articulated claims to a Tamil-speaking homeland (Hoole, 2001:69-78; Rampton, 2009; Manogaran, 1994:114-5, Thangarajah, 2003:26-27).

Clearly a lot of this logic was both enacted by and impacted upon the character of and access to the postcolonial state. There is little doubt that much of the potency of Sinhala nationalism and of a reactive Tamil nationalism owes much to the way in which the legacy of a colonially bequeathed highly centralised state has failed to provide space for even the kind of minimal power-sharing that might have precluded the escalation of fifty years of ethnic tension and conflict (Wilson, 1988; Tambiah, 1986, 1992; Welikala, 2008). Indeed, part of the Sinhala nationalist logic has fed into the exacerbation of state centralisation witnessed in the 1972 and 1978 constitutions, which in 1972 removed the already weak safeguards for minorities contained in the Soulbury Constitution (Welikala, 2008), gave the state an explicit role in protecting and fostering Buddhism and, in 1978, introduced a powerful executive presidency, with few safeguards or checks. It has also produced a system of governance, which has been criticised by the state itself as extremely weak in local government structures (Sirivardana, 2003; Government of Sri Lanka, 1999) which again has reproduced imbalances in access to political power.

It is also clear that the gradual processes of centralisation and

Sinhalisation that have taken place, have successively alienated and marginalised the Tamil elites and the broader swathes of the Tamil people. This in turn produced a reactive Tamil nationalism demanding power-sharing which progressively hardened from the post-1948 ITAK demand for federal autonomy to the 1976 Vadukkodai Resolution demanding a separate state and from non-violent peaceful protest to armed struggle (Wilson, 1988, 1994, 2000). In the postcolonial period we also regularly witnessed junctures at which Sinhala political elites appeared to be willing to make concessions and to implement power-sharing agreements. However, what has most frequently occurred is that attempts at introducing reforms to the state in the way of power-sharing have frequently been met by a potent nationalist backlash, frequently mobilised by opposition parties, and through populist protest and at times, through rioting or insurgency, leading to the abandonment of reforms or negotiation. In that sense, attempts to reform the state have produced processes of 'ethnic outbidding' that frequently exceed elite machinations, revealing that whilst the state has played a significant part in the hegemonisation of nationalism, what is lacking in emphasis is how the state not only impacts upon but is also impacted upon in turn by Sinhala nationalism reproduced at diverse social sites.

Sinhala nationalism, hegemony and identity

This returns us to the original contention which was that Sinhala nationalism has a potency that relates to the way it produces a political and socio-cultural representation of Sri Lanka as a space in which the aspirations of the Sinhala Buddhist people and the unitary state and the integrity of the island territory form a profound nexus. And, this has become hegemonic to

the extent that it is widely disseminated amongst the social strata of the Sinhala community producing a notable congruence between nationalist ideology and popular culture and practices. Although there are a select few scholars who have explored nationalism in this way (e.g. Brow, 1996; Kapferer, 1999 [1988]; Moore, 1989),⁶ this approach has on the whole been neglected in favour of the aforementioned institutional or elite-focused approach. Two problems which continue to dog the students of hegemony however, are, firstly, the issue of how to measure the extent of hegemonisation, a question that is explicitly posed by Moore (1989:207) when he states that, there is a 'paucity of (my) knowledge about how the rural population understand their society and state in a wholistic sense. The other is that, even were such knowledge available, it would be very difficult to determine how far mass beliefs or images about society have been shaped by the "ideological apparatuses" of the state and the political elite.' And, secondly, whether the attribution of 'hegemony', 'consent' or 'congruence' to what appear to be shared ideas and practices about nationhood or ethnicity really are a case of congruence at all. For instance, Fearon and Laitin and Paul Brass, in relation to ethnic violence, have all questioned whether the pursuit of ethnonationalist projects by differing social strata and classes are really exemplary of shared discourses and discursive action (Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Brass, 1997). For these scholars, followers of such projects may and often do have other 'ground-level' or local motivations which become encoded in or use the cover of the logic of ethnic discourse.

In a sense, this interrogation of discursive theories of identity is well-placed. My own view, which echoes Fearon and Laitin (2000), is that this

should not lead us to discard the discursive understanding of identity or a theory of hegemony in relation to the construction of dominant social representations and practices. The best outcome rather would be to nuance our understanding of the relation between discourse, identity and hegemony so that it takes full account of both the fluctuations and differences that continue to persevere within the overall envelope of Sinhala nationalism. Indeed, if there is a charge to be made against writers like Kapferer, Brow and Moore in different ways in relation to their conceptions of Sinhala identity, it is not that the position is essentialist or even primordialist (a charge that is erroneously made against Kapferer [Fearon and Laitin, 2000:846, 861]) but that they have presented an excessively static and structure-bound account of the ontological or ideological dominance of nationalism. It is in this sense that I wish to explore a more fluid conception of hegemony as it relates to Sinhala nationalist identity, which will simultaneously address the extent to which we can measure the depth of hegemonisation and, in turn, the fact that past failures in ethnic accommodation and peace processes have failed because of this hegemonic depth and the added failure to recognise this in scholarship and political practice.

The JVP and Sinhala nationalist hegemony

A focus on the on the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP – ‘People’s Liberation Front’) will facilitate just such an understanding. My aim is then is to depart from some of the broader dynamics of nationalism explored above and to concentrate on the way that this movement played a crucial role as a *habitus*-like engine, both a product and driver of Sinhala nationalism. The JVP emerged as an off-shoot of the Maoist section of the Ceylon Communist Party

in the mid-1960s, the chief constituency of which was drawn from the subaltern, vernacular-educated youth of the universities and the rural sphere, many of whom suffered from political, cultural and socio-economic marginalisation in terms of a postcolonial order ruled by the anglicised elites, including high rates of youth unemployment. Although, this subaltern constituency has expanded over time to include more urbanised constituencies, the vernacular educated and rural component has remained constant. In the 1960s, the JVP or *kalliya* (movement), as it was known before 1970, was one amongst at least half-a-dozen New Left Maoist or Guevarist groups that were mobilising the same constituency of vernacular educated, rural Sinhala youth and the disaffected members of the existing Left parties (Keerawella, 1980:3-4; Keerawella, 1982:66-90; Rampton, 2010:134-141). What is notable about the JVP is that they were the only one out of these new parties to make significant headway in mobilising at least 10,000 to 20,000 cadres between 1966 and the first 1971 JVP insurgency.⁷

What was different about the JVP and which made the movement such a powerful magnetic attractor when compared to other groups was the development of a rapid and rhizome-like recruitment programme, consisting of the now infamous 'five classes' (*panti paha*) (Rampton, 2010:150-164). These classes reproduced many of the motifs of Sinhala nationalism, including the same bifurcation of economic development in which the traditional peasant economy would be encouraged and the plantation system eradicated (Rampton, 2010:155-157). A further class on 'Indian Expansionism' also reproduced a classic threat to the Sinhala nation in the form of Indian political and business interests and demanded the disenfranchisement of the long-

suffering Upcountry Tamil plantation workers who were scheduled for repatriation in the aftermath of the revolution (Rampton, 2010:158-160; Chandraprema, 1991:78-9; Jayawardena, 1984a:9-10; Samaranayake, 1987:275-280). Extensive recent field work research with ex-cadres and cadres indicates that the nationalist content of these classes was completely resonant with and reinforced the ideological constitution of the JVP's constituency base, accounting for the rapid and extensive mobilisation achieved (Rampton, 2010:116-167). They were very much the sons and daughters of the socio-political order hegemonised in the 1950s and an order from which they did not depart or challenge in any significant sense.

Although there have been fluctuations in the ideological programme of the JVP, including a period of rather tenuous and ambivalent support for Tamil self-determination between the 1970s and 1982 and again in the early-to-mid 1990s (Rampton, 2010:174-180; Samaranayake, 1987:285; Chandraprema, 1991:95-7; Jayawardena, 1984a:11; 1986a:120; Venugopal 2009),⁸ the party has maintained a predominantly Sinhala membership and has pursued a Sinhala nationalist ideological programme and set of goals. Whilst the party's support base has shifted over the years to include more semi-urbanised and urban constituencies of the lower-middle classes and the poor, it has nonetheless maintained a commitment to rural interests and promoted the idea of the rural sphere as the moral heartland of the island's culture and heritage. These tenets are evident, for instance, in the JVP's university recruitment programme which divides university students into opposing camps of the rural vernacular-educated on the one hand and the city-dwelling, English speaking elites on the other (Rampton, 2010:189-196). The party

since its inception has also maintained a potent commitment to a disciplined, ascetic lifestyle and the renunciation of luxury and self-interested goals, a commitment that echoes Daharmapala's disciplinary *gihī vinaya* code for daily living (Rampton, 2010:82-3; Bharati, 1976; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:213-4). Since its reincarnation in the 1990s, the JVP has also maintained an outward commitment to 'clean politics', free of the violence and corruption that are evident in mainstream patronage-based politics (Rampton, 2003).

From 1983 to 1990, the JVP opposed Tamil self-determination and between 1987 and 1990 they were at the forefront of mobilisations against the Indo-Lanka Accord and against intervention by the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF). From the mid-to-late 1990s, they also mobilised resolutely against the implementation of firstly, Chandrika Kumaratunga's devolution proposals, including spearheading street demonstrations against the ill-fated Devolution Bill of 2000 (Rampton, 2010:220; Ghosh, 2003:194; DeVotta, 2003:124-5). Secondly, between 2001 and 2005 they also established a potent platform against the heavily internationalised 'liberal peace' framework established by Ranil Wickremasinghe and the UNF Government on the one hand and the LTTE on the other. They were extremely vocal in their criticisms of the role of Norway, the peace mediators, against local and international NGOs supportive of the process and against the Ceasefire Agreement, arguing that the LTTE were an illegitimate terrorist organisation and that international actors were seeking to balkanise the country (Rampton and Welikala, 2005:33-37). The JVP also played a key part in this period in mobilising grassroots support for the 2004 electoral victory of the UPFA

regime and for the 2005 Presidential Election victory of Mahinda Rajapaksa on a *Mahinda Chintana* manifesto dedicated to the preservation of Sri Lankan sovereignty, the unitary state structure, the territorial integrity of the island and against foreign interference in the island's political processes (Rajapaksa, 2005). The JVP were therefore instrumental in the ascendancy and resurgence of Sinhala nationalist discourse, bringing mainstream political actors back onto a platform that had receded in the years of the 'liberal peace' between 1994 and 2005 when the mainstream political parties had demonstrated an ostensible commitment to state reform as a way out of ethnic conflict. Since that time President Rajapaksa has assumed the mantle of nationalist legitimacy for his regime through the articulation of nationalist goals and through the pursuit of a military solution that has witnessed the defeat of the LTTE.

So, what is significant about the JVP is not that they are a representative sample of a cross section of the social strata in the country as they have always represented the aspirations of the subaltern, marginalised classes and groups in the Sinhala South. However, what is telling is the fact that what is often described as a radical 'anti-systemic' movement (Uyangoda, 2000a:112-114; Venugopal, 2009:1; Seneratne, 1997:104-5; Samaranayake, 1997:111), reproduces many of the motifs and policy goals of a Sinhala nationalist discourse that has a genealogy stretching back to the nineteenth century. In that sense, where one might have expected such a movement to produce a counter-hegemonic discourse, one instead finds a party thoroughly hegemonised by nationalist thought and practices. However, it does not do this as a simple mimicry or derivation from the proto-nationalist blueprint. As

stated earlier in relation to the work of Laclau (2005), hegemony, rather than being a static monolith is fluid and subject to a relentless fluctuation of frontiers separating inside from outside and friend from enemy. Thus, we see with the JVP a repositioning of Sinhala nationalist discourses on a frontier of populist authenticity with postcolonial elites frequently framed as the outside and as the enemy, collaborative with neo-colonial, neo-liberal and globalising forces. Or, at other junctures, one has witnessed elements of the elite drawn back into nationalist platforms as part of a broader coalition of forces, which nonetheless divide the political landscape into *deshapremi* and *deshadrohi* ('patriot' and 'traitor'). In a very real sense, the JVP held up a mirror to the political elites of the frustrated social order projected and yet never quite fulfilled for a constituency suffering inequality and marginalisation. It is in that sense that one should depart from a monolithic conception of hegemony to one that recognises the play of differences and tension and the realignment of frontiers that are constantly at work albeit that the channels of mobilisation, the language and rhetoric articulated still reinforce and sediment a nationalist effect.

Sinhala nationalist hegemony and the failure of power-sharing

The JVP therefore represents a litmus test on Sinhala nationalist hegemony, demonstrating the extent to which a particular representation of the socio-cultural, political and economic order had by the 1950s become diffuse and widely held. It is for this reason that we must be skeptical of those analyses that continue to reduce the Sinhala nationalist effect in Sri Lanka to elite machinations. This analysis remains incomplete as it barely looks at the other side of the coin, namely why populist political legitimacy should be

perceived to accrue from the pursuit of nationalist goals. This is clearly significant to the issue of past and present attempts to produce a political solution to the ethnic conflict. At each juncture when ethnic accommodation has been ventured, it has been assumed that the obstacles to achieving this end lay with a combination of the southern political elites, their political will in implementing legislation to reform the state and, after 1976, the potential for Tamil nationalists to pursue a hard line on the extent of autonomy secured.

In all attempts from the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam and Dudley-Senanayake pacts of the 1950s and 1960s, to the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, to the Kumaratunga Devolution Bill of 2000, to the Wickremasinghe peace initiative of 2001 to 2005, it was assumed that a combination of securing the political will of elites (albeit with considerable external pressure at times) and reform of the state would resolve the ethnic conflict. For example, in both 1957-8 and in 1966, SWRD Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake respectively engaged in talks with the FP (ITAK) to grant autonomy and power-sharing to areas of Tamil demographic concentration. These agreements spawned massive waves of popular protest, and (in 1958) violence in the South and East targeted on Tamil minorities (DeVotta, 2004:92-142; Tambiah, 1992:48-49; Wilson, 1994:86-90; Manor, 1989:268-273). Subsequently, the greater substance of these agreements was effectively shelved. In the late 1980s, the Indo-Lanka Accord in conjunction with the 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution worked on the premise that a newly established tier of local government through the provincial councils would provide the necessary measure of autonomy to satisfy Tamil nationalist demands. What occurred, however, was the launching of extensive popular

protest and an extremely violent JVP-led insurgency amongst a broader coalition of Sinhala political actors against what was seen as an Indian-imposed solution (Rampton, 2010:202-211; Krishna, 1999; Bose, 1994).⁹

In the period between the 1990s and 2005, one key credo in international intervention and peace-making was that, if bipartisan consent could be secured between the UNP and the SLFP ruling elites, the barriers to peace negotiations and reform of the state would fall (Ghosh, 2003). However, the political forces of 'ethnic outbidding' undermined both the PA-led Devolution Bill of 2000 and the Ranil Wickremasinghe-led CFA initiative between 2002 and 2004 (DeVotta, 2003; Rampton and Welikala, 2005). The nationalist reaction against both initiatives was led by nationalist actors in the form of the JVP in the first case and, in the second, a combination of SLFP, JVP and JHU actors against what was perceived in nationalist discourse as a western conspiracy to balkanise the country. Much of the discontent against the UNF peace-bid was fuelled by, firstly, the heavy internationalisation of the peace process which featured the US, Japan and the EU as Co-Chairs and Norway as mediator (Goodhand et al., 2005). Secondly, against the economic policies pursued by Wickremasinghe's UNF regime which were perceived as promoting tighter integration into the global neo-liberal economy and benefitting the Western Province and the elites at the expense of the rural sphere. Thirdly, a backlash against the international post-Tsunami humanitarian and development effort which was seen as transgressive of state sovereignty and usurping of the role of the Sri Lankan State. Finally, a reaction against the specter of a divided country prompted by the LTTE's release of its ISGA (Interim Self-Governing Authority) blueprint for autonomy

in 2003. Again, these peace processes were perceived as inimical to the interests of the broader social strata of the Sinhala South and were mobilised by forces that went well beyond a narrow elite strata, but which nonetheless articulated their opposition on broadly similar Sinhala nationalist platforms.

Indeed, this same nationalist platform provided the key vehicle for the current Rajapaksa-led UPFA regime to consolidate its power since the 2005 period and in so doing to wrest the mantle of patriotic authenticity away from the smaller nationalist parties like the JVP and JHU, who have been left with the choice of joining the government or being increasingly marginalised within the contemporary political context. This ideological platform has also formed the backdrop for the regime's abandonment of the 'liberal peace' framework for resolving the ethnic conflict and its turn towards a military solution that has witnessed the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, an outcome that has if anything further entrenched the hold of a now triumphalism Sinhala nationalist logic, with no signs of a power-sharing, political solution forthcoming.¹⁰ That this nationalist discourse still holds populist currency has been apparent in the broad support for the war, the legitimacy victory has bestowed upon the President and recent local government electoral victories between 2007 and 2009, a Presidential Election victory in 2010 and a landslide General Election victory which provided the current regime with a majority, unparalleled since 1977 when the first-past-the post electoral system was still in place. What the current landscape therefore demonstrates is the extent to which Sinhala nationalism has been resurgent and has provided the current President and the UPFA coalition with the discursive vehicle with which to secure political ascendancy. This ascendancy has not been secured through instrumental

manipulation by elites but through the way in which support for Rajapaksa and his regime is constructed on the basis of that which his supporters share with him and his government in a discursive and ideological sense: that he is *primus inter pares* in the pursuit of a conception of the Sinhala nation. It is this side of the relationship between leaders and masses which is frequently neglected in instrumental and elite-focused accounts.

Conclusion

The history of Sinhala nationalism must be understood as one in which universal and particular currents interlock. It is this interlocking of the biopolitical and governmental apparatuses of power with the existing frameworks of identity that produces an irreducible difference to nationalisms across contexts. What is also clear is that there are evidently differences in the intensity and social diffusion of nationalist discourses that relate to the extent and depth to which such discourses become hegemonic and generative of the social and political representations that they seek to effect. It is also the generative potential of nationalism, which undermines perspectives that continue to perceive nationalism as merely epiphenomenal to other political social, economic and cultural factors. In Sri Lanka what is clear is that Sinhala nationalism has been operative at diverse sites but that the discourses and apparatuses of nationalism have become articulated into an enduring social formation where they have attained a hegemonic depth beyond mere elite instrumentality. This has in turn impacted, through the inclusions and exclusions in nationalist discourse, upon the emergence of a reactive Tamil nationalism and upon the ethnic conflict. Although, the postcolonial history of Sri Lanka has been replete with the potential for ethnic

accommodation and for state reform, it is this hegemonic depth, which has consistently resurfaced to torpedo negotiated forays seeking the development of a political solution based on power-sharing and/or consociational arrangements.

Notes

¹ This article draws from and develops research from Rampton (2010).

² Notable exceptions have included Bruce Kapferer and Manu Goswami who have thrown the problematic of dichotomous thinking into stark relief. See Kapferer (1999[1988]) and Goswami (2002, 2004).

³ It is interesting to note that DeVotta claims on the first page of his work on Sinhala nationalism to be aiming at transcending “instrumentalist (elite and rational choice)” constraints (2004:1), yet reiterates the same elite-oriented and instrumental framework by his self-proclaimed focus from the outset on “linguistic nationalism as the mechanism Sinhalese elites used to achieve their preferences” and on “ethnic entrepreneurs” (2004:2). This approach also clearly reduces Sinhala nationalism to the vehicle of language.

⁴ Having said this, this fuzzy logic whilst becoming marginal has not been entirely effaced through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

⁵ The *Buddha Jayanthi* commemorated 2,500 years since the death of Buddha.

⁶ Although Moore (1989:207) explicitly repudiates a Gramscian reading of nationalist ideology, he himself, citing Abercrombie (1980), pursues a line of thinking which does not in any way depart from a Gramscian reading of the role of ideology. This is predominantly due to his misreading of Gramscian hegemony as purely ‘instrumental’ (e.g. a tool for manipulation by ruling classes) and his own understanding, following Abercrombie and Skocpol, which tracks the congruence of ruling and subordinate classes’ ideology. However, more informed readings of ‘hegemony’ would certainly point to the way that Gramsci was tracking the *longue durée* sedimentation of ideology into ‘common sense’ practices and the way that ideas can preserve the unity of a whole ‘social bloc’, in other words the development of congruence and even ‘common sense’. This evidently suggests a movement well beyond rather crude ‘instrumental’ accounts which see dominant power frameworks and even states as executives of the bourgeoisie and their interests. See Gramsci, (1971), Anderson, (1976) Barret, (1994) and Fontana, (1993) for debates on hegemony.

⁷ This is a conservative estimate. Some scholars have also asserted that 20,000 were arrested and 20,000 killed (see Uyangoda, 2003:38).

⁸ Despite support for Tamil Self-determination, the party still constantly referred to Tamil nationalism as a bourgeois capitalist movement which would split the working class and that ultimately, “the JVP reserves its right to say whether the decisions taken by the Tamil-speaking people are right or wrong...” (Red Power, 1978:4).

⁹ This solution was also rejected by the LTTE who saw it as an extremely dilute form of autonomy and who themselves began to engage in insurgency against the IPKF.

¹⁰ The most recent attempt to produce a political solution to the conflict, the APRC (All-Party Representative Committee) process, which has been concurrent with the military defeat of the LTTE, has finally recognized the need to go beyond the mainstream parties in securing a broader political consensus amongst southern actors as to the scope and scale of state reform. However, international and regional support for this initiative was again slow to recognize the lack of political will for the APRC process which has finally been adjudged as little other than a smokescreen allowing the UPFA Government to buy time with regional and international actors during the war with the LTTE (International Crisis Group 2007:23-27; Edrisinha 2008; David 2008).

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