Abstract: Based on two years of fieldwork in Sri Lanka, this dissertation systematically examines the mutual skepticism that Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists express towards one another in the context of disputes over religious conversion. Focusing on the period from the mid-1990s until present, this ethnography elucidates the shifting politics of nationalist perception in Sri Lanka, and illustrates how Sinhala Buddhist populists have increasingly come to view conversion to Christianity as generating anti-national and anti-Buddhist subjects within the Sri Lankan citizenry. The author shows how the shift in the politics of identitarian perception has been contingent upon several critical events over the last decade: First, the death of a Buddhist monk, which Sinhala Buddhist populists have widely attributed to a broader Christian conspiracy to destroy Buddhism. Second, following the 2004 tsunami, massive influxes of humanitarian aid—most of which was secular, but some of which was connected to opportunistic efforts to evangelize—unsettled the lines between the interested religious charity and the disinterested secular giving. Third, the closure of 25 years of a brutal war between the Sri Lankan government forces and the ethnic minority insurgent group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has opened up a slew of humanitarian criticism from the international community, which Sinhala Buddhist populist activists surmise to be a product of Western, Christian, neo-colonial influences. Illuminating this renewed Sinhala Buddhist criticism that Christianity is a quintessential anti-national force, the study then moves on to analyze the nodes of Buddhist-Christian conflict, rivalry and conciliation. By building upon concepts of economic theology and political theology, the author demonstrates how religious subjectivities and religious politics are shaped by the material and ideological clash of Buddhist and Christian soteriology. Under the revised demands of ethno-religious nationalism in the post-war context, the ethnographic work also delineates the politically expedient and the theologically orthodox lines along which alliances between Buddhists and certain denominational segments of Christianities have been forged. Thus, the study highlights the internal diversity within the religious traditions and religious politics within Sri Lanka—with focus especially on Pentecostalism, Catholicism, Theravada Buddhism. Finally, the work explores the newness and innovation that is engendered within the field of mutual religious influences. Specifically, it offers an examination of how liturgy and soteriological (salvational) aspirations have shifted under the circumstances of religious rivalry, as well as under the constraints of a state that privileges particular religious forms.
Acknowledgements

This research was generously funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the PEO Foundation. Support from the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University was crucial in the formative stages of the project. I am extremely grateful for this support.

In carrying out this research in Sri Lanka, the hospitality of friends, acquaintances, and interlocutors, has been abundant. I can not name all who have contributed to this study, so as to maintain anonymity that is so important given the sensitivity of the matters discussed here. I am grateful for their patience in answering my many questions over visits and long interviews while we sipped heavily sugared milk-tea in cities and villages surrounding Colombo, Galle, and Matara. Several friends and teachers, have shown me great kindness, and understanding. All shortcomings of this work are of course entirely of my own doing.

Special thanks to the DeSilvas—my second family. To Rosemary a dear friend, and the strongest woman I know. To Thangy, who endures the rainy days of Hatton. Herath Bandara who patiently taught me Sinhala, and also Sandamali Karunaratna. Noel Arokiam for being the younger brother I never had.

I thank Reverend R. Assagi for being an exemplar, a mentor, and like a friend from a life past. Father Charles for his kindness. Shantha Premawardhena, and Father Aloy Pieris for sharing their insights and knowledge matters of inter-religious significance. Their pluralistic orientation to other forms of religiosity is inspiring. The Franciscos and especially Randini nangi, the Wijesinghes, the Oodugamas, for telling me the most scintillating stories, for making me laugh, and for always inviting me to tag along. Piyumi nangi for her friendship and curiosity. Heyshan malli. Dharshini nangi. Achala and Thushari, thank you for helping me find the elusive kadapul flower, and for helping to set things right. Most especially, I thank Thushari Dinusa for her dedication to helping me understand the things that without her I could not have.

Friends and fellow fieldworkers who I met up with in Colombo and elsewhere were also a great source of emotional strength, and intellectual energy that sustained me in Sri Lanka. Ben Schonthal, Nalika Gajaweera, and Mythri Jegathesan, you are especially wonderful companions, who always blow my mind with your warmth as well as with your insights. Vivian Choi, Luke Heslop, Andrew Lucas, Rudy Edirasinghe, Niran Anketell, Sidharthan Maunaguru, Monica Smith, Clare Breedlove, Eva Ambos, Lea Krivchenia, Constance Theissen, Ozgul Ozcan, Quirien VanStraalen, Beatrice Bloomfield, Tom Rosenberg, Vince Porturica, Dave Stentiford, and Nethra Samawickreme. I hope that I run into you always and everywhere. Scholarly
conversations with Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda, Prof. Hasbullah, Prof. Tudor Silva, Prof. GPV Somaratna, Prof. Sinnathamby, Mr. Thambiarajah Ponnadurai, have opened my eyes to things I may not have seen while I was in Sri Lanka. I am very grateful to each of them for taking time to meet with me.

At Johns Hopkins, Veena Das has been abundantly patient in seeing this project through, nudging me gently even when I stubbornly closed my eyes. Her insights have influenced me more than she knows. She has especially awakened me to how to think about the complexities and contradictions entailed even within a field marked by sharp identitarian based conflicts, and my focus on maintaining a fidelity to empirical realities that go against the grain of identitarianism stems from her influence on me. I will continue to look to her exemplary ways of thinking and writing to further develop the nuances within my ethnographic work.

There have been many times when Naveeda Khan has been able to see more clearly than I, just what it was that I meant to convey in my writing. Her mentorship, patience, creativity, and clear-sightedness has been remarkable. I wouldn’t have survived the writing of this work without her. Jane Guyer has been an incredibly insightful and generous presence in my world at Hopkins. My work pertaining to economy, gift, charity has been greatly enhanced by her probing questions, which have helped me to go further in my inquiry. Thanks also to Aaron Goodfellow, Bill Connolly, Jane Bennett, Juan Obario, Anand Pandian, Niloofar Haeri, Deborah Poole, and Clara Han for their intellectual energy.

I am grateful to John D. Kelly and also to Martha Kaplan for their intellectual engagement and mentorship. Thoughtful comment from Jonathan Spencer, Charlie Hallisey, Filippo Ossella, Jock Stirrat, Benedikt Korf, Bart Klem, Dan Kent, Tom Widger, Jude Fernando, Sharika Thiranagama, Juliana Finucane, Michael Feener, Joy Pachuau, and Tanika Sarkar, has enhanced my thinking in various ways. I appreciate having had the chance to meet them in Zurich, Utrecht, Colombo, Singapore, Delhi, and Madison.

The friendships of Tim Hanafin, Gulru Cakmak, Mariam Mufti, Amrita Ibrahim, Amanda Lucia, Sandra Eder, Aaron Goodfellow, Citlalli Reyes-Kipp, Valeria Procupez, Maya Ratnam, Hester Betlem, Andrew Bush, Derek Denman, Kellan Anfinson, Diana Gross, Jennifer, Frank, and Nathaniel Patinella, and Jesse, Brandon and Benecio Cmaylo-Leyro, sustained me as I wrote.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my parents, Shashikala and Vennaralagappan Mahadev, for all of their love, and unstinting support. Also to Kishore, Kelly, Blake and Jax, and to Lila and Igor—all of my love. I dedicate this work to my Thatha and Ayya who are no more in this life, and to my dear Achi who lives on.
# Buddhist Nationalism and Christian Evangelism:
## Rearticulations of Enmity and Belonging in Postwar Sri Lanka

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~Introduction~

Inter-Religion in Sri Lanka

Heretics will converge on the center of Dambadiva from the periphery and surround it. Like the waves of an ocean, they will inundate the land. [The kingdom] will come under siege and fall into the hands of these frightful heretics.

From The Carpenter Heretic, a folktale penned by Buddhist apologists in Ceylon, circa 1762 (Translation from Sinhala by R.F. Young and GSB Senanayaka)

“The next tsunami in Sri Lanka will be a religious one.” The comment, proffered by a foreign observer of happenings in Sri Lanka, thickly resounded among Sinhala Buddhists, and was reproduced on Sri Lankan Buddhist websites and blogs, just months after the world watched the massive waves of December 2004 pummel the island. Just one year prior to the disaster, the death of a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk had

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1Section 7.8 of The Carpenter Heretic. (trans. Young and Sennanayake, 1998: 11). The trope that ocean waves washed up “heretics” onto the land extends at least back to the 1700s—the period under which Ceylon was colonized by the Dutch. According to the canonical doctrines that delineate Buddhist cosmology “Dambadiva,” is the chronotopic locale in which a bodhisatva or Buddha-to-be becomes manifest on Earth, and the Buddha Dhamma or teaching comes to reign. Classically, this place of the sacred enunciation of the Dhamma cyclically emerges in India, but in this particular folktale it is represented Sri Lanka. As discussed in the commentary and translation by Young and Senanayake, Buddhist monks used the folktale to furtively complain of the “heretical” activities of Christian missionaries of the early colonial times. The translators also note that the anti-Christian apologetics depict Jesus Christ as a “Carpenter-heretic,” or, more accurately, as a “Carpenter-prēta.” A prēta is a “hungry ghost” or malevolent spirit in Buddhist cosmology, which in Sri Lanka, dead ancestor usually, who capriciously haunts, and inadvertently creates obstacles for, the living. Such unseen spirits, in his or her haunting, express base attachments to the world of the living. The folktale maligns the carpenter God of the Christian missionaries by combining the image with profane elements of the local cosmology, leading Young and Senanayake to classify the eighteenth century Sinhala folktale as “adversarial syncretism” (Young 1995: 63).

2 An observation made by a German volunteer named Eckert, in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Eckert wrote an editorial on the matter for Sri Lanka’s The Buddhist Channel webpage. See also Mahadev 2013.
widely been reckoned to be the result of a Christian “conspiracy to destroy Buddhism,” that spurred on a contingent of Sri Lankan Buddhists to rally around efforts to introduce legislation to ban what they deemed to be “unethical” conversions (Degalle 2004, Uyangoda 2007, Matthews 2007, Berkwitz 2008). Hoping to pursue an ethnographic inquiry of the politics, practices, and aesthetics of religious conversion and “anti-conversion” activism, I arrived in Colombo for dissertation research in April 2009. I arrived exactly two weeks before a third significant event for Sri Lanka. In a most surprising turn, after 25 years of militarized ethnic conflict, the Sri Lankan armed forces defeated the Tamil nationalist secessionist militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009. The final weeks of battle gave rise to international criticisms of Sri Lanka’s conduct in the war against the ethnic minority civilians who were caught in the crossfire. These humanitarian criticisms compounded Sri Lankan populists’ concerns about the moral and political entailments about the influence of outsiders. Sinhala Buddhist nationalists were indignant that the “hypocritical” international community did not commend Sri Lanka for the war victory over the LTTE “terrorists.” These conditions have reinforced Sinhala Buddhist populists’ anxieties about their country’s geopolitical vulnerability. In editorials that circulated in Sri

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3 Goodhand, Korf and Spencer 2010.
Lanka’s English and Sinhala language press after the war’s end, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists commonly traced the “neo-colonial” inclinations of Western humanitarian organizations to the religio-moral formation of these outsiders. In short, these writers, as well as many of my Sinhala Buddhist interlocutors in the field, implied that the inclination to pursue neo-colonial agendas in postcolonial nations such as Sri Lanka is the result of a Christian ethos—an ethos that may be suppressed by secularist inclinations, but which they see as never being far from the surface.

Positioning itself with respect to the apparent rise of evangelical and especially Pentecostal Christianities, this dissertation tracks the political and theological effects of growing millennial Christian urgencies and intensifying Buddhist nationalist anxieties. My interest to undertake the study was piqued when populist agitations were often being directed at Christian “fundamentalists” who were seen to be proselytizing reached my attention in early 2004 through international news media. Things being as they were during the protracted years of civil war, since my initial visit to Sri Lanka in 1998, I had grown accustomed to some of the extreme populist discourses against the inherency of ethnic differences, of the impossibility of ever trusting what was “in the heart of a Tamil,” and against the sheer “arrogance” of Tamil demands for equality, and especially for a large swath of territory for their Eelam. After 25 years of civil war then,
I was surprised to find that in the main, Sinhala Buddhist nationalist activists now apparently conceived the enemies of the state not to be rooted in the Tamil sub-nationalist movement and the aspirations for a separate State. Rather, the concern appeared to be rearticulated against those who have been indoctrinated into Christianity in processes of conversion. It appeared to me that within ethno-religious conflict, there had been a shift in emphasis, a redirection of concern from the “ethno-” towards issues of the “religious.” Sinhala Buddhist nationalist anxieties, I discovered, were in the process of being reoriented along new identitarian lines—lines which were not entirely stable. This alerted me to the important point that the ethnic and sectarian fault lines are malleable, and that stories of conflict along religious lines which might have remained latent during the period of the civil war and Tamil insurgency, have intensified as the context has changed.

It was roughly around the turn of the millennium—which Sinhala Buddhist nationalists mark as year 2543 on the Buddhist calendar—that this series of happenings, and their geopolitical entailments, punctuated Sri Lankan national life. However, this was not the first time that Buddhists feared that the country’s littoral geography would bring about the vulnerability of Buddhism to foreign detractors. Circa 1762, Ceylonese

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Buddhists had already developed nascent traditions of folklore denouncing the “heretics” who “inundated the land like waves of the ocean” (Young and Senanayake, 1998). Yet, it is not only Sri Lanka’s Christians, but also Sri Lankan Buddhists, who claim histories of arrival to the island. Both of these communities see their respective legacies in Sri Lanka as works of “civilizing” and salvational missions. These two distinct and internally diverse, religious communities celebrate their allogogenous relationships to the island. Whereas Sinhala Buddhist myths chronicle the indigenization of the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka (Kapferer 1988), in the main, Christians in contemporary Sri Lanka struggle to gain the stature of belonging to the nation vis-à-vis the majority’s long-standing civilizational claims. The legendary miscegenation of Vijayan Buddhist conquerors and native islanders is said to have given birth to the Sinhala people and Sri Lankan civilization, which preceded the arrival of colonial powers and European and American Christianities by many centuries. However each community makes claims that their religious thought and practice has righteous civilizing and moralizing effects over the people of the land. Given these competing claims to the religious constitution of the island country, the inter-religious interactions between Theravāda Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka

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5 Geiger 1908, Kapferer 1988. The foundational mytho-histories of the Mahavamsa link the Sinhalese “race” or ethnic group to Sri Lanka. Legendary miscegenation between Vijayan conquerors and the native woman Kuveni is believed to have produced the Sinhala, “Lion-people.”
since the era of European colonialism, has been contentious.\textsuperscript{6} The intensities of these Buddhist-Christian conflicts have shifted with time and with circumstance.

With the sense that Christianization through proselytism and conversion may overwhelm Sri Lanka’s Buddhist majority, the example of South Korea has loomed large in the politico-religious imaginary of Sri Lankan Buddhists. Given that the once “small Buddhist isle” of (South) Korea made a quick demographic transition to become “a predominantly Christian nation within half a century,” the comparison touches off intense anxieties among Sri Lankan Buddhists and propels them to intensify practices of religious revival and “anti-conversion” activism.\textsuperscript{7} The growth of evangelical Christianity is certainly noticeable in Sri Lanka, but it is unclear how extensive this growth has actually been. Recent census statistics from Sri Lanka in 2001 and in 2012 suggests that the Buddhist population of Sri Lanka has declined from 76.7% to 70.2%, whereas Roman Catholic numbers stayed steady at 6.1, the Muslim population has increased from 8.5% to 9.7%, the “Other Christian” category (Protestants and Pentecostals) has increased from .9% to 1.3 percent, and the Hindu population


\textsuperscript{7} The fact that South Korea also has a vast tradition of ancestor worship and shamanism goes unacknowledged in such narratives, and does not matter for the Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists who seize upon the comparison. See also Kim, A. “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea,” in Sociology of Religion. Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 117-133.
increased from 7.8 to 12.6 percent. The changes may appear substantial, but the 2001 census occurred during the war years when the census could not account for populations living under LTTE controlled areas, whereas the 2012 census accounts for the former warzones of the north and eastern regions of the island. Given the complexities of population enumeration, especially as it pertains to religious and ethnic identity in the context of militarized conflict, it is unclear how accurate these official numbers actually are.

Nevertheless, the apparent growth of religious minorities has impelled Sinhala Buddhist revivalists to leverage new modalities of religious influence to ensure that Sinhala Buddhists do not “become alienated from the Buddhist religion of their birth” (*janmeyen laebu Buddhagama athhalaha*). Though Sri Lankan populists have long had a great sense of their own vulnerability, these vulnerabilities have lately found expression in agitations against the growth of Christianity. Especially since 2012, Sri Lankan Muslim minorities have become subject to anti-conversion activism by a new anti-pluralistic Buddhist nationalist group—a new set of circumstances which are

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9 This language is used in the 2009 *Report on Unethical Conversions* released by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, which I discuss in further detail in Chapters One and Two.

10 Tambiah has remarked on Sinhala Buddhists’ sense of vulnerability in terms of Sri Lanka’s ethnic composition, referring to the community as “the majority with a minority complex” (1986: 91).
outside of the scope of this dissertation. In what follows, I discuss the political perceptions and agitations over Buddhist apostasy and Christian conversion, insofar as it concerns the apparent growth of “new” varieties of Christianity in Sri Lanka.

The dissertation demonstrates how populist perceptions about Christian enmity have become resurrected and reconstellated with the new wave of ambitious and charismatic evangelisms, and with the contingencies of postwar concern. Given that conversion and apostasy mark the threshold between belonging and not belonging in this context, deep controversies and passions are stirred by proselytism in Sri Lanka.¹ As one of my born-again Pentecostal interlocutors readily admitted, Pentecostals are “not good at inter-religious relations.” Nevertheless, the assumptions of the interested motivations of religious others are often overblown, and the episodes of violence, threats, and harassment against minorities in Sri Lanka are staggering, very real, and unjustified. According to advocates of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (an advocacy organization which represents a few mainline¹¹ Protestant Christian churches, Pentecostal denominational churches and all of the “free” charismatic churches), to date, there have been approximately 150 reported attacks on

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¹mainline is the term for the churches that were established during the colonial era, including the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations. This excludes Pentecostal denominations (i.e. Assemblies of God and Four Square) and other “free”, “independent” or non-denominational ministries.
Christian church properties or on evangelists in Sri Lanka since end of the war in April 2009. Another report, by the non-partisan Center for Policy Alternatives based in Colombo, which was released in March 2013, gives qualitative details of 65 attacks on places of religious worship of all minority communities in Sri Lanka—Muslim, Christian, and to a lesser-extent, also Hindu—though the precise numbers are not known. Indeed, populist anxieties have persisted, though as I would like to modestly suggest the hostilities that have been aroused have taken a new form. What becomes clear is that though Sinhala Buddhist nationalist anxieties initially became crystallized within broad stereotypes of Christian forms of persuasion, they have also partially dissolved with shifts in intra-religious politics.

**Contributions to the Anthropology of Christian Evangelism and Buddhist Nationalism**

How does the “external” problem of Christian influence come to be an “internal” problem of self-constitution? In other words, what does conversion to Christianity do to the character and the concerns of people? Talal Asad (1996) has

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12 Personal communication with NCEASL legal team, on August 1, 2013. This excludes attacks against some of the mainline Protestant churches which are represented by and report to the ecumenically-oriented National Christian Council. These numbers would also exclude any attacks on Catholic entities, which operate separately from the other Protestant and Pentecostal churches.
suggested that in attempting to make sense of religious conversion, we need to move from asking whether, to what extent, and why people convert, to asking, what are the epistemological changes inaugurated by conversion, and “what new possibilities for constituting themselves” do converts encounter? Arguably, the whole subfield of the anthropology of Christianities in the global south which has expanded dramatically over the last several years has been shaped by this provocation. “Taking seriously” what religion is entails accounting for what adherents understand it to be doing in their lives, and thus by and large the new anthropologies of Christianity have involved taking account of emic perspectives of the epistemologies, belief structures, and ways of living that conversion newly inaugurates. The Christian emphasis on the strength of conviction inheres in Christians’ orientations as believers in Christ’s sacrifice and the miracle of Resurrection (Ruel 1982). In turn, signs of a convert’s “authenticity” are sought out by Christian moral authorities to disprove worries of insincerity (Keane 2007, Mosse 2006, 2012). Likewise, Christians defend the righteousness of their work against those who are incensed by apostasy, as in the case of Hindu nationalists in India (Vishwanath 2013). Thus, the movement within the anthropology of Christianity to “take seriously” the entailments of being and becoming Christian, may be seen as

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13 Asad. “Comments on Conversion” (1996: 265)
countering earlier trends wherein, in Marxian fashion, political economy was foundational, and religiosities appeared to be merely epiphenomenal.

The ethnography that I offer here only in part considers what conversion inaugurates for the Christian believer (I treat this in depth in Chapter Three, and to some extent in Chapter Two). Rather, this dissertation examines the resurgent formation of perceptions pertaining to what conversion to Christianity is considered to do to the character of Sri Lankan persons, from the etic perspectives of Buddhist nationalists who strive to protect the predominance of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. What primarily comes through in the ethnography is that Christianity indeed appears to be strongly resonant with a capitalist ethos (Weber 1905, Connolly 2008), but that Sinhala Buddhists perceive that Christian converts to be pursuants of economic fortune in ways that take precedence over moral rectitude.¹⁴ In the context of growing evangelical Christian urgencies and heightening Buddhist nationalist anxieties, what is conversion understood to do to the qualities of a person? What are the nodes of rivalry and conflict, and points of negotiation that emerge within this tense multi-religious milieu?

¹⁴ In my discussion in Chapter One, I discuss how for Weber the linkages between a Christian ethos and capitalism emerge out of “elective affinities”; for Connolly on the other hand, capitalism and Christianity are deeply “imbricated”.
In the flux of reconstellating identitarian-based conflicts along religious lines, what becomes apparent is how the nodal points of conflict between Buddhist and Christian religiosities are arranged along political and economic lines inflected by their respective practical-theological differences. Specifically, established mainline Christianities and relatively newer Pentecostal-charismatic varieties of Christianity are equally implicated within Buddhist allegations against unethical conversions. However, in their distinct trajectories towards localization and legitimization, intra-Christian denominational differences and other divisions cut through the broad classification of Christianity, which complicates the Buddhist-Christian polarity. In these viscissitudes of inter- and intra-religious negotiations, I discuss the force of institutional politics and the liturgical and even soteriological adaptations, which emerge out of Buddhist and Christian, as well as Pentecostal and Catholic rivalries. How are these theologies—political and economic as they are in their nature—urgently and anxiously leveraged to galvanize conviction and commitment? How does the conflict between religious rivals, and the theologies attendant to these rivalries, create new potentialities for conflict, conciliation, or subtle mutual influences within the sphere of ritual, soteriology and religious politics?
Organization of the Dissertation

Across four chapters I query the rising intensities of Buddhist nationalist anxieties and evangelical Christian urgencies, and the gradual but partial dissolution of simple identitarian polarities, and the economic and political theologies attendant to inter-religious conflicts and efforts at conciliation.

In Chapter One I discuss how populists’ concerns about the incursion of new Christianities are tied to allegations that Christian proselytizers use economic inducements to generate Buddhist apostasy and Christian conversion. When in 2004 a well-loved Sinhala Buddhist monk died under peculiar circumstances, his death was widely attributed by populists to a conspiracy by Christians who sought to destroy Buddhism in Sri Lanka.\(^{15}\) I demonstrate that the conversion of the alleged culprit—a Sinhala businessman who found economic success through a Catholic variety of deliverance practices resonant with Gospel of Prosperity—was considered by populists to have engendered in him immorality, and anti-national estrangement. I describe how Sinhala Buddhist populists tended to interpret features of the alleged culprit’s Christian ethical dispositions—such as charity and forgiveness—as marks of “fraudulence” and

\(^{15}\) Degalle 2004, Uyangoda 2007, Berkwitz 2008a\&b.
duplicity, which were seen to have been broadly inscribed into subjectivity of Christians through the processes of conversion.

The fact that the growth of Christian conversion has historically and theologically (if we consider the rising prevalence of prosperity gospels) ripened with economic privileges, runs counter to the renunciatory progression of Buddhist soteriological goals of *nibbana*. I show how in the Sri Lankan context, these polarizing lines of economic and religious enmity tend to follow well-trodden paths of soteriological, and even party-political affinities and affiliations which have been inscribed into the Sri Lankan political milieu since the formative years of post-Independence politics (1940s-1950s). The crystallization of these identitarian stereotypes have amplified the populist polemics against Christians, casting them as anti-nationalists who seek to dismantle the predominance of Sinhala Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Following Gil Anidjar (2005) I examine the “economic theologies” of upward mobility that has come to be associated with Christianity in Sri Lanka, and how this mobility and philanthropic spirit, and the alleged culprit’s ultimate fall from grace, was interpreted by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists through Buddhist conceptions of theodicy. By interpreting this case that fomented “anti-conversion” agitations, it becomes clear that the religious, political and economic subjectivities that are seen as being
inaugurated with conversion to Christianity. Thus, conversion, I argue, marks for Sinhala Buddhist populists the threshold between belonging and not belonging to the nation.

In Chapters Two and Three I go into further detail about the economic accoutrements of Christian attraction, which are significant nodes of inter-religious rivalry. In Chapter Two I focus on the inter-religious rivalries over charity and secular humanitarianism that developed first during the colonial era missions, and have been aggravated in the post-disaster and post-war contexts. The growing body of literature on humanitarianism shows how these secular forms of care have strong affinities to capitalist interests (Haskell 1985) and that humanitarianism involves secularized extensions of Christian charity (Parry 1986, Fassin 2010, 2011, Calhoun 2010). The fact that there are continuities between secular humanitarianism and human rights on the one side, and Christianity on the other, is certainly not lost on Sinhala Buddhists. I illustrate how they often perceive that an interested Christian ethos persistently infuses the gifts of aid and intervention. I discuss how my Buddhist nationalist interlocutors bristled with the thought that foreign aid workers, and evangelists from
far and near, were peddling gifts to elicit conversion, and conceitedly demanded acknowledgement of their moral, economic, and political superiority.\textsuperscript{16}

As Fassin reminds us, “humanitarian reason” is largely produced by “geostrategic goals” (2012: 2). Likewise, social scientists have increasingly observed that the cause of religious freedom, cast as a universal human right, and promoted as an agenda of U.S. Department of State, has tended to be tied up with U.S.-based evangelical Christian prayer and lobbying in favor of the Persecuted Church (Castelli 2005, Sharkey 2008, Mahmood 2012).\textsuperscript{17} As Mahmood (2012) writes with respect to the Middle East: “far from being a universally valid, stable principle, the meaning and practice of religious liberty have shifted historically... often in response to geopolitical struggles, the expansion of modern state power, and local regimes of socio-religious inequality.”\textsuperscript{18} As Castelli (2005) has shown within some strands of the American evangelical movement, to spread the Gospel in the face of “persecution,” is conceived as a form of martyrdom for Christians. Indeed, ministers of certain highly secure evangelical churches in Colombo occasionally preach to their congregations that persevering in the Christian imperative to share their faith, and to stare the possible

\textsuperscript{17} A new initiative within the SSRC’s \textit{The Immanent Frame} editorial posts on “Engaging Religion at the Department of State” http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/03/05/religious-freedom-minority-rights-and-geopolitics/ Accessed: August 2, 2013.
repercussion of death in the face, will be rewarded with “higher levels of Heaven.” In practice, this rhetoric rarely emboldens such ambitious proselytizing among the upper middle class Sri Lankans who attend these churches. More marginal Pentecostal churches, which are more often actually subject to violence, are less inclined to encourage proselytism among non-Christians. One Pentecostal minister who had been in practice in a southern coastal church took a slightly defensive posture when I asked how he prepared his congregation for the possibility of religious persecution: “I’m not an extreme person. I don’t prepare my church for persecution. I prepare them for the End of Days (Antiyama Kaleya). Jesus will come to the sky, and lift up those who are Saved. I want the people to be prepared to be with Jesus.”

Two nodes of political, economic, and theological conflict, I argue (as I have elsewhere (Mahadev 2013), include two varieties of Christian “gifts” of attraction. Situated as they are in a context of inter-religious rivalry, Christian charity and even secular aid are always-already seen as serving as modalities to “induce” conversions. To understand the alleged complicity of material gifts in religious attraction, I examine the incommensurability of Christian charity and Buddhist dāna, which have long stood as a node of conflict in Sri Lanka. I argue that charity and dāna each enable distinct salvational trajectories, and that at their origins, each of these forms of giving offer
practices that were substantial innovations over the dominant paradigms of exchange in their respective milieu. However, the incommensurabilities between the two forms of gift, when set in competitive relation with one another, foment rivalries articulated as the “selfishness” of the other. These circumstances give rise to rivalrous practices of giving, “competitive philanthropy” among lay Buddhist revivalists who seek to reinvigorate the commitments of other Sinhala Buddhists (Gajaweera 2013). As I suggest, charitable giving practices unconventionally exercised by affluent Buddhist laypeople as well as handfuls of Buddhist monks, seek to undermine Christian allegations of Buddhist “selfishness,” and to fend off the possibility that Buddhists will convert as a result of material attraction. Such Buddhist practices of charity are recast to mitigate the new forms of enmity, as well as with the intent of “rehabilitating” Tamils civilians and ex-combatants, thus bringing them back into the fold of the Sri Lankan nation.

Miracles—a second form of gift—I found, are also central to the competing claims of sovereignty over the religio-moral sphere in Sri Lanka. In Chapter Three, I discuss how within Pentecostalism, to receive charismatic Christian “gifts” of God’s grace are seen to spontaneously compel unshaking conviction among religious subjects (Coleman 2000, Marshall 2009). Given that charismatic Christian evangelists tend to be
successful in their expansionary pursuits, I discuss how such miracles have become a second intense node of inter-religious rivalry and conflict in Sri Lanka.

As I detail in Chapter Three, certain established mainline churches, entangled in the war of identitarian perceptions, struggle to maintain a balance between their national grounding and their international character. I show how they do so by attempting to take distance from the ambitiously expansionary, so-called “fundamentalist,” forms of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. This has particularly been true of the central authorities of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church. However, ironically there is a thriving charismatic movement within the Catholic Church (Csordas 1997), and these charismatic strands have flourished within Sri Lankan Catholicism. I show how Church leadership focused on orthodox iterations of liturgical practice so as to actively define Catholicism against Christian rivals and to disentangle the Church from populist scrutiny. I ethnographically detail how Catholic leadership sought to mitigate the effusive expressions of charisma or miraculous expressions of God’s grace, as well as by building alliances with Buddhist nationalist opponents of “unethical conversions,” so as to achieve exceptional standing amongst other Christian groups in Sri Lanka. Building upon, revising, while simultaneously provincializing Carl Schmitt’s thesis on political theology, I show how the exclusivist inclinations within
charismatic Christianities are rebuffed by both Sri Lankan Catholics and Buddhists leaders, through the solidification of orthodox Catholic theologies of miracle, and through the work of diplomacy. Not only are these logics of reform politically expedient, the consequences for religious practice are striking.

Furthering an exploration of how competing theologies and soteriologies play out in this inter-religious milieu, in Chapter Four, I describe how a Buddhist monk introduces a new ritual movement to venerate the messianic Boddhisatva Maithreya. I argue that he does so as against such rivalrous evangelical Christian promises as “Jesus is the shortest way to overcome samsara.” This maverick Buddhist revivalism promises to hasten the possibility of attaining nirvana, and thereby shores up Buddhist commitment, in the face of competitive evangelical Christian urgencies. I demonstrate how the new Sri Lankan Buddhist movement is dialogically responsive to such Christian claims. In an earlier generation of Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalism which emerged during especially during the British colonial era, several thinkers accounted for religious change by drawing on Weberian thought on modernization and rationaliziation of religion. Obeyesekere (1970) coined the term “Protestant Buddhism.” Observing that changes within Buddhism were comparable to the types of changes that occurred in European Christianity during the Reformation (also Obeyesekere and
several scholars explored the intellectual currency of the notion of Protestant Buddhism as it pertained to the revivalist imperatives in Sri Lanka. However, the terminology fell out of favor in the 1990s. In the critiques of the Weberian-derived ideal-typification, one overarching concern was that “Protestant Buddhism” seemed to connote that Buddhist reforms (such as the promotion of lay Buddhist religiosity, and moral imperatives to purge deity veneration from practical Buddhist repertoires), were merely derivative of Protestant Christian moral imperatives. My sense is that to impute the idea that Buddhism is merely imitative of Christianity into “Protestant Buddhism” is a misreading of the thesis; nevertheless, many scholars, including those who coined and developed theses scholarly terms of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism, have rightly taken to referring to contemporary Buddhist revivalist sensibilities as “Buddhist modernism,” so as to not over-determine the sources of religious change. In my discussion of the religious change impelled within a

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20 The most pointed critique comes from Holt (1991). He contests this notion that a) Buddhist reformism was influenced was primarily Protestantism—rather he suggests that Catholic influences are more evident. b) He contests whether the revival movement was laicization at all—rather, he suggests that the transformation could be classified as a “monasticization” of the Sinhala Buddhist laity.
21 Another one of the main issues for critics of the “Protestant Buddhism” thesis is in terms of how empirical phenomena can be expressed imperfectly through ideal-typifications, because of the lived contradictions. Most scholars, including Obeyesekere himself, have resolved to call the reforms entailed by the Sinhala Buddhist revival “Buddhist modernism” in lieu of “Protestant Buddhism.” For important critiques of the Protestant Buddhism concept, see also Hallisey (1995), P. DeSilva (2006), Blackburn (2010.)
milieu of rivalrous inter-religious encounters, that this new Sri Lankan Buddhism ritual movement described in Chapter Four, suggest that Theravāda Buddhism and Pentecostal Christianity, (among the other forms of religiosity in Sri Lanka) constitute a field of mutual influences. The upshot of the new Theravādin milleniarian movement that I describe is indicative of how the affective and theological charge of Pentecostalist evangelical urgency is absorbed, activating potentialities within Buddhism which are already scope of Buddhist soteriological conclusions.

The new maverick religious movement which I highlight does not go uncontested by Buddhists religious authorities who sought to maintain Theravāda Buddhist orthodoxy in Sri Lanka, however. Nevertheless, amidst the fever-pitch of nationalist anxiety and evangelical urgency, I attend to how such inter-religious provocations impel innovations and modulations within religious practice and theology that not only mark the diversity internal to Buddhism and Christianity, but which also add texture to a multi-religious landscape.

In sum, this dissertation offers a close look at how, for Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, Christian conversion and Buddhist apostasy came to represents a
dangerous trend which they insist must be undone through resistance to proselytism.\textsuperscript{22}

The ethnography illuminates the impassioned rivalries between Buddhists and Christians as they act upon different constructions of the ethics of religious propagation. The study explores how the concerns about proselytism intensified, around what centers of gravity these tensions were articulated, and how these identitarian conflicts began to dissolve around the edges and became concentrated elsewhere. Finally, the study examines how such inter-religious tensions, political maneuvering, and competitive theologizing is generative of transformations in the realm of ritual, salvational trajectories and temporalities, and religious experience.

\textbf{Notes on Fieldwork}

The ethnographic field research for this dissertation took place intensively over two years from April 2009 to April 2011, and during briefer periods of research during the summers of 2005 and 2013. Prior stints of study in Sri Lanka during 1998 and 2000-01 have also informed my thinking and writing. From Baltimore, since 2004, I had followed the earliest phases of Sinhala Buddhist nationalist efforts to draft legislation

that would criminalize practices of proselytism and religious conversion in Sri Lanka.

Just prior to my arrival for dissertation work in Colombo in 2009, the second of two rounds of legislative bills put forward by the Jathika Hela Urumaya (described in Chapter One) had been struck down and deemed unconstitutional. Some of my Sri Lankan Christian interlocutors of the established mainline churches insisted there was no point in studying “a dead issue,” and that it was only Christian “fundamentalists” who were causing problems for Buddhist-Christian harmony (see Chapter Three). Yet, I was interested in the variegations in sentiments and perceptions among Sri Lanka’s Buddhists and Christians in relation to the politics of conversion and apostasy. What had perpetuated and alleviated tensions between the two “communities” on identitarian grounds?

Schonthal has expertly shown that within the course of the conversion debates in Sri Lanka, populist “anxieties and disputes over religious conversion have been sharpened and rendered more intractable through their translation into constitutional language...” (2012: 327). Indeed, although the threat of legislation seemed to have abated by 2009, it was abundantly clear that tensions over Buddhist apostasy and conversion to Christianity were still thick in the air, even if they have been reoriented away from certain established mainline Christianities, and directed towards the most
ambitious evangelizing groups. By late October 2009, accusations of “fundamentalist”
Christian villainy were reignited when two “Buddhist” women died in an open-air
faith-healing meeting conducted in central Colombo by a Sri Lankan Pentecostal
minister who was widely in known charismatic Christian circles as skilled in expunging
demonic influences from pious supplicants (Mahadev 2013). A politicized set of monks
and lay Buddhists razed the minister’s prayer hall to the ground, and called for a
renewal of efforts to ban proselytism. These “anti-conversion” activists argued that
Pentecostal faith-healing was obviously inflicting harm onto vulnerable people.
Through incidents such as this, and several others, I tracked the sentiments,
perceptions, tensions, and efforts at conciliation that had exacerbated and
reconstituted the identitarian polarities of “Buddhist nationalism” and “Christian
evangelism.”

I initially focused my energies by observing political and social happenings in
Colombo, and by speaking to Buddhist and Christian leaders to learn about their
abiding concerns, and to learn how they had been working to diminish hostilities with
religious others. I started by approaching inter-religious and ecumenical organizations
who had been actively working to curb the identitarian enmity that had arisen. Soon
thereafter, I also began attending evangelical Christian churches, and conservative as
well as unconventional places of Buddhist worship. My efforts eventually began to straddle sites in Colombo city and its outskirts, and as I had planned, also the small cities and coastal villages in the southern districts of Matara and Galle which had been affected by the tsunami a few years prior. I began connecting with temple (pansela) and church-based organizations which had been involved in providing care for people in tsunami affected areas, and learned more about the inter-religious tensions that arose during that time. My arrival roughly coincided with the closure of several “tsunami-rehabilitation” programs, and the opening up of new efforts by secular and religious organizations to enter the former war-zones to care for Tamil IDPs (internally displaced people). These former warzones were by and large, still off-limits, under the guard of the Sri Lankan government forces who were hesitant to let in foreign NGOs and reporters who were not verifiably on board with the Sri Lankan war effort.

I followed interlocutors and friends to the temple, to rituals of giving, practices of tovil and preta pidineya ("exorcism"),\(^\text{23}\) to Catholic and Protestant church services and to Pentecostal faith-healing and deliverance meetings. Observing practices of dāna, charity, meditating, chanting, praying and talking in tongues, I witnessed the forms of

\(^{23}\) Scott (1992, 1994) problematizes the translation of tovil as “exorcism,” because this was the missionary terminology; however, Sinhalese rituals of tovil are not equitable to exorcism since the “demons” being purged did not represent ultimate evil as they did in Christianity. Also Stirrat (1992), Pieris (2009).
devotion and discourse that constituted lay Buddhist and Christian efforts of “moral striving.” I examined these and other modalities through which people of these different religious orientations sought to connect with what they often saw as the most elevated pathways to spiritual assent. Moreover, I went along with them to observe their occasional “lapses” into traveling the lower channels to sate worldly needs (i.e. what evangelists call “back-sliding”), and observed and spoke with them about their efforts to double-back. Moreover, what may have been a “lapse” according to a pious religious frame occasionally led to down a path of religious experimentation and non-exclusivist forms of religious attraction and commitment.

With several families, including the Franciscos and the DeSilvas who were Buddhist, with the Oodugamas and the Sathyagnagnyans who were Born-again Christian, and the Weeraratnas the Thomases who were a mix of Buddhist and Christian, (and a few other families whose names I will not mention to maintain anonymity), I read newspapers, watched televised sermons, and absorbed the gossip about religious leaders and other public figures. The controversies about the death of the Buddhist monk, and the alleged Christian culprit who was believed to have killed

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24 My thought on moral striving is partially informed by the work of Naveeda Khan (2012) and Veena Das (2010). The work of Omri Elisha (2010) on Moral Ambition is also helpful in thinking about moral striving in terms of born-again Christianity.
him (Chapter One), was told to me in public whispers, by friends and new acquaintances. These Buddhist interlocutors told me how the monk, and other significant figures, such as the monk who I discuss in Chapter Four, had helped them deepen their commitment, and fortify their efforts to find the high road within their religious tradition. Among these Buddhist and Christian friends, I learned about which religious and public figures inspired them, and of whom they were “fans,” and who they reviled. Buddhist revivalist monks—especially two monks featured in Chapters One and Four who acquired a lot of “fans” through their sermons that compellingly counseled lay Buddhists to strive for the *summum bonum* spiritual task of *nibbana*, by insisting that it was within their reach.

In a village near to Devinuwara (Dondra) the southernmost tip of the island, I spent long days between a few Buddhist and Christian families. I observed how a cantankerous and aged Christian woman, when asked, had handed over a share of

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25 Here I follow Justin McDaniel (2011), who characterizes the way Thai Buddhist monks develop a popular following, as fandom. Whereas many of the most highly influential monks in Sri Lanka focus on encourage lay people to strive for *nibbana*, McDaniel emphasizes the popularity of Thai monks who are considered to have magical powers accessed through amulets (also Tambiah 1984).

26 Gombrich (1971), Obeyesekere and Gombrich (1988) discuss the manifestations of “Protestant Buddhism” as entailing, in part, new emphasis among lay Buddhists on the *nibbana* (Pali for *nirvana*), the *summum bonum* goal of Buddhist soteriology. Ordinarily, lay people are considered to embody a karmic position that is less advanced advanced than Buddhist monks, and thus, Buddhist laity require many, many lifetimes to attain of *nibbana*. Thus, traditionally, Sinhala Buddhist laity pursued *laukika* (this-worldly, samsaric) goals by beseeching the various deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon, rather than pursue the *lokkatara* (other-worldly-nibbanic) spiritual goal. Holt (1991) also discusses this ultimacy of the nibbanic spiritual task in comparison to the samsaric one, but rejects the notion of protestantization. Spiro classified it as a distinction between the “nibbanic” and “samsaric.”
money to the Buddhist temple, while contemptuously muttering to me about the obligations of being a big woman (lokku nona) of the village. I saw how small a Christian church was newly built up, and observed the deep commitments, as well as the lightly held ones of those who joined and then defected from a church. I noticed how, a Christian woman, Dhanika, was forthcoming with how she managed to remain Christian in spite of the fact that her husband was Buddhist. He was quite accepting of her Christianity, though all of their sons were mainly being raised Buddhist. Some of her neighbors were less accepting, I had already known from interviews with other women who had become annoyed by her evangelizing. But they peaceably ignored her efforts to tell them the “Good News” (Subha Aranchiya) because they remembered when twenty years prior, one of the village monks had led an attack on the Pentecostal prayer meeting in the neighborhood, at which Dhanika had been present.

Dhanika had since made peace with that monk, in large part by ensuring that dāna was sent to the temple on behalf of her family, according to the village-wide rota of almmsgivings. This compromise is all the more noteworthy given the ways in which perceptions of inter-religious enmity have become rather entrenched within Sri Lanka’s political center of Colombo. We will see that heavy-duty work of religio-

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27 A pseudonym
political wills tends to be necessary to ease the tensions that, for a time, seemed to have become ossified on an identitarian basis. In spite of the intensifying orientation to anti-pluralistic forms of religious commitment propelled by the centripetal forces entailed within both Sinhala Buddhist populism and Sri Lankan Christian evangelism, in the spirit of William James, I hope that readers will glimpse the great breadth of the forms of religious experience in Sri Lanka.²⁸

²⁸ I gesture to James’s work on Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), and A Pluralistic Universe (1909). With the notion of centripetal forces existing in a polyphony of voices, I gesture to Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of multiplicity of discourses dialogically at work in the novel.
“Fraudulent” Christians amidst Sinhala Buddhist Skeptics: A Recent Formation within the Politics of Nationalist Perception

News that a well-loved and highly revered Sri Lankan Buddhist monk had died suddenly at age 55 arrived to Colombo from St. Petersburg, Russia on December 12, 2003. The death of Gangodawila Soma Thera, a monk who had soared in popularity among Sinhala Buddhists throughout Sri Lanka since he returned from a mission to Australia in 1996, was considered to be untimely, and the cause, suspect. In the days that followed the news, the circumstances leading to the “mysterious death” (abhirahas apawath kīma) of the beloved monk were closely scrutinized by Colombo-based Sinhala Buddhists. Soma Thera’s supporters attempted to piece together fragments of evidence that suggested how and why the monk had been led to Russia. Prominent Sinhala Buddhist monks and lay activists who were close to the monk quickly proclaimed that his demise was evidently the result of the sinister machinations of Christiyani muladharma wardheyeng, or “Christian fundamentalists,” who had invited him to receive an honorary degree in Russia, allegedly on false pretenses. Rumors of conspiracy generated by the monk’s inner circle circulated in the Sinhala language news media, and the Buddhists of Sri Lanka became widely convinced by the allegation that the

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29 Berkowitz 2008a.
monk’s demise resulted from the treacherous work of Christian detractors (Degalle 2004, Uyangoda 2007, Berkwitz 2008b).

Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalist-protectionists used the tragedy of Soma Thera death’s to stand as a warning to Sinhala people about the malevolence of Christians, and took the alleged Christian culprit’s conversion, and its moral and economic entailments, to be emblematic of that malevolence. As I argue in this chapter, the alleged culprit’s conversion stands to epitomize for Sri Lankan populists how it is that conversion to Christianity becomes rendered as an insidious socialization process that initiates Sri Lankans into practices that are capable of transforming otherwise innocent (ahinsakay) Sri Lankans into duplicitous and even anti-national subjects. Indeed, populist conspiracy allegations speak to broader anxieties about what sort of socialities Christian forms of life are imagined to entail. I discuss the linkages between the businessman’s religious affinities and his economic interests, which Sinhala Buddhist nationalists interpret as having been instrumental in leading the Sinhala businessman towards malevolent inclinations.

Sinhala Buddhist populists widely alleged that it was a well-known national icon named Lalith Kotelawala, a Colombo-based Sinhala Christian business mogul, who had conspired against the monk. Kotelawala had converted to Christianity from Buddhism
in the 1970s, at a time during which his company faced government regulations
introduced in an effort to nationalize the economy. Given that Kotelawala was a public
figure at the helm of Sri Lanka’s largest and most successful corporation, the story of
his conversion is well known in Sri Lanka. He often publically credited his adopted faith
for his business acumen, as well as his philanthropic spirit. To understand the
entailments of religious conversion in Sri Lanka, and Kotelawala’s conversion in
particular, I historicize the trends of politically and economically expedient
conversions during the eras of colonialism and decolonization. In doing so, I detail how
the lines of Buddhist-Christian enmity have been drawn along points of political-
economic and religious convergence. Illuminating the story of Kotelawala’s conversion,
I argue that the politics of religious conversion in Sri Lanka points not only to the many
ways in which capitalism and Christianity continue to be “imbricated” (drawing on
Weber (1930), and following Connolly (2008)) in the Sri Lankan postcolony. But it is also
indicative of how these alignments of religion and the political economy appear to
Sinhala Buddhist populists, and how these aspects of political economic concern are
central to these inter-religious conflicts.\footnote{Perhaps precisely because the workings of these convergences, and the operations of power are opaque (Mitchell 2010).} It is particularly striking that the idea of
economic villainy, or “fraudulence,” is instantiated by populist renderings of
Kotelawala’s conversion narrative, and that the concern about Christian fraudulence is also crystallized within the discourses of anti-conversion activism.\(^3\)

Buddhist-Christian antagonisms in contemporary Sri Lanka are crystallized in the story of the virtuous Buddhist monk, and Sri Lankan businessman who allegedly plotted his death after relinquishing his commitment to Buddhism. The narrative is indicative of what Sinhala Buddhist nationalists perceive conversion to Christianity to do to the character of Sri Lankans. Pace Gil Anidjar (2005), I argue that the story of Lalith Kotelawala, as told from the perspective of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, is a tale of “economic enmity.” Whereas Anidjar focused on the entailments of the “economic theology” characteristic of medieval Christianity that was then wedded to mercantile capitalism of “the wandering Jews” of Europe (also Sombart, Weber, and Simmel), I concentrate on the enduring linkages between capitalism, Christianity, and party political affiliations, in post-Independence Sri Lanka. The insinuations about the alleged Christian culprit reveal much about the politics of nationalist perceptions as it pertains to Christianity, and how mutual Buddhist-Christian enmity is reinforced in this milieu. This story of the alleged culprit, I suggest, helps us to better understand why Sri Lankan populist activists remain emphatic that to affirm nativist religious

\(^3\) The concern about conversion “by fraudulent means” is articulated in legislation passed in several Indian states. The Sri Lankan anti-conversion bills drew this language from that Indian legislation (Schonthal (2012), Mahadev (2013)).
commitment is crucial for countering evangelical mechanisms for extending Christian influence.

**Soma Thera and the Legislation against Christian “Fraudulence”**

Soma Thera’s life and death has been significant in the reanimation of a new wave of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka at the turn of the millennium for a number of reasons outlined by scholars of Sri Lankan Buddhism (Degalle 2004, Uyangoda 2007, Berkwitz 2008a&b). The monk can be seen as one in a long line of Sinhala Buddhist revivalists who emerged with the rise of nationalism.³² Soma Thera’s revivalist discourses promulgated the idea that threats to Sinhala Buddhists that their culture was being besieged by a number of “foreign” influences posed by Tamils’ Hinduism, and also by Islam, and Christianity in Sri Lanka (Berkwitz 2008, Uyangoda 2007). Uyangoda (2007) has described how Soma Thera’s sermons often stood to warn Sinhala Buddhists how their economic interests were being threatened by “the cunning and manipulation” of Hindu and Muslim business owners (2007:169).

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³²Scholars of Sri Lankan religious history, particularly Malalgoda (1978) and Obeyesekere and Gombrich (1988), have illustrated how the trends of Theravada Buddhist revivalism and reform in Sri Lanka arose in reaction to the growth of Christianity during the period of European colonialism. Continuing with this revivalist trend, Soma Thera’s discourses condemn lay Buddhist practices of worshiping “Hindu” gods Berkwitz (2008).
Soma Thera was especially well known for warning Buddhist laity to stay attuned to the foreboding encroachment of “fundamentalist Christianity” into Sri Lanka (Berkwitz 2008: 96, Uyangoda 2007). Uyangoda notes that Soma Thera warned that by 2025 Buddhists would become a demographic minority in Sri Lanka if they did not resolutely work to revive, promote and protect their religion against the expansionary agendas of Christian fundamentalists (2007: 169). The timing of these anxieties, which developed roughly around the turn of the new millennium, coincided with what evangelists refer to as “pre-millennial tensions,” wherein Born-again Christians intensified their efforts to evangelize in areas yet “untouched” by Christianity.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) Soma Thera also had a public debate with the Muslim politician, inciting tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities as well. See also Berkwitz, and Uyangoda.

\(^{34}\) Kay, 2000.
Spurred on by Soma Thera’s death, politicized contingents of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists were quick to seize upon the public’s mourning and sense of outrage, using it as an opportunity to lobby for legislative measures to curb proselytism and Christianization in Sri Lanka.\(^{35}\) By the time of Soma Thera’s death in December 2003, discourses about “unethical conversions” had been circulating in Sri Lanka for several years, with Soma Thera being one of its central proponents. But with his passing, a small but vociferous set of Sinhala Buddhist monks formed a new political party, the

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Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party), which campaigned for seats in Sri Lankan Parliament, on the platform that they would lobby to pass a bill to ban “unethical conversions” (Degalle 2004, Uyangoda 2007, Berkowitz 2008a). These monks were at first backed by a number of lay Buddhist organizations as well as other monastic groups. The *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (hereafter, “the JHU”) was elected to Parliament for a short term in 2004, on these promises to criminalize Christian proselytism.\(^{36}\) For the first time in Sri Lanka’s history, robed Buddhist monks formally entered party politics at the parliamentary level.\(^{37}\) “Christian fundamentalists” (*Christiyani muladharma wardheyo*) were cast as culprits involved in tempting conversions among Buddhists, and who demand that newcomers to Christianity “smash ‘idols’” of the Lord Buddha, and use various other means to denigrate Buddhism.\(^{38}\)

The JHU introduced the *Prohibition of Unethical Conversions Bill* to Sri Lanka’s Parliament in 2004, building upon and borrowing language from legislation passed in

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\(^{36}\) This engagement of Buddhist monks in party politics at the Parliamentary level is unprecedented. This is remarkable because as Spencer (2007) has shown, political engagement is not considered befitting for the station of a monk, since monks are prototypically exalted as “world-renouncers” (Tambiah 1976; Spencer 1990: 197). Though indeed, Spencer and others have discussed circumstances which have provoked Buddhist nationalist monks in Sri Lanka to run for election in the past, the populous has refrained from voting them in until this incident. However, popular support for the JHU was quickly waned because the monks began engaging in acts of violence. The JHU was soon viewed as an extremist group.

\(^{37}\) As I have shown elsewhere, populists cast evangelicals and especially Pentecostals as “Christian fundamentalists” (*Christiyani muladharma wardheyo*). There are considered to be denigrating Buddhism by demanding newcomers to Christianity “smash ‘idols’” of the Lord Buddha (Mahadev 2013; also *The Religious Conversion Debate* 2005-6). Considering the case of Singapore see DeBernardi’s (2007, 2008) discussion of iconoclasm as part of bridge-burning rituals and Spiritual Warfare.
The draft legislation charged Christians of converting non-Christians using “force, allurement, and other fraudulent means” (emphasis mine). \(^\text{40}\)

Many Buddhist protectionists were emphatic that passing the bill would preserve the conditions of possibility for religious freedom in Sri Lanka, and particularly so that innocents could be free of impositions of Christian proselytizers. \(^\text{41}\) By 2009 however, two different iterations of the bill had been unsuccessful on the grounds that ratifying such laws would limit religious freedoms for minorities which are guaranteed in the Sri Lankan Constitution (Schonthal 2012). Nevertheless, the language of “fraudulence” and “unethical conversions” which is crystallized in the draft legislation has retained its significance, and has had a profound afterlife among Sri Lankan Buddhists who are alarmed and decidedly vigilant against the expansionary ambitions of evangelical Christians. The fact that the concept of “fraud” inscribed in the proposed legislative bill connotes a type of deceitfulness that is an expressly economic crime is highly significant. In what follows, I will delineate why it is that concerns about the fraudulence of Christians, resonates so deeply with Sinhala Buddhist populists.

\(^{39}\) See Schonthal (2012) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between the Sri Lankan draft and Indian state legislations. Also Mahadev (2013).

\(^{40}\) See also Owens, Matthews, Hresko

\(^{41}\) See also Mahadev 2013. Menon (2003) shows how discourses on the conversion of “innocents” by “trickster” proselytizers are common in Hindu nationalist politics in India.
In Colombo, populist activists express constant skepticism of the motivations of Christians. They are emphatic that proselytizers are given to using “unethical means” to secure religious patronage and conversions among Buddhist laity. The concern about Christian “fraudulence” buttresses some of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists’ most cynical contentions against Christians in Sri Lanka today. For the Sinhala Buddhist populists who feel the need to be especially vigilant against of evangelical Christian expansionism, the language militating against the “fraudulent means” of persuading conversions, I suggest, also shares a resonance with the view that Christian converts evince the potential to themselves develop a “fraudulent” character, much as, I will demonstrate, Kotelawala appeared to have.

**Capitalism, Christianity, and Party Politics, Since Colonialism and Decolonization**

What conversion to Christianity has stood to mean for Sinhala Buddhist populists in Sri Lanka can be illuminated by the analogical linkages between party politics, economic orientation, and religious affiliation in Sri Lanka. Considering what Mick Moore (1997) has called the “ethnicity of capital” in Sri Lanka, brings into focus how, since decolonization, political, economic, and religious affinities have been stereotypically linked together in practice, as well as in popular Sri Lankan perception.
First, I consider the alignments between political, economic, and religious orientations in Sri Lanka, to prepare the ground for analysis in a subsequent section. Kotelawala’s biographical narrative is one of a Buddhist who became a Christian, and in turn was drawn in populist renderings as a quintessential figure of economic and religious enmity in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Religious conversion in Sri Lanka has long been associated with political and economic pragmatism. During the British colonial era, a growing Ceylonese elite—both Sinhala and Tamil—were educated in the English language, and had converted to Christianity. It was members of this Anglicized elite who were enabled by skill and cultural capital to enter the ranks as civil servants under the colonial regime. However, in the lead up to decolonization, “return” conversions to Buddhism were practically required of the political class. The vast majority of Sinhalese political elite of Ceylon converted from Christianity “back” to Theravāda Buddhism, so as to accommodate the rising tide of nationalist, and specifically, populist sentiment. A growing class of Ceylonese nationalists, consisting largely of Sinhala Buddhist populists, but also Tamil Hindu leaders, had begun to agitate against Anglicization in

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42 Jayawardena (2000)
43 Ibid.
the late British colonial period.\textsuperscript{45} The Ceylonese political elite converted from Christianity to Buddhism in anticipation of universal franchise and the democratization of electoral politics after Independence.\textsuperscript{46} Power was officially ceded to Ceylon and the country was granted independence in 1948 while Britain was relinquishing its control over India and preparing for World War II. Unlike India however, Ceylon remained under the auspices of the British Crown, retaining Dominion status until 1972 when it finally became a republic in the Commonwealth, and newly adopted the name of Sri Lanka.

Those converts among the elite “Anglicized” Sinhalese who had converted from Christianity to Buddhism for pragmatic reasons of politics were pejoratively referred to as “Donoughmore Buddhists.” The nickname came from the interim constitution crafted by the British in the 1920s which had not made any provisions for minority representation in the government on the flawed premise that Sri Lanka had no history of communal conflict (DeSilva 1981, Ashton 1999).\textsuperscript{47} The first three Prime Ministers who came to power after Independence, all from United National Party (UNP), were

\textsuperscript{45} Obeyesekere & Gombrich (1988); Jayawardena (2000)
\textsuperscript{46} As historians of Sri Lanka have noted, although there was a significant rise in nationalist sentiment among both Sinhalese and Tamils in the lead up to Ceylon’s independence, unlike in India, there was little actual agitation for self-rule (KM DeSilva 1981, Ashton 1999, Schonthal 2012). Nationalist sentiment was channeled against the Anglicized and Christianized Sinhala and Tamil elite who had risen to prominence in the colonial era and who dominated the Ceylonese economic and political sphere, rather than against colonial rule itself.
\textsuperscript{47} KM De Silva (1981: 436); Ashton (1999: 456).
converts from Christianity to Buddhism, but Ceylonese populists viewed these UNP politicians to be maintaining the status quo via a political-economic system inherited from the British. While under the Dominion of the Crown in that initial decade after Independence, the UNP leadership continued policies of economic liberalization, and retained ties to the British with the aim of sustaining Ceylon in the global economy.

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist majority regarded the UNP political elite as maintaining the privileges of “Anglicized” personhood, which were unfavorable to ordinary Sinhala Buddhist citizens and counter to nationalist ideals. Some populist adversaries of the UNP derided these leaders as crypto-Christians—much as they tend to do today.

With the sweeping victory of SWRD Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) over the UNP, in 1956, a nationalism that was populist prevailed in the Ceylonese political arena. Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike had been a chief interpreter for the British colonial regime and an Anglican Christian since his birth and through much of his career. But with the wave of nationalist populism that emerged,

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48 These UNP leaders did make efforts to appeal to Sinhala Buddhist concerns of protecting Buddhism, but these were viewed as merely compensatory (Ashton (1999)).
50 Nationalists came to resent elites’ cultural capital and the exclusionary potentialities of the English language Thiru Kandiah (1984) discusses how the English language was referred to in Sinhala as the katuwa, or “the sword,” for the capacities enabled by those who wield it to cut one’s political and economic opponents. Also Rajasingham-Senanayake (1997: 15-19), and DeVotta (2004).
51 See also Manor (1989)
Bandaranaike converted to Buddhism, and thus, Bandaranaike too was a “Donoughmore Buddhist.” However, rather than engaging only nominally with Buddhism as had his UNP predecessors, he was elected to the Premiership on a commitment to restore the Sinhala Buddhist heritage of the island. Once elected, his newly policies privileged the monastic community (Seneviratne 1999), and introduced the “Sinhala-only Act” to promote Sinhala language (DeVotta 2004). His economic reforms sought to support the working class that did began to alter the character of the political economic system introduced by the British. Bandaranaike and subsequent SLFP leaders have moved Ceylon towards a center-left economic model. Moreover, Bandaranaike was also a central contributor to the Non-Aligned Movement. Thus, with this postcolonial period of nationalization under the SLFP, various minority communities—including Christians, Tamils, and the European and Anglicized contingents of elite Sri Lankan society—were stripped of certain institutional privileges that had been afforded to them during the colonial-era.

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52 Manor (1979, 1989)
53 Manor (1989) details how SWRDB wore austere vestments, indicating the piety of a lay Buddhist.
55 De Silva (1979), Stirrat (1992). The “Sinhala only” Act which made Sinhala the sole national language, with English as an official language, but excluded for a time the Tamil language. The Sinhala-only Act served to alienate Tamil-speaking minorities from Sinhala-speaking people, since Tamil was not initially recognized as an official language. Sinhala-only agenda was to enable Sinhalese people to easily enter the civil service to supersede Tamils’ over-representation in the colonial-era civil service. However, within a couple of years, Tamil was also given similar status. But much damage had been done to inter-ethnic relations as a result of the disparities and the political discourses. This linguistic nationalism has greatly
As Stirrat (1992) has shown with the case of Catholics, with populist predominance over Ceylon beginning in the decade after Independence, Christianity, and certain other identitarian features of Anglicized or Europeanized personhood, rendered these contingents of citizenry as “denationalized” subjects of Ceylon. Ironically, since the Sinhala-only Act promoted Sinhala language and culture by disallowing Sinhalese people from studying in the English medium it had the effect of further exacerbating Sinhalese people’s sense of disadvantage in the global economy.  

As historians have emphasized, the significance of Bandaranaike and his SLFP’s victory for the furtherance of populist nationalism cannot be underestimated—although it has been argued that the implementation of his ideals fueled ethnic chauvinism only inadvertently.

Ever since this early post-Independence era, Ceylonese and Sri Lankan politics have been dominated by these two major political parties—the UNP and the SLFP—which represented a political bifurcation along economic and religious lines: the UNP is generally viewed to be pro-Christian, globally oriented, and supportive of economic

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58 Manor 1989, Schonthal (2012). The SLFP’s populist orientation was often dragged further towards the side of majoritarianism by its more stridently nationalistic coalition partners—often far more so than party leaders themselves were inclined. Bandaranaike eventually became reluctant to abide by the demands of extreme nationalists. He was ultimately assassinated by a Buddhist monk.
liberalism and pursued opportunities to secure foreign aid (Shastri 2004, Bastian 2007).

On the other hand, SLFP is considered to be “with the people,” on leftist premises of promoting local economic growth and supporting the nation, mainly insofar as it is defined by populists (Spencer 1990, Moore 1997). These stereotypes perdure within party-political affiliations, however much history has added layers to contradict the correlates between political, economic and religious persuasions in Sri Lanka which constitute the UNP-SLFP polarity. As we will see, these stereotypes provide the animus for the sense of enmity between Buddhists and Christians as it plays out in Sri Lanka’s political domain even today.

Beyond the formative periods of decolonization and post-Independence takeover by the Anglicized economic elite represented by the UNP (1948-1956) and the populist and socialistic political orientation of the SLFP (1956-1959), two other moments in Sri Lanka’s history extended and punctuated these analogical links

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59 The point must not be over-generalized, because patronage-based party-switching is very common (see Moore, Stirrat). [The Sri Lankan system inherited a Westminster Parliamentary system wherein these two dominant parties form coalitions with various smaller parties which represent minority interests. Later on, an Executive Presidency was appended to the parliamentary system was, so today, the Sri Lankan system entails a combination of parliamentary and presidential structures.] Moreover, in contrast to the bipolarity of the UNP and SLFP political-economic and religious configurations, as Amita Shastri (2004) has shown, the UNP leader JR Jayawardena also promoted open markets and garnered much foreign aid support, his regime facilitated ethnic scapegoating. In contrast when CBK (SWRD Bandaranaike’s daughter) came to power in the 1990s on the SLFP ticket, she was compelled by global economic forces to shift her policies from center-left to center-right, promoting the idea of economic globalization “with a human face”; moreover she did much to try to quell ethnic tensions and end the war with the LTTE through political negotiations—much to the chagrin of populists who believed them to be irredeemable ‘terrorists’ (Shastri 2004).
between ethno-religious identity and political-economic persuasions. The first period, the economic nationalization enacted by the SLFP in the 1960s through much of the 1970s, (initiated by PM Sirimavo Bandaranaike, SWRD Bandaranaike’s widow) extended SWRD Bandaranaike’s populist politics on the principle of promoting the socio-political interests of ordinary, especially agrarian, Sinhalese, and upon socialistic grounds of advancing local industries (Spencer 1990, Brow 1996, Moore 1997). The SLFP government borrowed heavily to subsidize the new industrial growth, imposing high tariffs on imports and placing quotas on exports, thereby closing the island’s economic doors (Rajapatirana, 1988). Nationalization (1960s-1977) involved the subsidizing of public sector industries and was detrimental to large private corporations, like the insurance corporation operated by the Kotelawala family. Recall that this period is important to the life-history of Kotelawala, since it was then that he converted to Christianity, against the grain of the postcolonial political elite. It was precisely while facing the governmental controls on big business that Kotelawala converted Christianity, and he ultimately credited his Christian faith helping him overcome financial hardships imposed by these SLFP regulations. The significance of the political and economic entailments of Kotelawala’s conversion to Christianity, in the context of growing ethno-religious nationalism, I argue, point to linkages between economic and
religious identity politics, and the intensification of religious and economic
polarization along party lines.

After a period of SLFP-rule, the UNP regained power in 1977 and reversed the
period of nationalization by introducing economic liberalization, opening doors for
trade and foreign aid (Moore 1997, Bastian 2007). Scholars have shown how this period
in which the economy was opened and privatized after a period of closure exacerbated
inter-ethnic tensions by giving rise to Sinhalese resentment against minority
communities. Gunasinghe has shown that, among other changes, Sinhalese businesses
were newly being deprived of concessions they had received during the period of
economic nationalization (1986 (2004): 101). The economic shift precipitated inter-
ethnic violence in the early 1980s, and ultimately gave rise to a vicious ethnic-based
war of Tamil insurgency and Sinhala counter-insurgency (Gunasinghe 1986, Woost and
Winslow 2004).60 The open economy “has been associated with a decline in trust, a rise
in ethnic conflict, and an increase in opportunism in Sri Lanka,” Woost and Winslow
write.61 They summarize that,

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60 Gunasinghe shows that with the new economy various “regulative mechanisms were dismantled, and
quota systems, permits and licenses were abolished,” industries were privatized—and particularly public
sector industries were relinquished to the private sector (101). The anti-Tamil riots of 1983 is the event
regarded by scholars, Tamil activists, as well as humanitarian observers as the pivotal incident that
fomented the LTTE’s separatist ambitions, which generated the ugly insurgency and counter-insurgency

... it is precisely the transition since 1977 from a relatively ‘closed’ economy to one encouraging diversification through foreign investment and international trade, that not only helped to bring the civil war about... but has also helped to sustain it. Freer trade made it easier for both the government and the LTTE to manipulate the international webs of humanitarian and development aid to consolidate power, to receive funds from Sri Lankans resident abroad (Portenous 2000), and to procure weapons and other necessities for waging war... Economic liberalization seems to have provided both some of the motivation and some of the means for the civil war, although we don’t want to downplay the role of a growing culture of violence (Daniel 1996). (Winslow and Woost, 2004: 13)

Bastian (2007) points out that the economic liberalization of 1977 was extended and intensified by broader global trends. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, he reminds us, there was an imperative attached to foreign aid agendas that involved enabling economic development and the growth of markets through securitization, promoting an especially neoliberal model of peace, security, and development (2007:iii; see also Kelly et al 2010).

Winslow and Woost (2004) characterize the thesis that it was economic contingencies which fomented Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka as a “post-ethnicity argument,” suggesting that “an explanation of origins no longer serves as an explanation of persistence. This is because, over time, war produces a new social formation, one that is grounded in an economy that includes war and violence as part
of the reality in relation to which people are fashioning their lives” (8). The authors are careful not to diminish the importance of the past, as they say, “the past does matter, not in the sense of unchanging animosities between essentialized groups that are acted out in the present but because past social positioning and cultural constructions set up contemporary potentials” (17).

This post-ethnicity argument is consonant with Moore’s (1997) observation that the populist polity of post-Independence Ceylon furthered socialist principles of economic closure to protect the constitutive “core.” Moore shows how the livelihoods of the dominant caste—the Sinhala Buddhist Goiyagama landowners, who were alienated from structures of a capitalist economy—became central to the ethos of populism in Sri Lanka. Moore describes an “onion”-like arrangement which placed the British the furthest from the populist agrarian center, followed by Indian traders who were in a slim minority, Muslim traders, Sri Lankan Tamils, the Karava (lower caste than Goiyagama, but who became upwardly mobile through arrack and the trade of other commodities. The Karava had by and large converted to Catholicism, which enabled them to surpass Goiyagama status). In other words, Moore shows how those

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62 Similarly, Scott, Abeyeskere, Berkowitz, emphasize focus on contingency and particularity, rather than the effects of mytho-historical entrenchment of conflict in the longue-duree (Scott).
63 Moore 1997.
who were most alien to the Sinhala Buddhist populist center were those who had the
greatest access to capital. Moore argues that from the 1940s to the 1970s “the ethnicity
of capital” had animated nationalist political discourses (344; see also Spencer 1990),
wherein various minority communities were cast as antagonists in the story of Sri
Lankan populism. Recall that we have seen that Soma Thera himself emphasized in the
mid-1990s that Sinhalese Buddhist economic interests were being threatened by Tamil
and Muslim business interests (Uyangoda, 2007: 169). Moore argued however that the
ethnicity and caste entailments of capitalism waned in significance by the 1990s when
he was writing, as a result of a “partial rapprochement between political and business
elites” (1997: 344; also Sashtri, 2004). I suggest here that the story of Lalith Kotelawala
and the allegations of his involvement in Soma Thera’s death, considered from a
populist perspective, points to the reconfiguration of the lines of enmity in Sri Lanka.
That is to say, although there may have been a rapprochement in the 1990s, there has
been a resurgence of populist perceptions as they relate to the persuasions of global
capital and foreign aid. I would only suggest that at this time, it appears that these
persuasions hinge less upon distinctions of ethnicity and caste, and increasingly on the
basis of religious affiliation.
Considering the multiplicity of causal arguments that scholars have made in line with the “post-ethnicity argument” that attributes the persistence of ethnic conflict to ways in which ordinary Sri Lankans are differentially subject to the vagaries of the local and global economy, Woost, writing in 2004, aptly suggested that, should the ethnic war subside or even end, the contradictions that spawned it, although historically transformed by war and other global shifts, will still remain. The calm of peace after war’s end may only be a moment of shock, a gasp of relief, before conflict articulates itself around some new, unexpected principles of identity and interests (2004: 98).

Now that the war has finally ended in 2009, we are seeing precisely what Woost had anticipated: the rearticulation and intensification of nationalist anxieties and antipathies, expressed in economic terms, and particularly oriented towards religious minority groups which are growing (or at least are perceived to be, in the case of Sri Lankan Muslims) and threatening to Sinhala Buddhist predominance.

Sri Lanka’s populists attribute the growth of the Christian minority specifically to “foreign-funding,” of new churches. They perceive the new churches, like the “foreign-funded NGOs” in Sri Lanka, to be equipped with all of the accoutrements of Christian charitable capital. Charity is likewise situated within populist discourses as a successful mechanism for attracting disadvantaged and vulnerable people of Sri Lanka.

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65 Goonetilake (2007).
to Christianity. The enduring entwinements of capitalism and Christianity are resurgent forces that provide fodder to fuel populist anxiety. Indeed, the post-disaster, post-war, and post-humanitarian context of Sri Lanka, I contend, has created a new set of potentials, and revised identitarian-based anxieties which Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists feel compelled to address.

Turning now to the conspiracy allegations against Kotelawala, I discuss how Sinhala Buddhists associate the businessman’s fall into fraudulent disgrace with his conversion to Christianity. Following the death of Soma Thera, Sinhala Buddhist anti-conversion activists retrospectively read Kotelwala’s conversion narrative as signifying how his adoption of Christianity in the 1970s was pivotal in his transformation into a figure who acquired inclinations to attempt to destroy Buddhism, and who also ultimately came to harbor anti-national and practically seditious sentiments. I suggest that for Sinhala Buddhist nationalists who are increasingly anxious about the new wave of evangelical Christianity, Kotelawala’s “fallen” character came to stand as the archetypical upshot of Christian conversion: the narrative of the “fraudulent” Christian businessman epitomizes perceptions about the dangerous effects on the character of a person who turns to Christianity in the struggle to cope with a modernizing economy.66

66 Several scholars, including Stirrat (1992), suggest that conversion to Christianity has grown substantially precisely for this reason. Robbins (2007) describes a desire for salvational alterities that, for people who live in marginal regions, the good life is imagine as existing elsewhere.
Buddhist Virtuosity and Christian “Fraudulence”

How did a Sri Lankan Christian businessman come to be widely construed as a murderer and a fraudulent disgrace? Just prior to Soma Thera’s funeral, posters scripted in the Sinhala language appeared in public spaces in Colombo, alleging that Kotelawala, the executive director of Ceylinco, Sri Lanka’s largest private corporation, was involved in the monk’s death. Editorials and news stories alleging Kotelawala’s culpability circulated in the Sinhala press for many months afterwards. Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourses often generalized the allegation as against “Christian fundamentalists” (Christiyani muladharma wardheyo). Yet, it was Kotelawala who was implicated in the untimely death of Soma Thera because, as rumor had it, it was he who sponsored the monk’s trip to Russia. He was believed to have concocted a plan to lure the monk away from Sri Lanka with the offer of an honorary degree of dubious merit from a university in St. Petersburg. Soma Thera’s Russian trip was said to have been arranged by an accomplice of Kotelawala’s, another Christian, whose brother surreptitiously gained employment as the newspaper editor for the Janavijaya Foundation, the organization commissioned with “the propagation and revival of

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69 Berkwitz (2008)
Buddhism” through Buddhist social service works. The rumors had it that this accomplice—Reverend Shanthi Jayasekera—was posing as a Buddhist to carry out the plot to humiliate and harm Soma Thera. Jayasekera was said to have arranged for the travel and the honorary degree ceremony, while Kotelawala was rumored to have paid for all of the expenses.

In the initial allegations, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists contended that Soma Thera’s murder was premeditated. Various lay and clerical organizations demanded that the Sri Lankan Government, under President Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike, investigate the death of Soma Thera. When the autopsy reports from the Sri Lankan Government Commission came back with indications that Soma Thera had died of natural causes, anti-conversion activists offered a slew of justifications in an effort to corroborate the guilt of Christians. Soma Thera’s supporters insisted that the Government investigators falsified the autopsy report so as to prevent communal disturbances. In different variations on the story, different degrees of culpability were imputed to the culprit and his accomplice: At the very most the allegations accused the culprits of premeditated murder. At the very least, the invitation to Russia

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70 The Janavijaya Foundation is linked to the Bhikku Training Center, discussed above.
72 www.lankaweb.com/news/items03/170203-1.html
73 http://www.sundaytimes.lk/051023/n32w/3.html
74 http://www.asiantribune.com/node/14650
was assumed to have been intended to humiliate Venerable Soma Thera—a conclusion they arrived at since it appeared impossible that any legitimate Russian academic institution could have had genuine intentions to bestow an honorary degree upon a monk whose works had all been written in Sinhala (Berkwitz 2008).  

Berkwitz cites an editorial (Weerapperuma 2005) in a Sri Lankan English government paper wherein the editorialist asserts that the conspiracy was at first merely intended to “embarrass” the monk by presenting him with an honorary degree from a Christian university, and that when Soma Thera suddenly suffered a heart attack the organizers secondarily conspired to delay in providing him with medical attention (Berkwitz (2008a) pp 208).
Given that the expansion of evangelical Christianity appeared to be occurring at the expense of the Buddhist predominance over Sri Lanka, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists easily concluded that the powerful Buddhist revivalists like Venerable Soma Thera attracted the jealous attention of Christians. What exactly was so compelling about the story of Christian conspiracy against Soma Thera that it gave momentum to Sinhala Buddhist nationalist imperatives to lobby for a ban against practices of proselytism which were seen as leading to Buddhist apostasy and Christian conversion through unethical means?

The Biography of the Convert: Hail Deshamanaya Lalith, Full of Grace

Lalith Kotelawala was born and raised a Buddhist, and had remained a Buddhist as a young adult. Kotewala’s ancestors were somewhat unique in having maintained their commitments to Buddhism, unlike many of the bourgeois Sinhala families that rose to prominence in Ceylon under British colonial rule. Although his ancestors had taken Anglicized names, one had even been knighted, and were steadily with the UNP,

76 Contributing to my point about postcolonial capitalist enterprise and party politics: the company was in fact handed over to the Kotelawala family (to Senator Justin Kotelawala, Lalith Kotelawala’s father) when one of the founders, Cyril Perera, a UNP supporter, fell into trouble with the SLFP ruling party for objecting to SWRD Bandaranayake’s “Sinhala-only Act” in the 1950s. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceylinco_Consolidated. Accessed June 19, 2012.
the male line of the Kotelawala family had remained Buddhist through and through.\textsuperscript{77}  
The family had been active in the Buddhist revival and reform movement in the 1920s through 1960s.\textsuperscript{78} Kotelawala’s grandfather had served in the ranks of the Ceylonese police and military, and his uncle served as the third Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. The Kotelawala family was one of the Sinhalese families that were seen as having been instrumental in the making of the independent Sri Lankan nation.\textsuperscript{79}  
The young Lalith Kotelawala fell in love with and married a Sinhalese woman from a wealthy Anglican Christian family, and their happy marriage was touted as a testament to the positive relations between Buddhists and Christians in postcolonial Ceylon.\textsuperscript{80}  
After his father’s death in 1973, Lalith Kotelawala became heir to Ceylon Insurance Company—Ceylinco—in a time of crisis for large businesses in the postcolony.\textsuperscript{81} In the decade prior to Kotelawala’s leadership over the company, the government had nationalized private corporate holdings (in 1961), and by the 1970s the effect upon the insurance industry was being severely felt. When the young Lalith Kotelawala inherited the company during a time of heavy financial pressure that had

\textsuperscript{77} Kotelawala’s grandmother, Alice Attygalle, converted to Christianity after his grandfather, John Kotelawala, committed suicide.  
\textsuperscript{78} Edirasinghe.  http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~lkawgw/gen3003.htm  
\textsuperscript{80} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, pp 14.
“broken and disillusioned” his own father, he felt certain Ceylinco would fail under the strict government regulations.\textsuperscript{82} He was said to have become deeply anxious as a result of all of his inherited responsibilities.\textsuperscript{83} According to his biographer, Kotelawala’s brother-in-law recognized the young businessman’s duress, and insisted that he seek spiritual help to overcome the obstacle.\textsuperscript{84} The brother-in-law introduced Kotelawala to a Catholic priest in the Sri Lanka village of Kudagama. Kudagama was, at the time, a major site for Catholic pilgrimage (also attended at times by Sinhala Buddhists), which was run by Catholic priest made famous by his abilities to deliver people from demonic spirits (Stirrat 1992). The priest, Father Camillus Jayamanne, exorcised and vanquished demonic influences from the lives of supplicants, and was known to have the capacity to unblock any impeded channels to a person’s capacities for spiritual and worldly success. Incidentally, Jayamanne is a figure well known to anthropologists, thanks to Stirrat’s 1992 ethnography on Sinhala Catholic religiosity (a work I will return to in some detail later in Chapter Three).

\textsuperscript{82}The insurance companies were nationalized in 1961. Perera (2001), his biographer suggests that Justin Kotelawala (Lalith’s father) was an opponent of the nationalization, and struggled under it as the head of the company. She writes: “Justin Kotelawala died in 1973 in London, where he had gone to, after the nationalization, a broken, disillusioned and sad man, branded a profit making capitalist whereas he was an indigenous pioneering business man who and place a solid foundation stone for free enterprise in the not yet politically independent Ceylon” (14). See also http://lmd.lk/archives/2006/December/public.htm, December 2006.
\textsuperscript{83} Perera 2001
\textsuperscript{84} ibid
Lalith Kotelawala managed achieve astonishing financial success despite the difficulties his company faced during the period of nationalization. He ultimately expanded the company, turning it into the most successful set of capitalist enterprises in the country. In a 2006 interview with a Sri Lankan business journal, Kotelawala reflected that at this time of nationalization under the socialist SLFP government of the 1970s, with a statement that was editorialized as follows:

... “We [Ceylinco Insurance] had no money to pay a host of claims. I had hundreds of people at my doorstep asking for their money – accusing, threatening and scolding me. It was probably the darkest time of my life,” he remembers. A trip to and blessing in the miraculous precincts of Kudagama was a turning point, he testifies. “It was then that I saw Jesus; and even though I was a Buddhist, I know I was saved by him. Even now, whenever I have wanted funds for my charitable ventures, for instance – or had problems – I have felt his presence,” Kotelawala says. He has also defied the government many a time, especially when he felt injustice being meted out. His first such act of defiance was when he dismantled and relocated an entire printing press that was to be taken over due to nationalisation policies, at a time when businesses were nationalised by merely posting a notice on a tree.85

The turning point for Kotelawala, as widely extolled through his biographies that have circulated among the Sri Lankan public, was his conversion at Kudagama. With Father Jayamanne’s blessings and the experience of deliverance, Kotelawala believed he had been divinely enabled to navigate Ceylinco through the turbulent waters of a

nationalizing economy. Having survived the trying times, Kotelawala converted to Christianity, becoming one of the faith-healing Father's primary patrons.\(^8^6\)

Consequently, in time, Kotelawala expanded the company, building it into the most successful company in all of independent Sri Lanka. The conglomerate eventually came to consist of more than 300 companies.\(^8^7\) Having made the Ceylinco conglomerate into a fiscal powerhouse that greatly benefited the Sri Lankan economy, Lalith Kotelawala was celebrated as the pride of Sri Lanka, and he was revered for his business acumen. In 1994 the Sri Lankan Government bestowed Kotelawala with one of the

\(^{86}\) The Father was Father Camillus Jayamanne, the focus of anthropologist R.L. Stirrat’s study of folk Catholic practices in Sri Lanka in his book *Power and Religiosity in a Postcolonial Setting* (1992). Father Jayamanne was a popular healer among Sinhalese Catholics and to some extent non-Catholics, through the 1970s-90s. In Chapter 3, I discuss this form of Catholic deliverance, in greater detail.

country’s highest civilian honors, conferring him with the title of “Deshamanaya,”
which distinguished him as a “National Treasure.”

An Epiphany and a Turn to Philanthropy

Another moment of Kotelawala’s biography as a Christian convert occurred in 1996. Kotelawala was among those who were severely affected by the 1996 bombing of the Central Bank—a horrific act of violence that had generally been acknowledged as the work of an LTTE suicide bomber. Fifty people were killed in the act of terrorism. Kotelawala was one among the 1,500 people who were badly injured: he lost an eye in the fallout. During the period of his convalescence he was said to have had an angelic vision—an epiphany—which is often described in popular lore as Kotelawala’s second

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conversion. In his own account, it was this experience, and the epiphany that ensued from the suffering, that had inspired him to do philanthropic work, and to invest in microfinance, using his own personal financial wealth.89

By and large Sri Lankans expressed admiration for Kotelawala’s financial achievements and his altruistic spirit. However, Kotelawala’s pursuits as a capitalist and philanthropist produced equally many detractors—particularly after the death of Soma Thera in 2003. Convinced of Kotelawala’s Christian variety of villainy, Sinhala Buddhists came to conceive of his turn to philanthropic work as harboring the ulterior motive of attracting Buddhists and other non-Christians to Christianity. The formation of these perceptions about Kotelawala’s extra-altruistic motives coincided with broader accusations that Christian evangelists are in the practice of unethically using charity as

89 http://lmd.lk/archives/2006/December/ben2.htm. This story is within the popular lore about Kotelawala’s life. Also, Perera, Sreema. Pp65
an instrument to attract converts from among poor and vulnerable segments of the Sri Lankan population (a subject I elaborate in Chapter Two).

Apropos of the stereotyping of religious orientation and political affiliation which I discussed above, these stories of his philanthropic turn further consolidated populist perceptions of Kotelawala’s elite brand of Christian ‘villainy.’ His economic character has analogically followed the party political lines of the UNP, a party which had persistently attended to the negotiated peace initiatives demanded by the international aid community. Kotelawala, as a Christian, made his support of the UNP public in the lead up to the 2005 Presidential election, and he in turn gained even more adversaries among the populist-leaning SLPF. At that time, Kotelawala and the then-Archbishop of Colombo Diocese (Catholic) Oswald Gomis publicly entreated Christians to vote against Mahinda Rajapaksa, who at the time had been campaigning for presidential office on the SLFP ticket. He did so under the auspices of *The Society for Love and Understanding*, an organization which Kotelawala had founded as a business-based lobby to encourage the Sri Lankan government to ease back on the counter-insurgency.⁹⁰ Kotelawala sponsored full-page political statement in Sri Lankan

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⁹⁰ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1511600.stm. In contradiction of the stereotype of the SLFP as populist to the point of being exclusionary, the SLFP-led government under Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike was as moderate. The SLFP-led coalition government, the People’s Alliance, was relatively amenable to peace talks with the LTTE. (See also Shastri 2004, Moore 1997.)
newspapers, with images of Kotelawala and the Catholic Archbishop, flanking text that beseeched that “Christians Awake!” attached to a warning to Sri Lanka’s Christian minority that if Rajapaksa were to be elected, he would allow chauvinism and radicalism to flourish.\textsuperscript{91} The statement was a sharp censure against Rajapaksa, and an implicit endorsement of the opposition candidate, the UNP’s Ranil Wickremesinghe (who was then the Prime Minister under President Kumaratunga). Kotelawala, along with Archbishop Gomis, extended their investment in lobbying for a peaceful resolution to the ethnic conflict with Tamils, by addressing Catholics and Christians of Sri Lanka to whom they believed could most effectively make an appeal. Sri Lanka’s political history had given these two public figures reason to believe that that SLFP candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa’s populist stance would also impinge not only upon the rights of ethnic minorities, but also of religious minorities. Specifically, the campaign intimated that Rajapaksa, if elected, would allow Sinhala Buddhist activists to advance their anti-conversion legislation. As per the premonitions of Kotelawala and Archbishop Gomis, Rajapaksa has indeed pursued an unstinting military battle against

\textsuperscript{91} Two editorials published in Sri Lankan newspapers in November 2009 commented upon the then-Archbishop Oswald Gomis’s position, and condemned Lalith Kotelawala’s business-based initiative called “the Society for Love and Understanding,” detail these media events. Both articles were written by Catholic commentators who strongly opposed the former Archbishop’s efforts to influence the impending election, and were published in papers run by government-owned corporations. (The Daily News and the Sunday Observer are both published by Lake House Publications). http://www.dailynews.lk/2005/11/09/news30.htm; http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2005/11/13/fea23.html
the Tamil insurgents, which ultimately put a violent end to the war (in 2009), as he had promised his populist base during his election campaign. As I detail later on in Chapter Three however, the upshot of Rajapaksa’s election for Sri Lanka’s Christians has been far more complex than either of the two Catholic leaders surmised. Kotelawala’s campaign against the SLFP candidate added to Sinhala Buddhist convictions that the businessman leader was an adversary of Sinhala Buddhists, and that he was inclined to use party politics to conspire against populist efforts to protect the nation.

Up until 2005 when President Kumaratunga (SLFP) had been in power, Kotelawala used his Society for Love and Understanding to encourage the President’s bipartisan efforts to negotiate with the LTTE, to resume peace talks, and to enable a devolution of political power to the provinces that would give the secessionists a reason to put down their arms and return to the Sri Lankan fold. But in 2006, Kotelawala shocked Sinhala nationalists when he described his diplomatic manifesto to

92 Kotelawala incorporated these lobbying efforts undertaken by the business community under an organization which he called The Society for Love and Understanding. In 1999, when the Sinhala majority parties—including the ruling party, the People’s Alliance (partially constituted by the SLFP), and the UNP opposition—were at loggerheads over whether to approve President Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike’s initiative to engage in peace talks with the LTTE. The UNP opposition party voted the proposal down. Though Kotelawala usually voted for the UNP, he was disappointed in the UNP decision to oppose Bandaranaike’s efforts, so tried to get the two parties to agree to a bi-partisan effort to negotiate a peace accord with the LTTE. The initiative, called “the Business Forum,” would entail that Kotelawala himself would meet the rebel leader, to bring the proposal to him directly. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/420519.stm and http://lmd.lk/archives/2006/December/ben2.htm, and Human Rights Watch World Report, 2002, pp 256. The proposal had been favored by the President Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike, and was originally put forth by a Tamil Minister of Parliament, Neelan Tiruchevalum. Tiruchevalum was assassinated by the LTTE for being a traitor to the Tamil secessionist cause.
GulfNews (an English daily based out of Dubai). When questioned regarding the possibilities for peace in Sri Lanka, Kotelawala answered that the LTTE should put down their arms and relinquish their control over the Tamil people. Yet, at the same time, Kotelawala was recorded as having said:

In all fairness, the LTTE has been pushed into doing it [i.e. into taking up arms]. They have done great service to their people and you can't brand them as pure terrorists as they are genuine freedom fighters. They must realise that the best opportunity to work things out is through a system of self-governance. That is the structure that needs to be discussed. ...The current policy of the government is a hit-back policy and that is an Israeli policy. I don't think it's right. Mahatma Gandhi said that the eye-for-an-eye, a-tooth-for-a-tooth policy makes the world blind and toothless. And it will only keep escalating. We can't ask (the LTTE) to disarm in order to sit down and talk while we hold onto our arms. Things must be left as they are and we must talk about devolution, federal state or autonomy.  

Kotelawala emphasized that a negotiated peace between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE would be good for Sri Lanka’s economic growth. After the Cold War international development agencies insisted upon the twin initiatives of economic market development and the promotion of peace and stability, with an eye towards promoting neoliberal agendas in the “developing” world (Duffield 2001, Bastian 2007, Kelly et al 2010). Bastian argues that it was with this post-Cold War develop affected Sri

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Lanka along partisan lines. From the perspective of the staunch SLFP-supporting Sinhala nationalists who were adamantly against negotiation with the rebel group, Kotelawala and his UNP political orientation was seen as being inclined to acquiesce to “terrorist demands.”

Commenting on Kotelawala’s statement, Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Defense issued this response to the article, condemning Kotelawala on their website:

... a person who is being philanthropic but spends ten times more of his philanthropic budget to get public attention may be alleviating some deep mental agony rather than enjoying the philanthropy itself. Further, the people who support a terrorist organization by way of humanitarian activists may be finding their way to express their violent motives or hatred to the society stems from some mental disorder. Mr. Kotelawela who claims to be a morally superior being, a compassionate and forgiving Christian has a moral responsibility to express his views honesty and openly without distorting the facts. Any ordinary person who reads the article, which has been given a wide publicity through the Internet, will not be able to get the correct picture of the LTTE and most dangerously, will be left with a totally distorted picture of Buddhism.

Because of the perversely violent political tactics undertaken by the LTTE secessionists within the Sri Lankan public sphere, and because of Sinhala Buddhists’ inclinations to roundly vilify the rebels as the ultimate enemy of the Sri Lankan state, Kotelawala, with

95 (Bastian 2007, also Duffied 2001).
96 Kotelawala was certainly not the first Sri Lankan to consider negotiations; but all who had had been sharply criticized by the most vociferous Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalist activists—both Buddhist monks and laypeople who were engaged in anti-LTTE activism—on the grounds that Sri Lanka is a “Sinhala Buddhist country” (see also Tambiah 1992, Spencer 2010).
his sympathetic religious inclinations, became even further mired in controversy. The representatives of the Sri Lankan state, and populist activists in general, condemned the Christian entrepreneur’s putative anti-nationalist inclinations: piled on top of allegations that the businessman-cum-philanthropist had been connected to the 2004 death of Soma Thera, Kotelawala’s 2006 statement rendered him to be inordinately and unwarrantedly sympathetic to the Tamil secessionists in the eyes of Sinhala Buddhist populists. Such expression of “sympathy” for the LTTE, was seen as evidence that further incriminated Kotelawala as an anti-nationalist. 

The visionary moment Kotelawala experienced during his recovery from the 1996 Central Bank bombing brought on what he described as a second conversion that deepened his commitment to Christianity. In his account, his epiphany not only inspired his charitable ethic, but as also impelling him to become exceptionally forgiving. However, in the populist imaginary of Kotelawala’s Christian moral trajectory, his philanthropic spirit, and forgiving Christian nature, was rendered not as

98 In earlier stages, CBK attempted to hold peace talks with the LTTE, and she had gained many enemies in the process. While previously Kotelawala had been supportive of CBK’s willingness to negotiate with the LTTE, he now criticized her efforts in terms of the distribution of tsunami aid money: “When I visited the regions after the tsunami, I learnt that the people were fed up with the war. They wanted freedom for their children to go to school in peace, without the fear of conscription into the cadres. The tsunami tragedy was a perfect opportunity for the government to talk peace. I was appalled at the way the aid was handled. The world responded with great compassion but the government, under Chandrika Kumaratunga, would not give it to the LTTE. We could have clinched peace at that time, especially because the north-east was the worst off.” Gulf News, Weekend Review. November 9, 2006 http://gulfnews.com/about-gulf-news/al-nisr-portfolio/weekend-review/articles/business-with-philanthropy-1.39768
virtuous: his charitable endeavors were cast as efforts to “bribe” poor Sri Lankans into converting to Christianity, and his forgiving view of the LTTE “terrorists” caused him to imprudently think that the militants could be engaged diplomatically. Yet, the businessman’s forgiving Christian nature was rendered not only as foolhardy. Within the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist imaginary, Kotelawala’s conversion to Christianity was understood as having initiated the businessman into immorality, an anti-national ethos, and into Christian imperatives to destroy Buddhism. In this politics of populist perception, resolute Sinhala Buddhist nationalists interpreted Lalith Kotelawala’s political inclinations, like his misguided charitable spirit, as malignant attributes of his adopted religion.

**Karmic Just Desserts**

The rumors of the malevolent character of the Christian business mogul and philanthropist have had an interesting afterlife which exceeds the original scandal. The tabled legislation to ban “unethical conversions” was deemed unconstitutional and thus failed in early 2009, leaving Sinhala Buddhists who were incensed that Kotelawala was getting away with the murder of Soma Thera feeling unrequited in their demands for justice. However, in June 2009 new events implicating Kotelawala in financial fraud
led Sinhala Buddhist nationalists to believe that karmic justice was on their side.

Independently of all of the prior accusations against Kotelawala, one of the many businesses under Ceylinco Consolidated fell into disrepute. The 2008 global financial crisis destabilized the system of global high finance, and Sri Lanka began to feel this destabilization. In response, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka was prompted to newly enforce capital requirements, and to investigate corporations which appeared to have been skirting the requirements. Having offered remarkably attractive rates of return, thousands of Sri Lankans had invested their savings in Ceylinco’s Golden Key Credit Card Company. But the Central Bank’s investigation revealed mismanagement and corporate dishonesty in the Ceylinco subsidiary. The investment fund was revealed as a “scam,” akin to a ponzi scheme.99 The Central Bank charged Ceylinco with having maintained insufficient capital to support the Golden Key Company. When evidence of this scheme was revealed by the Central Bank, investors ran to retrieve their finances and a liquidity crisis within the company ensued. In turn, Kotelawala was accused of defrauding Sri Lankan investors. Seylan Bank, another subsidiary within the Ceylinco group, “divested stakes to settle depositors of the Golden Key Credit Card Company,”

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and in turn, it too faced a liquidity crisis. The state-owned Bank of Ceylon was ultimately put in charge of bailing out the bank.

In his defense, Kotelawala claimed that he had not had direct oversight over the Golden Key Credit Card Company and was unaware of the malfeasance, being that it was a branch of Ceylinco operations that was outside of his immediate jurisdiction. He pleaded ignorance of the investment scheme which appeared to have intentionally defrauded Sri Lankan investors of 26 billion Sri Lankan Rupees—roughly equivalent to 230 million US dollars. However, his defense was considered insufficient and the Sri Lankan authorities apprehended and imprisoned him. Kotelawala was indicted in July 2011. His wife, who had fled the country, was said to have greedily taken some of the riches with her to her exile. She was portrayed as a selfish hoarder. Interpol finally appréhended Cecil Kotelawala in England, in March 2012.

For the many Sinhala Buddhists who were convinced and embittered that Lalith Kotelawala was the Christian who plotted and had gotten away with the murder of their Soma Thera, the new round of accusations against his fraudulent character felt like poetic justice. Several of my Sinhala Buddhist interlocutors expressed great

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101 Ibid.
102 http://english.srilankamirror.com/2012/03/interpol-traces-cecile-kotelawala-to-england-address/
satisfaction at the thought that there was some vindication for the untimely loss of Soma Thera. The rhetoric of one Sinhala Buddhist blogger exemplifies the type of comparative theodicy that was invoked to explain Kotelawala’s moral failure:

Let us sincerely hope that Dr. Kotelawala, even though he no longer believes in The Buddha word, [that he at least still believes that] there is a thing called “Ditta Dhamma Vedaneeya Karma” (retribution within this life) unlike in Christianity where a mere “confession” can cancel all one’s misdeeds. Even as did Jesus Christ express loudly on the Crucifix “Eli, Eli, Lema, Sabachthani?” – “My God! My God! Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?” These words may be ringing in the ears of Dr. Kotelawela as well. Let us be merciful and hope that his drama will be resolved quickly—personal credibility and reputation is another issue altogether (blogger’s translation).103

For the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists who routinely accuse Christians of preying upon vulnerable people and of being attracted to false and fleeting economic advantages, Kotelawala’s disgrace was a public validation of their suspicions. This was karmic retribution.

Global Flows of Christian Influence, Conversion, and Stranger-Socialities

The perception about the anti-national orientation of Sri Lanka’s Christians, I suggest, bears a relation to George Simmel’s concept of stranger-sociality. There is wide-spread suspicion among Sinhala Buddhists that the subjectivities and political

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sensibilities of Sri Lankan Christians bear malignant potentialities. Christianity has arrived to Sri Lanka from beyond the bounds of the country’s littoral contours, and it appears to Sinhala Buddhists that Christianity inappropriately inducts foreign values among Sri Lankan people. The itinerant Simmelian “stranger” who chooses to lay down roots, embodies a “synthesis of nearness and distance.”¹⁰⁴ I would suggest that so too is “nearness and distance” perceived to be characteristic of Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Tamil converts to Christianity. However, this sociality emerges not as a result of strangers who enter from the outside. Rather, it is through a process that Sri Lankan populists understand as estrangement—that is, through conversion. Simmel suggests, that subjectivity of a stranger—a subjectivity that involves being simultaneously inside, and outside of the dominant social milieu—imbues the stranger with the “attitude of ‘objectivity.’”

I would suggest that it is precisely this attitude of supposed objectivity, evident in Kotelawala’s ambivalent and “forgiving” stance towards the LTTE insurgents, which Sinhala Buddhist nationalists have found objectionable: because Kotelawala does not condemn the militant-secessionists as “terrorists,” but instead stands in “sympathetic” relation to (militant) Tamil nationalism, Kotelawala’s apparent neutrality was figured

¹⁰⁴ Simmel (1950).
as antithetical to the Sinhala Buddhist ethos of the nation. There of course has been a
very ugly history of systemic violence undertaken both by Tamils and Sinhalese in the
names of their nationalisms. But in the current context wherein Sinhalese nationalists
endemically ascribed to the notion that LTTE villainy is irrevocable, Kotelawala’s
expression of Christian “forgiveness” and refusal to definitively side with the Sinhalese
Buddhist cause, is rendered as practically seditious. Indeed, Sinhala Buddhist
nationalists view his loyalty to the nation as having been denuded through his
conversion to Christianity. His ‘Christian’ objectivity was in fact seen to resemble the
disapproving stance taken by the secular international community at the end of the
war. For Sinhala Buddhists the war ended as a victory and the liberation of Tamils. The
liberal humanitarian ambivalence (a supposedly “Christian” ambivalence) over the war
was, for its purveyors, an objectively drawn condemnation of both the vanquished LTTE
which had terrorized civilians and conscripted child soldiers, as well as of the
Sinhalese-majority Government forces which proceeded with the offensive reportedly
without distinguishing between combatants and civilians.\textsuperscript{105} The criticism of the latter
was put forth more forcefully of course because, as these international humanitarian
entities averred, the LTTE was no longer in existence to be held accountable for their

\textsuperscript{105} Bastian (2007), suggests that this condemnation of militancy and sympathy towards both sides was a
condition of international foreign aid.
war crimes. The Sri Lankan Government’s military offensive appeared to the international community as ethnic cleansing that took place under the guise of counter-insurgency.

While Sinhalese Buddhists vigorously celebrated the 2009 military defeat of the Tamil insurgents, and extolled the win as having served to “liberate” Tamil citizens from the LTTE’s reign of terror, rowdy celebrants ordered Christian organizations in Sri Lanka to foist the national flag or else be implicated in anti-nationalism and thus face the consequences of harassment. In short, Sri Lankan Christians, and the international humanitarian activists and NGOs who criticized Sri Lankan majoritarian counter-insurgency practices, may both be seen as embodying Simmelian objectivity of the quintessential strangers who are neither here nor there in terms of either Tamil or Sinhala nationalisms. However, from the vantage point of Sinhala Buddhist populists, these ambivalences, and anxieties for future majority-minority relations expressed by Sri Lankan Christians, by international humanitarian actors, Tamil nationalists, and moderate Sinhalese, categorically damn them as bearers of anti-national political inclinations.
Observers of the “developing world” tend to assume that Christianity in the postcolony is growing only among the poor. However, the story of Lalith Kotelawala, the business mogul and philanthropist, gestures to how prosperity and poverty are linked within Christianity in postcolonial Sri Lanka, and how economic, political and religious affinities combine within Sinhala Buddhist nationalist perceptions.

Kotelawala’s conversion to Christianity is exemplary of this phenomenon insofar as Buddhists retrospectively interpreted his conversion and his supposed involvement in Soma Thera’s death to be reflective of a set of hostilities that are typical, in greater or lesser quantities, among Christians in general. Indeed, the story of Kotelawala’s financial success (believed to be enabled through deliverance from demons in a Catholic variety of charismatic conviction) is akin to Christian “Prosperity Gospels” which have enlivened Christian piety in various locales throughout the world (Meyer, Coleman 2000, Robbins 2004). These economic components of Christianity have especially lent to Sinhala Buddhist nationalist tendencies to claim that Christianity shallowly plays to consumers of religion.

This identitarian political enmity in Sri Lanka is associated with the economics of transnational Christian missionary arrival and the recent evangelical Christian
revival. In the very different historical context of medieval Europe, Christians’
economic relations with Jewish merchants became entrenched as anti-Semitism.

European Christians found themselves in economic competition with Jews (Sombart
1913 (2004)), and as a result rendered Jews as an “economic enemy,” epitomized by
Shakespeare’s Shylock (Anidjar 2005). Relating to this, Gil Anidjar suggests that at the
foundations of Christianity there is an economic theology, involving the
transubstantiation of blood and the liquefaction of value (2005: 50). Anidjar pinpoints
the significance of Salarino’s response to Shylock’s lament that his daughter, Jessica, his
“own flesh and blood,” had disavowed him by eloping with a Christian; Salarino says to
Shylock, “There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and rhenish” (Anidjar’s
emphasis). Anidjar’s focus on that key phrase—more between your bloods—indicates that
the problem transcends economics; religion also stands between them (498). In such a
milieu, religious and economic entailments of being determine the nature of blood,
rather than the other way around. Jessica’s rebellious conversion from Judaism to
Christianity, from the perspective of the young Christian merchants of Venice,
inaugurates her into a superior sociality and morality that breaks her bonds of flesh
and blood with her father.\textsuperscript{106} As Andijar suggests, conversion to Christianity in this Venetian life-world had a fundamentally deracinating effect, one that penetrates as far as the nature of being.\textsuperscript{107}

My diversion towards a discussion of Christian-Jewish enmity in Europe is not intended to equate the historical persecution of Jews to what evangelical Christians experience as persecution (however much the contemporary global evangelical movement may like to insist there is such an equivalence (pace Castelli 2005, Moss 2013)). For indeed, given that the Sri Lankan elite inherited vestiges of British infrastructures, the type of capital historically leveraged by them cannot be classified as the so-called pariah capitalism by which Weber characterized the social and political disprivilege and economic distinctiveness of European Jews.\textsuperscript{108} Rather, my point is to

\begin{itemize}
\item Anidjar builds upon the Marxian equivalence between religion and economics, and emphasizes that “Jesus himself had, after all, uniquely located economics, and more precisely, money, at the center of his political theology, distinguishing between God and Cesar on the face of a silver coin” (498). For Anidjar, this economic theology is foundational in Christianity. It is also replicated in the rituals of religion and economics. Anidjar compares Eucharistic transubstantiation and the transvaluation, which Marxian observes involves the transformation of use value into currency, to discuss the analogous processes of coagulation and liquefaction entailed in Catholic liturgy and the capitalist economy. It is Catholic mercantile expansionism that relied upon “wanderings of the Jews” who served as moneylenders (Sombart: 1951[1913]: p13, Simmel 1950, Anidjar 2005). Even before the dawn of European modernity, Jews came to be considered impure by blood, condemned as usurers and irredeemable sinners.\textsuperscript{107}
\item Anidjar writes: “Blood became, as it were, the liquid ground upon which would be drawn drastic and radical distinctions between bloods. Non-Christians, for their part, became the carriers of impurity, hostile persecutors and defilers of Christian blood. It should therefore come as no surprise that this period that witnessed an exponential rise of anxiety surrounding Christ’s very blood—a blood that was flowing and overflowing in chalices of Europe as well as on the walls of its churches and out of the eyes of its saints statues and other bleeding relics, a blood after which women mystics were vocally hankering, and surrounding Christian blood at large, was the same period that saw the finalized invention of the economic enemy. In both cases, the figure of this double anxiety—blood and money—was, of course, the Jew” (502).\textsuperscript{108}
\end{itemize}

\textit{Economy and Society, 493.}
generally shed light on how inter-religious enmity in these cases follows patterns of these communities’ relations to the economy, and how religion and political economy are constitutive of being. Anijdar points to how the difference between Christians and Jews is a difference “between bloods”—a difference that became racialized within discourses that equivocated between of the purity of blood and the righteous use of money. In contrast, I have shown how the Sinhalese convert to Christianity is considered to become estranged from righteous and in-born nationalist sentiment, and the accoutrements of Christianity and capitalism—the financial success, charitability, and charisma in the sense of divine grace promised by prosperity gospels—gesture to the economic modalities of Christian distinction and its attendant processes of estrangement.

In the Sri Lankan context however, religious and political subjectivity is not quite as deeply racially intoned as in Renaissance Europe. In Sri Lanka, rather than Christian conversion and Buddhist apostasy involving an alteration of blood, I would suggest that, from the vantage point of Sinhala Buddhists, conversion and apostasy can be best understood through the culturally-built ideas of being and selfhood which are prevalent within the concept of karma. The widely used Sri Lankan expression that conversion presents a transgression against “the religion of one’s birth” (janmeyen laebu

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Buddhagama aththalaha), I suggest, is linked to the Buddhistic conviction that one’s life conditions are karmically inherited. This is implicit in the rhetoric of one Sinhala Buddhist critic of Christianity—a lay Buddhist revivalist of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress—who wrote in the 1940s that, “Any attempt to make a full blooded Sinhalese the follower of any other religion other than his ancestral faith [i.e. Buddhism] would be like grafting something alien to the stem of an old oak” (cf Stirrat 1992:21). In Sri Lanka, conversion and apostasy does not deracinate per se, but it is seen as upsetting the cosmically-given karmic inheritance of the Sinhala Buddhist person. The sense that conversion reconstitutes being appears in early colonial era discourses against Christian conversion.

Indeed, in addition to the identity politics of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the ideologies that sustain it, it seems to me that there is a latent concern about what radically altering one’s life’s conditions by one’s own volition may do to the social and cosmological order. Thus, I would suggest that implicit within the perspectives wrought within Buddhist conceptions of selfhood, wherein one’s ontological status is cumulatively made through one’s past actions (karma) over the cycles of death and

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109 Stirrat culled this commentary of a Sinhala Buddhist activist named Malalsekera (a member of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress), from Catholic Messenger (8 March 1940) a newsletter printed by the Roman Catholic Church of Ceylon.
rebirth (*samsara*), that to be born as a Christian is quite a different thing than renouncing one’s religion to become one.\(^{110}\)

**The Economics of Villainy**

We have seen that Lalith Kotelawala, who converted from Buddhism to Christianity, found financial success, acquired wealth, and who used that wealth for charitable purposes typically regarded by populists as duplicitously orienting others towards a “foreign” religion that begets immoral dispositions. Kotelawala has indeed acquired almost mythic status that is resonant with broader discourses against unethical conversions. For believing Christians however, it was not a foreign and estranged God that enables Grace. Rather, Kotelawala’s deliverance from demons, acquisition of blessings and capacities to tap into the Gospel of Prosperity, were signs of God’s presence. Such Prosperity Gospels are part and parcel of what Jean and John Comaroff have called “millennial capitalism” (2001). In the “millennial age,” the Comaroffs argue that the economic relation between missions and nations of the

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\(^{110}\) One Buddhist friend of mine suggested to me that this is the case for conversions that run in the other direction as well. She commented on SWRD Bandaranaike’s many mistakes during his Presidency—particularly the mistake of allowing Buddhist monks free access to university education, which she pointed out, engendered the tendency of Sinhala Buddhists laymen to take up robes for pragmatic reasons, and then disrobe upon receipt of their university degree. This friend said to me, “my father had always said (about Bandaranaike) that anyone who had been *born* a Buddhist would not have made that kind of mistake.” It seemed to me that they perceived that the well-intentioned act of a man who had converted from Christianity “back” to Buddhism, was prone to karmic misfire.
“global South” opens up the accusation that “the affluent North (is) siphoning off the essence of poorer ‘others’ by mysterious means for nefarious ends” (21). The Christo-centric calendrical temporality, promising to arrive at its end in the near-future, lends to discernments over one’s own, and others,’ conditions of possibility for salvation or damnation (Guyer 2007). The Comaroffs argue that such born-again Christian millennial movements are endemic to neoliberal globalization. Under the rubric of millennial capitalism, the Comaroffs observe an odd coupling(s), the binary complementarity, of the legalistic with the libertarian; constitutionality with deregulation; hyperrationalization with the exuberant speed of innovative occult practices and money magic, pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels; the enchantments, that is, of a decidedly neoliberal economy whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh specters in their wake (ibid, 2; emphasis theirs).

Tracking cases in post-Communist countries, as well as in Africa, they suggest that “the line between Ponzi schemes and evangelical prosperity gospels is very thin indeed” (22). In a similar vein, Shipley discusses how, in the course of Ghana’s neoliberal turn, pastoral fakery and parody that exists at the margins of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, challenges economic and divine “potencies” and mocks the promise of prosperity.

111 D. Premawardhana (2013), and also N. Roberts (2012), importantly critique the instrumentality of conversion that can be imputed into the idea of such a line of argumentation.

112 In bringing together the legalistic and theistic, the Comaroffs are not far from making the point that Carl Schmitt famously made in his essays on political theology, in which he finds an analogy between the exception made by the sovereign lawmaker who grants a pardon, and the miracle enacted by an omnipotent (and Christian) God. Schmitt, pp__.
gospels (2009: 529). Under hostile circumstances, fakery and deceit open up the conditions of possibility not only for the authority of the individual pastor to be undermined—for some, the validity the religious creed as a whole may be diminished, especially in the context of stark inter-religious rivalries such as those evident in Sri Lanka’s present milieu. The Comaroff’s suggest that what millennial varieties of Christianity offer—(like Ponzi-scheme capitalism—is the allure “of accruing wealth from nothing” (22). While nothing is not what Lalith Kotelawala had at the time of his conversion, the miracle of prosperity enabled by the graceful blessing of a Catholic priest known for his extraordinary abilities to vanquish demons and unclog channels of worldly success, allowed for smooth sailing the in turbulent waters of a highly regulated national economy.\footnote{113 The Comaroffs’ skepticism towards such spiritual engagements in religiosity is evident, with religion appearing as epiphenomena of the the political economy. For a critique of the Comaroffs’ skeptical inclinations, see D. Premawardhana (2012), “Transformational Tithing… ” in Nova Religioso.}

The narrative that connects economic virtue and enmity to the perceptions of Kotelawala’s rise and fall is a narrative that expresses double-sidedness: there is an “odd coupling(s), the binary complementarity” of “millennial capitalism,” of prosperity gospels and ponzi schemes, and thus, also virtue and villainy. Such dualities are perhaps endemic to supernatural power.\footnote{114 Siegel (2006).} After all, success is often just as easily
 construed as the workings of grace as they are seen to be the work of the sorcerer’s magic. In a similar vein, while Kotelawala’s objectivity allowed him to proclaim that “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom-fighter,” for Kotelawala’s critics, the lines that rendered him as a moral exemplar and generous philanthropist were redrawn so as to underscore how his conversion to Christianity had led him down a path towards fraudulent anti-nationalism.

Commemorating Soma Thera and the Imperative of Curbing Christian Conversions

To this day, lay and monastic Buddhist supporters of Soma Thera allege that “Christian fundamentalists are killing Sri Lankan Buddhist monks,” and remain emphatic that Buddhism ought to be protected by preventing the advancement of Christianity in Sri Lanka. Each December since the death of Soma Thera in 2003,

115 Gescheire, Siegel, Stirrat.
116 Typically, the Gospel of Prosperity, also known as the “Health and Wealth Gospel,” is associated with charismatic neo-Pentecostalism. Simon Coleman suggests that this movement is associated with the Faith Movement (a.k.a. Faith Formula, Prosperity, or Word Movement) spearheaded by Kenneth Hagin in the 1960s (2000: 27-29, cf. D. Hollinger 1991:59). Hagin “shifted from older styles of Pentecostal practice (indeed he was forced out of the Assemblies of God) into less legalistic, separatistic expressions of faith” (Coleman (29), drawing from Hollinger). In other words, there was a shift within the Pentecostal piety movement from austerity and asceticism towards one that emphasized prosperity. In Catholic faith-healing, and deliverance practices in which Kotelawala had involved himself, prosperity was engendered in a very different way than in Prosperity Gospel Pentecostalism. As Stirrat (1992) has described, the Sri Lanka Catholic priest, Father Camillus Jayamanne, is a “surrogate sufferer” who carries the burden of supplicants’ sin (118). In Christic fashion, Jayamanne—who himself would shoulder a heavy cross through the various stations of the Way of the Cross built on the grounds of his shrine—suffered in ways viewed by devotees as “a sacrifice for the sins of mankind” (118).
117 Here is one such series that propagates the allegation: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcXdQhV-Tck
traditional death-anniversary rites and memorialization of the Buddhist monk are conducted at the Bhikku Training Center, based in Maharagama (southeastern Colombo), Sri Lanka. The Center is a non-governmental monastic educational institution founded by Soma Thera’s primary monastic teacher. On this 8th death anniversary of Soma Thera in 2010, I sat with a friend in the crowded Maharagama monastery and temple. A lay Buddhist orator dressed in white appeared at the front of the hall, backed by a set of seated Bhikkus, all of whom were involved with Soma Thera’s Janavijaya Foundation, donned orange and mahogany robes. Behind them were two separate murals picturing Venerable Soma Thera, and his guru and founder of the Bhikkhu Training Center, Venerable Pannhiyasiiha Thero.
The lay Buddhist orator took the microphone to eulogize Soma Thera, in front of the hall full of lay Buddhist dhayako (patrons), dressed entirely in white. The orator commemorated Soma Thera’s legacy with an ardent expression of why Sinhala Buddhists need to vindicate his death by putting a stop to unethical conversions to Christianity. His impassioned plea detailed the many ways in which Christians are working to destroy Buddhism. He gave specific testimony of how a Sinhala Buddhist girl approached the parish priest of a local Catholic church in hopes that he would help her secure employment in Italy. As the dhayaka explained to those of us gathered there for the memorial service, the Catholic Father had agreed to help the Buddhist girl, but only on the condition of her conversion. We learned that the girl accepted the lucrative job offer in Italy in exchange for her adoption of Catholicism. Dramatically pacing in front of the assembly hall, the orator continued to explain that upon the girl’s return to Sri Lanka from Italy she possessed a clothing garment which dishonored the Lord Buddha. He knew this, he explained, because the girl had confessed all of this to the Sri Lankan police, after she had been assaulted by some neighbors who found the garment in her possession and consequently turned her in to the authorities. With dramatic pause, the lay orator pulled the offending garment out of his bag. In his clenched fist, he raised the black garment above his head, and unfurled the material to reveal a pair
of yoga pants embossed with golden images of the Lord Buddha. Shaking the garment overhead he exclaimed, “Balanna!” (look!), emphasizing to us how conversion to Christianity has been leading Sinhalese people to turn their backs on Buddhism, and to desecrate the image of Lord Buddha. At this memorial service held just one year after the *Prohibition of Unethical Conversions Bill* had been deemed unconstitutional, this lay Buddhist orator, backed by the monks of Maharagama who remained politically animated over the issue, called to the lay devotees that there was a need to renew the efforts to curb unethical conversions in the name of Venerable Soma Thera.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen from this view of the political center in Colombo, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists expressed a troubled sense that conversion to Christianity initiates Sri Lankan citizens into a set of anti-national sentiments and activities—or at least has the potential to do so. By and large, Sinhala Buddhists remain convinced that the virtuous Sinhala Buddhist monk had been killed by a Christian as part of a broader conspiracy to destroy Buddhism. The anxiety about what conversion does, and the sense that new conversions are being elicited unethically, proliferated because of its transmission through Sinhala-language media, and rumor. The growth of millennial
Christian urgencies, paired with the economic accoutrements associated with
Christianity, has added to the view that conversion alters the moral constitutions of Sri
Lankans, and has in turn intensified the polemics against Christian expansionism in Sri
Lanka. Indeed, amidst various contingent events, Sinhala Buddhists have come to view
Christian conversion as generative of enmities that are expressed in terms of
alignments of political, economic and religious interests.

Undoubtedly, the bones of contention between religious rivals in Sri Lanka
today are indicative of how religion and political economy are entwined. As we have
seen, the political corollaries of conversion are evident in the iconic conversion of
SWRD Bandaranaike from Christianity to Buddhism during the period of
decolonization. Lalith Kotelawala’s conversion flowed in a direction opposite of such
conversions undertaken by the post-Independence political elite of Ceylon. In the case
of Kotelawala’s conversion, the economic corollaries of Christianity are abundantly
evident. In the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist imaginary, Kotelawala’s conversion, and
the political and economic subjectivities that his conversion was understood to have
initiated him into, popularly rendered him as being inclined towards Christian
fraudulence, and to potentially be in league with other more vicious enemies of the
populist interests of the Sri Lankan state.
While in Colombo during my dissertation fieldwork I was told a joke that captures the sea-change in modal ways that Christianity has grown in influence. The Sri Lankan Christian joke-teller was an ecumenically-oriented Baptist, and then-head of the World Council of Churches: “How do you know when you’re Saved?” he asked me. I didn’t know, so he announced, “You know you’re Saved when you begin speaking with an American accent!” As I laughed Rev. Shantha explained that this critique of evangelism was in circulation in the 1960s among ecumenically-oriented Sri Lankan Christians who were opposed to more zealous and culturally-insensitive forms of Christian evangelism. The joke had been hurled at him by a Christian friend who criticized him for participating in a Gospel rally in Sri Lanka during the 1960s, well before he had disavowed Christian proselytism. Rev. Shantha added that the punch

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118 Rev. Dr. Shantha Premawardana, a Sri Lankan Baptist and a naturalized U.S. citizen of Sri Lankan origin gave me an early lesson in the political and economic corollaries of Christianity as it had expanded its global reach. The then-head of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and a self-proclaimed community organizer who had been based between Hyde Park, Chicago, and Geneva, Switzerland, Premawardhana generously agreed to meet with me on a return trip to Sri Lanka.  
119 In an opening vignette of a paper on the politics of conversion in Sri Lanka and the US, Premawardhana (2004) explains that he had first heard the joke about getting Saved at an “Evangelical Crusade” that took place in Sri Lanka in the 1960s. The “joke” suggesting that the Saved would acquire an American accent, as if by divine grace, was flung at Premawardhana by another Christian friend in protest of Premawardhana’s participation in the “Crusade” which took place at the Rugby Stadium in Bogambara, Sri Lanka. Premawardhana, Shantha. In the retrospective of that moment, Premawardhana distinguishes his earlier self from his present self, marking a conversion of sorts from an evangelical Christianity (and the “Crusader” politics of the evangelical movement), and a form of Christianity that is much more sensitive to Christianity as a coercive force and which therefore critically steps back to distance itself from an ambitiously evangelical and proselytizing form of Christian engagement. Central to his personal mission, and to his vocation as the then-head of the World Council of Churches, was to actively engage in inter-religious dialogue and to make a compelling case for a non-evangelical approach to Christianity among Christians. Implied in this essays was that he had, at some (undisclosed) point in his life, undergone a conversion of sorts—a conversion from the “Crusader” politics of the evangelical movement, to a form of Christianity that is much more sensitive to the fact that Christianity has historically served as a coercive
line has since changed: “Since the 1970s, when they tell the joke, they say, ‘You know that you’ve been Saved when you get the taste for Coca-cola!’” The scholarly ecumenist explained that this shift in the punch line marked, first, how Christianity proliferated as an effect of political hegemony during the era of colonialism. The subsequent change indicates how Christianity’s advance was related to the hegemony exerted through flows of a globalizing economy. Convinced by and true though he was to his Christian values, the self-aware ecumenist explained all of this to me shortly after I arrived in Sri Lanka in 2009. His joke indeed signals the shift from colonial era conversions from Buddhism to Christianity wherein conversion to Christian was practically required of the emergent political class, and second, the political reversion to Buddhism during decolonization and yet at the same time, the postcolonial rise of a politically-underprivileged Christianity among a growing postcolonial economic elite.

While I have sought to illustrate how prolific the conviction that Soma Thera had been killed by a Christian had become among Sinhala Buddhist nationalists of Sri Lanka, I hope not to overstate the absolutism of Buddhist-Christian antipathies. In Chapter Three, I discuss how and why the antipathies that were being directed towards Christians in general were diffused, and through a complex set of political and religious
maneuvers, were channeled towards certain Christian entities (i.e. “fundamentalists” and charismatics) and away from others (i.e. (Sinhala) Catholic nationalists). Moreover, one of my primary interlocutors, a woman named Anoja (whose heightened commitment to Buddhism I discuss in Chapter Four), was firmly convinced that Soma Thera had been killed by Lalith Kotelawala. She told me about this conviction of hers when we out of earshot of her Pentecostal Christian husband, who she clearly loved very much. I hope to eventually elaborate further how tactical exceptions—both political and everyday—complicate the polarizing identitarian principles that I have outlined here. The subsequent chapters lend to a discussion of the diversity of Sri Lankan Christianities. I thereby add further nuance to the view offered here, wherein I focused on the emblems of Sinhala Buddhist virtuosity, and the treachery of the Christian convert who was alleged to have plotted his death.
One July afternoon in 2009 I visited the Buddhist Bookshop connected to the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress on Baudhaloka Mawatha, a major by-way in the heart of Colombo. The All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC), operated primarily by lay Buddhist revivalists, is a well known fount for the promotion of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and is listed as an approved charity. This corner of Baudhaloka Mawatha in Colombo, and a corner just a short northbound walk from the ACBC where the Sri Sambodhi Viharaya and Buddhist Media Network are located, are veritable centers of Buddhist nationalist activism, advocacy and power. Entering the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress Bookstore, I browsed briefly and internally rehearsed the questions to ask the shopkeeper in Sinhala, until I mustered the courage to approach him. As I began to explain to the bookkeeper that I was doing a research project a Sinhalese woman who had been browsing alongside me turned to ask in English about my research. “I am a student of anthropology, based in the U.S...” I began. “Oh. My daughter is an anthropologist,” she said. “She’s at a university in the U.S.” Before I had the

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120 This chapter builds on certain ideas in an essay I published elsewhere (Mahadev 2013).
121 That was established in 1919, incorporated in 1955. For the significance of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, see also Schonthal, 2012.
opportunity to ask more about her daughter, she quickly proceeded to ask more about my project. “I’m studying about Buddhism... and Christianity,” I stammered. “... I’m researching about the religions of Sri Lanka,” I resolved to articulate in the Sri Lankan-inflected English accent which I naturally slip into in Colombo when not speaking in my imperfect, but often complimented Sinhala. Looking me squarely in the eyes she responded to me tersely by saying that, “Christianity is a selfish religion. Christians believe that only humans can be saved. Whereas the Buddha’s Dharma says that all beings—the animals, and even the insects—all will be saved.” Before I had a chance to say anything at all, the woman turned on her heel to proceed to the checkout counter, giving me little more than a second look as she left.

Returning to the bookkeeper’s desk to further explain my research, I asked him for books on Buddhism, and Buddhist books which particularly offer reflections on Christianity. He very helpfully pointed to a number of them, written by Buddhist authors who were thinking with, and more often, against, Christianity. In addition to the titles that he pointed out, there were also an array of books in Sinhala by the Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thera, and his teacher Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Thera. There were also English language texts by Ajanh Brahms (a British Theravāda Buddhist monk), and a host of other thinkers well versed in Theravāda Buddhist
thought. There were also a number of books by an up-and-coming figure, named Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero (who’s monastic career and innovative teachings I discuss in Chapter Four). Also, worn paperback copies of Bertrand Russell’s *Why I Am Not a Christian*, in both English and in Sinhala translation, sat pointedly on the crowded shelves. The helpful bookkeeper also directed me to copies of the report commissioned by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress to investigate the problem of unethical conversions to Christianity released in Sinhala just that year, in which I showed particular interest.

Before departing from the bookshop, the shopkeeper gave me the name and number of a lay Buddhist leader of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, a medical doctor by profession, with whom I could speak to further to pursue the thematic interests of my ethnographic project. Within a couple of days, I made the call to the Doctor. When I opened my mouth to introduce myself on the phone as a researcher from the U.S., I foolishly spoke with my American English accentation. The voice on the other end brusquely asked me, “Where do you live?” “I now live in Colombo. I just moved here, but I have lived in Sri Lanka for almost two years, in the past.” “No, I mean what is your address?” I tensed, and asked him why he needed to know my address. He responded, “I want to make sure that you are not employed by an NGO.” I assured him that I was
not, but our conversation unfortunately did not go much further. He directed me to
learn about Buddhism from the Sri Lankan professor who had helped to sponsor my
university affiliation.

Sri Lanka is renowned among travelers for outstanding hospitality—a
hospitality which I had often experienced over the course of many visits to Sri Lanka
since 1998. Yet these moments felt inhospitable—almost as inhospitable as the
experience of traveling through Sri Lankan military and police checkpoints in times
when I had been less than proficient in Sinhala. Overcoming that initial sting, I tell
these stories of my earliest dissertation fieldwork mishaps and miscommunications
because they point to two very important features of contemporary Sinhala Buddhist
nationalism which I will flesh out in this chapter. First, my encounter with the
unnamed Sinhala Buddhist woman who insisted that Christian eschatology produces an
orientation towards “selfishness,” was clearly a defensive retort: I suspect that she
must have thought of me as a pretentious for daring to compare Christianity to her
Theravāda Buddhism. As I will parse out in this chapter, the Sinhala woman’s insistence
that Christianity lends to selfishness can be understood as a competitive rejoinder to an
old colonial-era missionary line of critique which reduced Buddhism to a “selfish”
religion on the putative grounds that it disinclined people to give charitably to alleviate
the material woes of the poor. Some Christians of certain evangelical persuasions persist in propounding these derogations.

Why has religious giving engendered such conflict and competition since some of the first encounters between Buddhists and Christians in colonial-era Ceylon, and what does it mean in Sri Lanka today? In the first half of this chapter, I draw on the historiography of the Buddhist-Protestant Christian encounter in British Ceylon, to show why Christian missionaries and evangelists have long been rendered in the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist discourses as detractors from Theravāda Buddhism and from virtuous forms of Buddhist giving. An examination of religious studies scholarship on classical Theravāda Buddhist principles of giving alms or dāna, reveals that despite superficial similarities, the practices of Christian charity and Buddhist dāna are not really commensurable and thereby cannot be compared as if they could be placed on a single scale of phenomena and moral practices. I argue that rivalrous attempts to compare what are in fact incommensurable practices have produced chronic mutual misunderstandings between Buddhists and Christians of Sri Lanka. Thus, the politics of religious giving has become a central node of religious rivalry in Sri Lanka, much as we have seen earlier in the case of the “fraudulent” businessman and philanthropist whose political subjectivity and moral disposition came to be perceived by Sinhala Buddhist
nationalists to be a transformation resulting from his adopted Christian identity.

Indeed, the concern that Christians using the allure of charity to “induce” conversion and religious patronage saturates Buddhist-protectionist discourses. Such discourses point to the conviction among Buddhist nationalists that Christian charity is an institutionalized ruse to advance the expansionist agenda of evangelicals. Charting the tensions and misunderstandings between Buddhists and Christians over religious giving in the contexts of the post-tsunami and post-war period, this chapter delineates the contemporary political resonances of these tensions. By considering literatures on the history of religions in Sri Lanka, and the question of gift, dāna, charity, indebtedness, I discuss the competitive theologizing and mutual derogations between Buddhists and Christians.

Secondly, the Doctor’s concern over whether I was a representative of a foreign NGO, and his reticence to speak to me on the grounds that I speak with an American accent, is also worthy of remark because it points to the heightened political entailments of NGO activities of humanitarian giving and interventionism which were prevalent at the time of my fieldwork in Sri Lanka. My visit to the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress occurred shortly after the close of the 2009 civil war, when then-Secretary of

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122 Such is the case also among Hindu nationalists in India (Menon 2003, Bauman 2010, Froerer 2010, Vishwanath 2013).
State Hilary Clinton voiced the criticism that "I think the Sri Lankan government knows that the entire world is very disappointed, that in its efforts to end what it sees as 25 years of conflict, it is causing such untold suffering." Sinhala Buddhists were outraged at the “international community” for what they saw as attempts to undermine Sri Lanka’s sovereign right to protect itself from internal threats to its territorial integrity. As Sinhala Buddhist nationalists were celebrating their military victory over the LTTE secessionists and extolling the win as a liberation of Tamil civilians, they countered the international human rights criticisms with claims of hypocrisy on the part of the West, and the United States in particular. These Western NGOs were either angling to return to Sri Lanka after the tsunami programs had closed, or working to shift back out of “development mode” to “emergency mode” in their operations just as the Sri Lankan Government began barring the press and international humanitarian NGOs from entering the warzones. Several international NGO organizations (e.g. the ICRC), staff members of particular NGOs (e.g. Nonviolent Peaceforce), as well as a number of foreign reporters had visas revoked if the Government deemed them to be critics of war effort.

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123 She said in her appearance before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/World+disappointed+with+Sri+Lanka:+Clinton/1/38272.html
With the surge of international humanitarian condemnations of Sri Lanka’s conduct in war, religious rivalries also intensified. Sri Lankan populist discourses reduced these international humanitarian interventions to the nefarious work of neo-colonialism. Thus, secular international humanitarian aid was seen as bearing similar political entailments as Christian charity—as a concerted effort by “the West” to conspire against Sri Lankan sovereignty, and local values. As the international humanitarian battle over the legitimacy of a civil war that entailed civilian and extra-juridical killings by culprits on both sides of the war has raged on, Sinhala nationalist discourses proclaimed that Western humanitarianism is only putatively secular, and that in fact it carries a strong trace of a clandestinely interested Christian ethos. Sri Lankan populists voiced fears that evangelical activity is liable to establish a “denationalized” contingent within the country that could be mobilized in aid of the “recolonization” of Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{124} In a May 2011 editorial the conservative Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist public intellectual and university professor, Nalin De Silva, warned Sinhalese Sri Lankans to “get ready for a humanitarian attack.” In the editorial and in blog posts De Silva condemned “Western Christian Modernity” (“the WCM”) as having

\textsuperscript{124} Goonatilake.
“no respect for the sovereignty of the other countries,”125 and in an alarmist mode, wrote:

... The West could even prop up a tiny group of Tamil Christians in Sri Lanka to agitate against the Sri Lankan government so that they could invade Sri Lanka under the guise of protecting various rights of the group, with or without taking economic measures. Whatever the mechanism may be the invasion will not be due to the love of Tamils but in order to destroy the Sinhala Buddhist culture which is a threat to WCM. We have to prepare for this so called ‘humanitarian’ attack from this moment and the government should be ready with a plan to face any eventuality.126

In the heavy polarization over the question of whether conduct in war was ultimately just or not, populist discourses have tended to vilify those who were critical of their successful military efforts as anti-national “LTTE sympathizers.” NGOs and humanitarian agencies operating within Sri Lanka were classified as “foreign-funded NGOs” and cast as agents seeking to “recolonize” Sri Lanka.127

In post-disaster and post-war Sri Lanka the “problem of the gift,” as it were, is that the political entailments of gift-related interventions, have intensified nationalist concerns about the nature of the agendas attached both Western aid and Christian

126 Ibid. Such anxieties about the Western humanitarian NGO community were “propping up” the Tigers agenda had fomented since the turn of the millennium when a Norwegian envoy came to Sri Lanka to facilitate peace talks, and was widely viewed as showing favoritism to the LTTE. Deegalle (2004), and Berkwitz (2008a) similarly show that concerns about secular NGOs and their links with Christian evangelism were expressed JHU and before the JHU, by Soma Thera.
charity. Why have these convergences, conflations, and recognitions of the linkages between the religious and the secular forms of giving transpired? Secular humanitarianism is of course well known as having its origins in capitalism and Christianity (Haskell 1985, Parry 1986, Fassin 2010, 2012, Calhoun 2010). Christian charitability, as well as Western secular humanitarian aid, appeared to Buddhist nationalist-protectionists as carrying a hidden agenda: that is, Christians and “white” foreigners (sudhaya) who were generally assumed to be Christian, with their charitable work, were attempting to outshine Sinhala Buddhist expressions of generosity, and to inaugurate anti-national sentiment. The materiality of charity, from the viewpoint of Buddhist protectionists, is an always-already attractive tool through which Christians can ensnare new converts. Foreign humanitarian agendas, even when secular, are very often seen by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists as being built upon, and virtually equivalent to, the colonial entailments of Christian charity.

In fact, the structural differences of Theravāda Buddhism and Christianity—both internally diverse though these classifications of religion they may be—serve as a basis for the conflicting notions about ethical and unethical styles of religious attraction. I suggest that foundational differences between Christian charity and Buddhist dāna continue to critically circumscribe the practices that foment religious
rivalries today. Religious conversion is often cast by nationalists as religious patronage—it is often assumed to be reciprocation for charitable gifts. Thus, while for Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist nationalists these sorts of conversions appear to be the “unethical” work of conniving Christian proselytizers, to think about conversion as reciprocation for the gift of charity in a Maussian framework complicates the question of culpability. Situating how comparison of Buddhist and Christian forms of giving has been generative of chronic mutual misunderstandings, I discuss the conundrums that the religious and secular duality of the post-disaster gift presents to Sri Lankan nationalist populists, and I delineate “theological” histories of inter-religious competition that underlie these tensions today.

Also in what follows, I detail how Sinhala Buddhist nationalists have answered provocations put forth by Christian critics of Theravadin Buddhist sensibilities about suffering: new engagements in Buddhist charitable work are on the rise in Sri Lanka (Samuels 2003, Gajaweera 2013). Evidently, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists and revivalists concertedly undertake Buddhist charitable work so as to fend off the threat of Christianization.¹²⁸ These efforts to express moral and political striving, are aimed purposefully at undermining evangelical proclivities to diminish Buddhism as a “selfish

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¹²⁸ Ibid. Also Menon 2003, on the Indian case of nationalists who use charitable work to keep poor Hindus within the fold.
religion.” In the process, Sinhala Buddhists are reconceptualizing the ways in which a charitable ethos fits within Theravadin conceptions of theodicy. How do such long-standing inter-religious rivalries inspire new modes of religious engagement? I illustrate how these provocations have specifically inspired transformations in Sinhala Buddhists’ ideas about meritorious giving, and in certain cases, about the monastic vocation itself. In considering how Buddhist charitable activities are directed to those who suffer from involuntary material deprivation, rather than giving exclusively to mendicant monks, I delineate how everyday theological articulations are encoded within the texture religious giving and the vocation of Buddhist charitability.

**Charity v. Dāna: Early Missionary Appraisals**

Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka had long espoused criticisms that ran in the opposite direction to the one espoused by the Sinhalese woman who confronted me with a pointed condemnation of exclusivist and selfish entailments of Christian eschatology. In fact, colonial-era missionary discourses had disparaged Theravāda Buddhism with the very same allegations—that Buddhism constituted a “selfish” religion. The historian Elizabeth Harris (2006) has shown that European and American

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129 See also Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988
missionaries in 19th century Ceylon repeatedly made the criticism that Theravāda Buddhism emphasized “salvation” (read: nibbana) only for the individual. For the Christian evangelists who thought of generosity and altruism as one of the most important virtues within their own religion, the Theravādin focus on giving to mendicants who willfully deprive themselves for the sake of their own spiritual release appeared to them as a “selfish” pursuit. Moreover, these British-era evangelists noted that Buddhism did not appear to have a systematic form of charitable giving to care for the poor, to match the Christian sensibilities of love, and the inspired practice of extending this love in the material form to the needy (Harris, 57).

Harris cites one colonial-era evangelist who stringently criticized that “[the] worst parts of the native Singhalese character is their neglect of the poor, sick and destitute” (1844: 265; cf Harris 2006: 57). The missionary continued, “Does this not prove that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel and that those who have no love to God have little disinterested love to their neighbors?” (57). Harris summarizes the incendiary missionary critiques of Buddhism which were built upon the view that Buddhist thought and practice was incapable of evolving moral principles as a result of the absence of “the commandments of a Supreme Being and the prospect of divine judgment” (57). In Harris’s words:
Since Buddhism provided neither, [the missionaries’] first judgment was that Buddhism’s moral premises could not be followed. Second, they argued that belief in transmigration, rather than nurturing individual responsibility, destroyed it, because of the fatalism they linked with the law of kamma... Third, they claimed that the doctrine of kamma... destroyed compassion, because the misfortunes of others were seen as payments for their past misdeeds. When, in apparent contradiction, the missionaries witnessed acts of charity among Buddhists, they drew on their fourth judgment that Buddhist acts of goodness were performed purely for the purpose of gaining a better rebirth and were therefore selfish (57, emphasis added).

In sum, the missionaries judged the logics of karma and merit (pin) to involve human judgment rather than Divine Judgment, and thereby concluded that human judgment led to morally depravity rather than as enabling ethical discernment.¹³¹

From the vantage point of the European expatriates of the time, the fact that some Ceylonese were perceptibly “poor” was the result of the failure among the local

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¹³⁰ Within the missionary condemnations of Buddhism it is clear that they mistakenly assumed that Theravāda Buddhists instrumentally engaged in the practice of dāna with focus upon the reward of “merit” accrual, further contributing to the Christian judgment of Buddhist “selfishness.” Learning about the “laws” of karma, the missionaries saw the inclining Buddhists to rely on human judgment, rather than divine judgment, and saw it to contribute to moral depravity and selfishness. While Christian missionaries and Buddhologists in Theravādan countries during the early phase of British colonialism tended to be unconvinced that Buddhism was an effective moral system, there was a positive attitudinal shift towards Buddhism among those who arrived in the latter phases of colonialism.

¹³¹ As Obeyesekere (1968) describes it, “karmic eschatology” is an ethicization… theodicy. a logics of cause and effect
elite to treat them charitably to material provisions. In other words, poor Sri Lankans were seen as languishing due to a lack of generosity, rather than due to the new set of inequities inaugurated with the introduction of a predatory colonial economy. Viewing dāna from this perspective, the early missionaries in Ceylon triumphantly extolled Christian charity as the morally superior act. Therein developed the tendency—among Christians, and as I will show, eventually also among Buddhists—to compare the incommensurable practices of Buddhist dāna, to the Christian practice of charity. This practice of comparing incommensurables, I argue, has contributed to chronic mutual misunderstandings between people of these two religious traditions in Sri Lanka.

**Buddhist Extensions of Care in Post-tsunami Sri Lanka**

The derogations of Buddhist “selfishness” touched a nerve particularly in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami, as evident in one of the accounts told to me by one of my most generous interlocutors, a grandfatherly Buddhist monk in the

132 Moreover, it has been well documented that the colonial plantation economy which extracted wealth from the upcountry lands. Sinhalese villagers were ousted from some of these lands, but refused to work on the hard terrain. So the British “imported” Tamil laborers from southern India. Sinhalese villagers were ousted from some of these lands. Meyer (1992), Moore (1989).
village of Ahangama. Reverend Assagi served as the chief incumbent monk of a pirivena and monastery, a center for novice monks to learn and practice the basic precepts of Buddhist monastic life in Ahangama. When this village on Sri Lanka’s south coast saw the devastation of the tsunami, survivors fled inland to Reverend Assagi’s temple and pirivena. With the permission of Reverend Assagi, the bodies of the dead were carried into the premises, and were kept within the temple for mourning until proper burials could be arranged. It was an extraordinary thing for the body of a layperson to be taken to the temple premises. Ordinarily, the concern of killa or inauspicious impurity, associated with a corpse, and particularly a layperson’s corpse which had not been properly prepared to undergo mortuary rites, would bar such an occurrence. But this monk was called to action by the extraordinary circumstances and he responded with his characteristic generosity. The surviving traumatized people were also immediately given space to rest and recover in the large hall connected to the monastic quarters. With the resources of the temple, and with reinforcements brought in by laypeople who had been out of harm’s way when the tsunami hit, people who survived the tsunami were fed and calmed, and given space to grieve and rest in the safety of the temple.
Monks and lay people cared for people who were traumatized and homeless for the days up until the camps for the displaced were opened. Before the flow of humanitarian relief supplies had reached the temple, BBC News showed up, looking to cover the people’s plight in a place where tsunami victims had taken shelter. But Reverend Assagi sent the news team away from his temple. Now, why did he refuse to allow BBC in to show the world how he was contributing to the care of those devastated by the tsunami, in the temple that was under his charge? Assagi Thero explained it to me in Sinhala, in our conversation which took place nearly five years after the event:

In the newscasts, while showing images of laypeople who took refuge in the temples, BBC News announced that the people had not been provided with food to eat, and water to drink. They filmed in some nearby temples, saying this, even after the people had just eaten what had been given to them, and were sitting in the safety of the temples with full stomachs! I had heard that BBC was in the habit of portraying the situation this way. I didn’t want this to happen at my temple, so I sent them away. They have given the world wrong ideas about our country.

Assagi Thero admitted that he had also turned away World Vision, denying their offer to distribute aid on the temple grounds. World Vision, a well known Christian NGO, has long been suspected by many Sri Lankan Buddhists, (as well as by some devoted Hindus
and Muslims), of facilitating “unethical conversions” by the generous pull of Christian charity.\footnote{Bornstein (2005) writes of World Vision in Zimbabwe.}

Reverend Assagi’s actions are quite striking given that he is relatively moderate in his nationalist inclinations compared to many Sri Lankans. In fact, I was surprised to learn that he was not given to the view that Christians were conspiring to kill Buddhist monks; he was one of two Sinhala Buddhists I encountered who suggested that the conspiracy allegations that Christians had killed Soma Thera was the work of political sensationalism. Furthermore, Assagi Thero could not be categorized as someone who is inherently suspicious of foreign organizations as many other Sinhala Buddhists tended to be. The monk coordinated and cooperated with certain international NGOs in distributing aid and eventually worked to rebuild the school that was wiped out by the tsunami. He allocated temple lands for the construction of the new school, defying the objections of the lay Buddhist dhaykeyo (lay Buddhist patrons) who advised him to preserve the temple lands. He was pleased with these international partnerships, and gave these foreign NGOs due credit for their contributions. That said, he, like many other Sri Lankan Buddhists, were concerned about unethical conversions undertaken by Christian organizations and with foreign charity. He was emphatic though that it is
“unethical conversions”—those conversions that take place in response to material inducements—and not Christian conversions in general, which pose a problem to his Buddhist sensibilities.

For Assagi Thero the issue was that the BBC News had depicted Sri Lankan Buddhist laypeople and monks as unable—or worse, unwilling—to feed and care for victims of the tsunami. He had heard from others that the BBC was misconstruing the situation. It is possible that that the BBC News channel was simply trying to raise awareness around the world about the urgency of relief operations and the need for donor assistance and thus described an absence of relief efforts. Thus, although enabling humanitarian aid to flow from transnational sources for disaster relief was by and large a secular endeavor, its juxtaposition with the BBC portrayal, was subsumed under broader colonial, missionary, and humanitarian trends wherein Westerners failed to acknowledge Sinhala Buddhist generosity. Other similar incidents of humanitarian “condescension” occurred during the period of tsunami recovery were described to me by Sinhala Buddhist lay people, which were always regarded to be consonant with Christian tendencies to denigrate Buddhism. From the perspective of Buddhist clergy who served as conduits for the distribution of foreign aid and charitable capital through their temples, the initial interactions with many
international entities may have felt not so unlike how they imagined their predecessors experienced Christian missionaries bearing charitable good will and evangelical zeal. Indeed, such failures by foreign entities to acknowledge the generosity, compassion and capabilities of Sinhala Buddhist monks and laypeople in that time of crisis, may have felt like a painful throwback to colonial era encounters with foreign missionaries.

**Dāna in the Canon: Mechanics of Reciprocity**

This layered history of Buddhist-Christian relations as they relate to the differential structure and ethos of religious giving, brings Sri Lankan populist anxieties and allegations into relief. Considering the classical Theravādin paradigms of dāna alongside this history, Christian charity appears to be contentious within this context for a number of reasons. At present, the foremost reason is that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists perceive Christian charity as a means through which Christian proselytizers use material “inducements” to convert disadvantaged people. Christian evangelists in turn assert that the Buddhist criticisms against them stem from the fact that Buddhist monastic community’s economic interests are hurt by lay people who convert to Christianity and thus give up the practice of giving dāna to sustain the monks. For instance, while in Colombo I encountered some Sri Lankan Christian
evangelists whose rhetoric replicated the allegations of Buddhist “selfishness” of early missionary discourses. Nowadays, they also often add assertions about anti-Christian “jealousy.” One Colombo-based Protestant minister who I interviewed in 2009 averred that the rise of Christianity in Sri Lanka is the result of the attractiveness of Christians’ generosity. The minister averred that lay patrons to the Buddhist monks become “put off” by all of the obligations to maintain the monks. “The Buddhist monks take alms on a daily basis from the lay people. When Buddhists lay people see all that the Christian pastors do for the people, they get attracted to Christianity. So when the people convert, the monks get upset.” The evangelist continued: “Conversion hits the monks right in the stomach, you see?” poking his own stomach to emphasize his point that the Buddhist Sangha is losing its constituents to Christianity, thereby materially strangling their livelihoods.

Is dāna a one sided pursuit in which monks receive material sustenance from Buddhist laity as Christian critics suggest, or is the issue that perceiving these practices through a lens of Christian moral paradigms of charitability in effect obscures what might be at stake for the Buddhists? The fact of the incommensurability between Buddhist dāna and Christian charity, and the scathing judgments of dāna by evangelical Christians, merits further discussion.
Examining these issues first in terms of the theological considerations foundational to the development of Christian charity as it compares to Buddhist dāna, I then turn to the work of anthropologists and scholars of religion who have observed ordinary forms of giving, both which recuperate Theravadin sensibilities about generosity (Hallisey 1996 & 2007, Bowie 1998, Egge 2002, Findly 2003, Heim 2004).  Doing so demonstrates how radically distinct these paradigms of generosity are.

The common act of comparing the incommensurable practices of charity and dāna without attention of the particularities of their difference, has led to an intense efforts of the rivals to competitively leverage the weight of theological concepts against one another. I suggest that what is at stake here is the difference in criteria of what constitutes “generosity.” Paying heed to Charles Hallisey’s (1996) notion of "ethical particularism," it is possible to recognize the multiplicity of ethical forms that may emerge from within a single tradition of religious thought. In this vein, an examination of dāna historically and ethnographically reveals a more nuanced picture of Buddhist

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134 I would suggest that some of this scholarship implicitly responds to Christian and secular liberal critiques that Theravada Buddhism engenders “selfish” sensibilities. Several scholars have attempting to recuperate ordinary forms of giving practices as valuable expressions of Theravadin generosity. I undertake this comparison with an eye towards setting the theological arguments about Buddhist and Christian giving alongside one another to highlight their incommensurability, in vein of Parry’s (1986) argument on “the Indian gift” and its incommensurability with the Christian gift of charity.

135 I am also thinking here of the Wittgensteinian (1958) and Cavellian (1989) point about skepticism and the problem of becoming “disappointed with criteria,” Das (1998). Such a “disappointment” can lead one to complicate one’s held identitarian forms of thinking (here, I am blend the idea of skepticism’s potentialities with the imperatives Adorno puts forth in Negative Dialectics).
giving as a moral paradigm than does the manner in which Christians, and many secular critics, have tended to portray it. Doing so from the perspective of literatures in the history of religions illuminates the relevance of dāna particularly within the traditional Indic context, and how Theravādin Buddhists of Sri Lanka today have sought to broaden the meaning of Buddhist giving under the present circumstances.

**Charity and Dāna as Paradigms of Generosity**

The Christian practice of giving charity, according to Allahyari (2000), is instrumental in reinforcing processes of ethical personhood in the Christian tradition. She argues that giving charity where it is needed is conceived as essential to the construction of a “moral self.” It is consonant with the Christian ideas of “turning towards” God, or conversion, and viewed as instrumental in orienting “individuals towards the value of salvation” (Allahyari 2000, Robbins 2006). Scholars have argued that this ideology of Christian giving was particular within European economic modernity. Haskell (1985) writes of the “capitalist origins of humanitarian sensibility.” Likewise, Parry (1986) suggests that the Christian sensibility of compassionate and altruistic works emerged within Christianity just as capitalism had begun to show its effects; moral imperatives towards charity were derived from ideas early Christianity,
and were reanimated, Parry argues, as a counterpoint to the alienating and impoverished drives of a free market (Parry 1986).136

In contrast to the Christian charitable ideal of working to compassionately to help alleviate the experience of poverty, at the foundations of Buddhist giving is a concern that is quite different. According to Heesterman (1964), Parry (1986), and Laidlaw (1995), the central concern of Indic, and particularly Brahmanical and pre-Buddhist practices of giving has not been to alleviate poverty, but rather to ensure that the pollution transmitted through the gift does not contaminate the substantive purity of the recipient. Parry cogently argues that the Indic forms of giving do not compel reciprocation precisely because material gifts given in the Indic context are substantively loaded with impurity or inauspicious consequences, and are thus spiritually burdensome gifts of Brahmanical dānadharma. “[T]he gift is held to embody the sins of the donor, whom it rids of evil by transferring the dangerous and demeaning burden of death and impurity to the recipient,” and hence Parry shows why in this context, the Maussian theory of the gift is not applicable (Parry 1986: 459). Thus,

136 Haskell (1985), in a two part essay, The Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, suggests capitalism created the conditions of possibility for heightened humanitarian sensibility. Abolitions expanded the moral horizons not out of mere “self-interest.” Rather, abolitionist activism and other humanitarian practices gained currency because capitalism created conditions that enabled certain classes of people to expand their concept of humanity and ideas about care (i.e. long distance travel, improved understanding about the far-distant world), suggests Haskell. Haskell, following Foucault, suggests that modern times were far less brutal that previous era—a point that, if right, could potentially undermine Parry’s point.
sacrificial gifts in the Indic context are perilous to the donor, since they bind him “dangerously close to one who may prove unworthy” (460). As Parry shows, the paradox in the Brahmanical context is that anyone willing to receive such a gift to facilitate the expiation of the sins of the donor “is almost by definition unworthy to receive them” (460). Overarching hierarchies of purity and pollution—substantive conditions which were normatively understood in Brahmanical religion to be transmitted through material exchange in ritual and non-ritual circumstances—had given rise to caste hierarchies and discrimination.

It was in defining meritorious practice against the normative Indic soteriologies associated with giving that early Buddhist concepts of exchange can be seen as innovatively propelling what may be translated as “generosity” (Egge 2002, Findly 2003). Scholars in the history of religions argue that the Buddha introduced dāna as a paradigm of giving to profoundly amend the Brahmanical relationship between ascetics and lay donors (Egge 2002). Whereas Brahmanical conceptions of substantive purity and pollution gave credence to “bio-moral” evaluations of persons and caste hierarchies, the historical Buddha sought to undo these Brahmanical ideologies (Egge 2002). Through interpretations of the Buddhist canon, Egge shows that the Buddha did

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so by provoking a shift in the practices of religious giving. By taking into account the then-dominant Brahmanical paradigm of almsgiving from which Buddhist ideologies and material practices emerged, it is possible to discern that the Buddhist practices and principles of dāna hinge not upon the notion that there is merit in giving as the Christian missionaries had surmised. Rather, this early Buddhist reformism offered an interesting prospect: rather than a donor placing emphasis upon the moral qualities of the recipient of charity, the Buddhist ideology of dāna emphasizes that there is virtue in receiving indiscriminately and with great composure, vis-à-vis the Brahmanical anxieties of substantively receiving bio-moral and karmic impurities (Egge 2002, Findly 2003, Heim 2004).

Specifically, these classical Buddhist conceptions of generosity were rooted in the ideologies of 1) receiving empathetically and without discrimination, and 2) giving generously, mindfully, and without discrimination. The latter act of giving moreover has the potential to orient the person towards renunciatory ends in pursuit of nibbana.\(^{138}\) The Buddha, in his time, recast the trepidation associated with receiving

\(^{138}\) At the same time as the recipient is at the center of the moral imperatives to reform Brahmanical traditions, the mental comportment of the donor is also of central importance in the relationship of Buddhist exchange (Egge 20). The Pali canon suggests that donors were instructed to give liberally, with a happy, calm state of mind (20-1). Doing so with a mind that is impervious to the fear of potential for hunger and thirst, and to the fear of contamination through the gift received, was said to processually effect the mental purification required for attainment of nibbana (35). Furthermore, the donor’s fixation upon the accrual of merit was practically construed as a demerit in the teachings. The exceptional giving of Prince Vessantara—a popular story of the Jataka tales (the Buddha’s past life stories)—exemplifies this principle.
impurity from a donor, as a problem of mental impurity on the part of the recipient (Egge 2002). Interpreting texts of the Pali canon, Egge shows that the Buddha had been emphatic that the onus to remedy the negative psychological effects of receiving the gift is upon the beneficiary of dāna—that is, on the Buddhist monk (2002: 3-4). A member of the Sangha, who in principle could be someone from any caste, is asked to forego all preoccupations with substantive purity and pollution of the donor—an explicit rejection of the premise of caste hierarchies.¹³⁹ A monk’s worthiness to receive offerings is determined by his mental purity—the ability of the recipient to eliminate ignorance and desire, an indication of his progress toward nibbana (Egge 3-4). These Buddhist principles challenged the Brahmanical presumptions that sacrificial offerings must be ritually purified to ensure that the offering would be acceptable the gods (26). In a cognitive turn, the Buddha refashioned the idea of a successful ascetic as one who attains this mental purity—as one who expresses indifference to worldly distinctions—as one who is the true “Brahman” (26).¹⁴⁰ In short, Buddhic reforms revised of indiscriminant giving (Gombrich and Cone 1977; Heim 2004). The myth highlights how the Prince gave voraciously, and without discrimination nor regard to the merits of the act. The Prince gave away all possessions, including his family members to a demon. This act of generosity in the extreme, was considered to be profoundly meritorious. So meritorious was the act that the karmic consequences of his actions involved the return of all of his possessions.

¹³⁹ This is not always worked out in practice. The Theravadin Buddhist Sangha in Sri Lanka is divided along caste lines.

¹⁴⁰ According to Findly, scriptural sources suggest that that the Buddha a member of the Sangha should be undaunted by any offering; receiving required releasing the mind from preconceived notions regarding the status of the donor, and graciously accept the gift with equanimity and composure (muditha) (Findly 2003: 211).
Brahmanical sensibilities about spiritual heightening, doing away with the practice of purification by fire, and ideologically cutting through discriminatory conceptions that had been prevalent in the Indic world of Gautama Buddha’s time.

**Mind, Materiality, and Ethics in Theravāda Buddhism**

The ethos of asceticism supported by almsgiving directed to monks, or as part of the process of renunciation of material wealth, is radically different from Christian charity in form, content, and purpose. It is clear that the Theravāda Buddhist archetype of giving ascribes liberative qualities to states of mental freedom from material attachments. Accordingly, the trajectory of nirvanic spiritual ascent that is contingent upon a sort of moral and ethical progress may potentially be contravened by material accoutrements such as charity, or alternatively, by excessive wealth.

A Theravāda Buddhist adage says that “suffering is a teacher only second to the Buddha.”[^141] That is to say that suffering—including the suffering of “the poor”—is rendered as a tool of pedagogical potential. More precisely, the experience of suffering is positioned within Theravāda Buddhist philosophy as a spur that impels one to

[^141]: Hallisey, personal communication. [Ask him where/who this may have written this in such an elegant form as it is here.]
develop the compassionate disposition that is instrumental in setting oneself on a meritorious path towards enlightenment or *nibbana*. Many ordinary Sri Lankans estimate that one’s spiritual progress accords with one’s apparent lives’ conditions, based on the “karmic eschatology” which Obeyesekere (1968, 2002) suggests instills practices of ethical discernment into the conduct of everyday life. In turn, Sri Lankan Buddhists generally regard poverty, emotional difficulty, and other hardships to be karmically governed—that is, to be the result of righteous or sinful actions committed by the person in some past life. What is more, Sinhala Buddhists commonly consider the inclination or disinclination to engage in the work it takes to make spiritual progress to inhere within one’s life’s conditions, and to be indicated by one’s station in life. That is to say, the inclination or disinclination for moral striving is often seen as being dependent upon the degree to which one experiences suffering. Given this theodicy wherein the morality or immorality of action is seen to dictate the quality of rebirth, those who appear to be experiencing a great deal of suffering are sometimes viewed as if they are in their spiritual infancy—a point from which it requires much moral work to make a spiritual ascent.

143 Obeyesekere “Sin, Theodicy…” This cause and effect karmic narrative (theodicy) was often used to explain the misfortune of the tsunami, in Theravadan Thailand (see Merli, 2005, 2012) and in Sri Lanka. Weber “Theodicy, Salvation and Rebirth” (1922: 138-150).
144 On moral striving, Naveeda Khan (2012).
145 Ibid.
Out of this logic, some upper class Buddhists and Hindus who I spoke to in 2005 contended that charity presents a problem because these external means to alleviate suffering do not allow people to feel their suffering, thereby causing the poor to lack sufficient inspiration to attain a better rebirth.146 However, in an inversion of this “karmic neoliberalism,”147 Southwold has shown that relatively poor “village Buddhists” assert that it is in fact wealthy and powerful people who are unlikely to attain better rebirths in their next lifetimes because they could not possibly be suffering enough to impel them to perfect their conduct (1983: 202-212).

How are such Theravādin soteriological concerns about the potentially pernicious effects of charity in forcefully abbreviating the karmic cycle of suffering and release from samsara implied but not articulated in modern legal and political discourse over religious conversion in Sri Lanka? As I have discussed elsewhere (Mahadev 2013), Theravāda Buddhist thought is rooted in an ideology of renunciation that problematizes what materiality does to the condition of the mind, and thereby interestingly intersects with the secular human right of religious freedom. Indeed, the

146 The former position, a kind of karmic-neoliberalism, is rarely expressed nowadays. Many Theravada Buddhists engage in social service and charity, valorizing the alleviation of suffering as compassionate action. In some cases, Buddhist protectionists have responded to Christian charity by engaging themselves in charitable work, stating their nationalist purpose of ensuring that poor Sinhalese Buddhists don’t become swayed to Christianity by evangelists bearing charity.
147 For this label I credit Lawrence Cohen, who long ago (2006) commented on a paper on the “ordinary ethics” of Theravada Buddhism.
human rights parlance of “freedom of conscience” indicates that the mind must be free in order to be freely express religious choice. Given that Theravāda Buddhism classically renders the mind to be free only if it is free of the impingements of material fetters, implicitly informs Sinhala Buddhists’ allegations that conversions to Christianity in Sri Lanka are taking place “unethically” by the force of material “inducements.” Indeed, in “anti-conversion” discourses, Sinhala Buddhists often argue that such freedom of the mind is required to adequately consider the worth of a religious creed. As such, the Theravādin soteriology which relates material renunciation to liberation of the mind utterly contravenes Christian sensibilities about charitable giving.

The Theravadin soteriological approach to “free conscience” that is implied but not articulated in the modern legal and political discourse over conversion reinforces the nationalistic agenda to curb Buddhist apostasy in Sri Lanka. Indeed, even though these concerns are not overtly expressed, the tensions between the right to protect one’s religious community from intrusive efforts of proselytism on the part of the Sinhala Buddhists, and the right to propagate one’s religion on the part of Christian missionaries, provide affective force in the debates over conversion and conversion ethics. The particularities of these logics that reinforce Sinhala Buddhists’ objections to
conversions seen to be elicited with the aid of charity, tend to remain obscure to Christians as well as to secular activists. ¹⁴⁸ Thus, such secular and Christian advocates of religious freedom typically dismiss Sri Lankan Buddhist allegations against Christian “unethical conversions” for being mired in nationalist ideology; they often dismiss them as baseless claims and reduce them to expressions of Buddhist jealousies of Christians’ cultural and socio-economic capital.

In other words, Theravadin logics of religious freedom not only contravene the Christian evangelical and secular human rights discourses which call for religious freedom on different terms. ¹⁴⁹ These opposing views on religious freedom are folded into the secular discourse of human rights that recasts these issues in terms of “freedom of conscience.” Indeed, the contentions over religious freedom—seen either from the vantage point of asserting a right to protect one’s religious community from intrusive efforts of proselytism, or out of interest to assert a right to propagate one’s religion—are not merely constructed on the basis of secular conceptions of ethics.

It is important to reiterate here that Buddhist dāna is considered to be foundational to the formation of the Buddhist moral community. Buddhist laypeople

¹⁴⁹ Castelli (2005).
give dāna to monks, in return they receive dharmadeshanawa (bana, preaching of the Buddha’s teachings), which binds the community of monks (Sangha) to laity and reinforces Buddhist morality and sociality. As Heim (2004) argues, the monks in medieval Theravāda Buddhist societies placed great emphasis on lay Buddhist dāna even when monastic landlordism was the predominant socio-economic structure of the day (73). Of this medieval context Heim asks, why then, given their abundant landholdings and capacities for monastic self-sufficiency, would the monks have composed vast compendiums on the virtues of dāna? Heim suggests that it stands to reason that the monks were genuinely concerned with the practice of dāna as a means to interact with Buddhist laity, and not merely to reap the material benefits procured in this exchange. The practice of dāna, Heim suggests,

creates virtuous people and monks. If monks had been allowed to forget the daily alms-round and live off the profits of their land holdings, their estrangement from their status as pātras, in which the central values of the tradition are upheld, could lead to moral and religious decline. Moreover, without daily contact with monks, the laity would be deprived of their chief religious identity and function and may lose interest in religion. Thus in an important way the dāna system creates and sustains the religion and the religious culture. Dāna cultivates the interpersonal values of respect and admiration for others, of śraddhā and devotion to superiors (73–4).

150 Although dāna is archetypically the donation of provisions to the Buddha and mendicants monks, who are generally viewed as the appropriate recipients of meritorious giving, scholars have shown that, under certain conditions, Theravāda Buddhists also give charity to, and perform services for, the poor—reinforcing the ethic of compassion towards all who are suffering (Bowie 1998, Samuels 2003, Hallisey 2007).
There is high spiritual value placed on forest-dwelling monks who, because of their remove from lay social, political and economic life, are categorically surmised to be close to the attainment of nibbana (Tambiah 1976). Sri Lankan Buddhists often covet interactions with forest monks. Yet, as Heim suggests, the opportunity to learn the Dhamma from community-oriented Buddhist monks who are thoroughly engaged in regular interactions with laity during almsgivings especially constitutes a return gift in these relations of exchange. I have observed that Buddhist monks often counsel lay people on the affairs of the home and on interpersonal relationships, as well as on emotional and spiritual matters. At the same time, lay dhayakeyo (patrons), are often emotionally invested in the well-being of the monks who nurture their spiritual ambitions.

Doctrinally, altruistic and compassionate giving is generally not classified as “dāna” (Heim 74-5). Traditionally there has been concentrated value assigned to the practice of giving to those who are karmically “worthy” of receiving (Heim, Egge)—that is to say, the most meritorious form of giving involves giving dāna to Buddhist monks. Thus, charity to the poor can be seen as producing a certain conundrum according to these classical premises of Theravāda Buddhism (Heim, 2004: 74; Mahadev 2013) and as

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151 It is with the forest-dwelling monks that Sinhala laypeople often covet proximity and even intimacy (Gombrich 1971). Pre-noon dāna offerings are the one opportunity for lay people to engage with them.
Heim summarily suggests, “It is not clear how the ethics of esteem could accommodate the ethics of altruism” (75). There are no outright moral injunctions against giving to the poor, Heim tells us, but in this Indic system, there is a categorical difference between giving to the Sangha, and giving to those in need (74-5).

**The Merits of Everyday Buddhist Giving**

In spite of the fact that the paradigmatic form of meritorious giving is oriented towards monks, the everyday ethical practices of giving among the followers of Theravāda Buddhism do emphasize helping those in need, particularly in times of economic and moral crisis. Though ordinary practices of altruism are not always considered to fetch merit in the same way as alms-giving to the monks does, Bowie (1998) describes how Thai Buddhists often gave alms to those in need during times of drought. She emphasizes that Thai Buddhists often considered giving to the poor to be a truly noble act that had positive karmic consequences; indeed in some cases, Bowie tells us, giving charitably to those in need was considered an act of merit that was equal, and for some, was even superior to giving dāna to monks.
In Sri Lanka, on special occasions such as a birthday, the celebration often entails delivering and distributing lunch packets to an orphanage or a home for the elderly—often in addition to delivering alms to monks. Once when I participated in the distribution of food the beggars on the birthday of my host, the Francisco family and I hand-delivered these provisions to the men on the street who were folded over with their various infirmities, who sat in the scorching hot sun on the bridge over the Nilwala River in the city of Matara. I was told that we had accumulated *pin* in this process. In another instance we traveled to the Ahanagama temple, and coincidentally arrived round the time of the noon meal at the monastery. Assagi Thero invited us to partake in the meal offered by the lay patrons (*gihi minissu*) who had made the offering of that day’s *dāna*. My host remarked that I would accumulate a great deal of merit for having enabled the Franciscos to partake in the meritoriously given and meritoriously received meal, however coincidentally we happened to do so.

Not all forms of giving among Sri Lankan Buddhists are necessarily motivated by the promise of merit acquisition and the desire for karmic assent, however. Winslow (2013) has observed that Sinhala villagers are engaged in everyday varieties of giving, to neighbors, friends and kin. Moreover, *kaakaa dāna*, and *baala dāna*—that is, giving food scraps to crows, and to dogs—are two such everyday ways that ordinary Sinhalese
Sri Lankans care for non-human beings, on the premise that they too are sentient beings ensnared in the cycle of *samsara*. Winslow suggests that these everyday forms of giving tend to fall under the radar of observers precisely because they are so ordinary that they are not remarked upon as meritorious practices of giving.

**Buddhist Reforms and Revivals**

We have now seen that Christian evangelists have tended to charge Theravadin Buddhism with the failure to produce charitable religious subjects. According to Theravadin logics, this is a false allegation. Nevertheless, Sinhala Buddhists find it hard to recognize their own practices of everyday giving as doctrinally or practically sufficient to counter the evangelical Christian critiques or to compete with the practices of Christian charity. Incensed by the moral critiques leveled by Christian missionaries, and alarmed about the movement of Sri Lankans towards the adoption of European habits during the British colonial era of Ceylon, contingents of Sinhala Buddhist revivalists endeavored to counter the trends of Anglicization and Christianization (Malalgoda 1978, Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988). In the rising tide of nationalism of the day, lay Buddhist activists encouraged their fellow Buddhists to uplift the “downtrodden” among the Sinhalese. The well-known case of the early 20th
century Buddhist revivalist and lay renunciate, the famous Anagarika Dharmapala, who rebuked the Sinhalese elite for aping the ways of the British, and faulted them for their lack of patriotism (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988, Jayawardena 2000). In one such reprimand, Dharmapala stated that “There is hardly one university-educated Sinhalese who has done any material good for his countrymen. *All idea of altruism is blunt in him* and his greatest bliss consists in attending a Queen’s House Ball or a Governor’s Levée” (Guruge 1965, cf Jayawardene 2000: 267).

Historian Kumari Jayawardena shows that the rising Ceylonese Sinhala Buddhist elite responded to Dharmapala’s provocations, and by the early 1900s began to direct their profits to Buddhist charities and Buddhist educational institutions to compete with the missionary schools, orphanages and other institutions through which Christians exerted their influence (2000: 267). With this, the Sinhala Buddhist revival movement was in full swing by the mid 1900s. ¹⁵² This revivalism during the era of rising Sinhala Buddhist nationalist sentiment propelled practices of Buddhist charity that some scholars have called “socially-engaged Buddhism” (Queen and King 1999, Bond

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¹⁵² 268. The Dutch required church membership for those seeking “high offices and… church attendance for students in schools” (Berkwitz (2008a) cf K.M. DeSilva 1995, 556-7). In the Indian context, Goswami (2004), writes on similar nativist nationalisms.
Broadly considered, these revisionist practices of giving have been classified by scholars as “Protestant Buddhism” or as “Buddhist modernism.” In this nationalist movement, Sinhala Buddhist laypeople, and to a limited extent also Buddhist monks, became newly oriented towards social service, including charitable work among relatively impoverished Sri Lankans, as part of ethical self-formation (known as *shramadāna*) (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988, King and Queen 1999, Samuels 2000, Bond 2004). Among Buddhist monks the practices of charitable work and social service by Buddhist monks has periodically gained and lost socio-religious currency in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988), but has tended to remain steady among lay Buddhists.

What is clear is that a new era of lay and monastic charitable work has been inspired—or dare I say, provoked—within the contemporary Sri Lankan milieu, particularly as a result of the contingencies of growing Christian influence and humanitarian and charitable aid influxes. Observers of practices of religious giving in

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153 As I’ve discussed in the introduction, the term “protestant Buddhism” has been problematized by scholars. I have found that the term “engaged Buddhism” to be even more problematic, because calling these reforms as such implies that they were “disengaged” before.

154 Again, “Protestant Buddhism,” Obeyesekere (1970) and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) have argued that this revivalism entailed a laicitization of Buddhist principles, in that monastic practices became increasingly central in lay Buddhist practice, particularly among the middle class Sinhala people. See dissertation introduction for critique of this notion, and how scholars have refigured the concept as “Buddhist modernism”.

Sri Lanka note that the notion of “dāna,” as a meritorious form giving, has been revalued so as to also encapsulate giving to the needy—a transformation witnessed particularly in the post-tsunami milieu and postwar context (Gajaweera 2013). This renewed effort to engage in Buddhist charitable work is undoubtedly a response to derogations of Buddhist “selfishness,” and is simultaneously an effort to reverse the competitive edge that Christians are seen to have over Buddhism because of their traditions of Christian charity.

The Allure of the Gift

The inter-religious argument over the gift of charity has rematerialized in Sri Lanka especially amidst the nationalist critiques of the instrumentality of Christian charity in attracting converts. As we have seen, the language of the Bill assumes that proselytizers use “force, allurement, and other fraudulent means” to elicit conversions among Buddhists and other non-Christians. Nearly every dedicated Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lankan who I spoke to in the city of Colombo, and many in rural areas on the southern coast during my fieldwork (2009-2011) were convinced that Christians and

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156 T. Widger, F. Osella and J. Stirrat confirm that they too observed this loose usage of the term dāna in their research during 2012-13. Personal communication.
157 Gazette notification. Also, Hresko, Owens.
others who came bearing charitable aid, had come with the intention to convert non-
Christians in this manner. The Commission Report by the All-Ceylon Buddhist
Congress (2009) details a multitude of stories in which Christian groups gave “material
inducements” to tsunami-affected people. Some groups were said to have rescinded
these gifts if the recipients rejected a gift of a Bible and invitations to come to church
(89: sections 352-3). The Report quotes one woman from Kandy, who was said to have
disparaged such conversions with the words, “meeka bisnas convert ekak” – “this is a
business conversion” (88: section 343).

“Foreign-funded NGOs” came under particular scrutiny in Sri Lanka in an
intensified way after the tsunami, and were further amplified after the war. Sinhala
Buddhist figures accused international NGOs of endeavoring to “recolonize” Sri
Lanka.158 Likewise, new evangelical churches were seen as “mushrooming” in Buddhist
areas as a result of funding from the United States. Organizations like World Vision and
Samaritan’s purse, which were both operating in Sri Lanka, came under fire by anti-
conversion activists because they were actively evangelizing in Sri Lanka (Commission
Report 2009: sections 239 & 573). These organizations are well known in other regions

158 The anthropologist and Sinhala Buddhist nationalist S. Goonetilake leveled a critique of such
of the world for their “faith-based initiatives” which actively engage in evangelism (Bornstein 2005, Sharkey 2008 & 2013).

There were a handful of cases in which evangelical church organizations used the tsunami disaster as an opportunity to proselytize in the post-tsunami period, as detailed by Matthews (2007). A high-profile case involved a Waco, Texas based church organization which sent missionaries bearing aid to Sri Lanka (ibid). When upon their return the church boasted of the number of new conversions secured during the mission trip on its website, The New York Times published an article in January 2005, bearing the headline, “Mix of Quake Aid and Preaching Stirs Concern.” This resulted in a heightened fury against foreign Christian aid organizations in Sri Lanka. However, many international organizations that had arrived in Sri Lanka which were nominally Christian but operated entirely upon secular principles. Many such humanitarian organizations—including UMCOR (Methodist)—came under scrutiny because of its Christian name. UMCOR changed the logo at its Sri Lankan offices from the cross and the flame to the less conspicuous all-caps “UMCOR.” Generally, such international

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See also Rohde, D. “Mix of Quake Aid and Preaching Stirs Concern.” Published: January 22, 2005 http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/22/international/worldspecial4/22preach.html
charities abided by mandates to operate on the basis of secular non-partisanship, sometimes in spite of what local beneficiaries demanded of them (Korf et al, 2007).

As a result of the Christian symbolism in their name and logo, Sri Lankan populists typically assumed even the International Committee on the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (LRCS), to be operating on religious principles, even when it had not been the case. As Forsythe (2005) shows, Henri Dunant (1828-1910), the founder of the Red Cross, was an evangelical Christian who considered himself to be “an instrument in the hands of God.” However, subsequently, the ICRC did not emphasize the Christian origins of the organization, and insist that entirely secular motivations guide the organization (2005: 28). Calhoun highlights that the Red Cross had originated in the late 19th century with the imperative to enable dying soldiers to die “a good death,” which in Europe, meant a Christian death, involving confession and professions of faith (2010: 36). This type of humanitarian care was crucial as modern war technologies proliferated and resulted in increasing numbers of casualties (ibid, 36; also Haskell 1985).

Calhoun reminds us that humanitarianism transformed the older Christian notion of charity: “From a focus on the internal rectitude and purity of religious
communities, evangelicalism brought a new outward orientation. It addresses the
world of strangers as potential converts” (35-36). Calhoun goes on to point out that

... the founders of the Red Cross sought to reduce suffering through politically neutral means. In an era of revolutionary politics, the changes they sought and the services they provided were conceived as non-partisan. By the time of the Franco-Prussian War, the International Committee of the Red Cross provided its care under the flag of neutrality. This flag, of course, appropriated a Christian symbol. Care—charity—was provided not only out of religious motivation, but also on the basis of religious understanding of what common humanity meant beyond national identities (Calhoun 2010: 37).

In time, many humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross became secularized, but the Christian symbolism remains. Yet, however much some of these organizations have been secularized to expand humanitarian work within the postcolonial world, in the case of Sri Lanka, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists tend to read this symbolism of origins into present-day motivation. In fact, contemporary Sinhala Buddhist discourses on “Western” humanitarianism tend not to mark the distinction between Christian charity and transnational secular aid. This is perhaps not so surprising given their isomorphism of their histories. However much continuities between secular humanitarianism and Christian charity may not be apparent to the secular NGO staff who strive for non-partisanship in giving (Korf 2007), such continuities are often discerned by recipients and local observers of this foreign humanitarian aid in Sri Lanka.
The Problem of the Gift

As we have seen, for Sinhala Buddhists “anti-conversion” activists, Christian charity is critiqued as necessarily being attached to efforts to convert non-Christians. Moreover, secular humanitarian is also viewed as bearing, at minimum, a trace of an interested Christian ethos. Indeed, in this post-colonial, humanitarian aid milieu, faith-based and secular giving of various kinds are perceived to carry with it the influence of international flows of charitable capital. Religious charity offered by Christians is especially suspected of being an intentionally persuasive tool of proselytizers that threatens the foundations of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

This issue can be illuminated by the Maussian thesis on the gift, as well as through the multiple interpretations given to his enigmatic thesis (Schrift 1997, Godelier 1999). The dual nature of the thesis on the hau is of particular import: though Mauss invokes the notion of the hau, or the spirit of the gift, many scholars have regarded the hau as a “secular” force that enforces the rule of return. Within this framework, it is the very materiality of charity that compels religious “patronage.” Other scholars who have critically revisited the Maussian thesis have taken seriously the idea that the hau is an actual spiritual force that compels return. Locating the

distinct ideologies of the “charismatic gift” among his Pentecostal Christian
interlocutors in Sweden, Simon Coleman (2004) discerns this duality in the Maussian
thesis: the gift has the potential to initiate a contract, or, as in the Pentecostal case, the
gift inaugurates a covenant (421-2). The former view that the material gift generates
religious patronage on a contractual basis coincides with Sri Lankan populist criticisms
that charity begets conversions mechanically, as if they are a "bribe" or inducement
(Menon 2003, Mahadev 2013). In contrast, Coleman’s interpretation of the hau as a
“covenantal” spiritual force is consonant with what my Sri Lankan Christian
interlocutors insists happens in the process of conversion: believers stress that if
people feel compelled to convert that it because of the workings of the Holy Spirit that
is experientially transmitted between the donor and the beneficiary of charity. As one
Sri Lankan Protestant evangelical minister described an incident when a Buddhist
monk from a nearby temple befriended him and began asking him to teach him English,
he said: “I of course won’t go in for direct conversion”—he emphasized this for the
benefit of the evangelist sitting near us who conducts sensitivity-trainings to help
Protestant ministers ultimately lessen the resistance to Christian evangelism in Sri
Lanka. “But I hope that that monk sees the God working through me, and that he will
gain the conviction to convert.”
Since the gift necessarily demands reciprocity as if by some unseen supernatural force inherent to human sociality, the notion of “pure gift” without the strings of requisite reciprocity is rendered as a fiction (Mauss 1966, Douglas 1966).\(^{161}\) The nearest approximation of such a “pure gift” is charity, which as Douglas argues, “wounds” the recipient because of the impossibility of reciprocation (1966). Given the complications of aid distribution, dissatisfaction among beneficiaries, and the ubiquitous suspicion that secular and faith-based humanitarian organizations are a vehicle through which Westerners could instill foreign values, DeAlwis (2009) recalls Douglas’s famous insight.\(^{162}\) As DeAlwis has put it, although charity is, on the surface, a “salve” to heal the wounds of war and natural disaster, poignantly, Sri Lankan beneficiaries were also subjects who are “aided and ad(minister)ed and disciplined in additionally wounding ways” (DeAlwis 2009: 122).\(^{163}\)

The unwritten demands of reciprocity created by the charitable gift indeed have implications for the politics of religious affiliation. In their study on the politics of tsunami aid and religious patronage, Korf, Hasbullah, Klem and Hollenbach (2007) detail the inescapability of the “patrimonial rationale” that drives the social


\(^{163}\) Making a similar observation about the wounding capability of charity, Korf et al point to various reports by social scientists diagnosing that post-tsunami aid in Sri Lanka has created conditions in which beneficiaries felt “humiliated”, and who were rendered passive “victims” in the process of recovery from humanitarian crises.
relationships involved in the gift of post-tsunami humanitarian aid in the eastern Sri Lankan context. Their concept of the patrimonial idea of giving is comparable to Coleman’s notion of the “contractual” gift discussed above. In the post-tsunami context of the eastern coast of Sri Lanka, Korf et al described how religious leaders typically refused to give exclusively to their own lay adherents (2007: 506). While many religious institutions strived to maintain the “purity of the gift” by refusing partisanship in giving and to deliver tsunami relief provisions evenhandedly based on need, the authors show that many tsunami-affected people expected to be the exclusive beneficiaries of the charity granted by their churches, mosques and temples. They write:

... the recipients attached significant importance to religious identity and had clear expectations about their religious leaders and the way they handled gifts. While the churches had long abandoned the idea of using gifts for conversion or as a patronage resource for their followers, their constituencies appeared to expect them to do exactly that. Christian respondents wanted their religious patrons to provide assistance to them. Informants living in the Smyrna section of the tsunami housing project [Smyrna Fellowship is the aid channel of a US based evangelical church and relies on private funding from a Swedish family] complained that their own churches (Catholic and Methodist) had not helped them much, and what they had given came from foreign gifts. Smyrna, though, had done well. The receivers considered the church that had delivered gifts to be one that cared for them. Therefore, this church deserved their loyalty. One informant said: ‘The priest [from their original congregation] was worried

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164 Ibid.
166 Ibid. Matthews (2007) discusses how evangelical groups have been conflated with NGOs in the post-tsunami humanitarian context.
people might join Smyrna, but no church came . . . If Smyrna builds a church, certainly we will go there. They built all the houses and the playground. Certainly, we will join’ (570).

The authors observe that there is a “patrimonial rationale” implicitly involved in the practice of giving and receiving even when the purveyors of charitable aid did not intend to elicit conversions.

The case that Korf et al put forth illustrates that even when religious leaders strived to uphold the purity and non-partisan nature of the charitable gift, and earnestly gave without expectation of conversion, after a Maussian fashion the authors suggest that altruistic acts, wittingly or not, necessarily generated the requirement of reciprocity. Thus, patrimonial rationale of religious charity almost mechanically generated “converts” or religious patrons. In this light, conversion may appear to be a practical inevitability in relationships of charitable exchange wherein donor and recipient are of different religions. The trope of “rice Christianity” not being uncommon in Asia, the phenomenon of shifting religious allegiance based upon the availability of charitable aid is certainly not new, nor exclusive to Sri Lanka—nor even Asia.

In my own ethnographic research I found many cases in southern tsunami-affected villages, where people wryly commented, and sometimes complained, that
because of aid offered by churches there were a number of new conversions, but these conversions had sometimes been temporary. “They began going to that new church. But once the tsunami aid dried up, they came right back” [to Buddhism, to veneration of a wide spectrum of deities]. I was told of multiple instances of such unstable conversions. Other version of the stories had it that the beneficiaries of this aid “went back” to practicing no religion at all. One interlocutor who said he was driven to attend the newest church in the area on the rationale of post-tsunami material reciprocity was Sarath uncle, Thalalla village’s matchmaker. Though Sarath had traveled 11 kilometers by bus each Sunday to the Matara Assemblies of God Church in the Kotuwa (the Dutch Fort) since the 1990s,\textsuperscript{167} he explained that he felt beholden to a new minister in the area, Pastor Erick, who had come bearing aid after the tsunami. Sarath uncle felt compelled to attend Pastor Erick’s new church in a nearby village, a Church of Christ branch—in spite of feeling less persuaded to attend the church. Pastor Erick was adamantly against “speaking gibberish” in church, as per the injunctions of the Church of Christ school of Christianity to which he belonged.\textsuperscript{168} As a result of this denial of charismatic practices, the new church was relatively less attractive to Sarath uncle

\textsuperscript{167} The AoG church was established in the 1970s.
\textsuperscript{168} Church of Christ is a Protestant “non-denominational” church which was developed out of the American “Restoration Movement.” The foundations of the church are built upon New Testament principles in reaction against the trends of the Great Awakening which had generated the charismatic practices of neo-Pentecostalism. For more on Church of Christ, see Allen (1988).
than the Assemblies of God Pentecostal Church that was further afield from his village.
I observed that he would “show his face” occasionally at Pastor Erick’s church, but
would more frequently participate at the Pentecostal church. Sarath felt compelled to
be a patron of Pastor Faber’s Church, he said, because he had “received so many things
from Pastor Erick after the tsunami.”

While the central allegation by Buddhist protectionists is that it was Christian
charity that had consistently induced the poor and the vulnerable into converting to
Christianity, the conversion narratives I collected rarely attributed attraction to
Christianity to be the result of the gift of charity. More often than not, what tended to
be most attractive to converts were the miraculous healings, and liberation from
economic or emotional impediments, through what Christians understand as the
“charismatic gift”—which Colman describes as the covenantal gift—enabled by the
grace of God (Coleman 2000, 2004, Marshall 2009, see also Chapter Four of this
dissertation). This may well be because the general structure of conversion narratives
entails the theme of a person who becomes committed to Christ after overcoming
immense material or emotional hardship, physical ailment, addiction or relationship
turmoil, as detailed in several recent ethnographies (see Coleman 2000, Richette 2003,
comparing evangelical conversions in Sri Lanka do indeed describe how many converts were taken by the persuasive expressions of care and sense of community generated in the process of evangelical recruitment (Perera 1998, Religious Conversion Debate 2005-6).

Rehabilitating Ethno-Religious Perceptions: Postwar Politics of the Gift

In the context of the prevailing fears among Sinhala Buddhist nationalists that they do not have sufficient mechanisms to compete with foreign-funded humanitarianism nor church-based care giving, new efforts have been made to galvanize Buddhist charitable activities. Sri Lankan studies scholar Stirrat (2006) has observed “competitive humanitarianism” in the aftermath of tsunami. Taking the religious context into account, Gajaweera (2013) describes a situation of “competitive philanthropy” which reinvigorated various Buddhist organizations. Indeed, many such Buddhist charities are explicit that their work is motivated by the prevention of “unethical conversions” in mind (Gajaweera 2013, Mahadev 2013).169 One example is the recent establishment of the Red Lotus Society170 by a group of concerned Colombo-based Sinhala Buddhist laypeople in 2006. The founders are all actively involved in

169 Also Menon 2003
lobbying efforts to prohibit “unethical conversions.” They have name the organization with the idea of mirroring the work of the Red Cross.\textsuperscript{171} For Gajaweera’s interlocutors, the fact that Sri Lanka and Laos were both highly ranked in the World Giving Index was a great point of pride. They expressed that although Sri Lanka too often went unrecognized for its generosity, the fact that both countries were highly ranked was proof-positive that Theravāda Buddhism does indeed engender generosity and charitable dispositions (2013b).\textsuperscript{172}

Gajaweera’s ethnography (2013) discusses two organizations in particular, comprised primarily of Sinhala Buddhist lay people, which are involved in humanitarian operations in the former warzones. One is a women’s group that engages in charitable work and promotes Sinhala Buddhist values in villages inhabited exclusively by Sinhalese people, but which border Tamil and Muslim villages. Second, she Gajaweera describes the manifestation of “cosmopolitan” Buddhist imperatives to domesticate international humanitarianism within Sri Lanka. She characterizes the Foundation of Goodness as striving to bridge Buddhist conceptions of meritorious practices of giving to the poor (which they sometimes refer to as \textit{dāna}), and the good

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{The Buddhist Times}, (vol. issue, 2005)
\textsuperscript{172} Sri Lanka was tied with the UK for the 8\textsuperscript{th} place in 2010.
https://www.cafonline.org/pdf/WorldGivingIndex28092010Print.pdf
intentions of international donors. The Foundation, mainly comprised of Sinhalese Sri Lankans, orient their conduct around Buddhist values but translate these values into secular premises of “goodness” (Gajaweera 2013).

The altruistic agenda of providing for the material needs of refugees and the reformatio of sentiment favoring potentialities for peace between Sinhalese and Tamils in the post-war era described by Gajaweera as “cosmopolitan” Sri Lankan humanitarianism, also converges with nationalistic forms of Sinhala Buddhist charitable outreach. Arguably, these efforts of aid distributed by Sinhalese Sri Lankans in the former war zones are aimed to weaken the international humanitarian community’s contentions against Sinhalese Buddhists’ treatment of Tamil civilians.173

The concern about Western and Christian influence in Sri Lanka has refigured populist sentiment about Sinhala Buddhist and the Tamil Hindu relations. Corroborating this, I turn now to a discussion of a monk whose biography is a striking and an unusual one—one of the central figures within a highly politicized monastic Buddhist organization, the Janavijaya Foundation that had been established by Soma Thera. I first met the

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173 These “official” reports of growing amity between Sinhalese and Tamils in the former war zone stand in contradistinction to international reports that Tamils feel as though they continue to face humiliation as their lands continue remain occupied by the Sri Lankan Army: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/abuse-by-sri-lankas-army-rubs-salt-in-wounds-of-war-tamil-women-say/2012/07/06/gJQADaSiRW_story_1.html?socialreader_check=0&denied=1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/abuse-by-sri-lankas-army-rubs-salt-in-wounds-of-war-tamil-women-say/2012/07/06/gJQADaSiRW_story_1.html?socialreader_check=0&denied=1). Jayadeva Uyangoda has recently shown that the Rajapakse regime continues to ignore the political rights of Sri Lanka’s minorities: [http://himalmag.com/component/content/article/5075-a-victors-peace.html](http://himalmag.com/component/content/article/5075-a-victors-peace.html) (July 6, 2012).
monk who I will call Dhammadasa, at the Bhikkhu Training Center of Maharagama, one afternoon in 2009, after he had finished his teaching duties for the day. When I arrived, I prostrated at the feet of Rev. Dhammadasa, and we sat down in a common room for an interview. The thirty-five year old monk wore mahagony robes, and his face was bespectacled with thin wire frames. I learned that the Reverend Thero's primary role at the Bhikkhu training center was to deliver Pali lessons to junior monks based at the center. But it soon became clear that the work that Rev. Dhammadasa truly relished was his charitable efforts, and that he came to view it as central in his vocation as a Buddhist monk.

Reverend Dhammadasa enthusiastically shared with me accounts of charitable projects that he had begun to undertake in the tsunami affected areas, as well as in the former war zones, and second only to Reverend Assagi, he became one of my most generous monastic interlocutors. He was one of the central figures in the Janavijaya Foundation—a social-service organization founded upon Buddhist revivalist principles by the late Soma Thera. Dhammadasa Thero shared his experiences about embarking

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item A pseudonym.
\item Soma Thero did so based on the model of his primary monastic teacher, the Mahanayaka Thero named Madihe Pannasiha, the head of the Amarapura Nikaya credited for unifying the various Theravadan sects, and well known for engaging the Sangha in what scholars have called “political Buddhism.” For more on Madihe Pannasiha Thero see Bartholomeusz (1980), pp 92; Siriweera (1980); Abeysekara (2002); also Holt (1998) “The Persistence of Political Buddhism.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
on a Buddhist mission with me, and I received regular updates of how he involved himself in establishing schools, building homes, and distributing gifts for school children. His role as a charitable figure was one that he had begun to self-fashion, having been entrusted with one of the leadership roles in the Janavijaya Foundation.

Soon after we became acquainted, Rev. Dhammadasa introduced me to one particular Janavijaya Foundation initiative which helped to establish a Buddhist preschool in the tsunami affected coastal village Madihe, few kilometers west of the small city of Matara, where I would be based for much of my research. As Rev. Dhammadasa Thero explained, he had chosen the village of Madihe to build a preschool because it was the village of his own monastic teacher's birth. Reverend Madihe Panniyasiha Thero, was at the helm of one important phase of the Sinhala Buddhist monastic revival (Siriweera 1980, Tilakaratna 2003). Committed to Buddhist social service works as a central part of monasticism Panniyasiha Thero founded the Bhikkhu Training Center of Maharagama, which remains of a center of politicized monasticism.176

176 Madihe Panniyasiha Thero was teacher also to Gangodawila Soma Thera, who I discussed in detail in the chapter prior.
As Rev. Dhammadasa Thero articulated very clearly to me that he felt driven to start a Buddhist preschool in the village because several “Christian” preschools had been initiated by foreign money during the course of tsunami reconstruction efforts. While spending time at the Janavijaya Preschool in Madihe, it seemed to me that the other preschools in the area of which the monk spoke, were based on initiatives funded by Western monies, but were by and large secular entities. Eventually it became evident that Rev. Dhammadasa Thero assumed that these foreign-run preschools were “Christian” not because they were in fact missionary schools, but because they were foreign-funded, and were initially run by expatriate volunteers from Western countries (sudhayo, or “white foreigners”).

**Reinhabiting Monastic Vocation**

“Jagadupakritireva Buddhapoojeya” –helping the needy is the real offering to the Buddha.

-Dhammadasa Thero

Dhammadasa Thero pursued this social service work to an extent which some other monks considered to be inappropriate. While Dhammadasa Thero was upstanding in his dedication to his work and did not seem to have breached any of the rules of the
Vinaya from what I could see, some of his monastic co-residents found that his late-night arrivals from overnight trips where he stayed in temples in other towns skirted monastic codes. Dhammadasa Thero remained a central figure at the monastery’s Janavijaya Foundation, but relocated his living quarters to another smaller temple that could accommodate to his erratic schedule of comings and goings to Preschool ceremonies, and charitable mission trips all around the island. He frequently invited Japanese Mahayana monks to join him as benefactors of the projects, and cultivated other important associations. Among the supporters of his work it was rumored that he was asked to relocate because other monks had become “jealous” of his savvy and his ease with “move among the people,” which other monks felt limited from engaging based on the conventions of meritorious monastic living according to the Vinaya (Buddhist monastic code of conduct).

Dhammadasa Thero impressed me with the dedication to his charitable work. It was a dedication which went against the grain of Buddhist monastic conventions. When discussing his engagement in social service work in rural areas he said to me, “I feel it is my duty.” He then explained that,

177 In an opposite type of case, Abeyeskera (2002) discusses a Buddhist monk who was considered as corrupt and as failing to adhere to monastic rules. Abeyesekera describes how ironically, while undergoing a court trial against him, the monk cheekily used the monastic requirement of take his final meal before noon as a way of getting the trial to adjourn for the day. The court could do nothing but to acquiesce.
after age 50 or 55, I would like to change my life. I would like to meditate. This work that I do is not the monk’s duty. Normally the monk’s duty is meditation. To be without attachment—*Siha kalpanawa* [without attachments of the heart/mind]—it is not for me, it’s for others.

The Buddhist monk’s duties include meditation and reflection, he reiterated. I stopped him for clarification and asked, “You said that when you turn 50, 55, you will leave the…” “House” he filled in the answer, preemptively. “What?” I asked, twice, surprised by his diction. “House.” “From the house” Dhammadasa Thero repeated himself in order to ensure that I had indeed grasped his meaning. He implied that his retirement from charitable work as a young Buddhist monk would be akin to leaving behind his role as a householder. “Leaving the home” in one’s old age to undertake an ascetic lifestyle unto the death is of course a classic trajectory in the Hindu tradition (Das 1982, Burghart 1983), whereas the traditional Buddhist monastic trajectory involved early ascetic “retirement” from the world to pursue the path of *nibbana* (Gautama Buddha was twenty-nine when he left the home and thirty-five when he attained enlightenment, according to canonical lore). While Dhammadasa Thero had actually left his home to join the *Sangha* when he was only age eleven, he received higher ordination at the age of twenty and finished his education in Buddhism and Pali language when he was twenty-two. He avowed that he wanted to spend his productive years as someone engaged in social service, and to pursue mendicancy fully only late in
life. It is striking indeed how Dhammadasa Thero reconfigured the monastic role as it suited his idea of what constitutes meritorious social work, his taste, ambition, and socio-political sensibilities.

Rehabilitating Ethno-Religious Perceptions: Postwar Politics of the Gift

Whereas Gajaweera (2013) discussed lay Buddhist charitable and humanitarian giving in the former war zones, I found that Reverend Dhammadasa, as a Buddhist monk, was also engaged in work in these regions of Sri Lanka, citing very similar political premises to those described by Gajaweera. In the process of his engagement in this aid and charity distribution work, Reverend Dhammadasa, I suggest, reconfigured for himself the entailments of the monastic vocation. As a steward of this mission of Buddhist social service, the monk gifted school supplies, shoes, umbrellas, and other provisions to Tamil refugee children being temporarily housed in IDP camps in the Vanni (near Vavuniya). Reverend Dhammadasa emphasized that his mission was “to change the impression held among Tamil people that Buddhist monks are always fighting”—a reference to the Sri Lankan Buddhist Sangha’s involvement in lobbying Sri
Lankan political leaders into pursing military means to extinguish the threats of Tamil militancy. 178

The monk maintained that the image of war-mongering Buddhist monks was a misrepresentation which the LTTE had falsely espoused, and which he wished to dispel. To do so, Dhammadas Thero, along with a couple of other Janavijaya Foundation monks, traveled to the Vanni, where he convened Hindu priests who had been displaced in the war. He ceremonially gifted the priests with white cloth—the traditional dress of pucari ritual officiants. Dhammadasa Thero proudly described to me how he had gathered ninety Hindu priests and held a three-hour discussion with them. In his account of his meeting with them, he strongly admonished the Hindu priests for their inaction during the war. He detailed to me how he lectured to the Hindu priests, in Sinhala, with a Tamil translator to facilitate understanding between them: “Why did the war start? You never did your duty... Hindu priests should do their duty very well. If [you] Hindu priests had done your duty very well, the war would have never started.” He also implied that the disharmony between Sinhalese and Tamil people, and the malignant rise of the LTTE, was one of the upshots of the

Christianization of Tamils. Seamlessly shifting out of reported speech, to explanatory mode, he emphatically said to me that,

Prabhakaran, and Tamil children [i.e. child soldiers], and Anton Balasingham—all are not Hindus. All are Catholic. They never attended any Hindu kovil (temple). Prabhakaran, Anton Balasingham, and Charles Antony—these names are not Hindu names. That war is, not a Tamil war. There is something behind it, I think. That’s the truth.

When I interjected, saying, “but hamaduruwo (honorific), as I understand, the LTTE, they’re not only Catholic… nor Christian. They’re mainly Hindu, no?” Reverend Dhammadasa responded that,

Ordinary Tamil people don’t know anything—they only learned to fight. They don’t know Hinduism. There are not any [real] Hindus [among them]. When I spoke with the Hindu priests, it was clear that they don’t know anything—they can’t advise their people, they don’t speak to them and counsel them. They don’t know about Hinduism… Vedanta, the Veda book—they know nothing of it. Only Hindu priests! What do they teach? They don’t know how to teach. I advised them, “first you must look after your people.” It is very important for them. I tried to discuss with them, rather than preaching to them as in a sermon. I prefer to discuss and also work with children. That way they can learn more from us. Buddhism is very practical. If we work with children or with people, they know, working with us, who is a Buddhist monk. They can understand [the monk’s vocation]. Dharma talk is, only talk. They can understand more easily, practically [through practical engagement].

From Dhammadasa Thero’s vantage point, it was the induction of Christianity that tore the social fabric of Sri Lanka and disabled Sinhala-Tamil and Buddhist-Hindu amity and co-existence which was stitched together by the shared cultural traditions that
permeated the Indic region. In his view, it was conversion to Christianity, rather than inherent Sinhala-Tamil enmity, which had engendered communal conflict in Sri Lanka. While Reverend Dhammadasa tended to regard Catholic and Christian clergy to be hostile towards Buddhism and Buddhist monks in particular, he would occasionally concede that some of Catholic and Christian figures, particularly those in southern Sri Lanka, are “good” and cooperative. He suggested that though significant capacities for discernment—of the type that he himself exercised—were required in order to know the difference between those Christians (“Catholics”) who were upstanding citizens, and those who were non-cooperative and who were of malignant anti-national persuasions.

It was not only Reverend Dhammadasa, but several other Buddhist monks and lay Buddhist activists who similarly enunciated the view that it was Christianity that had contributed to the impulse towards Tamil sedition, and that this had been enabled through Catholic, Protestant, and now increasingly Pentecostal practices of charitability in the northern and eastern religions of Sri Lanka. In Sinhala nationalist rhetorics, the Tamil rebel leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was painted as one who had become a dissident only after disavowing the “religion of his birth” to become a Catholic (or a Methodist, in other versions of the lore). The idea among Sinhalese
people that the rebel leader had converted from Hinduism to Christianity was culled from the fact that he had named one of his sons Charles Anthony. Contrarily however, one of his biographers shows that the elusive rebel leader was born a Hindu and had never converted to Christianity—that his only “religion,” if his zeal could be characterized as such, was Tamil nationalism (Narayan Swamy, xiii). Yet, in the popular imagination of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, it was Prabhakaran’s conversion and renunciation of the religion of his birth that caused him to become an upstart, and “to demand (for the minority) far more” than what minorities were entitled to in a majority Sinhala Buddhist nation.

The anti-national potentialities of trans-national Christian giving during the course of the war and after the tsunami was also denoted in the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress report on unethical conversions. To quote the report: “We cannot put into figures the enormous monetary help that Sri Lanka received after the tsunami. Problems arose from the aid that was received in dollars and sterling pounds…” (158 section 686). Furthermore, the report stated:

There were three problems with regard to the monetary aid Sri Lanka received. The first was, that the money and aid was coming in under the guise of

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179From Inside An Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran, the first profile of the world’s most ruthless guerrilla leader. Although some of his closest associates were Tamil Catholics… naming of son. Construed he was Catholic/Christian. While indeed there was a number of early Tamil converts to Catholicism in the Jaffna peninsula during the era of Portuguese rule, the Catholic Church was also successful in converting Sinhalese people in littoral areas (Jayawardene).
humanitarian aid was actually going to the Tamil Tigers... The second was that the Disaster Management Center had spent huge amounts of money to cater to the needs of the NGOs that had arrived to the island. The final one was that Buddhists, Hindu and Muslim people were harassed by the NGOs in their big effort to convert them to Christianity (158 section 687).

The compounded set of issues has resulted in the sense among Sri Lankan populists that seditious and anti-national Tigers, humanitarian operations of NGOs, and the Christian evangelical movement are all cut from the same poisonous cloth.

Along these lines, Reverend Dhammadasa adopted a revisionist “post-ethnicity” explanation for the Sinhala-Tamil conflict which supersedes the previously-held view that there was an inherent “racial” basis for conflict. This revisionism seems to indicate that Sinhalese nationalists recognize the past conflict with Tamils as contingent. Though the idea that there is inherent racial difference continues to occasionally be expressed by Sinhala nationalists—for instance, with the occasional assertion that “you can never trust what is in the heart of a Tamil,” by and large, among Sinhala Buddhist nationalists I encountered in my research, particularly...
in institutional centers from which such sensibilities have been propelled in the past, the sense that the conflict is an endemic one certainly seems to have receded to a large degree.

Rather, apparent in post-war discourses, State-run and local Sinhala Buddhist civilian-run charitable operations were envisioned as crucial to the process of “rehabilitating” Tamil IDPs (internally-displaced people). Tamil IDPs were figured as having been enculturated by Tamil nationalist political discourses into anti-Sinhala sentiment over the course of nearly thirty years under the reign of the LTTE secessionists. Whereas Sinhala Buddhist nationalists in the mode of counter-insurgency assumed that all displaced Tamil civilians to be separatist insurgents or, at the very least as “sympatheists” of Tamil secessionist movement, the majoritarian nationalist post-war campaigns projected an image of Sri Lankans attempting to transcend the provincial nationalisms that have divided Sri Lanka. Sinhala Buddhist post-war discourses have sought to redefine the political relationship between the south and the north, between Sinhalese and Tamil citizens. This sensibility of “reconciliation” and reassimiliation hinged upon the refiguration of Tamils as depoliticized and innocent citizens in need of care and assistance. Any persistence of anti-Sinhala Tamil nationalism, according to Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, was that it came from outside,
from the Tamil diaspora. That is to say, anti-Sinhala Buddhist sentiments were believed
to have been bred among Tamil diaspora who live in the “Christian West,” and by
Tamils converts to Christianity who had been denuded of homegrown, autochthonous
Lankan values.

We have seen that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists of Sri Lanka today express
alarm that the activities of NGOs and Christian charities present a danger to Sri Lanka
insofar as they may enable anti-Sinhala and anti-Buddhist forces to invade their
country in new colonial guises. I have tried to demonstrate how secular humanitarian
aid and political interventions, at present, tend to be viewed as continuities wrought
out of similar missionary agendas that inspired Christian charity. Secular aid, and
Christian charity, I argue, have both been perceived to be intentionally demeaning to
Theravāda Buddhist and Sinhala cultural values. This essentialized conception of
Christian charity of course elides the practices of caring for the poor, within the
alienating conditions of capitalism which principled Sri Lankan ecumenists, leftists, and
liberation theologists pursue in their desire for social justice. In spite of these lived
nuances, I have shown that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists have tended to perceive
Christian charity as a means that evangelists use to undermine Sinhala Buddhist forms
of meritorious giving, and Buddhists’ capacities for care. Additionally, I have shown
that in the nationalist imaginary both secular and Christian forms of giving are folded into each other, compounding perceptions that these varieties of giving are instrumental in enacting anti-national political agendas which I began to outline also in Chapter One. Sinhala Buddhists, as nationalists and as religious revivalists, respond to the multivalent associations attached to charitable practices of Christians—as well as of those who are presumed to be Christian—with revisionist conceptions of meritorious work. Equipped with reformist sensibilities in a milieu which might be characterized as post-humanitarian, Sinhala Buddhists’ post-tsunami and post-war charitable engagements are positioned so as to counteract the threats to Buddhism and the integrity of the Sri Lankan nation.
As Christianity and polytheism entered into mortal combat, miracles became a major weapon in the arsenal of Christianity.

Robert Garland, “Miracles in the Greek and Roman World”

It was the early Christian Fathers who established the principle that only a single Church could become the source of an authenticating discourse. They knew that the “symbols” embodied in practice of self-confessed Christians are not always identical with the theory of the “one true Church,” that religion requires authorized practice and authorizing doctrine, and that there is always a tension between them—sometimes breaking into heresy, the subversion of Truth—which underlines the creative role of institutional power.

Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion

In Chapter Two we have seen that charity is understood to be a quintessential gift of Christian attraction. A second form of Christian gift that is profoundly attractive is the “gift” of charisma or God’s grace which miracles of the Pentecostal-charismatic sort (Coleman 2000, Marshall 2009). Writing on miracles in the very different context of the Athenian religious milieu, the classicist Robert Garland has shown that, “As Christianity and polytheism entered into mortal combat, miracles became a major weapon in the arsenal of Christianity” (2011: 87). With the growth of neo-Pentecostalism in Sri Lanka over the last few decades, charismatic Christian claims of
miracles and “miraculous conversions” have similarly become significant points of Buddhist-Christian conflict. One way to understand the nature of this interreligious competition and conflict I suggest, is to examine the relationship between miracles and the “sovereign” domains that the communities in question hope to retain or to newly carve out. This is of course to follow a line of inquiry that, in a different intellectual domain, was initiated by Carl Schmitt (1985 [1922]). As we have seen thus far, the legacy of Christian missions and modern Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka has produced intense identititarian-based religiosities. The inter-religious sociality characteristic of this milieu has religious leaders of both communities working to ensure that their religious traditions remain valid and vital, as against other competing claims of cosmic powers that manifest in the Sri Lankan life-world. As I illustrate in this chapter, in the postwar political configuration of Sri Lanka, political-theological concepts and structures that have been long-established and those that have a more recent provenance, can be seen to work in tandem with one another, animating plural, conflicting and conciliatory notions of sovereign religious domains.

What precisely do miracles have to do with sovereign power? As scholars of Sri Lanka have shown, however much the Sri Lankan state may be structured by a system of governance inherited from the British colonial regime, classical Theravāda Buddhist
notions of sovereignty are centrally upheld through “the rituals of the Kandyan state” (Seneviratne 2000, Malalgoda 1978, Berkowitz 2003). A political theology fortified by doctrines that validate the sovereignty of the Dhamma—that is, the Buddha’s teachings, and the cosmic order itself—has long been prevalent in processes and ideologies involved in legitimizing the power of the Sri Lankan state.¹⁸⁴ The notion of a cosmically-ordained sovereign—the Cakrvartin the “Universal Emperor” is inscribed in Buddhist doctrine (Collins 1998). Per this doctrine, the Cakrvartin ensures that the “two wheels of the Dhamma” are always in motion; the persistent turning guarantees righteousness throughout the kingdom (Reynolds et al 1972, Bechert 1973, Tambiah 1976).¹⁸⁵

The King of Kandy, being at the helm of political and cosmic power in pre-colonial times, housed and protected the Buddha’s Tooth Relic at a temple, the Dalada Maligawa, situated adjacent to the King’s palace. When the Kingdom of Kandy was ceded to British forces in 1815, British governors newly acquired authority over the sovereign power vested in the Buddha’s sacred Tooth Relic (Malalgoda, 1976: 118). According to Malalgoda, the British recognized that the key to maintaining sovereignty of the nation

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¹⁸⁴ (Smith; Reynolds, Obeyesekere)
¹⁸⁵ In episodes of crisis, related to the ascendance of a Cakrvartin, a Devadharma or Dharmaraja—a Divine or Sovereign protector of the Dhamma—a also appears as a redemptive force when the sovereignty of Buddhism over Theravada Buddhist lands (Keyes 1977, Malalgoda 1993, see also Chapter Four).
was to possess and protect the sacred Relic, for the Relic was the fount of sovereign power. However, the colonists’ relationship to the Relic soon incited anxieties among Christian missionaries, since by protecting and saluting the Relic, British officials appeared to be promoting a Buddhist state (118). Within a few years after the takeover, we learn from Malalgoda, British officials acquiesced to missionary demands, such that when Kandyan chiefs prompted the Governor to “provide a military salute for the festival and to make a customary gift to the Relic, the governor rejected the application ‘on the ground that he would do nothing which could imply identity in the Buddhist faith on the part of the authorities’” (118-9). 186 Although the British colonial regime tried to keep its administration of power distinct from the agendas of Christian missionaries, over the course of British rule, the colonists gradually came to be associated with the missionary will to “disestablish” and demolish Ceylon’s religions, and Buddhism in particular, as well as the local hold over sovereign power itself. 187 Earlier waves of Portuguese colonialism had ‘established’ Catholicism in the maritime provinces, later Dutch Calvinists established Protestant Christianity “to the exclusion of

186 A 1928 letter from the Revenue Commissioner of Kandy, George Turnour’s letter, dated 21 July 1838 (cf. Malalgoda 118-9, footnote 56 on pp 119).
187 As discussed in Chapter One, Malalgoda (1976) gives a most comprehensive treatment of the vicissitudes of the relationship of colonial governors of Ceylon and Christian missionaries. He describes how originally these colonial administrators promised to protect “the religion of the Boodhoo,” but eventually reneged under pressure from missionaries. See also Obeyeskere (1979), Winslow (1984), Amumagama (1985), and Fox and Somaratna (1996). Similar efforts occurred throughout the Buddhist world. For the case of Burma, see Mendelson (1964), Korea see Goulde (1985). Blackburn (2010) similarly discusses the disjunction between colonial rule and missionary agendas.
all else, including Catholicism” (Malalgoda 29, cf. Perniola). However, successive colonial powers had initially made inroads only as far as the coastal zones. As Malalgoda argues, “converting the coastal subjects to Christianity was deemed (to be an) effective means of weaning them from their potential source of loyalty to Kandy” (29).

Although these colonial powers challenged the sovereignty of the state, only the Tamil Tigers expressed such extreme hostility towards the Sinhala Buddhist dominated Sri Lankan State that they sought to explode the country’s sovereignty, quite literally, when in 1998 LTTE suicide-bombers attacked the temple where the sacred reliquary is stationed. The attack on the Temple of the Tooth occurred in January 1998, a week prior to Independence Day festivities that year, forcing authorities to shift the pageant to the political capital of Colombo. The offense prevented a visit from Prince Charles to the sacred pre-colonial capital of Kandy. Yet, the Lord Buddha’s Tooth Relic was "miraculously" not damaged in the explosion. Devout Sinhala Buddhists say that this is because the relic, imbued with the Buddha’s living power, was able to preserve itself by launching itself into the air. The Tooth Relic, along with the other relics of the Buddha, more than any other representative of Buddhic will that works immanently in the world, was, and is considered to be supremely sovereign, within classical Theravāda

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188 Coningham and Lewer (1999).
Buddhist conceptions of the state. Although today sovereign power technically lies with an elected President and set of Parliamentarians based on a liberal democratic form of governance inherited from the British, this system had been charted atop preexisting state forms and notions of Dhammically-ordained sovereign power. This older notion of the sovereign agency of cosmic Buddhic power is considered as the motor that maintains the righteousness of the State. As I demonstrate below, in the exceptional circumstances such as in 2009 when the State forces vanquished its ultimate enemy, the LTTE, pre-colonial conceptions of sovereignty episodically coalesced with the inherited forms of executive power.

As I have discussed in prior chapters, from the perspective of Sinhala Buddhist populists in this particular context, new forms of enmity appear to be arising from within Sri Lanka, and are seen to be perduring from without: ostensibly secular Western humanitarian movements seen as being in league with Christian missions which strive to demolish Buddhism. Thus, the sense of geopolitical vulnerability has found some of its sharpest expressions in nationalist agitations over Buddhist apostasy and Christian conversion. Evangelical Christians and secular humanitarian critics, like

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Tamils militants before them, are, in an over-generalized way, surmised to be agents of “recolonization”—as traitors in *potentia*.\(^1\)

The institution of the Sri Lankan Roman Catholic Church is however engaging in bridge-building with Buddhist nationalists by actively denying interest in securing a monopoly over religious conviction in Sri Lanka. These Sri Lankan Roman Catholic leaders do so in spite of the Catholic imperatives of evangelical which endure even within the post-Vatican II Catholic Church. This chapter details the triangulation between Buddhist nationalists, Catholics, and Pentecostals, in the negotiations over religious conversion and in the majoritarian determinations of who abides by the rules of the nation. Recall from Chapter One that Sri Lankan Catholics were especially implicated in populists' allegations of anti-nationalism leveled against broadly against Christians. It was a Catholic who Sinhala Buddhists widely believed to have killed the monk who championed Sinhala Buddhist revivalism in 2003; as I demonstrated, the Buddhist monk and the *Catholic* businessman who allegedly killed had become emblems of Buddhist-Christian enmity.

Considering that Catholics had been implicated in broader populist concerns that Christians are treacherous anti-nationals in *potentia*, how did religious and political

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\(^1\) See also Thiranagama (2010) for nationalist conceptions of traitordom from the point of view of Tamil Tigers, and ex-Tiger dissidents, for another angle on the matter of this tendency towards bi-polarity.
leaders manage to extricate Sri Lankan Catholics from such allegations and anxieties? Under the circumstances of heightened Buddhist-Christian enmity, it would seem that it would practically require a miracle to exculpate Catholics from the populist preoccupation about what conversion to Christianity does to the character of Sri Lankan persons. However, by 2010, the Sri Lankan Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Ranjith, was appointed as a Cardinal of the Catholic Church. This is significant because the bestowal of a Cardinalship upon a clergy member from a non-Catholic country is a substantive indication that the Church is well-reputed within that country. As I demonstrate, the Sri Lankan Catholic Church—as a categorically Christian entity—pursued exceptional status. In a context wherein identity-based assumptions about the political persuasions of Others have become entrenched, how was such Catholic exceptionalism achieved? In other words, once a state of exception had already been established as the norm (Agamben 2005), how was a new exception made possible? This Catholic exceptionalism, I argue, involved both political and theological work of exculpation, allowing the Sri Lankan Roman Catholic Church to join the ranks as a solidly “nationalist” entity of Sri Lanka. Schmitt’s insights, with some revision, are

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192 Recall from Chapter One that what had instigated populist ambitions to ban unethical conversions was the death of a Buddhist monk widely believed to have been killed by a Sri Lankan Christian—and specifically, by a Catholic. The Catholic businessman-philanthropist, Lalith Kotelawala, who nationalists alleged to be culpable for “destroying Buddhism,” had ties with then-Archbishop of the Catholic Diocese of Colombo, Oswald Gomis.

193 Agamben 2005
helpful in delineating how this exceptionalism was sought after in effort to fortify Sri Lankan sovereignty against external threats.

In the context of sharpened Buddhist-Christian hostilities, the Sri Lankan State, and Sinhala Buddhist populists became habituated to the practice of discerning which fellow citizens are potential friends, and who are categorically treacherous to the nation, has been animated by a pressing sense of anxiety in Sri Lanka’s counter-insurgency and “war on terror” (Jeganathan 2003, Thiranagama and Kelly 2011). Such a bi-polar sociality is central to Carl Schmitt’s thesis on The Concept of the Political (2008 [1927]).\textsuperscript{194} This bi-polar inclination is particularly prevalent in states of emergency—states which Schmitt, and more recently, Giorgio Agamben (2005), have theorized (also Mouffe 1999). Nationalists feared that their country’s sovereignty was at risk from within during wartime. In the postwar context, Sri Lankan Catholic leaders newly demonstrated that Catholics, like Buddhists, are expressly committed to upholding the interests of Sri Lankan sovereignty—even against criticisms leveled by Western states and humanitarian organizations against Sri Lanka’s conduct in war. I show the Sri Lankan Catholic Church, from its institutional center, acquiesced to implicit demands

\textsuperscript{194} Mouffe, writing in 1999, challenged Schmitt’s European-based critics who saw that the utility of Schmitt’s thought as hinging upon bipolar political realities (class politics) in Europe, which those critics believed to be dead. Of course, the events of 2001 inaugurated a new era, which quickly entrenched new polarities, ripe for Agamben’s return to Schmitt’s thesis on states of exception.
to perform its nationalistic political orientation, ultimately helping to assure the institution’s survival in Sri Lanka.

In telling this story of how the Sri Lankan Catholic Church, at its institutional center, became “national,” I expound how theologies and practices relating to charismatic miracles in the Church were negotiated. A Catholic theology of the miracle is present, if only nascently developed, in Carl Schmitt’s thesis on *Political Theology* (1922 [1985]). Sri Lankan Catholic leadership aligned with the Sri Lankan state for the cause of national sovereignty, and did so issuing statements requiring Catholics to modulate the charismatic form embedded within the Catholic *Pubuduwa* movement that flourishes under the auspices of the Church in Sri Lanka. Such charismatic forms are those that are seen as most directly impinging upon populist domains of religious sovereignty. In telling this story of this multi-religious milieu in which sovereignty, conflicts and conciliation are ever-being negotiated, I offer an unconventional answer to a question raised by Chantal Mouffe in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (1999). Mouffe asks whether Schmitt’s “theory of sovereignty is still relevant in a globalized world?” For many political theorists, Schmittian thought has only been relevant only insofar it helps to unravel the conundrums of Western liberal democracies. As Mouffe puts it, Schmitt’s thought specifically “serves as a warning against the dangers of complacency
that a triumphant liberalism entails.” However, for a growing chorus of scholars in the anthropology of religion and in philosophy of religion who have begun to think through the persistence of enchantment in modern religious and political life, the answer to Mouffe’s question is a qualified “yes.”

In *Political Theology* Schmitt observes that in modern juridical decisionism, legal concepts are synonymous with theological concepts. Observing the continuities between the theological and the legal, he suggests that power is best revealed at its limits. This is a point that is especially useful undertaking an exploration of religious politics. Specifically, Schmitt argues that in the domain of theology, the exception that the Divine makes is the *miracle*—such as a decision by God to offer salvation to a sinner on Judgment Day. In theological frameworks wherein God is consider to be an interceding figure (for Schmitt, a Catholic rationalist, God is not), another kind of exception may involve Divine intervention wherein one is miraculously saved from death and pain which would have naturally been inevitable. In the domain of the political, the Sovereign exerts the ultimacy of his power by making an exception to the

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195 Also On the “enchantments of modernity” see also Comaroff and Comaroff (2001), Alexandra Owens (2007), Bennett (2001). Other important theorists of the “post-secular” of course include Asad (2003), Casanova (1994).

196 While Schmitt argues that the Enlightenment banished the miracle from the world: “The idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism, a theology and metaphysics that banished the miracle from the world…The rationalism of the Enlightenment rejected the exception in every form” (*Political Theologies* 36-7). His complaint of irreligion aside, in *The Catholic Church and its Political Form*, it is event that Schmitt was a devoutly Catholic, but reasoned that the only existing miracles are the miracle of transubstantiation, and the miracle of God’s offering Salvation to sinners on Judgment Day.
law. Schmitt gives the examples of a Sovereign decision to exonerate a convicted criminal, or to introduce a state of emergency (5-12). I rework Schmitt’s thesis on sovereign authority, to show how sovereign power is negotiated in a multi-religious milieu that is beholden to the demands of populist nationalism and popular perception, but also to challenges extended from beyond the State’s national borders.

Schmitt drew the analogy between the domain of theology and the domain of the political, based on his work as a jurist and legal theorist. Therein, he discerned that political ideas carry a trace of antecedent theologies. Whereas Foucault (1977 [1975]) after him made it explicit how guilt, judgment, sin, culpability, and disciplinary action are transformed, epistemically, under the watchful eye of God and subsequently, the panoptical eye of the State, Schmitt’s thesis illustrates how the confession booth and the courtroom are analogues to each other. However much Schmitt’s observations may have absorb arguments about the “secularization of religion” characteristic of the early writings of Schmitt’s interlocutor, Max Weber,197 Hent DeVries (2006) has argued that Schmitt may not have necessarily implied that the political form completely supplants the religious.198 In such a post-secularist mode, Naveeda Khan (2012) draws on DeVries’s

197 To Weber’s credit, his writings affirmed an immanent religiosiy, arguing that the “iron cage of modernity”—by implication, rationalization and the entrenchment of the capitalism form—could potentially imprison humanity. In Weber’s later writings, he radically affirmed the enchantments apparent within contemporary life. (See for instance his essay, “Science as Vocation.”)
198 See also Catherine Colliot-Thleene’s (1999) essay on Weber & Schmitt.
writings to emphasize that “The usefulness of the concept of political theology is that it allows the analysis to run in both directions.” There is simultaneously a “transcendent vector and the immanent quality of political theology” (Khan, 2012:11). I build upon this body of work on political theologies to think through the relationship between miracles and the negotiations over religious and political sovereignty, and its overlapping and contested realms in Sri Lanka. I tell a rather surprising story which illustrates how in the post-war moment several Buddhist and Catholic religious and political agents collaborated to uphold Sri Lankan sovereignty insofar as it is conceived from the populist Sri Lankan vantage point. Remarkably, this collaboration helped to ensure the good standing of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, vis-à-vis popular Sinhala Buddhist perceptions.

Out of political expediency and theological soundness, Sri Lankan Catholic Church authorities sought to sequester the charismatic sphere that flourishes within the Church. Taming the charismatic forms within Church, I illustrate, is a theological, liturgical, and political concern. Moreover, these moves are also a constituent part of a broader set of political maneuvers by sovereigns-of sorts to ensure that Sri Lankan Catholicism thrives despite broader hostilities towards Christian “fundamentalists” and other “anti-national” forces which populists consider to be nefariously at work against
the interests of Sri Lankan sovereignty. Given that Vatican II has made greater allowances for adaptations such as charismatic practice within Catholicism, these modulations of charismatic practices within a postcolonial church may seem counterintuitive. After all, it was the Vatican that approved the Charismatic Renewal within the Church during the 1970s, precisely to further the evangelical mission of the Roman Catholic Church. In spite of the heterodoxic inclinations and the centripetal forces engaged by religious authorities to tame them, along the way, some of the diversity internal to Pentecostal and Catholic practices in Sri Lanka will become apparent.

Sri Lankan Christianities: Comparative Theologies of the Miraculous

For the Sinhala-Buddhist “anti-conversion” activists who may have initially regarded Christianity as a monolithic bloc, in the course debates over the constitutionality of the Prohibition of Unethical Conversions Bill between 2004 and 2009, Sri Lanka’s Christians began to appear as fractured by denominational and sectarian distinctions. While Sri Lanka’s various Christian communities all took a stance

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200 Benjamin Schonthal (2012) writes that twenty-one petitions and counter-petitions were made for and against the constitutionality of the Bill, between 2004 and 2009. In 2009, the Bill was finally deemed unconstitutional. See also Schonthal, “Buddhism and the Freedom of Religion: Religion and the Constitution in Post-Colonial Sri Lanka (nd. forthcoming).
in opposition to the legislative proposal, in the course of the debates with Buddhist nationalist advocates for the cause, the Christian groups did so as very separate factions. These various factions of Sri Lankan Christians included 1) ecumenically-oriented Protestants represented by the National Christian Council (NCC); 2) evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal represented by the National Evangelical Christian Alliance of Sri Lanka (NECASL); and 3) Roman Catholic leaders represented by the Catholic Bishop’s Council. Leaders of the Sri Lankan Roman Catholic Church kept themselves apart from Protestant groups as they engaged in talks with Buddhist nationalist-protectionists, a move that evinced age-old rivalries.\footnote{Rivalries that of course go back to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but more immediately to the history of conflict during Ceylon’s colonial era when they began to rival and persecute one another (Dutch Calvinists missionaries and colonists persecuted the Portuguese Roman Catholics).} What all of these Christian groups had in common was their opposition to the legislation that would essentially criminalize conversions to Christianity (Schonthal 2012). Each of these entities voiced concerns that passing such legislation would contribute to unjust persecution of those people who choose to convert by the force of genuine convictions.

Shortly after the onslaught of “anti-conversion” activism in Sri Lanka in 2004, Catholic leaders began engaging in outreach to Buddhist nationalists, asking them to carefully discern between “fundamentalist Christian” detractors, and Christian friends. Gradually, Buddhist nationalist opponents of unethical conversions did indeed begin to
differentiate between Christians in general, and Christian “fundamentalists” (Cristiyani muladharma wardheyo) in particular. Leaders of the Catholic Church were particularly successful in assuaging nationalists’ anxieties about Catholic involvement in evangelism among Buddhists. Middling between Buddhist nationalist and evangelical Christian positions on conversion, Sri Lankan Catholic Church leaders emphasized that unlike evangelical Christians, Catholics do not proselytize among born-Buddhists. Since the Catholic Church already had a well-established devotional base in Sri Lanka, Catholics, they argued, had little reason to seek out new recruits. Expressing solidarity with Sinhala Buddhists, Catholic leaders argued that Christian “fundamentalists” were engaging in sheep-stealing among Catholics, just as much they were converting born-Buddhists. Catholics emphatically stood on the populist-sovereign side of the debate, emphasizing that Roman Catholicism is a well-established religion in Sri Lanka. In doing so, they were able to assert that they had no agenda to threaten the establishment of Buddhism.

These so-called fundamentalists who Catholics sought to define themselves against included Protestant and especially Pentecostal evangelists. Pentecostalism has been remarkably successful in gaining new converts in various locales throughout the world, as the burgeoning literature on the anthropology of Pentecostalism attests. This
literature shows that in many respects, there is remarkable similarity across Pentecostal-charismatic discourses in various world-wide localities. Thomas Csordas (2009) and others anthropologists writing on charismatic Christianities have described Pentecostalism as “transposable” to a great many contexts throughout much of the globe.\textsuperscript{202} In Pentecostal assertions of charismatic authority, they insist that the success of Christianity is the result of their living God who “miraculously” engages the individual through the Holy Spirit, and brings the individual into belief (Marshall 2009, Coleman 2000). While such expressions of faith pervade the Pentecostal life-world, Buddhists and Catholics dismiss the Pentecostal-charismatic paradigm as the work of “emotional manipulation.”

While Manichean inclinations towards identitarian perception have been persistently borne out in the politics of ethnic and religious belonging in Sri Lanka, at the same time, Pentecostal preachers also extol bi-polar distinctions between good and evil (Marshall 2009, Meyer 1998). In the course of promising a “new life,” and the possibility of “overcoming” adversity, evangelists render other established religious forms as diabolical, and thereby unsettle multi-religious milieus.\textsuperscript{203} According to DeBernardi until quite recently, transnational evangelists have promoted the practice

\textsuperscript{202} See also Martin 2001, Meyer 2009, Robbins 2009.
of identifying “demonic strongholds” in equatorial zones. This involves enjoining Christians to engage in “Spiritual Warfare” against diabolical domains dominated by other religious and ritual traditions (DeBernardi 2008).204

In tracing out these competing theologies of the miracle in Sri Lanka, distinct Buddhist, Catholic, and Pentecostal conceptions of religious authority become evident. In this context, we see a triangulation of rivalries and alliances between the sovereign domains of these religious and political worlds. In what follows, I discuss how Catholic leaders sought to tame and sequester the heterodox profusion of charismatic miracles which have entered into the Catholic domain. Thus, not only does this ecclesiastical model of *charism* or the gift of grace adhere to authorial teachings of the Catholic Church. But also, in Sri Lanka, the dictums calling for conformity to solemn and sober worship, also has the pragmatic effect of helping to exculpate Catholics from broader accusations of anti-nationalism that have been leveled against Christian “fundamentalists.” Before turning to these efforts, I must first discuss what the institution of the Catholic Church sought to define itself against, by considering the incendiary discourses deployed by evangelists in charismatic Christian practices of “Spiritual Warfare.”

204 Meyer (1998a) discusses similar demands by Pentecostal evangelists that new converts “make a complete break from the past” to rid the devil from one’s life.
Manicheanism, Incendiary Sermons, and Proliferating Hostilities

We have seen in Chapters One and Two that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists skeptically view conversions to Christianity as tending to taint the character of Sri Lankans, and to consider these conversions to be undertaken for superficial reasons. However, for Pentecostal Christians there is no question of the authenticity of these conversions because they are miraculously impelled by “the Grace of God” (deviyange anugrahaya). For Sri Lankan Pentecostals, infusion by the Holy Spirit (Shudha Atmaya) brings charismata, or gifts and signs of God’s grace, experienced as miracles (hāskam), which engender conviction and “spontaneous” conversions.205 As Ruth Marshall has argued in the Nigerian context, building upon Carl Schmitt’s thesis on political theology, from the Born-again Christian point of view, miracles are “sovereign” over the Pentecostal self.1 Indeed, for Pentecostals, miracles are proof-positive of their living God’s powerful presence in the world. From its origins in the Methodist Holiness Movement in the United States, the earliest Pentecostals preached that Christians were newly receiving “Holy Ghost Baptism” which, with repeated exposures to the Holy Ghost, would wholly sanctify the body and being of believers (Wacker 2003: 42). Those who are “sanctified” by the grace of the God are candidates to harness that sacred

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205 The correlate of this term, anu hāsa, is used to describe a person or place that has grace. Malasekera’s dictionary defines anu hāsa as charisma. See Bastin (2004) for a discussion of a discussion of has kam among Sinhalese who participate in rituals at certain shrines to Hindu deities.
power through their abiding convictions, and to minister others towards receiving grace.

In Colombo, Pentecostalism apparently involves similar aesthetic and discursive practices to those practiced in other places within the world, as it is described in scholarly work on the anthropology of Pentecostalism. At a Pentecostal denominational church in central Colombo, I attended a Sunday English language service with Tara, a Sri Lankan Tamil woman who had spent much of her life in southern Africa. Sermons were interlaced by the musicality of song, guitar, drums, electronic keyboards, prayer and tongues, all which were uttered at decibels and levels of dissonance that waxed and waned. In the midst of this charismatic exuberance, my eyes panned the room, as Tara swayed and sang with eyes half closed, and others around us cried with eyes tightly closed, with chattering teeth, swaying or dancing with arms uplifted. Several people nodded as if to affirm the touch of the Holy Spirit, saying “thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, halleluiah, halleluiah...” Their uttered words of whispered prayer slowly ebbed into a flow of language that became incomprehensible to my ears. With this not-unpleasant cacophony I felt myself sway, though I did so with my eyes open. This involuntarily movement “graced” me, much as I have felt moved at concerts falling within the

\[A \text{ pseudonym}\]
American musical genre of “dream pop,” where dissonant sounds generate ethereal affects. As this musicality eventually was conducted towards quiet, people recovered themselves and sat down, and the primary vocalists and instrumentalists became back-up praise-sayers for one of the church pastors, a layman named John.\textsuperscript{207} Pastor John began by commenting to the congregation that he had almost been made late for Church that morning because of the traffic impeded by \textit{kavaadi}, which feted the opening of a new Hindu temple on Havelock Road in Colombo. \textit{Kavaadi} is the ecstatic veneration usually performed for the Tamil Hindu God Murugan, who is also widely worshipped by Sinhalese Buddhists as the deity Kataragama—a central member of the pantheon of guardian deities who are protectors of Buddhism. \textit{Kavaadi} includes the spectacular act of hookswinging, undertaken by a small handful of devotees of Murugan/Kataragama, which among other ecstatic practices, entails swinging from large metal hooks that pierce the flesh of the backs of a few elect male devotees (Obeyeskere 1978). Suspended in the air, the male devotees hang and swing from the piercings while attached to large tree trunks, which are carted through the streets on trucks that carry them in procession. Pastor John elicited nods from the congregation \footnote{207 A pseudonym.}.
who also were evidently delayed en route to Church that morning because of the procession.

Reiterating that his lateness was due to being blocked in traffic, Pastor John moved on to disparage Hindus’ participation in “blood sacrifice.” “You mustn’t give a blood sacrifice. God expects from you only a living sacrifice. You must give your living body to Christ! All other gods are ineffective!” Pastor John exclaimed. The classic Christian trope of condemning “idolatrous” sacrifice as the maleficent influence of Satan, which must be expunged from the Christian life, was apparent in the Pastor’s discourse. As delineated as far back as the medieval theologian, Anselm of Canterbury, who detailed a “soteriology of substitution” in which a God-Man, the Son-of-God, Christ made a blood sacrifice, which Redeemed humanity, promising to cleanse humanity of Original Sin, and a sacrifice to invalidate all other blood sacrifices (Walker Bynum 2004). As Anselm expounded, Christ’s sacrifice placed upon humanity “a debt that cannot be repaid” (ibid). The indebtedness for Christ’s act of redeeming humanity demanded reciprocation. It necessitated love, devotion, and belief in Christ’s sacrifice and the miracle of his Resurrection (Walker Bynum 2004, M. Ruel 1997). This mandate for belief in the sacrifice Christ made in his Passion, and miracle of his Ressurection, is

\[\text{208 (Cannell 2005, O.Harris (2006), Cervantes 1994)}\]
also of course inscribed in the verse, among the most popular for evangelicals, John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have Eternal Life.”

Pastor John went on, pacing in front of the congregation, exclaiming that God punishes those who worship other Gods, and those who offer blood sacrifices. He underscored this retributive nature of his God, exclaiming: “6 million Jews died in Germany. Do you know why?” My eyes grew big and I let out an indiscernible gasp, my sensibilities shocked, as the predominantly English-speaking Sri Lankan audience, interspersed with people of other nationalities, sat listening. They appeared unphased. When the devotional songs of praise and the sounds of tongues resumed with passion and exuberance, that which had earlier inclined me to sway, felt frozen.

An earlier generation of Protestant missionary writing in the early 20th century similarly expressed disdain for the “false” deities that flourished because the “emptiness” of the Buddha allowed the devil could sneak in (Harris 2006). Certainly not all Pentecostal ministers use such incendiary discourses, as this one, evidently borrowed from American Pentecostalism. But the incendiary discourses that are vocalized in prayer meetings do episodically incite reactionary violence by Sinhala Buddhists. In the postwar milieu of Sri Lanka, evangelists often claim that Christianity
can build a “bridge of peace.” They assert that Christianity provides a “Universal” faith that can accommodate all ethnicities, implying that this is a bridge built by obliterating religious difference, according with ideologies of Spiritual Warfare that requires converts to “make a complete break from the past” (DeBernardi 2008, Meyer 1998). I emphasize that the imperative towards evangelical Christian bridge-burning is often not a totalizing reality for converts who strive to accept their non-Christian neighbors, families, and friends, nor for those Buddhists who become exasperated with evangelists for demanding too much of them. I point these inflammatory discourses out not to vilify charismatic Christians, but rather to point out an example of charismatic Christian temperaments towards other religions, against which Catholic leaders sought to define their Church against.

A New Injunction

In a printed dictum put forth by the Catholic Diocese of Colombo in October 2009, the newly-appointed Archbishop of Colombo, Malcolm Ranjith, expressed concerns to the Sri Lankan Catholic community that “paraliturgical services” were interfering with the sanctity of Roman Catholic Mass in Sri Lanka. The polemic was, in

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209 The Archbishop Oswald Gomis, mentioned in the prior chapter with reference to the party-political affiliation that he publically shared with the businessman Lalith Kotelawala, was succeeded by Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith.
part, intended to tame Catholic forms which involved charismatic practices of “praise and worship.” Addressing Catholic clergy and lay people through this “Liturgal circular concerning various Movements and Services,” Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith attended to the problem by calling for the preservation of “sobriety” in Catholic worship. In the written memorandum that the Archdiocese of Colombo circulated among Sri Lankan Catholics, the Archbishop denounced the Pentecostal-charismatic form as “cacophonous exuberance,” and pronounced that:

- The so-called “Praise and worship” elements are not allowed during the entire rite of Mass. Inordinate loud music, clapping, long interventions, gestures which disturb the sobriety of the celebration are not permitted. It is very important that we understand the religious cultural sensitivity of the Sri Lankan people. Majority around us are Buddhists whose worship is thoroughly sober; and Muslims and Hindus too do not create any commotion in their worship. In addition, we know that there is strong opposition to Fundamentalist Christian sects in this country, and we as Catholics, have been striving to explain that Catholics are different from these sects. However, some of these so-called praise and worship exercises seem to resemble more of the Fundamentalist religious exercises than those of the Roman Catholics. Let us respect our cultural diversity and sensitivity.

This dictum was perceived by many Catholics to be a polemic against the Pubuduwa or “Revival” movement within the Church. Pubuduwa is the colloquial Sinhala term that

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210 Since the publication of the circular, the Archbishop of Colombo has been promoted to the status of Cardinal.

has become synonymous with the movement sometimes referred to as “Catholic Pentecostalism,” officially known in transnational circles as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR).\textsuperscript{212} The movement, originally developed by Catholic laity in the U.S., gained recognition from the Vatican in 1975 as a legitimate world-wide movement within the purview of the Church (Csordas 1997).\textsuperscript{213} The Vatican’s recognition of the CCR was considered to be consonant with the determinations of the Second Vatican Council, which called for “enculturation” to accommodate cultural difference within the Catholic Church, so as to ensure that Catholicism retains its global relevance.

Especially in the urban capital of Colombo, the charismatic Catholic \textit{Pubuduwa} movement has been credited for keeping Catholics who have been keen to explore Pentecostal Christianity within the fold. At the same time, the practices of the movement have been scrutinized by some Catholic laity and clergy in Sri Lanka for too closely resembling Pentecostals’ flamboyant charismatic practices. The Sri Lankan Church hierarchy cautioned Catholics who are involved in the \textit{Pubuduwa} movement in Sri Lanka, to be careful of such boisterous expressions of religiosity because nationalist opponents of “unethical conversions” would take notice, and mistake them for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{212} For an ethnographic approach to the movement, see Csordas 1994 & 1997.
\end{itemize}
“fundamentalists.” The increasing visibility of charismatic Christianity in Sri Lanka has indeed tended to agitate Buddhist opponents of Christian proselytism.

Within the Vatican, the Sri Lankan Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith had already been well-known for his liturgical conservatism.214 Appointed by then-Pope Benedict as the Secretary of Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments within the Vatican, the Sri Lankan Archbishop had made an impassioned argument for reconsidering a number of Vatican II liturgical reforms, in February 2009.215 Archbishop Ranjith has been a foremost proponent of restoring the Latin Mass, and he called for the reversion to a number of Vatican I dictums. In doing so he solidified his position as a favorite among certain Vatican authorities, especially then-incumbent Pope Benedict XVI himself.216 Applying these imperatives in Sri Lanka through the Liturgical circular of October 2009, Archbishop Ranjith newly mandated that Sri Lankan Catholic laity

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214 Special thanks to Paola Aranha, historian of the Catholic Church, for alerting me to this fact.
215 From Catholic World News, February 23, 2009: “Vatican liturgical official makes new plea for ’reform of the reform’” [http://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=60291], accessed August 27, 2012. A couple of months after Ranjith’s polemics against Vatican II, Pope Benedict XVI gave a homily “on the solemnity of the Pentecost” during Pentecost festivities (May 2009). In the homily Pope Benedict explained that the gifts of the Spirit allowed the Apostles to overcome fear, so as to enable them to undertake Christ’s mission. This was clearly a reminder to Catholics that they ought not be swept away by neo-Pentecostal exuberance, and to remind Catholics that Pentecostals do not have the monopoly over the Biblical event. ([http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/benedict-xvi-s-homily-for-solemnity-of-pentecost](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/benedict-xvi-s-homily-for-solemnity-of-pentecost))
receive the Sacraments while kneeling, and by mouth rather than in hand, so as to ensure the avenue for communion with God remains unobstructed.

**Assuaging Tensions**

The October 2009 memorandum encouraged these regulations not merely to insist upon the importance of the integrity of ecclesiastic rituals, however. More crucially for the Sri Lankan Catholic Church, in insisting upon devotional “sobriety,” the Archbishop emphatically sought to distance the Church from other exogenously evangelizing charismatic Christianities. Doing so would ensure the Church’s ability to co-exist with Sri Lanka’s Theravāda Buddhist majority. Because the Roman Catholic Church of Sri Lanka constitutes the majority of all Christian denominations in Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Catholic leaders were able to assure Buddhist protectionists that the Church has little reason to gain new converts. Catholic leaders asserted that their practice of evangelism only involves efforts to deepen the faith of those Sri Lankans who are born as Catholics.

Officials within the Catholic Bishop’s Council of Colombo affirmed Archbishop Ranjith’s reasoning for instituting reforms: “The anti-conversion efforts came up because fundamentalists in the Gospel business go in for direct conversions.” One
member of the Council explained that, by 2008, the original drafters of the 2004 legislative bill had come to recognize the distinction between independent churches which freely evangelized, and the established mainline churches:

It is only the fundamentalist churches that are a threat (to Buddhism). We have been dialoguing with the JHU [Jathika Hela Urumaya, the political party responsible for putting forth the original 2004 “anti-conversion” Bill] for some time now to make them aware of our distinction from other Christian groups. So the original impetus driving the Bill has died out. The government is not interested in raising issues that will cause communal troubles.

It was the fact that Sri Lanka’s Christianities are fractured by denominational diversity that populists’ 2004-09 “anti-conversion” legislative efforts were derailed. Drawing parallels between Catholicism and Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions of practice, the Archbishop conveyed fraternity and similitude with Buddhists and Buddhist principles of devotion as against Pentecostal-charismatic forms of worship. What does this work of differentiation mean for the practice of Sri Lankan varieties of Catholicism?

The Decolonized Church and the Predicament of Belonging

To understand the trajectory of Sri Lankan Catholic national belonging, I must first briefly reiterate how it came to be that Sri Lankan populists perceived Sinhala and Tamil Catholics of Sri Lanka to be outside of the nationalist fold. The period of decolonization was an especially critical time for the status formation of mainline Sri
Lankan Christian churches. Amidst an array of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions that emerged in Ceylon during the early era of nationalism, episodic clashes over territory erupted between Buddhists and Catholics (Somaratna 1991, Stirrat 1992, Spencer 1995). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ceylonese Catholics were quick to defend Catholic privileges which were gradually being stripped away with the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (Stirrat 1992: 20). Stirrat illustrates that at the time of the British colonial era, in the predominantly Catholic areas north of Colombo city, in some cases lay Catholics resorted to violence. Stirrat suggests that while the Ceylonese Catholic Church chronicles of the time expressed the certainty of Catholic superiority, by the First World War the European Catholic hierarchy was put on the defensive when Catholics were roundly left out of the national equation in populist polemics (20-21). 217 Thus, when European missionaries began to leave Ceylon as the legal and electoral structures began to shift in the course of decolonization, the Ceylonese Catholic community became further disempowered. 218

218 Stirrat shows that in addition to Buddhist nationalist opponents, in the 1930s left-wing groups saw “the Church as over-wealthy, over-privileged, and over-powerful (1992: 39). By 1956, a decade after Ceylon’s independence, Sinhala was instituted as the national language in what was known as the Sinhala-Only Act. Stirrat shows that in addition to Buddhist nationalist opponents, in the 1930s left-wing groups saw “the Church as over-wealthy, over-privileged, and over-powerful (39).
Lankan historian K.M. DeSilva (1979) put it, Christians were rendered “a beleaguered minority.”

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) generated a set of guidelines for the Catholic Church to grapple with how to remain a relevant and compelling institution, especially within the formerly-colonized nations. Whereas colonial-era Catholic and Protestant Christian missions were by definition evangelical, the postcolonial rise of ethno-religious nationalism inspired, or in some cases demanded that Sri Lankan Christianities move away from their expansionary evangelical roots. Furthermore, the resolutions of Vatican II allowed folk forms of Catholic religiosity to thrive in Sri Lanka. Oftentimes, Catholicism encompassed practices which at different points in history were consigned to the margins of the Catholic Church (Stirrat 1992, Mosse 2006).

A relatively more recent incident which spurred Sinhala Buddhist antipathies towards Roman Catholics was the 1994 release of Crossing the Threshold of Hope by Pope John Paul II. In it, the Pope stated that Buddhism is an “atheistic” system; he wrote that “The Buddhist doctrine of salvation constitutes the central point, or rather the sole point

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219 Stirrat (1992) describes how Sinhala Catholic deliverance rituals were prolific in the 1970s-80s, and had begun to die out by the early 1990s. The Catholic Church hierarchy tended to disapprove of these folk Catholic forms of religiosity, and so consigned these practices to the margins of the Church, in spite of their popularity. On the south Indian case, Mosse (2006), and see Zupanov (2008). Mosse describes how early Jesuits in South India allowed for possession/exorcism (deliverance rituals), and later arrivals of Jesuit missionaries sought to orient Tamil lay Catholics towards confession rather than exorcism diabolical possessing spirits.
of this system. Nevertheless, both the Buddhist tradition and the methods deriving from it have an almost exclusively *negative soteriology*” (85, emphasis his). For Sinhala Buddhists especially in Colombo and in the diaspora, the Pope’s comparative theology and assertions of Buddhist negativity were taken as insults to Buddhism, which set off indignation and anger among them. Then-Bishop Malcolm Ranjith (under then-Archbishop Oswald Gomis) sought to placate Buddhist readers by explaining that Pope John Paul II’s theological exegesis that was not meant to insult, but rather was intended to comparatively appraise and praise Buddhist philosophy. Yet many Sinhala Buddhist activists remained unappeased, and leveled accusations that Roman Catholicism is enduringly linked to European colonial and neo-colonial principles oriented towards the disestablishment of Buddhism. Pope John Paul II himself visited Sri Lanka in 1995 rectify the antipathies, amidst heavy protests. Rohan Bastin (2012) has detailed how during the visit, the Pope made an apparently unscheduled and spontaneous stop at Kochchikade Church, a Catholic Church that also attracts many Buddhists and Hindus. The Church is well known for containing a miracle statue of

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220 The Pope sought to make a theological comparison between Buddhism and Catholicism, by describing the point of intersection between the two traditions. The Pope specifically referred to Tibetan Buddhism that is growing in popularity in the West due to the work of the Dalai Lama. In his writings Pope John Paul II explained how the world-renouncing orientation which is end-point for Buddhist nirvana, was a starting point for Christian mystics (85-86).

Mother Mary. Sri Lankan Catholics and Buddhists were taken by the statue of Mary, whose “eyes had turned from blue to brown.” As Bastin argues, Sinhalese people understood the Marian miracle to signify how Sri Lankan Catholicism had become disinherit from a blue-eyed European colonial elite and inherited by the brown-eyed people of Sri Lanka (106). Bastin suggests that the Pope’s apparently spontaneous act of stopping to worship the miraculous Sri Lankan Mother Mary was perceived by Sri Lankans as though the Pope was validating Sri Lanka as home to genuine Catholic Sacraments—a move which Bastian suggests may have softened the controversies over the Pope’s theological critiques of Buddhism which had caused such a stir just a few months earlier.222

The controversy over Pope John Paul II’s exegesis on Buddhism in 1994, and the subsequent allegations that a lay Catholic businessman had been the primary culprit in the death of widely adored Soma Thera in December 2003 (detailed in Chapter One), resonated with Sinhala Buddhists’ broader suspicions about Catholics’ involvement in the wider “Christian conspiracy to denigrate and destroy Buddhism.” In this light, the deepening alliance built between the head of state, Mahinda Rajapakse (elected

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222 *The Sunday Observer* editorial account by Ananth Palakidnar (April 10, 1995) secularizes the tale of the miracle, explaining the spontaneous stop by detailing that the Pope merely had to “answer the call of nature,” and that as a result, people within the Church had a rare opportunity to receive the Papal blessing. http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2005/04/10/fea31.html
President in 2005), and the new Catholic Archbishop (appointed Metropolitan Archbishop of Colombo in 2009), to help protect, and even exempt Sri Lankan Catholics from the identitarian polemics espoused by Buddhist nationalist opponents of conversion, is remarkable.

**Dispensation and Denomination: Charismata and the Manifestation of Grace in Catholicism and Pentecostalism**

The negotiated alliance which enabled a transformation in Sinhala Buddhist nationalist political perceptions of Catholics relied on concerted efforts of religious leaders to distinguish Catholicism from the ambitiously growing practices of charismatic Christianity. Yet, these charismatic forms of religiosity also inflect certain Sri Lankan Catholic movements. The Catholic and Pentecostal Churches are rooted in distinct apostolic and dispensationalist genealogies. A compound form of these Christian genealogies are prevalent in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal—“Catholic Pentecostalism” as it is sometimes called. To understand this segmentation and sectarianism, I turn now to a discussion of the distinct genealogies of Catholicism and Pentecostalism, and the hybridity entailed by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The distinct genealogies of dispensation engender distinctly different ideas of how it is that the believer can commune with God. The central difference between
Catholicism and Pentecostalism can be seen within the distinctiveness of doctrines of charismata—spiritual manifestation of the Divine and the emanations of divine grace.

For Catholics, charismata are lodged within the sacred relics of Christ, and are made present in the Eucharist as flesh and blood through the authoritative personage of the consecrating priest. As espoused in the Sri Lankan Archbishop’s liturgical circular, the Eucharistic liturgy is “the source and summit from which all divine graces flow into the Church.” In contrast, for Pentecostals, charismata manifest as spiritual presence that can flow freely. This is enabled when the charismatic pastoral leaders, call down the Holy Spirit, often in unison with the prayerful members of the congregation. The free-flow of the Holy Spirit is understood as having the capability to liberally grace all who are present. This free-flow of charismata provokes the putatively “insober” practices which Sri Lankan Buddhists have increasingly come to associate with the most aggressive varieties of “fundamentalism.” In the charismatic Christian form then, the gate-keeping function of the priest who holds the liturgical keys to the Sacraments is partially circumvented with the notion that the Holy Spirit directly sanctifies the individual.223

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223 See Bloch (1994) on the gate-keeping function of Catholic priests.
The differences between traditional Catholic and Pentecostal structures of belief and practice surrounding the charisms of the Holy Spirit are lodged in the distinct apostolic genealogies. On the one hand, Saint Peter is one of the original Disciples of Christ who received the body and blood of Christ at the Last Supper, and was present at the Sermon on the Mount prior to Christ’s Ascension. Peter was one of the twelve who were set forth on the Great Commission and received the charismata at Pentecost. Catholics regard Saint Peter to have received a unique charism from God, and he is thus known as “the rock” upon which the Roman Catholic Church was built.²²⁴ As First Bishop of Rome, Saint Peter is understood to have passed the charism on to subsequent Bishops of Rome in an unbroken chain to the current Pope. It is the Papal transmission of the charism, via the priest who unleashes it through ritual consecration, which enables the Holy Ghost to hallow the Eucharistic Host. The Catholic liturgy is thus considered sacrosanct and is hence heavily guarded by the Papacy.

In contrast to the Petrine notion of the Catholic charism that is confined to the Eucharist and guarded in its release, the spirit-model of charismatic experience extolled by Pentecostals validates a profusion of miracles, which pivots upon the

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²²⁴ The singling out of Peter is said to have been built upon the idea that Peter uniquely received God’s blessing, evidenced by the fact that he was the first of the disciples to clearly grasp that he was Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God (Gospel of Mark).
conversion of Paul (Coleman 2000, Marshall 2009, Robbins 2010, Bialecki 2010). Saint Paul the Apostle was inducted as a “believing servant” of Christ well after the Ascension of the corporeal Christ. As Pentecostal and Pubuduwa ministers emphasize in sermons, Saul was a disbelieving Jew and a harsh persecutor of Christians. But the miraculous conversion of Saul, who while on the road to Damascus, was miraculously graced with a charism from the heavens. With it he experienced an epiphany which instantaneously converted him into Paul, “a firm believer in Christ as the Savior and Son of God.” This Pauline model of post-Ascension charismatic experience validates the notion that charismata of the Holy Spirit are capable of democratically gracing even non-believers, and turning around even the thickest of Christ’s adversaries. Recipients of this “graceful touch” of the Holy Spirit are miraculously sanctified, and “spontaneously converted” into believers. It is this Pauline theology which has given rise to the rhizomatic profusion of Pentecostalism.

In the case of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Sri Lankan Pubuduwa movement, the Petrine and Pauline forms are interwoven. As far as it concerned Archbishop Ranjith, it was imperative to disentangle these entwined theologies, to ensure that the Petrine authority over charismata, retains its eminence over Pauline

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225 Simon Coleman (2000), Ruth Marshall (2009), Joel Robbins (2010), and Jon Bialecki (2010), have all productively discussed the neo-Pauline theological turn in global Pentecostalism.
forms of expression. It seems to me that Schmitt himself, in the stage at which he wrote *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), would have lauded Ranjith’s efforts as theologically sound, and politically expedient. Roman Catholicism and Political Form was published one year after *Political Theologies*, and in it, Schmitt is evidently a conservative apologist for the Church, both in terms of its theologies and its political style. It is clear that from *Political Theologies* and *Roman Catholicism and the Political Form*, that true to the orthodox Roman Catholic form, the only miracles of post-Apostolic divine intercession the Schmitt acknowledged as genuine are 1) the miracle of transubstantiation and 2) the miracle of a merciful God who accedes to a supplicant’s appeal on Judgment Day. Schmitt, a rationalist Catholic thinker, pointedly denies the unmitigated appearance of God between the time of ascension and his Second Coming.227

226 Schmitt was ultimately excommunicated from the Church (in 1926). McCormick (1998); also Scheurman (1999: 337, see note 100), explains that Schmitt he was excommunicated because he remarried without annulling his first marriage; Schmitt had been warned by Church authorities that if he chose to remarry he would be excommunicated, but he proceeded with his decision anyway in 1924—just one year after writing *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*.  

227 Schmitt articulated a form of belief partially concordant with the idea of the cessation of miracles in the post-Apostolic Age—with the defining exception of the miracle of transubstantiation involved in the Eucharistic Mass—true to Catholic form. As evidenced in Schmitt’s critique of Dostoevsky’s story of the Grand Inquisitor (in the Brothers Karamazov), in which Jesus makes a fictive appearance in Seville during the Inquisition. *Roman Catholicism and the Political Form* is, in part a defense of the Catholic Church against Protestant detractors—detractors who deny the miracle of transubstantiation, and who criticize the authoritative forms of the Church. Still, in the second regard, Schmitt’s Catholicism is conceptually closer to Deism and rationalist Protestant Cessationism which denies the possibility of miracles in the post-Apostolic present, than to the tenets of Pentecostalism.
The Dying Art of Sri Lankan Catholic Deliverance Rituals

As I have illustrated above, the neo-Pentecostal provocations to take on a “New Life” with Christ is often marked by incendiary discourses which render features of the newcomers’ “past” life as diabolical (Meyer 1998, Csordas 1997, DeBernardi 2008, Marshall 2009). Literature in the anthropology of Christianity—and the anthropology of Pentecostalism in particular—describes how these Manichean distinctions of the divinely graced, and the diabolically afflicted, are imputed into everyday lives of subjects of Born-again religiosities (Marshall 2009, Meyer 1998). In Sri Lanka, these onto-epistemological practices of rendering the other as diabolical are common both within denominational churches, as well as “independent” or “non-denominational” deliverance ministries. As detailed by Stirrat (1992), similar Catholic practices of deliverance were prominent in regions inhabited by Sinhalese Catholics. These practices were once prevalent at Catholic shrines that dotted regions north of Colombo.228 As Stirrat notes, these spectacular Catholic rituals of demonic deliverance and healing rose in popularity and thrived at the margins of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church in the early 1970s, but waned by the early 1990s. This Catholic form of deliverance was prevalent until the last two decades, indeed, before neo-Pentecostal

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228 Stirrat focuses mainly on Gampaha District, and the northern outskirts of Colombo.
Christianity had arrived to these areas. I would provisionally suggest that Pentecostal forms of deliverance practices were partly inherited from Sri Lankan Catholic deliverance practices, and were partly derived from the transnational influence of the Pentecostal traditions spearheaded by the Pentecostal televangelist Oral Roberts.²²⁹

Stirrat described three shrines in Sri Lanka’s Western Province that served as pilgrimage sites which supplicants flocked to seek out exceptionally gifted charismatic Catholic healers. The shrines were developed as pilgrimage sites that centered around the powers of deliverance executed by these healing priests. Thousands of pilgrims—predominantly Catholic, but also Buddhist, Hindu, and also occasionally Muslim—would attend these shrines to seek the healing grace channeled through the charismatic Fathers. These charismatic figures, each at their own shrine, were clearly rivals. The powers vested in these priests were understood to stem from their exceptional piety and ascetic dispositions. As Stirrat argued, it was through the exemplary renunciation of these charismatic priests that enabled them to serve as a conduit of Grace, and the blessings they each bestowed allowed the lay supplicants to pursue their worldly needs and desires unimpeded. All three of the Catholic Fathers who Stirrat describes were

fortuitously gifted with sacred relics. For instance, Father Jayamanne (Lalith Kotelawala’s priest, recalling Chapter One) claimed to possess a thorn from Jesus’s Crown of Thorns, a sign for believers that he had been elect by God; the Thorn was the fount from which Father Jayamanne derived his power (Stirrat 2004). These relics bore charismata. Stirrat describes how in these Catholic deliverance rituals, the demonic agents possessing the afflicted subject would become manifest, and occasionally announce itself bellicosely to be the God Kataragama—the Sinhala Buddhist guardian deity (again, known as Murugan among Tamils). Indeed, much like the newer Pentecostal ministries, these folk Catholic ritual performances rendered the deities of other pantheons as diabolical, yet easily vanquished with their God’s grace.

The Catholic deliverance healers described by Stirrat became highly influential among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. This popular Catholic religiosity had been common in sites where the reach of Catholic influence had been extended, but where Church authority was not totalizing. Stirrat shows that this form of Catholic religiosity was consistently marginalized, yet tolerated, by the official Church even at the height of its popularity. The sovereign authority of the charism—the very site of Divine power—is in the hands of a singular priest, rather than in the hands of the Church itself. Oriented towards enforcing its own authority, Stirrat shows that the Church
attempted to keep this popular and unorthodox devotional form at the margins, until it eventually faded out of practice.\textsuperscript{230}

\textbf{“Sheep-stealing” and the Displacement of Sri Lankan Catholic Folk-healing}

These Catholic deliverance priests, like newer “non-denominational” deliverance ministries, conduct exorcisms that “get the devil out,” quite publicly, in the course of the services. Again however, these Catholic deliverances performed \textit{en masse} seem to have been displaced by the Pentecostal form; in fact, it appears that non-denominational Pentecostal deliverance ministries may have actually spun-off from, and supplanted, antecedent forms of Catholic deliverance practices associated with shrines of the type that Stirrat detailed. The most powerful Pentecostal healing ministries tend to be non-denominational or “independent” churches, which typically

\textsuperscript{230}What becomes clear is how these folk forms of religiosity compete with the authority of the institutional Church, in ways that can be as political as they are religious. Stirrat astutely draws parallels between the operations of political patronage and religious patronage. He points out that in the modern political system of Sri Lanka, there has been a proliferation of economic, political, and religious patronage which are constantly being negotiated. While the power of Ministers of Parliament tends to be contingent upon associations with the political center (172), many of the most powerful and charismatic MPs switch parties so as to not be tied down to a centralizing authority, enabling to run their own personal fiefdoms (170-175). To achieve popular assent, the exceptionally ambitious MPs, like the holy men and the popular Sinhala Buddhist deity Kataragama, must dissociate themselves from the structures of authority (173). The MPs who try to leverage their power and loosen their ties from structures of authority of political parties, resemble certain “amoral” Sinhala Buddhists deities like Kataragama who have risen to popularity during the postcolonial era (Stirrat pp; Obeysekere 1963, 1966; Winslow 1984). Stirrat observes that the charisma of these “patrons” has transformed into “personal power” established through an expanding clientele and constituency, rather than depending upon power derived from one’s links to the institutional center. Winslow (1984) has drawn similar analogies between MPs and deities, and between civil servants and the lesser malevolent spirits of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. She nicely articulates how various specific deities hold sovereign sway over distinct regional domains in Sri Lanka.
take place in make-shift prayer halls that are usually located in regions that have high concentrations of Catholics. These are distinct from “denominational” Pentecostalisms, which tend not to involve such spectacular exorcisms.

While Pentecostals ordinarily do not celebrate Eucharistic Mass, several of the Pentecostal deliverance ministries found in areas north of Colombo, where Catholicism is most saturated, typically incorporate *Awasaana Rathrii Boojanaya* (lit. the Last Supper), an improvised Eucharistic Mass that ritually marks a high point in their communion with God. At Pastor Milton’s Divine Ministry, after bouts of sermonizing, testimonials, healing exorcisms, song and prayer that breaks into glossolalia, the Communion ritual is performed. The Christian devotees, garbed entirely in white, form a line and approach one of several spaces situated at a round table. The women cover their heads with white shawls, or the end of their sari. The Pastor and his *Sevekeyo* (assistants—literally Servants (of God)) direct the congregated people one by one to a space at the table, from which the congregants lift chalices of wine, and flat *roti* (bread) to their mouths and consume them. Kneeling, each supplicant reverently partakes of the blood and body of Christ. They do so without any direct mediation by the Pastor of the *Sevekeyo*, who merely facilitate by refilling the chalices and conducting congregational

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A pseudonym.
traffic. After partaking in the Awasaana Rathrii Boojanaya, the congregation members file away from the table, and return to kneeling on the floor for silent prayer, until all who are present have sipped the blood and eaten the flesh of the transubstantiated vittles.

When song and collective prayer then recommence, this post-Communion period is the point during the service in which the most effusive expressions of possession and Holy Spirit baptism emerge. Men and women fall, flail, dance, scream, cry and vomit.

Since in many cases the physical flailing aroused by exposing the possessing agent can be injurious to the afflicted person or to others around them, the possessed are often restrained by the ministerial Servants or “Sevakeyo.” The Sevakeyo “shepherd” the possessed people, carrying them to an area within the reach of the Pastor so that he can easily “pray over” them. “Jesunuge nameya, “PAYA! PAYA! PAYAAA!” (“In Jesus’s name, GET OUT!” (paya, is an abbreviated form of the verb paleyang, used for lesser beings. Ordinarily, “paleyang” is a command abusively hurled at stray dogs or demons.))

The Pastor forcefully shouts “PAYA” as he presses the forehead of the writhing, possessed being, laying on a strong healing hand, and to expel the demons from the person.

Although some deliverance ministries emulate the central Catholic ritual form of Communion, Pentecostal deliverance ministers sometimes make mocking reference
to Catholicism. Pastor Sirisena, is one minister who has a massive following in what is a predominantly Catholic area in the northern outskirts of Colombo. Pastor Sirisena sings, dances, jokes, and bellows his praise of Jesus—praises which are amplified by high levels of reverb on his microphone. Capitalizing upon the echo-technology provided by his mic and amplifiers, the Pastor intersperses pop-song, dance exaltation, as well as gestures and jokes which elicits incredible laughter, smiles, smirks and applause from his congregation. In one moment the Sevakeyo are eliciting testimonies from members of the congregation about their miraculous experiences of “getting healed,” momentarily giving each of them center stage. Affirming each of these testimonies, Pastor Sirisena makes passionate and guttural assertions proclaiming the ultimacy of Jesus’s authority, followed by rounds of halleluihas. In another moment of the service, Pastor Sirisena imitates the slow monophonic grandeur of Gregorian-style chant ordinarily voiced during the consecration of the Sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church. The recognizable gesture to the Catholic Mass, juxtaposed with the Pastor’s fast-talking and bellicose style, creates provocative commentary which is taken to suggest how Catholic Mass is a passive and inefficacious form of engagement, in contrast to his “inspired” charismatic (deviyange anugrahaya lath (lit. received by the

232 A pseudonym.
grace of God)) style. Pastor Sirisena’s song and dance pokes fun of the established Catholic pathways to commune with God; it is an critique of the ossification of charismatic authority, or in Weber’s terminology, in the “routinization of charisma,” that they aver is endemic to Catholic structures of authority.\textsuperscript{233} The Pastor’s joke induces the Born-again congregants to respond with raucous laughter—laughter which can potentially initiate Catholic newcomers into the practice of disparaging their inherited Catholicism as they are inducted into a new form of Born-Again Christian sociality. Indeed, eventually, for some of these Pentecostal newcomers, this laughter may come to index knowledge of things past, as much as the things that are proximal.

Absent and antithetical to Pentecostal Christianity is the devotional element directed to the Catholic patron Saints and to Mother Mary; Pentecostals regard these figures as detrimental and diabolical distractions created by Satan to prevent exclusive commitment to Trinitarian principles. On this basis, Born-Again Christians consider

\textsuperscript{233} A dialogue between Schmitt and Weber on these matters is indeed evident: Catherine Colliot Thélène (1999) has argued, it was Weber’s thesis on Protestantism and economic rationality that prompted Schmitt to offer a thesis on Catholicism and juridical rationality. Schmitt’s thesis on Catholicism was explicitly intended as defense against the Church’s Protestant detractors, explains Ulmen (translator of Schmitt’s works into English (citation)). That is to say, Schmitt’s \textit{Roman Catholicism} was a modern-day discourse in the vein of the Counter-Reformationist. Weber’s argument about how rationalization generates a ‘disenchantment of the world,’ seizes upon the Protestant theology of \textit{Deus absconditus},\textsuperscript{233} a theology that pronounces that God has left the world and hides himself from it, not manifesting in material or spiritual form, unwilling to intercede in the temporal present. Drawing on Protestant dispensation, and finding within Calvinist predestination the elements of a logic and practice to formulate an ideal type, Weber depicts Protestantism as an austere variety of Christianity without \textit{charisma} operating actively within the world, except quietly through those to whom Grace was already given.
their variety of piety as superior to Catholicism.²³⁴ From the perspective of many Born-again devotees, Catholics are little better than Hindu and Buddhist “idolators.” It is because of this “idolatry” (rupa namaskareya), Pentecostal discourses derisively suggest, that religious others and backsliders are constantly afflicted by demonic impediments. One Pentecostal minister disavowed the statue of a Catholic Saint situated near the entrance of his rented church building: the statue had been installed by the building owner long ago. The Pastor insisted that upon entry to the prayer hall, the Believers would by-pass the image, piously worshipping “only the name of Jesus and the Cross.”

It appears that Pentecostalism has usurped Catholic folk religiosities and healing practices that had once been prevalent in these areas, and have begun to transform them into Born-again charismatic religiosities. Pentecostal ritual forms of deliverance borrow from, and at the same time, threaten to overtake the popularity of some folk Catholic deliverance practices that once existed as official-Church marginalia. Considering this, I now turn to examine the effect that Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith’s injunction against “insobriety” in Catholic practice had upon the

²³⁴ While even Catholic priests often express dissatisfaction the “Saintocentric” practices of laity, Stirrat shows that in fact people recognize the existence of the Saints which have a place in heaven, but that they are not necessarily intercessory beings that carry out the will of God. Stirrat describes these actions as having good cognitive and affective outcomes for the Sinhala Catholics in the fishing village of Ambakandawila among those who he conducted his research (159-60). He explains that for his interlocutors, actions involving the Saints were not seen as having direct effects; rather, they were palliatives to give oneself confidence in one’s own actions.
transnational Charismatic Catholic Renewal movement in Sri Lanka, as well as upon local amalgamations of Catholic practices.

**The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Urban Sri Lanka**

One of the primary targets of Archbishop Ranjith’s dictum about cultural sensitivity and sobriety of worship was the internationally-recognized Catholic Charismatic Renewal, known colloquially in Sri Lanka as “Pubuduwa,” (reawakening or revival). *Pubuduwa* is promoted by a Colombo-based lay-Catholic group named the Community of the Risen Lord (hereafter, the CRL). During Wednesday night CRL prayer meetings in Colombo, the crowd ordinarily swells well beyond the capacity of the Catholic school auditorium where it is held, with upwards of 2,000 people in attendance for the English language service. Anticipating the crowd, the Sevakeyo, or assistants, set out chairs on three sides of the building to accommodate the overflow. These outdoor areas are equipped with screens and audio equipment that capture the goings-on on the charismatic stage, including the song, testimonials, expressions of prayerful thanksgiving, beseechments asking God to show his grace, and glossolalic utterances. The projected images fade in and out to show different angles of the stage, the

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235 Csordas 1997
Leading the services is the Catholic charismatic lay leader, Lalith Perera, known among his lay followers as “Lalith Thatha” (Lalith “Father”). Other lay Catholics also play a significant role in the CRL ministry. Lalith Thatha established the Community of the Risen Lord in the early 1970s, shortly after the movement had been developed in the U.S. When news of the liturgical regulations reached the ears of the Sinhala Catholic CRL leader, he anticipated that the Archbishop had intended to rein in the CRL. Through conversations between Brother Lalith Perera and the Archbishop, certain minor modifications of CRL practices were to be put into effect. Archbishop Ranjith newly barred the handling of the Holy Eucharist during these Wednesday night prayer meetings, even by an ordained priest. Prior to the regulations, at the end of the CRL service a single priest would process across the length of the auditorium to the outer perimeter of the building so as to give all of the devotees access to the divine presence.

236 In the main, the CRL services are oriented towards English-speaking middle class and elite Colombo Catholics, as well as upper and middle class Sinhala and Tamil Catholics. While the Wednesday night services are conducted in English, live Sinhala and Tamil translations of the biblical exegesis and testimonials of the Pubuduwa services can be heard through speakers placed near certain outdoor sections of the crowd.

237 This usage of Thatha “Father” (Thatha is the kin-term of address for paternal relative) is more causal than the term used for ordained priests, who are ordinarily addressed as “Piyathumi,” or in English as “Father.”

238 Csordas describes the constitution of these charismatic Catholic covenant communities in the American context in some depth.
within the Eucharist. The assembly would respond to the priestly display of the Eucharistic monstrance with a heightened intensity of glossolalia. Following the new dictum on extra-liturgical services, devotees waited expectantly for the monstrance containing the charism to appear, however the sacred host was required to stay stationed in the middle of the stage as per the agreement with Archbishop Ranjith. As representatives within the Catholic Bishops Council explained, the CRL “had to make certain adjustments so as to not mislead the people. People may get things from CRL that they don’t get from Sunday liturgy. But (the objective of CRL) must be to lead them back to their local parishes.”

It seemed that this modification did slightly diminish the intensity of charismatic expression in the Colombo CRL prayer meetings only in those final moments of the service, but the numbers of Catholics who regularly attended the services were not significantly affected. The Catholic Pubuduwa services have continued to thrive, with the gifts of tongues gracing the participants. Lalith Thatha offers rousing biblical exegesis—offering interpretations often not heard within the Catholic Church. For instance, he delivered a sermon on the Jew named Saul who had been staunchly dedicated to the persecution of Christians. “When on the road to Damascus he was struck down by a miraculous vision from God, and was told to stop what he was
doing, Saul had a complete change of heart—Praise the Lord! The Jew name Saul had become the Apostle named Paul, you see? Halleluiah, Halleluiah, Halleluiah.” Engaging with the incorporeal manifestation of God through the Holy Spirit as Saint Paul was seen to have, the CLR promotes an “apostolic” attachment of the charismatic Catholic self to the God who is present “in the here and now.”

**Charismatic Catholicism in Small Town Peripheries**

Through its outreach programs, the Colombo-based CRL had also begun to export their Catholic Pubuduwa devotionalism to various “outstation” places such as Kandy, Panadura, Negombo, Kalatura, Matara, and other small Sri Lankan cities where there are established Catholic parishes. These parishes have become the occasional satellites to the Sri Lankan center of the internationally-influenced Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The southern Sri Lankan coastal town of Matara—the home base from which I conducted much of my ethnographic research—was one such parish that considered itself to be blessed to receive monthly visits from the Community of the Risen Lord. Matara, a predominantly Buddhist area, had long ago been the primary site of Buddhist revival; but being that it was located on the coast, it also gained the influence of colonial-era Christianities (Malalgoda 1978, Young and Somaratna 1995,
Several Pentecostal churches can also be found in the area, some of which arrived as early as the early 1970s. Some of these Pentecostal prayer halls represent the types of Christian expansionism that Buddhist anti-conversion activists rebuke as “panduru palliya” (“bush churches,” i.e. churches that spring up ‘like bushes’), that are “mushrooming” in Buddhist areas.

At the time of my research (2009-11), there were roughly two hundred Catholic families who belonged to the local parish. In my conversations with the Parish Priest over the matter of the charismatic prayer meetings, he affirmed and welcomed *Pubuduwa* as a lay Catholic practice. He expressed that he was not troubled by this form of Catholic expression among his parishioners, explaining that he found that CRL’s emphasis on meditating upon Jesus resonated with the goals of advancing Catholic piety among the laity. In spite of the Parish Priest’s embrace of *Pubuduwa* for Catholic laypeople, subsequent to the circulation of the Archbishop’s dictum on liturgical conformity, the effects of the regulations were palpable in the Matara parish. On a Sunday shortly after the memorandum on Catholic liturgy had been circulated,

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239 As Malalgoda tells us, this “Matara period” of Buddhist revival occurred the middle period of colonialism (Dutch-era), from roughly 1790-1830 (1978: 186; see also Blackburn 2010). The center of revivalist gravity has shifted to Colombo, yet there is a still strong Buddhist community and political activism associated it. In addition to the Buddhist and Catholic presences, being a port city there is also a strong Muslim presence in Matara city. A Hindu temple which had been demolished in the 1983 anti-Tamil riots, had been rebuilt by a Hindu priest, who dedicated himself to the revival of the worship of the God Murugan (Kataragama); the temple now attracted Hindus from nearby towns, and equally as many Sinhala Buddhists from Matara city. Recently, more such denominationally-affiliated Pentecostal churches have begun to emerge in Matara and its outskirts.
following Mass and the homily offered by the Father, Catholic parishioners were given special instructions on how to engage in the CRL services. Brother Francis, a seminarian and assistant to the Father, explained to the congregation that CRL lay leaders traveled from Colombo to lead the Pubaduwa services. “Lalith Pererage athula kandayam aawa.” “Lalith Perera’s inner circle has come,” Brother Francis told the congregation members, who anticipated that they would be led into prayer by CRL associates that Sunday, following Mass. The Pubuduwa services were an exciting and relatively new component of Church activities. The mornings on which the once-monthly Pubuduwa service was to be held at the Matara Church, Sunday Mass was particularly well attended. Although not quite overflowing the capacity of the Church as on festival days, the church swelled, not only with the regular congregants of the Matara parish, but also with Catholics who ordinarily attended Sunday Mass in smaller churches which were not host to the CRL Pubuduwa services. Some traveled from upwards of 25 kilometers away especially to take part in the Pubuduwa service in Matara.

Brother Francis explained to us that the Pupaduwa service was to be relocated; rather than conduct the Pubuduwa within the main church building which faced Beach

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240 A pseudonym
Road, a main road in Matara town adjacent to the ocean, from which passers-by could glimpse the pious activities of Communion, the Pubuduwa service would take place in another building, tucked behind the church, where parish social events were often held. This relocation would not only maintain the sanctity of the liturgical and the ecclesiastical space as prescribed by Church authorities. It would also prevent the sounds of ecstatic worship from escaping the premises and alert passers-by that the charismatic form had been adopted and was being validated within the local Catholic parish.

Abiding by the directives of the liturgical circular, Brother Leo gave the congregation several caveats before they could elect to participate in the Pupaduwa service. He stated adamantly that if members of the congregation wanted to take part in the service that they ought not yell or shout during the service: “kaae gahanne epaa”. Brother Leo insisted that the participants don’t simply utter disconnected “letters,” or sounds: “akuru kiyawenne epaa.” “You must pray beautifully. Prayer for us is meditation”: “nyaaajnyaa keriima bhavana tamay.” “Prayer through song is famous in Lalith Thatha’s services—there are many different types of songs than the hymns we sing. ... [However] without praying in the correct way some people come and scold the priest or the bishop, and call them crazy (pissu). Without praying the correct way, some
deny the Father, or Bishop, call him crazy, and leave the Church,” he said, subtly criticizing the tendency of Catholic defection to Pentecostalism. “Practice prayer in the right way.” “We want to heighten our religious experience”: “usas wenna oone.” “This is the way that we should protect our religion”: “arakshawa kerannawa.” Emphatically, Brother Leo stated, “This is the way we should behave in our religion. We’re not here for a birthday party,” he quipped.

Following the announcements, the Father and Brother Francis took their leave of the congregation. Most of the Catholic lay people who were present during mass, along with nuns from the adjacent Convent, filed out of the church building and filled an adjacent building. After some technical difficulties the services began, and upon screen at the front of the room were alternating projections of a single image of Jesus, and lyrics to devotional songs. The sermon preached by one Colombo-based CRL leaders, Brother Arjith\textsuperscript{241} was structured so that the devotees would repeat the utterances involved in the sermon. Backup singers, instrumentals, the congregation’s praise-talk, the exuberant exaltations of the praise leaders, produced a dissonantly layered sound, which overlaid the song’s baseline. Devotees closed their eyes, and swayed with arms outstretched, nodding their heads to the pulse of the ambient sound.

\textsuperscript{241} A pseudonym.
But, perhaps out of obedience to Brother Francis and the will of Father, the devotees of the church themselves did not talk in tongues. Rather, they quietly whispered their legible but ecstatic praise. The praise of Brother Arjith and the other CRL leaders, on the other hand, crescendoed towards a passionate song-chant-prayer interspersed with a “shari-a-la-la-la-la-la-la…” of tongues. More utterances of “shia-la-la-la-la-la” pierced the soundscape as the prayer leaders spoke in tongues while the congregation uttered their prayers.

We have seen that there has not been outright monitoring, or policing of the charismatic forms of Pubuduwa in Colombo or beyond. Participation in the Pubuduwa practices of the Community of the Risen Lord are definitely encouraged by ecclesiastical authorities in such “outstation” places as Matara. Nevertheless, there is significant tempering of the charismatic form.

**Sinhala Catholic Normativity and an Ecclesiastically-Approved Catholic Revivalism**

Compared the cases of CRL Pubuduwa participants in Colombo and Matara, Catholics dwelling in strongly Catholic areas of Sri Lanka evidently have a very different relationship to the Pentecostal-charismatic form. A thoroughly Catholic form of revivalism, a service called *Kurusa Daehaena*, conducted by Pastor Terrance. The
Kurusa Daehaena service generates a soundscape very different from that which emerges from Pentecostal-charismatic “praise and worship” practices which so easily draws the attention of its critics.

In the vicinity of a town called Ja-Ela, roughly twenty kilometers north of Colombo, I discovered that many families dedicated to Catholicism have strong opinions about Pentecostals who they refer to as “Bible katiya,” and sometimes do so pejoratively. “Bible katiya” means Bible sect, group, or gang—a name which Pentecostal bearers of the nickname like to spin sympathetically to mean “people of the Book.” One of my Catholic interlocutors from the village, Dakota malli explained to me in Sinhala that they referred to Pentecostals as such because they require a lot of time (waediya wallāwa) for Bible reading. “Too much time” Dakota repeated it in translation. Dakota malli explained that “Bible katiya” connotes the separation between Catholicism and Pentecostalism. Dakota and others in his family to whom I spoke had also grown accustomed to seeing Jehovah’s Witnesses going door-to-door evangelizing. They described Jehovah’s witnesses, like Pentecostals, to worship “rupa naetuwa”—without images. Dakota specified that the Bible katiya denies Mary and the Saints. “Bible katiya

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242 All pseudonyms.
243 He translated “waediya wallāwa” not as “a lot” but as “too much.” Doing so it was momentarily unclear to me whether he translated it as a typical Sinhala speaker of colloquial English diction would do, or whether he was pointedly commenting upon a point of difference that has generally been a constant source of distance between Catholics and Protestants.
refuse to pray to statues, and only pray to Jesus through the image of the Cross because of their exclusive focus on the Bible,” he expounded. Suranmaya, Dakota’s cousin, added that she had heard the *Bible katiya* call their god “Yeweh,” which she understood to be a different god than her own. In fact, Archbishop Ranjith had addressed the Pentecostal usage of “YHWH”, condemning its adaptation among Christians. As it is stated in the Liturgical Circular: “The Tetragram ‘YHWH’ is not to be pronounced in prayers or hymns because of its sacred nature... This takes into account the sensitivity of the Jewish community in this regard, from whom we inherited much into our worship.”  

I also gathered from the Dias family, and their extended kin and neighbors, that they take some distance from the few Catholic neighbors who they know to be “Pubuduwa pauwla” or “(Catholic charismatic) revival families” in their neighborhood. 

Mr. Jackson Dias, in one breath commented that Lalith Perera, the head of the CRL was his own relative. In another, he seemed to suggest that the practices of the CRL are un-Catholic. While describing one *Pubuduwa pauwla* (Catholic Charismatic Renewalist families) who lived in the vicinity of their home, he pointed that woman of the house

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was odd, gesturing with a finger-to-temple to indicate to his son that she is crazy (pissu).

These traditionally committed Sinhala Catholics conceive of themselves as distinct from Pubuduwa Catholics, Pentecostals, and other varieties of Protestants. Thus, I was intrigued to learn then that the Dias family, along with many Sinhala Catholic residents of Ja Ela and other villages in the area, are regular participants in another variety of what might be called “extra-liturgical services,” that takes place outside of their regular Sunday Mass at St. Rogus Church in Ja Ela. Dakota malli, and Mrs. Dias, excitedly told me of a special Thursday night prayer meeting, that takes place at another parish, several kilometers away from Ja Ela. The Thursday night Deva maeheeya, or God’s service, was emphatically not a Pubuduwa service. This particular Deva maeheeya, named Kurusa Daehaena—which translates as “the Enchanting Cross”—was conducted by one Father Terrance, at the grounds of a Catholic church within another parish named St. Helena. I had also heard much buzz about Father Terrance’s revivalism and healing capacities from some Colombo Catholics. Apparently it was at the former Archbishop Oswald Gomis’s behest, that Father Terrance began “to conduct

\[245\] pseudonym
a prayer service to enkindle the faith of the people,” which he had done so around the
area since 2009.246

St. Helena was considered among Ja Ela Catholics as a sacred Catholic ground.
The space boasted the stations of the Cross which had been developed on the church
grounds during the early 1990s by Father Terrance’s predecessor. As Stirrat explains,

The Way of the Cross (pada namasakaraya) consists of fourteen prayers and
meditations on various stages of Christ’s Passion. It can be a purely private
affair, but in Sri Lanka it normally takes place either before pictoral
representations of the Passion hung in churches, or in the open air before a
series of crosses or statues marking the various stations. Prior to Vatican II it
was a favourite form of devotion encouraged by priests. The Way of the Cross is
a dramatic reliving of Christ’s Passion that accentuates the theme that Christ
died for the sins of mankind... (1992: 68).

Though The Way of the Cross is an important devotional component within Sri Lankan
Catholicism, not all parishes are equipped with such articles of faith and reflection on
their church grounds.247 The St. Helena Church grounds were seen as sacred grounds
because the Church was equipped with the Stations of the Cross. Saint Helena is

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246 Such services had been pioneered at St. Helena’s Church in Yakkaduwa by Fr. Terrance’s predecessor,
Fr. Sunanda. The outdoor prayer service had been pioneered in 1990 by Fr. Sunanda Wanasinghe, who
passed away in 1998. It seems there had been a 10-year hiatus of the Kurusa Daehaena (then known as
Kurusa Yagaya and Suva maeheeya (Cross Oblation Ritual and Healing service), before Father Terrance
revived the practice. http://kurusadahana.com/ky/index.php These services became especially popular
since Fr. Terrance’s arrival at the parish in 2009. “Nothing is impossible with God,” by Rev. Fr. Terrance
247 In fact, St. Mary’s of Matara began a fundraising campaign in 2010, to acquire the resources that
enabled them to build a small set of fourteen stations in white stone, which was installed in the open air
adjacent to the church several months later.
revered for having discovered the relics of the Crucifixion during the 4th century, and thus, for Father Terrance, renewed dedication to the Cross at St. Helena’s Church was befitting for the sanctity of the place.  

Evidently, Father Terrance’s initiative to conduct the Kurusa Daehaena on the hallowed ground of St. Helena’s Church in Yakkaduwa was intended to shore up Catholic devotion in the several local parishes. I discovered that the popularity of the Kurusa Daehaena service went well beyond the few parishes for which the revival services had been prescribed. Clearly, the objective of the Kurusa Daehaena was to fortify Catholic piety, in large part to defend against the expansion of Protestant and particularly Pentecostal Christian churches that have sprung up in the vicinity.

One Thursday evening, after dark, the Dias family, several neighbors and I—about twelve of us—piled into a van slated to go from the a rural neighborhood off of Ja Ela town to St. Helena Church in the village of Yakkaduwa. An uncle drove us for over half an hour along dark, dusty, and winding roads until we reached our destination. We made our way towards an edge of the large outdoor stage, and found a place to stand on the edge of congregated mass. As my eyes adjusted to the dark, I was amazed to see that some three thousand people had assembled on the grounds in this rural locale. The

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248 She is revered in Orthodox, Eastern, Roman Catholic traditions, and certain Protestant denominations.
congregants stood in a U-shaped formation facing the stage. As the last devotees had trickled onto the grounds of the amphitheatre, they lit small yellow Catholic candles and planted them in an alcove near the stage. The flames flickered and danced at the bottom of the stage, casting their light in the direction of a huge wooden crucifix. A raised platform was stocked with the images from the Passion, with angels flanking the backdrop. Several altar boys donning vermilion cassocks stood at the bottom of the platform, while recorded Sinhala devotional hymns with strong male choral vocals and a female voice on back-up played. The music, the talk from the crowd, came to a hush as Father Terrance approached the lectern at the top of the platform, and the faces all around me became solemnly focused.

The altar boys turned to face the congregation and Father Terrance gently indicated that we should sit. The Father began a solo spoken praise in a cadence that
resembled the authoritative yet gentle speech commonly uttered during the homily in traditional Sinhala Catholic churches. Then, Father Terrance began elongating his words into the microphone, the grandeur of his enunciation to God confessed sin of the people and the country, and asked forgiveness for all those devoted to him. In Sinhala: “We want to give thanks to you Lord!” the steady, loud, and clear voice proclaimed.

This supplication reached a point of pause, opening into a round of praise utterances in English and in Sinhala, which were amplified by microphones. Each phrase was first uttered by the Father, and then succinctly followed by matching utterances from a small handful of female devotees with the monophonic intonation of a Mass reading.


Returning in Sinhala to the priestly cadence of prayer, Father Terrance began offering a general pronouncement of thanks on behalf of the healed, as he announced a miraculous event, naming a recent date on which one member of the congregation was relieved of a significant handicap. More rounds of praise for Jesus ensued. Directly following upon Father Terrance’s leading utterances, the assembly uttered “Prasansa wewa” (we praise You) in unison with the microphoned voices of the Church women.
Father Terrance, then soloed praise to God, addressing him directly, “The families you’ve freed, through your healing Grace... We want to give our thanks, dear God.” Father Terrance’s voice crescendoed with conviction as he turned to speak of the Covenant: “Since the experience on the Mountain, every single one of our lives has changed!” *(haema kenekagema Jiwitte wenas unal)* “Out of love for us, you appointed Moses during his mountain experience [Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Commandments], you appointed Abraham, you appointed Jacob, you appointed Isaac, our venerated one You, appointed Jesus *wahansii* to lead us to another experience on the mountain,” [where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount prior to his Ascension]. We shall give our love, and our thanks, through this *geethika*, “*mang adarē Jesu,*” a song of adoration for Jesus.

Following the song, and further exaltations of Jesus, the *Deva maeheeya* service came to a close when an assistant priest carried the Monstrance, containing the Sacred Host, shielded under a yellow parasol. Such is typical in Eucharistic processions at the Vatican, wherein the Sacred Host is displayed within the monstrance, shielded by a canopy. In a similar fashion, the holy Buddhist relics are carried under a yellow parasol during processions in Sri Lanka. Now, as the monstrance was revealed, all who had
gathered lit more yellow Catholic candles.\footnote{The yellow candles (faux beeswax) traditionally symbolize the purely produced light of Christ: “The brilliant flame, in its charming glow, points to His divinity; the taper of the candle symbolizes His human nature; the wick hidden in the wax, points to his holy soul; the wax itself denotes His virginal person” Theiler (1909: 20-1). Henry Theiler.} The light set the open-air nave aglow, each visage marked with solemnity, as the congregation grasped to take in the momentary manifestation of the Holy Spirit, with arms outstretched to receive God’s grace as the Sacred Host passed the open-air nave. Together, Father Terrance, and the priest who had carried the monstrance forward in procession, moved towards a separate building on the St. Helena Church campus, and Father Terrance stationed himself adjacent to it. The bulk of the crowd quickly surrounded Father Terrance, and one by one Father Terrance placed his palm on each forehead, and whispered a quiet prayer. Freshly blessed, the devotees turned to go home. A handful of people stayed afterward, moving indoors for a brief, small-group prayer and healing session with Father Terrance. It seems that the practice of exorcism, when called for, takes place privately, by special appointment with Father Terrance.

Father Terrance’s Catholic ministry adopts certain features involved in charismatic Christian prayer meetings, and yet uniquely ensures that the authoritative tenets of Catholicism are upheld. At the Kurusa Daehaena service, the congregation matched Father Terrance’s utterances word for word, without a single flourish, in
parallel with how Catholics regard the Holy Spirit to be concentrated and contained within the Eucharist. The spiritual power contained by the Eucharist was seen as emanating out from it, and the congregants reached out to receive this grace. But the manifestation of this Grace was only subtly expressed. Within this ‘extra-liturgical service,’ we see that the experience of the Holy Spirit has been contained by priestly authority. Kurusa Daehaena shares with the Pentecostal form a primary focus on Christ and Christ’s sacrifice upon the Cross—although the Kurusa Daehaena sermons espoused by Father Terrance certainly do not condemn the worship of the Saints and Mary. Still, the services placed emphasis on Christ’s sacrifice, encouraging the deepening of belief not through focus on the pious intermediaries who were exemplars of faith and bearers of grace, but through direct praise of the Savior himself.

In charismatic Pentecostalism as well as the Catholic Pubuduwa, we have seen that ministerial function of the Pastor is an act to call upon God to channel the Holy Spirit so that it can be democratically be experienced as the direct intercession of the divine, which is signaled by glossolalia. The pastor is regarded to wield greater charisma the more he is backed by the force of a prayerful and believing congregation—a congregation that shows faith in the minister, as well as in the Deity. In contrast, in the Catholic Kurusa Daehaena service, true to the Catholic form,
traditional priestly authority is upheld. The precise repetition of utterances said by the
Father, without any flourish of speech or gesture, distinguishes this local ecclesiastical
form of Catholic lay revivalism, from the Pentecostal “excesses” of tongues, and as
Archbishop Ranjith put it, from the “cacophonous exuberance” that signifies for
charismatics the unmediated nature of the Holy Spirit.

**Sri Lankan Catholicism and the Politics of Sovereign Devotion**

What the gift of charisma is, what it can do, and who has access to it, itself is
highly disputed among the various religious communities of Sri Lanka. We have seen
on the one hand, Sinhala Buddhist doctrines have it that the Buddha is no longer in the
world, but common conviction has it that cosmic Buddhic power of the “Thus-Gone
One” (*Thathāgata*) perdures in the world. For Sinhala Buddhists, this Dhammic power
perdures even when the structures that protect it are fragile, and may potentially be
besieged by various anti-Buddhist and anti-national threats. In contrast, the varieties of
Sri Lankan Christianities are built upon distinct genealogies of the *charism*, with distinct
conceptions of how one gains access to God’s grace. We have also seen how some
varieties of charismatic Pentecostal Christian engagement, in striving to consolidate
exclusivist commitments, relying on Manichean distinction-making that often antagonizes religious rival.\textsuperscript{251}

The Sri Lankan Catholic Church’s stated affinity with Buddhism on the grounds that devotional sobriety is inherent to both religions, was clearly a timely response meant to enjoin Catholic laity to participate in abating Buddhists’ concerns about Catholic engagements in evangelism and charismatic religiosity. Indeed, Sri Lankan Catholic Church leadership remains anxious that Catholics might become Pentecostals, but express hopes that these charismatic revivalist forms, if confined to the Church, could keep Catholics become apostates. Yet at the same time, Pentecostal-charismatic leaders of established denominational churches remain hopeful that Pentecostals and Catholics can be reconciled, in a common evangelical cause.

Under the circumstances of Buddhist protectionism and “anti-conversion” activism in Sri Lanka, we have seen that even in the post-Vatican II era, the conjoined forms of Catholic and Pentecostal-charismatic religiosity can present a conundrum for the Sri Lankan Catholic Church as a regulative body. I suggest that here we see the “opportunistic tolerance” which Schmitt identifies as a point of critique against the political “style” of the Church.\textsuperscript{252} Archbishop Ranjith’s effort to reign in, while

\textsuperscript{251} See also Marshall 2009.
\textsuperscript{252} Roman Catholicism and Its Political Form. 1996[1923].
simultaneously allowing the charismatic forms which operate under the rubric of Catholicism in Sri Lanka, is animated by reasons which are ecclesiastical as well as political. I now turn to a discussion of the broader diplomatic entailments of these efforts to tame the charismatic forms that have been incorporated into Sri Lankan Catholicism.

Religious Politics and the Symbolic Sovereign as Promoter of Religious Tolerance

Following the May 2009 defeat of the militant separatist LTTE, President Rajapaksa and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces were exuberantly feted by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists within Sri Lankan public sphere for having been unrelenting in the military efforts against the Tamil insurgents. Having proceeded with the Sri Lankan “war on terrorism” without regard to international criticism, and ultimately securing victory over the insurgents, was seen by populists as an achievement which no leader before Rajapaksa endeavored to do with the fullest force of State authority. To many proponents of these populist forms of Sri Lankan nationalism, the President’s actions liberated Sri Lanka from the LTTE. They bespoke his true commitment to the small but proud nation against seditious militants as well as anti-national and neo-colonial detractors. In turn, with the immediate aftermath of the war, the President gained
renown among many populists as a righteous sovereign guardian of the heritage of the nation.253

In the victory speech President Rajapaksa delivered after the military defeat of the LTTE, he spoke of the grand sweep of Sinhala victories over foreign detractors:

It is necessary on this historic occasion to inquire as to how it was possible that we have obtained a proud victory, achieved today by defeating the world’s most ruthless terrorist organization. We are a country with a long history in which we saw the reign of 182 kings who ruled with pride and honour for a period that extended more than 2,500 years. This is a country where kings such as Dutugemunu, Valagamba, Dhatusena and Vijayabahu defeated enemy invasions and ensured our freedom. As much as Mother Lanka fought against invaders such as Datiya, Pitiya, Palayamara, Siva and Elara in the past, we have the experience of having fought the Portuguese, Dutch and British who established empires in the world. As much as the great kings such as Mayadunne, Rajasingha I and Vimaladharmasuriya, it is necessary to also recall the great heroes such as Keppettipola and Puran Appu who fought with such valour against imperialism.254

Many Sinhala Buddhist nationalists lauded Rajapaksa as the “King” in league with the great Sinhala kings of nationalistic lore (Kapferer 2011: vvi). The nationalist legends of Sinhala Buddhist kings who vanquished foreign (usually Tamil) enemies in the ancient past and restored the grandeur of Sinhala heritage, evoke the paradigm of sovereign

253 Rajapaksa’s position as a symbolic sovereign was not publically challenged until the Army Commander, Sarath Fonseka, was threatened by Rajapaksa, and ran in the Presidential election against him. This divided the polity on who was a leader sufficiently nationalistic, and also capable of post-war rebuilding. Some of those who were concerned about Rajapaksa’s lack of concern for Tamils and other minorities, held out hope that Fonseka would be a strong candidate to reconciliation.
heroism rooted in Theravāda Buddhist cosmology. For instance, in the eulogies of the ancient Sinhala King Dutugamenu, who vanquished the Tamil invader, the Nayyakar King Elara, Sinhala discourses projected that after Dutugamenu’s death, that he was reborn into the Tusitha heaven (Bechert 1978, Kapferer 1988). Dutugamenu’s karmic reward was his reincarnated status as God who was slated to be reborn as a close disciple of the Maithreya Buddha, in the far-future (Bechert 1978). With this proximity to the Buddha Maithreya in a far-future life, the hero-king was ultimately destined to attain nirvana. In the immediacy of the war victory, Sinhala Buddhist nationalist rhetorics similarly situated Rajapaksa’s karmic accomplishments of statecraft in line with this hallowed cosmic futurity.

While a mass of billboards in Colombo celebrated the President and the Armed Forces in the highly fraught aftermath of the war, other billboards and flyers posted throughout Colombo presented the President as an avid supporter of inter-religious peace. The exemplar was poised to encourage other “Sri Lankans who loved the nation” to embrace the possibilities for harmonious relations with people of other religions in the dawning of a new era. This broader program by the Rajapaksa government to sympathetically align with religious minorities came at a time when many Christian

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advocates feared that Sinhala Buddhist populists would turn the full force of their attentions against alleged Christian anti-nationalism. For some Christians, President Rajapaksa appeared to be a moderate partner who had the potential to undercut populist trajectories of anti-Christian violence and anti-conversion legislation.

President Rajapaksa played an especially significant role in helping to extricate the Sri Lankan Catholic Church from populist discourses that which had tended to malign Christians in general as anti-national subjects. The demonstrative alliance between the Catholic leader Archbishop Ranjith and President Rajapaksa especially in the postwar period, proved a compelling affirmation that the Sri Lankan Catholic Church is a thoroughly trustworthy nationalist entity. This refiguration of populist

The image is of President Mahinda Rajapakse lighting clay oil lamps, typically used in Buddhist devotional practices. It reads “veek sith paanad” or “one mindfully lit oil lamp!” suggesting that the lamp is being lit with a unified heart and mind, and connotes that the President (a symbolic sovereign, I argue) stands as an exemplar of tolerance and inter-religious unity between the four major religious of Sri Lanka—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.)
sentiment transpired in spite of prior anxieties that Catholics were in league with other evangelizing “fundamentalist” Christians.

As a result of the alliance with Archbishop Ranjith, President Rajapaksa had an amiable meeting with Pope Benedict at the Vatican.\(^{256}\) This is significant because non-Catholic heads of state rarely visit the Vatican unless the state is a major player in world politics. Rajapaksa’s wife is a Catholic, and their inter-religious union is promoted as a testament to strong Buddhist-Catholic relations in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans are well aware

\(^{256}\) Rajapaksa made several visits at least since 2007, had been facilitated by Malcolm Ranjith, who at the time was The Secretary of Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
of this close relationship between the Rajapaksas and Archbishop Ranjith, as well as the President’s ties to the Vatican.

In the main, Sinhala Buddhists nationalists have come to see that this alliance does not compromise the President’s abilities to protect populist interests. Now, if anything, most Sinhala Buddhist nationalists see that these relationships have the potential to help fortify it. In affirmation of this Sri Lankan Buddhist-Catholic alliance and the agenda for Sri Lankan national unity, Archbishop Ranjith used his ties to the Vatican in an effort to help the Sri Lankan national cause: the Archbishop facilitated an alliance between Pope Benedict the Sovereign of the Holy See, and President Rajapaksa the symbolic-Sovereign of Sri Lanka. This relationship paved the way for diplomatic efforts by the Vatican to plea that the EU show “respect for Sri Lankan sovereignty.” The EU
had been threatening to deny Sri Lanka certain trade benefits because of the country’s alleged misconduct in war. In November 2009, Ranjith gathered an inter-religious committee from Sri Lanka, consisting of himself, a Catholic father, two Buddhist monks, a Muslim cleric and a Hindu priest, to approach Vatican officials. In their meeting they sought to collectively affirm that Sri Lanka was now at peace, unified, that the State was adequately caring for its internally-displaced Tamil civilian population. The committee met Pope Benedict and presented him with a gift, and met with the Vatican foreign minister to present a memorandum on the postwar condition of Sri Lanka. There, the inter-religious leaders of Sri Lanka pleaded a case to Vatican officials to help protect Sri Lanka from economic sanctions being threatened by the EU.

Specifically, the inter-religious committee lobbied the Vatican officials to show favor to Sri Lanka by pleading with the EU on their behalf to ensure that trade concessions which had been beneficial to Sri Lanka’s garment industry remained intact. The Archbishop and the inter-religious committee conveyed to the Vatican foreign minister that there were significant strides being made by the Sri Lankan government to resettle Tamil IDPs (internally-displaced people). They argued the case that to deny...
Sri Lanka the trade provision would reduce the effectiveness of the government’s good-faith efforts to help the Tamil people recover from war, displacement, and 25 years of being subject to LTTE oppression. The Vatican minister agreed to try to compel the EU committee to vote in favor of Sri Lanka in receiving the trade provision. But in the end, the Vatican's connections, and the cause itself, were deemed to be too tenuous to successfully support the appeals. The EU stripped Sri Lanka of the benefit of GSP+ preferential trade status.\footnote{GSP+ is the “Generalized Scheme of Preferences”. http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/generalised-scheme-of-preferences/index_en.htm} In spite of the failed effort, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the symbolic Sovereign protector of the Sri Lankan state, helped to consolidate confidence among the Sinhala Buddhist public that the Sri Lankan Catholic Church is not a liability, but an asset, a friend, and powerful ally to the Sri Lankan nation.

I would suggest that the alliance between the Sinhala Catholic Archbishop of Colombo and the President Mahinda Rajapakse, has enabled a *pardoning* of sorts: whereas Sinhala Buddhist nationalists had been campaigning against the anti-national activities of Christians in general, the Sri Lankan Catholic Church now successfully escapes categorization by populists as a proselytizing and anti-national Christian entity. These politicized forms of inter-religious dialogue went a long way in mediating
the demands of populist nationalism that are persistently put upon Sri Lankan Christians. As validation of these positive inter-religious relationships in his home country, the Archbishop of the Colombo Diocese, Malcolm Ranjith, was promoted as a voting member of the Vatican’s Cardinalate in October 2010. The efforts of Sri Lankan Catholic leadership to lobby in favor of Sri Lanka on the political front, modified popular perceptions, and refigured the Church, at least at its institutional center, as a recognizably nationalist entity—a situation that has been institutionally opportune for Roman Catholicism.
In a September 30 introductory meeting with Ambassador and PolChief, Roman Catholic Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith recounted the recent political evolution of Sri Lanka, of which he has been both an astute observer and important participant, and described the role of the Church in society. He noted that while he himself was a Singhalese, he was very sympathetic to the plight of Tamils, who had suffered greatly from pogroms and discrimination by the majority and from the disastrous results of LTTE separatist ideology. He explained that the Church had played a key role in brokering talks between the GSL and the LTTE over the years, including the 2002 cease-fire agreement. After the war, the church was advocating publicly for the release of IDPs and other controversial positions. This had led to criticism from the Buddhist right and even death threats against the archbishop himself. This was the opposite of the leading role in reconciliation the archbishop believed Buddhists should have been playing years ago.

Despite this criticism, the archbishop said he believed President Rajapaksa personally was a good man and in the constellation of Sri Lankan politics was a relative moderate (he reminded us that Rajapaksa used to attend human rights meetings in Europe as an opposition MP). Rajapaksa and his brothers were under great pressure from the Singhalese Buddhist right, and any show of what would be perceived as weakness before the international community could result in their losing ground to much more extreme elements. Indeed, he argued that if something happened to the president there would be “chaos” in Sri Lanka.

[...] This led to the archbishop addressing directly the question of war crimes accountability. He said “my suggestion is, in order to strengthen democracy in Sri Lanka, don’t push accountability now.” He reasoned that weakening the Rajapaksas could backfire. Moreover, if Sri Lanka were denied GSP-plus or the U.S. were to enact strong economic sanctions, leading to a sharp downturn in the economy, Sri Lanka — where democracy was not strong now — could suffer revolution from the right or a coup by the military, which currently had a very strong position in society. The archbishop said this was why he had recently come out publicly in favor of extending GSP-plus to Sri Lanka, despite the GSL’s many human rights problems. Ambassador countered that this was a very interesting perspective, but if the Rajapaksas were in fact moderates, they needed to show it in at least a few ways. The archbishop said this was the challenge that he had been working on — how to get the president not to worry only about the “forces lurking beneath him” and to act as a moderate. He told the president it was important to work with Tamil leaders on reconciliation and to invite the diaspora to help re-build the economy. “The Rajapaksas will come and go,” the archbishop opined, “but the Tamils will always be here.”
After his promotion, Cardinal Archbishop Ranjith remained solidly opposed to the externally lodged humanitarian criticisms concerning Sri Lanka, and continues to be an advocate for the Sri Lankan Government. Cardinal-Archbishop Ranjith was appointed to the “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission” (LLRC) assembled by President Rajapaksa in May 2010. The LLRC was tasked with conducting an internal review of Sri Lanka’s military conduct, and to provide recommendations on postwar development. Cardinal Rajith began propounding soft critiques of war-time and postwar initiatives—a small push to ensure that President Rajapaksa lived up to the promises of reconciliation (see above conversation between Archbishop Ranjith and U.S. Ambassador Butenis, documented in Wikileaks). At the 2012 UNHCR meetings in Geneva on these matters, the Sri Lankan Catholic leader has remained adamant that the international community ought to suspend their “undue meddling” into the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.  

While a few commentators were impressed that the Sinhala Catholic leader had begun to “speak truth to power” in the aftermath of the war, in the main, critics of the Sri Lankan Government have been infuriated by the fact that the Catholic leader

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participated in providing an inadequate account of Sri Lankan “war crimes.” Critics of the current Sri Lankan regime have seen this internal accounting as insufficient to ensure reconciliation. Progressive Sinhala and Tamil activists in Sri Lanka express that the current regime may have won the war, but that it is now incumbent upon the government to “win the peace.” Some Tamil Catholics have felt alienated and embittered by what appears to them as “Sinhala chauvinism” expressed by the head of their own Church. Many Sinhala Buddhist nationalists continue to repudiate the claim that Tamils have faced any historical injustice at all. While some of these populists persist in criticizing the Catholic leader as inherently inclined to inhabit the anti-nationalist ethos which they consider to be native to Christianity, in the main, Cardinal Ranjith has remained exempt from such allegations in the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan public sphere, through his alliance with the symbolic Sovereign.

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**Complexio Oppositorium, or Political Theologies and the Making of Strange Bedfellows**

The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: it confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.

*Carl Schmitt, Political Theologies*

Although the Sri Lankan Catholic Church has found itself entangled in a war of identitarian perceptions, in terms of its institutional center, the Church has recently been quite successful in its diplomatic efforts to maintain a balance between its national grounding and its international character. Although at first glance these maneuvers involving religion and politics that I have described above may appear to be unrelated, together they underwrite a political theology of belonging which for minorities in this nationalist milieu must be ever-negotiated.

Again as we’ve seen, in a field of Sri Lankan religiosities, ambitiously-evangelizing charismatics engage in Manichean discourses that extol the experience of being baptized by the Holy Spirit (*Shudha Atmaya*), and of ridding afflictions by demonic spirits (*Yaksha Atmaya*). These miraculous events of charismatic Christian practices are considered “sovereign” over the Pentecostal self as Marshall (2009) has argued, and are central within rituals of conversion and Spiritual Warfare (also DeBernardi 2008). The pentecostalist profusion of miracles are understood to be received democratically,
evidenced by those who gain capacities to speak in tongues. This sensibility about the miraculous in the everyday however, tends to foreclose other forms of religious engagement and belonging. There is a persistent sense that these “new” Pentecostal varieties of Christianity impinge upon, and threaten to eradicate, established sovereign domains of Buddhist religiosity. Catholic leadership, recognizing the force of populist nationalism in Sri Lanka, and desiring to maintain the established institutions of Roman Catholicism in Sri Lanka, have asked lay Catholics to use caution in adopting charismatic styles of devotion. Modulating the Catholic miracles of charismatic revivalism has been crucial for the institution of the Church, since Pentecostals’ charismatic practices provoke apostasy that could potentially jeopardize Catholics’ relations with Buddhists. Thus, Sri Lankan Catholic leadership has sought to orient Sri Lankan Catholic laity against outwardly evangelical drives that inhere in charismatic Christian forms.

The concerns about the “anti-national” sentiments which had earlier been ascribed to Sri Lanka Christians in general, and certain Catholic public figures in particular, have in large part been quelled by the political alliance between the Sinhala Catholic Cardinal-Archbishop Ranjith and President Rajapaksa. The latter, I have argued, has come to represent a symbolic sovereign in the immediacy of post-war
reckoning, Rajapaksa was recognized as being especially devoted—and for some, karmically destined—to be the sovereign upholder Sinhala Buddhist nation. Given that in many respects, the outcome of the war was utterly unexpected: long-time observers of Sri Lanka, and Sri Lankans themselves, could hardly predict that twenty-five years of war between the Government of Sri Lankan and the LTTE would come to such a swift end.\footnote{See Goodhand, Spencer and Korf (2010).} It can be said that from the Sinhala nationalist perspective, winning the war entailed a \textit{miraculous} turn of events. In fact, the postwar Sri Lankan Ministry of Tourism campaign, “Sri Lanka: Small Miracle,” was crafted with the idea that in the dawn of a new era of peace, the small but territorially intact island was a “miracle” ready to be explored by well-heeled foreign tourists. However, when the Minister of Tourism was privied to the idiom that “it would take a small miracle (for some fortuitous thing to happen),” the ad-campaign was recognized as having the potential to reflect badly upon Sri Lanka’s image.
After many thousands of advertising dollars were spent, the campaign was suspended shortly after it aired, with the Minister of Tourism stating:

... why do we want to brand our country as a small miracle when we have performed big miracles? Leave alone the past and take the recent war victory. Isn’t that a huge miracle? At a time when we were pressurized by many of the super power nations to bring the military operations against the world’s most ruthless terrorist organization to a halt, we were still able to crush the LTTE and bring peace to the country after nearly three decades of ruthless war. In such a backdrop why should we tag our country to be a place of small miracle?^{262}

Whether we consider them big or small, thinking through these local Sri Lankan conceptions of miracles and sensibilities about sovereignty and the defense of sovereignty, I find it useful to return to Schmitt’s thesis. Reformulating some aspects of Schmitt’s thought, I contend that there are overlapping theologico-political domains being claimed by various competing religiosities, associated with various religio-political bodies.

The triangulation between the Sri Lankan State, the Catholic Church, and the charismatic movements within and outside of the Catholic Church, evinces the two central concepts—forms of exception—elucidated by Schmitt’s thesis. In his delineation of how power works, Schmitt finds the limit cases to be the most revealing. He traces a genealogy of the exception, wherein the Divine conjures a miracle in a religious frame.

^{262} [http://www.island.lk/2010/05/02/features11.html](http://www.island.lk/2010/05/02/features11.html)
Analogously, a Sovereign executes an extra-legal pardon or concocts a state of emergency. Schmitt’s notions of miracles specifically accord with Catholic orthodox conceptions of *charismata*—wherein the miracle is limited to transubstantiation, or the miracle of Salvation when a sinner is confronted at Judgment day.\(^{263}\)

In the case I have presented here, differently from the Schmittian conception of the sovereign as absolute authority, we have seen that domains of religious sovereignty are ever-being negotiated between rivals and allies. However much they are pragmatic, the two forms of exception appear differently than in the absolutist sense Schmitt figures for the execution of power. We have seen how claims about *charismata* and miracles are substantial sites of religious rivalry. The Roman Catholic ecclesiastical structure demands that *charismata* are accessed only through those who are ordained to do so. They are considered to be sacrosanct, and thus are sequestered and contained within the Eucharist, and made present through liturgy. In contrast, the Pentecostal form is an effusive free-flow of *charimata*, which Pentecostals willfully assert to transgress established boundaries that Buddhists and Catholics see as their own exclusive domains. Furthermore, the notion of political “pardoning” I have borrowed is

\(^{263}\) Indeed, Schmitt’s political sociology on *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* doubles as a treatise on Catholic exceptionalism. His conservative conceptions of the miraculous are also inflected by Schmitt’s rationalism “secularist” and “rationalist” (in the Weberian senses of the terms), belie the limitations of Schmitt’s argument about charisma, miracles and the relation to the Divine, as well as his overarching argument on the miracle in political theology.
not absolutist in the way of Schmitt’s concept of the Sovereign: for in modern Sri Lanka much rests upon the dictates of populist perceptions, and not solely upon the decision of an absolute authority (however much a growing set of Sinhala adversaries increasingly regard Rajapaksa’s clan to have become dictatorial over the last few years). We have seen that these exceptions are negotiated in tandem with one another, placing the demands of nationalism even upon those Christian religiosities which ambitiously claim to be universal.

The Pentecostal forms of religiosity that, for Church authorities, sit uncomfortably under the rubric of Sri Lankan Catholicism on the one hand, and the exception that allows the Sri Lankan Catholic Church to be considered a nationalist entity under the rubric of Sri Lankan populism, are strikingly analogous. This relationship of incorporating that which doesn’t ideal-typically belong within a given category—the category of the Catholic in the first instance, and the category of the Buddhist in the second—is resonant with Schmitt’s point about complexio oppositorium. In the apologetical mode of Roman Catholicism and the Political Form, Schmitt defends the seemingly “limitless opportunism” of the Catholic Church. Schmitt argues that the Church’s capacity to find common cause with what may seem to be antithetical social, religious and political entities, is not something to be condemned—especially as the
Church expands its reach within other (then-colonized) countries. Rather, finding strange bedfellows is part of the Church’s *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. This “opportunistic tolerance,” Schmitt argues, is evident in how the Catholic Church has even sought to subsume (and reform) atheistic Marxism. Liberation Theology is one such example of *complexio oppositorium* to which Schmitt points. The Vatican II provisions in the mid-1960s later officially sanctioned other such “opportunistic tolerance[s],” allowing such phenomena as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to flourish. Yet, in both cases, the limits of the Church to “tolerate” the consequences of adopting ideologies and practices that are antithetical to its own orthodox principles, occasionally become sharp points of contention and authoritative action by the Church hierarchy. Such was the case with Archbishop Ranjith’s dictums on liturgical reform. Similarly, the Sri Lankan Catholic Church has come up against these limits of tolerance for Liberation Theology as well, when the Sri Lankan (Sinhala) Jesuit ecumenist, and progressive theologian, Father Tissa Balasuriya, was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1990s. Then too it was under the authority of Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict), that then-Bishop Malcolm Ranjith drew Ratzinger’s attention to Balasuriya’s feminist discourse on *Mary and Human Liberation* (1990), and deemed the work to be heretical. Father Tissa was excommunicated in 1997. Only after
much consternation was Father Tissa was readmitted to the Church, “encompassed” again after he signed a Profession of Faith.264 [RIP Father Tissa, 1924-2013]

The irony of using inter-religious dialogue in Sri Lanka’s postwar moment in a way that shores up majoritarian nationalism is consonant with Jonathan Spencer’s argument about the “illiberal consequences of liberal institutions in Sri Lanka” (2008; 2010). The endemic “illiberalism” can be found not only as a feature of a strident and exclusivist populist nationalism in Sri Lanka, however. New and resurgent drives to evangelize through illiberal discourses of exclusivist Pentecostal-charismatic Christian commitment, which yet “liberally” enable prosperity, health, and “the good life,” as believers see it. Such “new” Christianities have restored rivalries between various Sri Lankan Christian entities, as much as they have ignited conflict between Christian and Buddhist institutions. Schmitt’s theses on sovereignty, and on the Catholic Church, themselves generally evince “illiberal” thinking in terms of religion (Fischer: 2010),265 and is thus particularly fitting to the case I have presented. Indeed, in the case of Sri Lanka, the nexus between orthodox Catholicism and explicitly exclusivist charismatic varieties of Catholicism conflicts with the ways in which the center of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church authority is circumscribed by ethno-religious populism. The Church’s

265 As Karsten Fischer (2010) has so argued in an essay entitled “Hobbes, Schmitt and the Paradox of Religious Liberality.”
mitigation of these inter-religious tensions, through the alliance of the leader of the local head of the Church and the symbolic Sovereign dedicated to appeasing Buddhist nationalist exigencies, illustrates how political theologies make strange bedfellows indeed. The multiple competing political theological wills at play reflect competing sensibilities about belonging, and the limits of belonging, in postwar Sri Lanka today. We see how various competing claims of miraculous, sovereign forms of power, are a means through which religious and political agents attempt to retain, gain ground, hold sway over, and survive within these contested domains. Under such conditions, it remains to be seen what further alliances between different communities of faith will be broken and remade.
The imperatives within millennialism are typically generated in circumstances of acute social turmoil, and entail the imagination of an apocalyptic end to the world order and pre-millennial invocations of a savior who is imagined to be able to redeem that future for the devout. Here, I discuss how it is under circumstances of simmering inter-religious rivalry that Theravāda Buddhist Sri Lankans are newly evoking a messianic figure. While not a “millennial movement” in a strict sense, I illuminate a case in which a maverick monk has inspired an orientation towards the messianic and millenial features of Buddhist eschatology to heighten religious commitment among Sinhala Buddhist devotees, with the implicit aim of warding off the potential for apostasy. The devotional movement that had been growing in popularity mainly among middle and upper-class Sinhala Buddhists first caught my attention when, shortly after my arrival in Sri Lanka for fieldwork in 2009, I began receiving text messages advertising subscriptions to recorded sermons by one Venerable Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero. I soon found myself observing the rising tide of devotion and ritual practice that was being initiated by the Theravādan Buddhist monk. Many Buddhist laypeople who I met in Colombo and in towns and villages in other parts of the island were moved by
the young and charismatic monk’s iterations of the Buddha’s *Dhamma*, which were broadcast on Sinhala-language television programs aired throughout the country.

One interlocutor and friend, Anoja, a woman in her mid-30s who is a regular devotee at Siridhamma Thero’s temple, offered to introduce me to his teachings. On a *poya* (full-moon) day in 2009 she invited me to Siri Sadaham Ashramaya located in a southern stretch of Colombo. Well over a thousand Buddhist lay people, clad entirely in white, had crowded the temple-monastery in the morning heat. Siridhamma Thero eventually emerged, donning robes of mahogany. He was accompanied by a *dāyaka* (a lay patron-assistant) who walked alongside him holding a yellow parasol above his head. A red *pāvadē*, an ornamental carpet ordinarily used for escorting deities between shrines, had been spread for him to tread upon. Siridhamma Thero eventually sat upon a throne-like chair in front of the devotees who had gathered. He proceeded to deliver a sermon which instructed parents to conduct themselves virtuously, so as to exercise good influence on their children. He recounted how just prior to becoming the Gautama Buddha, the meritorious *bodhisatva* Gautama sat in the *Tusita* heaven. The Buddha-to-be was eventually invited by the gods to select the couple on Earth who he discerned to be the most suitable parents for him. Siridhamma Thero announced to

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266 A pseudonym.
267 Gombrich shows that this is a common teaching in Sinhala *Dhamma*-school textbooks (1991: 101).
his devotees that like the Bodhisatva, every karmic seedling chooses its parents, although we ourselves may not remember having done so. He maintained that it behooves expecting parents to do good, be mindful and to collect merit, so that the karmic seedling will turn into a child that brings the good results of merit accrued in past lives. “This, in turn, brings benefits, rather than suffering to the family,” he said. Nestled on the tiled floor, the devotees absorbed the lesson on the practical effects of striving to emulate the perfections (pāramitā) exhibited by the Gautama Buddha of the past—and, as the preacher-monk enunciated—the very virtues that will be expressed by Maithri Bōsat, the Buddha-to-come. The lay Buddhist devotees appeared to beam with the gratitude and contentment they felt in being in the presence of Siridhamma Thero, and in hearing the Buddha Dharma from his lips.

Following the sermon, Anoja and I stretched our sleeping legs. Amidst the sea of devotees, we eventually came to stand in front of a figure of a deity that I did not recognize. It was striking to me that any deity at all was featured in a newly reconstructed temple which I knew to attract reform-oriented urban Buddhists like Anoja. After several conversations, I recognized that Anoja’s sensibilities resembled the Buddhist modernism noted by scholars for attempting to orient Buddhist worship away from its “syncretistic” accretions. Modernist reformers have particularly attempted to
veer Sinhala-Buddhist laypeople away from traditional engagements with various Hindu and pre-Buddhist deities which have been absorbed into practice in Sri Lanka (Obeyeskere 1970; Bechert 1978; Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988). In her clear colloquial English Anoja answered the inquisitive look on my face, saying: “You see, our Buddhist people are chasing after Hindu Gods. Instead of worshipping Hindu Gods, Siridhamma Thero says that it is better to worship a Buddhist God. So he has encouraged us to worship Maithri Bōsat.” We stood in front of the statue of the “god” who Anoja referred to as Maithri Bōsat (Sanskrit Maithreya Bodhisatva, Pāli Metteya Bodhisatta; hereafter, I use the colloquial Sinhala Maithri Bōsat, except where scriptural conventions are appropriate). As we did, it became clear that Siridhamma Thero took a different approach to advancing Sinhala Buddhist commitment than some of his revivalist predecessors.

A month after my initial visit to the temple with Anoja, the Sinhala language television station, *Swaranavahini*, broadcast a *puja* and *perahera*—ritual propitiation and procession—involving Maithri Bōsat as the focus of veneration. The event took place under the auspices of Siri Sadaham Ashramaya, and the telecast included a voice-over narration by Siridhamma Thero himself. In this narration, the monk elucidated the

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268 *Perahera* typically involves one or more of the four guardian deities of Sinhala Buddhism, which have symbolic associations with Sinhalese royalty.
logic of venerating the Buddha-to-come, and summoned devotees to share their merit (pīn) with him, as they would with a deity to whom they’ve committed themselves to by a vow (bāra dennawa). According to the monk, in addition to remembering the teachings of Gautama Buddha, these practices would help those who aspire to overcome samsāra and see nibbāna relatively quickly. As I learned from Sinhala Buddhists—who, like me, were watching this unique event for the first time—the implicit logic of sharing merit with the figure who is next in line to achieve nibbāna was that it would hasten his arrival on Earth.

From the Maitrī Bōsat Puja in October 2009 (photos from the Ashramaya’s facebook page)

In this chapter, I discuss the innovative, and in some regards, maverick components of a new subset of Sinhala Buddhist religiosity, and discuss how it stands

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269 Following conventions of Sinhala Buddhism I use the Pali kamma, nibbāna and dhamma rather than the Sanskrit karma, nirvana and dharma.
within the broader movement of Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka. Theravādan thought and Sinhala Buddhist practitioners have tended to treat Maithri Bōsat as spiritually superior and ascetically removed from the mundane concerns of human supplicants. The Boddhisatva thereby tends not to be actively propitiated, as John Holt (1991) has strikingly demonstrated. Holt shows how the figure of Avalokiteśvara was introduced to ancient monastic traditions of Sri Lanka through Mahāyāna Buddhists influences, and over time, was transformed into a Theravāda Buddhist guardian deity known today among Sinhalese as the god Nātha. In their respective theographies, both Avalokiteśvara and Nātha are regarded as being next in line to become the Boddhisatva Maithreya. Holt articulates that in both cases, the Boddhisatva is an important figure, but is one who is not beseeched by Sinhala Buddhist supplicants to fulfill their needs. Holt reads this transformation of Maithri from a Mahāyānan figure to a Theravādan one through the iconographic thread that links their identities: both are depicted as a royally-clad image of a deity with a meditating Buddha nestled in his crown. The representation of Maithri Bōsat that stood before me in Siridhamma Thero’s Siri Sadhaham Ashramaya shares these very features. However, as the devotees I encountered understand it, their Maithri Bōsat is utterly distinct from the Sinhala deity Nātha who stands guard within the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. Thus, here I ask, what is
the significance of the fact that Siridhamma Thero is newly encouraging the devotees at his temple to “worship” (wandinawa) Maithri Bōsat—a figure who is ordinarily not propitiated? What are the implications of his maverick efforts to emphasize the messianic promises embedded within the Buddhist canon, and to animate new rituals intended to quicken the pace of samsāra?

As I demonstrate, the otherwise inaccessible Buddha-to-come is now being called upon to respond to new demands for a heightened sense of religious commitment from Buddhist laity. I illustrate how for Sinhala Buddhist people, Siridhamma Thero’s innovations hold the promise that, with devoted effort, the end of samsāra and the attainment of nibbāna can potentially be within reach. This innovation of approaching a figure who is ordinarily absent from everyday life according to Theravādan temporalities of the cosmos, I contend, is inflected by the broader social
milieu which is patently a multi-religious one. These new efforts to share one’s merit with Maithreya Bōsat, and thereby hasten his arrival on Earth, is illustrative of how Sinhala Buddhism is *dialogically responsive* to influences of other religious traditions which—as students and scholars of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism well know—are often cast as alien incursions into what ought to be terrain purely cultivated by the Buddha’s Dhamma. In considering these invocations to the Buddha-to-come, it is notable that contemporary Sri Lanka is a place where evangelical Christians broadcast such promises and threats as “Jesus Christ is Coming Very Soon”—as they have done in large red block letters splayed upon the parapet wall of a Galle Road church not a kilometer from Siridhamma Thero’s temple-monastery. Charismatic forms of evangelical Christianity, marked by their ecstatic devotional practices and their emphasis on the coming *antiyama kālē*, or the apocalyptic End of Times, has become ever-more palpable in Sri Lanka especially since the mid-1990s. I suggest that growing rivalry with these new varieties of evangelical Christianity in Sri Lanka, as much as with older “syncretistic” “Hindu” gods that have been incorporated into the pantheon of Buddhist protectionism, implicitly underlies the impulses towards this new facet of revivalism.

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270 Mahadev (2013) offers a discussion of the remarkable growth of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity that has triggered reactionary anti-conversion vigilantism in Sri Lanka.
In the Indic context the emergence of new gods and practices is common, with new devotional forms often emerging as a way of confronting crises. Scholars of Hinduism have discussed the emergence of local goddesses tied to healing diseases (Foulton 2002; Nicholas 2003), and goddess cults responsive to pressures of everyday life in urban Indian settings (Das 1980; Lutgendorf 2002). Others have discussed god and saint-cults that have arisen amidst the alienating potentialities of the political economy in postcolonial Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1977; Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988; Stirrat 1992). In a different vein, historian Sumit Sarkar considers devotional newness in his study of the illiterate and “rustic” Ramakrishna Pramahansa who became “the guru of the city badralok (gentlefolk),” which moved against the grain of Hindu reformist measures that were common in 19th century Bengal (1992: 1543). Bhrighupati Singh (2012) recently argued that the emergence of a new warrior deity emerged as an expression of “agonistic intimacy” between caste rivals, which offers a “political theology of the neighbor” in rural Rajasthan. All of these cases indicate how the new deity, guru, or practice mediates particular social needs. These forms of innovation, like the case of Siridhamma Thero’s introduction of the ritual practice invoking the Bodhisatva Maithreya, are radically different from that of reform movements within Hinduism or Buddhism which purport to cleanse these religions from what is conceived
as “superstition” and leave only a “pristine” form of religion constituted by philosophical principles.

What Siridhamma Thero resorts to in order to bolster Sinhala Buddhist religious commitment does not simply involve rationalizing mechanisms which distill Buddhism down to its philosophical and ethical premises. Nor do these ritual practices merely imitate Christian forms of religious propagation. The monk’s initiative draws on older ritual forms traditionally reserved for exogenous deities is what encourages the deepening of faith. By drawing a latent, messianic figure who is central to Theravāda Buddhist futurity into the present, the new rites lend to a diversification of Sinhala Buddhist practice that stands as an implicit rejoinder to evangelical Christian promises. These features of the new movement have all served to elevate the monk and his temple in stature and popularity. Yet, in spite of this popularity, certain ancillary claims asserted by the monk carry the risk of being characterized as a departure from orthodoxy. I illustrate what happens when Theravāda Buddhist religious authorities eventually deem the maverick to be straying from quintessential premises of the Theravādan tradition by leaning on Mahāyāna Buddhist suppositions. In other words, the devotional movement surrounding Siridhamma Thero raises the question: what happens when established authorities deem the maverick to be going rogue?
Practical and Political Theologies of the Bodhisatva Maithreya in Theravāda Buddhism

In the Theravāda Buddhist scripture on the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta within the Digahana-nikaya or “Collection of Long Discourses,” the Gautama Buddha pronounced that the passing of time would ravage the memory of his words and teachings, resulting in slippages of human morality and virtuous judgment (Collins 1998). The decline of Dhammic memory lends particularly to the failure of the Sovereign—the cakkavattin or the “Universal Emperor”—to keep the “two wheels of the Dhamma” turning, and in balance (Reynolds et al. 1972; Gombrich 1971: 101; Keyes 1977: 288). The two wheels symbolize the Sovereign’s responsibility to simultaneously maintain the wheel of worldly power (ānācakka), and the wheel of righteousness (dhammacakka) (Reynolds et al 1972: 1). Gautama Buddha prophesized in the Digahana-nikaya that as the Dhamma gradually begins to fade from memory, the Sovereign begins to blunder, failing to properly distribute land and to look after his people. Out of desperation, people resort to petty thievery. Thievery gives way to malaise. Gradually, moral impoverishment of humanity deepens and violence proliferates. Over the course of many generations, degeneration becomes so entrenched that human morality becomes stunted, and even

271 Dighana Nikaya comprises a portion of the Tipitaka, canonical to the Theravādan tradition.
physical growth and beauty are impeded. Ultimately, humanity will be plunged into catastrophic violence, according to Gautama Buddha’s prophecy. Pitiduwe Siridhamma’s renditions of the teaching emphasized that with

the proliferation of ten evil deeds (dasa akusal) the typical life span of a human being will be reduced to ten years. (For a Buddha to emerge on Earth the life span of a human being should be between 120 – 100,000 years.) Ultimately, the human mind will come to be governed by animal instincts, and humans[...] will use weapons to kill one another.\footnote{This Sinhala text, along with a section on Gautama Buddha’s revelation of the Maithri Bōsat’s coming, can be found inscribed on much of Siri Sadaham Ashramaya paraphernalia. Icons of Maithri Bōsat were sold as posters in the bookshop, with Sinhala text of the discourse printed on the back. This English translation was listed on Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero’s (then-official) Facebook page (posted by site manager on October 27, 2009).}

Those few who manage to hold on to the last vestiges of merit that they accumulated in past lives retain an iota of good sense to hide themselves from the utterly degenerate segments of humanity, enabling them to survive the cataclysm. After the dust settles, those who remain garner their shreds of reason, and collectively reorient themselves towards goodness and its karmic consequences. Together they set about to ever-so gradually restore morality, over the course of many lifetimes. By the time morality, beauty and health are restored to their peak, a virtuous king will rule, and the Maithri Bōsat will have amassed a superhuman quantity of merit, and will come to reside in the Tusita heaven. When the world is ready, the gods of the higher heavens will invite the
Bodhisatva to descend to Earth and be born as the human. I quote fragments of Siridhamma Thero’s version of the discourse which depicts the coming of Maithreya:

...on the invitation of the Devas, Maitreya Bodhisattva [will] assent to relinquish the Tusita heaven and be born in the human realm. The prosperous and heavenly kingdom of Ketumathi ruled by a universal monarch [...] shall become home state for the aspiring Buddha [...] Having consumed only what is suitable for life as an ascetic for one week [...] [he] ordains as a monk and accompanied by Devas, Brahmas and a retinue of million men, and sets out to the Bodhi tree. Ascending [...] the Bodhisattva attains Samma Sambuddhahood after scaring away Vasavaththi Mara [...] Maitreya Buddha, one hundred and thirty two feet in height, will live for eighty thousand years. Those fortunate to see Maitreya Buddha would have the minimal requirement of offering a handful of flowers, a lamp, or some rice in Buddha’s name. Those who committed deadly sins (ananthariya), entertained false views, born in preta, asura realms, are deformed in body, or use that belonging to the triple gem without permission or knowledge, shall not meet the Maitreya Buddha.²⁷³

According to the doctrine, Maithreya will achieve enlightenment and extol the Dharma as the Gautama Buddha did before him, thereby re-establishing the supremacy of Buddhist morality.²⁷⁴ All those who hear the Buddha Maithreya’s utterances of the Dharma will automatically understand the lucid teaching and be compelled by it. Thus, all hearers will instantaneously achieve nibbāna.

²⁷³ Ibid.
²⁷⁴ The cyclical ascendancy, decline and return of a redemptive force are rooted in Indic conceptions of Maha yuga.
While the Bodhisatva Maithreya is ensconced in Theravādan doctrine and in local conceptions of the future, the Buddha-in-the-making has traditionally not been the object of veneration and worship among Sinhala Buddhists. Only a gesture to Maithri is made in the course of traditional merit-transfer rituals on special occasions that are broadly referred to as pinakāma (meritorious acts). Laypeople acquire merit (pīṅ gatta) by giving alms (dāna) for the sustenance of Buddhist clergy, and in exchange, the monks deliver sermons (bana) on the Dhamma to the lay donors. At the close of these events the monks use ritual speech to transfer merit to lay participants, and the monk-officiant requests that all who are present channel the merit by concentrating upon their dead kin and other loved ones. It is then that the monk-officiant announces the ritually-embedded wish that all participants may see the end of samsāra, and expresses the hope that the merit earned should grant the lay donors the good fortune of being born in the time of the future Buddha, so that they can eventually hear the lucid and pure Dhamma from Maithreya’s lips, and thereby secure the guarantee of instantaneously “seeing nibbāna.” Since ordinary humans are not capable of achieving the sumnum bonum spiritual task on their own, this evocative part of the rite reiterates

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275 Such occasions include periodic rituals to offer merit to ancestors, and the festival that marks the beginning of the rainy season (katina pinkama) wherein the relationship between Buddhist clergy and laity is ritually renewed. Also Gombrich (1971: 93). On Theravādā merit-transfer see Bechert (1992).
the ties that bind Buddhist laity and clergy together (Gombrich 1972). In Gombrich’s explanation of the ceremonial transfer of merit he writes that,

... only modernist monks confine themselves to the bald wish that all may obtain nirvana [by their own volition]. Traditionally... the form of such a wish is for the monk to hope that the donors, or all present, or those for whose sake the ceremony is taking place, may in their future lives enjoy human and divine bliss... till they are reborn in the time of Maithri, and then attain nirvana. All then say ‘Sādhu,’ and by their assent make this prārthanava [prayer of aspiration] for themselves. It is only a few fundamentalists who eschew this formula and condemn this postponement, urging the necessity of striving for nirvana here and now... (1972: 256. Bracketed comments mine).

In sum, Buddhist laypeople in Sri Lanka have traditionally tended to imagine themselves to be almost imponderably far from attaining nibbāna, and are conceived of only being capable of doing so under the care of Maithri, who is understood to be spiritually and morally superior to all of the deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. Being oriented towards the supramundane realm (lōkōttara) at present, traditionally Maithri is regarded to be disinterested mundane (laukika) affairs of humans and not disposed to engaging with supplicants, as Holt has illustrated. Thus, traditionally, Sinhalese Buddhists have tended to see no point in venerating the Maithri Bōsat because he is considered to be so near to attaining nibbāna that he is presently engaged in austerities and is thus inaccessible to supplicants. In his present state as a Bodhisatva, Maithri is a nascent placeholder for supremely-good, karmically meritorious persona
who is not yet incarnate. In short, among Sinhalese, as in other Theravāda Buddhist cultures, worship of Maithri is ordinarily considered to yield very little fruit.

Because nibbāna is conceived of being in the far-distant future, accessible only after a great deal of moral and spiritual striving, Sinhala Buddhist laity (and laity of Theravāda Buddhist cultures more broadly) are traditionally inclined to attend to more immediate concerns that affect their everyday lives, while morally navigating themselves through samsāra (cycles of death and rebirth) by focusing on the consequences of their actions (kamma). Yet, more recently, in spite of these traditional hierarchies that confine the possibility of nibbanic ascent to those who maintain ascetic lifestyles according to the monastic code, a modernist trend emerged, wherein reformers encouraged the “monasticization” of Buddhist laity (Holt 1991). As Obeyeskere and Gombrich (1988) and others have documented in the scholarly literature on the Buddhist revival, this modernization of Theravāda Buddhism (ideally-typically) entailed the development of a lay Buddhist orientation towards the pursuit of nibbāna, and away from “kammatic” (or samsaric) gods and lesser spirits within the

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276 In terms of lay religiosity, this revivalism entailed practices such as temporarily taking precepts traditionally reserved for monks on poya days. Reformers also discourage worship of deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon (Obeyesekere and Gombrich 1988). Early stages Buddhist revivalism coincided with the onslaught of Christian missionization during European colonialism in Ceylon. Today, such reforms are linked to ethno-religious nationalism.
Sinhala Buddhist pantheon.\textsuperscript{277} That said, however much the emergence of a modernist lay Buddhist orientations towards nibbāna have existed within the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist revival for more than a century, to my knowledge, the practice of taking a posture of veneration and worship (wandinawa) towards the image of the Bodhisatva Maithreya was unprecedented in Sri Lanka prior to Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero’s innovation of the Matri Bōsat Puja.

The installation of Maithri Bōsat as a subject of veneration is a new element within the Sinhala Buddhist revival. Distinctive ideologies surrounding Maithreyan soteriology separate the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions. Within the Theravādan tradition the achievement of Buddhahood is considered to be very rare; only twenty-eight Buddhas (including Gautama and Maithreya Buddha) of the Pali Canon are acknowledged in the Theravādan tradition that we find in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. In Theravāda Buddhism, outside of these 28 beings who attain nibbāna and preach the Dhamma, at most, extraordinarily adept beings can become an arahat through their own pursuits. An Arahat is an exceptional class of humans who individually attain all of the insights of nibbāna through their own striving, but who are incapable of extolling the Dhamma to the world, and so just fall

\textsuperscript{277} Following Spiro, they distinguish between “kammatic” (action-oriented) and “nibbanic.”
short of Buddhahood. This Theravādan conception of asceticism of the mute *arhat*
stands in contrast to Mahāyāna Buddhist conception of the *bodhisatva*. Whereas in
Theravāda Buddhism the *bodhisatvas* who ultimately become Buddhas are limited to 28
beings in the whole history of the cosmos, in Mahāyāna soteriology, there are many,
many Buddhas who exist through space and time. Whereas the *Bodhisatva* within the
Theravādan tradition is one who becomes a Buddha, a “peerless” man of virtuosity, a
*Bodhisatva* in the Mahāyāna tradition is any virtuous being who suspends their own
attainment of *nibbāna* so as to help others along the path, until all beings achieve it. In
some varieties of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddha-nature is immanent in the world and,
through practice, is accessible to all.²⁷⁹

It is these early disputes that generated the schism which eventuated in what
today constitutes two separate Buddhist traditions of the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna.
In these ancient Indian “buddhological bickering,” the antecedents of today’s
Mahāyānan school chastised the older Theravādan school for being conservative and
“unenlightened” (Holt 1991: 28). Mahayanists pejoratively referred to Theravādans as
the “Hinayana” or “the lesser vehicle,” and defined themselves against their rivals,
claiming themselves to be the embodiment of the “Mahāyāna” or “the greater vehicle.”

²⁷⁹ Also Holt (1991: 29).
The earlier Theravāda school considered the emerging Mahāyāna school to be lax in
upholding the Vinaya, or code of monastic conduct. These early Theravādan monks
prided themselves on closely and literally interpreting the canonical texts. They
rebuked the innovation of Mahāyānan thinkers, for they saw as them as concocting
liberal interpretations of the notion of a Bodhisatva. The Theravādans saw this
inclination as problematic because they believed the Mahayana view as serving to
dilute the singularity of virtuosity entailed by Buddhahood.

Indeed, from a doctrinal and clerical point of view, Mahāyāna Buddhism is
considered to be distinct from, and adversarial to, the Theravādan tradition in many
respects. Sinhalese Buddhists view Sri Lanka to be the quintessential Theravādan
homeland, and generally consider Mahāyāna Buddhism to be foreign to it.

Nevertheless, as Holt (1991) has shown with the figure Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisatva
image was introduced by itinerant Mahāyānan monks into Theravādan Sri Lanka
during ancient times. The iconography associated with Avalokiteśvara is a figure of
royalty depicted with a Buddha in his crown. Over several centuries, the vicissitudes of
the identity of this mythic figure has shifted in Sri Lanka. In short, the identity of

\[280\] Many scholars of Buddhism have expounded the major distinction between Theravāda and Mahayana
Buddhism in terms of the relative ease of availability of nirvana and the position of the Bodhisatva in the
latter tradition.
Avalokiteśvara the *Bodhisatva* was eventually subsumed by the Sinhala God Nātha, who in the 8th century, was worshipped for his abilities to subdue *yakkhas* and *bhuthas* (“demons” and malevolent “ghosts”) (130). Holt describes that the Nātha of that period was considered “a compassionate and responsive deity who maintains order in the face of *dukkha* (suffering)-causing agents” (130). Several centuries later, however, a foreign invading deity named Pitiye (culturally linked to the Tamil *Nayyakar* invaders) mythically vanquished Nātha, and Nātha, in turn, “retreated” to “higher ground” (127). According to Holt, Nātha Deviyo “now spends his time concentrating on his attainment of buddhahood, rather than fighting battles on behalf of the Kandyan Sinhalese” (127). As a result, Sinhalese Buddhists today identify Nātha Deviyo as “Maithreya-in-the-making,” and the icon’s *Bodhisatva* status has thereby been restored (127). While today Nātha remains one of the four guardian deities of Sinhala Buddhism, Holt describes his cultic following as quite minimal because he is seen as dedicated to pursuing *lōkōttara* (supramundane concerns) and is considered to be unconcerned with *laukika* (mundane) pursuits.
Episodic Emergence of Maithreya in Theravādan History

While ordinarily Maithreya tends not to be venerated in Theravāda Buddhist cultures, historically the messianic Buddha Maithreya has episodically considered as being at hand in conjunction with popular uprisings and movements during periods of economic and political crisis in Theravāda Buddhist societies. Studies by Kitsiri Malalgoda (1970), Charles Keyes (1977), and Richard Salter (2000) have shown that in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Cambodia respectively, the Buddha Maithreya was metonymically linked to millenarian desires which converge with Theravādan principles. These desires were embodied by the figure of a coming dharmadeva or the dharmaraja—deities and kings (or god-kings) akin to the cakkavartin—who are predicted to restore righteousness and social and cosmological order. Keyes highlighted the Thai case of millennialism that emerged out of the desire for social liberation at the turn of the 20th century. In regions where Thai, Burmese, and Chinese immigrant communities were caught up in political and economic duress and military conflicts due to the struggle for power between the Siamese kingdom and French colonial power, local millennial movements arose, framed by discourses of miracles and prophecies of redemption. Prophecies warning of imminent and dramatic catastrophe, and terrifying reversals of the order of things, generated social and moral panics among Thais. Keyes discusses how a
millenarian savior idea was associated with a “Righteous Ruler”, the "meritful lord," or "meritful person” (296). Within the same period, Chinese immigrants were seen as threatening the local Thai economy. When the immigrants attacked a Thai village, the Thai Buddhist peasantry resisted and redeemed the Thai position against all odds—a success which millenarian believers attributed to their link to forest-dwelling monks who, as pure ascetics, are prototypically considered to be the ultimate religious virtuosos in the Theravādan cultural milieu (291).

Of course, the story of the Cakkavartin told within the Dighana-nikaya discussed above can be read as a socialistic discourse, as was the case among Khmer people. Richard Salter describes the resonances between the revolutionary vision of the Communist Party of Kampuchea and the millennial potentialities of cosmology that are involved in the Khmer (Theravādan) Buddhist worldview. The Cambodian intellectual elite developed Marxist sensibilities about liberation through their educational pursuits in France, and upon return to Cambodia, these ideas took a Maoist turn (2000: 282).

There are salient structural affinities between Maoist ideology and Khmer Buddhism, Salter argues, in terms of notions of time and the cosmos, and in terms of the authority

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281 Salter indicates that these virtuosos were seen as capable of wielding miracles through amulets. (See Tambiah 1984).
and ethical sensibilities shared between the two (2000: 284).\footnote{282} Here too, among Khmer Buddhists, a soteriology that centered upon the *devaraja* or *dhammaraja* “as the maker and maintainer of the world” was prevalent (288).\footnote{283} The Khmer Rouge drew upon this symbolism, and “consciously played out its similarity and superiority to Buddhist ethics” (296).\footnote{284} Various other insurgent practices were said to be shot through with Buddhist injunctions against various misdeeds (295). As with the Thai case, another feature of this resonance between local Khmer Buddhist sensibilities and the liberative potential of revolution was that the forest was valorized among Khmer people as a space of renewal, where ascetics could cleanse themselves from the corrupting karma that accumulates by associating with the seat of power and finance located in the capital city (291-2). Salter suggests that the Khmer Rouge’s Maoist ideology gathered much traction among peasants precisely because the cadres emerged from the forest and descended upon the city.

\footnote{282} In making the case about how Maoist revolutionary ideology was coopted by Theravādan cosmological principles, Salter takes care not to lay blame for the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge on Theravāda Buddhist thought and moral practice.\footnote{283} Salter cites Yang Sam (1987) *Khmer Buddhism and the Politics from 1954-1984*. \footnote{284} Ibid. Yang Sam highlights a public speech delivered by a cadre who emphasized that militants “observed more than ten *sila*” [moral conduct and austerities] central to the Buddha’s teachings. Salter writes: “… the normative ethics of the Khmer Rouge coopted virtue through the meritorious conduct of cadres. Though they disavowed religion, they followed many of the same patterns of historical Khmer ethics, and their adherence to these previous patterns lent the movement legitimacy” (cf. Salter 296).
Finally, Malalgoda’s essay draws on documentation of popular uprisings against colonial powers in Ceylon to underscore how the King of Kandy (the pre-colonial capital of Sri Lanka) was archetypically conceived as the Cakkravartin ordained by the Buddhic cosmos to righteously ensure that the Wheel of the Dhamma continues to turn. When the (Tamil) Kandyan King ceded his thrown to the British in 1815, the political turmoil led to episodes of insurrection among Sinhalese people (1970: 436-8). One colonial administrator described the series of incidents as “a revival, partly religious, partly seditious” (1970: 436). Within the movement, the powerful Sinhala Buddhist guardian deity Kataragama was associated with the idea that “a Prince of Righteousness would shortly arise”... and in the “meantime he was guarded by the gods; and that he would restore Buddhism to its pristine purity, and that at his coming, all foreigners and heretics would wash away” (436). Malalgoda emphasizes it is incorrect to assume that Indic doctrines of karma disincline Buddhism and Hinduism towards millennialist trends, as Max Weber had surmised (439). On the contrary, these millennial movements were animated by underlying Theravāda Buddhist soteriological premises, rather than resulting syncretically out of Christian millenarian influences.

While the messianic and millenarian features doctrinally inscribed in Theravāda Buddhist scriptures have come to the fore in popular movements within Theravāda
Buddhist cultural contexts during key crises, the innovation to encourage Sinhala Buddhist laity to venerate the Bodhisatva Maithreya as if he were a god is quite a different phenomenon. Canonically, as well as in the episodes of millennialism described above, the appearance of Maithreya is a metonym for Theravādan political-theological ascendance. Strikingly however, Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero’s renditions of discourses on Maithri are devoid of any explicit political-theology. Albeit efforts to conceptually link the dharmadeva or the dharmaraja (god or king who serves to protect the Buddha’s Dhamma) to the coming Maithreya in the context of popular uprisings detailed by Malalgoda, Keyes, and Salter, the references to Maithreya are gestural; there is no indication that Maithreya was consecrated and ritually summoned in ways akin to the practices inaugurated by Siridhamma Thero.

The Dialogics of Religious Rivalry

It stands to be repeated that the practice of ritually summoning the Bodhisatva is apparently Siridhamma Thero’s invention, and practices associated with Maithreya are, in fact, extremely rare in the history of Theravādan cultures. To understand this new phenomenon I find it instructive to set Siridhamma Thero’s initiative to reintroduce the Sinhala Buddhist laity to the messianic promise of Maithri Bōsat alongside a
Pentecostal’s articulations of the Christian message of Subha Aranchiya, the Good News, and the evangelist’s ruminations upon the “shortcomings” of Sinhala Buddhism. Doing so brings into relief how Buddhism and contemporary evangelical Christianity mutually inflect one another in Sri Lanka today. The mutual inflections came through clearly in one of my meetings with a Sinhalese Pentecostal minister who I met in a southern coastal town which had been badly affected by the 2004 tsunami. Adorning the walls of the Pentecostal church, was a mosaic of posters; written in Sinhala and English, one called for the prevention of domestic violence, another encouraged breastfeeding, a third described the science behind a tsunami. One faded black and white photocopy of a poster, stated ominously, in English:

‘I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land. And I will shake all nations.’

God is shaking the World! Unless you repent, you will Perish! Even now God is preparing for Judgment Day. Are you?

When Pastor Jayasena285 eventually invited me to take one of his business cards, I saw that that it bore a listing of his honorifics, credentials, and contact information. The card also listed the many credentials of Jesus Christ, crowned by a slogan stating that “HE is the shortest way to overcome sangsara.”

285 A pseudonym.
The slogan that “He is the shortest way to overcome *sangsara* (*samsāra*),” is a statement enunciating an evangelical imagination of how to bridge two worlds: it gestures to how Sri Lankan Christians might translate, read, and propagate the Salvational promise of Jesus Christ amidst the *doxa* of Theravāda Buddhist soteriology. That is to say, Pastor Jayasena imagines a potential flock of Sinhala people, who are, at present, uninitiated in Christianity and take Buddhist notions of *samsāra* as axiomatic. Pastor Jayasena emphasized the conundrum of the duration of duress that Buddhist people must face. “Buddhism & Hinduism have a very long *samsāra*,” he said. “It takes many births (to be saved from suffering). If you are reborn as an animal or a spirit—how terrible! If you believe in Jesus, you can be with Him in heaven after only one life.” In making their presence known in Sri Lanka especially in the last two decades, Sri Lankan Pentecostals have seized upon the comparative advantage that the relatively immediate solution of eternal Salvation through Jesus Christ has over Theravāda Buddhism’s slow path to *nibbāna* as an eternal end to suffering.

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286 In the encounter with other religions, such notions can only really be orthodox. To quote Bourdieu: “Orthodoxy, straight, or rather *straightened*, opinion, which aims without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of *doxa*, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice—*hairesis*, heresy—made possible by the existence of *competing possibles* and to the explicit critique of the sum total of the alternatives not chosen that the established order implies...” (1977: 169-70).
Many Sinhala Pentecostal-charismatic ministers deliver thundering sermons in Sinhala that assert the superiority of their “living God” who prevails over Satan and his emissaries—the *Yaksha Atmaya* (“demon spirit”) which is said to presents itself to Buddhists in the guise of deities. Many of my Christian informants contrasted their *living God* with the “empty” Buddha, who they contend is a mere statue (*pilimaya vitharai*), an icon which substantively lacks divinity, and which has no bearing on the world today. In insisting that the Buddha cannot exert power in the world today, Pentecostal ministers selectively demonstrate knowledge of Theravāda Buddhist creeds that emphasize the Buddha’s humanity. Well-known tales of the Gautama Buddha’s biography do indeed depict the Lord Buddha’s *parinibbāna* as the cessation of his entrenchment in the cycle *samsāra*, and the ultimate end of his existence in the world.\(^{287}\) Pastor Jayasena articulated what he saw as a dilemma for Sinhala Buddhists:

> Though they worship in a Buddhist manner, they don’t get anything from the Buddha. So they worship Hindu Gods to get helps. They mix up Hinduism with Buddhism. I am not criticizing, I am just giving you a plain idea. When there is no help from their gods, they look to God. Our Christian God can help more than [their gods].

\(^{287}\) Buddha is known in Pāli scriptures as *Thattāgatta*—meaning “the Thus Gone One.” For Theravādans, a Buddha inhabits a position that is not altogether different from the “Absent Lord,” a Thīrthankar of the Jain tradition, addressed by Babb’s 1996 study.
These reproaches of Sinhala Buddhist lay practices take on a new urgency given the adamant and apocalyptic futures projected by Pentecostal-charismatic Christians who are at the forefront of the new wave of Christian evangelism in Sri Lanka today.

In conversing with Pastor Jayasena I commented upon the peculiarity and ingenuity of his approach to Christian apologetics. I asked him how Sri Lankan people who are not Christian respond to the fact that he likens the promise of Jesus to a shortcut out of samsāra. “I am a revolutionist,” Pastor Jayasena averred. “I use language to make new words, so it is easy for people to understand.” He insisted that,

If you use theological terms, they don’t understand. If I meet a Buddhist, I talk Buddhism. If I meet a Hindu, I talk Hinduism. If I meet a person who believes in Islam, I talk Islam. And if I meet a Ba’hai person... I talk Ba’hai. I start with their religion, and finally I tell about the difference between their religion and Christianity. When I do this, they realize I respect and understand their religion. When they realize this, they willingly invite me to preach.

Pastor Jayasena was emphatic that he engaged in evangelical work by invitation only.

For in this predominantly Buddhist area where hostilities towards Christian evangelists has tended to run high over the past several decades, it was imperative for the Pastor to demonstrate that his evangelism relied on persuasion, rather than upon coercion, inducement or deception.  

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288 Legislation drafted by a party of Buddhist monks who were elected to Sri Lankan Parliament in 2004 sought to prohibit “unethical conversions,” which were allegedly taking place by “force, allurement, and
Pastor Jayasena’s translation of the messianic promise of the salve for worldly suffering ultimately offered by Christ in terms of Buddhist notions of samsāra is in itself an invention that can be attributed to the Pastor himself. He is innovative in his own right. Yet other Sinhala Christian evangelists I discussed the provocation that “Jesus is the shortest way to overcome samsāra” found it to be an accurate and compelling one.

Important literature in the history and anthropology of Christianity, produced both by anthropologists, and in a very different vein, by missionaries, has probed the question of translation, equivalency, and what sort of conversion such a translation can produce given the hermeneutic filters that circumscribe native receptivity. However, I am not offering the discussion of a communicative event wherein missionary intention misfires, and becomes lost in translation, allowing the emergence of new and disordered epistemologies, as well as responses of boredom and violence, that Vincent Rafael (1993) has expertly described as having emerged from the context of Tagalog society under early Spanish colonialism. Rather, in this chapter I am interested in the broader field of responsiveness to evangelical drives that are evident within Sinhala Buddhism. Yet this responsiveness does not merely entail a dialectics of “conversion” and outright nationalist resistance to it. For indeed, while we do see the competing

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other fraudulent means.” Though the bill was deemed unconstitutional and indefinitely put on hold in early 2009, nationalists seek to invalidate the sincerity of these conversions and delegitimize methods of Christian evangelism (Mahadev 2013).
evangelical drives for a totalizing set of conversions to Christianity, and countervailing
devotes to negate and delegitimize such activities through the politics of “anti-
conversion,” it is certainly not all that we find within this context.

Seeing the maverick effort to usher forth the arrival of Maithreya as an implicit
rejoinder to evangelical Christian urgencies, I find it instructive to move beyond
dialectics towards a Bakhtininan-derived notion of dialogics. Martha Kaplan and John
D. Kelly (2001) have particularly taken the Bakhtinian concept of dialogics beyond the
frame of linguistics within which Bakhtin has framed it to illuminate the workings of
power in the context of British colonialism in Fiji. They use the concept of dialogics to
critique the dialectics involved in Benedict Anderson’s construction of nationalism
(1983), and specifically the periodization entailed by it. As Kaplan and Kelly put it in
their critique, this periodization entails, “...more shortcutting and wishful thinking
than rigor in most allegations of inevitability, necessity, and grandiose causality.” They
write:

For Bakhtin and others, history as a dialogical process is an open series[...] In a
dialogical account even global history is a series of planned and lived responses
to specific circumstances that were also irreducibly constituted by human
subjects, creating not a single vast chain of “the subject” changed by “the
object” and vice versa, but a dense, complex network of individual and
collective subjects continually responsive to one another. These constitutive,
irreducibly subjective dialogics add enormous contingency and complexity to
what dialectic there is between material realities and human realities[...] In
place of the dialectical commitment to totalization, in place of the premise that
some kind of totality is always already there, our approach to the dialogics of
power takes an important cue from Weber[...] and has as its premise that
powerful systems come into existence sometimes, but never only on their own

In Bakhtin’s terms, we can understand the unifying and authorial discourses expressed
by Buddhist nationalists and Christian evangelists as providing two competing sets of
“centripetal forces,” each which demand orthodox commitments of their religious
subjects (1981: 272-3). Yet it is evident that in practice, in the religious milieu I am
describing, these orthodoxies set forth by religious authorities are not totalizing. The
unconventional approach of Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero exhibits a centrifugal,
decentralizing aspect, which is evidently neither a straight vector of resistance against,
nor compliance to, any one of these authorial regimes of religious power. Instead, the
contingencies involved in these “forces” invigorate, and orient possible vectors of
newness, without simply engendering imitation.

While Pastor Jayasena incorporates the Buddhist principle of samsāra as a means
of translating Christian notions of the cosmos to persuade Sinhala Buddhists that
Salvation is superior to the Buddha’s slow path out of suffering, Siridhamma Thero
implicitly responds to such critiques. The latter begins to reclassify the messianic
Buddha as a God superior those Hindu deities that fill what for Christians is a “lack” of a
true and singular God. However, this is not merely a compensatory mechanism in Christian terms; for Buddhist nationalists (“fundamentalists” as Gombrich referred to them above) though there is a “lack” of lay commitment, it does not entail any shortcoming of their Lord Buddha. To elucidate the compelling procedures that Siridhamma Thero used to deflect attention from “Hindu” gods towards the Bodhisatva Maithreya, I now turn to a discussion of the hierarchical logics of nibbanic ascent that are characteristic of Theravāda Buddhism, and to the mechanics of merit-transfer which are prototypically involved in worship of Sinhala Buddhist deities.

Sinhala Buddhist Deities and the Ritual Transfer of Merit

As I have elaborated above, in the Theravādan endeavor to ultimately experience the insights that are offered discursively through the Buddha’s Dhamma, an aspirant must perform acts of punya karmaya (good karma) to cultivate a number of merits (pīna) over the course of many, many lifetimes. Although advancement through the murky waters of samsāra is the ultimate Theravāda Buddhist aim, the attainment of nibbāna is typically considered to be possible only in an imponderably far future life. For most Buddhists who live outside of the lifetime of a Buddha, pathways to nibbāna are considered to be long, arduous, and oftentimes involve non-linear spiritual
evolutions. Thus, for Buddhist laypeople of the Theravādan tradition, the immediate
goal of Buddhistic striving has traditionally been to obtain a better rebirth. As a result,
Obeyeskere and Gombrich (1988) characterize the division of religious labor in the
following way: Sinhalese Buddhists venerate and meditate upon the Buddha for
otherworldly (lōkōttara), nibbanic pursuits, and they beseech the Gods to fulfill their
immediate, this-worldly (laukika), samsaric needs.  

In the course of laity’s traditional focus on samsaric (this-worldly) goals, Sinhala
Buddhists approach deities who are subsumed under the (ordinarily) inaccessible and
ascetic Lord Buddha. These “Hindu” and “pre-Buddhist” Gods have been assimilated
into the Sinhalese Theravāda Buddhist pantheon. In being “buddhicized” the
ontological status of these Gods is diminished, Holt tells us:

Metaphysically, Sinhala deities retain no absolute ontological status. They
embody no essential preexistent divine principle or absolute essence of “being”. As such, they pose no competitive threat to Theravāda soteriology. The character of the Sinhala gods is also at variance with Hindu conceptions of
divine ontology and power. Gods of Hindu/brahmanical origins who have been
incorporated into Sinahala Buddhism have been transformed, emasculated of
their “ultimacy,” and are more comparable to lesser Vedic deities. For instance,

289 Holt (1991) argues that approaching the gods to address mundane (laukika) concerns may seem
antithetical to the ultimate, supra-mundane (lōkōttara) goal of nibbana, Sinhala Buddhists have
traditionally not regarded the practice of enlisting the Gods to perform boons in one’s favor as contravening	nirvanic aims.
within the context of Sinhala Buddhist cosmology, Visnu is not identified as the ‘absolute’... (1991: 16).

Scholars have commented that these deities are roughly comparable to patron saints central to popular Catholicism. Though Pastor Jayasena described the practice of deity veneration pejoratively as a “mix up,” most often Pentecostal evangelists diabolize these deities entirely. At the same time that Christians level the criticism that the Sinhalese practice of worshipping the gods is not a Buddhist but a Hindu one, Buddhist reformers, revivalists and “modernists” similarly articulate an anti-syncretistic stance.

Yet, however much scholars, Buddhist reformers, and Christian critics of Buddhism locate these deities as exogenous to Buddhism, those devoted to the deities in their everyday lives nonetheless regard themselves as truly and wholly Buddhist. The Sinhala Buddhist interaction with the deities (deviyo) entails beseechment and exchange. Those who engage in these ritual practices propitiate gods with offerings (dēva dāna) of fruits, flowers, incense, garlands, and lighted oil lamps. One implores a deity for assistance, and the supplicant then binds him or herself to the deity by a vow (bāra dennawa). When the request has evidently been fulfilled, the supplicant returns to

291 Stirrat (1992) discusses the Sinhala Catholic practice of rendering all Buddhist and Hindu deities and spirits as ultimately evil.
the deity to fulfill the vow by again making offerings and by sharing the merit of one’s
good karma with the deity (pīn dennawa).

The fact that Sinhalese Buddhist supplicants use their own karmic merit as
currency in beseeching the gods illuminates how the deities are positioned within the
moral hierarchy of the cosmos. Sinhala Buddhist gods, like humans, need merit for
their spiritual ascent towards nirvana. Yet, under the rubric of anthropocentric
Buddhism, unlike the actions of humans, the actions of deities do not produce merit
(pīn) no matter how selfless their actions may be. The ascent of a deity towards nibbāna
is contingent upon receiving merit from human supplicants. Thus, the effort of humans
to share their merit with a deity is understood as enabling the deity to be born as a
human in some far-off future lifetime, so that he or she may too engage directly in the
pursuit of nibbāna. A human birth is a stepping stone for the deity to make their ascent
towards nibbāna. Strikingly, in the case of Sinhala Buddhism, the answer to the question
of why popular worship of particular deities recedes over time has an academic answer
that accords with the culturally embedded one: within the Sri Lankan Theravāda
Buddhist paradigm of deity-veneration, some gods are able to collect so much merit
from the good deeds that they do for humans over the course of their lifetimes
(samsāra), that the deities make a spiritual ascent, and in the process, retreat towards
asceticism. The upward mobility of gods renders them as unapproachable to supplicants.

When Siridhamma Thero introduced the practice of venerating Maithri Bosat, even those Sinhala people who were not familiar with his expositions on why doing so was important automatically recognized the implications of the act. This is because within Sinhala Buddhist ritual life, the cultural form of veneration and worship of the gods is axiomatic—as axiomatic as the Bodhisatva Maithreya’s position within the (Theravādan Buddhist) cosmos. A Pentecostal-Christian interlocutor who is knowledgeable about Buddhism and avowedly respects Buddhism because she sees it as a constitutive part of her culture, responded immediately when I asked if she had heard that Siridhamma Thero was encouraging devotees at his temple to worship Maithri Bosat. Though a close friend of Anoja, she had not yet heard of the practice but excitedly commented on my report, exclaiming that “It must be because Maithri needs merit! You see, Maithri can be born on Earth and become a Buddha only if he has enough merit. Siridhamma Thero must be encouraging people to worship Maithri because he must need merit to be born on Earth!” In fact, giving merit to Maithreya had a dual purpose in Siridhamma Thero’s scheme of devotionalism: First, directing the laity’s attention to Maithreya would obviate the allegedly syncretic adaptation of
“Hindu” gods within the pantheon of Sinhala Buddhism. Secondly, focusing laity’s attention upon the pursuit of *nibbāna* and the possibility of making Maithreya’s arrival proximal and timely rendered the attainment of *nibbāna* a viable possibility for lay Buddhists. These were mutually-reinforcing components of a practice that could heighten lay Buddhist commitment. By venerating Maithri Bosat and using the currency of merit to ensure Maithri’s spiritual assent, Sinhala Buddhists could envision a quicker means to overcome *samsāra*.

**The Maverick Goes Rogue**

In November 2011, two years after the first Maithri Bōsat *puja* and *perahera* was broadcast, Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero donned new yellow robes. He began slowly, making a special announcement to the laity who had gathered there that day for the *puja*. He spoke convincingly, conveying to his devotees that he had experienced an overwhelming sense that he had made a significant spiritual advancement through his intensive reflections upon the *Buddhu Dhamma*. He explained that he was experiencing sensations which he believed signaled his attainment of a level of *jhana*, which indicates a heightened state of Buddhic consciousness. In his mind’s eye he had experienced a rebirth of sorts. Through gestures suggesting that in hearing the *Dhamma* he was
extraordinarily adept at absorbing its illuminating light, Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero implied that he had “entered the stream” (sotāpanna), arriving at a stage that is one of the final stepping stones to nībbaṇa. At that point, the adept comes to be classified as sōwan—a position which Theravāda Buddhists understand will lead to nībbaṇa after just seven births.

Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero announced that with this rebirth, his name too had changed, and that he thenceforth would be known as Siri Samantha Badhra Thero. He explained that the name Samantha Badhra had been among the names of the monks that Gautama Buddha had announced would one day become Bodhisatvas, Siridhamma Thero explained that no monk in the last 50,000 years (the present kalpa) had possessed the name before him. The newly self-minted stream-enterer entreated his devotees and the members of the monastic community to find an arahat who could verify his spiritual advancement. Because arahat are rare enlightened ascetics whose status is obscure to the ordinary eye, Samantha Badhra Thero opened the invitation to any member of the monastic community to test his knowledge of the Dhamma and verify his ascendant status, in an open forum on the temple premises.292

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292 Theravāda Buddhists regard the present age to contain insufficient dharmic knowledge and insight for ordinary people to discern the existence of an arahat.
Hearing this, concerned members of the *Mahasangha* were incredulous. Many were incensed. A *sōwan* (stream-enterer), like an *arhat*, is archetypically silent about his status, and the *Sangha* thus took issue with Siridhamma Thero’s pretension that he is so close to attaining *nibbāna*. One monk who is well known for his social and political activities with the National Bhikkhu Front said that Pitiduwe Siridhamma had clearly gone mad, and that he should be institutionalized and heavily medicated. A handful of these monks went to the temple to talk Siridhamma Thero down from his conceits. His devotees were afraid for his life, and tried to deter the Buddhist clergy from entering
the temple, while a number of police lined the streets to prevent any injuries. One
Minister of Parliament who has a reputation for being awed by spiritual figures ranging
from the God Katharagama to Sai Baba, brashly assured fellow devotees of Siri
Samantha Badhra that if any harm were to be done to the monk, that he would set fire
to himself right there, on the street in front of the temple.

Shortly after this encounter at the temple, the monks who opposed Pitiduwe
Siridhamma Thero approached Sri Lanka’s Media Ministry as well as the Ministry of
Buddhist Affairs with the allegation that the monk had gone rogue. The members of the
Sangha publically denounced the monk who now called himself Siri Samantha
Badhrahim for leading Theravādan Sinhala Buddhists astray. They petitioned the Media
Ministry to prohibit all television and radio networks from broadcasting any sermons
or other events delivered by the monk. Responding to the authority of the Sangha,
television and radio networks ceased all programming that showcased his sermons. The
Ministry of Buddhist Affairs also delisted Siri Sadaham Ashrayama from the National
Registry of Buddhist Temples. Only one Sinhala language news outlet continued to
support the monk. They aired a radio interview of Siri Samantha Badhra Thero,
allowing him the opportunity to explain his revised spiritual status as a stream-enterer,
and his newly-adopted name. In the broadcast he expounded that his mission to spread the Dhamma had become more urgent, stating in Sinhala that:

This Dhamma that I understand is not only something for Lanka, but for the whole world. I must tell this message of the Dhamma and it must be publicized. In the world, there are scientists, intellectuals, millionaires, and it is time to tell them this message. Why, even Arthur C. Clark has said that 2050 is the time that the Buddha Dhamma will become the world's greatest religion. This cultural custom and religious philosophy which we behold in our country—I am designed to promote and preserve it. Now the biggest challenge is this: How can we make it their religion? How do we show it to the world?²⁹³

We see that the monk asserts the universality of the Buddha’s Dhamma, much as Sri Lankan Christian evangelicals avow universality to be a feature of their own religion. In the context of growing rivalry between Pentecostal-charismatic evangelists and Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, perhaps this is not surprising. Although Siridhamma Thero’s methods were unconventional, his efforts to attract Buddhist laity to higher nibbanic pursuits were initially in concord with nationalists’ efforts to reform and revive Buddhism in the face of evangelical Christians’ inclinations toward expansionism. However, because he pronounced that he had “entered the stream” towards nibbāna, and insinuated that he is now a prime candidate to become Maithri Bosat in a near future life, Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero was denounced by several

monastic authorities. In turn he lost several followers. But Anoja and others remained true and consistent patrons of the temple, and devotees of the monk. Anoja felt convinced that the point at which the monk became Siri Samantha Badhra Thero did indeed signify a deep and genuine change in his person and his preaching. She felt that his discourses on the Dhamma had become more lucid than ever before, and that she thereby felt he was worthy of the status of stream enterer, or even beyond. Anoja exclaimed that if anything, after these incidents, Siridhamma Thero’s temple has risen in popularity. Some of the more tech-savvy of the devotees have found ample ways of circumventing the media blackout on Siri Samantha Badhra Thero. To this day, lay devotees regularly assist in publicizing events at the temple, and stream videorecordings of Samantha Badhra Thero’s sermons and other religious programs, which are accessible within Sri Lanka and internationally both through Facebook and the temple’s website.

As much as they are attentive to the newer set of urgencies posed by the expansionary ambitions of Sri Lankan Christian evangelists like Pastor Jayasena, the Theravāda Buddhist clergy who reacted so strongly against Pitiduwe Siridhamma a.k.a. Siri Samantha Badhra Thero recognize an imperative to distinguish Theravāda Buddhism from the Mahāyāna tradition. Implicitly confronting the former, more
immediate challenge, I suggest that Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero encouraged Sinhala Buddhist devotees to focus on shortening their samsāra and quickening their ascent to nibbāna. This maverick monk challenged his devotees to drop their attention to Hindu Gods—some of whom are central to Sinhala Buddhist protectionism. In their stead, he introduced the messianic Maithreyā, who is only latently present within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, but nevertheless available within its conception of the future. He enlisted Sinhalese Buddhist devotees to not only set their sights on nibbāna, but also to share their merit with the Bodhisatva; for in giving their merit to Maithreyā it is possible that they would hasten his arrival on Earth. Until that point, Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero’s innovation was considered to be entirely within the pale of Sinhala Buddhist modernism. For the monk to position himself as an agent who helps deepen lay Buddhist commitment with the promise of hastening Maithreya’s arrival, however, is distinct from his secondary innovation which so riled those entrusted to uphold Theravādan orthodoxy. That is to say, whereas Sri Lankan Theravādan Buddhist monastic authorities received the introduction of Maithreyā Bōsat as a focus of veneration as an innocuous, if maverick, innovation, the secondary move raised concerns among the monastic community who now perceived the monk to be roguishly scheming to convert Siri Sadaham Ashramaya into a Mahāyāna Buddhist temple. What
these figures of religious authority found to be scandalous was that the monk formerly known as Pitiduwe Siridhamma Thero was posturing himself as a candidate to become the Bodhisatva Maithreya, raising classical Theravādan consternation over the liberality of the Mahāyānan Bodhisatva concept.

What is clear is that Siridhamma Thero’s innovations to enhance Sinhala Buddhist lay religiosity are imbricated within a multi-religious social milieu, and are most certainly responses to anxieties stoked by competing religious traditions. At the same time, the vicissitudes of his innovations are fragile, threatening to be rendered as heresies that challenge the orthodoxy insisted upon by the Buddhist Sangha—the clerical body whose institutional memory spans back to much older rivalries engendered by the schismatic Mahayanists. Indeed, from the vantage point of the wider monastic community, the second innovation threatens a heresy of a type that arguably may be seen as more dangerous than the apostasy entailed by lay Buddhist conversions to Christianity. Indeed, the legitimacy of these innovative moves in Sinhala Buddhist ritual life are evidently shaped by the contours of religious rivalries—rivalries which are quite new, and others that are very old.
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Agamben, Giorgio

All Ceylon Buddhist Congress

Allahyari, Rebecca Anne

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Anidjar, Gil

Asad, Talal.

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Ashton, S.R.


Babb, L.


Bakhtin, M.


Banchoff, Thomas


Bastian, Sunil


Bastin, Rohan


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Bechert, H.

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Bennett, Jane

Bergunder, Michael.

Berkwitz, Stephen C.

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Bialecki, Jon

Blackburn, Anne M.
Blackburn, Anne M., and Jeffrey Samuels, eds.  

Blanton, Anderson  
2013 The Materiality of Prayer, SSRC Blog:  

Bloch, Maurice  

Bond, George Doherty  

Bornstein, Erica.  

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Bourdieu, Pierre  

Bowie, Katherine A.  

Brow, James  
Burghart, Richard

Bynum, Caroline Walker

Calhoun, Craig.

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Cannell, Fenella (ed).

Casanova, José

Caspersz, Paul

Castelli, Elizabeth A.

Cervantes, Fernando

Coleman, Simon


Colliot-Thélène, Catherine

Collins, Steven

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff, eds.
Coningham, Robin, and Nick Lewer  

Connolly, William E.  

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Copeman, Jacob  

Crawford, Leonard  

Csordas, Thomas J.  

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Das, Veena  

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Das, Veena

De Alwis, Malathi, and Eva-Lotta E. Hedman (eds.)

De Alwis, Malathi

DeBernardi, Jean

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Deegalle, Mahinda

De Silva, K. M.

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De Silva, Premakumara

De Silva, Premakumara.

DeVotta, Neil.

De Vries, Hent, and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (eds.)

Egge, James

Elisha, Omri.

Fassin, Didier, and Mariella Pandolfi (ed).

Fassin, Didier

Findly, Ellison Banks
Fischer, Karsten  

Forsythe, David P.  

Foucault, Michel  

Foulton, Lynne  

Gajaweera, Nalika  

Garland, Robert  

Geiger, Wilhelm (trans.)  

Geischere, Peter  

Globe Information and Publicity Services  
Godelier, Maurice

Gombrich, Richard

Goodhand, Jonathan, Benedikt Korf, and Jonathan Spencer (eds.)

Goonesekere, RKW

Goonatilake, Susantha

Goswami, Manu

Goulde, John Isaac

Gunasinghe, Newton

Guyer, Jane I.
Hackett, Rosalind I.J. (ed)

Hallisey, Charles

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Harris, Elizabeth

Harris, Olivia

Haskell, Thomas L.

Heesterman, Johannes Cornelis
Heim, Maria

Hollenbach, Pia, and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura

Holt, John C.

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Hresko, Tracy

James, Wendy (ed.)

James, William

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Jayawardena, Kumari
Jeganathan, Pradeep  

Kandiah, Thiru  

Kaplan, Martha and John D. Kelly  

Kay, William K.  

Keane, Webb  

Kelly, John D., with Jauregui, Mitchell, and Walton  

Keyes, Charles F.  

Khan, Naveeda  
Kim, Andrew E.

Kodikara, S. U.

Korf, Benedikt with Hasbullah, Klem, Hollenbach

Laidlaw, James

Lambek, Michael (ed.)

Lutgendorf, P.

Mahadev, Neena

Mahmood, Saba
Malalgoda, Kitsiri

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Manor, James

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Marshall, Ruth

Martin, David

Matthews, Bruce

Mauss, Marcel

McDaniel, Justin Thomas
Mendelson, E. Michael

Menon, Kalyani

Merli, Claudia

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Meyer, Birgit

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Meyer, Birgit and Peter Geschiere (eds.)
Meyer, Eric

Mitchell, Sean T.

Moore, Mick

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Moss, Candida

Mosse, David

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Mouffe, Chantal (ed.)
Nanayakkara, Sankajaya

Nicholas, Ralph

Obeyesekere, Gananath

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Obeyesekere, Gananatha

Obeyesekere, G and Gombrich, R.
Owen, Alex

Owens, Alexandra

Parry, Jonathan

Paul II, Pope John


Pieris, Aloysius


Perera, Sasanka
Perera, Sreema


Prasad, D. M.


Premasiri, P. D.


Premawardhana, Devaka


Premawardena, Shantha


“Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act”


Rafael, Vincent


Rajapatirana, Sarath

Rajasingham-Senanayake, Darini  

Rampton, David  

Ranjith, Malcolm, Archbishop of Colombo Diocese  

Reynolds, F., G. Obeyeskere, and B. Smith (eds.)  

Richette, Christian  

Roberts, Michael  

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Roberts, Richard H.

Robbins, Joel

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Rogers, John D.

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Ruel, Malcolm
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Samuels, Jeffrey

Sarkar, Sumit

Schmitt, Carl

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Schrift, Alan D. (ed.)

Schonthal, Benjamin

Scott, David

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Seneviratne, Heraliwala L.

Sharkey, Heather J.

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Shastri, Amita

Shipley, Jesse Weaver
Siegel, James T. 

Simmel, Georg 

Singh, Bhrigupati 

Siriweera, W. I. 

Somaratna, G. P. V. 

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Sombart, Werner 

Southwold, Martin 

Spencer, Jonathan 
Spencer, Jonathan

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Stirrat, R. L.

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Strong, John

Tambiah, Stanley J.

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Tambiah, Stanley J.

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Thirakarate, Henry
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Thiranagama, Sharika, and Tobias Kelly (eds.)

Tilakaratne, Asanga

Trainor, Kevin

Tulana Research Center for Encounter and Dialogue (Fr. Aloysius Pieris)

Queen, Christopher S., and Sallie B. King, (eds)
UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Uyangoda, Jayadeva

Van der Veer, Peter (ed.)

Viswanath, Rupa

Wacker, Grant

Weber, Max

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Weber, Max

Winslow, Deborah, and Michael D. Woost (eds.)

Winslow, Deborah

Young, Richard Fox

Young, R.F., and G.S.B. Senanayake

Young, R.F, and GPV Somaratna

Županov, Ines
Neena Mahadev

CURRENT ACADEMIC APPOINTMENT 2013-2015

Postdoctoral Fellow in the Transregional Research Network (CETREN), University of Göttingen, October 2013 – present
Collaborative work on the project theme: “The Politics of Secularism and the Emergence of New Religiosities”

EDUCATION

PhD  Johns Hopkins University, Anthropology, 2004 – degree to be conferred 2013


Dissertation Committee and External Examiners: Veena Das, Naveeda Khan, Jane Guyer, William E. Connolly (Political Theory, JHU), John D. Kelly (Anthropology, UChicago)

Comprehensive exam essays and oral defense, MA and ABD qualified December 2008
Conceptual & regional essay titles:
“Two Forms of Vision—one Enlightened and one Enchanted: Reason and Ineffability as Vicissitudes of Religious Pluralism”

“Selfish Giving?: Theravāda Buddhism and her Mahāyāna Buddhist and Christian Critics”

MA  University of Chicago, Social Sciences, degree conferred August 29, 2003

BA  Carleton College, Sociology/Anthropology, concentration in South Asian Studies degree conferred June 10, 2000

-Earned designation of “Pass with Academic Distinction” for Senior Comps research (BA thesis) project

-Dave Okada Memorial Prize recipient, “Awarded annually to the social sciences major who has demonstrated the most remarkable intellectual achievement in his or her studies.”
PUBLICATIONS


BOOK REVIEWS


INVITED AS PEER REVIEWER

Nations and Nationalism
Borderlands journal for volume on Religion and Sexuality

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

42nd Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 2013
Presenter on panel entitled, *Spaces of Utopia Out of South Asia*, organized by Smriti Srinivas
Paper title: “Spiritual Warfare” and Postwar Territoriality in Sri Lanka

Society for the Anthropology of Religion, Biennial Meeting, Pasadena, CA April, 2013
Presenter on a panel on *Political Theologies*, organized by Dr. Mayfair Yang.

Association for Asian Studies, Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA March 2013
Paper title: “‘Fraudulent’ Christians: a New Formation within the Politics of Sinhala-Buddhist Perception”
Paper title: “An Emergent Theravāda Buddhist Millennialism?”
Paper presentation will be part of a panel entitled “Apocalyptic Visions: Reflections on Crossing the Ultimate Boundary” organized by Dr. Michael Hesson.

41st Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, October 11th-14th, 2012
Panel Organizer and presenter for panel entitled: “Making Merit, Fortifying the Nation: Ritual Currencies of Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka”
Also served as discussant for a panel entitled “Risking a Claim: Language, Acknowledgment and the Everyday.”

“Christianities in the History of India,” Conference at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, February 2011

“Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in the Era of Globalization,” Workshop at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, September 2010

Society for the Anthropology of Religion Conference, Phoenix, AZ, April 2007

Berkeley South Asia Conference, University of California-Berkeley, 2006
Chair and organizer for panel, “Socialities of Virtue: Religion and the Politics of Affiliation”.

Madison South Asia Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003
INVITED PAPER PRESENTATIONS

“Charity, Philanthropy and Development in Sri Lanka,” sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 2013

“Sri Lanka in the World, the World in Sri Lanka,” Roundtable at University of Zurich, Department of Human Geography, November 23, 2011
Specially invited to deliver a paper on local perspectives on Christian evangelism and current geopolitical conditions of Sri Lanka.
Paper title: “Buddhist Nationalism and the Evangelical Christian “Gifts” of Attraction: The Ethics and Politics of Inter-Religious Encounters”

International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo, Sri Lanka
April 2011
Invited to deliver a lecture on aspects of dissertation research in Sri Lanka.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
2012 “Christianities in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” Lecturer and Dean’s Teaching Fellow
Johns Hopkins University
Awarded a competitive teaching fellowship to teach an undergraduate course of my own design.
Course description: In its evangelical spread, Christianity has taken many forms. What does it mean to be “Saved” in different social and cultural contexts? How has Christianity been embraced, rejected (even violently resisted), or “syncretically” incorporated into local structures of religious belief and practice?

2011 Study Leader, University of Chicago Alumni Association tour of India
Delhi, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Agra, Varanasi, Sarnath. October – November 2011
Hired as University of Chicago alumni representative and Study Leader for a small group tour of several northern Indian cities and villages, in association with Odysseys Unlimited and University of Chicago Alumni Relations Office. Delivered lectures and had informal conversations with alumni on Hinduism and Buddhism, pilgrimage and sacred cosmology of Varanasi, mysticism, caste, sectarian conflict and co-existence, and the struggle for India’s independence from British colonialism, in cooperation with the Odysseys Tour Director.
2011  “Gift and Sacrifice,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Juan Obarrio
Johns Hopkins University
Course description: “How do gifts become the foundation of society? How does the fetish take control over a person? What is the meaning of the ritual sacrifice of living beings and things? The course examines classical and contemporary anthropological explorations of circulation, exchange, of power, dread and desire.”

Johns Hopkins University
Co-designed and co-taught this course to introduce undergraduates to the anthropology of religion.
Course description: “This course offers an exploration of some of the world's major religions, including Hindu traditions, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, so-called pagan religions, and indigenous religions of Africa and other regions of the world. We offer key concepts and terms in the study of religion, a sampling of doctrinal and orthodox views of various religious traditions, as well as a view of how these religions are practiced 'heterodoxically' in a variety of local contexts in the contemporary world.”

2006 “Africa in the 21st Century,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Jane Guyer
Johns Hopkins University
Course description: “The present and future of Africa are often projected in apocalyptic terms. We attempt here to understand the ordinary realities of life--family, making a living, community, congregation, governance and inequality--with special attention to African scholars, public figures, writers and artists.” We concentrated our energies especially on ethnographic material that highlighted life and new developments in African cities.

2006 “Kinship,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Sonia Ryang
Johns Hopkins University
Course introduced undergraduate students to the anthropological study of kinship.

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, 2009
Awarded funds to carry out ethnographic fieldwork for a project entitled “Buddhist and Christian Ethical Endeavors: Charitable Works, Conversions, and Unstable Religious Commitments in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka”
National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship, 2004—2007
Awarded competitive fellowship for early stages of doctoral study at Johns Hopkins University, Department of Anthropology.

Dean’s Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2012
Awarded Fellowship to design and teach an undergraduate seminar-style class.

Phulanthropic Educational Organization (PEO), Scholar Award, 2010
Fellowship awarded to finalize fieldwork, 2010-11.

Mellon Language Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, 2008
For advanced language study in the Sinhala Language.

Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship Recipient, Summers 2007 & 2008
For study of Sinhala Language, at the Madison South Asia Language Institute.

Fulbright Fellowship (Post-Baccalaureate), Sri Lanka, October 2000 – July 2001

Best Graduate Student Abstract (2nd), Society for the Anthropology of Religion Conference, 2007

J. Brien Key Fellowship, Summer 2006
Awarded funds to partially cover summer language training tuition expenses to study Tamil.

Women, Gender and Sexuality Program, Travel Grant, Johns Hopkins University, Summer 2005
For preliminary Ethnographic Field Research in Sri Lanka

Dave Okada Memorial Prize in the Social Sciences, Carleton College, 2000.
“Awarded annually to the social sciences major who has demonstrated the most remarkable intellectual achievement in his or her studies”.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRAINING
Sinhala, advanced private lessons with Cornell U. Professor of Sinhala, Kandy, Sri Lanka. 2009
Sinhala, Intermediate (intensive), South Asia Summer Language Institute, UW-Madison. 2007
Sinhala, Beginning (intensive), South Asia Summer Language Institute, UW-Madison. 2006
Tamil, Intermediate (intensive), South Asia Summer Language Institute, UW-Madison. 2005
Tamil, Beginning (one semester), University of Chicago. 2002
French, High School and University-level study. 1994-1998
OTHER WORK & SERVICE

2006-07  **Chair, Graduate Representative Organization (GRO), Johns Hopkins University**
Elected to serve as the Chair of the Graduate Representative Organization, which advocates for graduate student concerns at Johns Hopkins University.

2007-08  **Academic Policy Coordinator, GRO, Johns Hopkins University**
Served as the Graduate Representative Organization Academic Policy Coordinator to advise Deans of the University on academic policies that affected graduate students. Elected to the position by other graduate students involved with the organization.

2007-08  **Grad Student Employment Policy Committee member, Johns Hopkins**
Convened with University administrators, faculty, and staff to discuss problems facing graduate students in their capacity as employees. Collaborated to create policies to protect graduate students from abuse in the workplace—to foster a healthier environment for working, researching, and teaching at the University.

2003-04  **South Asia Outreach, Educational Outreach and Campus Program Coordinator, University of Chicago**
Organized educational initiatives, including workshops and conferences for K-12 teachers. Also worked on curriculum development through the use of film, books, and other resources.

2002-03  **Scholar At-Risk Network, Case Manager, The Human Rights Program, University of Chicago**
Responsible for managing confidential case files of scholars from various regions of the world who were experiencing harassment, violence, and threats to their lives and to their academic freedom. Work entailed finding possible fellowship exchanges for the scholars, offering them temporary refuge, and possibility for academic growth, with the aim of allowing the scholars to return to their home countries providing that it was safe for them to do so.

1999-00  **Writing Tutor, The Write Place, Carleton College**
Tutored students in history and anthropology courses to help them develop effective writing skills. Nominated for position based upon strong writing and interpersonal skills.