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**The 1915 Anti-Moor Pogrom and Ethno-Religious Violence in
Ceylon, 1853 – 1915**

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Abstract

The 1915 anti-Moor pogrom was the first major episode of popular ethno-religious violence in Ceylon. Between 29 May and 6 June 1915, Sinhalese-led violence targeted Moors (the largest Muslim ethnic group in Ceylon), and included murders, rapes, assaults, attacks on mosques and homes, and the destruction of over 4,000 shops. The spectre of '1915' has in the last decade received renewed attention in the context of escalating anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka (Ceylon was renamed in 1972). Why did this violence take place between Sinhalese and Moors?

In my thesis, I re-open this neglected chapter in Ceylon's history, critically re-examine the deeper roots of ethno-religious violence between Sinhalese and Moors, and present a historical narrative of cycles of intolerance and victimisation. I explore the role of colonial policies and discourse in bringing ethno-religious groups into conflict with each other, and reassess certain positions taken in the existing historiography on the pogrom, as well as popular narratives on the outbreak, spread and aftermath of the pogrom. I then examine the colonial state's failure to pre-empt this violence in 1915 and its harsh belated suppression of the violence.

My research uncovers a longer-term history of ethno-religious violence and investigates the ethnic and religious sensibilities and identities that crystallised from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. To do so, I repeatedly shift lenses from the microscopic, to the local, to the global, in analysing Sinhalese-Moor contestation in the religious, economic, and social spheres, and the clash between indigenous practices and colonial legislation. In my treatment of the 1915 pogrom, I locate the violence within the global context (the Islamic revival, and later, the First World War for example), and shed light on broader historiographical questions pertaining to the history of British colonialism in Ceylon.

List of Abbreviations

SLNA	– Sri Lanka National Archives
TNA	– The National Archives, London
DRWC	– D.R. Wijewardene Collection
PIC	– Police Inquiry Commission
SIC	– Shooting Inquiry Commission
Parl. Pap.	– Parliamentary Papers

Introduction

Background

In 1915, Ceylon witnessed the first major episode of popular ethno-religious violence. The Sinhalese-led violence targeting Moors (the largest Muslim ethnic group in Ceylon) between 29 May and 6 June 1915 included murders, rapes, assaults, attacks on mosques and homes, and the destruction of over 4,000 shops.

In its post-colonial period, Sri Lanka (Ceylon was renamed in 1972) has been associated with ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese-led state and the Tamil minority.¹ Decades of discriminatory state policies and ethnic violence between Sinhalese and Tamils culminated in an armed conflict that ended bloodily in 2009. Then, in the post-armed conflict period, anti-Muslim violence re-surfaced and escalated between 2012 and 2019.² 1915 is a reminder that communal violence in Ceylon did not emerge after Independence in 1948; instead, it has roots deeper in the colonial period. Yet, this narrative can also be misleading. 1915 did not mark the beginning of Sinhalese-Moor conflict; in fact, it marked the end of sustained violence between these groups for almost a century. What is the real history of the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom?

Perhaps better known in English by the opaque moniker, the ‘1915 Riots’, in Sinhala it is typically called the ‘1915 Marakkala Kollahālaya’ (Moor riot).³ The English term does not indicate who the victims of the violence were, while the Sinhala term suggests it was the Moors

¹ A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, ‘Ethnic Strife in Sri Lanka: the Politics of Space’ *Regional and Federal Studies* 3/1 (1993), p. 145.

² In the post-colonial period, the Moor identity was increasingly replaced with the more accommodative religious identity marker, ‘Muslim’. Amnesty International, ‘From Burning Houses to Burning Bodies: Anti-Muslim Violence, Discrimination and Harassment in Sri Lanka’ (8 October 2021), p. 13 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ASA3748632021ENGLISH.pdf>, (27 July 2022).

³ Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations: Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History* (Reading, 1994), p. 183.

who rioted. Indeed, nationalist historiography suggests Sinhalese suffered most in 1915 during the two months of martial law imposed by the British colonial state in a belated response to the pogrom.⁴ In reality, it was the Moors who experienced the brunt of the Sinhalese violence that was unleashed simultaneously in five of the nine provinces.

The spectre of '1915' has in the last decade received renewed attention in the context of escalating anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka. Why did this violence take place between Sinhalese and Moors, and why were Moors and not Tamils the perceived antagonists in the lead up to 1915? Indeed, there was no violence of any significance between Sinhalese and Tamils during British rule.⁵ Instead, I find that Sinhalese and Tamils were united in their animosity towards monotheistic groups in general, and Moors in particular.

In this thesis, I re-open this chapter in Ceylon's history, critically re-examine the deeper roots of ethno-religious violence between Sinhalese and Moors and present a historical narrative of cycles of intolerance and victimisation. I explore the role of colonial policies and discourse in bringing ethno-religious groups into conflict with each other, and reassess certain positions taken in the existing historiography on the pogrom, as well as popular narratives on the outbreak, spread and aftermath of the pogrom. I then examine the colonial state's failure to prevent this violence in 1915 and its harsh belated suppression of the violence. This involves a consideration of just how far the colonial context mattered.

I recover evidence of popular attitudes regarding the way Moors and Sinhalese conceived of each other, and for the first time, identify Moor viewpoints that have not previously been

⁴ Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness: a collection of speeches, essays and letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala*, ed. A. Guruge (Colombo, 1965), pp. 537-542.

⁵ Harshan Kumarasingham, 'A Democratic Paradox: The Communalisation of Politics in Ceylon, 1911-1948', *Asian Affairs*, 37/3 (2006), p. 342. It is for this reason I do not focus on Tamils in this thesis.

found in academic or popular histories. I explore tensions in the way that, on the one hand, the state and elite Tamils viewed Moors *as* Tamils, while on the other, Moors increasingly viewed themselves as a distinct ethno-religious group. Religion is an important part of ethnicity in Ceylon, and I test this idea when analysing the mobilisation of religious identities in communal violence, the boundaries of religious revival, and economic competition between Sinhalese and Moors. The existing historiography has made insufficient use of the Sinhala- and Tamil-language press despite a proliferation of mass media from the late nineteenth century onwards. I draw on these vernacular publications as key sources. While many editors of these newspapers were themselves elites, letters to the press and coverage of local events by correspondents outside Colombo offer vital alternative perspectives. Indeed, these perspectives tend to be absent in many well-known accounts of key historical events, including monographs produced by Sinhalese contemporaries or their biographers. Publications by or on Sinhalese leaders such as D.B. Jayathilaka, E.W. Perera, and F.R. Senanayake tend to highlight the contribution of that particular person in quelling violence or seeking justice. Such narratives are reflected in major historical works such as K.M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka*.⁶ However, they omit the vital alternative perspectives that are reflected in the Sinhala and Tamil press of the time.

Prejudicial popular narratives on the 1915 pogrom also call for more rigorous historical scrutiny. Even in the existing historiography on the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom, there is a tendency to cast aspersions on the sincerity of Moors who came forward to plead their cases in terms of assessing damage (bodily and structural) sustained during the pogrom. When Moor political actors such as Mohammed Macan-Markar and W.M. Abdul Rahiman reported to the Colonial

⁶ Jayasena Dahanayaka, *Deshabandu F.R. Senanayake* (Colombo, 2011); Nandadeva Wijesekera, *Sir D.B. Jayatilaka: A Biography and Assessment of the Man and His Work* (Colombo, 1973); Douglas D. Ranasinghe, *The Lion of Kotte: His Life & Times, Vol. 1* (Colombo, 1976); K.M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2008) pp. 476-478.

Secretary on the damage incurred by Moors in the pogrom, two historians (and colonial administrators) noted the ‘vengeful’ tone and vindictiveness of the claims.⁷ Many claims for compensations were said to be exaggerated. The historical record tends to highlight the actions of the few Moors who attempted to blackmail Sinhalese by falsely accusing them of rioting. There is a failure by historians too to acknowledge the narratives of victims and survivors.⁸ Meanwhile, despite statistics that over 4,000 Moor shops were looted, and dozens killed, popular narratives have maintained that Moors were not the real victims. In this context, even the use of the term ‘pogrom’ is deeply contested, and the euphemism ‘riots’ is preferred.

Modern academia based largely outside Sri Lanka has typically been implicitly or explicitly critical of such popular narratives. Yet, it sometimes emphasises the relatively shallow and contingent roots of communalist conflict (by drawing parallels with the better-known Indian context) and reduces causality to certain policies or ephemeral economic relations.⁹ My research uncovers a longer-term history and takes seriously the religious sensibilities and identities that crystalised in the preceding half century. To do so, I repeatedly shift lenses from the microscopic, to the local, to the global, in analysing episodes of ethno-religious violence, the clash between indigenous practices and colonial legislation, and religious revival. In my treatment of the 1915 pogrom, I locate the violence within the global context (the Islamic revival, and later, the First World War for example), and shed light on broader historiographical questions pertaining to the history of British colonialism in Ceylon.

The evolution of religious and ethnic identities is one of the most important and explosive issues in the historiography of Sri Lanka. However, the focus is normally on ‘Sinhala-ness’, and, to a

⁷ Charles S. Blackton, ‘The Action Phase of the 1915 Riots’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 29/2 (1970), p. 243; Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations*, p. 189.

⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

⁹ William Gould, *Religions and Conflict in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 72-74.

lesser extent, ‘Tamil-ness’. I engage the literature on Sinhalese identity formation, while focusing on the role of British Orientalism in intentionally and unintentionally promoting Sinhala-Buddhism. I aim to make a more significant contribution in the conceptualisation of Moor identity formation, which has received substantially less scholarly attention. While Sinhalese identity had its roots in pre-colonial, pre-modern periods, evidence suggests that an (elite) Moor identity is relatively modern (compared to a purely religious conception of their identity, which had a much longer historical resonance dating back to at least the Portuguese period and likely even earlier).¹⁰ In the late nineteenth century Moors were minorities among Sinhalese and Tamils in Ceylon. Additionally, there was a minoritisation of Ceylon’s Islam within global Islam. I am interested in these two layers of minoritisation, reflected first in the dearth of Muslim voices in Ceylon’s historiography, and second, in the virtual absence of Ceylon’s Moors in the broader historiography on Islamic revivals and the ‘Muslim world’.

Historiography

There is extensive scholarly work on Sinhalese identity formation in the nineteenth century, including seminal texts by K.N.O Dharmadasa, Kitsiri Malalgoda and Anne Blackburn.¹¹ The Sinhalese formed the majority ethnic and religious community in Ceylon. In 1911, Ceylon had a total population of around 4,100,000. According to the 1911 Census, there were 2,715,420 Sinhalese people in Ceylon, of whom 2,474,170 were Buddhists.¹² Sinhala-Buddhists accordingly comprised around 91 percent of all Sinhalese, and 60.3 percent of the total population.

¹⁰ C.R. De Silva, ‘Portuguese Policy Towards the Muslims in Ceylon, 1505-1626’, *Ceylon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9 (1966), pp. 113-119.

¹¹ K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor, 1992); Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A study of religious revival and change* (Berkeley, 1976); Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Chicago, 2010).

¹² E.B. Denham, *Ceylon at the Census of 1911, The Review of the Results of the Census of 1911* (Colombo, 1912), pp. 196 and 246. This was the Census taken closest to the 1915 pogrom.

The Sinhalese were diverse in their occupational backgrounds and class. For example, by the late nineteenth century there was an elite class of local capitalists and landowners, a trading class, urban and plantation labourers, and the peasantry.¹³ Sinhalese were further differentiated by caste and geographical region. Yet despite these differences, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Sinhala press overwhelmingly used the term ‘*jātiya*’ to refer to the collective Sinhalese or Sinhala-Buddhist people.¹⁴ It is difficult to precisely date how far back this use goes, but how firmly embedded it became is reflected in the establishment of a newspaper entitled *Sinhala Jatiya* in 1903.¹⁵ The meaning of ‘*jātiya*’ has changed over the centuries; in the sixteenth century it could be used to refer to ‘birth’, ‘kind’ or ‘caste’ within the Sinhala group. In the late nineteenth century, it was frequently used in a manner comparable to English terms such as ‘nation’, ‘race’, and ‘ethnicity’.¹⁶ During this period the ‘Sinhalese’ were imagined to form a cohesive ‘national’ or historically island-wide ‘community’ even though the various parts (for example, inhabitants of a particular district) only interacted with a fraction of the whole population.¹⁷ At the same time, scholars such as Tessa Bartholomeusz and C.R. de Silva observe the rise of a Buddhist fundamentalism, which they defined as relying more on Buddhism ‘as a foundation for identity’ as opposed to other identity markers such as caste; and identifying ‘Buddhist Sinhalas as the people who have been charged by the Buddha himself to maintain and protect Buddhism’.¹⁸ This fundamentalism included chauvinistic ideas ‘over who

¹³ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 367-426.

¹⁴ Sarath Amunugama, *The Lion’s Roar: Anagarika Dharmapala and the making of modern Buddhism* (New Delhi, 2020), p. 296.

¹⁵ Harshana Rambukwella, *The Politics and Poetics of Authenticity*, (London, 2018), p. 39.

¹⁶ Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period: 1590s to 1815* (Colombo, 2003), p. 106; Alan Strathern, ‘Towards the Source-Criticism of Sitavaka-Period Heroic Literature, Part Two: The *Sitavaka Hatana*: Notes on a Grounded Text’, *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* (2008), p. 62.

¹⁷ Benedict R.O.G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Rev. (London and New York, 2006), pp. 3-7.

¹⁸ Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and C.R. De Silva, ‘Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka’, in Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and C.R. De Silva (eds.), *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka* (Albany, 1998), p. 2

is rightful heir to *dhammadīpa*' (the island where Buddhism would be fostered), and the fear that the island was 'vulnerable to corruption by impure forces deemed hostile to Buddhism, whether internal or external'.¹⁹ This tight identification of ethnicity and religion was reflected in the new term 'Sinhala-Buddhists' used by both the Sinhalese and the British.²⁰ The nineteenth century marked a period of rupture in terms of institutions of governance, giving rise to contestation over authenticity and indigeneity.²¹ In this context, non-Sinhalese in particular (but also Sinhalese converts to Christianity) were vulnerable to being cast as the 'other' and even the 'enemy'; these 'others' included the Moors.²²

In contrast to the wealth of scholarship on Sinhalese identity, the scholarship on Moor identity formation during this period is comparatively sparse. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Muslims of Ceylon comprised various ethnicities, religious sects, and schools of Islamic jurisprudence.²³ According to the 1911 Census, Muslims comprised 6.9 percent of the population, numbering around 283,000. Muslims formed the third largest minority on the island. Indian Tamils (largely brought by the British in the nineteenth century as plantations labourers) and Ceylon Tamils were the two largest minority groups (12.9 percent and 12.8 percent respectively, according to the 1911 Census).²⁴ When contrasted with Muslims in India, who numbered in the tens of millions, the Muslims in Ceylon represented a small minority of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. The interconnectedness of the Sinhalese and Buddhist identities can be compared with long-term changes to ethno-religious identity in Burma. Although diverse ethnic groups in Burma had by the seventeenth century become, nominally at least, Buddhists, it was in the 1910s that 'a nationalist ideology based on Buddhism...[became] the core of an ethnic national identity'. Victor B. Lieberman, 'Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth Century Burma', *Modern Asian Studies* 12/3 (1978), p. 461; Niklas Foxeus, 'The Buddha was a devoted nationalist: Buddhist nationalism, *ressentiment*, and defending Buddhism in Myanmar', *Religion* 49/4 (2019), p. 665.

²⁰ The founding of a Sinhala newspaper entitled '*Sinhala Baudhdhya*' in 1906 is one reflection of such change.

²¹ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*; Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded* (Chicago, 2013).

²² Bartholomeusz and De Silva, 'Buddhist Fundamentalism', pp. 3 and 10-11.

²³ Dennis B. McGilvray, 'Sri Lankan Muslims: Between Ethno-nationalism and the Global Ummah,' *Nations and Nationalism* 17/1 (2011), p. 49.

²⁴ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 196.

the island's population, and remained somewhat aloof from domestic politics and struggles for representation when compared to efforts by the Sinhalese and Ceylon Tamils.

Moors formed the largest ethnic group within the Muslim population, numbering around 266,600 people (6.5% of the population).²⁵ Moors comprised two distinct ethnic groups: Ceylon Moors, who came to trace their ancestry back to Arab and Persian traders who began to arrive around the seventh century CE, and Indian Moors, who were associated with Indian-origin traders arriving some centuries later from Tamil Nadu in India in particular.²⁶ Ceylon Moors' belief in their Arab/Persian ancestry can, thus far, only be traced back to the early nineteenth century. Simon Casie Chetty, a writer and member of the Ceylon Legislative Council, observed in 1836 that 'We have no authentic records extant respecting the origin of the Moors, and, therefore, it is not possible to trace it with accuracy. What has been offered on the subject by European writers, appears to have its foundation in nothing but the vague and often distorted traditions circulated among the natives themselves.'²⁷ This claim shows both the role of Orientalist scholarship in knowledge formation regarding indigenous groups, and the absence of a clear narrative on Moor history in Ceylon at the time. Prior to this period, Moors were likely to have viewed the boundaries of their group identity in terms of their shared Islamic religion, and their occupation, as traders. I discuss changes to the Moors' ethnic consciousness in the nineteenth century further below.

In addition to the Moors, there were some smaller Muslim ethnic groups in Ceylon. The second largest Muslim ethnic group was the Malays (around 0.3% of the population), who traced their

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ameer Ali, 'The Genesis of the Muslim Community in Ceylon (Sri Lanka): A Historical Summary,' *Asian Studies* 19 (1981), p. 71.

²⁷ Simon Casie Chetty, 'An essay descriptive of the manners and customs of the Moors of Ceylon', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3/2 (1836), p. 337.

ancestry to Java and Sumatra in modern-day Indonesia.²⁸ There were also significantly smaller groups such as the Afghans, Memons, and Bohras resident in Ceylon. The Malays and the Memons were Sunnis by sect; typically, the Malays belonged to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, while the Memons belonged to the Hanafi school. The Afghans in Ceylon were also usually Sunni.²⁹ The Bohras, originally from India, were Shi'a.³⁰

This diversity of Muslims in Ceylon – hailing from India, Java and Sumatra, and those claiming ancestry from Arabia and the Persian Gulf – and the variety of languages they spoke (Tamil, Arabic, Urdu, and Malay, for example) speaks to the difficulty in collapsing such coreligionists into a singular group identity.³¹ The Moors' religion and the language they spoke – primarily Tamil – remained the most salient features of their identity at least until the 1880s. Furthermore, the Moors were not in a position to develop a 'nationalist' agenda.³² As Lorna Dewaraja demonstrates in her long history of Muslims in Ceylon, Muslims had no history of hegemony on the island and never aimed for statehood – a striking difference with the subcontinent.³³ Moreover, the Moors shared only a very loose myth of common descent from Arab traders (in contrast to the Sinhalese, who saw theirs as an 'unbroken history' for over two millennia). Nevertheless, the late nineteenth century witnessed a revivalist movement, driven by actors and ideas from within and beyond Ceylon that gave rise to a distinct, elite Ceylon Moor identity.³⁴

²⁸ Llyn Smith, *Islamic Ideology and Religious Practice among Muslims in a Southern Sri Lankan Town*, (PhD diss., University of London, 1997), p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³¹ M.A. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity* (Colombo, 2007).

³² Anthony D. Smith, 'Memory and Modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner's Theory of Nationalism,' *Nations and Nationalism* 2/3 (1996), p. 384. By contrast, the Sinhalese became increasingly 'nationalist' and went on to seek self-governance.

³³ Lorna Dewaraja, *The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One thousand years of ethnic harmony, 900-1915* (Colombo, 1994).

³⁴ Vijaya Samaraweera, 'The Muslim Revivalist Movement, 1880-1915' in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Vol. 1* (Colombo, 1997), pp. 293-322; Qadri Ismail, 'Unmooring identity: the antinomies of elite Muslim self-representation in modern Sri Lanka', in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds.) *Unmaking the Nation: The politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1995), pp. 55-105.

This Ceylon Moor identity is a subsection of the ill-defined ‘Moor’ identity, which appears to have been thrust on the group by the Portuguese first, who gave the Muslims they encountered on the island the European label ‘Moros/Mouros’, and later by the British. The British then expected the ‘Moors’ (the Anglicised form of the name) to be represented by the Tamil Member in Legislative Council between 1833 and 1889.³⁵ The process of Ceylon Moor identity formation accelerated between 1889, when they were first given separate representation through a ‘Mohammadan Seat’ in the Legislative Council, and 1911, when they were identified as a distinct ethnic group to Indian Moors for the first time in the Census of Ceylon. I explore this process of Ceylon Moor identity formation in depth, while commenting on the under-sourced process of Indian Moor identity formation. Specifically, I attempt to highlight the ways in which Islamic revival in Ceylon was distinct from those processes occurring elsewhere in South Asia.

The historiography of colonial-era Sinhalese-Moor violence is essentially confined to the events surrounding the 1915 pogrom. I build on this literature, which includes book chapters and journal articles by Michael Roberts on sacred space, and Kumari Jayawardena on economic and political factors behind the violence, by placing events in a more global context and longer time frame beginning in 1853.³⁶ The two early scholarly monographic treatments of the 1915 pogrom are valuable to my research in two ways.³⁷ First, writing in his capacity as Senior Deputy Inspector General of Police (IGP) in 1978, A.C. Dep’s focus on salvaging the condemned role of the police in the ‘riots’ shines a light on the Police Riot Files, which are no longer accessible

³⁵ As a religious term, it did not imply that Ceylon’s ‘Moors’ had shared ancestry with the North African or Mediterranean Moors the Portuguese had been most familiar with. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, p. 37; Dennis B. McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim ethnicity in regional perspective,’ *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32/2 (1998), p. 434.

³⁶ Kumari Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors in the 1915 Riots’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 29/2 (1970), pp. 223-233; Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations*, pp. 149-212.

³⁷ The two contemporary monographs on the 1915 ‘riots’ were by Ponnambalam Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon* (London, 1916), and Armand de Souza, *Hundred Days in Ceylon Under Martial Law 1915* (Colombo, 1916; repr. Colombo, 2006), and are used as primary sources in my thesis.

to researchers without a letter from the current IGP.³⁸ Second, P.V.J. Jayasekera's doctoral thesis provides the most detailed account of the pogrom to date in his analysis of the causes of Sinhalese-Moor conflict from 1900 onwards using colonial and Sinhalese (but not Moor/Tamil-language) reports.³⁹ Curiously, Jayasekera has since 'repudiated his own dissertation findings and consigned it to partial oblivion' due to a shift, perhaps, in political beliefs.⁴⁰ His thesis has never been published. The only copy of his dissertation lies in the SOAS Library, barely touched since the 1970s.

The historiography on '1915' evolved from scholarship written from a Marxist perspective, in the 1960s, to sociological explorations of the drivers of violence. For example, A.P. Kannangara, and Ameer Ali analysed the causes of the violence from a particular lens or angle; Kannangara focused on the impact of social disintegration, urbanisation, migration and caste, while Ali explored religious factors, and attempted to highlight the role of pan-Islamism and religious prejudice in antagonising the Sinhalese.⁴¹ John Rogers, meanwhile, placed the 1915 pogrom within a longer genealogy of religious violence, giving it the much needed context that it was removed from until then.⁴² In 1994, Michael Roberts provided the first holistic reappraisal of the causes, discussing economic and religious factors, as well as Sinhala-Buddhist ideology and Sinhalese nationalism.⁴³ Roberts identified the long history of violence

³⁸ A.C. Dep, *Ceylon Police and Sinhala-Muslim Riots of 1915* (Ratmalana, 2001).

³⁹ P.V.J. Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon, 1900-1919, with special reference to the disturbances of 1915* (PhD thesis, University of London, 1970).

⁴⁰ Michael Roberts, 'Sri Lanka: Intellectual Currents and Conditions in the Study of Nationalism', in Michael Roberts (ed.) *Collective Identities* (Colombo, 1997), p. 7. Jayasekera's anti-colonialism appears to have led to a kind of nationalism. See C. R. de Silva, 'Confrontations with Colonialism: Resistance, Revivalism and Reform under British Rule in Sri Lanka 1796-1920, Vol. 1 by P. V. J. Jayasekera' *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* 41/1 (2018) pp. 65-68.

⁴¹ A.P. Kannangara, 'The Riots of 1915 in Sri Lanka: A Study in the Roots of Communal Violence', *Past & Present* 102 (1984), pp. 130-165; Ameer Ali, 'The 1915 Racial Riots in Ceylon (Sri Lanka): A Reappraisal of its Causes', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 4/2 (1981), pp. 1-20. Nira Wickramasinghe, through the lens of modern vehicles, also offers insights on migration and urbanisation in Colombo from the late nineteenth century, and the way such machinery was employed during the pogrom. See Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: everyday machines in colonial Sri Lanka* (New York, 2014), pp. 112-116.

⁴² John Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society in Colonial Sri Lanka* (London, 1987).

⁴³ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations*, pp. 149-212.

in Ceylon over religious processions, dating it back to at least 1899. It is on his work that I build in Chapter 1, dating such violence back further to 1853 (where this thesis begins). In my exploration of the pogrom (Chapter 4), I disagree with George Rowell, who argued that the pogrom was a pre-planned, highly organised act of violence by political actors, by questioning his sources.⁴⁴

Charles Blackton and P.T.M. Fernando examined the spread of the pogrom between 29 May and 6 June, and the response of the state to the pogrom.⁴⁵ However, their analysis of *why* the state responded as it did, first with inaction and then with excess, is limited. In Chapter 5, I attempt to delve further into the state's decision-making process and colonial logic, by which initially police inaction allowed violence to escalate unchecked. This inaction was followed by an abrupt change of gears in which martial law was declared, and innocent Sinhalese were terrorised for two and a half months.

Robert Kearney, who wrote the introduction to the 1970 Symposium on 'The 1915 Riots in Ceylon' observed that the episode was central to constitutional reform in the island.⁴⁶ Yet, the pogrom appears to have been forgotten or ignored in much of the constitutional reform literature that followed. P.T.M. Fernando in 1969, and Prabodith Mihindukulasuriya in 2019 – who take the cause and course of the 1915 pogrom as a given according to the historiography above – have thoroughly examined the post-pogrom campaign for justice, in Ceylon and abroad,

⁴⁴ George Rowell, 'Ceylon's Kristallnacht: A reassessment of the pogrom of 1915', *Modern Asian Studies* 43/3 (2009), pp. 619-648.

⁴⁵ Charles S. Blackton, 'The Action Phase of the 1915 Riots', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 29/2 (1970), pp. 235-254; P.T.M. Fernando, 'The British Raj and the 1915 Communal Riots in Ceylon', *Modern Asian Studies*, 3/3, (1969), pp. 245-255.

⁴⁶ Robert Kearney, 'The 1915 Riots in Ceylon: A Symposium – Introduction', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 29/2 (1970), pp. 219-222.

focusing on the period between 1915 and 1919.⁴⁷ Mihindukulasuriya's research is the most recent on the pogrom, and fills a gap on the nexus between Sinhalese attempts to seek redress for the state's excesses and the role played by British Christian humanitarian organisations. In that context, I formally end my research period in 1915 although I look ahead to 1917, which is when the final state-sponsored Commission of Inquiry Report was published and acted upon. The efforts to appoint a Royal Commission of Inquiry that continued up until 1919 were unsuccessful.

Research on this colonial-era conflict is increasingly relevant to present-day Sri Lanka; Sinhala-Buddhist – Muslim relations have deteriorated in the post-armed conflict period (since 2009), leading to ethno-religious violence reminiscent of the anti-Moor pogrom of 1915. Anti-Muslim attacks, featuring the burning of Muslim homes, businesses and places of worship, and murder, took place across Sri Lanka in June 2014, November 2017, February and March 2018, and most recently, in May 2019.⁴⁸ Muslims were scapegoated for the economic woes faced by Sinhalese, and portrayed as threatening the very existence of the Sinhalese race due to the former's perceived population growth.⁴⁹ The latest episode of anti-Muslim violence was ostensibly in response to the Easter Sunday Attacks in April 2019 perpetrated by Islamist suicide bombers. In May 2019, the broader Muslim community in Sri Lanka was punished (through physical violence and discrimination) for the actions of Islamists. The scale of ethno-religious violence targeting Muslims in contemporary Sri Lanka is, thus far, only comparable to the 1915 pogrom.

⁴⁷ P.T.M. Fernando, 'The Post Riots Campaign for Justice', *Journal of Asian Studies* 29/2 (1970), pp. 255-266; J.G. Prabodith Mihindukulasuriya, *The Role of British Christian Humanitarian Organizations in the Post-1915 Campaign for Justice in Britain* (PhD thesis, University of Colombo, 2019).

⁴⁸ 'From Burning Houses'.

⁴⁹ Shamara Wettimuny, 'On Kandy: How Myths about Minorities Underlie Violence', *Groundviews* (9 March 2018), <https://groundviews.org/2018/03/09/on-kandy-how-myths-about-minorities-underlie-violence/> (2 August 2022). Anti-Muslim sentiment coexists alongside a broader antagonism towards monotheistic groups. Christians, for instance, are viewed with suspicion particularly in the context of encouraging 'unethical' conversions to Christianity. See Verité Research, *Silent Suppression: Restrictions on Religious Freedoms of Christians, 1994-2014* (Colombo, 2015).

Much of the current Islamophobia is considered a recent phenomenon, arising in Sri Lanka's post-armed conflict context, exacerbated by global discourses and the growth of Islamism. Yet the anti-Moor narratives surrounding the 1915 pogrom and the causes of the violence echo anti-Muslim hate speech and violence in Sri Lanka today. Much of the anti-Muslim content presently shared on social media resemble the front-pages of newspapers one hundred years ago. Therefore, investigating the roots of such historical antagonism and the drivers of Sinhala-Buddhist insecurities regarding Moors remains an overarching objective of this thesis.

There is currently no scholarship on the interaction between the important yet ambivalent British position on religious freedom, Sinhalese and Moor identity formation, and ethno-religious violence. This gap stands in marked contrast to research on the impact of British colonial policies on Hindu-Muslim relations in India. The escalation of inter-communal tensions and ethno-religious violence particularly in the context of religious processions in India has featured heavily in South Asian historiography in general.⁵⁰ The 'frequent celebration of religious festivals by public procession' in India, according to Donald Horowitz, precipitated possibly more than half of Hindu-Muslim riots.⁵¹ Although two of Ceylon's most discussed 'riots' in Kotahena in 1883 and in Kandy in 1915 took place in the context of religious processions, there is limited investigation of religious violence stemming from such processions. The 'religious procession' is a key type of precipitating event that I return to throughout the thesis. On the one hand then, Ceylon's experience of religious violence during such processions is placed within the broader phenomenon of religious riots over processions in South Asia and highlights certain interconnectivities as well as divergences (Chapter 1).

⁵⁰ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, 2007).

⁵¹ Donald Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Delhi, 2002), p. 272.

Yet, on the other hand, Ceylon's experience of British colonial rule has often been consumed or overshadowed by the Indian experience, while the distinctions have been frequently disregarded. For instance, the connection between religion and the state differed between India and Ceylon; religion was considered the key organising principle in censuses in India, while ethnicity was more central to social classification in Ceylon.⁵² What impact did that have on group consciousness but also on transnational allegiances and alliances? Meanwhile, and despite important interventions on rebellion and anti-colonial violence in Ceylon, the historiography pales in comparison to the wealth of analysis on the Indian Mutiny of 1857 alone – no doubt due to the huge impact of the Mutiny on the British experience in India.⁵³ Was Ceylon really the 'model colony' the coloniser positioned it to be? Scholarship highlights three major anti-colonial rebellions between the end of the eighteenth century and 1848, taking place before the Indian Mutiny. But what of the next half century, and the early decades of the twentieth century? By identifying several episodes of ethno-religious violence during this period (Chapter 1), I show that Ceylon's conflict landscape is far more pockmarked than the historiography suggests – even though the impact of such violence on the British is minimal.⁵⁴ Throughout my thesis, I attempt to draw parallels and divergences between British colonial rule in Ceylon and India, and answer questions relevant to broader themes in South Asian and colonial history.

⁵² John Rogers, 'Early British Rule and Social Classification in Lanka', *Modern Asian Studies* 38/4 (2004), p. 646.

⁵³ Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Cosmopolitanism and indigeneity in four violent years: the fall of the kingdom of Kandy and the Great Rebellion revisited' in Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.) *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017), pp. 194-215; K.M. de Silva, 'The 1848 "Rebellion" in Ceylon: The British Parliamentary Post Mortem: Part 1', *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 5/1 (1974), pp. 40-76; Nira Wickramasinghe, 'Many Little Revolts or One Rebellion? The Maritime Provinces of Ceylon/Sri Lanka between 1796 and 1800', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 32/2 (2009), pp. 170-188; Kumari Jayawardena, *Perpetual Ferment: Popular Revolts in Sri Lanka in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Colombo, 2010).

⁵⁴ I use 'ethno-religious violence' to describe various types of violence between ethno-religious groups regardless of the specific triggers. I explore and defend my definitions of 'religious' and 'communal' violence in Chapter 1.

Suranjan Das observes that the first communal (Hindu-Muslim) riot in Bengal took place in 1891. These riots escalated until 1946, at the cusp of Indian Independence.⁵⁵ Such a timeframe can be contrasted with that in Ceylon, which saw ethno-religious violence emerge in around 1853, and escalate from the 1880s to 1915, after which ethno-religious violence was, at best, an insignificant feature of the conflict landscape (until the post-Independence period). In India, in contrast to Ceylon, Muslim separatism emerged and grew from the early twentieth century onwards, and Muslims attacked British ‘symbols of colonial and economic oppression’.⁵⁶ In Ceylon, Moors benefited from colonial rule, and aside from a brief demonstration of anti-colonial protest during the ‘fez controversy’ (Chapter 2), they were considered loyal subjects of the Crown (Chapter 5). Thus, it does not always help to compare Ceylon’s Moors with India’s Muslim minority. Indeed, the Ceylon Moors’ desire for disconnection with Indian Muslims, and their greater interest in the Ottoman Empire are important issues I address. I also explore how much influence the Ottoman Sultan, in his role of Caliph of Islam, had on the process of Islamic revival in a non-Muslim country. Furthermore, I have identified more useful parallels between Indian diasporic communities in areas such as the Caribbean – in terms of religious practices (Chapter 1) – and Kenya, in terms of their economic practices (Chapter 3).⁵⁷ Meanwhile, after uncovering a British colonial antisemitic discourse labelling Moors the ‘Jews of Ceylon’ in the way British stereotypes of Jews were deployed in other colonial contexts, I have used such labelling as an analytical lens through which the experience of Moors in Ceylon may be explained.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 2-5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); Goolam Vahed, ‘Constructions of community identity among Indians in colonial Natal, 1860-1910: The role of the *Muharram* festival’, *Journal of African History* 43 (2002), pp. 77-93.

⁵⁸ Abigail Green, ‘The British Empire and the Jews: An Imperialism of Human Rights’, *Past & Present* 199 (2008), pp. 175-205.

Nevertheless, events in India taking place around a similar time, such as in Chauri Chaura in 1922 offer useful ways of thinking through the 1915 pogrom both as an ‘event’ and ‘metaphor’.⁵⁹ As Shahid Amin shows, a violent event can be transformed into something else, like a mobilising nationalist movement or a turning point that catalyses the emergence of future nationalist leaders. Most importantly, and as popular memory on the pogrom suggests, the ‘nationalist master narrative’ serves to ‘explain away, the murder’ of Moors in 1915.⁶⁰ However, the ease with which Moor experiences were occluded in the historiography is not simply due to a ‘selective national amnesia’.⁶¹ Instead, the sources maintained within the colonial and post-colonial archive are part of the problem. In the next subsection on methodology and sources, I highlight the ways in which I attempt to address these shortcomings.

Methodology and Sources

I have identified certain areas in which I address silences, omissions, and misconceptions. In addition to historians omitting Tamil language sources from their analyses, Moor narratives in general tend to be neglected in the analysis of the 1915 pogrom. This is in part due to the paucity of contemporary Moor sources (possibly due to the limited literacy of the Moor population as per Census reports). I use Moor-owned newspapers, and letters and speeches by Moor political actors in my analysis of both Moor identity formation and the Moors’ experience in 1915. Most of these sources are based in the Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA) in Colombo. These archives are particularly difficult to use, as, due to a century of disuse much of the material is disintegrating because of inadequate storage conditions (including exposure to damp). Newspapers originally preserved on microfilms are regularly lost to vinegar syndrome.

⁵⁹ Shahid Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley, 1995).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The national and colonial archives are responsible for much of the distorted understanding of the pogrom. For example, the discussion of the pogrom in the SLNA publication *Sri Lanka: Reflections of History* (Colombo, 2012) makes no reference to the Moors' plight, instead focusing only on the hardships faced by the Sinhalese and the archival material available to confirm such hardships. These silences echo the colonial archive's original omissions in terms of who the victims of the pogrom were, what they experienced, and what happened to them after the pogrom. Such omissions reflect the colonial regime's lack of interest in minority subject populations. I reassess colonial sources by juxtaposing them with other sources, and reading along, against, and beyond the archival grain.⁶²

In addition to sources located at the SLNA in Colombo and Kandy, I have found material in archives and libraries across Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Kew in England, as well as in private collections in Colombo. I also used a newspaper digitised by Harvard University, Bridgeman Images, and ordered postcards containing images of key sites and events off Ebay.⁶³ In a problematic turn of post-colonial events, access to archival material that exist in both the National Archives of Kew and Colombo is not equal. Instead, due to the substantial cost of photographing any material in Colombo, and the poor conservation of documents and microfilms, I tended to use documents available at Kew where possible. Similarly, I found accessing public documents such as Ceylon Blue Books, Administration Reports and 'Riot Files' held in private collections an easier alternative for gathering sources in Sri Lanka. This thesis has benefited from the generosity of Ranjit Wijewardene, who provided me with access

⁶² Remco Raben, 'Ethnic Disorder in VOC Asia: A Plea for Eccentric Reading', *Low Countries Historical Review* 134/2 (2019), pp. 116-117.

⁶³ The Ebay methodology is borrowed from Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Towards a Critical History of Connection: The Port of Colombo, the Geographical "Circuit", and the Visual Politics of New Imperialism ca. 1880-1914', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59/2 (2017), pp. 346-384.

to his father, D.R. Wijewardene's private collection. D.R. Wijewardene was one of Ceylon's first 'press barons', and an emerging nationalist leader who was wrongly arrested by the state during martial law in 1915. Perhaps due to the weight of his own experience, his collection contains entire volumes from the Sinhalese campaign for justice in the aftermath of the pogrom. Similarly, I discovered the only photographs (identified thus far) taken during the pogrom in Malaka Talwatte's private collection of art and newspapers – something Mr. Talwatte too was unaware of. I also use the Michael Roberts Manuscript Collection, which includes Roberts' whole catalogue of research and primary source material compiled over ten years on Sinhalese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century (including newspaper articles and their translations).

In addition to these private collections, community libraries such as the Moors' Islamic Cultural Home (MICH) have provided invaluable primary sources that have not been preserved in the national archive. For example, the silverfish-eaten publication by the Fez Committee from 1906 that contains the proceedings of the fez meeting in 1905 at MICH offer rare insights into a transnational history spanning Ceylon, India, and the Ottoman Empire as shown in Chapter 2.

The thesis does not take a singular approach to investigating Sinhalese-Moor relations, including identity formation and ethno-religious violence. Instead, each chapter adopts a slightly unique approach, depending on the nature of sources used, and the availability of information and secondary literature. For example, in investigating the two religious revivals, I take a comparative history approach, and adopt an almost microhistorical focus on the fez to explore Moor identity formation. In discussing the impact of the First World War on the pogrom, I adopt a connected history approach considering events in Singapore and India, as well as on the Western Front. While most writings on the pogrom have adopted a single

theoretical lens, which affected some of the early historiography on the pogrom, I borrow from the various tools of history writing to explore religious, economic, ethnic, and social matters.

Terminology and Identity Markers

‘Pogrom’

The term ‘1915 Riots’ has increasingly come to be re-labelled a pogrom in the historiography, first in 1994 by Michael Roberts and later in 1995 by Qadri Ismail.⁶⁴ The term ‘pogrom’, derived from ‘the Russian verb “gromit” (to thunder, smash, or break), was used first in 1871 to describe anti-Jewish riots in Odessa during Holy Week’, and was absorbed by the English language in the early twentieth century.⁶⁵ I too use the term pogrom, despite its imperfection, as it offers a glimpse into the terror wrought upon the victims, the Moors, and the fury with which they were hounded, at home, at work and at their place of worship – at a time when the state disregarded the violence as ‘another’ communal disturbance. The terms ‘massacre’ and ‘genocide’ appear to focus on the loss of life, and seem inappropriate for an event in which the death toll is officially ‘only’ 25; the terms also do not convey the targeted destruction of property.⁶⁶ ‘Violence’, Faisal Devji observes, is often ‘a euphemism for some degree of murder or charge of battery’, and is not a term that historians have productively dealt with although I employ it throughout the thesis as a general descriptor.⁶⁷ Importantly, ‘riot’ is compromised: in Ceylon, Nira Wickramasinghe suggests, the terms ‘riots’ and ‘rioters’ ‘were loosely but not innocently used’, and that such language had to be located ‘within a colonial discourse often

⁶⁴ Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 185; Ismail, ‘Unmooring Identity’, p. 82.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey S. Kopstein, ‘Pogroms’ in Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury and Keith Ian Weiser (eds.), *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism* (Cham, 2021), p. 216.

⁶⁶ Pogroms, too, are generally associated with a large loss of life. In Ukraine between 1918-1921, between 50,000 to 200,000 Jews are estimated to have been killed in anti-Jewish pogroms. David Gaunt, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, Natan M. Meir, and Israel Bartal, *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington, 2010), pp. 4-9.

⁶⁷ Faisal Devji, ‘Communities of Violence’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013), p. 801.

aimed at depicting violence between communities as senseless and spontaneous.’⁶⁸ Like Alexander McKinley and Mihindukulasuriya more recently, I deliberately use the evocative term ‘pogrom’ to investigate the events of May-June 1915, to draw attention to the fact that the language and labels are complex, politicised, and ultimately highly significant.⁶⁹

A recurrent doubt in the minds of critics of the term, such as K.M. de Silva, is the absence of state involvement in the 1915 pogrom. De Silva’s work in Sri Lanka is considered canonical, and so his use of the term ‘riots’ has had a disproportionate impact on the reading for 1915.⁷⁰ However, state actors, or armies or militias are not necessary components of a pogrom.⁷¹ Instead, Jeffrey Kopstein observes, neighbours target neighbours while ‘forces out of the community’ can also initiate violence that varies from ‘plunder to assault to murder’.⁷² Meanwhile, the clear intention to economically wipe out Moors in 1915 bears resemblance to the ‘early pogroms’ in southern Russia (such as in 1881-1882).⁷³ According to David Gaunt et al, ‘The motivating factors here were socioeconomic, in particular the disruption caused by industrialization. Thus, these pogroms were not “interpersonal,” but rather targeted wealth and property as symbols of economic injustice.’⁷⁴ Similarly, as I show in Chapters 3 and 4, perceived changes to relative economic positions between Sinhalese and Moors underlay the violence of 1915, reflected in the primary choice of physical target during the pogrom—the Moors’ shops.

⁶⁸ Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History* (New York, 2014), p. 119. Sinhala newspapers used the terms ‘*kōlāhalaya*’, and ‘*kelabeema*’ to refer to ‘riots’, as well as ‘*kalahaya*’ (quarrel/brawl), even when describing the violence of 1915, as opposed to ‘*sanharaya*’ (pogrom/massacre). Tamil newspapers described the violence of 1915 as ‘*kalakam*’ (riot). See *Dinamina*, 31 May 1915, and *Islam Mittiran*, 23 June 1915.

⁶⁹ Alexander McKinley, ‘Merchants, Maidens, and Mohammedans: A History of Muslim Stereotypes in Sinhala Literature of Sri Lanka’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2021), pp. 1-18.

⁷⁰ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 474-478.

⁷¹ Kopstein, ‘Pogroms’, p. 216.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷³ Gaunt et al, *Anti-Jewish Violence*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Importantly, and previously unacknowledged, the first use of the term ‘pogrom’ to describe the violence of 1915 was by an eyewitness to the violence, James Devane, who was appointed a Special Commissioner under Martial Law and tasked with repressing the Sinhalese-led violence. Devane observed in July 1915, a month after the violence subsided ‘[i]n one aspect the rising was not dissimilar to those Jewish *pogroms* not uncommon in Europe in the Middle Ages, and not unknown to certain European countries to-day’.⁷⁵ Devane appears to be thinking comparatively about the violence, in a way I later do about the vilification of Moors in Chapter 3. His use of the term does not grab the attention of the colonial state however, which tended to use the euphemistic terms ‘riots’ and ‘disturbances’, which were later co-opted by the post-colonial state and scholars.

Ethno-religious labels and the background of ethnic consciousness in Lanka

In discussing group identity, I use a combination of emic and etic terms, and am conscious of highlighting the chronology of their use and changed meanings over time.⁷⁶ I mean emic to refer to terms used by the group under consideration, and etic to refer to outsiders’ terms that are used for analytical purposes. I use the term ‘Ceylon’ to describe the island during the period of British colonial rule. In reference to any period before British rule (which began in 1796), I use the term ‘Lanka’, and ‘Sri Lanka’ for the post-1972 period when the island was officially renamed. Meanwhile, I focus on two ethno-religious groups (Sinhalese and Moors) that underwent processes of identity formation between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Sinhalese

⁷⁵ Report of Commissioner Devane, 15 July 1915, TNA, CO 882/10/128, Ceylon: ‘Correspondence relating to disturbances in Ceylon’, May 1915-January 1916, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 14.

A ‘Sinhalese’ identity had existed for centuries prior to British colonialism and was not something born out of the encounter with the British.⁷⁷ In fact, scholars like Michael Roberts and Alan Strathern trace the identity back well before the advent of European colonialism.⁷⁸ Strathern suggests that ‘Sinhaleanness’ may have been deployable as an elite/dynastic category as early as the Mahāvamsa, and that the evidence is quite compelling that it had become an inclusive ethnic identity by the tenth century.⁷⁹ This debate is an explosive one; the famous ‘People of the Lion’ exchange between R.A.L.H. Gunawardana and K.N.O. Dharmadasa is an unresolved dispute over tracing the Sinhalese identity back somewhere precisely between the tenth and twelfth centuries.⁸⁰ This thesis does not delve into that debate; instead, it focuses on a particular later period of identity formation. The British advent to Ceylon heralded an ‘age of reforms’ during a period of colonial transition, that saw ‘new forms of control [arise] out of the recycling of extant traditions’.⁸¹ It is particularly the state’s institutionalisation of ethnic difference that I focus on. The etic term ethnicity is used here to refer to what the colonial state and local actors referred to first as ‘race’ (such as in the newly established Legislative Council in 1833), ‘community’, and later, ‘nationality’ (as in the 1911 Census).⁸² K.M. de Silva emphasises that ethnicity ‘is not immutable but is as liable to change as most other social phenomena’.⁸³ An ethnic group is one that has a sense of itself as distinct, and that distinction is rooted in cultural features such as language, religion, and a shared history.⁸⁴ This shared

⁷⁷ I typically use the term Sinhala to refer to the language spoken by the ethnic group, the Sinhalese.

⁷⁸ Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815* (Colombo, 2004); Alan Strathern ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern Period: Its Place in a Comparative Theory of Second Millennium Eurasian History’, *Modern Asian Studies* 43/4 (2009), p. 833.

⁷⁹ Strathern ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern’, pp. 834-5; Strathern, ‘The Digestion of the Foreign in Lankan History, c. 500-1818’ in Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.) *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017), pp. 221-3. The Mahāvamsa or the ‘Sinhalese Chronicle’ was first written in around the late fifth or sixth century CE.

⁸⁰ R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, ‘The People of the Lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography’, in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London, 1990), pp. 45-86.

⁸¹ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 156.

⁸² John Rogers, ‘Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka’, *The Journal for Asian Studies* 53/1 (1994), p. 18.

⁸³ K.M. de Silva, ‘Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in South Asia’, *South Asia*, 19/2 (1996), p. 140.

⁸⁴ Strathern, ‘Digestion of the Foreign’, p. 220.

history often refers to competition and conflict with other groups. It may also be expressed in an origin myth or a story of common descent, but these factors are not necessary. I accordingly explore how Sinhalese and Moor consciousness of their ‘ethnicity’ changes from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in a way that represented some degree of rupture from the past.⁸⁵

The Sinhalese were naturally internally divided in several ways, including by caste and region. For example, the Goyigamas were the traditionally farming caste whereas the Salagamas were cinnamon-peelers, and Karavas were the fisher caste. The ‘shift of the centres of Sinhalese population from the dry zone to the wet zone after the thirteenth century’ created both ecological and occupational opportunities for newer castes.⁸⁶ From the sixteenth century onwards, the colonial occupation of the lowlands (and the ‘Maritime Provinces’) eventually created a distinction between the Low-Country and the Up-Country. Despite such varying caste or regional identities that often superseded their common or distinct Sinhalese identity, by the end of the nineteenth century the Sinhalese were encouraged by Sinhalese nationalist leaders (as I show in Chapter 2) to value their overall Sinhalese identity more. This re-emphasis of the idea of a ‘Sinhalese *jātiya*’ came at a time when political difference between the Low- and Up-Country Sinhalese (that had existed for almost three centuries) had been institutionalised into two separate seats in the Legislative Council, following the creation of a separate seat for the Kandyan Sinhalese in 1889.⁸⁷ Given the focus of this thesis on violence *between* two ethno-religious groups, I do not discuss caste conflicts.⁸⁸ While such caste differences mattered a great

⁸⁵ Similar debates on the ‘changing’ nature of Buddhism in the nineteenth century exist. See Elizabeth Harris, *Theravāda Buddhism and the British encounter: religious, missionary and colonial experience in nineteenth century Sri Lanka* (London, 2006) pp. 163-5.

⁸⁶ Michael Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 48-49.

⁸⁷ Between 1833 and 1889, the Sinhalese were represented in the Council by a single member, who was invariably a Christian from the Low-Country. Rogers observes that this was not an intentional move by the British to hurt the Kandyans; instead, the British were likely to have been quite indifferent to their cultural differences. Rogers, ‘Early British Rule’, p. 643.

⁸⁸ Moors did not have any ‘hereditary, endogamous’ notions of caste. McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims’, p. 445.

deal and sometimes led to conflict in this period, they do not surface as significant elements in the communal violence analysed here. The receding of caste in issues of communal violence rather testifies to the potential for Sinhalese to act more cohesively, a tendency that re-emerges in the post-colonial period.

Ethnicity remains the primary category in inter-communal relations, but it was heavily associated with and imagined through religion. Importantly, the idea of a Sinhalese '*jātiya*' both included and excluded Sinhalese Christians depending on the context.⁸⁹ This line between Sinhala-Buddhists and Sinhalese Christians sometimes blurred; Christians were occasionally brought into the broader fold of the 'Sinhalese' ethnic group, particularly when Moors or Tamils were the identified 'other'. Some Sinhalese Christians converted back to Buddhism during the late nineteenth century.⁹⁰ The Superintendent of the Census for 1901 credited 'increased Buddhistic zeal and propagandism in the decade' for the increase in the growth rate of the Sinhala-Buddhist population since 1891, reversing a trend of Christian conversions over the previous century.⁹¹ Such conversions suggest that the boundaries of the Buddhist identity were porous, and Sinhalese Christians could return to the Sinhala-Buddhist community. However, Tamil converts to Buddhism would not have been considered 'Sinhalese', as their ethnicity (and caste) were not cultural traits like religion that could be acquired or dispensed with.⁹² I use all three terms in my thesis. When it is possible to distinguish the religious identity of the Sinhalese (especially in the context of religious violence), I use the labels 'Sinhala-Buddhist' or Sinhalese Christians/Catholics. In the discussion of economic grievances, where it is not clear what the religious identities of the Sinhalese under consideration are, I use the broader term 'Sinhalese'.

⁸⁹ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 29.

⁹⁰ The Sinhalese who remained Christian were 'positioned as a kind of fallen minority within the larger Sinhala Buddhist ethos'. Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 64.

⁹¹ Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *The Census of Ceylon, 1901*, Vol I. (Colombo, 1902), p. 93.

⁹² Rogers, 'Post-Orientalism', pp. 14-15.

The hyphenated term ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’, used for the first time as such in my period, is a deliberate invocation of the ethno-religious identity that was politicised (particularly through the modern printing press) in colonial Ceylon during the nineteenth century, and persists to the present-day.⁹³

As the term ‘*jātiya*’ connotes various aspects of identity – and was therefore equivalent to a very general English term such as ‘people’ – I use the term ‘ethnic community’ as defined by K.M. de Silva. De Silva defines ethnic communities as those for ‘whom the core of their identity would be the cultural traits that set them apart from others, language primarily and often religion as well’.⁹⁴ This sense of community arguably constituted a ‘soft’ identity, which was often ‘more relevant to elites than to the masses and whose salience rose and fell according to political context’.⁹⁵ Another English term used by (colonial and local) elites was ‘Ceylonese’, which had a territorial-political character applying to all ethnic and religious groups. For many Sinhalese nationalists, however, the ‘Ceylonese nation’ was considered to have an essentially Sinhalese character.⁹⁶ Similar to the way in which Englishness and Britishness often merged in the imagination of colonialists, so did the idea of the ‘Ceylonese’ and the Sinhalese; both sets of taxonomies operated by the logic of synecdoche. However, I use it to refer to the population of Ceylon as a whole, in the way the colonial state also did.

Moors

Moors in Ceylon did not have as long a history of ethnic consciousness on the island as the Sinhalese. Moors referred to themselves in their vernacular Tamil as ‘Sonahar’ (also spelled

⁹³ Bartholomeusz and De Silva, ‘Buddhist Fundamentalism’, p. 20; Serena Tennekoon, ‘Newspaper nationalism: Sinhala identity as historical discourse’, in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, (London, 1990), pp. 205-226.

⁹⁴ De Silva, ‘Ethnicity, Nationalism’, p. 140.

⁹⁵ Strathern ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern, p. 836.

⁹⁶ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 60.

‘Conakar’), which according to Asiff Hussein means ‘native of Arabia’.⁹⁷ According to M.A. Nuhman, ‘Conakar’ was ‘a derivation of *yavanar* borrowed from Sanskrit or Prakrit, which is found in classical Tamil literature’.⁹⁸ The Sinhalese referred to the Moors as Yon or Yonaka (a derivation of Sonahar) prior to the late nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Moors in Ceylon eventually adopted ‘Moor’ as the English term for self-identification following contact with the British. As discussed above, Ceylon Moors from the nineteenth century onwards attempted to highlight their Arab origins; the claim made in 1907 that the Ceylon Moors could actually trace their lineage to a group of Hashemite exiles from Arabia was itself only a century old. These claims of Hashemite descent were first documented by Sir Alexander Johnston, the first British Chief Justice of Ceylon in his Orientalist studies of the local populations in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ He was informed of such descent by local Moor chiefs whom he approached as ‘sources’.¹⁰¹ There is no evidence as yet, aside from this advice received by Johnston, with regard to the claims regarding Hashemite exiles.¹⁰² There are, however, various artefacts such as Kufic inscriptions on tombstones dating back to the tenth century and earlier that substantiate the millennia-long presence of Arab traders on the island.¹⁰³

There appears to have been little sense of a shared group identity prior to the late nineteenth century (the process of this identity formation is discussed in detail in Chapter 2). The English

⁹⁷ Asiff Hussein, ‘The Moors and their Language’ *MICH Souvenir VII 1999-2004* (Colombo, 2004), p. 53.

⁹⁸ Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims*, p. 45.

⁹⁹ I discuss derogatory Sinhala terms for Moors that were increasingly used by the late nineteenth century in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ ‘[T]hose Arabs of the house of Hashim who were driven from Arabia in the early part of the eighth century by the tyranny of the Caliph Abd-el-Malek Ben Marwan, and who proceeding from the Euphrates southwards made settlements...on the Island of Ceylon’. Alexander Johnston, ‘A letter to the Secretary relating to the preceding inscription’ *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol.I (1827), p. 537.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* Johnston claimed to have conducted investigations ‘with assistance of the most learned and enlightened of the Mohammedan priests and merchants, as well of Ceylon, as of the coasts of Malabar, Coromandel, Malacca and Eastern Islands’.

¹⁰² ‘Casie Chetty, ‘Moors of Ceylon’, p. 337.

¹⁰³ Ali, ‘Genesis of the Muslim Community’, p. 77.

terms ‘community’, ‘nation’, and ‘race’ were used interchangeably by the Moors of my period and a similar range of terms, such as ‘*saadi*’, and ‘*saahiyaththi*’, were used interchangeably in Tamil. The terms ‘Mohammedan’ and ‘Muslim’ (also ‘Moslem’) were also used interchangeably. In contemporary newspapers and public speeches dating back to 1905, elite Moor leaders referred to the ‘Mohammedan nation’, ‘Mohammedan race’, and the ‘Muslim community’ without distinguishing between the terms.¹⁰⁴ For example, in the same English-language speech, an elite Moor repeatedly used the term ‘our community’ but also referred to the ‘Mohammedans’ as a ‘race’ among other ‘races who live as our neighbours’ in Ceylon.¹⁰⁵ Another elite Muslim (from India) speaking in Colombo referred to the ‘Mohammedan community throughout the world’ as well as the ‘Mohammedan community in this Island’, highlighting the globality of the imagined religious community.¹⁰⁶ The paraphrased Tamil translation of this speech referred to ‘our race’ [*ungal saadi*] as opposed to ‘community’.¹⁰⁷ An analysis of the usage of these terms across English and Tamil suggests how fluid or flexible the terms were. The fact that there were no discussions on which terms were considered more legitimate reinforce the idea that such terms were used interchangeably. Ultimately, it is likely that these terms simply meant ‘people’ similar to the way in which ‘*Sinhala jātiya*’ referred to Sinhalese people. Yet, as I show in Chapter 2, the English-term ‘nation’ was increasingly politicised among Moors in a particular context; the need to define and defend the group’s identity.¹⁰⁸

Background of British Policies and the Impact on Moors

¹⁰⁴ *Muslim Nesan*, 6 January 1906.

¹⁰⁵ Fez Committee, *The Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting of the Mohammedans of Ceylon held in Colombo on December 31, 1905* (Colombo, 1906), p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Muslim Nesan*, 6 January 1906.

¹⁰⁸ I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, *A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan’s “Ethnology of the ‘Moors’ of Ceylon”*, (Colombo, 1907).

Prior to tracing the genealogy of ethno-religious violence in British Ceylon in Chapter 1, it is necessary to highlight certain socio-political and economic changes that took place during the first half century of British rule. There is extensive discussion on the way British colonialism resulted in status changes across various Sinhalese groups in the nineteenth century, such as in Kumari Jayawardena's *Nobodies to Somebodies*.¹⁰⁹ By contrast, aside from major interventions such as Lorna Dewaraja's chapter on Muslims under British rule, there is not much literature on the impact of British colonialism on Moors during the early nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, British policies particularly affected Moors insofar as they were released from the historical restrictions placed on them under Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule, including restrictions on the freedom of religion, mass expulsions from colonially-occupied territories, as well as control over the movement and accumulation of wealth by Moors.¹¹¹ The change in the Moors' socio-political and economic positions by the early twentieth century was stark; the Superintendent of the 1911 Census recorded the Moors as among the most economically successful local groups in the island.¹¹² How did such a significant shift in status take place in just over a century?

Initially, the common perception of Moors – apparently shared by the Portuguese, Dutch, and the British East India Company – was that of a competitor to the limited quantum of wealth the island offered. However, as the actors involved in the colonisation of the island changed, so too did the thinking around economic prospects and the accumulation of wealth.¹¹³ As the British

¹⁰⁹ Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: the Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2000).

¹¹⁰ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, pp. 148-158.

¹¹¹ De Silva, 'Portuguese Policy Towards the Muslims', pp. 113-119.

¹¹² Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 236.

¹¹³ This shift in thinking along with the shift in actors is demonstrated clearly in the contrast with India, where mercantilism remained the guiding principle until the mid-Victorian period. This shift from mercantilism to free trade roughly correlates with the end of Company rule following the Indian Mutiny in 1857. See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 6/1 (1953), p. 6.

Crown took over the administration of the colony, it gradually adopted Britain's evolving imperial economic policy of free trade.¹¹⁴ Guided by the metropole, the colonial administration's economic objectives were to grow the national economy of Ceylon. To transform Ceylon's economy and make investing in the island a commercially viable option, it turned to non-European groups on the island. The Moors were one such group.

On the one hand, the British saw the Moors as 'industrious', 'energetic', and 'enterprising', while also 'thrifty', 'calculating' and 'shrewd'.¹¹⁵ Such perceptions can be contrasted with the perception of Sinhalese as 'lazy' and 'indolent'.¹¹⁶ Such essentialisation of ethnic qualities was not unique to colonial rule in Ceylon. British ethnological conceptions of 'natives' were neither uniform nor static, and varied depending on the context in which they regarded the 'natives'.¹¹⁷ For instance, although the British in Ceylon praised or privileged the Moors as enterprising in trade, elsewhere, Muslims could be represented as the opposite of productive: Edward Said points out that Muslims were frequently considered particularly lazy, such as in Lamartine's experience of Palestine.¹¹⁸

Yet in Ceylon, Ameer Ali observes that the colonial logic behind such a differentiation between the Sinhalese and the Moors was socio-economic and derived from the primary nature of the labour they engaged in – cultivation and trading respectively. The British accordingly perceived Moors in Ceylon as sympathetic to their vision of economic individualism; some even admired

¹¹⁴ P. J. Cain, 'Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context' in Andrew Porter *et al* (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (1999), pp. 38-41.

¹¹⁵ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 121; John D. Ferguson, *Ceylon in 1903* (Colombo, 1903), p. clxvi.

¹¹⁶ J. Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: an account of the island, physical, historical, and topographical, with notices of its natural history, antiquities, and productions* 2nd ed. (London, 1859), p. 127; Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon* (London, 1803), p. 190.

¹¹⁷ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), p. 178. Laziness was a trait supposedly common among 'Orientals'.

the Moors' ethos regarding economic pursuits.¹¹⁹

On the other hand, the relaxation of impediments, and the granting of inducements to Moors took place gradually. Shortly after arriving on the island, Governor Frederick North's 1799 Proclamation guaranteed laws and practices that distinctly applied to Moors, and codified practices including marriage in a Mohammedan Law in 1806.¹²⁰ North also abolished the Dutch poll tax imposed on the Moors, lambasting it as 'an oppressive and disgraceful tax on an industrious race.'¹²¹ Upon occupation of the whole island in 1815, the British found Moors were a useful form of transport labour. Moors provided cattle for the transport of goods and connected trade from the inland regions to the Eastern coast.¹²² Meanwhile, following the suppression of the Uva-Wellassa Rebellion of 1817-18 (when the Buddha's Tooth Relic was stolen from the British who had taken possession of it in 1815, and a pretender to the Kandyan throne emerged), the British rewarded the loyalty shown by Moors. On 2 March 1818, a Proclamation extended political patronage to Moors – including the ability to appoint a Muhandiram of their own (as opposed to being answerable to a Sinhalese Muhandiram).¹²³

The British were aware of how Moors were treated by their predecessors and appear to have framed their colonial policies in light of such prior treatment. For instance, in 1806, Alexander Johnston advocated the colonial state to induce Moors (and Indian Moors in particular) to trade in Ceylon by establishing free ports, and repealing taxes that 'were peculiarly obnoxious to the Mohammedan traders of Ceylon, and...Mohammedan capitalists of the coasts of Malabar,

¹¹⁹ Ali, 'Muslims and capitalism', p. 311.

¹²⁰ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 148.

¹²¹ Frederick North, quoted in Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 148.

¹²² Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 19.

¹²³ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 150; Sivasundaram 'Cosmopolitanism and indigeneity', pp. 194-199.

Coromandel, and Malacca'.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the British removed economic disabilities (originally imposed by the Dutch but upheld by early British administrators) in 1832. By order of government regulation, Moors were given the ability to purchase land in key commercial areas of Colombo such as Pettah and the Fort in 1832.¹²⁵

The Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833 came out of a Commission of Inquiry into improving the governance of Britain's colonies in the East. The Commission's recommendations for Ceylon led to the centralisation of the colonial administration, and the establishment of a Legislative Council with nominated communal representatives.¹²⁶ The Council is often identified as a crucial mechanism by which colonial rulers promoted ethnic identities and competition. Yet importantly, Moor identity was not promoted this way. Unlike the Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers, the Moors were not given separate representation until 1889 (Chapter 2).

It was in the economic sphere, then, that Moors first saw a change in their fortunes, as well as in the space offered by the British for Moors to practice their religion. Within this permissive environment, Moors developed their capital base through trade and urban property. Conflict and grievances stemming from religious and economic competition are the two key causal themes on which I focus, before discussing the course of the pogrom, and the state's response.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 presents the long history of ethno-religious violence in British colonial Ceylon,

¹²⁴ Johnston's use of the term 'capitalist' highlights the economic ethos of the time. Johnston, 'A letter to the Secretary', p. 537+.

¹²⁵ Government regulation published in the *Colombo Journal*, 21 January 1832.

¹²⁶ G.C. Mendis (ed.) *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*, Vols. 1-2 (Oxford, 1956).

labelled 'riots' by the state and historians, between 1853 and 1915. It does not limit itself to Sinhalese-Moor violence alone, and instead sets the stage for the following chapters by painting an impression of the religious violence landscape between and even within ethno-religious groups in Ceylon. The chapter presents the status of religious freedom on the island and the parameters of religious violence, before revealing a chronology of violence. The function of the chapter is to establish the empirical dimensions of violence during my period, leaving much of the explanatory and analytical work for subsequent chapters. However, the chapter includes two contextualising explorations of sound worship (pp. 58-63) and the Muharram festival (pp. 74-78), which constitute two of the key religious activities under investigation.

Chapter 2 discusses identity formation across both the Sinhala-Buddhist and Moor populations. This chapter explores the scope of the Buddhist and Islamic revivals, reflects on the extent to which colonial orientalist discourse and scholarship served colonial domination, and whether it in fact consistently shaped one kind of identity formation over another. It also explores the politicisation of ethnicity, in my period, to understand what stymied Ceylon's development of the type of secular, trans-religious, trans-ethnic anti-colonial movement that emerged in India (alongside a religious communalist 'nationalism'). The discussion of the two revivals is situated within the framework of the global conjuncture to understand exactly why changes in identity construction took place in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 3 discusses antagonism between the Sinhalese and Moors in terms of competition over trade, land and capital, and the spread of harmful stereotypes. The first section explores the economic and social grievances of the Sinhalese with respect to Moors, such as the perceived increasing 'ubiquitous' presence of Moor traders and their 'complicity' in the spread of European cultural influences. The second section discusses the manifestation of those

grievances in the forms of vilification and discrimination. The chapter ends by examining why the colonial state failed to detect growing Sinhalese antagonism, freely expressed in the press, towards the Moors.

Chapter 4 highlights the main features of the 1915 pogrom and discusses the trigger event and the spread of the violence. It begins by re-examining the Gampola Perahera case that has been discussed extensively in the historiography, and the months leading up to the pogrom. Next, it reconstructs the way in which violence erupted on 29 May 1915 and contests the nationalist narrative of events. Finally, it attempts to foreground the experience of Moors during the nine days of the pogrom.

Chapter 5 analyses colonial governance in the context of the First World War. Globally, the First World War represented the turning point for several anti-colonial, nationalist movements. In Ceylon, by contrast, it was the state's response to the 1915 pogrom that is considered to have galvanised an anti-colonial movement; the War has never featured in this analysis. The chapter explores whether the experience of the War made the pogrom more likely to take place and determined the (belated) over-reaction of the state.

The thesis ends with a Conclusion that reassesses the history of the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom, and ethno-religious violence in Ceylon between 1853 and 1915. It also reflects on the relevance of this period in Ceylon's history towards understanding present-day Sinhalese-Muslim relations.

Chapter 1: A Genealogy of Ethno-Religious Violence

The 1915 pogrom has been studied as a discrete event, and a watershed in terms of political relations between the Sinhalese and the state. Lorna Dewaraja claims that Sinhalese and Moors enjoyed ‘good relations’ before 1915, suggesting that the anti-Moor ‘riots of 1915’ were an aberration.¹ Rarely has the pogrom been studied alongside other episodes of ethno-religious violence, such as the Kotahena Riot. John Rogers attempted the first concerted genealogy of ‘riots and disturbances’ in British Ceylon and brought the ‘religious riot’ into sharper focus.² He analysed the ‘riots’ in Kotahena in 1883, Kalutara in 1896-97, Anuradhapura in 1903, Gampola in 1907 (and the extended Gampola Perahera case between 1912-1916), and the 1915 anti-Moor ‘riots’. Michael Roberts claims that ‘about fourteen’ such confrontations over noise worship took place between 1899 and 1915, but he focuses on the Gampola Perahera case and the events of May-June 1915. This chapter places the events of May-June 1915 in a broader context of ethno-religious violence, which can be traced back for more than three-quarters of a century. I suggest that ethno-religious violence has a far longer history than previously understood.

My chronology of violence dates between 1853 and 1915. 1853 is the starting point simply because it is the earliest example of violence over religion that I have found in archival material. I do not assume that such violence did not exist before the publication/reportage of such issues.³ While the broader dynamics that explain ethno-religious conflict involving Moors are set out

¹ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka.*, p. 158.

² Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 157.

³ For example, Muslims accused Christians of destroying a mosque in Colombo in January 1848 in the press. However, due to the absence of any further detail around the alleged event, I do not consider it in my genealogy of ethno-religious violence. *Colombo Observer*, 23 March 1848.

in subsequent chapters, there are three important factors that made violence more likely from the 1850s onwards. First, the accumulation of land by Moors in Pettah and the Fort from 1832 onwards seems to correlate with contestation over perceived ‘sacred space’ (defined below) in Colombo.⁴ Meanwhile, Indian Moors among other Indian ‘natives’ were encouraged by the colonial state to move to Ceylon and were enticed by colonial land grants in the 1830s.⁵

Second, religious violence involving Moors accelerates in the late nineteenth century in areas like Gampola and Kandy, following the construction of mosques. Finally, I suggest that the enactment of the Police Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, to regulate the use of sound in religious processions, was a response by the colonial state to a possibly new and growing cause for violence. This position differs from that of Roberts, who – unaware of the 1853 Trincomalee ‘riot’ – argues that the Ordinance created the conditions for violence and often exacerbated religious tensions.⁶ ‘Sound worship’ was both the trigger for the 1915 pogrom as well as a recurring feature in other episodes of religious violence between 1853 and 1915.

A. Religious Freedom and State Neutrality on Issues of Religion

Globally and locally, administrators across the British Empire offered policies of non-interference to local populations at various times.⁷ The state passed various proclamations and regulations on religious freedom; three compacts are of particular importance. First, shortly after arrival on the island, Governor Frederick North issued a Proclamation in 1799 that guaranteed ‘liberty of conscience and the free exercise of religious worship to all persons who

⁴ *Colombo Journal*, 21 January 1832.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Michael Roberts, ‘Noise as Cultural Struggle: Tom-Tom Beating, the British, and Communal Disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880s-1930s’, in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi, 1990), p. 257.

⁷ For example, after the Indian Mutiny and the establishment of the British Raj, the British ‘officially committed to its policy of non-interference in religious matters’ in India and colonial Burma. Nile Green, ‘Buddhism, Islam and the Religious Economy of Colonial Burma’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 46/2 (June 2015), p. 183.

inhabit and frequent the said settlements of the Island of Ceylon'.⁸ The reference to those who 'frequent' the island is likely to have included Indian Moors who were itinerant traders, and moved back and forth between Ceylon, and the Coromandel and Malabar coasts.

In Ceylon in 1815, the state offered certain obligations to one of the local populations over which it presided.⁹ This obligation (and the second compact associated with religion) is known as the Kandyan Convention of 1815. The last King of the overwhelmingly Buddhist Kandyan Kingdom was captured by invading British troops in early 1815. In March 1815, the British offered limited religious freedoms to the conquered chiefs who signed the peace treaty, known as the Kandyan Convention. Article 5 of the Convention held that 'the religion of Boodhoo [Buddhism], professed by the chiefs and inhabitants of these provinces, is declared inviolable, and its rites, ministers, and places of worship are to be maintained and protected.'¹⁰ Buddhists across the island (as opposed to only those living in the former Kandyan Provinces) viewed the Convention as a socio-legal contract with the British.¹¹ The state was expected to protect the freedom of Buddhist belief, and the rites and practices associated with the advance of such beliefs.

Accordingly, early anti-colonial resistance during the 1817-18 Uva-Wellassa Rebellion was partly driven by Buddhist discontent. The British had taken 'guardianship' of the Buddha's Tooth Relic, as it gave them a degree of legitimacy even in the Buddhist mindset; the rebels sought to reclaim the relic. Alan Strathern argues that such violence was not 'revolutionary' but

⁸ Section 6, Ordinance No. 23 of 1799, in H. White, 'Legislation on Ceylon in the Early Portion of the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 14/47 (1896), p. 97.

⁹ R. L. Stirrat, 'Catholic Identity and Global Forces in Sinhala Sri Lanka', in Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and C.R. De Silva (eds.), *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka* (Albany, 1998), p. 150.

¹⁰ 'Kandyan Convention' (2 March 1815), <https://citizenslanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Kandyan-Convention-1815-E-1.pdf> (2 August 2022).

¹¹ Roberts remains sceptical about how attached Kandyan Buddhists really were to the Convention.

‘restorationist’. He shows that the events of 1815-1818 fit into a longer pattern of deploying ‘indigenous authority’, whether by the British or local ‘pretenders’ to the throne.¹²

Notwithstanding such resistance, Buddhists considered the Kandyan Convention to advance state support to Buddhism, rather than being merely a compact about non-interference or religious freedom. The British, by contrast, viewed the Convention as no different to other laws introduced during their rule – one that could be amended or superseded as required. The use of the Police Ordinance, violating the Kandyan Convention, was why some Sinhalese portrayed the British as ‘perfidious villains’.¹³ Walisinghe Harischandra (a nationalist defender of Anuradhapura) wrote,

The English government have given a solemn pledge to protect Buddhism and maintain it, and I cannot see how they could go behind that and enforce a police regulation. The question is, should they observe the Police Ordinance more closely than the compact entered into between Great Britain on the one hand and the Kandyan King on the other...Local legislation cannot over-ride that compact.¹⁴

The Kandyan Convention, then, remained a thorn in the side of the British, as it obliged them to protect Buddhism. The third compact pertaining to religious freedom, introduced in 1833, was the state’s avowed position of neutrality in religion in Ceylon that essentially restated the 1799 Proclamation. The British, like the Dutch and Portuguese before them, were associated with Christianity and missionaries.¹⁵ However, the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833 touted the expediency of religious neutrality in the administration of the island as a single territorial unit. The Commissioners of the reforms argued,

¹² Strathern, ‘Digestion of the Foreign’, p. 235.

¹³ Michael Roberts, *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon 1929-1950*, Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1977), p. lxxvi.

¹⁴ Walisinghe Harischandra, *The Sacred City of Anuradhapura, with Forty-six Illustrations* (Colombo, 1908; repr New Delhi, 1998), pp. 85-86.

¹⁵ K.M. De Silva, ‘The Government and Religion: The Problems and Policies c1832 to c1910’, *University of Ceylon: History of Ceylon*, Vol. 3 (Peradeniya, 1973), pp. 187-188.

the interference of the government in the religious affairs of the country, although induced from considerations of policy...has checked the improvement of the country, and the advancement of the people...Nor can it [the state] justly afford to the Bhoodist faith a greater degree of support than it extends to the Christian religion, and to other systems, including the Hindu and Mahomedan [sic].¹⁶

This policy of neutrality received a backlash from both Buddhists and missionaries.¹⁷ Certain missionaries, including Spence Hardy, led a ten-year campaign to convince the state to dissociate itself from Buddhism.¹⁸ Buddhists, meanwhile, viewed any such move as a betrayal of the Convention's terms. Despite this tension, in 1844 Governor Campbell received instructions from London to dissociate the state from Buddhism – orders that emphasise the influence administrators in the metropole, such as the Secretary of State for the Colonies, held over administrators in the colonies. This turn towards a greater influence of Christianity over colonial policy mirrored developments in India between the late 1830s and mid-1850s.¹⁹ In Ceylon, the policy of dissociation was signalled as complete when in 1847 the government that had thus far held custody over the Tooth Relic handed over this single most important symbol of Buddhism to the Buddhists.²⁰

K.M. de Silva suggests that one cause of the Matale Rebellion in the former Kandyan Provinces in 1848 was anti-British resentment for severing the 'traditional link between Buddhism and the state'.²¹ Following the brutal suppression of the Rebellion, Governor Torrington proposed

¹⁶ Mendis, *Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*, p. 37.

¹⁷ The colonial state could not be considered even nominally neutral until it disestablished the Anglican Church in Ceylon in 1881. See Tessa Bartholomeusz, 'Catholics, Buddhists, and the Church of England: The 1883 Sri Lankan Riots', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 15 (1995), p.102. Even after the official separation of church and state, Buddhists complained that government support for missionary schools was used to 'destroy children's love for their own religion'. *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 28 February 1890.

¹⁸ M.U. De Silva, 'Suppression of Buddhism under the British and the Resistance of the Buddhists' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 49 (2004), p. 39; De Silva, 'The Government and Religion', p. 190.

¹⁹ Such policies provoked, to some extent, the 1857 Mutiny. Ian Copland, 'Christianity as an arm of Empire: The ambiguous case of India under the Company, c. 1813–1858', *The Historical Journal* 49/4 (2006), pp. 1042-45.

²⁰ De Silva, 'Suppression of Buddhism', p. 40.

²¹ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 340.

a solution to such underlying grievances to Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Torrington noted, ‘the first and foremost of our endeavours will I hope be the restoring to the religion of the people and its Ministers that qualified protection which is due to them by treaty, necessary for them on grounds of policy, and may not be inconsistent with the mild system of toleration of the British Government’.²²

Toleration, however, never manifested into a clear policy. Indeed, the ‘Bhoodist Question’ continued to be debated in Parliament in Britain in 1853, after the restoration of the status quo ante. These debates focused on the extent to which the colonial state should involve itself in Buddhist affairs such as the management of temple lands; Christian Europeans in Ceylon wanted all support and connection with Buddhism severed.²³ Following the Kotahena Riot in 1883, Colonel Henry Olcott (a Theosophist introduced in the next chapter) asked the colonial state for a ‘formal declaration of religious neutrality along the lines of the Indian proclamation of 1858’.²⁴ The Governor at the time, Gordon, rejected the proposal out of concern that such a proclamation may have suggested a prior lack of neutrality.

Thus, the state had to navigate the complex environment of maintaining neutrality while administering law and order in the context of religious practices that were ostensibly guaranteed by the Kandyan Convention.²⁵ It unpredictably vacillated between an attempt to maintain legitimacy by acting as a protector of Buddhism, a desire to be seen as neutral to ensure stability, and an inherent preference for Christianity that was often driven by personalities in Colombo and London.

²² Torrington to Earl Grey, 15 September 1848, SLNA, Lot 5/35, Governors inward letters.

²³ *Ceylon Times*, 18 January 1853.

²⁴ De Silva, ‘Government and Religion’, p. 204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

B. Conceptualising Ethno-Religious Violence

The scale and intensity of the 1915 pogrom were certainly new, at least in the British colonial period, yet ethno-religious violence was by no means unprecedented. Nira Wickramasinghe challenges the idea of Ceylon as a ‘model colony’, observing frequent disruptions to colonial law and order that resembled violence in other colonies.²⁶ Religious violence (defined below) was certainly more prevalent than suggested in colonial discourse and early post-colonial discourse. The term most used to describe and later analyse religious violence was ‘riot’. ‘Riot’ is thus both a category of practice and of analysis.²⁷ The term was originally used by the colonial state and the English-language press, and later adopted by the parties involved in the violence, who also referred to such violence as ‘riots’.

In the post-colonial period, scholars writing on the most prolific episodes of religious violence, such as G.P.V. Somaratna’s scholarship on the Kotahena ‘riots’ and P.V.J. Jayasekera’s doctoral thesis on the 1915 ‘riots’, continued to employ such terminology. Veena Das speaks to the difficulty in defining the various types of violence including ‘riots’, ‘pogroms’ and ‘civil disturbances’ that are often conflated as ‘riots’ in ‘official discourse, academic writing, and even individual testimony’.²⁸ In Britain and France (i.e. non-colonial contexts), governments saw ‘riots’ as ‘a violent disturbance of the peace by an assembly or body of persons; an outbreak of active lawlessness or disorder among the populace’.²⁹ Thus ‘riot’ is a distinctly European category of analysis that (re)emerges as a tool of colonial governance and control in the nineteenth century, and often indicated public disorder. I do not use ‘riot’ as an analytical

²⁶ Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, p. 119. In India, communal violence between Hindus and Muslims escalated from the 1920s onwards. The 1940s witnessed the major Dacca Riot of 1941 and the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’ and Noakhali Riots of 1946. See Anwesha Roy, *Making Peace, Making Riots: Communalism and Communal Violence, Bengal 1940-1947* (Cambridge, 2018).

²⁷ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, ‘Beyond Identity,’ *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), pp. 1-8.

²⁸ Veena Das, *Life and Words: violence and the descent into the ordinary* (Berkeley, 2007), pp. 205-206.

²⁹ Jack Fruchtman, Jr, ‘Introduction: The Arc of Violence: Riots, Disturbances of the Peace, Public Protests and Crowd Actions in History’, in Michael T. David (ed.) *Crowd Actions in Britain and France from the Middle Ages to the Modern World* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 4.

category but instead refer to it as a category deployed by colonial authorities and contemporaries. Aside from the latter stages of the 1915 pogrom, the colonial state does not appear to have been paranoid about its own security and remained aloof from religious violence between local groups. In other words, it is difficult to interpret colonial depictions of violence as part of a ‘divide and rule’ strategy that pitted religious or ethnic groups against one another.³⁰

Christopher Bayly acknowledges that there is a ‘question whether a distinction should be drawn between “religious conflicts” – disputes over symbols, rites and precedents – and “communal conflicts” in which broader aspects of a group’s social, economic and political life were perceived as being unified and marked off from others by religious affiliation’.³¹ Similarly, I define religious violence as an episode in which sacred symbols, space or activities (including religious buildings and festivals) become the explicit flashpoint for heated disagreement between groups.³² This need not involve physical attacks on persons or property, but it may involve symbolic violence, such as the desecration or disparagement of what other groups hold to be sacred. By contrast, I use the term ‘communal violence’ when the immediate or primary triggers seem to be group interests not of a religious nature. That is to say, religious identities may have structured the violence even if it was not triggered by concern over sacred symbols, space or activities. I also use ‘ethno-religious violence’ as an umbrella term to describe the entire gamut of violence between ethno-religious groups regardless of the specific triggers.

³⁰ Wickramasinghe has convincingly argued against the existence of ‘divide and rule’ more generally in Ceylon. Nira Wickramasinghe, “Divide and Rule” in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) During the Period of Transfer of Power’, *University of Colombo Review* 10 Special Issue (1991), pp. 75-93.

³¹ Christopher A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi, 1998), p. 212. For Suranjan Das, religious identities ‘concerned personal allegiance to a set of practices and dogmas, often in search of a reward from a transcendental reality. Communalism, on the other hand, entails individual commitment to the special interests of a religious community in order to gain worldly advantages at the expense of other communities.’ See Das, *Communal Riots*, p. 9.

³² Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, p. 222.

Rogers' term 'religious riot' refers to religious violence (as defined by me) that took the form of public disorder in the manner reflected in the contemporary language of riot. He suggests religious riots, in the context of Lankan history, were 'new', and first appeared 'in the 1880s' between Buddhists and Catholics.³³ Tessa Bartholomeusz similarly observes a shift in the relationship between Buddhists and Catholics between the 1870s and 1880s, from unity to confrontation (while the Church of England recedes into the background from previously being the primary foe of the Catholics).³⁴ The only 'riot' she focuses on is the Kotahena Riot of 1883. She argues that the shift in relations was due to a change in the understanding of which religious group was privileged by the colonial state. From the point of view of the Catholics, the state was increasingly privileging Buddhists, as opposed to only Anglicans (while denying patronage to the Catholics).³⁵ Curiously, there is no evidence of religious violence involving Anglicans, for two reasons. First, Anglicans were fewer in number than the Catholics (who had been converted by the Portuguese and remained Catholic even under the Protestant Dutch), and they remained a minority within the Christian population in Ceylon. Second, processions – the primary space in which religious violence erupted – were not central to Anglican culture in this period. This cultural difference is embodied in the state's antipathy to sound worship, and the Victorian belief (as highlighted by Roberts) that communion with God should take place in the privacy of the home.³⁶

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Harris suggests that Buddhists, who previously demonstrated a willingness to coexist with other religious groups, eventually were responsible for escalating

³³ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 158.

³⁴ Bartholomeusz, 'Catholics, Buddhists, and the Church of England', p. 92.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-97.

³⁶ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 153.

inter-religious tensions.³⁷ She suggests that in the 1870s, Buddhists (re)introduced pomp and pageantry to their religious festivals with a level of ‘noise’ that had not been seen since the fall of the Kandyan Kingdom.³⁸ Indeed, Harris has already complicated the historiography by suggesting that religious tension dates to Vesak Poya in 1815, exactly a century before the 1915 pogrom erupted during the Vesak festival of that year. The episode in 1815 was contained to the realm of verbal and written protest.³⁹ This example raises the question of how the history of intellectual or rhetorical conflict relates to that of physical violence, a question that I explore further in Chapter 2.

The bulk of this chapter is concerned with episodes of tension that can be strictly defined as ‘religious violence’ because of their immediate or primary trigger points. In the latter part of the chapter, however, ‘communal violence’ between Sinhalese and Moors is traced, as these episodes are no less important in understanding the developing frictions between these communities.⁴⁰

The language used in the primary sources is, unsurprisingly, not consistent. The state and religious press, for example, when reporting on ‘riots’ between ‘factions’ or ‘communities’, occasionally used religious identity markers and other times used ethnic identity markers. Such inconsistency in labelling underlines the fact that there were no monolithic colonial categories

³⁷ Elizabeth J. Harris, *Religion, Space and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts* (Oxford, 2018), p. 79. I agree with her argument regarding Roberts' neglect of Buddhist agency in provoking inter-religious competition.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69. More broadly, Harris believes that open-air preaching contributed to religious tensions, an issue I discuss in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ Post-colonial scholars like Gyanendra Pandey critique the term ‘communalism’ as a form of colonialist knowledge that referred to ‘suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities’. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Oxford, 2006), p. 6. Yet the Sinhalese and the Moors, as discussed in the introduction, were aware of themselves as distinct groups prior to colonialism in Ceylon, and it is in that context that I use ‘communal’ to describe relations between two groups who – when violence erupted (for even innocuous reasons) – mobilised along these group lines.

and that religious and ethnic categories blurred in the minds of observers and participants. The use of ethnic identity markers to identify belligerents in events not necessarily connected to ethnic or religious disputes highlights the extent to which categories of identity were constructed and reported with a particular colonial logic, and underscore the biases preserved in the colonial archive. In reporting the murders of three women, for example, a *Ceylon Times* editorial refers to ‘four Malabars’ as potential suspects, a term used to describe Tamils.⁴¹ The term ‘Tamil’ increasingly replaces ‘Malabar’ towards the end of the nineteenth century, and reflects an evolution in the use of ethnic labels.⁴² The indigenous use of identity markers to refer to people, as found in vernacular newspapers, emphasises the broad-based use of ethno-religious identity markers among local populations.

Through an analysis of English and vernacular newspapers, including state publications and community journals, I have identified at least 23 events of religious violence that took place between 1853 and 1915, in addition to the five ‘religious riots’ that have been previously explored in the historiography (Figure 1). Most of these 23 are ‘new’ events that are not featured in the historiography on religious violence in Ceylon.⁴³ The total figure of religious violence during British colonial rule must therefore be revised upwards, from five to (at least) 28. The aggressors in such violence were Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.⁴⁴ The victims of such religious violence included Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians alike. Furthermore, I have identified and classed 15 additional events as ‘communal violence’

⁴¹ *Ceylon Times*, 11 January 1853.

⁴² Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 58.

⁴³ Meanwhile, certain events such as the Wattala Riot and the Balangoda Riot are mentioned in the scholarship but are framed as caste conflicts or protests.

⁴⁴ The Christians involved in religious violence were always identified as Catholics. The Muslims were always Moors.

between Sinhalese and Moors. These events are differentiated from ‘religious violence’ as defined above.⁴⁵

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN CEYLON: 1853-1915

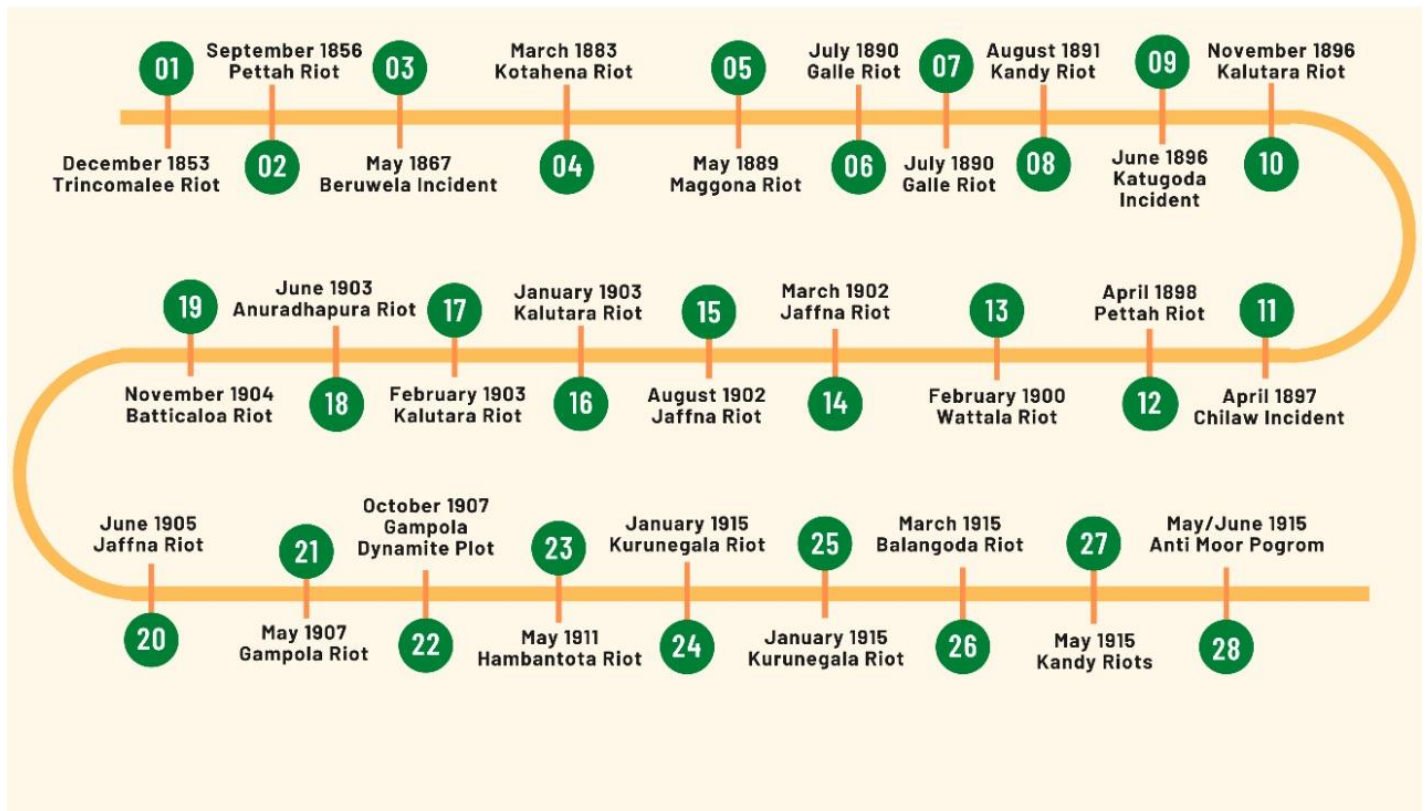


Figure 1: Episodes of Religious Violence in Ceylon: 1853-1915

C. A Chronology of Violence

These events of religious violence can be classified according to the place, object, or form of behaviour that triggered them, such as places of worship, sacred spaces, and religious processions. In contestations over sacred space, Yoginder Sikand suggests that clear group boundaries are drawn, pitting one group against the other.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, objects, like trees, can

⁴⁵ *Ceylon Observer*, 31 October 1895; 14 May 1897; 21 October 1897; 26 December 1900; 13 April 1903; 4 April 1904; 19 April 1906; 16 April 1913.

⁴⁶ Yoginder Sikand, *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 2.

become sacred in certain contexts.⁴⁷ There are three ways in which a symbol, space or activity could be considered 'sacred'. First, they may be so in an 'immanentist' sense, to deploy Strathern's terminology, meaning that supernatural beings or forces are held to be immanent within them.⁴⁸ For instance, Buddhists make offerings before Bo trees, which are believed to be occupied by deities whose goodwill may be secured by supplication. It follows that any damage or desecration of these symbols, spaces, or activities could damage relations with these entities, leading, for example, to misfortune. Secular and colonial reportage tend to underestimate this dimension.

Second, something can be considered sacred in a 'transcendentalist' sense, insofar as these symbols/spaces/activities have a soteriological import; for example, they affect people's karmic status or afterlife. Finally, something may be sacred if it is perceived as embodying or reflecting a group's most fundamental identity and values. An attack on such symbols/spaces/activities is therefore viewed as an attack on the group itself by denigrating the core of its self-identity.

I analyse religious violence chronologically and focus on the immediate cause or context of the violence, the identity of the aggressors, provocateurs, and victims, and what the response of the state was, if it is known. It is far from unproblematic to sort participants out into these categories and the categorisations are not intended to convey a moral charge. As Veena Das acknowledges, 'the images of perpetrator and victim are frequently reversed'... or where 'aggressors can experience themselves as if they were victims'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, my analysis cannot proceed without some such categorisation. One reason that the sensation of victimhood is so subjective

⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego, 1987), p. 12; Martyn Smyth, *Religion, Culture, and Sacred Space* (New York, 2008), p. 21.

⁴⁸ Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), Chapter 1 for 'immanentism' and 'transcendentalism'.

⁴⁹ Veena Das, 'Specificities: Official Narratives, Rumour, and the Social Production of Hate', *Social Identities* 4/1 (1998), p. 109.

is because of the role of provocation. Provocateurs are defined as people who engage in symbolic violence (therefore coming under the definition of religious violence), while aggressors are those who initiate physical violence. Meanwhile, in my discussion of the ‘riots’ already written about in the historiography, such as the 1903 Anuradhapura Riot, I suggest my understanding of the event differs from other historians once it is placed in a much longer genealogy of violence.

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN CEYLON: 1853-1915

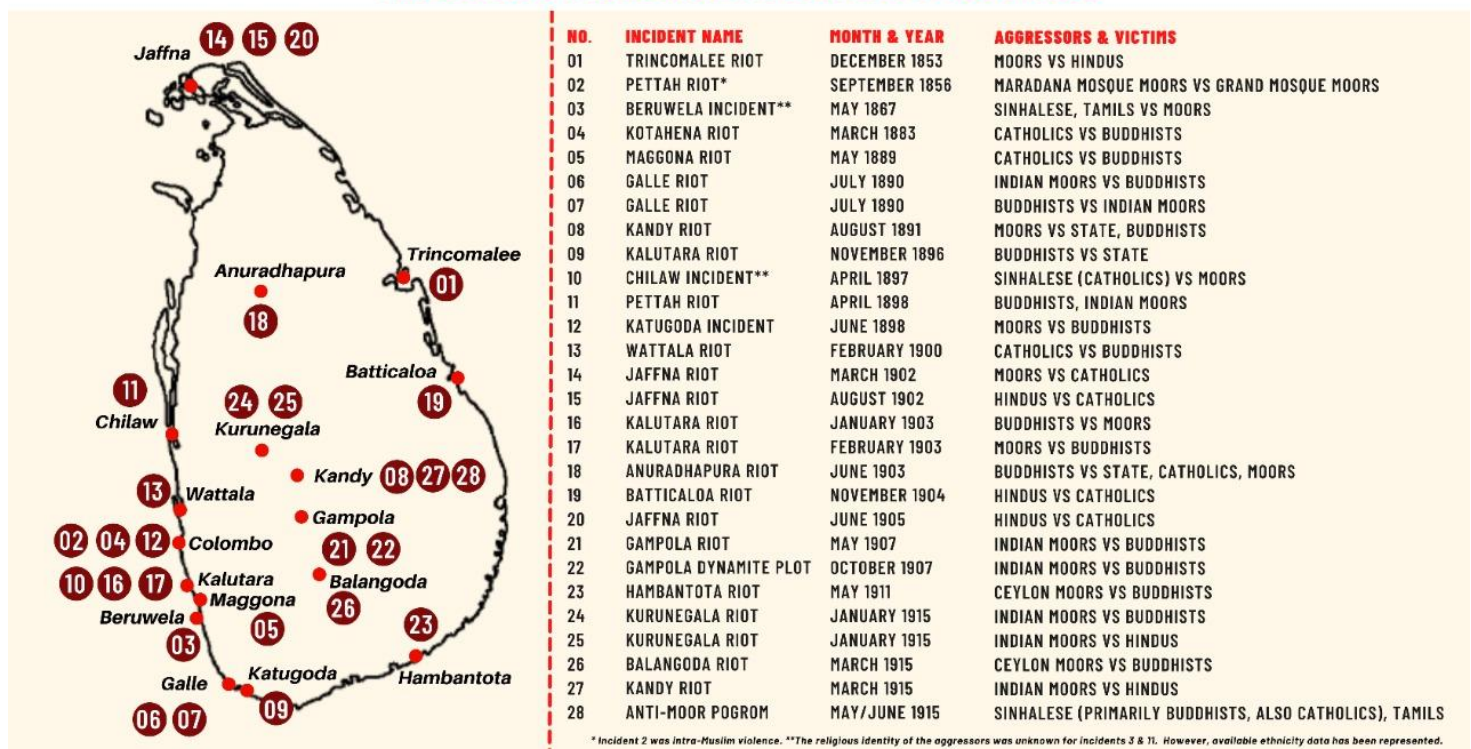


Figure 2: Religious Violence in Ceylon (by district and aggressor/victims)

The *Ceylon Observer*, a useful source for events dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, was an independent newspaper that was edited by the Ferguson family. These Scottish Baptists aimed at an English-speaking elite readership, which would have included both Europeans and Ceylonese. From its narratives, the paper had an interest in maintaining colonial stability, rather than easing inter-communal tensions.⁵⁰ Often these two objectives coincided; however, I

⁵⁰ It was nevertheless a ‘liberal-minded’ paper, compared to others such as *The Times*, and considered one of the more objective English-language papers in the mid-nineteenth century. See Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 307.

highlight the rare instances when these interests came into conflict and explore the colonial state's logic in pursuing one interest at the expense of the other. Colonial newspapers were often written from a perspective that was detached from local religious concerns, and there was a marked disdain regarding non-Christian religious beliefs or traditions. However, colonial press reports – when read alongside reportage from vernacular newspapers published by local religious groups – seem to accord with other sources, and there does not appear to be any consistent bias towards a particular group.⁵¹ There are no vernacular Moor sources that mention religious violence prior to 1882 (when the first Moor-community newspaper was published) that have survived in the colonial or indeed community archives. Sinhala newspapers date back to the 1860s, and I have consulted those copies that remain undamaged/accessible. I have similarly looked at court records if such cases were elevated to the Court of Appeal or Supreme Court. As noted previously, most of the episodes have not been discussed in the secondary sources. Meanwhile, colonial reports between the Governor in Ceylon and the Colonial Office in London do not seem to reflect many of these events on the ground.⁵² The large gaps in discussions of religious violence suggest that the colonial state often chose to respond to local disturbances within the domestic decision-making framework of the colony, without sharing information with the metropole that did not present a threat to the colony's stability. There was, however, more discussion of religious violence at the local level by Government Agents, although it did not lead to any changes in policy.⁵³ The relative absence of discussion on local religious violence suggests that religious mobilisation was not on the colonial state's radar (and this also explains why earlier scholars working on 'religious riots' did not find much evidence of violence prior to 1883). However, given the relatively regular occurrence of religious

⁵¹ Newspapers include those published by the state and the English-language press (*Ceylon Observer*, *The Examiner*, *Colombo Observer*, *Ceylon Times*, *Colombo Journal*), Buddhist press (*Sarasavi Sandaresa*), Moor press (*Islam Mittiran*, *Muslim Nesan*) and Catholic press (*Gnanartha Pradeepaya*).

⁵² The colonial state kept the Colonial Office informed of major episodes of religious violence, such as the 1883 Kotahena Riot, 1896 Bo Tree Riot and the 1915 pogrom.

⁵³ See for example, Report of A.G.A. Western Province, TNA, CO 57/143 Administration Reports 1900.

violence, as I show below, such a failure to share information distorted the real picture of inter-religious relations on the island.

[1, Trincomalee]: The first known ‘religious riot’ during the British colonial period dates to December 1853. The colonial press narrative of the event ominously foreshadowed the religious violence to come, and, crucially, the 1915 pogrom. The *Ceylon Times* editor reported, ‘A great riot had occurred between the Hindoos [sic] and Mahometans [sic] caused by the refusal of the former to discontinue beating their Tom Toms whilst passing the Mosque when the Moormen were assembled at Prayer, some blows were exchanged.’⁵⁴ The Hindus, to some extent, provoked the Moors. Another newspaper, *The Colombo Observer* was said to have noted ‘that fears were entertained that the Moormen would proceed to severe acts of retaliation against the Hindoos by firing the portion of the town inhabited by the Tamils.’⁵⁵ Interestingly, the editor referred to ‘similar commotions’ in Bombay that had recently occurred between Parsees and Muslims. These ‘commotions’ are likely to have been the Parsee-Muslim riots of October-November 1851, in which Muslims attacked Parsees for the allegedly ‘defamed’ image of the Prophet Mohammad in a pamphlet produced by a Parsee publisher.⁵⁶ Having erupted and receded in October, violence once again flared up in November 1851, during the Muharram festival, in which Muslims were accused of assaulting Parsees.⁵⁷ In Trincomalee, Moors and Tamils appear to have inhabited specific parts of the town. According to a newspaper report on Trincomalee in 1847, six years prior to the ‘riot’, there were two mosques, while the rest of the town was ‘studded with heathen temples...the people mostly worshippers of Siva’.⁵⁸ This particular procession seems to have brought the physically separate lives of two religious

⁵⁴ *Ceylon Times*, 23 December 1853.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ R.D. Nicholson, ‘The picture, the parable, the performance and the sword: secularism’s demographic imperatives’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41/12 (2018), pp. 2197-2214.

⁵⁷ A Parsee, *The Mahomedan Riots of Bombay in the Year 1851* (1856), p. 30.

⁵⁸ *Colombo Observer*, 21 February 1848.

groups into violent conflict in 1853. This episode is notable as the comparison by colonial actors of a riot in Trincomalee with one in Bombay highlights a trans-imperial awareness of local religious disputes, at a time before the great ‘Indian Mutiny’ of 1857. It is similarly likely that Moors in Trincomalee and elsewhere in the island were aware of the violence in Bombay as trade between the Coromandel and Malabar coasts would have taken sea-faring traders (carrying news and goods) around the southern coast of Ceylon, and the port of Trincomalee.⁵⁹ Importantly, violence in Bombay appeared to re-emerge a month after the initial violence, during the Muharram festival – a festival that soon becomes a cause of heightened inter- and intra-religious tension in Ceylon.

The 1853 Trincomalee Riot is the first known episode of religious violence involving the use of tom-toms when passing a place of worship. Crucially, it occurred before the enactment of Police Ordinance No. 16 of 1865, which regulated the use of sound in religious processions. Sections 69 and 90 of the Ordinance regulated public processions, including the use of music, and prohibited the beating of tom-toms at any time within any town without a license issued by the state. What role exactly did sound play in religious processions, for whom was it important, and what was the state’s rationale for such regulation? The discussion below is my first contextualising deviation from the chronology of violence.

Religious processions in general, and Buddhist peraheras specifically, had a long and symbolic history in Ceylon. Peraheras were associated with crop fertility, purity and cleansing, the magical creation of order, supernatural changes that could produce rain, and the public performance of existing social/political/religious hierarchies (reflected by the dress or role of

⁵⁹ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 81.

participants in the procession).⁶⁰ Sinhalese nationalists in 1915 read such religious practices as far back into history as possible. According to a memorial, ‘religious processions are of great antiquity in Ceylon, dating perhaps from the introduction of Buddhism in the third century before the Christian era.’⁶¹

As part of the performance of such processions, Buddhists used ‘tom-toms’ to produce music; this sound was integral to the procession. Scholars have suggested that sound in worship may have been politically subversive or expedient in certain colonial contexts. Harris argues that sound worship was a tool of religious revival and competition, while Bartholomeusz called music ‘one of the main instruments of indigenization in the late nineteenth century’ and ‘the most important vehicle of bringing Christ to the people of Ceylon’.⁶² Ethnomusicologist Jim Sykes suggests the Anglicised word tom-tom may have been adapted from *tammātamma*, to refer broadly to indigenous drums (see Figure 3 below).⁶³ He observes that the playing of tom-toms was central to the process of ‘musical giving’, which formed one of the ‘gestures of respect to the divine powers’.⁶⁴ By playing drums in the way the gods had created music on the day of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, the drummers enabled the gods to re-live this moment of Enlightenment, and asked in return for divine protection for their community.⁶⁵ Sykes adds that musical giving was a ‘meritorious and purificatory act that produces and/or accompanies the creation of good karma’ – the ‘transcendentalist’ dimension of sacredness described above.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York, 1991), pp. 198-200. Contemporary perceptions reflected in *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 26 January 1892.

⁶¹ ‘Interim Report by the Secretary of the Committee appointed by public meeting on 25th September 1915: Appendix II-Peraheras or Buddhist Processions’, D.R. Wijewardane Collection, *The Memorials and Papers Relating to the Riots of 1915*, Vol. I (Colombo, ?); William Geiger (ed.), *The Mahāvamsa* (London, 1964), pp. 211-212. Peraheras can be traced at least as far back as the Mahāvamsa.

⁶² Harris, *Religion, Space and Conflict*, pp. 78-79; Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, ‘Sinhala Anglicans and Buddhism in Sri Lanka: When the “Other” Becomes You’ in Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and C.R. De Silva (eds.), *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka* (Albany, 1998), p. 135.

⁶³ Jim Sykes, *The Musical Gift: Sonic Generosity in Post-War Sri Lanka* (New York, 2018), p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Michael Roberts notes that the tom-tom was ‘an integral part of protective rituals seeking to keep epidemic diseases at bay, while also being essential to healing rites’, indicating the immanentist dimension.⁶⁷ Musical sounds, then, were explicitly a form of ‘sabda pūja’ (literally, sound worship).⁶⁸ Crucially, sound worship could create supernatural changes. Processions, tom-tom music, and the creation of sacred space were inherently connected.

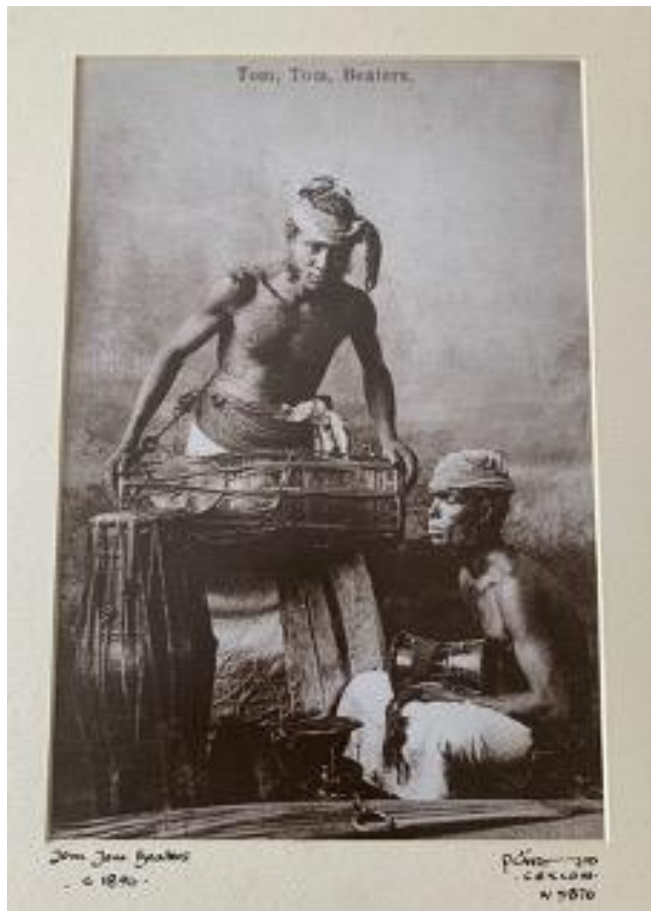


Figure 3: ‘Tom, Tom, Beaters’ circa 1890, Platé Ltd, Ceylon

There was a clash of norms between groups (such as Buddhists, Hindus and certain Muslims) for whom sound worship was vital, and those for whom it had a rather different and reduced role (like the colonial state).⁶⁹ There was also conflict between groups who fully shared notions about the sacrality of sound worship but objected to other groups’ renditions of it – because

⁶⁷ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 151.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁹ I discuss the use of tom-toms in a particular Muslim festival later in this chapter.

their own sacred space was polluted (rather than purified) by ‘other’s’ sounds. For example, Buddhists accused Catholics of attacking their processions, building churches near their temples, ringing bells, and then demanding the silencing of the Buddhists’ instruments.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the state’s antipathy to the use of sound was not unique to the colonial state in Ceylon. Instead, it appeared a feature of the British Empire more generally, and essentially appears to reflect concerns about keeping the peace. In India, Hindu processions were legally bound to silence their music in front of mosques, while in British Guiana, Trinidad and elsewhere in the Caribbean, the state passed ordinances to control processions in towns and public roads.⁷¹ Colonial policies appeared to differ in their rationale for restricting sound – for aesthetic reasons or notions of civility; fear of communal disturbances; or because it was not Christian sound. For example, colonial interference and the policing of Muharram processions in Burma were done to maintain public order.⁷² In Ceylon the British perceived ‘native’ music as ‘primitive and wild’.⁷³ For example, the following Orientalising report from Badulla of a Buddhist procession ‘in full fling’ reflects a mixture of aesthetic and Christian disgust.

⁷⁰ Christian missionary assertion is explored in the next chapter. *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 9 December 1890.

⁷¹ Sandra B. Freitag, *Religious rites and riots: from community identity to communalism in North India, 1870-1940* (PhD thesis, Berkeley, 1980), p. 96; Prabhu P. Mohapatra, “Following Custom”? Representations of Community among Indian Immigrant Labour in the West Indies, 1880-1920’, *IRSH* 51 (2006), Supplement, pp. 186-187.

⁷² Green, ‘Religious Economy of Colonial Burma’, p. 180.

⁷³ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 149.

repeated. That Sunday and the Sunday succeeding, 1882. de Winton was at Batticaloa.—The annual pujawa of the Buddhists is in full swing. Thousands upon thousands of Sinhalese come pouring into the town to do honour to the birth of Buddha, clad in neat clean clothes, which everybody seems to have about him, or her, from the modest 3d. print of Manchester to the finest Spitalfields silk the looms could turn out. Pinkamas from outlying villages, and from great distances, come in with all the show and pomp of native processions. Banners and flags, tomtoms and execrable music, dancing men and dancing boys, masked men in imitation of his satanic majesty, men on stilts and boys on dummy horses, combine to make Badulla a pandemonium during these gatherings. The tomtomming does not stop day or night, to the great discomfort and annoyance of the sick and the quiet, living near the temple. Offerings of rice, money, clothes and valuables pour in, which are received by the greedy priests. Two-thirds of these go to the high priest at Kandy, and the incumbent of the Badulla temple appropriates the remainder. In a couple of days all will be quiet, and a month hence, religious Buddhists will go on a pilgrimage to Bin tenna towards the Horaborawewa, and so obtain the blessings of Nirwana.

Figure 4: 'Badulla', *Ceylon Observer*, 13 June 1882

In keeping with the British colonial state's objective of constructing a capitalist colonial economy, the state considered music used at night a disturbance to those who were expected to work hard during the day.⁷⁴ Yet traditionally, Buddhist and Hindu festivals took place at night, and often into the early hours of the morning. To moderate this sound, the state fined offenders five pounds or imprisoned them for three months for using sound in processions without the requisite license. The breadth of the law was extended to include rural areas in regulations published under the Police Ordinance in 1898. This law had a direct impact on religious processions, including Buddhist processions.

The British were also deeply hypocritical in their approach to sound worship, as they appropriated local norms of sound worship to establish the political legitimacy of Empire and to sacralise the Crown. For instance, the British organised peraheras with plenty of sound when

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, pp. 149-153. The state exploited labour, particularly on tea plantations during the day yet allowed rest overnight to maximise productivity. See James S. Duncan, 'Embodying colonialism? Domination and resistance in nineteenth-century Ceylonese coffee plantations' *Journal of Historical Geography* 28/3 (2002), p. 318.

they celebrated the arrival of Governors to a particular district (*Ceylon Observer*, 24 December 1903; 11 May 1914), Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 (*Ceylon Observer*, 29 June 1887), and King George V's coronation in 1911 (*Ceylon Observer*, 4 March 1911). Meanwhile, public proclamations regarding new taxes were announced through the beating of tom-toms.⁷⁵ By playing on the legitimising structures of Buddhist sovereignty to further entrench their rule, British action highlighted the important relationship between peraheras and kingship.

[2, Colombo] To return to the timeline of religious violence, the second event took place on 12 September 1856, in Colombo, when intra-religious violence was threatened between the Moors of the Maradana mosque and the Grand Mosque in Pettah.⁷⁶ Importantly, the *Ceylon Times* labelled this episode a 'religious riot', even though the actual violence was limited, highlighting the fact that the term riot often referred to public disorder in colonial parlance. The defendant (appealing the Police Magistrate's verdict in the Supreme Court) 'came with about 10 or 15 people' to the Grand Mosque with the intention of committing a breach of the peace. Physical violence was restricted to a single blow on the complainant's mouth.⁷⁷ The aggressors were the Moors associated with the Maradana Mosque, who went to the Grand Mosque in New Moor Street to 'object to the reading of "Cotuba" on the last day of the Hajj festival.⁷⁸ 'Cotuba' or 'kuthba' is the sermon given during prayers, which 'was formerly read only at Marandahn [sic] on that Festival'. This violence, then, was over the issue of religious innovation, or a change in the way festivals were observed, with prayers being read at a different mosque to that which had previously read it.⁷⁹ Such conflict represented the earliest signs of Islamic Revival in

⁷⁵ *Ceylon Times*, 11 March 1853.

⁷⁶ This is the first episode of intra-Muslim conflict that has been brought to light. However, it is not the last. John Rogers notes that disputes over the control of mosques were apparent in the late nineteenth century and often resulted in fatalities. See Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 17.

⁷⁷ *The Appeal Reports: Being Reports of Cases Argued and Determined on the Supreme Court of Ceylon Sitting in Appeal*, Vols. 1-3 (1860), p. 187.

⁷⁸ *Ceylon Times*, 26 September 1856.

⁷⁹ *The Appeal Reports*, pp. 183-184.

Ceylon (discussed in Chapter 2), albeit ‘from the inside’ in terms of ‘sectarian rivalries between opposing individuals and groups’ who began ‘claiming for themselves singular authority over Islamic tradition’.⁸⁰ The colonial state blamed those who went to the Grand Mosque for having disturbed the peace, yet they were lenient in their punishment. In court, the state appears to have encouraged peaceful coexistence by virtue of its judgment: ‘it is hoped however that these disturbances will now cease as the defendants have been dealt with very leniently; and they must take warning and try to restore peace and harmony amongst their people’.⁸¹

[3, Beruwala] The next episode of religious violence featured the desecration of a mosque – an act of obvious aggression that sought to pollute a place of worship. On 3 May 1867, seven Sinhalese and one Tamil forcefully entered a mosque in Beruwala and left a pig carcass in the premises.⁸² The desecration of the mosque became known as ‘The Great Pig Case’, which intended to hurt the religious feelings of the worshippers of that mosque. The case was heard in the Supreme Court in November 1867 by the Chief Justice. Mr. D.Q.A. Cayley, for the Crown, framed the indictment in the language of ‘intending to break and disturb the peace of our Lady the Queen; and to oppress, aggrieve, injure and annoy...subjects of our Queen’.⁸³ According to Cayley, the Moors – who held pigs ‘to be unclean and abominable’ – were deprived of the ‘liberty of conscience and the free exercise of their religious worship’ due to the defendants’ actions. It was allegedly ‘the first time that an outrage of this character had been committed’, although recently ‘several differences appear to have arisen between the Mohammedans and certain Singhalese residents of the place’ (the Beruwala-Kalutara region).

⁸⁰ Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 21. I borrow Jones’ broad definition of sectarianism to mean a ‘diverse array of conflicts between Islamic communities. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸¹ *Ceylon Times*, 26 September 1856.

⁸² *Ceylon Observer*, 11 November 1867.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

The details of this event and the court case were not relayed in the Governor's despatches within Ceylon or abroad.⁸⁴

There appears to have been a lull in inter-religious tensions between 1867 and 1883, at least as far as official records and newspaper reportage suggests. The first episode of violence over processions in 1853 is therefore an outlier, as this type of violence recurs more regularly only from the 1880s onwards. One reason for this lull between 1867 and 1883 may have been that the Police Ordinance came into being in 1865, and ethno-religious groups may have initially abided by the law or allowed the state to manage the regulation of religious rites. As explored in the next chapter, there was a shift taking place during this period, particularly among Buddhists, from tolerance to confrontation with other religious groups. Rather than Buddhists turning violent during a period of surging religious revival, this transition to violent confrontation appears to have been precipitated by Catholic violence. From the 1880s onwards, there is a more reliable and regular narrative of religious violence.

[4, Kotahena] In 1883, the 'Kotahena Riot' took place. Substantial scholarship on the Kotahena Riot exists, including by G.P.V. Somaratna, John Rogers, and Stanley Tambiah.⁸⁵ However, I re-introduce the Riot within a broader chronology of violence at a time when other religious groups were similarly asserting their religious identity and claiming the urban/rural spaces surrounding their places of worship, as in the 1853 Trincomalee Riot.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ 'Ceylon, Offices', 1867, TNA, CO 54/430.

⁸⁵ G.P.V. Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot, 1883: A Religious Riot in Sri Lanka* (Nugegoda, 1991); Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling crowds: Ethnonationalist conflicts and collective violence in South Asia* (Berkeley; London, 1996).

⁸⁶ Catholics were the numerical majority in Kotahena (around 50 percent), whereas Buddhists made up only around 25 percent of the population in Kotahena. The proportion of Roman Catholics in 100 Christians was almost 72. Lionel Lee, *Census of Ceylon 1891: A General Report* (Colombo, 1892), pp. 35-38.

The main Catholic religious centre in Kotahena was St. Lucia's Cathedral, which was reconstructed from around 1870.⁸⁷ In 1883, the Catholics were planning to reopen their cathedral (see reconstructed Cathedral in Figure 5 below). That same year, the chief incumbent monk of the Dīpaduttamārāmaya Buddhist temple embarked on a reconstruction of the site and built a 'proper temple' in place of the original residence.⁸⁸ The monk was Ven. Migetuwatte Gunananda, a famously fiery orator whose participation in the Panadura Debate of 1873 is discussed in the next chapter. The temple was to be officially re-opened in March 1883 and marked by a *pinkama* (a merit-making procession), which was authorised by a procession license. The 'Netra Pinkama' was scheduled between 8 February and 31 March 1883.⁸⁹ Crucially, neither establishment was new.⁹⁰ Catholics had possessed the grounds of the cathedral 'in the time of the Dutch' whereas the Buddhist temple (a basic pavilion) was originally constructed 50 years before the Riot. Yet renovations and more recent infusions of wealth into these structures renewed the symbolic prestige of each building.

⁸⁷ R.F. Young and G.P.V. Somaratna, *Vain Debates: The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna, 1996), p. 190.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸⁹ Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot*, p. 37.

⁹⁰ Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Kotahena in Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot*, p. 42.



Figure 5: St. Lucia's Cathedral, Colombo, Kotahena, circa 1912, Platé Ltd, Ceylon

On 25 March 1883, Easter Sunday, when a Buddhist procession headed to Dīpaduttamārāmaya went past St. Lucia's Cathedral, Catholics gathered at the cathedral attacked the procession. The Buddhist procession was 'violently assailed by thousands of Roman Catholics with sticks, stones and brick bats'.⁹¹ The police – 'outnumbered by thousands and overpowered' – could only bring the situation under control with the help of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers (Figure 6).⁹² One Buddhist and one Catholic died in the violence, and at least 30 others (including twelve police officers) were wounded.

Some Buddhists saw the actions at Kotahena as an act of 'war'. A 'religious observer' writing to the Sinhala-language *Lakminipahana* in March 1883 blamed the priest at St. Lucia's Cathedral. Indulging in rumours, he noted that the priest gathered intemperate Roman Catholic

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹² Governor to Earl of Derby, 28 March 1883, SLNA Lot 5/70, Miscellaneous, No. 127.

thugs and spent church money on alcohol for his followers on the day of the procession.⁹³ The writer (who lacks credibility, as an aggrieved Buddhist) alleges that the priest said, ‘my dear children, if you die in this battle you will go to heaven’.

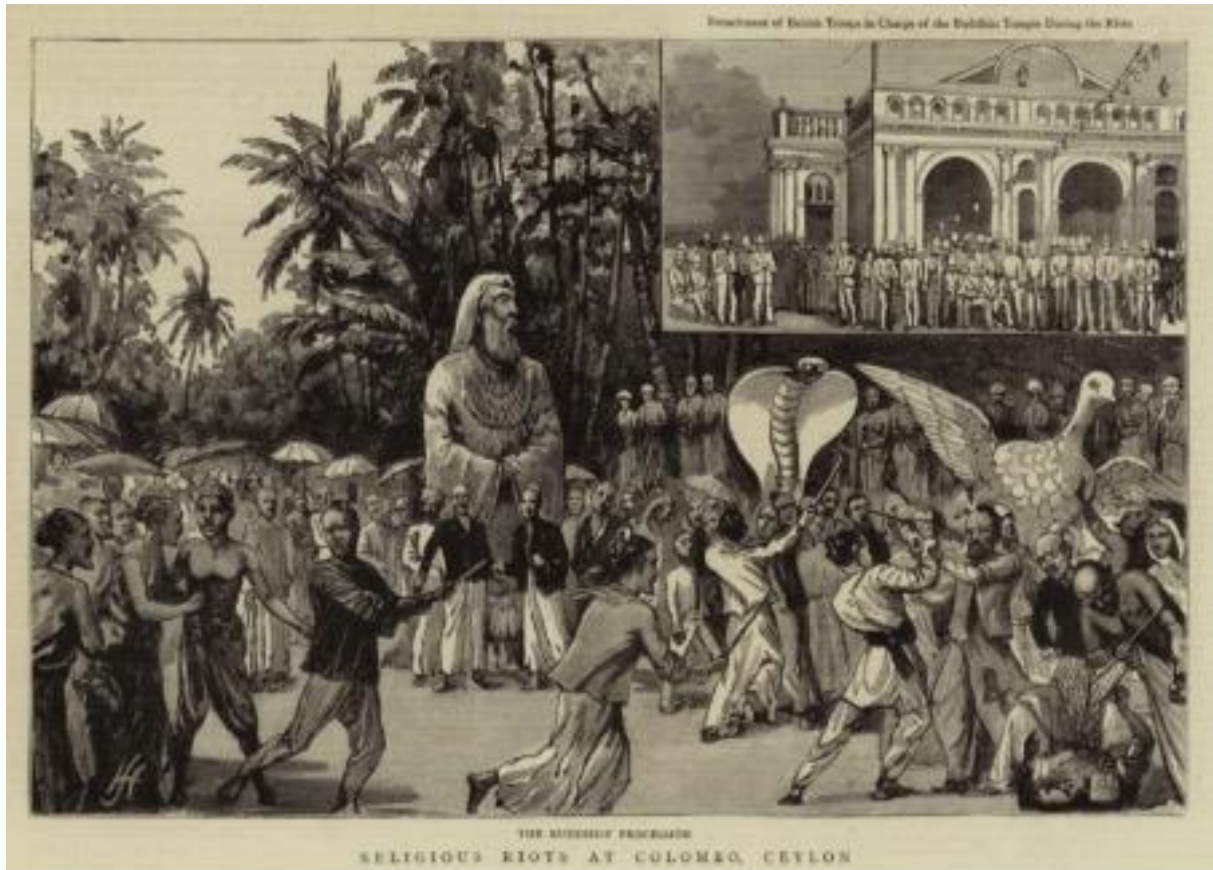


Figure 6: Religious Riots at Colombo, Ceylon. Illustration for *The Graphic*, 30 June 1883

Figure 6 above is an interpretation of the Riot that was published for readership in Britain. There are several symbolic Buddhist ‘objects’, such as the king cobra – believed to have protected the Buddha from the elements as he meditated and attained enlightenment, and a swan, which symbolised wisdom. Perhaps these objects, if they were indeed carried during the procession, reflected an anticipation of trouble with the Catholics and were expected to provide protection from antagonistic Catholics. A Commission of Inquiry was later appointed to investigate the

⁹³ *Lakminipahana*, 31 March 1883. *Lakminipahana* was the first Sinhala newspaper published in 1862.

reasons for the violence in Kotahena. The Commissioners identified the ‘proximity of the Buddhist Temple and the Roman Catholic Cathedral’ at Kotahena as the first cause of violence.⁹⁴ The second reason cited in the Commission’s report was ‘the gradual revival of Buddhism and the controversies consequent thereon’ – a theme I explore in the next chapter.

[5, Maggona] Catholic aggression increased during this decade, and the risks were noted by the colonial state. On 24 May 1889, a procession of Buddhists and Buddhist monks from Maggona to Beruwala passed a Catholic church. The Catholics at the church demanded the Buddhists stop their perahera activities, but the Buddhists refused. According to the Sinhala-Buddhist newspaper *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, ‘as is their custom, the Catholics started to beat the Buddhists’.⁹⁵ Although this event was featured in the English and vernacular press, it does not feature in the Governor’s despatches or correspondence.⁹⁶ However, it is mentioned in Government Agent F. R. Saunders’ Administration Report for the Western Province. Saunders observed:

the very serious risk which is incurred by permitting what are called “religious processions” to march through the streets and villages with or without native music. These processions...will some day, I feel sure, lead to serious riot and bloodshed. I constantly receive letters from His Grace the Archbishop of Colombo pointing out to me the danger of serious collision between the Catholics and Buddhists...It was only a few months ago that a quiet Buddhist procession was passing along the Galle road. A few words were exchanged as it passed a Catholic church. This led to recrimination, and as the result one Catholic was killed and several Buddhists and Catholics were severely assaulted...In my opinion all religious processions of whatever description should be strictly prohibited.⁹⁷

Interestingly, the Anglican Archbishop highlights the risk of collision between Catholics and Buddhists – groups that were increasingly asserting their religious identity by the late nineteenth

⁹⁴ Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Kotahena, cited in Somaratna, *Kotahena Riot*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 28 May 1889.

⁹⁶ Ceylon, Despatches, May-August 1889, TNA, CO 54/583.

⁹⁷ Report of G.A. Western Province, TNA, CO 57/108, Administration Reports, 1889, B12.

century. Saunders' position, meanwhile, was to prohibit *all* religious processions (even Catholic ones). Importantly, 'native music' was not seen as the key issue, as Saunders suggested that even processions without music be banned. Saunders' foreshadowing of 'serious riot and bloodshed', however, does not appear to have resulted in any significant policy change in 1889.

The *Ceylon Observer* agreed with the Sinhala press, when it identified the Catholics as aggressors, describing their use of swords and knives.⁹⁸ Indeed, it was in these two riots, in Kotahena and Maggona, that people were killed (even though in this case the deceased was a Catholic). In the next decade, although religious violence becomes more regular (and does not involve Catholics), there were no recorded deaths. However, in February 1900, Catholics are once again the aggressors in the deadly Wattala Riot, in which one Buddhist person died (and one Catholic was killed by Buddhists).⁹⁹ At the detriment of breaking away from the chronology, it is worth situating the Wattala Riot alongside the Kotahena and Maggona Riots. Notably, these events took place along the South-Western coastline, where several Catholics were concentrated.

[13, Wattala] The Buddhist narrative on the Wattala Riot of 1900 – advanced in the *Sarasavi Sandaresa* – claimed that a 'Catholic threw an axe at the perahera. The axe hit the elephant, which reacted by running wild. The elephant damaged some Roman Catholic houses.'¹⁰⁰ However, Catholics claimed that Buddhists provoked violence by passing the 'Catholic Church at Wattala beating tom-toms while the latter were at service'.¹⁰¹ According to the Sinhala-

⁹⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 27 May and 1 June 1889. This riot near Beruwala is likely to have been one manifestation of the deeper conflict between Catholics and Buddhists in the Induruwa-Bentota area in the nineteenth century as described by Sarath Amunugama. Sarath Amunugama, *Lion's Roar*, p. 456.

⁹⁹ *Gnanartha Pradeepaya*, 5 March 1900.

¹⁰⁰ *Sarasavi Sandaresa* editorial quoted in *Gnanartha Pradeepaya*, 5 March 1900. The original *Sandaresa* paper is not available at the SLNA.

¹⁰¹ *Ceylon Observer*, 27 February 1900.

language Catholic newspaper *Gnanartha Pradeepaya*, Catholics were disturbed by the perahera, when two of the perahera elephants attacked a holy cross planted at the Wattala junction.¹⁰² They argued that two men on top of the elephants ‘encouraged the elephants to remove the cross’.¹⁰³ This act ‘angered Catholics in the area’, who then threw stones at the perahera, thereby triggering violence. Church bells were rung to summon crowds from Modara, and large crowds gathered in Wattala. The population of Catholics between Peliyagoda, Wattala and Modara enabled large crowds to converge in one riot site. ‘Both men and women threw stones’, in a rare example of women actively participating in violence.¹⁰⁴ Aside from their roles in the 1915 pogrom (which I discuss in chapter 4), there is no mention of women involved in any of the other episodes of religious violence, whether as victims or agents. Meanwhile, the colonial judiciary, the final arbiter of such cases, heard a number of these riot cases, which included murder and assault, in April 1900.¹⁰⁵ In all three Wattala ‘riot cases’, the accused were acquitted, the jury believing that they were not the parties responsible for the offences.¹⁰⁶ Similar to the state’s response to the 1856 Pettah Riot between Moors, the colonial state errs on the side of leniency, and does not appear one that is paranoid about religious violence. However, one final case remained pending until August 1900. Thirteen Catholics were accused of unlawful assembly, armed with deadly weapons (swords, knives, and clubs), and rioting. Eleven of these men were sentenced to two years in prison.¹⁰⁷ Notably, John Rogers and Michael Roberts, the only scholars who mention the Wattala Riot, frame it largely in terms of caste. Rogers contextualises the violence by observing the Buddhists were from the ‘low’ Vahumpura caste, from Wanawahala in Peliyagoda, while the Christians were Salagamas from Wattala.

¹⁰² *Gnanartha Pradeepaya*, 5 March 1900.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Ceylon’s judicial system included Trial by Jury, which was often found to be susceptible to ‘the race question, the composition of the jury, and the nationality and local connection of the accused’. For example, in the Anuradhapura case of a Buddhist priest as complainant against accused Moors, the all-Moor jury brought a verdict of not-guilty (a move the judge deemed ‘perverse’). *Ceylon Observer*, 14 March 1913.

¹⁰⁶ *Ceylon Observer*, 27 April 1900.

¹⁰⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 28 August and 1 September 1900.

Nevertheless, he concedes that despite these groups having historic antipathies due to caste differences, their religious identities took on ‘new importance’ by 1900.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, the colonial state argued in the Administration Report of 1900 that the episode was a ‘riot between the Buddhists and Catholics’, an analysis that conveys an important dimension of the conflict.¹⁰⁹

[6, Galle] I return to my chronological narrative of religious violence at the point of departure in Maggona 1889. On 2 July 1890, ‘Coast Moormen’ [Indian Moors] attacked a Buddhist procession that was using tom-toms while passing a mosque in China Garden in Galle. The *Ceylon Observer* reported that,

a Coast Moorman attempted to disturb the crowd at the rear of the procession, but he was beaten and pushed out. Another *Sambankaran* [Indian Moor] who repeated the offence was treated in a similar manner. About 25 Coast Moormen then rushed on the opposite party with clubs, stones and other missiles.¹¹⁰

The Sinhalese, who were ‘quite unprepared’ had the ‘worst of the affray...A Sinhalese man named Nonis was severely beaten by the *Sambankarans*, who dragged him away...about 7 or 8 injured persons, the majority being Sinhalese were conveyed to the hospital.’¹¹¹ Although there were no fatalities in this episode, this is the second event in which Moors attacked a religious procession for the use of tom-toms when passing a mosque – as in the case of the Trincomalee Riot of 1853. Monotheistic aggression (i.e., led by Catholics and Moors), meanwhile, appears to dominate the spectrum of religious violence thus far. The victims of such monotheistic aggression, in the context of processions and the use of sound worship, were Buddhists and Hindus.

¹⁰⁸ Rogers’ argument that ‘Buddhism offered Vahumpuras a respectable way to challenge high-caste Christians’ highlights the intersection of caste and religious interests. Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, CO 57/143, Ceylon Administration Reports, 1900.

¹¹⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 4 July 1890.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

[7, Galle] However, as in the Kotahena Riot and the Wattala Riot, Buddhists were not placid victims, and fought back where they could. In response to the violence on 2 July 1890 (Event 6), Buddhists ‘threatened [a] renewal of hostilities’ against Moors a few days later.¹¹² Perhaps spurred on to react to monotheistic assertiveness, Buddhists went on the offensive while they ‘prepared to go in procession through China Garden on Sunday, notwithstanding the refusal of the police to grant a licence’.¹¹³ Even in the days prior to the Sunday procession, Buddhists had unleashed ‘reprisals’ on ‘unoffending Moormen in the suburbs and villages’, indicating physical violence. This event marked the first violent confrontation over processions between Sinhalese and Moors.

[8, Kandy] In August 1891, Moors burnt their own ‘pagoda’ (a shrine) during their ‘Hobson-Jobson’ procession in Kandy, as it took place at the same time as a Buddhist perahera, and the police had refused to give the former a procession license.¹¹⁴ The threats to the Moors’ procession, including the Buddhist perahera, and the state’s refusal to grant them a procession license, triggered an act of symbolic violence by Moors. This violence, however, was self-destructive and demonstrative, rather than aimed outwardly at one of the other two ‘offending’ parties. However, it is an act of group assertion likely aimed at impressing the colonial state: that restrictions on *their* freedom of worship would be met with (displays of) aggression.

My second contextualising excursion focuses on this Moor procession and associated festival.

The term Hobson-Jobson was a British term,¹¹⁵ that scholars have connected with ‘Kudu

¹¹² *Ceylon Observer*, 7 July 1890.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ceylon Observer*, 24 August 1891.

¹¹⁵ It was also the name of Henry Yule’s Anglo-Indian dictionary originally published in 1886.

festivals'.¹¹⁶ These were celebrations of Muharram, a typically Shi'a festival that on the tenth day (*Ashura*) mourned the death of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet who (among others) was massacred at Karbala in the seventh century CE. Muharram was, however, observed by some Sunnis in Ceylon, as well as in North India, the Natal colony, and the Caribbean.¹¹⁷ The Shi'a population in Ceylon at the time, made up of primarily Bohras and, to a lesser extent, Khojas, was unlikely to have been more than in the hundreds. The large-scale nature of these Muharram processions suggests that more Muslims than just these small Shi'a trader groups participated in them. Moreover, the Bohras in Ceylon were typically based in Colombo and Galle at the time (based on the locations of their mosques).¹¹⁸ Yet these Muharram festivals took place from (at least) 1866 onwards in Kandy, Trincomalee, and Matale as well.¹¹⁹

An article describing the celebration of 'the Hobson Jobson' offers two insights when it claims, 'respectable Mahomedans tell us that "*jouseng*" forms no part of their religion'.¹²⁰ First, the term Hobson-Jobson came from 'jouseng', which is likely to have come from the chanting 'Ya Hussein'.¹²¹ Second, 'respectable Mahomedans', as far as the British were concerned (judging by the fact that a Ceylon Moor was always appointed the Mohammedan Member in the Legislative Council), must have been Ceylon Moors. Ceylon Moors were overwhelmingly Sunni. By contrast, some Indian Moors were Shi'a.¹²² Furthermore, it is possible that in the mid-to-late nineteenth century the more recently immigrated Indian Moors participated in these

¹¹⁶ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 154.

¹¹⁷ In the Caribbean and in India, some Hindus also celebrated Muharram; this does not appear to have been the case in Ceylon. See Mohapatra, "Following Custom"?, p. 181; Freitag, 'State and Community', p. 14; Goolam Vahed, 'Constructions of community identity among Indians in colonial Natal, 1860-1910: The role of the Muharram festival', *Journal of African History* 43 (2002), p. 80.

¹¹⁸ There were only two Bohra mosques in Ceylon at the time – in Colombo and Galle.

¹¹⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 28 May 1866; 13 February 1889; 15 August 1905.

¹²⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 28 May 1866.

¹²¹ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 92. In Trinidad, Indian immigrants chanted 'Hosay Hosay', which was 'the creolised version of the lamenting chant of Hai Hassan Hai Hussain'. See Prabhu J. Mahapatra, *Hosay Massacre of 1884: Class and Community among Indian Immigrant Labourers in Trinidad* (Delhi, 1997), p. 1.

¹²² Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 264.

festivals even if they were not Shi'a.¹²³ In the Caribbean, Indian migrants participated in Muharram festivals as a form of community representation.¹²⁴ It is possible that these Indian Moors participated in, or even brought such Indian migrant practices with them to Ceylon. Notably, Muharram processions were not attacked except in one instance.¹²⁵

The imagery associated with Muharram in Ceylon bears substantial similarities with practices abroad. Descriptions of Muharram in Ceylon include the 'tiger dancers and men and boys in fancy dress',¹²⁶ the 'sound of coconut shells, tomtoms and other...musical instruments'.¹²⁷ Importantly, Muharram was typically observed with an 'exuberance' similarly displayed in Buddhist peraheras, when 'the visual and aural landscapes of...towns would come alive as spaces of intense public piety'.¹²⁸ The central event of Muharram, however, was the movement of a 'pagoda' that was carried out from the mosque and led through town.¹²⁹ In Event 8 above, it was this large object that was set on fire.

It is worth comparing the British disdain for Buddhist use of sound worship in processions with their dislike of Muharram observations too. In 1866, one observer wrote, employing the same

¹²³ Noor Rahim observed Malays celebrating Muharram with flag-raising ceremonies and re-enacted battles of Karbala during his childhood in the 1940s in Colombo. He also suggests that Bengali Sepoys, originally part of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment (which was primarily comprised of Malays), may have brought with them the tradition of observing Muharram. Noor R. Rahim, *Narration of the History of our Proud Ancestral (Orang Jawa) Heritage* (Colombo, 2016), pp. 58-59; G. Tylden, 'The Ceylon Regiments, 1796 to 1874', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 30/123 (1952), pp. 125-126.

¹²⁴ Mohapatra, "Following Custom"?, p. 181.

¹²⁵ The *Lakrivikirana* supplement reported a night-time assault on the *Jouseng kudu* on 12 April 1870 in which one person was killed by a stone to his head. The report does not identify the religious identity of the perpetrator. *Lakrivikirana*, 16 April 1870.

¹²⁶ *Ceylon Observer*, 4 September 1890. Goolam Vahed explains that for the participants of the festival in Natal Colony, the "tigers" represented real tigers in India who often attacked participants'. Vahed, 'Constructions of community identity', p. 84.

¹²⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 14 August 1891. For parallels in Natal, see Vahed, 'Constructions of community identity', p. 83.

¹²⁸ Jones, *Shi'a Islam*, p. 92.

¹²⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 24 August 1891, 15 August 1905, and 11 May 1914. Pagoda was the British term for 'ta'ziyas'. A ta'ziya was a replica of Husain's tomb in Karbala made of various materials including wood and paper. Jones, *Shi'a Islam*, p. 92.

epithets used to condemn Buddhist peraheras, ‘to add to our miseries, the festival of the Mohurrum [sic] has commenced and we have no rest from morning till night – what with tom-toms of all sizes and powers and tomfoolery of the most noisy and frightful description in the public streets’.¹³⁰

As the twentieth century progressed, the tradition of a shrine being paraded through town declined, and is confined to simply ‘the living memory of older people’.¹³¹ Ameer Ali suggests that reformist Wahhabi ideas may have entered Ceylon in the nineteenth century with the migration of Indian Muslim traders.¹³² He also claims that ‘the idea that no music should be played in front of the mosques was one such prejudice that became an important issue towards the end of our period’. Roberts, citing Ali, suggests that ‘it is possible that *Wahhabi reformism* in British Ceylon was most pronounced among the handful of Memon merchants and among those known as “Coast Moors” or “Indian Moors”’.¹³³ I would accordingly connect the decline in the observance of Muharram with a rise in sectarianism: the purification of Sunni practices and the renunciation of Shi’a practices including idol worship.¹³⁴ In India, from around 1885 onwards, Muharram celebrations were increasingly ‘challenged by Sunnis and led to public disturbances’.¹³⁵ In Ceylon, a similar change appears to take place some years later. In 1914 a dispute between two Islamic sects, who worshipped at the same mosque, was brought before

¹³⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 24 May 1866.

¹³¹ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 154. For the celebration of other festivals that have survived into the twenty first century see Dennis B. McGilvray, ‘A Matrilineal Sufi Shaykh in Sri Lanka’, *South Asian History and Culture* 5/2 (2014), pp. 246-261.

¹³² Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 7.

¹³³ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 155.

¹³⁴ Future pressures to ‘boycott various “un-Islamic” practices like flag-raising festivals’ are highlighted in Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (Durham, 2008), p. 271. In India, in the late nineteenth century, there were similar attacks on ‘the shared religious traditions that had once characterized’ upwardly mobile Hindus and Muslims; ‘the sweepers of Punjab...stopped visiting Sufi shrines and observing the “Muslim” Moharrum rituals’. Sikand, *Sacred Spaces*, p. 15.

¹³⁵ Jones, *Shi’a Islam*, p. 100. In India, Shi’as too demanded changes in the way *Ashura* was observed whereas in Ceylon, the negligible Shi’a population do not appear to have had such agency (and until further research on Shi’a communities is undertaken, their experiences remain relatively silent).

the district court in Puttalam. The congregants of the mosque took an injunction out against the trustees of the mosque who attempted to allow ‘a pagoda procession’ from the mosque. This practice had extended ‘far beyond living memory; that the plaintiffs and the defendants in their time have taken part in it with all its attendant ceremonies on numerous occasions’.¹³⁶ However, influenced by reformist ideology, the shrine worship was increasingly considered ‘a break of Muhammadan law’ and a ‘direct violation of the precepts of the Koran’, and therefore its continued practice was ‘an outrage to their religious feelings’.¹³⁷ Interestingly, the Supreme Court refused to grant the injunction ‘as no civil right was involved in this case’, and it was left as an ecclesiastical matter to be sorted out by the parties concerned.

This rise in sectarianism represents a rupture from the mid-nineteenth century, when the English press noted ‘They [Moors] have none of the great feuds which exist in India and Persia where the great Sects of the Soonnies and Sheahs are at war with each other [sic]’.¹³⁸ Indeed, there is a paradox in the decline of the Muharram festival. In the mid to late nineteenth century, religious identity was asserted through this religious festival – as evident in the burning of the shrine when Moors did not receive a license for procession. However, the decline of a Muslim albeit specifically Shi’a festival is also connected to such religious assertion – both forms of assertion represent a growth in Islamic reformism, shifts in identity construction, and ultimately, the purification of Islamic practices. These changes will be explored in depth in the next chapter on religious revival.

[9 Katugoda] The next episode of religious violence concerned the desecration of a Buddhist monk’s saffron robe, which can be interpreted as a physical infringement and insult to

¹³⁶ Pitche Tamby et al v. Cassim Marikar et al (1914) 18 NLR 111.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ceylon Times*, 9 September 1856.

Buddhists. In June 1896, a Moor squirted tobacco juice on a monk's robe and chased the monk while 'pulling his robe and slapping him on the face'.¹³⁹ The violation of a monk's robes suggests deeper underlying tensions with what the robe represented. The assault on the robe attracted a large crowd of Buddhists from Magalla and nearby hamlets 'who appeared to be highly irritated at the insult to one of the yellow-robed fraternity'.¹⁴⁰ Although the Buddhists threatened reprisals, no riot ensued as 'the Moors prudently closed all their boutiques and kept indoors'. The decision to close boutiques suggests that Moors expected reprisals against their economic livelihoods in retaliation for violating the sanctity of the robe – a sacred object in the eyes of Buddhists.

[10, Kalutara] Another object that was sacred to Buddhists was the Bo tree, as the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment while meditating under a Bo tree. Each monastery has a Bo tree, and some Bo trees, such as the one in Anuradhapura (discussed below) are considered the most important religious sites in the island. In the 'Kalutara Bo Tree Incident', which erupted into violence on 26 November 1896, '[a] serious riot took place...over the cutting of a Bo tree'.¹⁴¹ This 'riot' has been explored in depth by John Rogers and Nira Wickramasinghe. Ten years prior in 1886, Buddhists built a small shrine at the base of a Bo tree that was part of a grouping of three Bo trees situated on Crown land in the Kalutara Fort. Buddhists cited oral tradition and 'ancient texts' to argue that the land was 'theirs'.¹⁴² Between 1891 and 1894, Buddhists petitioned the state to claim title to the land; all these petitions were rejected. In August 1894, Assistant Government Agent Brodhurst ordered the destruction of the other two Bo trees (i.e., not the Bo tree that had a shrine at its base). Peaceful protests followed this action. In the first example of a Governor getting involved in a local religious dispute, on 6 August,

¹³⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 16 June 1896.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ceylon Examiner*, 26 November 1896.

¹⁴² Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, p. 122; *Lakminipahana*, 28 November 1896.

Governor Havelock 'immediately ordered the work stopped'.¹⁴³ However, by this time only a small portion of one of the two trees remained.

The matter was also referred to colonial officials in London, who decided to support the state's position regarding the destruction of the two trees. The reason given for this was they did not want the state to be seen as granting a privilege to Buddhists – who may potentially later claim all Bo trees in the island. The Bo tree with the shrine, however, was not to be destroyed as Colonial Office officials felt Brodhurst had 'needlessly stirred up trouble'.¹⁴⁴ Such caution from the Colonial Office suggests that the metropole was more concerned about giving cause for religious disputes than some colonial agents on the ground.

Two years later, however, in October 1896, Dawson ordered Buddhists to move the shrine at the base of the Bo tree elsewhere by 27 November 1896. The Buddhists, aghast, organised under the 'Kalutara Buddhist Union' on 11 November, and submitted a petition requesting the state to refrain from destroying the tree with the shrine. Dawson did not reply to this petition, as his was an empty threat that was not necessarily to be carried out – but his silence convinced Buddhists that the decision on destroying the tree was final. On 26 November, around a thousand Buddhists surrounded the Bo tree and demonstrated against this perceived restriction of their religious freedom, which was guaranteed by the state under the 1815 Kandyan Convention. The state deployed the police, who arrested a number of those in the crowd.¹⁴⁵ What was ostensibly a protest turned violent, when protestors forcibly 'rescued' prisoners from the police station and wounded a policeman. By evening the crowd had dispersed, convinced that the Bo Tree, at least for that day, would not be harmed. Over the course of the next ten

¹⁴³ John Rogers, 'The Kalutara Bo Tree Affair, 1891-1897' in Michael Roberts (ed.) *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited* Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1997), p. 326.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

months, the colonial state deliberated over the future of the Bo Tree and shrine. The state ultimately allowed the Bo tree to stand but removed the shrine. According to Rogers, the state did this quietly by bribing the guardian of the shrine who accepted a sum of money and left the site.¹⁴⁶ The tree was left unharmed, and within a decade, Buddhists were once again making offerings at the base of the tree.¹⁴⁷ The need to preserve this Bo Tree, and the ability to mobilise a crowd in its defence represents a turning point in the Buddhist defence of its 'sacred spaces'. Such defensive action is next seen in Anuradhapura in 1903.

[11, Chilaw] In another act of symbolic violence, the defiling of a mosque wall in Chilaw in April 1897 resembled the desecration of the mosque in Beruwala in 1867. Two Sinhalese men drew pictures of pigs on the mosque wall to insult the congregants of the mosque. They had also written 'expressions in Tamil characters insulting towards the Mohammedans', as Tamil was the primary language of Moors.¹⁴⁸ A police magistrate convicted the accused of insulting Muslims and provoking a breach of the peace.¹⁴⁹ The case was appealed in the Supreme Court on the grounds that the act of defilement was done 'secretly', and therefore 'negated any intention to provoke a breach of the peace'.¹⁵⁰ The Chief Justice amended the conviction, initially made under the Penal Code, and convicted them under section 4 of the Vagrants Ordinance, No. 4 of 1841, which involved indecent exhibition at a public place.

[12, Pettah] Meanwhile, an episode of religious violence that took place in April 1898 may have been influenced, to some degree, by the Kalutara Bo Tree riot. The timing of the riot is such that events in Kalutara (1896-97) may have encouraged Buddhists elsewhere along the

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Offerings are likely to have been flowers or lighting candles as part of merit-making.

¹⁴⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 1 March 1898.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

South-Western coastline to be more protective of their Bo trees. The Pettah Bo Tree Riot, as it was dubbed by the press, erupted between Buddhists and Moors over a Bo tree situated opposite the Krawehl Coal Sheds in Pettah. Even some Hindus venerated this Bo tree, in a reflection of their shared practices and assumptions about the sacred with Buddhists. The significance of this object to multiple religious groups reflects how multi-religious Pettah was, and what a crucible of conflict it could become.¹⁵¹

The site of the Bo tree in Pettah, according to the press, ‘of late...has become the object of adoration by Moormen’ who claimed it was on the burial site of a ‘Moorman of repute’.¹⁵² Violence erupted as the state ‘decided to remove the tree, the cause of the quarrel’, reflecting the poor judgement of the Inspector General of Police and the Mayor of Colombo, who were present at the scene of removal.¹⁵³ This action drew an angry mob of stone-throwing Buddhists. It also upset Moors who recently claimed the site as sacred. Despite the role of the state in removing the tree, the anger of the crowd was not directed at the state, but at the ‘other’ religious group. Several Moors gathered at the site of the uprooted tree and ‘kept up howling *deen! deen!* till two of them fainted and had to be carried away’.¹⁵⁴ The police attempted to separate crowds converging near the tree and managed to preserve a fragile peace overnight. However, the next morning, ‘several scattered assaults took place’.¹⁵⁵ The press mentioned the identity of the belligerents, reporting ‘fights and affrays in several parts of the city’ over two days ‘between Sinhalese Buddhists, and Coast Moormen’.¹⁵⁶ Stones and brickbats were thrown, and shops were looted. On the first day of the violence, ‘anonymous notices were circulating...threatening bodily harm to Buddhists on the Wesak Festival night and the Buddhists retorted with circulars

¹⁵¹ *Ceylon Observer*, 30 April 1898.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ceylon Observer*, 2 May 1898.

threatening the Mahomedans during the Hadji Festival'.¹⁵⁷ These two incidents were clearly connected and highlight how tensions over sacred objects can have consequences in other sacred 'spaces', such as festivals.

Chronologically, the Wattala Riot of 1900 was the next major episode of religious violence, and featured Catholics and Buddhists as discussed above (Event 13). Next, in Jaffna in 1902, Catholics were first restricted in their free observation of their religious beliefs, and later became victims of violence. **[14, Jaffna]** In March 1902, Moors 'prevented the dead body of a Roman Catholic being taken to the burial ground by the public road near which their mosque is situated' in Jaffna.¹⁵⁸ **[15, Jaffna]** In August 1902, a Hindu mob set fire to and destroyed a Catholic church and school.¹⁵⁹

[16, Kalutara] In January 1903, Sinhalese pelted stones at the roof of a mosque in Kalutara and disturbed worshippers. 'A fight between the two parties, and a riot ensued', with many injured.¹⁶⁰ Inter-communal relations deteriorated in the month and a half that followed, as 'petty fights between these two parties [were] of daily occurrence'. For example, Sinhalese 'rowdies' set upon a Moor and 'thrashed [him] severely'.¹⁶¹ Such violence, referred to as 'riots of this nature' in the press, was viewed as 'getting to be rather too frequent just now' between the two communities.¹⁶² However, there was also reprisal violence. **[17, Kalutara]** In February 1903, a 'serious fight took place', which included the assault of a Sinhalese man and his wife, who were 'dragged [by Moors] to their mosque'.¹⁶³ These events, which varied in magnitude from

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 31 March 1902.

¹⁵⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 20 August 1902.

¹⁶⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 21 February 1903.

¹⁶¹ *Ceylon Observer*, 13 March 1903.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

deseccration to complete destruction of places of worship, reflect the tensions around places of worship at the turn of the century.

[18, Anuradhapura] On Poson Poya, 9 June 1903, a special day in the Buddhist calendar, a ‘riot’ took place in the Sacred City of Anuradhapura. The ‘Anuradhapura Riot’ is another of the key episodes in the existing historiography on ‘religious riots’. This episode hinged on the Sinhala-Buddhist belief that they needed to take back ‘rightful ownership’ of ‘their’ lands in Anuradhapura.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, from around 1873 to the early 1900s, tensions between Buddhists, Christians, and the state ratcheted up. In June 1903, Buddhist claims on the ‘sacred city’ turned violent for the first time. Elizabeth Nissan, Anne Blackburn, Sujit Sivasundaram, Pradeep Jeganathan, and Elizabeth Harris have all discussed various aspects of the (newer and historical) claims that Anuradhapura ‘belonged’ to Buddhists.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, violence emerged from a protest against the ‘pollution’ of a Buddhist site due to the expansion of the Anuradhapura town. However, the violence and the claims on Anuradhapura must also be placed within the broader context of confrontations over ‘sacred space’ elsewhere, such as over Bo trees in Kalutara and Pettah, and the freedom for Buddhists to assemble and use sound worship in processions such as in Maggona and Wattala. Against the backdrop of escalating assertions of religious identity during religious festivals, the Anuradhapura Riot appears to be an expression of Buddhist assertion directed against groups considered offensive, including the state, Christians, and Moors.

¹⁶⁴ *Sihala Samaya*, 2 April 1914.

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Nissan, ‘History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist nation’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 25 (1989); Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘Buddhist Kingship, British Archaeology and Historical Narratives in Sri Lanka c.1750-1850’, *Past and Present* 197 (2007), pp. 111-142; Pradeep Jeganathan, ‘Authorizing History, Ordering Land: the Conquest of Anuradhapura’, in Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail (eds.), *Unmaking the Nation: the Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1995), pp. 106-136; Harris, *Religion, Space and Conflict*, p. 135.

The Buddhist narrative on the ‘riot’ is that it was due to the ‘persecution of Buddhists’ on the 2,211th anniversary of Buddhism’s establishment on the island.¹⁶⁶ On this day, over 20,000 pilgrims had assembled in the ‘sacred city’. During this period, Buddhists were already agitated over the ‘removal of ancient Buddhist pillars for mending roads’... and were thus ‘in an excitable state’.¹⁶⁷ The archaeological commissioner, H.C.P. Bell, directed engineers of the Public Works Department to use ‘loose stones’ that he thought were not archaeologically relevant (even though they were to Buddhists) to build the road.¹⁶⁸ Later, when Mudaliyar Amarasekera accidentally ‘rode over a woman’ when ‘riding through the roads’, the enraged crowd started rioting. The *Ceylon Observer* adds that the Mudaliyar gave the woman’s husband ‘five cuts’ with the latter’s own umbrella, ‘and then with open hand struck him on his nose’.¹⁶⁹ The Mudaliyar (a title given to a senior class of Ceylonese government officials) symbolised the violence and callousness of a colonial state that disregarded local religious concerns.

In the violence that followed, anger appears to have been directed against the state, and minority religious groups in the area. Government buildings were attacked (in the only such physical attack against the colonial state), and the Roman Catholic mission was burnt down.¹⁷⁰ Moors (the leading butchers and traders in the area) were indirectly attacked when a meat-stall, ‘an abomination to the Buddhists’ was destroyed. The church and meat-stalls were considered pollutants of the sacred space.¹⁷¹ In the weeks that followed, Sinhala papers contributed to anti-colonial discourses by comparing the British ‘take over’ of this ‘very important place for all Buddhists in the world’ with the historic ‘take over’ of Anuradhapura by King Elara and ‘savage

¹⁶⁶ Harischandra, *Sacred City*, p. 86.

¹⁶⁷ *Times of Ceylon* 9 June 1903, quoted in Harischandra, *Sacred City*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁸ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 185.

¹⁶⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 10 June 1903, quoted in Harischandra, *Sacred City*, p. 88.

¹⁷⁰ The taverns appeared to have survived even though taverns had previously been condemned in Buddhist campaigns for purification of the area. The taverns were opened with permission from the state and brought revenue to the state.

¹⁷¹ *Lakminipahana*, 27 June 1903.

Tamils' (*hädi demalun*) before King Dutugemunu saved it.¹⁷² By casting current events in mytho-historical light, the battle for the 'sacred city' of Anuradhapura took on renewed importance.¹⁷³ Signalling the significance of the site and speaking comparatively, Sinhalese nationalist Anagarika Dharmapala (introduced further in Chapter 2) wrote that 'Anuradhapura is like Mecca to the Mohammedans'.¹⁷⁴

The colonial state made multiple arrests and the case went to court. Walisinghe Harischandra, the local head of the Maha Bodhi Society branch founded in Anuradhapura in 1900, was arrested on 13 June as the ringleader of the 'riot'. He was tried in court (pictured in Figure 7 below) as a nationalist agitator by the state. However, an 'all-Christian jury' found Harischandra innocent on the grounds that there was no evidence the violence was premeditated.¹⁷⁵ Rogers notes that the 'Government officials wanted very much to implicate Harischandra', yet the justice system – perhaps more neutral than the state appreciated – did not deliver them their man.¹⁷⁶ Harischandra was instead immortalised in the Buddhist imagination as a nationalist defender of the faith.

¹⁷² *Sihala Samaya*, 25 June 1903. Reflecting a recycling of epithets, the use of '*Hädi demalun*' can be traced back to at least the sixteenth century in the *Sitavaka Hatana* to describe Tamils fighting Dutugemunu. Strathern, '*Sitavaka Hatana*', p. 60.

¹⁷³ For more on myth-making as a form of legitimisation, see E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 24-26.

¹⁷⁴ Anagarika Dharmapala to the King of England, 1 September 1903, quoted in Harischandra, *Sacred City*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 186.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 7: *The Trial of Harischandra in The Sacred City of Anuradhapura (1908)*

[19, Batticaloa] On 14 November 1904, a ‘religious riot at Batticaloa’ erupted between Hindus and Catholics, in which ‘several were fatally wounded and...one is not expected to live’.¹⁷⁷ The Government Agent had issued orders that Hindu religious processions could not be taken past the Catholic Church, and similarly, no Catholic procession could be taken past the Hindu temple in Pulliyantivu. However, the Catholics disregarded this order, and took a funeral procession past the Hindu temple. Hindus gathered at the temple objected to this and a ‘small row took place first’. The Government Agent, who was summoned, asked for the funeral procession to be taken past the temple in his presence, a violation of his own order (and likely perceived as favouring Christians). Indeed, the Government Agent’s action may reflect a personal pro-Christian sympathy. The Hindus once again objected, and a ‘very serious disturbance’ erupted. Police were called to the scene but only brought the violence under control after several were badly wounded.¹⁷⁸ The aggressors in this case were the Hindus, yet the Catholics and the Government Agent were also responsible for events escalating to the point of violence – underscoring the role of provocateurs.

¹⁷⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 18 November 1904.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

[20, Jaffna] The following year, in June 1905, another ‘riot’ occurred in Jaffna between Hindus and Catholics over the issue of sound worship in processions. The Hindus ‘objected to the beat of tom-tom in a procession’, which triggered violence in which several were severely wounded. In both Jaffna and Batticaloa, Hindus were more populous than Catholics, and may explain why they were willing to resort to violence in opposition to the use of sound in Catholic processions.

[21, Gampola] The next episode of religious violence, which has featured in the historiography, was the Gampola Riot in May 1907.¹⁷⁹ This riot is particularly significant as it features the opening salvos fired in the much longer Gampola Perahera Case that would escalate in 1912. Up until 1907, and despite ‘a great deal of ill feeling going on since 1885’, Buddhist processions had regularly passed through Gampola town playing musical instruments.¹⁸⁰ However, in 1907 Indian Moors who worshipped at the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque (along the route of the procession) raised objections, perhaps in the context of rising group assertiveness against the backdrop of religious revival.

The police and the Government Agent for the Central Province, J.P. Lewis, sided with the Moors based on preserving the peace. Lewis observed that Indian Moors at the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque had already taken Hindus to court for having ‘taken a procession in front of the Mosque when service was going on there’.¹⁸¹ Clearly, both Buddhists and Hindus were at odds with Moors in Gampola over the issue of sound in processions. Although the Gampola Police Court heard the case in favour of the Moors, the Kandy Police Magistrate reheard the case and

¹⁷⁹ John Rogers and Michael Roberts have both referred to this episode and as such it features in the existing religious violence landscape. However, there has thus far only been limited detail on the violence, which I expand on.

¹⁸⁰ Government Agent Central Province to President, Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance Committee, 10 October 1912, SLNA, 21489 ‘Kandy – Buddhist Temporalities – Wallahagoda Devalee Perahera, Despatch No. 21489.

¹⁸¹ J.P. Lewis’s note, SLNA, 21489, Wallahagoda Devalee Perahera.

acquitted the Hindus. As I show using future court cases surrounding processions in Gampola, it is difficult to discern a consistent bias in the judiciary. Instead, personal judgment rather than a fixed state policy appears to determine the outcome of such cases. Nevertheless, on 21 May 1907, Lewis felt it prescient to *not* ‘issue licenses for Buddhist Processions to pass the Mosque if there is any alternative route by which such processions can reach the Temple’.¹⁸²

However, the procession went ahead on 27 May 1907 without the license to beat tom-toms when passing the mosque. According to Lewis, ‘the processionists were attacked by the Moormen, and six persons were injured’.¹⁸³ When the participants attempted to pass the mosque, ‘there was a great riot and free fight between the Muhammadans and Buddhists with clubs, brick bats, stones, etc., being the result of an attempt to stop a “pinkama” passing the mosque.’¹⁸⁴ Indian Moors occupied the junction near the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque, and according to the correspondent for the *Ceylon Observer* in Gampola, ‘innocent passers by were assaulted’.¹⁸⁵ For their part, ‘the Buddhists, taken unawares, bolted’. Nevertheless, over the next two days, the Moors ‘armed with clubs and stones took up a defiant and offensive attitude’.¹⁸⁶ On 29 May, the Moors pre-empted violence and closed their shops, while ‘assaults and fights between Muhammedans and Sinhalese’ from the villages of Delpitiya, Gampola Wela and Sinnapitiya were reported. In Gampola town, it was only the presence of local community leaders and trusted interlocuters such as H.F. de Silva and M.B. Fonseka who were able to disperse the crowds, ‘promising to obtain from Government redress for the wrong done to the women and children, and their religious feelings at the “Pinkama” procession.’¹⁸⁷ Ostensibly a

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Report of G.A. Central Province, TNA, CO 57/170, Ceylon Administration Report, B11.

¹⁸⁴ *Ceylon Observer*, 28 May 1907.

¹⁸⁵ *Ceylon Observer*, 30 May 1907.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

fracas over processions, this episode suggests that serious religious ill-feeling existed between Moors and Sinhalese in Gampola.

The colonial state was indeed concerned by the violence. Yet their avowed interests were not limited to preventing a disturbance of the peace. In fact, government officials stressed the importance of not disturbing the Indian Moors – the aggressors in this riot – ‘who are the leading traders at Gampola’.¹⁸⁸ It appears the state made a pragmatic decision to prevent processions passing the mosque with music to appease actors considered more important to the functioning of the colonial economy. Thus, in September 1907, Government Agent Lewis responded to a petition by Indian Moors and decided that a Buddhist procession’s ‘music should be stopped 50 yards on one side of the Mosque and not resumed before a point fifty yards beyond the Mosque’.¹⁸⁹ The legal basis for Lewis’ decision was the Police Ordinance, which prevented the use of tom-toms when passing within 100 yards of a place of worship. It is from this episode and the Gampola Perahera Case of 1912 that Buddhists accused the state of favouring Moors, which also led to Buddhist resentment. I discuss this dispute further in Chapter 4.

[22, Gampola] Following the Gampola Riot in May 1907, a Moor plot to attack a Buddhist perahera in Gampola was foiled in October 1907. According to the *Ceylon Observer*, ‘a quantity of dynamite buried on the Mosque road, Gampola, by some Moors who meant to kill the Perahera elephants, was fortunately discovered in time’.¹⁹⁰ Had it succeeded, the explosion under the elephants (central symbols of Buddhist processions) would have had a spectacular impact. If this event was indeed planned – as it may have been a conspiracy – violence foiled

¹⁸⁸ SLNA, 21489, Wallahagoda Devalee Perahera.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 24 October 1907.

is still violence intended. Thus, it adds to the understanding of inter-religious tensions in this period.

[23, Hambantota] On 12 May 1911, Moors attacked a Buddhist procession in Hambantota, which had been ‘tom-toming [sic] before they passed the mosque. Some Mohamedans in the Bazaar hearing of this rushed to the spot in large numbers tearing up the fences to provide weapons. The Buddhists seeing they would be overwhelmed sought sanctuary in the police officer’s house where they were soon surrounded by a crowd of angry Mohamedans.’¹⁹¹ The next day, the Moors were fined for disturbing a religious procession, and the Buddhists were fined for playing instruments without a license.

[24, Kurunegala] Two episodes of religious violence took place in Kurunegala in January 1915. First, on 27 January 1915, a ‘licensed Singhalese [sic] procession yesterday failed to stop tom-tomming when passing a mosque and the Moors collected and met it on the way back and [violently] broke it up. As a result, the Singhalese [sic] in the evening collected near a tavern on the Kandy road and assaulted and abused every Moorman who passed.’¹⁹² Twelve Moors were prosecuted for riot, and the Sinhalese were prosecuted for breach of license. In this case, violence was begun by Moors in Kurunegala, and resumed by Sinhalese. The latter were held to account by the state for not silencing their instruments when passing in front of the mosque, however, as opposed to rioting. The state appears to acknowledge that Sinhalese violence was provoked and did not hold them culpable.

¹⁹¹ Leonard S. Woolf, *Diaries in Ceylon, 1908-1911* (London, 1962), pp. 241-242.

¹⁹² Extract from Weekly Report of Assistant Superintendent of Police, North-Western Province for Kurunegala for Week ending 30 January 1915, Michael Roberts Collection, File 1501.

[25, Kurunegala] Second, on 31 January 1915, five ‘Moormen’ attacked Ramasamy ‘a Tamil man’ who was watching a Hindu procession (possibly for Thai Pongal) that involved ‘4,000 or 5,000 people’.¹⁹³ These Moors were likely to have been worshippers at the Jamiul Azhar Bazaar Mosque at 99 Bazaar Street, Kurunegala. During this same Hindu procession, ‘a brush occurred between the Sinhalese and Moormen’ in Bazaar Street.¹⁹⁴ Neither of these belligerents are likely to have been participating in the Hindu procession. This ‘brush’ was likely to have been connected to tensions persisting from the clash on 27 January. The Moors who worshipped at the Kurunegala Bazaar Mosque demonstrated, within a space of four days, that they would not tolerate sound worship in front of their mosque. Police eventually dispersed the crowd, and cases were taken up at the Kurunegala Police Court.¹⁹⁵ On 5 May, at the criminal proceedings before the roving Supreme Court in Kandy, ‘several people identified the accused’ for assaulting Ramasamy with a club.¹⁹⁶ This case was concluded just weeks before the pogrom erupted.

[26, Balangoda] In March 1915, the Balangoda Riot between Moors and Sinhalese took place ‘regarding the question of beating tom-tom in front of a mosque’.¹⁹⁷ Importantly, this ‘riot’ has been mentioned in the historiography as a ‘protest’ taking place in 1914; Ameer Ali’s source is Government Agent Thaine’s report in September 1915 from the Sabaragamuwa Province.¹⁹⁸ Thaine does indeed say ‘1914’. However, I believe this is a typographical error and must be 1915, as he also says the ‘riot’ took place ‘shortly after the Gampola verdict’, which pertains to the Gampola Perahera Case settled in February 1915. Thaine further notes that the violence was ‘organized by the Moors, who up to that day had never raised any objection to the beating of

¹⁹³ *Ceylon Observer*, 11 May 1915.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Islam Mittiran*, 13 March 1915.

¹⁹⁶ *Ceylon Observer*, 11 May 1915.

¹⁹⁷ Report of R.N. Thaine, 8 September 1915, TNA, CO 882/10.

¹⁹⁸ Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 11. Ali does not expand on this incident.

tom-tom in peraheras passing by the mosque'.¹⁹⁹ I discuss the emboldening of Moors following the Case verdict further in Chapter 4.

[27, Kandy] The final episode of religious violence prior to the 1915 pogrom took place in Castle Hill Street, Kandy, the very same street at which the pogrom erupted just three weeks later.²⁰⁰ On 4 May 1915, Indian Moors attacked a Hindu procession with sticks, and threw stones at the participants.²⁰¹ This attack on Hindu processionists, together with the attack on Hindus in Kurunegala in January, likely encouraged antagonism towards Moors and can help explain why Tamil Hindus also participated in the anti-Moor pogrom.

In addition to these episodes of violence that were related to symbols of sacredness, during the period under review, 1853-1915, violence emerged between Sinhalese and Moors over food shortages, caste, and even marriages.²⁰² These events are not featured in the chronology of 'religious violence' above, as they do not meet the definitional threshold described in the chapter introduction. However, the religious identities of Sinhalese and Moors were mobilised in these episodes of 'communal violence', even though religion was not the primary *cause* of violence. Figure 8 shows the episodes of communal violence, in red, as they emerged alongside religious violence, shown in blue, between Sinhalese and Moors. Meanwhile, Figure 9 shows that much of the violence took place in Colombo and along the coastline, where Moors were densely populated. Some of the violence cannot be distilled to a single factor, and often involved various overlapping factors concerning ethnicity, religion, and economics. Three incidents involving Moors and Sinhalese (Catholics and Buddhists) were the 1866 Grain Riot,

¹⁹⁹ Report of Thaine, TNA, CO 882/10.

²⁰⁰ Kannangara makes passing reference to this event as a 'fracas' but does not expand on it. Kannangara, 'The Riots of 1915, p. 134.

²⁰¹ Appendix III – Riots in Kandy, Affidavit of Perumal Kangany, 9 November 1915, D.R. Wijewardene Collection, Sinhalese Memorial, 25 November 1915.

²⁰² Violence was also occurring between and among other ethno-religious groups, that I do not discuss here.

1897-8 Chilaw Disturbances, and the marriage of Minakshi in 1870, as discussed by John Rogers and Alexander McKinley. The Grain Riot, discussed further in Chapter 3, erupted across Colombo, Kandy, and Galle when the price of rice increased due to shortages. Indian Moors and Chetties (non-Muslim traders originally from India) were accused of hoarding rice to raise prices, and many local populations including Sinhalese and Tamils attacked their grain stores.²⁰³ The Chilaw Disturbances were connected to tensions regarding relationships between Moor men and Sinhalese women, and Moors' moneylending practices, but the trigger was the increase in rice prices (like in 1866). Moors, who were the primary rice retailers, had their shops damaged and their goods set alight.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the illicit relationship between a Moor girl (Minakshi) and a Sinhalese Catholic man in 1870, dramatically versified in the *Marakkala Hatana* (Moors' Battle), turned violent when Moors from Colombo chased the fleeing couple to Moratuwa, and later, threw bricks at the Maradana police station after their case against the couple was thrown out.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, pp. 164-168.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-170.

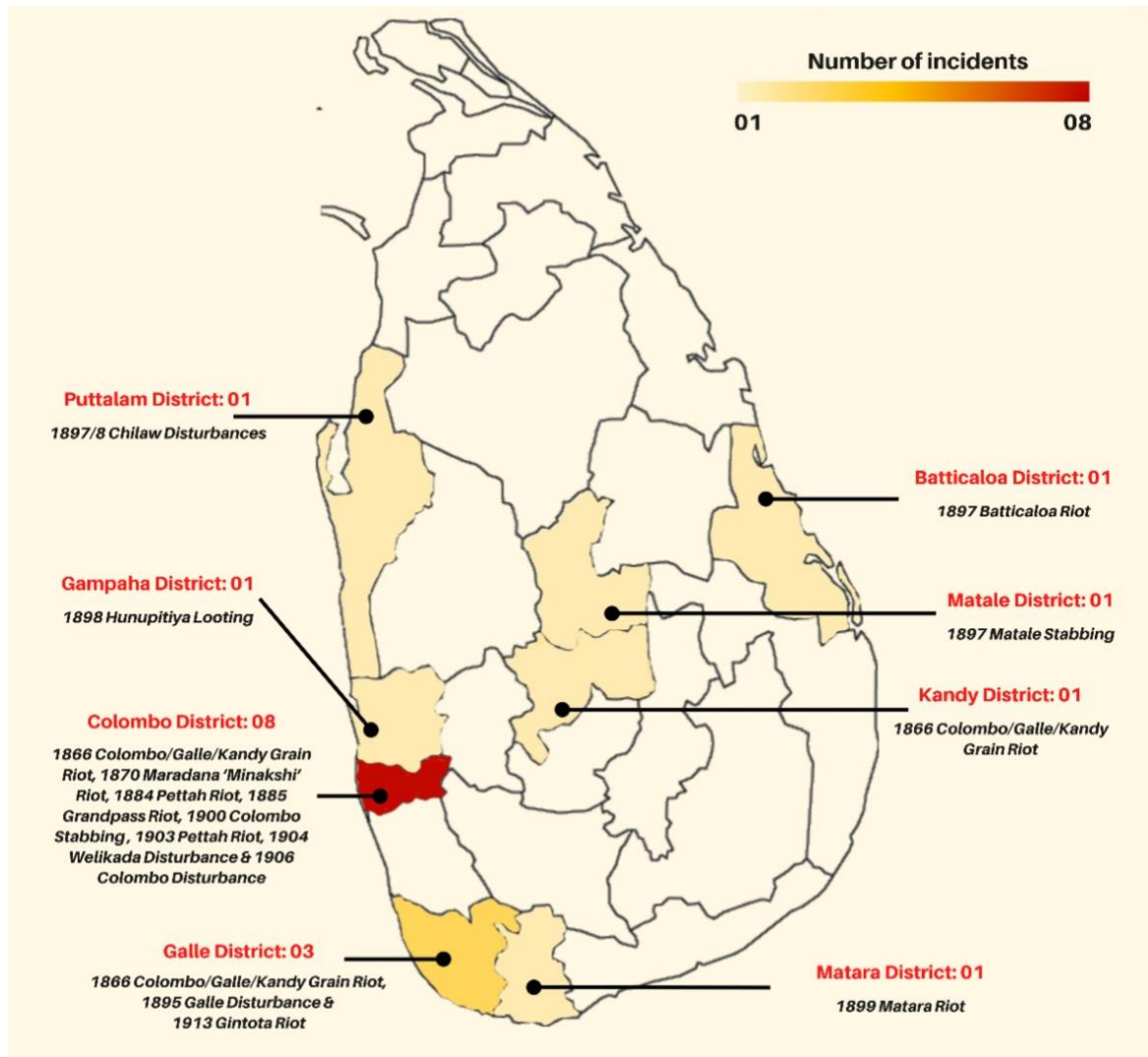
²⁰⁵ McKinley, 'Merchants, Maidens, and Mohammedans', p. 10.

SINHALESE-MOOR 'COMMUNAL VIOLENCE'

Date	Name	Aggressors & Victims	Notes
October 1866	Colombo/ Galle/ Kandy Grain Riot	Sinhalese, Tamils vs Moors, Chetties	Economic tensions, ethno-religious identities of victims less relevance than occupation as traders
May 1867	Beruwela Incident	Sinhalese, Tamils vs Moors	
February/ March 1870	Maradana 'Minakshi' Riot	Moors, Sinhalese (Catholics)	Sinhalese Catholics of Moratuwa
November 1884	Pettah Riot	Indian Moors vs Sinhalese	Sinhalese man provoked Indian Moors by slapping the manager of a gambling hall
July 1885	Grandpass Riot	Moors vs Sinhalese	Moors provoked by Sinhalese dhobies slapping a Moor boy who was playing cricket
July 1890	Galle Riot	Indian Moors vs Buddhists	
July 1890	Galle Riot	Buddhists vs Indian Moors	
August 1891	Kandy Riot	Moors vs state, Buddhists	
October 1895	Galle Disturbance	Moors vs Sinhalese	No reasons given, cannot distinguish between aggressors and victims
June 1896	Katugoda Incident	Moors vs Buddhists	
April 1897	Chilaw Incident	Sinhalese (Catholics) vs Moors	
May 1897	Matale Stabbing	Sinhalese vs Moors	Drunk Sinhalese stab a Moor outside a Moor boutique
October 1897	Batticaloa Riot	Sinhalese vs Moors	No reasons given, cannot distinguish between aggressors and victims
December 1897 - January 1897	Chilaw Disturbances	Sinhalese (Catholics) vs Moors	Assumed Catholic based on Catholic predominance of Chilaw
April 1898	Pettah Riot	Buddhists, Indian Moors	
May 1898	Hunupitiya Looting	Sinhalese vs Moors	Sinhalese looted the boutique of a Moors' during the 'Buddhist-Mohammedan' disputes, presumably in Pettah beginning April 1898
April 1899	Matara Riot	Sinhalese vs Moors	Unlawful assembly to commit riot and criminal trespass on the boutique of one Abdul Cader
December 1900	Colombo Stabbing	Sinhalese vs Moors	Two drunk Sinhalese got in a dispute with a Moor, and when other Moors came to his defence the Sinhalese pulled out knives, and stabbed the Moors
January 1903	Kalutara Riot	Buddhists vs Moors	
February 1903	Kalutara Riot	Moors vs Buddhists	
April 1903	Pettah Riot	Indian Moors vs Sinhalese	No reasons given, cannot distinguish between aggressors and victims
June 1903	Anuradhapura Riot	Buddhists vs state, Catholics, Moors	
April 1904	Welikada Disturbance	Sinhalese vs Moors	One Sinhalese stole a kettle used by Moors for ablutions, another Sinhalese broke bottles inside a Moor's boutique
April 1906	Colombo Disturbance	Indian Moors vs Sinhalese	Three Indian Moors charged with grievous hurt to two Sinhalese
May 1907	Gampola Riot	Indian Moors vs Buddhists	
October 1907	Gampola Dynamite Incident	Indian Moors vs Buddhists	
May 1911	Hambantota Riot	Ceylon Moors vs Buddhists	
April 1913	Gintota Riot	Sinhalese vs Moors	Cause unknown but police officers and Moors severely injured
January 1915	Kurunegala Riot	Indian Moors vs Buddhists	
March 1915	Balangoda Riot	Ceylon Moors vs Buddhists	
May 1915	Kandy Riot	Indian Moors vs Hindus	
May/ June 1915	Anti-Moor Pogrom	Sinhalese (primarily Buddhists, also Catholics), Tamils vs Moors	See Chapter 4

Figure 8: Sinhalese-Moor 'Communal Violence'

SINHALESE-MOOR 'COMMUNAL VIOLENCE' 1866-1913



Note on naming convention: When the term 'riot' was used in the description of the violence in primary sources, that naming convention is used here. When the violence seemed of less gravity than a 'riot', the colonial term 'disturbance' is used. Elsewhere, descriptive terms for the violence are used.

Figure 9: 'Communal Violence' Heat Map

Meanwhile, there were at least eight episodes of violence breaking out between Sinhalese and Moors in which the motivations are unknown.²⁰⁶ These episodes included multiple deaths. For instance, in Matale in May 1897, a group of drunk Sinhalese who 'were creating a disturbance opposite the boutique of a Moor trader' stabbed two of 'his confraternity'. One of these Moors died. In October 1897, in Batticaloa, another man (unknown identity) died in a 'riot' between

²⁰⁶ *Ceylon Observer*, 31 October 1895; 14 May 1897; 26 December 1900; 13 April 1903; 4 April 1904; 19 April 1906; 16 April 1913.

Sinhalese and Moors. The cause is unknown but the response of the state included the despatch of police from Colombo, and the military from Trincomalee, suggesting that the scale of the violence was too much for local policemen in Batticaloa to handle.²⁰⁷ In Colombo, in December 1900, two drunk Sinhalese ‘rudely brushed against a Moorman’, and when other Moors came to ‘the rescue of their co-religionist’, the Sinhalese stabbed and killed a Moor and seriously injured two others. The colonial state saw these episodes as ‘riots’ between ethno-religious groups. In reality, these outbreaks of public violence reflected tensions in the social fabric, and how, for example, ethno-religious identities were highlighted at times of confrontation.

There were at least four other episodes of Sinhalese-Moor violence involving the looting of boutiques between 1866 and 1904 that were based in the Colombo district. The most serious was arguably the November 1884 Pettah Riot, in which around 300 rioters participated.²⁰⁸ A personal dispute about money, between a Sinhalese man and a ‘very wealthy and influential’ Indian Moor who managed a gambling-hall, broke out and the Sinhalese slapped the latter. In retaliation, a few days later, Indian Moor traders in Pettah assaulted the Sinhalese man. The police, according to the *Ceylon Observer*, ought to have taken ‘precautionary measures...to prevent a rupture on [sic] the next few days between two races of people, who, by their avocations in life, were continuously coming together in the Fort, the Pettah and neighbourhood’.²⁰⁹ Was this a crude colonial ethnicisation of the dispute?

The violence that followed suggests it was not. Two days later, on 2 November 1884, ‘riots commenced in earnest’ as Indian Moors attacked the same Sinhalese man's son and his associates, and Sinhalese reinforcements arrived. ‘Rioting and looting were in full

²⁰⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 21 October 1897.

²⁰⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 3 and 11 November 1884.

²⁰⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 10 November 1884.

vigour...Stones, tiles, &c. were hurled right and left, and the streets rendered impassable'. By 4 November, 'Town and Coast Moormen' were involved in fighting with Sinhalese, suggesting that Ceylon Moors were eventually involved too – foreshadowing the spread of violence from Indian Moors to Ceylon Moors in the 1915 pogrom. There was a class dimension to the violence too, as reported by British spectators: 'Gangs of armed ruffians of the Sambankara [Indian Moor] class' formed, and 'vagabonds of all nationalities, taking advantage of the occasion...and turn the riots to their own gain'.²¹⁰ Although religious symbols or sacredness did not trigger violence, ethno-religious identities were mobilised, pitting Sinhalese against Moors in response to a localised dispute at a gambling hall. Moors as a group were blamed, and their shops from Pettah, to Kotahena and Kochchikade were targeted as a result. There is a clear conflation of their position in the colonial economy with their ethno-religious identity. This violence between Moor shopkeepers and Sinhalese villagers or townsfolk who do not control the bazaars is a concrete manifestation of the dynamics that I explore in Chapter 3.

The spread of ethno-religious violence shows some geographical concentrations, particularly along the South-Western coast where different groups had settled and participated in a relatively older market economy.²¹¹ Yet, several outbreaks occurred across the island, including in the North and the East, which did not experience violence during the 1915 pogrom. Over this period of 62 years, then, violence cannot be understood as a manifestation of purely local grievances that happen to be expressed in ethno-religious terms. Given the fact that all the major ethno-

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* The class element is reflected in the use of terms 'ruffians' and 'vagabonds'.

²¹¹ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 198.

religious groups on the island are involved – Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Moors – there appears to be a general conjuncture of heightened religious self-assertion.

Furthermore, two key patterns emerge in the genealogy of ethno-religious violence, each of which is relevant to the 1915 pogrom. First, the historical record of ethno-religious violence during this period does not feature violence between Buddhists and Hindus. Instead, these two groups often appear to be on the receiving end of violence, particularly in the context of their overnight religious processions. Their shared tradition of sound worship in religious processions unites them in their shared experience of the state restricting their religious rites to accommodate other unsympathetic religious groups. Michael Carrithers observes that Indic spirituality was fluid enough to accommodate multiple religious connections to different traditions, and terms this eclecticism ‘polytropy’.²¹² However, Buddhists and Hindus also feature as aggressors targeting *other* religious groups including Moors and Catholics.²¹³ Such aggression was seen in Kalutara in January 1903, in Jaffna in August 1902 and June 1905, and in Batticaloa in November 1904. This finding complicates historical understandings of Sinhalese/Buddhists and Tamils/Hindus as being perennially opposed communities.²¹⁴ Instead, it finds them on the same side of the dividing line when confronted with other monotheistic groups in the island. This pattern that emerges from the mid-nineteenth century onwards helps to contextualise the fact that Tamils/Hindus also participated in the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom, a relatively underappreciated fact. The religious distinction between Buddhists and Hindus does not appear important in the context of religious violence, even as distinctions in ethnicity were

²¹² Michael Carrithers, ‘On Polytropy: Or the Natural Condition of Spiritual Cosmopolitanism in India: The Digambar Jain Case’, *Modern Asian Studies* 34/4 (2000), p. 833. This polytropic quality and the interest of Ceylon’s Buddhists in various Hindu traditions (for their ‘spiritual sustenance’) was strongly criticised by revivalists who wanted to ‘purify’ Buddhism.

²¹³ Anglicans – ostensibly the group that could expect some level of state support prior to the disestablishment of Church and State in the 1880s – do not feature as aggressors (or victims) in religious violence.

²¹⁴ Several Tamils were Christian by faith. I focus on the Tamils of Hindu faith in this analysis.

still relevant (hence the reference to *hädi demahun* above). Similarly, the monotheistic Moors and Catholics do not come into violent conflict with each other over religious festivals during this period. Instead, Catholics seemed ‘unwilling to accept’ Buddhist processions as assertions of ‘Lanka [as] Buddhist land’.²¹⁵ There are only two episodes of Moor-Catholic violence that involve economics and caste-based conflicts: (i) the Chilaw Disturbances, and (ii) the Minakshi disturbances. Thus, the real religious axis appears to be Indic groups that use sound in worship on the one hand, and monotheistic groups that become more aggressive against ‘other’ religious rituals. While growing Catholic and Moor intolerance of sound worship is initially important, growing Buddhist religious assertion (explored in Chapter 2) by the late nineteenth century suggests that sound worship practices may have increased towards the end of the century.

Second, Moors appear to replace Catholics as the primary aggressors targeting Buddhist processions. Following the emblematic Kotahena Riot in 1883, Buddhist processions were attacked by Catholics in Maggona in 1889 and in Wattala in 1900 – all three of these riots resulted in fatalities (including both Buddhists and Catholics). By the last decade of the century, Moors – perhaps emboldened by Catholic action – attempt to impede Buddhist processions and contest sacred spaces with greater fervour. The events of July 1890 in China Garden, 1911 in Hambantota, the Pettah Bo Tree Riot in 1898, and 1907 in Gampola featured Moor aggression against Buddhist processions and sacred spaces. In 1915, the four attacks on Buddhist and Hindu processions prior to the pogrom suggest that Moors were making claims that the sacred spaces of their mosques were not to be infringed on by passing processions.

In the existing historiography, it is generally the Gampola Perahera dispute (1907 and 1912-1916) that is seen as setting the scene for violence in Kandy in May 1915. Yet it is necessary

²¹⁵ Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 200.

to place the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom in a longer history of religious violence. Violent conflict over the use of noise worship between Indian Moors and Buddhists dates back at least to 1890, while other disputes between Moors and Buddhists over sacred space were evident from 1867 onwards. Crucially, in the conflicts emerging specifically over religious processions going past the ‘other’s’ place of worship, in all but two of the riots identified, Indian Moors were the aggressors.²¹⁶ That Moors were victimised in 1915 across five provinces was indeed new, and on a scale previously unseen. However, the violence came after years of Indian Moors actively subverting Buddhist efforts at peacefully holding their processions at night. Thus, the pogrom of 1915 appears to be less an episode of what Pradeep Jeganathan calls ‘eruptive violence’ that emerged in a vacuum, than the product of cumulative episodes of religious violence over sacred space within the broader context of economic depression and war.²¹⁷ In Chapter 4, I examine whether the violence of 1915 was in some part intended, to further borrow from Jeganathan, as a ‘*guti-kama* (a beating, literally eating blows)’, which is viewed by the perpetrators as ‘an entirely legitimate activity, so moral, so normative’, to avenge decades of disrespect to Buddhist (and Hindu) traditions.²¹⁸

Conclusion

Ethno-religious violence during British colonial rule goes deeper and further than the current historiography suggests. Specifically, violence between Sinhalese/Buddhists and Moors was not unique to the early twentieth century. In India’s history of violence, the 1857 ‘Mutiny’ represented a turning point in terms of state-society relations. Meanwhile, in places like Bengal,

²¹⁶ Ceylon Moors were behind the Hambantota and Balangoda Riots.

²¹⁷ In Jeganathan’s construction of a ‘space for violence’ in another context, he questions the idea that the motives and logic behind violence are ‘a response to a perceived crisis... a response that remakes that disturbed balance’. Pradeep Jeganathan, ‘A Space for Violence: Anthropology, Politics and Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity’, in Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds.), *Community, Gender and Violence* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 47-49.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

which saw substantial Hindu-Muslim violence by the turn of the century, the ‘first recorded communal riot in modern Bengal’ was found to have taken place as late as in May 1891.²¹⁹ Even if we treat the 1853 Trincomalee Riot as an outlier, the fact that ethno-religious violence escalates from 1883 onwards suggests that Ceylon was by no means lagging behind places like India in terms of heightening ethno-religious antagonisms.

In Ceylon, unlike in India, the British did not see ethno-religious violence as a threat to the ‘existence of their rule’.²²⁰ Instead, such ‘riots’ were viewed as daily but not deadly disruptions to order in the colony that could be managed by the colonial judicial system. Indeed, one of the key reasons I have been able to identify so many ‘new’ events of ethno-religious violence is because they ended up being adjudicated in court, and therefore recorded for posterity. The impact of colonial policy on ethno-religious violence can be debated. The 1853 Trincomalee Riot, which predated the 1865 Police Ordinance, is evidence that the state’s regulation of sound was not a necessary precursor to violence – the sound alone, and the perceived disturbance to a place of worship, was enough to trigger a ‘riot’. Importantly, ethno-religious violence prior to 1915 did not lead to any broader considerations in policy (aside from the regulation of sound), as it was seen as local and unthreatening to the state in that contemporary political context. One reason it may have been viewed as unthreatening was because ethno-religious violence did not take place between the two biggest groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Crucially, in the 27 episodes of religious violence that took place prior to the 1915 pogrom, ‘only’ six people died. Similarly, in the 15 episodes of communal violence between Sinhalese and Moors prior to 1915, three people died. Although there were relatively frequent outbursts

²¹⁹ Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*, p. 2.

²²⁰ Anand A. Yang, ‘Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the “Anti-Cow Killing” Riot of 1893’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22/4 (1980), p. 577.

of violence, they were not necessarily deadly. The 1915 pogrom, then, marked a watershed in Ceylon's modern history of ethno-religious violence. How far were the events of May-June 1915 equivalent to the violence discussed in this chapter and how far should they be understood as a distinctly new phenomenon, as reflected in the terminology of the pogrom? The next two chapters attempt to contextualise the violence described in this chapter by focusing on the two key underlying causes of the pogrom: religious revival and religious identity formation, and Sinhalese economic grievances with Moors.

Chapter 2: The Buddhist and Islamic Revivals

In 1879, the Anglican Bishop of Colombo, Reginald Copleston, complained in a letter to his colleagues at the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Ceylon that,

[Buddhism] is receiving an *impetus*...from the prestige given to it by the interest taken in Pali scholarship and Buddhist literature in Europe. The Secretary of an obscure Society [Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, discussed below]...has been writing, it appears, to several Buddhist priests here, hailing them as brothers in the march of intellect, and congratulating one or two of them on the part they took so nobly against Christianity in a certain ill-judged but insignificant “public controversy” [Panadura Debate]...This nonsense has a good deal of effect, I think, on the common people; while the more educated...welcome the extravagant encomiums passed on the true original Buddhism by European writers, and thereby justify their own adherence to the national religion...It is also an error to suppose that Buddhism can be safely praised in England. All that comes out here and is made the most of.¹

The ‘impetus’ that Copleston refers to is more familiarly known in the historiography as the Buddhist revival, the timing of which owed something to the global conjuncture, including a scholarly interest in ‘Oriental studies’ from Europe and Britain.² Gananath Obeyesekere’s scholarship on ‘Protestant Buddhism’ is perhaps one of the most renowned theses on the Buddhist revival. It suggests that Buddhism was transformed in the nineteenth century as it mobilised against Christianity, and by taking on shades of Protestant Christianity (such as its ‘norms and organisational forms’) as evident in parts of Europe and America.³ Scholars such as Anne Blackburn, who have emphasised both longer-term continuities in Buddhist practice into the nineteenth century and the way in which some aspects of Buddhist revival can be dated

¹ R. Copleston quoted in *Classified Digest of the Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1892* (London, 1894), p. 664.

² I broadly define ‘revival’ as a self-strengthening of group identity, combined with an awareness of the ‘other’, i.e., the colonial state or other ethno-religious groups in Ceylon.

³ Gananath Obeyesekere, ‘Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon,’ *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 1/1 (1970), p. 46.

to the eighteenth century, have critiqued Obeyesekere's thesis. Thus, the long period of Buddhist revival featured two distinct phases that overlapped: the first (circa 1750-1850) involved *intra*-religious struggle, alliances, and reform; and the second (circa 1840-1915) involved *inter*-religious struggle, alliances, and reform. The first section of this chapter focuses on the second phase – when the Buddhist revival came into closer contact, and ultimately conflict, with other ethno-religious groups such as Moors.⁴ This contact with 'the other' triggered certain changes to the broader Sinhala-Buddhist identity.

In contrast to the *longue durée* of the Buddhist revival, the Islamic revival is typically dated to the 1880s. However, as suggested in Chapter 1, intra-religious struggle and reform can be traced back to the 1850s, when sectarian disputes emerged over Islamic practices. Like the Buddhist revival, then, Islamic revival appears to have had two phases of internally and externally-driven reform. The second phase, which may be more appropriately termed a 'revival' from the 1880s onwards, was not simply a direct response to the Buddhist revival although it took some cues from the ongoing Buddhist (and Hindu) revivals. It continued to display features of internal reform, and intra-religious alliances. I accordingly situate the discussion of the two revivals using a framework of global conjuncture to understand exactly why changes in identity construction took place in the late nineteenth century. If, as is hinted at in Copleston's diatribe, transnational support, alliances, and allegiances had a significant impact on the Buddhist revival, I argue that such factors also enabled the Islamic revival.

Notably, a Hindu revival also took place in northern Ceylon in the nineteenth century, pre-dating the second phase of Buddhist revival.⁵ There are several parallels between the Buddhist

⁴ This section of the chapter potentially presents itself as an analysis of the Buddhist revival, situated between the 'Protestant Buddhism' approach and the 'transformative eighteenth century' approach.

⁵ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 442-5.

and Hindu revivals, including the emergence of a charismatic leader, Arumuga Navalar, the focus on classical texts, and the borrowing of Christian practices to wield against missionaries who ridiculed Hindu iconology and ideology. Yet, despite such similarities there is limited evidence and reference in scholarship to the possibility that the two religious groups ever attempted to work together to confront Christianity. This lack of cooperation might be partly because Hindus and Buddhists had for so long in the island distinguished themselves against one another. It may have been a missed opportunity, but further investigation falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Unpacking the colonial setting

Overt connections, including the transmission of political thought and ideas particularly between the West, the Middle East and Ceylon, were substantial.⁶ Such connections were aided by modern technologies of communications and travel between port cities (such as Colombo), and helped promote the circulation of racial thought such as Aryanism, global ideologies such as pan-Islamism, and the growth of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments.⁷ On the one hand, the advent of the modern printing press, and the growth of ‘print capitalism’ in Ceylon contributed to the politicisation of ethnicities during the late nineteenth century as part of the self-strengthening of Sinhala-Buddhist, and to a lesser extent, Moor, identities.⁸ On the other hand, European intellectuals took an interest in ‘race’ studies and ethnographies that were developed across empires. Theorising Aryanism (including the notion that cultural differences may be inherently located in nature) was one such discussion on racial thought.⁹ There exists

⁶ For European influence over the ‘Young Ceylon’ group see, Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem, Percy Colin-Thomé, *People Inbetween* Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1989), p. 59.

⁷ Mark Frost, “Wider Opportunities”: Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870–1920’, *Modern Asian Studies* 36/4 (2002), p. 939.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 40.

⁹ David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven; London, 1994), p. 88.

limited scholarly discussion on the extent to which British ethnological conceptions of Aryanism, and British Orientalism, influenced Sinhala-Buddhist racial thought in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ I explore how this race theory emerging in the metropole was reproduced and remoulded in the colony, and the extent to which such a theory applied to Sinhala-Buddhists and those perceived as ‘others’ in Ceylon. I also analyse how Moors in Ceylon leveraged certain orientalist discourses and strategically deployed ethnic or religious categories for their own ends.

The question of how ethno-religious identities were deployed against the colonial state and the ‘other’ is, then, at the core of this chapter. The Buddhist revival demonstrates how religious feeling was used to resist aspects of colonialism. Ethnicity and language were two other devices that were interlinked in this nascent nationalist struggle. India is an obvious point of comparison that has already absorbed significant attention across South Asian historiography. In India, compared to Ceylon, language and ethnicity appeared relatively less important within the anti-colonial struggle. The British were partially responsible for this divergence between India and Ceylon, having ‘enumerated communities’ by religion (e.g. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) and caste in India.¹¹ In Ceylon, British Orientalist George Turnour’s 1833 summary of the recently translated Mahāvamsa, which interpreted ‘the history of Lanka as the history of Sinhalese kingdoms’, influenced the decision to employ race in the Ceylon Legislative Council.¹² Although British Orientalism eventually contributed to the growing status of Buddhism, and its attachment to Sinhalaness, one of the effects of promoting ethnicity ahead of religion through colonial structures was the rise of a nationalist, ethno-religious ideology. In contrast to this

¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*; Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, pp. 62-63. Sivasundaram focuses on Orientalism and Orientalist scholars operating in the first half century of British colonial rule. Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, pp. 96-134.

¹¹ Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), p. 1; Nicholas B. Dirk, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001), pp. 198-211.

¹² Rogers, ‘Social Classification in Lanka’, pp. 641-642.

context in Ceylon, religion, ethnicity and politics were ‘comparatively detached from each other’ over the longer-term of Indian history.¹³ Thus Ceylon’s experience reflects a unique pathway in terms of anti-colonial expression, inter-communal violence, and eventual Independence in 1948. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I attempt to unravel these differences between Ceylon and India.

I grapple with key drivers and principles of these two revivals that made the ‘other’ a threat or source of competition. This ethno-religious competition refers to the perception that the world was made up of distinct races that were intrinsically associated with religious traditions, and that it was natural to hope for one’s own ethno-religious group to be ‘victorious’ over others, whether, for example, in the spheres of economics, trade, or religious virtuosity.¹⁴ A common feature for both Sinhala-Buddhists and Moors in their conceptions of what constitutes ethno-religious strength was the idea of ‘togetherness’ – an ideal that both groups aspired to but which minorities seem to have been more likely to succeed in (out of a sense of necessity).¹⁵ This perceived togetherness of one group could in turn lead to resentment in the other group. Therefore, I draw attention to elements of ethno-religious competition, and efforts to improve group cohesiveness or ‘togetherness’ on the part of Sinhala-Buddhists and Moors.

¹³ Strathern, ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern’, p. 864, drawing on Lieberman’s distinction between ‘protected rimlands’ and an exposed zone that included India. See Victor Lieberman, ‘Protected Rimlands and Exposed Zones: Reconfiguring Premodern Eurasia’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50/3 (2008), pp. 714-715.

¹⁴ The language of ethno-religious competition can be compared with ‘ethnic coalition building’ (that highlighted ‘tribal differences’) in Zambia, and ‘clannishness’ used in other contexts. See Daniel N. Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 180 and 195.

¹⁵ Lan Cao highlights the ‘tendency towards “clannishness” of certain ethnic groups, particularly ‘newcomers’ to a country. Lan Cao, ‘The Diaspora of Ethnic Economies: Beyond the Pale?’ *William and Mary Law Review* 44/4 (2003), p. 1562. An example of minority togetherness from the late nineteenth century is the Mappilas of Malabar, who, according to a contemporary colonial official, ‘as a class pull well together’. David Arnold notes, that ‘the mosque provided a focus of loyalty and a centre for collective action’. David Arnold, ‘Islam, the Mappilas and peasant revolt’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 9/4 (1982), p. 262.

This chapter explores several questions. How and why did transnational connections matter in a local issue? How far did the British colonial state and orientalist discourses shape one kind of identity formation over another? Was the way in which ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities intertwined distinct to Ceylon? The chapter is presented both chronologically – by dealing with the Buddhist revival and then the Islamic revival – and thematically. In analysing these two revivals, I explore the scope of the revival, the impact of British Orientalism, and the degree of ‘invented tradition’ in forming a ‘national identity’.¹⁶

A. The Buddhist Revival

Scope of the Revival: Reorganisation, Education and Language

In some ways, the Buddhist revival began in the mid-eighteenth century, with Siamese monk Sthavira Upali’s visit to Lanka, and the establishment of the *Siyam Nikāya* (Siamese Order) in 1753.¹⁷ Buddhism, in general, is characterised by the possibility of renewal and reform.¹⁸ The earliest expressions of the revival were largely inward-looking (within the Buddhist fraternity) to reverse what was perceived as a long-term decline of Buddhism on the island.¹⁹ The aims of early reformist monks such as Velivita Saraṇamkara was the reorganisation of the *sāsana* (Buddha’s teachings), Pali learning for monks associated with the *Siyam Nikāya*, and the emergence of a ‘textual community’ across Southeast Asian monastic networks.²⁰ Caste differences had resulted in conflicts over who could receive *upasampada* (higher ordination), which was restricted to the *Goyigamas* until the nineteenth century. Thus reformists, both lay

¹⁶ I borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s term ‘invented tradition’ to describe revivalists claiming practices or beliefs as “[t]radition” which appear or claim to be old [but] are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’. Eric J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁷ Anne Blackburn shows that a ‘reformulation of the social organization and the intellectual practices of Lankan Buddhist monasticism took place during the eighteenth century,’ transforming the ‘character of Buddhism’. Anne Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (New Jersey, 2001), p. 5.

¹⁸ Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, p. 102.

¹⁹ I use the term ‘revival’ for this early phase with caution, as suggested in Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 100.

²⁰ Kitsiri Malalgoda, ‘Concepts and Confrontations: A Case Study of Agama’ in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Collective Identities* Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1997), p. 64; Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning*, p. 105.

and monastic, attempted to import ‘new ordination lineages’ from Southeast Asia.²¹ The result of such efforts was the formation of the new *Amarapura* and *Rāmañña Nikāyas*, which maintained caste differences (for example, the *Amarapura Nikāya* was connected with the *Karava* and *Salagama* castes) but broadened the scope for higher ordination in Lanka.²² The early stages of the revival also witnessed a shift in monastic dominance from the Kandyan region to the Low-Country region, setting the stage for the expression of religious identity in the South in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.²³

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Buddhist revival took a new turn, as it featured the modern politicisation of Sinhala-Buddhist identity. In this politicisation process, Sinhala-Buddhists appeared to ‘emphasi[se] their singularity and yet also facilitate their modernisation by transforming...into political groups for the modern political arena’.²⁴ Though discourses of Buddhist antipathy towards Christianity have a longer history on the island, early encounters with Christian missionaries in the British period were generally marked by tolerance or mutual coexistence.²⁵ Now there was a move ‘to build up the self-respect of the Sinhalese’, which included the defence of sacred space.²⁶ From this position, Sinhala-Buddhists increasingly saw other ethno-religious groups as competitors instead of those who had to be accommodated.

²¹ Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, p. 144. Addressing problems between the *nikāyas* remained part of the Buddhist revival even in the 1880s but it was one among many other priorities. *Ibid*, p. 164.

²² Amunugama, *Lion’s Roar*, p. 286.

²³ Sivasundaram. *Islanded*, p. 105.

²⁴ De Silva, ‘Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict’, p. 141.

²⁵ On the pre-nineteenth century: Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in sixteenth-century Sri Lanka: Portuguese imperialism in a Buddhist Land* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 136; Richard F. Young and J.S.B. Senanayake, *The Carpenter-Heretic: a collection of Buddhist stories about Christianity from 18th century Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 1998).

²⁶ Michael Roberts, ‘For Humanity. For the Sinhalese. Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat’ *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56/4 (1997), p. 1008.

As with other world religions in this period, Buddhism in Ceylon too had to define itself in relation to the religion of the coloniser because of being excluded from the state and politics.²⁷ For example, it attempted to shed polytheistic cultural influences from other religious traditions such as Hinduism, which came to be viewed as ‘contaminating’ Buddhism. Obeyesekere describes the ‘transformed’ Buddhism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as ‘Protestant Buddhism’. Blackburn challenges certain parts of this thesis, by claiming Obeyesekere is disproportionately preoccupied with Euro-American factors and posits that there was significant continuation in Buddhist practices, such as ‘continued collaboration between laypeople and monastics’ and ‘attachment to potent sites and relics...monastic education, [and] preaching’.²⁸ Nevertheless, some features of Obeyesekere’s thesis remain relevant.²⁹

Such features included a focus on ‘classical’ texts such as the *tripitaka*, and ‘Western’ rationalisation (the distancing from customs and tradition).³⁰ Inspiration was taken from Christian organisations, and reflected for example in the establishment of the ‘Society for the Propagation of Buddhism’ in 1862, which clearly mimicked (at least in name), the Christian ‘Society for the Propagation of the Gospel’ in Ceylon.³¹ Another example of borrowing from Protestant methods in the Buddhist revival were the spirited Temperance campaigns of the early twentieth century that were analogous to transnational temperance movements in places as far away as the Americas. Although abstinence from intoxication was one of Buddhism’s Five

²⁷ For example, by demonstrating that their sacred texts were not at odds with rational or scientific thinking. Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), p. 338.

²⁸ Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, pp. 199-200. For further critiques, see Charles Hallisey, ‘Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism’ in Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago, 1995), pp. 31-62.

²⁹ Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (New Jersey, 1988), pp. 202-240.

³⁰ Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, p. 200.

³¹ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 193.

Precepts, John Rogers argues that the two Temperance campaigns of 1904 and 1912 represented a form of cultural nationalism among the Sinhalese (not just Sinhala-Buddhists).³²

By the mid-nineteenth century, Buddhists were confronted by a rapidly modernising Christian missionary effort.³³ Christian missionaries affiliated with the Wesleyans, the Church Missionary Society, and the Baptist Church arrived in Ceylon in around the second decade of the nineteenth century. These Protestant missionaries engaged in aggressive proselytization, and their printed material was often derogatory towards other religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism.³⁴ For Catholics, for instance, the impact of the arrival of various Protestant missionaries was felt in two ways. First, Catholicism, too, was criticised by Protestant missionaries.³⁵ Second, the use of printing presses by the Protestants prompted the emergence of a Catholic press. This technological development influenced a modern Catholic consciousness, which arguably contributed to the Catholic militancy discussed in Chapter 1.³⁶

Throughout this early period of aggressive confrontation by the missionaries, Buddhists remained non-violent. Buddhists lacked the technological capacity to respond to Christian publications until the establishment of the Lankopakara Press in 1862. Instead, they petitioned the state to rein in missionaries who insulted the Buddha and published 'derogatory literature' against Buddhism.³⁷ Yet state policies appeared to be geared against Buddhists. For instance,

³² John D. Rogers, 'Cultural nationalism and social reform: the 1904 Temperance movement in Sri Lanka', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26/3 (1989), pp. 321-322.

³³ George Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response*, (Columbia, SC, 1988), pp. 3-4.

³⁴ Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, (London, 2006), p. 176. The first printing presses were introduced to the island by the Dutch in the mid-eighteenth century to spread Christianity. Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, pp. 107-8.

³⁵ Bartholomeusz, 'The 1883 Sri Lanka Riots', p. 94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

³⁷ De Silva, 'Suppression of Buddhism', p. 35; Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, p. 108.

the state set up an approval system that made only Christian schools eligible for funding.³⁸ By contrast, Buddhist schools run by local temples were often denied funding by the state's School Commission, which was dominated by members of the Christian clergy.³⁹ Despite such disadvantages, some monks provided Christian missionaries with translation support and access to their preaching halls, a tolerance that even baffled the benefiting missionaries.⁴⁰

Eventually, however, the confrontational attitude of Christian missionaries generated a counter-confrontational attitude from local religious representatives.⁴¹ This shift in the treatment of missionaries also applied to the treatment of non-Christian religious 'others' (including Moors). In the 1860s, as global forces weighed down on Buddhists already internally reorganising in Ceylon, Buddhists began to 'fight back and "write back" against Christianity', a phenomenon that was evident in Indian, Chinese, and Japanese societies too.⁴² The famous 'Panadura Debate' of 1873 marked this shift, when Buddhists represented by Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda (introduced in Chapter 1), supported by Ven. Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala, confronted Christian missionaries in a public debate on religion. In previous debates between 1865 and 1871 Christian missionaries exhibited the 'superiority' of their religious doctrine.⁴³ Yet by 1873, Buddhist monks had gained experience in debating (including internally, regarding caste and sect), and had familiarised themselves with Christian scriptures to point out illogic and inconsistencies.⁴⁴ Gunananda's final speech demonstrated this more abrasive response to Christian provocations:

³⁸ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, pp. 175-176.

³⁹ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 176; Lee, *Census of Ceylon 1891*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p.178. Similarly, the Hindu revivalist Navalar reportedly translated the Bible into Tamil for the first time in the nineteenth century. De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 443.

⁴¹ The tolerance demonstrated in earlier encounters with missionaries diminished but did not disappear. Harris, *Religion, Space and Conflict*, pp. 200-201.

⁴² L.A. Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change in Ceylon, 1865-1885* (Colombo, 1993), p. 1; Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 350.

⁴³ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 429-30.

⁴⁴ This appears to have been a strategy also adopted by Arya Samajists in India. See Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 351.

How will the Rev. gentleman get over the innumerable immoralities mentioned in the Bible for instance, that affair of Lot and his daughter, the incest committed by the sons and daughters of Eve, and a host of others?⁴⁵

The relatively new printing press was deployed by Buddhists to immediately print and disseminate the text of Gunananda's speeches, stimulating public interest in the confrontation with Christianity. The Debate was judged a victory for the Buddhists by the attending crowds (that is, by popular opinion), who cried 'Sadhu' in their thousands.⁴⁶ Importantly, this type of verbal conflict with the Christian 'other' predated the first episode of religious violence with Catholics in 1883. There is, then, an evolution in the type of conflict evident in the nineteenth century. The evolution was not, however, inevitable. Other factors beyond Buddhist assertion made violence more likely, such as competition in the marketplace, as explored in Chapter 3.

In May 1880, the arrival of two transnational actors, the American Colonel Henry Steele Olcott and the Russian Madame Helena Blavatsky, added impetus to the revival as they brought with them their global experience and organisational skills.⁴⁷ Even prior to arriving in Ceylon, Olcott had reached out to local religious figures such as Sumangala and Gunananda, and regional religious leaders like Dayananda Saraswati, the leader of Arya Samaj in India, in an indication of his strong regional network.⁴⁸ Olcott recalls their arrival in Galle:

On the jetty and along the beach a huge crowd awaited us and rent the air with their united shout of 'Sadhu! Sadhu!' ... A thousand flags were frantically waved in welcome. The multitude hemmed in our carriages and the procession set out.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ J.M. Peebles, *The Great Debate: Buddhism and Christianity Face to Face* (Colombo, 1873), pp. 156-157.

⁴⁶ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 226. Christians were, naturally, unwilling to concede that victory belonged to the Buddhists. Malalgoda, 'The Buddhist-Christian Confrontation', p. 197.

⁴⁷ Malalgoda, 'The Buddhist-Christian Confrontation', p. 173.

⁴⁸ Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change in Ceylon*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ H.S. Olcott, quoted in Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change in Ceylon*, p. 2.

The arrival of the Theosophists provided symbolic figureheads around whom Sinhala-Buddhists could gather.⁵⁰ Olcott described the value he and Blavatsky added to the revival in racialised terms: ‘we were the first white champions of their religion speaking of its excellence...in the face of the missionaries, its enemies and slanderers.’⁵¹ Their presence lent weight to the struggle against the many presumably ‘white’ missionaries. The Theosophists in India had already challenged Christian missionaries, and their support to Sinhala-Buddhists in Ceylon was viewed as a boon to the resistance of Christian missionaries in India.⁵² Theosophy was quintessentially a transnational movement of universal brotherhood, and Olcott and Blavatsky represented a transnational dimension to a local revival. Their familiarity with the printing press gave birth to two Buddhist newspapers, *Sarasavi Sandaresa* and *The Buddhist*, in the 1880s. *The Buddhist* was an English publication whereas *Sarasavi Sandaresa* was published in Sinhala, both of which are important sources for this thesis. The newspapers were managed and run through the Buddhist Theosophical Society, an organisation set up by the two Theosophists.⁵³ In the aftermath of the 1883 Kotahena Riot, Olcott went to London on behalf of the Buddhists to seek re-dress from the Colonial Office. He returned with a victory in terms of securing recognition for Vesak (the day of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death) as a national holiday.

Meanwhile, more assertive measures were taken to ‘protect’ and ‘develop’ Buddhism in Ceylon. Associations – such as the Buddhist Defence Committee – were established across the island by the laity.⁵⁴ In transnational confrontations with Christianity, similar developments

⁵⁰ I switch to using ‘Sinhala-Buddhists’ henceforth as opposed to Buddhists, in line with the shifts taking place.

⁵¹ H.S. Olcott, quoted in Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change in Ceylon*, p. 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4. Olcott’s influence was felt beyond India and Ceylon. He translated his ‘Buddhist catechism’ into Burmese, for example, for distribution in Rangoon. Green, ‘Religious Economy of Colonial Burma’, p. 186.

⁵³ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 246.

⁵⁴ Correspondence relating to the Erection of an Anglican Church at Anuradhapura, Col. Secretary to Vice President, Buddhist Defence Committee, 28 May 1894, SLNA, PF 1140.

took place. For example, a *Buddhasāsana Samāgama* was established by Charles Henry Allan Bennett (a European convert) in Rangoon in 1903 – with a distinctly Sinhala name.⁵⁵ In Ceylon, these Buddhist associations published and disseminated criticisms of Christianity, and reflected a growing sense of confidence and pride in their religion.⁵⁶ An article in *The Buddhist* argued:

Christianity is the enemy of Buddhism, it is foreign, and in its educational work it is deceitful...they exist in order to “maintain and spread that faith”...Occasionally, one of purer mind and nobler nature...throws in his lot with Buddhism, seeing in that system a means for alleviating the miseries of the world which does not exist in the Christian dogmas as now proclaimed.⁵⁷

Another feature of revival was the embrace of the vernacular. Sinhala played a crucial role in social mobilisation as the use and embrace of the language itself became a nationalist cause.⁵⁸ In a very explicit example of how Western converts to Buddhism shaped ideas of the ‘nation’, contemporary observer F.L. Woodward argued, ‘a nation is only a nation by virtue of the links of a common language’.⁵⁹ Woodward blamed Sinhalese elites for their neglect of the Sinhala language while they ‘profited to the full by an English-language education’.⁶⁰ He wrote, ‘the knowledge of English in Ceylon, *to the exclusion of that of the vernacular*, has become a sort of fetish (and is due to) a lack of knowledge of the nation’s past, and ignorance of, and indifference to, its possible future.’⁶¹ The Ceylon National Review, to which Woodward wrote, was the organ of the Ceylon Social Reform Society that was established in 1905 to advance the interests of Westernised Ceylonese elites in traditional, cultural issues. It represented in Ceylon

⁵⁵ Green, ‘Religious Economy of Colonial Burma’, p. 185.

⁵⁶ K.N.O. Dharmasena, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor, 1992), p. 130.

⁵⁷ ‘Buddhism and Christianity’, *The Buddhist* 10/10, (1899), pp. 151-152.

⁵⁸ Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness*, p. 52.

⁵⁹ F.L. Woodward, ‘The Nation and the Mother-tongue’, *Ceylon National Review* 3/8 (1909), p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

a secular nationalism akin to the Indian National Congress. Woodward was an Englishman, a Pali scholar, and Principal of the Buddhist Mahinda College between 1903 and 1919.⁶²

Alongside the interest in resuscitating the Sinhala language, the need to promote Buddhist education was connected to both the threat of Christianity and the perception that Sinhala-Buddhists were alienated from political power because they lacked elite education.⁶³ Government employment was highly desirable to educated Ceylonese, but proficiency in English was a prerequisite.⁶⁴ The state's priority in providing English education was to create a class of 'Anglicised' Ceylonese on whom they could rely.⁶⁵ State-funded English education was primarily available at Christian missionary schools, and it was typically the Burghers, elite *Goyigama* and *Karava* Sinhalese families, and elite *Vellala* Tamils predominantly in Jaffna who were granted access to such schools.⁶⁶ In this context, many Sinhala-Buddhists feared that English education in missionary schools could incentivise conversion to Christianity.⁶⁷ As a result of such fears, and the struggle for Sinhala-Buddhists to access state employment, the 'Buddhist English School' (later renamed 'Ananda College'), was established in 1886, and multiple other Buddhist schools were created thereafter. Buddhist schools provided a 'safe' environment in which Sinhala-Buddhist children could learn English and improve their employment prospects without the risk of conversion.⁶⁸ The schools appeared to be modelled on missionary schools, another characteristic of the Buddhist revival that lends weight to

⁶²Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon* (Colombo, 1907), p. 224.

⁶³Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, p. 211.

⁶⁴De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 418; Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 32.

⁶⁵Not too unlike Thomas Macaulay's dictum on reforming Indian education to create 'brown Englishmen'. See Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age*, p. 74.

⁶⁶Lakshmi Daniel, *Privilege and Policy: The Indigenous Elite and the Colonial Education System in Ceylon, 1912-1948* (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1992), pp. 30-32.

⁶⁷Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, 'Buddhist Burghers and Sinhala-Buddhist Fundamentalism', in T.J. Bartholomeusz and C.R. de Silva (eds.) *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka* (Albany, 1998), p.173.

⁶⁸Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, pp. 249-250. Similar debates were occurring in India, on whether priority should be given to English over indigenous scripts and languages – although there was no 'majority language' available as an alternative. Some Arya Samajists, for example, wished to promote Sanskrit education over Western education. See Nair, *Changing Homelands*, p. 5.

Obeyesekere's claim that (this wave of) the revival could be described as 'Protestant Buddhism'.⁶⁹

The impact of the Buddhist revival, and the sense that something had shifted in the public mindset over a relatively short time, was highlighted by Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a (Hindu) Ceylon Tamil, senior bureaucrat in the colonial machinery, and the Superintendent of the Census in 1901: 'Previously, it was considered among Sinhalese rather fashionable to be thought Christians... This is no longer the case. They are rather proud of their religion, and have even become aggressive to Christianity.'⁷⁰

The scope of the Buddhist revival included space for regional alliance building and transnational allegiances.⁷¹ Although the practice of exchange with Burma and Siam (in terms of pleas for news, royal embassies, and merit-making pilgrimages) was an important long-term feature of pre-modern Buddhism, regional Buddhist diplomacy took on a new intensity in certain ways in the global conjuncture of improved communication. Literary networks and the circulation of foreign newspapers enabled Ceylon's Buddhists (not just Sinhalese) to keep abreast of events in East and Southeast Asia with keen interest.⁷² Wilton Hack, an Australian Buddhist and Principal of Dharmaraja College, shared the contents of a letter he received from a friend in Japan in *The Buddhist*. The excerpt begins with a quote from the letter and ends with Hack's interpretation of Buddhism's advance.

"There has been a distinct revival of religious thought amongst the Japanese of late... Buddhism is again on the revival. Buddhist Missions are to be sent over to China very shortly." This extract shows that not only is this revival in Buddhism

⁶⁹ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 250.

⁷⁰ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 93.

⁷¹ Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, p. 163.

⁷² *Ibid.* These transnational literary networks were not unique to Buddhists, but were evident in Islamic circles in Ceylon too, as discussed below.

not confined to Ceylon and India, but that in the far off land of the energetic Japanese an awakening process is felt. The attention Buddhism is receiving in England, America and Australia justifies the conviction that the world over [Buddhism is] making [its] way to the front. Is it not a sign of the times that, whilst on every side there are signs of the modern Christian churches declining in power, Buddhism is reviving into fresh life and activity.⁷³

This source highlights the interest of Ceylon's readers in Buddhism's advance elsewhere in the region and emphasises the significant support for Buddhism against Christianity from non-Ceylonese Buddhists who settled in the island. Additionally, the newspaper, *The Buddhist*, had an agent in Rangoon (Messrs W.A. Perera and Co.) suggesting that Ceylon's Buddhist newspapers circulated abroad due to a reciprocal interest in Buddhist affairs in Ceylon. These networks, although they did not significantly affect the direction of this stage of the Buddhist revival, are likely to have had some bearing on the psychological strength behind Sinhala-Buddhists challenging Christianity in Ceylon. Hack observed 'fresh life and activity' in 1899, at a time when conflict over processions and Bo-trees was escalating in Ceylon. There is a correlation between the strength of religious feeling through Buddhist revival in Ceylon and beyond, and the willingness of Buddhists to confront the colonial state and other ethno-religious groups in terms of defending sacred spaces through violence if necessary.

The Impact of British Orientalism

'British orientalism' in Ceylon refers to the process of research into the histories, languages, and customs of the various groups that lay and scholarly colonial missionaries and administrators encountered for the dual purposes of disinterested scholarship and colonial governance.⁷⁴

Viewed from Ceylon, India was the epicentre of the colonial practice of studying people under

⁷³ 'Correspondence: Buddhism in Japan', *The Buddhist*, 10/10 (1899).

⁷⁴ British Orientalism was part of a larger pattern of European Orientalism. The German Wilhelm Geiger is probably the most renowned European philologist to take an interest in Ceylonese history and culture, even though Germany had no colonial interest in Ceylon.

colonial rule in Asia.⁷⁵ In India, orientalist discourse is seen as having contributed significantly to constructing ‘modern’ identities.⁷⁶ How relevant was such an observation for the shaping of the modern Sinhala-Buddhist identity? The Ceylonese, more broadly, did not operate simply as ‘informants’ to colonial orientalists, but as actors with agency.⁷⁷ Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, changing indigenous notions of Buddhism influenced British policy to some degree, lending credence to Christopher Bayly’s observation that colonising shaped the coloniser.⁷⁸ As the Buddhist revival advanced in terms of reorganisation, education, and language, evidence suggests that British Orientalism created or supported discourses that fuelled a xenophobic Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. How and why did this take place?

The state facilitated the translation of seminal Buddhist works, in particular the Mahāvamsa, from Pali to Sinhala, thereby greatly increasing popular access to a text that had long shaped the Sinhala-Buddhist psyche and understanding of history.⁷⁹ The Mahāvamsa was considered a history of the Sinhalese people from the sixth century BCE.⁸⁰ It narrated the ascendance of Buddhism in Lanka from the time of Vijaya, a mytho-historical prince from India who is credited as the progenitor of the Sinhala race.⁸¹ Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist, wrote, ‘According to the records [citing the Mahāvamsa], our ancestors came to Ceylon from India 2,470 years ago...the civilization of the Sinhalese dates from the

⁷⁵ Gamini Keerawella, ‘Colonial Knowledge Formation Under British Rule and Modern Sri Lankan Historiography’, (unpublished paper, delivered 29 October 2020, The National Trust – Sri Lanka Lecture 129).

⁷⁶ For a discussion on the divergences between such historiography on India and Ceylon, see Rogers, ‘Post-Orientalism’, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁷ Harris, *Religion, Space and Conflict*, p. 164.

⁷⁸ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 95.

⁷⁹ Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, p. 71. Governor Gregory’s patronage for the government publication of the Pali version and the Sinhala translations was an important development in terms of state recognition of the importance of the Mahāvamsa as a ‘definitive’ history of Sinhala-Buddhism on the island.

⁸⁰ The first author of the Mahāvamsa was Mahanama Thero, of the Maha Vihara fraternity in Anuradhapura. Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*, p. 9; Alan Strathern, ‘The Vijaya Origin Myth of Sri Lanka and the Strangeness of Kingship’, *Past and Present*, 203 (2009), p. 3.

⁸¹ Gunawardana, ‘The People of the Lion’, pp. 48-50; Strathern ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern’, p. 860.

introduction of Buddhism.’⁸² British orientalists working on the translation of such sources assumed that the Sinhalese (among other ethnic groups) were natural communities who had long been fully aware of themselves as such. It is unlikely that they predicted the future influence the renewed attention on the Mahāvamsa would have on Sinhala-Buddhists in decades, if not centuries, to come.⁸³

Instead, the British uncritically reproduced Mahāvamsian narratives that reinforced Sinhalese-held prejudices against minorities in Ceylon. A.M. Ferguson wrote to the papers, ‘Yesterday I stood on the mound...where one of the “decisive battles of the world” was fought; where the Tamil invader, Elara, fell to the sword of the Sinhalese monarch, Dutugemunu, and the time of Damilo [Tamil] progress southwards was arrested – at least temporarily’.⁸⁴ The credibility of the Mahāvamsa as an ‘authentic’ chronicling of history was reinforced (in the eyes of both Sinhala-Buddhists and British ‘colonial historiographers’) by the unearthing of the ruins of ancient Anuradhapura by colonial archaeologists in the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ The (re)discovery of impressive ancient ruins, such as in Anuradhapura would have given physical credence to the narratives of Buddhism’s long history in Ceylon. This is not to suggest the Buddhists were unaware of their Anuradhapura history, which was long known.⁸⁶ On 1 June 1864, an article in the *Lakminipahana* referred to Ruvanwelisaya in Anuradhapura as ‘part of our ancient heritage’. There was no mention of the British role in its ‘unearthing’. Meanwhile, the colonial state helped propel Sinhala-Buddhist pride by investing significant amounts of money in the restoration of *dagabas* (temples) in Anuradhapura for instance, and by hiring archaeologists

⁸² Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 692.

⁸³ E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), p. 44.

⁸⁴ John D. Ferguson, *Ceylon in the ‘Jubilee Year’* (London, 1887), p. 389.

⁸⁵ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 40; Elizabeth Nissan, and R.L. Stirrat, ‘The generation of communal identities’ in Jonathan Spencer (ed.), *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London, 1990), p. 32.

⁸⁶ Strathern, ‘Sri Lanka in the Long Early Modern’, p. 838; Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, p. 151.

and architects.⁸⁷ This propelling of Sinhala-Buddhist pride does not in itself seem to serve an obvious colonial logic beyond allowing the state to represent itself as a protector of Buddhism and the ancient traditions of the Sinhalese.

In fact, the colonial state's ambivalent religious 'neutrality' fuelled Sinhala-Buddhism. The British recognised the 'special' status of the Sinhalese, and of Buddhism. They acknowledged in various official reports like the 1911 Census that 'the national religion of Ceylon is Buddhism' and that 'only one race [the Sinhalese] can regard Ceylon as the home of the nation and the shrine of its national traditions.'⁸⁸ The Moors, by contrast, were considered 'outsiders' by virtue of their relatively far later arrival on the island – from around the eighth century CE. For example, in the same report referred to above, E.B. Denham (the British Superintendent of the 1911 Census) notes, 'the Moors in Ceylon themselves regard Kailpatnam [Kayalpattanam] as the home of their race', and claims they only initially settled on Ceylon for trade.⁸⁹

At the same time, British orientalism was closely associated with racial thought and ethnographical studies that were in fashion in the nineteenth century.⁹⁰ The emerging racial theory in Ceylon at the time claimed that Sinhala-Buddhists were of 'Aryan' descent. Aryanism, originating in European philology, had existed in India, among other British occupied territories since the late eighteenth century, and posited that certain Western Europeans and North Indians hailed from a 'common stock' and were 'racially superior' to others.⁹¹ This tenet was readily

⁸⁷ Report on the Restoration of the Abhayagiriya and Mirisawetiya Dagabas, SLNA, Ceylon Sessional Papers 8, 1900, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Lee, *Census of Ceylon 1891*, p. 35; Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 194. The British never offered administrative roles to non-indigenous groups, as was the case with Indians being offered positions in the Burmese government after 1917.

⁸⁹ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 234.

⁹⁰ Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, 23/2 (1989), p. 225.

⁹¹ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2006). Even Olcott was guilty of racially appraising certain peoples. He viewed the Burmese as 'an awfully lazy people', and

seized upon by Sinhala-Buddhists who were eager to prove their racial superiority among indigenous groups in Ceylon. Thus, this European discourse, which may have been seen to legitimise imperial domination, was re-purposed by Sinhala-Buddhists.

Scholarly ‘discovery’ held that Sanskrit was the precursor of various languages in the Indian subcontinent, and shared linguistic links with certain European languages.⁹² Sinhala was heavily influenced by Sanskrit, and thus considered an ‘Aryan’ language. This link, however, caused certain Sinhala-Buddhists to presuppose ‘a common racial origin’ located in ancient North India — connecting language with race, culture and the idea of the ‘nation’.⁹³ From the late nineteenth century onwards, Sinhala-Buddhists and nationalist newspapers increasingly used the language of Aryanism to assert their ‘racial’ superiority, as well as their perceived relative decline (as a consequence of colonialism).⁹⁴ Sinhala-Buddhists glorified their ancient origins, associating ‘the Sinhalese people with the chosen “Aryan race,” and the chosen Buddhist faith’.⁹⁵ They chastised themselves for straying from the ways of their Aryan ancestors. One correspondent to a Sinhala-language newspaper stressed in 1911, ‘Sinhalese, shouldn’t you share your Aryan great grandparents’ nationalism and strength... When you look at what the Aryan Sinhalese did for their religion, country and nation, it is a shame to see what recent Sinhalese are doing now’.⁹⁶ Another correspondent who submitted a poem to *Hitavadi*

Africans as ‘backward’ and ‘intellectually so inferior’. Stephen Prothero, ‘Henry Steel Olcott and “Protestant Buddhism”’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63/2 (1995), p. 295.

⁹² Sheldon I. Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley, 2003); Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, 2006).

⁹³ Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, pp. 145-147; Kumari Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity in Sri Lanka: Selected Essays* (Colombo, 2017), p. 279. By contrast, Europeans who shared such beliefs in the common roots of Indo-European languages were more inclined to believe that ‘the ties of language were reinforced and modified by the imprint of culture. In this way the Indian element of Aryanism could be cast away.’ See Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p. 91.

⁹⁴ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism, and Ethnicity*, p. 279; *Sihala Samaya*, 23 October 1911; *Hitavadi*, 19 May 1914.

⁹⁵ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 280.

⁹⁶ *Sihala Samaya*, 23 October 1911.

(a Sinhala-language, pro-Buddhist newspaper) titled ‘Sinhalese, Wake Up!’ wrote of the decline of the Aryan Sinhalese who had previously ‘lived as they wished for 2500 consecutive years’.⁹⁷ This conception of an ‘Arya-Sinhala’ identity was inextricably linked with Buddhism.⁹⁸

Invented Tradition and the Construction of a Late Nineteenth Century ‘National’ Identity

Describing the ancient Sinhalese as ‘Aryan’ is a form of invented tradition that dates to the nineteenth century. After centuries of partial European colonial occupation and competing Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms, the island was united under one kingdom, albeit a foreign one, in 1815. In this context, and associated with both Buddhist revival and British orientalism, Sinhala-Buddhists cast their ‘national’ identity back to ancient times, while they confronted new challenges presented by colonialism and modernity.

This emerging Sinhala-Buddhist ‘national’ identity was at odds with the ‘Ceylonese’ identity that was also being constructed (with little success) by an Anglicised, professional, or landed elite. Divergent discourses on Sinhala-Buddhist identity and Ceylonese identity were taking place almost exclusively in the Sinhala and English presses respectively. It is likely that many of the Anglicised elite did not follow the Sinhala press.

Yet the discourse in the Sinhala press did touch on the ‘threat’ of Anglicised elites, including Sinhalese elites. In a ‘Warning to the Sinhalese’, an article in the nationalist *Sinhala Jatiya* paper in 1914 claimed that European colonisers turned the Sinhalese race into a ‘failed race’ (*asamath jāti*). The article also lamented the fact that some ‘Sinhalese’ did nothing to protect

⁹⁷ *Hitavadi*, 19 May 1914.

⁹⁸ Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, pp. 145-148.

their ancestral traditions and values.⁹⁹ Other contributors to the Sinhala press commented on the elite Sinhalese national leaders, whom they viewed as leading the country astray. For example, A.W. Fernando (a contributor to the *Hitavadi* newspaper) wrote in 1915 that ‘the Sinhala nation will perish because of the leaders who act like foreigners and are of no use’.¹⁰⁰ The boundaries of these two ‘groups’ of Sinhalese leaders were porous as there were some ‘western-educated *literati*’ who campaigned for both the Buddhist revival and ‘Ceylonese nationalism’, and contributed to the Sinhala press.¹⁰¹ A.W. Fernando refers to these ‘very few noble people who have led the nation to progress’, by working ‘on the three great issues of *rata* [country], *jātiya* [nation/race] and *āgam* [religion].’¹⁰²

Scholars writing about present-day Sri Lanka have analysed the sense of ‘ownership or rightful belonging’ Sinhala-Buddhists have with regard to the country. Gehan Gunatilleke has called this an ‘entitlement complex’, which refers to the belief among many Sinhala-Buddhists that Sri Lanka is an inherently Sinhalese and Buddhist country.¹⁰³ Sinhala-Buddhists perceive themselves as ‘hosts’ of the country and minority groups such as the Moors as ‘guests’. This majoritarian disposition is not unique to Sri Lanka. The Buddhist majority in Burma similarly viewed Indian immigrants as outsiders and their ‘common enemies’.¹⁰⁴ The host maintains agency and power within this dynamic (as Sinhala-Buddhists controlled the post-colonial state) and can evict the guest if they ‘misbehave’. Such a host-guest relationship appears to have existed in the pre-British colonial period as well, particularly in areas such as the former

⁹⁹ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 2 July 1914.

¹⁰⁰ *Hitavadi*, 30 December 1915.

¹⁰¹ Frost, ‘Wider Opportunities’, pp. 949-950. W.A. de Silva and D.B. Jayathilaka are two examples of those who straddled both identities. For example, Jayathilaka delivered a lecture at the Mount Pleasant Hall in England about ‘The Sinhalese’s Grievance’, which was reproduced in *Sinhala Jatiya* on 19 May 1913. Their motivations in straddling both identities are not analysed in this thesis.

¹⁰² *Hitavadi*, 30 December 1915.

¹⁰³ Gehan Gunatilleke, ‘The Constitutional Practice of Ethno-Religious Violence in Sri Lanka’ *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 13/2, (2018), p. 373.

¹⁰⁴ Niklas Foxeus, ‘The Buddha was a devoted nationalist’, p. 665.

Kandyan Kingdom (that was predominantly Sinhalese and Buddhist), which welcomed Moors who fled Portuguese and Dutch-controlled areas around the coast.¹⁰⁵ Lorna Dewaraja provides examples of how this relationship functioned in terms of the assimilation of Moors into the Kandyan Kingdom's socio-political structure and body politic. For instance, Moors served as functionaries at the Buddhist Temple of the Tooth, and as administrators of Buddhist and Hindu monasteries and shrines.¹⁰⁶

However, by the late nineteenth century, there were growing Sinhala-Buddhist perceptions of national 'decline' and 'destruction'. Centuries of European colonial domination contributed to a sense that the very existence of the majority group was at risk of dilution at best, and extinction at worst.¹⁰⁷ An article in *Sihala Samaya* (published in 1907), titled 'The Decline of the Sinhala Race', lamented the loss of land to foreigners (including the Moors, discussed further in Chapter 3).¹⁰⁸ Fears of extinction, or destruction of the Sinhala-Buddhist 'race' frequently made headlines in Sinhala newspapers at the turn of the century. The nature of the threat was immediate, necessitating immediate remedial action akin to awakening from a state of stupor.

Several Sinhala newspaper editorials appear to reflect Sinhala-Buddhist lamentation and self-castigation. Early Sinhala newspapers discussed the 'idleness of the natives' (*Lakminipahana* 15 June 1864), the 'poor natives' (*Lakrivikirana* 18 June 1870), and blamed various 'others', including the British and minorities such as Moors and Tamils for entering the island, and 'exploiting' its wealth. Such articles began to appear more frequently from the 1880s onwards,

¹⁰⁵ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 47; Michael Roberts, 'Ethnicity after Edward Said: Post-Orientalist Failures in Comprehending the Kandyan Period of Lankan History', *Ethnic Studies Report* 19 (2001), p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, pp. 99-120.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Schonthal, *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law: The Pyrrhic Constitutionalism of Sri Lanka* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 224, Stanley J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 92-93.

¹⁰⁸ *Sihala Samaya*, 7 January 1907.

the period when religious violence also escalated.¹⁰⁹ In 1899, a number of articles on the decline of Sinhala-Buddhists with regard to education, religion and business, and the need for their upliftment were featured in *Sarasavi Sandaresa*.¹¹⁰ In 1905, the author of an article titled ‘Would the Sinhalese Progress Again’ hypothesised that most Sinhala-Buddhists would answer ‘no’ to the question posed in the article’s title, illustrating the general pessimism among Sinhala-Buddhists. In 1903 and 1906, sustained commentary – comparable to India, where lifestyle was considered a ‘form of domination’ – about the destruction of Sinhala-Buddhist customs, due to the mimicry of European speech and dress, and the consumption of meat, was carried in *Sihala Samaya*.¹¹¹ Importantly, 1903 was the year in which the Anuradhapura Riot took place, which included the attack of (colonial) government buildings and meat stalls. It is worth noting that a lot of the *Sihala Samaya* commentary appeared in the press *after* the Riot in June. Then, popular discourses are likely to have both fed-into violence and fed-off violence. In 1910, an editorial in *Sinhala Jatiya* featured a scathing castigation of the Sinhalese. It identified ‘Our Enemies’ as ‘our own selfish and powerful people’.¹¹² Similarly, in 1914, an article in *Sinhala Bauddhya* criticised Sinhala-Buddhists’ decadence, which resulted in their assets being transferred to foreign hands – a claim that is part of a discourse related to anti-colonialism.¹¹³ It is within this broad existential crisis, created essentially by colonialism and notions of racial-cultural decline, that Sinhala-Buddhists viewed Moors as rivals in trade and commerce and as encroaching on Sinhala-Buddhists’ religious space.

In this context of perceived decline, the host-guest relationship between Sinhala-Buddhists and Moors appears to have transformed. I attempt to describe this transformation by reference to a

¹⁰⁹ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 2 April 1886.

¹¹⁰ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 31 March 1899; 28 February 1899.

¹¹¹ Roberts, ‘Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat’, p. 1011; *Sihala Samaya*, 6 August 1903 and 3 September 1906.

¹¹² *Sinhala Jatiya*, 8 November 1910.

¹¹³ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 21 November 1914.

biological metaphor: Sinhala-Buddhists came to perceive the dynamic between themselves and Moors as akin to a 'host-parasite' dynamic. In this metaphor, the host is not empowered in the same way a host is within the host-guest dynamic. The host is instead disempowered, mainly because it does not wield state power (as it is in the hands of the coloniser). Apart from lacking power, the host is weakened by the 'parasite's' activities and is unable to purge the parasite easily.

This host-parasite dynamic was illustrated through writings and publications in the press. Moors, and Indian Moors in particular, were portrayed as sucking the lifeblood of the 'poor' 'foolish' and 'naïve' Sinhala-Buddhists, while enriching themselves to the detriment of the latter. Epithets used in the Sinhala press 'for several decades' to describe Moors as 'bloodsuckers' and 'vipers' offer a concrete image of the 'host-parasite' dynamic between Sinhala-Buddhists and the Moors.¹¹⁴ Such language dehumanises Moors and presents an image of physical threats to Sinhala-Buddhists. This perception of Moors as 'parasitic' becomes an intrinsic element of the Sinhala-Buddhist national identity, which was constructed partly in opposition to the various 'others' in Ceylon.

Furthermore, the host-parasite dynamic was voiced by ideologues and nationalist leaders in Ceylon.¹¹⁵ Anagarika Dharmapala was arguably the most important in this regard, as he was considered, and remains today, the 'father figure' associated with Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹¹⁶ He was also possibly the most outspoken

¹¹⁴ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, pp. 137-138.

¹¹⁵ These 'nationalist leaders' can be distinguished from the 'English educated westernised elite leadership', whose aims focused on constitutional reform and increased representation. See Janaki Jayawardena, *Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman' and Women's Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka* (PhD thesis, University of York: 2002), p. 185.

¹¹⁶ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 20

of the ‘nationalist leaders’ with regard to the Moors.¹¹⁷ In a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Dharmapala illustrated the sense of an entitlement complex – that Ceylon was the rightful land of the Sinhala-Buddhists – laced with existential fears.¹¹⁸ He wrote, ‘aliens are taking away the wealth of the country and the sons of the soil where are they to go? The immigrants who come here have other places to go to, the Sinhalese has no place to go.’¹¹⁹

Dharmapala was certainly not the only figure associated with Buddhist revival and expressions of nationalism. Other actors who were considered vital influences in the revival included Colonel Olcott, Migettuwatte Gunananda, Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala, and Piyadasa Sirisena, the editor of the *Sinhala Jatiya* newspaper and a popular playwright.¹²⁰ Sumangala arguably played a greater role in the first phase of reform or revival within the Buddhist fraternity.¹²¹ However, for this thesis, Dharmapala is more significant.

Dharmapala, born Don David Hewavitarne, came from a wealthy, Sinhala-Buddhist family and was initially educated in Christian schools.¹²² He joined the Buddhist Theosophical Society under the tutelage of Olcott and Blavatsky (the first of many transnational experiences Dharmapala would have) but left to found the Maha Bodhi Society in Ceylon.¹²³ This society aimed to restore Buddhist sites around the world, including Bodh Gaya in India. Dharmapala also founded and edited the *Sinhala Bauddhya* newspaper in 1906. His speeches and writings inspired Sinhala-Buddhists during colonial rule to resist oppression and embrace a less

¹¹⁷ Roberts, ‘Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat’, p. 1009.

¹¹⁸ Gunatilleke, ‘The Constitutional Practice of Ethno-Religious Violence’ p. 370.

¹¹⁹ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. lxxix.

¹²⁰ Sirisena was also a skilled novelist who ‘presented as historical reality a glorious, pure and noble past which was an attribution to the past of a definition of identity which was in fact contemporary’. See H. L. Seneviratne, ‘Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present’, in H. L. Seneviratne (ed.) *Identity, Consciousness and the past: Forging of Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka* (Delhi, 1997), p. 13.

¹²¹ Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, p. 141.

¹²² Roberts, ‘Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat’, p. 1013.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

ritualistic form of Buddhism, a legacy that has endured in the popular imagination for over a century.¹²⁴ Dharmapala is without a doubt a complex figure, whom recent historiography has sought to rescue from a dominant association with nationalist assertion and bigotry. For example, Steven Kemper's biography observes Dharmapala's more cosmopolitan concerns with Buddhism.

Dharmapala's anti-minority vitriol in general, and his anti-Moor rhetoric in particular, are important to understanding Sinhala-Buddhists' grievances regarding the Moors. Dharmapala's views on minorities were not static. Minorities were instead 'at times condescendingly seen as hapless victims of colonialism, at others more insidiously as corrupting and threatening influences'.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, for Dharmapala, the Moors remained 'the greatest Other for Sinhala discourse' at the turn of the century, and I explore further his economic and social concerns regarding both the Moors and the Sinhalese in Chapter 3.

B. The Islamic Revival

Scope of the Revival: Education and Transnational Connections

The existing scholarship observes that a sense of self-awareness or group identity emerged among the Moors in the late nineteenth century.¹²⁶ However, as suggested in this chapter's introduction, the historiography has failed to recognise early signs of internal struggle that date to the 1850s. In this earlier period, Moors tried to define where power lay within the community and their relationship with the state. For example, in the 1850s, in addition to there being violence between competing mosques (Chapter 1), Moors had significant disputes among

¹²⁴ Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago, 2015), p. 4. Importantly, Kemper attempts to distance Dharmapala from the Protestant Buddhism thesis that Obeyesekere closely associates Dharmapala with. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

¹²⁵ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 63.

¹²⁶ Vijaya Samaraweera, 'The Muslim Revivalist Movement, 1880-1915' in Michael Roberts (ed.), *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited* Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1997), pp. 293-322.

themselves about the appointment of Qadis (Islamic judges), and the remit of priests. In one dispute, one party was for the appointment of Qadis while the other party wanted to maintain the status quo of using British-introduced civil courts. The latter organised a public meeting and sent a memorial to the Governor in this regard.¹²⁷ Interestingly, the British response was to encourage Moors not to seek recourse in civil courts but to adjudicate on Islamic matters within the community – and encouraged the appointment of Qadis. In a case concerning the remit of priests, dubbed the ‘Moormen Moolah [sic, Mullah] Case’ by the English-language press in 1856, the plaintiff (a Moor priest) complained that the defendant (the Head Moorman) prevented him from receiving the ‘profits, emoluments and privileges’ of officiating at both the Maradana and New Moor Street Mosques as he used to, by preventing him from officiating at the New Moor Street Mosque. Like the previous debate on Qadis (and indeed, the 1914 Puttalam Case referred to in Chapter 1), the judge held the matter to be outside the jurisdiction of his Court, encouraging the establishment of separate courts for Moors.¹²⁸ Notwithstanding this early phase, this section of the chapter focuses on the second, more distinct phase of revival among Moors (as with the Buddhist revival), when their ongoing process of reform triggered changes to the broader Ceylon Moor identity.

In around the 1880s, Ceylon Moors in particular began to re-imagine their origins in Ceylon as part of a concerted construction of identity, no doubt partly a response to shifting (and, later, hardening) identities across other ethno-religious groups in Ceylon.¹²⁹ But it was also at this time that Ceylon’s Moors began seeing themselves as members of a broader global community of Muslims (*umma*); this emerging identity was both global and local at the same time. Where

¹²⁷ *Ceylon Times*, 17 June and 5 September 1856.

¹²⁸ *Ceylon Times*, 30 May 1856.

¹²⁹ M.A. Nuhman, ‘Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka: One Hundred Years of Conflict and Coexistence’ in J.C. Holt (ed.), *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities: Religious Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 23-24.

it is possible to distinguish the difference, I emphasize that it was largely a process of *Ceylon* Moor identity formation as this group regularly distanced itself from *Indian* Moors. Elite Ceylon Moors, the key actors involved in this process of identity formation, dismissed the Indian Moors as originating from South India, and dedicated significant energies into establishing their Arab ancestry, highlighting the longevity of their presence in Ceylon, their authentic religious heritage, and their ethnic uniqueness. Such collective memory, as described by Anthony D. Smith, serves the invaluable purpose of differentiating between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘alien’, the ‘Ceylonese’ and recent immigrants.¹³⁰

Similar to the Buddhist revival, Islamic revival and reform in Ceylon were both part of a search for a distinct Moor identity that was simultaneously ethnic and religious, and a response to the ‘over-confidence and [perceived] inevitability’ of Christian missionary activity on the island.¹³¹ Islamic revival, then, was a largely *religious* development that included Indian Moors, while the growth of a Ceylon Moor consciousness was an ethnic subset of the revival, even though the two processes were heavily intertwined. Meanwhile, there was some evidence of a distinct Indian Moor identity that was increasingly asserted. Indeed, as part of the physical construction of difference, Indian Moors built separate mosques to Ceylon Moors (discussed below) and asserted the sacrality of ‘their’ spaces with growing violence, as highlighted in Chapter 1.

The Islamic revival was not simply influenced by developments occurring at the local level. Instead, as with most revivals, it was significantly influenced by transnational events and actors – during a period that saw the expansion and increased assertiveness of ‘world religions’ in general and pan-Islamic political movements in particular.¹³² The term ‘revival’ was not used

¹³⁰ Smith, ‘Memory and Modernity’, pp. 382-384.

¹³¹ M.M.M. Mahroof, ‘Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Allama Iqbal in Sri Lanka’ in M.L.A. Cader (ed), *Exploring Sri Lankan Muslims: Selected Writings of M.M.M. Mahroof* (Oluvil, 2015), p. 60.

¹³² Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 333-355.

by contemporaries but is instead an etic one introduced in the historiography on Ceylon. There was no single term for revival that developed in local parlance. Instead, contemporaries described this process of revival with reference to ‘the progress of our community’ and the necessity to halt the ‘retrogression of the Muslims of Ceylon’.¹³³ The central features of Islamic revival included transnational actors providing spiritual and symbolic guidance to Moors in Ceylon, the adoption of Islamic attire, and participation in religious pilgrimages. The revival was also closely associated with the introduction of Islamic schools providing English language education.

The revival in Ceylon reflected currents stemming from a period of Islamic reform abroad. Globally, by the mid to late nineteenth century, Muslim political power in Asia had declined, and many coreligionists saw the need for internal reform to ‘save the faith’.¹³⁴ One of the discourses of reform, emerging in Egypt, was the issue of ‘modernism’, and how to reform Muslim society without rejecting either modernity or tradition.¹³⁵ Islamic modernism distinguished ‘modernisation’ from ‘Westernisation’, as the need for internal reform was partially driven by a desire to end decades of humiliation by European colonisers. In taking concrete steps to signal the religion’s ‘revival’ in Ceylon, numerous mosques were built as a testament of Moors’ religious devotion but also growing financial success in trade. This financial success was not at odds with the zeitgeist; as Leor Halevi puts it, ‘this was the ethos of the economically liberal movement of Islamic reform that arose under the aegis of the Empire of Free Trade’.¹³⁶

¹³³ W. M. Abdul Rahiman quoted in Fez Committee, *The Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting of the Mohammedans of Ceylon held in Colombo on December 31, 1905* (Colombo, 1906), pp. 4-5; ‘Notes by the Editor’ *Muslim Guardian* 6/8, (Colombo, 1907).

¹³⁴ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 338.

¹³⁵ Muhammad Khalid Masud, ‘Islamic Modernism,’ in Muhammad Khalid Masud et al. (eds.) *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (2009), p. 238.

¹³⁶ Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam’s Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida, 1865-1935* (New York, 2019), p. 9.

In this period, Ceylon Moors also openly declared their spiritual solidarity with the global *umma*, and their loyalty to the Caliph of Islam – the Ottoman Sultan. The global political context was such that ‘dual loyalties’ were permissible under British colonial rule. According to Cemil Aydin, the ‘caliph-sultan offered to encourage Muslim loyalty to the British Empire, as long as the British supported Ottoman geopolitical interests and rule over diverse populations, including Christians, in Anatolia and the Balkans.’¹³⁷ This ‘alliance’ between Caliph and Crown and the openly dual loyalty of the Ceylon Moors lasted up until the outbreak of the First World War. In the exploration of the ‘fez incident’ below, I attempt to highlight how Ceylon Moors leveraged these dual loyalties in exchange for religious liberties from the British.

In Ceylon, the ‘revival’ of Islam aimed to return it to what was imagined as its pre-colonial status, where Moors had more freedom to practise their religion than they did under Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. References to the pre-sixteenth century period were, however, dim and distant from consciousness. Meanwhile, this context did not apply to the independent Kandyan Kingdom, in which Moors had the freedom to practice their religion. The British in some way, then, enabled this revival by being more permissive of religious freedom for Moors over the long nineteenth century. The British response to the Islamic revival taking place in Ceylon was also distinct to the British response to revival and pan-Islamism in India. According to Faridah Zaman, the British colonial appraisal of Islamic revival in India was coloured by both the experience and memories of the Indian Mutiny in 1857, which had a profound psychological impact on the British.¹³⁸ Such British fears, however, were not evident in the British reaction to the Islamic revival in Ceylon,

¹³⁷ Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge; London, 2017), p. 85.

¹³⁸ Faridah Zaman, ‘The Future of Islam, 1672-1924’, *Modern Intellectual History* 16 (2018), p. 970.

as there was a distinct absence of Moor resistance to British rule on the island. This discrete British perception of Ceylon's Moors is an example of disconnection; it indicates that colonial discourses of Muslim subjects had a context-dependent dimension rather than acting as blanket tropes that applied across the Empire. The British view of Ceylon as a 'model Crown Colony', and this paternalistic perception of the inhabitants extended to the Moors.¹³⁹ Ponnambalam Arunachalam, writing his 1901 Census Report noted that Moors in Ceylon 'are less bigoted than their co-religionists in India'.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, John Ferguson, a member of the Legislative Council observed, 'the Mohammedans of Ceylon are bigoted, but not aggressive'.¹⁴¹ In this context, the Islamic revival in Ceylon was perceived as non-threatening to British rule.¹⁴²

Egypt and its intellectuals formed one epicentre of the global Islamic revival and movements of reform.¹⁴³ India represented another. Some of the ideas percolating among Indian reformists were transported to Ceylon.¹⁴⁴ India was already a significant source of Islamic influence, with *ulama* (Islamic scholars) from South India travelling to Ceylon for the purposes of educating their coreligionists. The establishment of the Aligarh Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875 by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, to promote English language education of Indian Muslims, resonated deeply in Ceylon.¹⁴⁵ Khan was a major figure in the Islamic revival in India, and his approach to Islamic modernism involved elite collaboration with the state.¹⁴⁶ Although Khan remained a distant figure, his example set in India was to be replicated to some degree in

¹³⁹ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 265.

¹⁴⁰ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 92.

¹⁴¹ Ferguson, *Ceylon in 1903*, p. clxvi.

¹⁴² Dennis McGilvray observes that the Moors never developed 'their own political or military ideology of sovereignty'. See McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims', p. 445.

¹⁴³ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 328.

¹⁴⁴ Ronit Ricci, 'Islamic Literary Networks in South and Southeast Asia', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 21/1 (2010), pp. 1-28.

¹⁴⁵ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 225.

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (New Jersey, 1982), p. 7.

Ceylon. A local Moor elite was created following the establishment of modern Islamic schools that provided English education. Yet this process was not a straightforward one.

In the past, Moors had chosen not to send their children to English language schools – despite the necessity of English for commerce and employment – to resist Christian influences.¹⁴⁷

Reverend James Selkirk recalled a visit to the ‘Mahometans of Kandy’ on 18 September 1838, and their resistance to Christian missionary efforts.¹⁴⁸ He observed,

As long as we spoke of the wisdom goodness, or power of God, we were listened to; but as soon as the name of Christ was mentioned, all was uproar and confusion, and I dare not put in writing all the blasphemies which these followers of the false prophet uttered against Christ...The only persons who directly oppose us...refuse to listen to our statements of Christian truth...are the Mahometans.¹⁴⁹

In this context of a real and perceived ‘threat’ from Christian missionary activity, Moors sought to either revive *madrasas* or ‘Islamise’ secular education.¹⁵⁰ Similar to the precedent set in India, *madrasas* in Ceylon received teachers or *ulama* from India in the 1880s. However, a difference of opinion emerged in this period particularly among educated Moor elites and the emerging intelligentsia – that *madrasa* education was inadequate in the changed socio-economic context of British rule. Emerging Ceylon Moor leaders, such as M.C. Siddi Lebbe (a proctor of law and educationist) and I.L.M. Abdul Azeez (a journal editor and community leader), were concerned about the ‘backward’ state of the community relative to other ethno-religious groups.¹⁵¹ Observers external to the community, such as Arunachalam, wrote in 1901,

¹⁴⁷ Samaraweera, ‘The Muslim Revivalist Movement’, p. 298.

¹⁴⁸ Sociological reports suggest that Christian missionaries globally faced difficulties in converting Muslims to Christianity. See S.M. Zwemer (ed.), *The Moslem World*, Vol. 1 (1911); Wolfgang Gabbert, ‘Social and Cultural Conditions of Religious Conversion in Colonial Southwest Tanzania’, *Ethnology* 40/4 (2001), p. 292.

¹⁴⁹ James Selkirk, *Recollections of Ceylon, After a Residence of Nearly Thirteen Years*, (London, 1844), p. 517.

¹⁵⁰ Mahroof, ‘Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’, p. 60.

¹⁵¹ ‘Notes by the Editor’ *Muslim Guardian* 6/8, (Colombo, 1907).

Though the Moors are by no means deficient in intelligence, they care little for education, especially education on Western lines...There is little sign as yet that they realize, or desire to make themselves worthy of their great heritage from Islam, whose votaries during the darkness of the Middle Ages kept the lamp of learning and civilization trimmed and burning throughout the greater part of Europe and Asia.¹⁵²

Inspired to some degree by revivalist movements taking place across the Buddhist and Hindu communities, certain Moor elites promoted English education for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Intrinsically, the Islamic revival attempted to reverse the perceived backwardness of Moors; this spirit was galvanised by the parallel processes of revivalism among Sinhala-Buddhists and Hindus.¹⁵³ The revival thus reflected the same sense of ethno-religious competition noted above. Instrumentally, it was found necessary to improve the English-speaking and comprehension skills of Moors for two economic reasons: (i) to get employment in government administration, and (ii) for trade.¹⁵⁴ For example, a significant number of Moors outside the Eastern province were traders of all scales who placed little emphasis on English education.¹⁵⁵

The advent of Islamic schools providing English education gave rise to a new class of elite Moors. In 1892, Siddi Lebbe and Wapche Marikar (a renowned construction magnate) opened the first Islamic school (Zahira College) within the premises of the Maradana Mosque. Siddi Lebbe then established several more schools in Kandy, Kurunegala, Galle and Matara before his death in February 1898. These schools were, however, primarily for males as education for

¹⁵² Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁵³ A.M.A. Azeez, 'The Muslim Attitude Towards Modern Education During the Nineteenth Century', August 1952, in A.M.A. Azeez, *Addresses and Articles*, Vol. I, (Colombo, ?), p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Some Moor businessmen were exploited due to their lack of English. The petition of S.L. Neina Marikar, a registered shareholder of the Ceylon Standard Press Company, was dismissed on the grounds that the affidavit he submitted to a district court was not written by him. The judge found that, 'although he possesses a slight knowledge of the English language, he had not the least conception of the real contents of the affidavit...The Court cannot have any sympathy with a shareholder who thus lends himself to be made use of by others'. See *Neina Marikar v Ceylon Standard Press Company, Limited* (1904) 7 NLR 251.

¹⁵⁵ Kumari Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 223.

females was largely neglected.¹⁵⁶ Moor women in general, during this period, remain largely hidden in the record of the colonial archive and the community's history. Delivering a verdict in court, Chief Justice Bonser – a colonial official – scathingly remarked 'these Moorish women are entirely under the thumb of their male relations'.¹⁵⁷ Although this commentary referred to two sisters in a court case against their brother, there is little in the historical record at least to present a different picture.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, there were no Islamic schools in the Eastern Province, despite containing the highest population of Moors. Thus, the Islamic revival, in the context of education, remained confined to the Western, Central and Southern provinces.

This process of advancing education, although spearheaded by Siddi Lebbe, could arguably not have been achieved in such a short time without the physical presence of Arabi Pasha. 'Orabi El Misri, known respectfully in Ceylon as 'Arabi Pasha', was exiled by the British from Egypt following his failed revolt against the Khedive Government in 1882.¹⁵⁹ He was exiled in Ceylon between 1883 and 1901 during which time his presence galvanised the revival and set the imagined boundaries of the global religious community within which Ceylon's Moors could locate themselves. His exile to Ceylon even captured the imagination of British audiences and was given full-page coverage in *The Graphic* (Figure 1). Two key features of the sketches are the women (covered entirely except for their eyes), so rarely captured on camera or in print, and the fact that Arabi and his companion Toulba are the only ones wearing a fez, among the variety of Islamic headgear pictured below. The significance of this singularity is discussed towards the end of this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Samaraweera, 'The Muslim Revivalist Movement', p. 303.

¹⁵⁷ Re the Estate of Avoo Lebbe Marikkar, deceased (1900) 4 NLR 298.

¹⁵⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Die Philosophin* 14/27 (2003), pp. 42-58.

¹⁵⁹ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 226.



Figure 1: Arabi in Exile, *The Graphic*, 24 February 1883

There are remarkable similarities in the reception of Arabi Pasha and his seven fellow Egyptian exiles by the Muslim (and particularly Moor) populations of Ceylon in 1883, and the reception of Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky by the Sinhala-Buddhist population in 1880. Lieutenant Governor J. Douglas noted at the time,

a large crowd was present, almost exclusively of Muhammedans with a few Europeans. Perfect order prevailed though there was much excitement when Arabi landed and he was followed and cheered by a large crowd of his co-religionists who enthusiastically kissed his hand.¹⁶⁰

This arrival (depicted in Figure 1 above) can be compared with the energetic reception of the Theosophists. The arrival of such transnational symbols of religious revival caused concern to some colonial administrators. The Governor presiding over Arabi's arrival, James R. Longden noted that the Moors were 'fanatical Moslems', and that Arabi and his fellow exiles were regarded 'heroes and martyrs to the faith'.¹⁶¹ Yet as a whole, Moors were considered a harmless minority, and colonial officials were doubtful that those in Colombo could be instigated to sedition by the exiles.¹⁶² However, Longden – clearly representative of the general colonial mindset concerning the subcontinent – harboured fears about the nationalism Arabi could inspire in neighbouring India with the support of Moors in the North and East of Ceylon. The real concern lay, then (as so often in the British imperial imagination), in the stability of India.¹⁶³ Ceylon's Moors had a strong trade relationship with various parts of India, and Longden feared that such a relationship could open 'a ready door to Arabi and his companions for intriguing in India should they desire to do so'.¹⁶⁴ Thus, Longden prevented the residence of the Egyptian exiles in either Jaffna in the North – 'only about 33 miles from the Indian coast' – or Batticaloa in the East, which had a larger Muslim population than any other district in the island.¹⁶⁵ The exiles were accordingly put up in the fashionable Cinnamon Gardens area in the heart of Colombo.

¹⁶⁰ Report of Lieutenant Governor J. Douglas, 11 January 1883, TNA, FO 78/4267, Egyptian exiles in Ceylon. (Arabi etc.) Vol. 1.

¹⁶¹ Longden to Earl of Derby, 21 January 1883, TNA, FO 78/4267.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Gallagher and Robinson, 'Imperialism of Free Trade', p. 14.

¹⁶⁴ Longden to Earl of Derby, TNA, FO 78/4267.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Arabi was arguably one of the most important symbols around which the Islamic revival in Ceylon took place. He stressed the importance of an English language education for all Muslims in Ceylon, and together with Siddi Lebbe, used his privileged position to advocate for the introduction of a 'secular western curriculum'.¹⁶⁶ The global and the local worked together effectively to advance the Islamic revival.

During this period of revival wealthy Moors spent their money on foreign religious travel, such as the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, and on constructing places of worship.¹⁶⁷ Bayly discusses the concept of 'religious building' as a means through which prosperous individuals or groups could declare their status and power, but also 'piety and self-sacrifice for the community'.¹⁶⁸ In Ceylon, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, large mosques were built increasingly in the style found in Arabia and the Ottoman Empire to announce both the greatness (and ubiquity) of God, but also the presence of a Muslim community.¹⁶⁹ This accelerated 'religious building' was evident in the number of mosques built in Colombo, such as the grand Red Mosque in Pettah built in 1909. The Red Mosque (Figure 2), and the Castle Hill Street Mosque in Kandy (built in the 1890s and enlarged in 1913) are two examples of religious building by the Indian Moors in Ceylon. The Red Mosque on Second Cross Street in Pettah was the main place of prayer for Indian Moors who originated from Kilakkarai-Kayalpattinam.¹⁷⁰ The largest number of traders from India were based in Pettah. The Indian Moors, increasingly successful traders in Pettah and areas like Kandy, originally did not have their own mosques at which they could pray. In part due to their financial success, these Indian Moors were able to build their own mosques to

¹⁶⁶ Report of Lieutenant Governor J. Douglas, TNA, FO 78/4267; McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims', p. 448.

¹⁶⁷ Siddiq Ghouse, 'Extract from the Diary of Haji Ismail Effendi: A Ceylon Moor Traveller in 1884' *MICH Souvenir IX 2009-2015* (Colombo, 2015), p. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 359.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200-year Saga*, (Colombo, 2003), p. 117.

practice their religion while also setting down more permanent roots in Ceylon. Muthiah estimates that Muslims from Kilakkarai-Kayalpattinam built over 300 mosques in Ceylon. There is no disaggregated census data on Indian Moors prior to 1911. However, an unofficial statistic in the *Lakminipahana* suggested there were only 130,000 Moors and 2,500 non-Moor Muslims in Ceylon in 1864.¹⁷¹ By 1911, there were 32,724 Indian Moors (and over 233,000 Ceylon Moors).¹⁷² Migration of Indian Moors from India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and rising (Ceylon Moor) birth rates are likely to have driven the expansion of both groups. Although he does not speculate as to why, I.L.M. Abdul Azeez claimed in 1907 of Indian Moors that ‘since of late they have arrived in abnormally large numbers’.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ *Lakminipahana*, 22 June 1864.

¹⁷² Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 196.

¹⁷³ I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, *A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan's "Ethnology of the 'Moors' of Ceylon"* (Colombo, 1907), no page.



Figure 2: Red Mosque, Pettah, circa 1905

It is against this backdrop of Islamic revival – advancements in education, the arrival of transnational actors, the adoption of Islamic practices such as the *Hajj* pilgrimage, and religious building – that a distinct Ceylon Moor identity was shaped in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet as in the case of the Buddhist revival, Ceylon Moor identity (like Sinhala-Buddhist identity) was further shaped by the impact of colonialism, and specifically, British Orientalism.

Impact of British Orientalism

The interest in Islam by British Members of Parliament, the constitutional policies enacted by colonial officials in Ceylon, the practice of ethnographic studies, and the discussions of ethnic groups in Orientalist societies and journals helped shape Ceylon Moor identity formation. One significant episode that demonstrates the impact of British Orientalism on the contours of this identity was the British colonial decision to introduce a separate seat for ‘Mohammedans’ [Muslims] in the Ceylon Legislative Council in the 1880s.

The impetus to introduce a seat for Muslims came not from the Moors nor indeed from within Ceylon. Instead, it emerged when, in Britain, Lord Stanley of Alderley raised the issue of representation for the Muslims with the Secretary of State for the Colonies between 1881 and 1888. Stanley’s advocacy is likely to have been connected to the fact that he was a convert to Islam, and indeed the first Muslim member of the House of Lords.¹⁷⁴ In a way similar to how Western converts to Buddhism influenced the status of Buddhists in Ceylon, this one Western convert to Islam had a significant impact on Muslim representation in Ceylon.¹⁷⁵ Stanley had, on 15 August 1881, raised in the House of Lords the ‘suffering’ of the Muslims in Ceylon (whom he had visited in Ceylon in 1859). He claimed, ‘Though they were from 170,000 to 180,000 in number, and were the most intelligent, active, and wealthy of the Native communities, they still had no representative in the Legislative Council.’¹⁷⁶ At this point, there were only three indigenous appointees (the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Burgher members) out of sixteen members of the Ceylon Legislative Council.

¹⁷⁴ Stanley also advocated for more representative government and the ‘Indianisation’ of institutions in India, agitating for those ‘within and outside the *umma*’. Jamie Gilham, ‘Britain’s First Muslim Peer of the Realm: Henry, Lord Stanley of Alderley and Islam in Victorian Britain’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33/1 (2013), pp. 93-110.

¹⁷⁵ Western Muslims, however, did not propose new forms of organisation, nor did they discuss doctrine with Ceylon’s Muslims, in the way Western Buddhists such as Olcott did.

¹⁷⁶ [Hansard] *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 264, cols. 1882-3 (15 August 1881).

Sir Robert Herbert, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the Colonial Office, supported Stanley's position on separate representation for Muslims.¹⁷⁷ Although Governor Gordon, who had taken up his appointment in Ceylon in 1883, felt creating a seat for the 'Mohammedans' was unnecessary – particularly since the Muslims themselves had not made any serious demands for such a change¹⁷⁸ – he was willing to introduce a new seat as part of the wider process of expanding 'native' representation on the Legislative Council.¹⁷⁹

In response to the British colonial debate over whether to introduce a separate Muslim seat, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, the Tamil Member in the Legislative Council, raised significant opposition in the form of a racial argument.¹⁸⁰ The underlying motivations of this episode would echo down the long road of constitutional reform in Ceylon, and it remains a prime example of how 'strategic ethnicity was practiced by groups trying to secure a greater degree of power and reactive ethnicity by threatened groups' – a clear example of ethno-religious competition.¹⁸¹ Ramanathan's opposition to granting separate representation to the Muslims (primarily made up of Moors) was on the grounds that they were Tamil in ethnicity but had converted to Islam. He also claimed that they were linguistically and culturally 'Tamil', implicitly revealing his perception of what the constituent features of group belonging were.¹⁸² At a speech delivered in the Ceylon Legislative Council on 25 November 1885 during a debate on a bill proposing

¹⁷⁷ Nirmala LaBrooy, *The Movement Towards Constitutional Reform in Ceylon, 1880-1910* (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), p. 237.

¹⁷⁸ Gordon to Knutsford, 6 November 1888, TNA, CO 54/579, Ceylon, Despatches.

¹⁷⁹ LaBrooy, *Constitutional Reform in Ceylon*, p. 237. The creation of a seat for the Muslims accompanied a decision – considered 'far more desirable and necessary' – to introduce an additional seat for Kandyan Sinhalese, to accompany the existing but now clearly defined Low-Country Sinhalese seat.

¹⁸⁰ The 'right' person to hold the Tamil seat, meanwhile, was also contested from within the Tamil community. See Legislative Council: Tamil Representative, 1898, TNA CO 54/646, Ceylon, Despatches.

¹⁸¹ Wickramasinghe, "Divide and Rule" in Ceylon', p. 85.

¹⁸² Ramanathan cites Max Müller's claim that the 'one safe exponent of national character...is language'. Ponnambalam Ramanathan, 'The Ethnology of the "Moors" of Ceylon' *Journal of Royal Asiatic Studies (Ceylon)* 10/36 (1888), pp. 238-239.

compulsory registration of Muslim marriages, and in a now-infamous paper he presented to the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on 26 April 1888, titled ‘The Ethnology of the “Moors” of Ceylon’, Ramanathan maintained that Moors resembled Tamils in both physique and features.¹⁸³ In his paper, he argued, ‘[i]f...we take language as the test of nationality, the Moors of Ceylon, who speak as their vernacular the Tamil [sic], must be adjudged Tamils.’¹⁸⁴

Ramanathan’s position on this issue was not simply a matter of disinterested ethnology.¹⁸⁵ Instead, it is likely to have been driven by self-interest and the desire to strengthen the Tamil position within the context of indigenous populations within Ceylon. Between 1833 and 1889, all Muslims were represented in the Legislative Council by the Tamil Member in Council. Thus, by subsuming Muslims within the broader ethnic ‘Tamil’ category, Ramanathan maintained a higher degree of elite control over a larger swathe of the local population than would be the case with separate representation. Notably, Ramanathan’s paper remained extremely influential. It was cited in the chapters discussing the different ‘races’ in Ceylon in both the reports of the 1901 Census, written by his brother Ponnambalam Arunachalam, and the 1911 Census, written by Denham.

Ramanathan’s ethnographic analysis prompted from elite Ceylon Moors their own ethnographic explanation of their distinct racial identity (‘reactive ethnicity’ in practice). First, in response to Ramanathan’s speech in 1885, Siddi Lebbe wrote several articles describing the Arab origins of the Ceylon Moors.¹⁸⁶ The articles contested Ramanathan’s claims by highlighting the substantially longer ancestry of the Moors in Ceylon (than accorded to them

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239. Ramanathan does not offer a fixed view of ‘nation’ and instead explores the identity of Moors from several perspectives, including through race.

¹⁸⁵ Rudolf Virchow, *The Veddas of Ceylon and Their Relation to the Neighbouring Tribe* (Colombo, 1888).

¹⁸⁶ Smith, *Islamic Ideology and Religious Practice*, pp. 76-77. Siddi Lebbe’s ideas can be traced back to Alexander Johnston’s publications on the origins of the Moors.

by Ramanathan). Although Ramanathan's speech was published in the English press, Siddi Lebbe's response appeared in his own, Tamil-language newspaper *Muslim Nesan*. Accordingly, this response may not have gained wide public traction beyond Moor readership. The limited response to Ramanathan's speech at this stage was also likely due to the lack of literacy among Moors, a problem that Moor elites had already identified.¹⁸⁷

A second, more comprehensive, response was presented in 1907 by I.L.M. Abdul Azeez. This response came almost two decades after Ramanathan's paper to the Royal Asiatic Society was delivered (and after Muslims had been granted separate communal representation in 1889). The length of the delay in responding to Ramanathan perhaps highlighted the limited ability of Moors, to offer any substantial resistance to Ramanathan at the time his claims were made.¹⁸⁸

In 'A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan's "Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon"', published by the Moors' Union in Colombo in 1907, Azeez denounced Ramanathan for intending to 'dissuade the Government from appointing a Moorish member in Council, it having leaked out then that the Government was contemplating to appoint such a one, and to make them understand that there was no necessity for taking such a step, as the Moors did not form a distinct race.'¹⁸⁹

Indeed, Azeez's approach to the matter of Moor identity is even more racialised than Ramanathan's; he connects their ancestry with their Hashemite Arab 'forefathers' who were 'banished' from Arabia but refuses to countenance the possibility of descent from Africans or

¹⁸⁷ In 1901, only 33.2 percent of male and 2.5 percent of female Moors were literate. See Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 401.

¹⁸⁸ Mohamed Sameer, *The Life of I.L.M. Abdul Azeez* (Colombo, 1919), p. 12. The timing of Azeez's response may also have reflected debates in elite public culture at the time, and a growing sense of confidence amidst other assertions of Ceylon Moor identity. His response comes after the fez incident (discussed below) for instance.

¹⁸⁹ Abdul Azeez, *A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan's*, no page.

Persians as ‘no community in the Island...claims descent from them’.¹⁹⁰ Azeez rued the scant availability of evidence on the Moors’ earliest arrivals in Ceylon in the first millennium. He also dismissed Ramanathan’s choice of sources in his ‘Ethnology’, such as ‘Valentyn, one of the bigoted Dutch whose antagonism to and persecution of the Moors are proverbial’.¹⁹¹ Azeez contrasted Ramanathan’s choice of sources with his own ‘trustworthy’ British sources, such as Alexander Johnston and J. Emerson Tennent, a former Colonial Secretary in Ceylon. Azeez was largely uncritical of Johnson as a source, evidenced by his rhetorical question, ‘Will anyone dare to doubt the veracity of the words of Sir Alexander Johnston, who was Chief Justice and President of His Majesty’s Council in Ceylon?’¹⁹²

Tennent’s sources are modern or late early-modern in provenance – and point to the scarcity of primary sources on the earliest arrivals of the Moors in Ceylon in the pre-Portuguese period. Tennent cites Johnston and believed that Johnston’s sources ‘probably spoke on the equivocal authority of the *Tohfut-ul-mujahideen*, which is generally...described as a narrative of the settlement of the Mahometans in Malabar’ in around 822 CE.¹⁹³ The *Tohfut-ul-mujahideen: an historical work in the Arabic language*, written by Zain al-Dīn in the 1580s was translated into English in 1833 by Michael J. Rowlandson. It makes two references to Ceylon in the context of a pilgrimage from Malabar to Adam’s Peak in Ceylon by Muslims who do not remain on the island. This source is not historically reliable for this earlier period to substantiate the origins of Moors in Ceylon.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, Abdul Azeez’s position as an academic authority can also be disputed. As discussed above, his sources were largely British colonial administrators and

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ James E. Tennent, *Ceylon: an Account of the Island Physical, Historical and Topographical, with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities, and Productions*, Vol. 1, (London, 1859), p. 606.

¹⁹⁴ Sebastian Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (New York, 2018), pp. 94-95.

scholars. Yet, his ‘Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan’s Ethnology’ is one of the earliest Moor sources on how the Moors self-identified prior to European colonial rule. Ultimately, the dependence of Ceylon Moors on British Orientalist scholarship is particularly evident in this vignette. Comparable to the development of Sinhala-Buddhist identity in the late nineteenth century, Orientalism also shaped Ceylon Moor identity – perhaps ironically, by assuming that non-Western sources were potentially reliable. Meanwhile, the ‘racial’ distinctions between Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors, also promulgated by Azeez and other Ceylon Moors, were eventually adopted by the colonial state.¹⁹⁵ The 1911 Census enumerated Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors in separate ‘racial’ categories for the first time – in another example of the colonised influencing the colonizer. Though the British do not credit the ‘Ethnology’ debates for their decision in 1911, Abdul Azeez clearly recommended in 1907 that ‘in future, the Ceylon Census Reports show the numbers of the Ceylon Moors and “Coast Moors” under their respective names’.¹⁹⁶

Despite Ramanathan’s best efforts, a seat for a Mohammedan Member in Council was created in 1889, and filled by M.C. Abdul Rahiman from 1889 to 1899, and by W.M. Abdul Rahiman from 1900 to 1916. These (Ceylon Moor) Members in Council did not, however, have as significant an impact on identity formation as other Muslim actors did.

The Fez as an Invented Tradition and the Construction of an ‘Ethno-Religious Identity’

The Islamic revival and the Ceylon Moor identity were greatly inspired by Arabi Pasha (and the other Egyptian exiles). The appearance of the exiles was mimicked by Ceylon’s Moors through the adoption of the *turukki toppi*, or ‘fez’, which the Egyptians regularly wore.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Abdul Azeez, *A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan’s*, no page.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 6.

Historically, Ceylon's Moors had not manifested their Islamic beliefs through a particular type of dress.¹⁹⁸ The Egyptians' arrival represented a turning point.

According to Arunachalam in his Census Report of 1901, 'the presence of Arabi Pasha and his fellow Egyptian exiles in Ceylon during the decade has had the effect of stirring up the Moorish community, but this has shown itself mostly in externals, the adoption of the dress of European Turks etc'.¹⁹⁹ Dressing, Nira Wickramasinghe observes, is 'as much a creative as a political act'.²⁰⁰ Cloth, or in this case, the fez, is 'critical in the representation and reproduction of society and forms a crucial link between social groups across space and through time'.²⁰¹ Elite Moors – the Southern, male bourgeois traders who were physically more proximate to Arabi as opposed to Moor farmers concentrated in the Eastern Province – may have predominantly worn the fez.²⁰²

The construction of a Moor identity was therefore given a concrete manifestation with the adoption of the fez as a 'national headgear'.²⁰³ The fez was only adopted after the arrival of the exiles in 1883. Yet by 1905 it was considered an integral and inextricable part of Moor identity – their 'national headgear'. The swift adoption of the fez is an example of Eric Hobsbawm's

¹⁹⁸ Samaraweera, 'Muslim Revivalist Movement', pp. 296-297. Asiff Hussein more recently observed that 'the Moors of old do not appear to have had a uniform attire, but that this varied with the times and the classes'. Asiff Hussein, *Sarandib: An Ethnological Study of the Muslims of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2011), p. 373.

¹⁹⁹ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 82.

²⁰⁰ Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Sri Lanka* (Delhi, 2003), p. 3.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Ismail, 'Unmooring identity', p. 58. Wearing of the fez did not remain an elite practice for long. Hussein observes that by the mid-twentieth century, 'the Moors of the eastern districts...certainly knew the Turukki toppi which attests to its widespread popularity among the Moors of all parts of the country'. See Hussein, *Sarandib*, p. 385. Hussein's evidence, which is not cited in *Sarandib*, includes a photograph of a Moorish family from the Eastern Province (taken in the mid-1900s) in which the patriarch wears a fez. Email correspondence with Asiff Hussein, 22 December 2020.

²⁰³ Dennis McGilvray observes that there existed 'both an urban Muslim elite and a rural Muslim agrarian population' on either side of the island. See McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims', p. 446.

‘invented tradition’, which plays a role in augmenting a sense of self-awareness or identity.²⁰⁴ Although the identity was not cast back in time, which is the expectation in Hobsbawm’s thesis, the invented tradition of the fez was defended in the context of its widespread use across the Muslim world. How and why was the fez adopted so swiftly in Ceylon?

In terms of religious leadership, there was no single spiritual Islamic authority for Moors in Ceylon. Thus, as discussed above, the Ceylon Moors saw a transnational, spiritual figurehead in Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) who asserted the role of Caliph of Islam. The Ceylon Moors did not perceive themselves as Ottoman subjects; they repeatedly declared their loyalty to the British monarchy. Yet, the fez brought Ceylon’s Moors into a global fold of (Sunni) Muslims, connecting them with the Caliph. The fez also enabled Ceylon’s Moors to signal their membership in the global *umma*.

The adoption of the fez created a sense of ‘national authenticity’ for Ceylon’s Moors: the fez represented a ‘tradition’ that could be considered ‘theirs’ in contrast to non-Moors in Ceylon.²⁰⁵ When in 1905 the colonial state attempted to deny recognition of this material representation of identity – by prohibiting Moors from wearing the fez when appearing before the Supreme Court – Muslims (more broadly) responded with a show of strength. These actions reflected a new phase in the shaping of Ceylon Moor identity: it became politicised for the first time.²⁰⁶

I focus on the ‘fez controversy’ for three reasons. First, due to the paucity of contemporary Muslim sources (possibly due to the limited literacy of the population) and the negligible

²⁰⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, p. 9. Ceylon’s Muslims were not the only ‘nation’ to adopt the fez during this period. Other Muslims under British domination, such as the Zanzibaris adopted the fez in the early 1900s. See Aydin, *Muslim World*, p. 91.

²⁰⁵ Smith, *Islamic Ideology and Religious Practice*, p. 385.

²⁰⁶ This is different to the trajectory of Sinhala-Buddhist identity, which had been politicised at many points over the preceding *longue durée*.

historiography on Moor identity, the fez incident stands out as the only episode in which the Ceylon Moor identity was forcefully advanced on the national stage during this period.²⁰⁷ Second, in spite of the relevance of this episode, there has been marginal historical analysis of the fez controversy aside from passing reference to the event.²⁰⁸ The civic action the controversy engendered galvanised Muslim men from 16 of the 25 districts in Ceylon in a spirit of protest and group consciousness.²⁰⁹ For the scale of the protest alone, which shows that Muslims in general felt their shared religious identity was being threatened, it is worth investigating at length. Finally, the fez controversy stands as an early example of transnational Muslim attempts to confront the British on the issue of religious freedom. The First World War is often seen as a turning point in global and transnational anti-colonial protest by Muslims under British colonial rule. For example, Faisal Devji's scholarship on the 'radicalisation of loyalty' of Indian Muslims during the sedition trials of 1921 suggests that the Khilafat Movement and its allies obliged the British colonial state to remain true to its pledges to ensure religious freedom made in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny in 1857.²¹⁰ The fez controversy and the protest it galvanised precedes similar protests in India by over a decade.

In 1905, Chief Justice Charles Layard prohibited a Moor Advocate, M.C. Abdul Cader, from wearing the fez when making representations before the Supreme Court.²¹¹ Cader was the first Muslim in Ceylon to be made an Advocate. On 2 May 1905, Layard, the presiding Supreme

²⁰⁷ As late as 1949, the Secretary of the All-Ceylon Moors' Association, S.L. Mohamed wrote in one of the first attempts at historical writing on the Moors in Ceylon, 'it is a surprising fact that an old community like the Ceylon Moors, whose association with Sri Lanka dates from the early Arab traders, has not produced a single historian who has traced the growth of the community from sea-faring Arabs to settled inhabitants of this Island. This vacuum in the history of the community has helped to create false notions about it'. See S.L. Mohamed, *Moorish Culture: A Collection of Essays* (Colombo, 1949), Preface.

²⁰⁸ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 154.

²⁰⁹ The absence of women may be explained by the fact that women did not wear the fez, but also reflects the general functioning of gender in public space among Ceylon's Muslims. Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. iii.

²¹⁰ Faisal Devji, 'Escaping the Global Event: India, Islam and the Great War', (unpublished paper delivered 23 October 2020, Global and Imperial History Seminar, University of Oxford).

²¹¹ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 13.

Court judge, asked Cader to either remove his fez or uncover his feet, ‘as a mark of respect to the Court’ – or leave the Court.²¹² Cader left the court and would not re-enter for the rest of the year.²¹³ He and his coreligionists spent the next several months attempting to persuade Layard and the other Supreme Court Justices to permit the fez in Court.²¹⁴ Yet on 19 September 1905, the Supreme Court delivered a Minute reiterating the prohibition of the fez, as it was ‘quite incongruous to the gown and bands without which they have no right of audience in the Supreme Court’.²¹⁵ The Minute referred to a precedent for prohibiting the fez; the ‘one attempt to depart from the customary dress’.²¹⁶ Ponnambalam Ramanathan, in his capacity of Solicitor-General, had in 1890 appeared before Chief Justice Burnside ‘wearing his turban’. The Minute noted that Burnside ‘at once pointed out to Mr. Ramanathan that he was not conforming to the customary dress and Mr. Ramanathan from that time ceased to cover his head with a turban when appearing in the Appeal Court.’²¹⁷ Interestingly, the Minute goes on to record that prior to 1890, the Tamil advocate Kanagasabai used to wear ‘a turban when appearing in the Supreme Court Sessions at outstations’. It was only after Burnside’s dictum in 1890 that Kanagasabai too stopped wearing his turban.

The prohibition of the fez triggered an outcry among Muslims. They feared this decision could affect their pre-existing ability to cover their heads in the Ceylon Legislative Council, the Municipal Councils, in their roles as jurors and witnesses in the Supreme Court, in the other Courts of Justice, and government departments.²¹⁸ The prohibition was considered a deprivation of their religious rights.

²¹² It was considered disrespectful to cover both the feet and the head in Court, and as removing shoes was less viable, the practice was to keep the head uncovered.

²¹³ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 14.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²¹⁵ Minute of the Supreme Court, published in Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, pp. 28-30.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. iii.

On 31 December 1905 a mass meeting to discuss the ‘Fez Question’, involving the greatest number of Muslim protestors ever gathered during British colonial rule in Ceylon, was held in Colombo at the Maradana Mosque. The proceedings of the mass meeting were published by the Fez Committee, which comprised representatives of various Muslim groups in Ceylon who led the campaign against the Supreme Court’s decision. Bohras, who never wore the fez, were also represented. The elite composition of the Committee provides an insight into who the champions of an avowedly ‘Muslim’ cause were.²¹⁹ Such elites are likely to have played a dominant role in both ‘constructing’ and ‘representing’ the image of ‘Muslims’.

The details provided in the Committee’s publication are of historical value as they offer insights into the identity formation of Ceylon Moors in the early twentieth century.²²⁰ The publication also highlights the connections between Muslims in Ceylon and India, and the careful management of sovereign-subject relations (that is, criticising British colonial policy while professing their continued loyalty). Indeed, the fez controversy represents the most significant episode of pan-Islamic solidarity within Ceylon during British rule.

According to English and Tamil newspapers and the Fez Committee report, over 30,000 men attended the meeting.²²¹ This was over ten percent of the Muslim population in Ceylon at the time, which according to the 1901 Census stood at 246,000. A *Times of Ceylon* article published on 1 January 1906 called the gathering a ‘monster meeting’, referring to the ‘clannish cohesion

²¹⁹ This non-violent mobilisation of Muslims by elites can be contrasted with Islamic peasant rebellions in India, which culminated in the violent Mappila rebellion of 1921 (which was driven consciously in the name of Islam by antipathy to landlords and the colonial state). See Arnold, ‘Islam, the Mappilas and peasant revolt’, pp. 255-265.

²²⁰ The intended readership of the publication, which was also reproduced to some extent in the Tamil-language newspaper *Muslim Nesan*, was likely to have been both the colonial state, and the literate Muslim population of Ceylon – which at that time was negligible.

²²¹ *Ceylon Observer*, 3 January 1906; Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 1; *Muslim Nesan*, 6 January 1906.

of Mohammedans on questions of their faith, or on questions affecting it'.²²² The press recorded the presence of Turks, Persians, and 'men of African origin', suggesting transnational support from non-Ceylonese Muslims.²²³

The Fez Committee noted that 'at the time of the Meeting the Business Establishments of the Mohammedans...were closed [in Colombo]'.²²⁴ This economic *hartal* is an example of Muslim solidarity.²²⁵ The Muslims were also flexing their economic muscle by imposing costs on non-Muslim customers, who may have been inconvenienced by the closure of stores. Although such a mass meeting was unprecedented for the Muslims, a series of mass meetings (primarily attended by Buddhists) had taken place across Ceylon during the 1904 Temperance Movement, reflecting the context of general revivalism.²²⁶ Yet the fez mass meeting stands out in Ceylon's British colonial history because transnational networks coalesced into an effective form of local protest.

The fez incident reflects the rise of trans-imperial and global religious awareness by the early twentieth century. The Moors rarely used the language of pan-Islamism. Instead, they leveraged British imperial ideologies and deployed the language of religious freedom (such as 'rights and liberties') in their lobbying of the British during the fez controversy.²²⁷ Meanwhile, the connectedness of the British Empire – including networks of trade, language, and literature – was wielded by the Muslims as arguments (and veiled threats) in the struggle for religious and cultural freedom in Ceylon.

²²² Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 1.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²²⁵ This mode of anti-colonial protest or strike was also adopted elsewhere in the region, such as by Gandhi in India in the 1920s. Dinyar Patel, 'Beyond Hindu-Muslim unity: Gandhi, the Parsis and the Prince of Wales Riots of 1921,' *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 55/2 (2018), pp. 222-232.

²²⁶ Rogers, 'Cultural nationalism', pp. 319-341.

²²⁷ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 5.

A guest speaker from India delivered the main address at the meeting. Moulvi Rafiuddin Ahmad was by far the most high-profile Muslim dignitary to involve himself in the affairs of Ceylon's Muslims at the time. He had successfully campaigned against the opening of the play 'Mohamet' in London as it was considered insulting to Islam, and Rafiuddin had had audiences with both Queen Victoria and the Ottoman Sultan.²²⁸ He, then, was no ordinary ally. Importantly, he had a track-record of changing British minds on issues considered injurious to Muslims.



Figure 3: 'Moulvie Rafiuddin Ahmad', *Strand Magazine* Vol. VI (Jul-Dec 1893)

An advocate himself, Rafiuddin claimed he accepted the request to speak at the fez meeting because of the 'confraternity of Islam'.²²⁹ Quoting the Persian poet Sadi, he compared 'the great Mohammedan nation to a body...that when one limb of it is affected, the whole body feels the

²²⁸ Aydin, *Muslim World*, p. 86; *Muslim Nesan*, 6 January 1906; Moulvie Rafiuddin Ahmad, 'The Sultan of Turkey', *The Strand Magazine* Vol. 6 (Jul-Dec 1893), p. 575.

²²⁹ Rafiuddin said he was invited by his friend Carimjee Jafferjee (one of the leading Bohra traders in Ceylon at the time) and could not refuse his invitation. The crucial involvement of a Bohra, belonging to a minority Muslim ethnic group within Ceylon (as opposed to the majority Moor community), highlights the religious nature or 'Muslimness' of the fez incident. *Muslim Nesan*, 6 January 1905.

pain'.²³⁰ The analogy reflected the imagined religious community to which the Ceylon Moors belonged. Rafiuddin also claimed 'The British Empire is the greatest Mussalman [sic] power upon the surface of the globe. It boasts of one hundred million Mohammedans...therefore it is a further tie that has bound me and that binds Indian Mohammedans to the Mohammedans of Ceylon.'²³¹ This perceived connectedness of Muslims within the British Empire was apparent elsewhere, including in India. Zaman notes that by the late nineteenth century, 'contemporary Muslims appeared increasingly to be aware of...the experiences of their co-religionists dwelling in other, sometimes far-flung, parts of "the Muslim world".²³² While in daily affairs Ceylon Moors remained largely aloof from their coreligionists in India (as they tended to stress their ethnic difference from 'Indian Muslims'), there was room for alliance-building when lobbying a common ruler.

Rafiuddin's speech suggested that the loyalty of Muslim subjects to the British was conditional, and depended on the ability of Muslims to practise and manifest their religious beliefs, including wearing the fez.²³³ He also referred to the alternative source of allegiance to whom Ceylon Moors were allegedly pledged: the Ottoman Sultan.²³⁴ By invoking the 'Caliph of the Mohammedan world', who 'himself wears this head-dress', he raised the possibility of appealing to another source of power that could potentially be a more significant threat to the British than Ceylon's Muslims.²³⁵ This tactical invocation deliberately played on British fears of pan-Islamism during this period. Rafiuddin also described the freedom of Muslims in the

²³⁰ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 6.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Zaman, 'Future of Islam', p. 968.

²³³ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 7.

²³⁴ There is, however, no evidence that the Ceylon Moors reached out to the Sultan, nor that he ever commented on the 'fez incident'. Even if he did, in fact, receive news of the incident and pleas for support, evidence suggests that the Sultan was loathe to provide 'moral support' to petitions from Muslims abroad, or 'promote anything that could be construed as a Muslim challenge to the rule of European empires'. Aydin, *Muslim World*, p. 67.

²³⁵ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 7.

French and Russian Empires to wear the fez.²³⁶ This comparison was intended to show the British, who would naturally monitor the proceedings of the ‘monster meeting’, that their imperial rivals were perceived as allowing greater religious freedom. Such comparisons also illustrated the geographical spread of the imagined religious community to which Ceylon’s Moors saw themselves as belonging, and the flows of information among Muslims across empires.

Prior to and after the meeting, the fez controversy garnered widespread public attention in Ceylon. In the press, certain non-Muslim societies (which may have contained some Moor membership) announced their support on the ‘Fez Question’. On 1 November 1905, the Ceylon Social Reform Society, primarily made up of Anglicised local elites, forwarded a resolution regarding their sympathetic position to the Colonial Secretary.²³⁷ Notably, the Fez Committee did not invite the participation of non-Muslims at their meeting. Ameer Ali cites this as a ‘missed opportunity’ to turn a sub-national, religious identity issue into a national, anti-colonial protest.²³⁸ However, perhaps it was strategically wise, as turning a campaign regarding the fez into a broad-based anti-colonial protest may have triggered an unfavourable, and possibly violent response from the state.²³⁹ Furthermore, John Rogers notes that ‘the Moors stayed aloof’ in terms of the Buddhist-led Temperance movement in 1904.²⁴⁰ Buddhists may similarly have felt this protest did not concern them. This lack of interest (on the part of both communities in separate instances) suggests that ethno-religious competition frustrated any secular anti-colonial movement from developing.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12. Not all European empires were permissive of the fez. The Dutch objected to the adoption of the fez by Hadramite Arabs in the Dutch Indies. The Dutch also questioned the loyalty of an Indonesian prince (to the Dutch Empire) who wore a fez when visiting Istanbul. See Aydin, *Muslim World*, p. 94.

²³⁷ ‘Notes: The Fez Question’ in *Ceylon National Review* (Colombo, 1906), p. 89

²³⁸ Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 9.

²³⁹ Moor (and indeed other Ceylonese) elites were unlikely to have wanted to mobilise a national anti-colonial protest.

²⁴⁰ Rogers, ‘Cultural nationalism’, p. 336.

The organisers of the mass meeting resolved to send a motion signed by ‘the Mohammedans of this Island’ to the King. The Memorial requested the withdrawal of the Supreme Court’s Minute, approval for Cader to wear the fez, and for instructions to preserve the rights of Moors to wear their ‘national head-gear’ in courts and other places.²⁴¹ The timing for the delivery of the Memorial appears to have been neatly tied to Layard’s retirement and departure from Ceylon. Layard left Ceylon on 8 March 1906; the Memorial was delivered to the Governor that same week – almost two and a half months after the mass meeting.²⁴² By 16 March, the Supreme Court amended its own Minute, and Cader and future Moor advocates were allowed to appear in the Supreme Court wearing the fez. The Governor, meanwhile, informed the King that the grievance had been resolved locally.²⁴³

The Moors had succeeded in their campaign. The first major Moor-led collective action resisting British colonial governance had ended peacefully but favourably. It demonstrated the hardening of an ethno-religious identity and represented the height of the Islamic revival. Furthermore, it is worth situating the fez incident against the backdrop of ethno-religious violence. Within two years on either side of the 1905 protest, there were at least eight episodes of ethno-religious violence involving Moors, reflecting the fact that peaceful assertion took place alongside violent assertion of their ethno-religious identities.

As a post-script to the episode, there is a cruel irony in the way the fez became associated with Moors during the 1915 pogrom, highlighted in an incident related by Ponnambalam

²⁴¹ Fez Committee, *Fez Question Proceedings of the Mass Meeting*, p. 20.

²⁴² *Ceylon Observer*, 8 March 1906 and 9 March 1906.

²⁴³ Sameer, *The Life of I.L.M. Abdul Azeez*, p. 11.

Ramanathan. Travelling with the (Ceylon Moor) Turkish Consul, Mohammed Macan-Markar, through riot-affected areas on 3 June 1915, Ramanathan recalls,

On the way...the Turkish Consul mentioned to me that, as the fez-cap he was then wearing might attract a stone to his head, he had borrowed an English hat, and asked me whether he might wear it instead of the fez-cap. Just then a Sinhalese man, going along the road with another Sinhalese, exclaimed “Anna Hambaya” (“There goes a Hambaya”) [a pejorative term for Indian Moors]. The Consul lost no time in doffing the fez and donning the foreign hat.²⁴⁴

In the frenzy of the 1915 pogrom, the fez became an identity marker with which Moors could be victimised by other communities, both physically and verbally.

Conclusion

The two revivals, each distinct from other revivals including earlier ones within the Buddhist monastic orders, occurred during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, although the impact of such revivals would be felt well into the twentieth century. They gave rise to national-level elite leaders from across the Sinhala-Buddhist and Ceylon Moor populations, and triggered investments in education, vernacular languages, and places of worship. Both revivals aimed to inspire a sense of awakening among the Sinhala-Buddhists and Ceylon Moors to instil a sense of pride and togetherness across previously disparate peoples. The elite nature of Ceylon Moor group consolidation during this period appears to have been largely reflective of the nature of the Hindu revival in Ceylon, which was restricted to the landed, educated (and high caste) class. By contrast, Sinhala-Buddhist group consolidation occurred at a more popular level. The Buddhist and Islamic revivals were influenced from within and without, by home-grown community leaders and by transnational actors who made their way into Ceylon or whose wisdom travelled inland along with a broader movement of ideas. Sinhala-Buddhists and

²⁴⁴ Ponnambalam Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon 1915* (London, 1916), p. 46.

Ceylon Moors became aware of themselves as distinct ‘nations’ (peoples) bound together through religion.

The two revivals demonstrated both a sense of anti-colonial protest and the ability to mobilise ethnic or religious groups against the state or ‘other’ ethno-religious groups. The experience of Sinhala-Buddhists and Ceylon Moors reflected the coalescing of an identity amidst societal and economic changes concurrently taking place during British rule. Significantly, the relationship between the colonial state and the two revivals was distinct: colonial discourses appear to have promoted Sinhala-Buddhism to a substantial extent. By contrast, global trans-imperial discourses were more important for the Islamic revival even though colonial policies affected Ceylon Moor identity formation.

Ultimately, both revivals were fed by and fed into notions of ethno-religious competition and globally circulating discourses, such as Aryanism and pan-Islamism. These factors provided the ideological and emotional context for inter-communal conflict in Ceylon. However, it was their expression in the form of building projects (such as the construction of places of worship) that led to concrete contestations over space, as shown in the previous chapter. Similarly, in the socio-economic sphere, individuals’ basic sensations of well-being – such as the ability to purchase food, clothing and land for shelter – were recast through a lens of ethno-religious competition.

The Sinhala-Buddhists developed an entitlement complex in which their sense of belonging and ownership of Ceylon became more pronounced. Yet, paradoxically, this realisation was accompanied by deep existential fears, particularly around the perceived success and expansion of Moors in Ceylon. In a sense this combination appears to have prompted a kind of

consciousness among Sinhala-Buddhists, who would begin to see themselves collectively as a 'host' under attack by a 'parasite'. How, then, did the Moors come to be viewed as a socio-economic threat? The next chapter explores Sinhalese (including Christians') economic and social grievances with respect to the Moors, and how such grievances manifested in antagonism towards the Moors.

Chapter 3: Sinhalese Economic and Social Grievances against the Moors

The growing success of the Moors was interpreted by many Sinhalese as an affront to their own economic and social standing, dignity and, ultimately, identity. Both Sinhala-Buddhists and Sinhalese Christians felt animosity towards the Moors in this regard. At certain times, it is difficult to distinguish between Sinhalese who were Christian or Buddhist, especially in press discourse. In the economic and social spheres, the sources employ ethnic labels but, at times, Sinhalese Christians were explicitly brought into the broader fold of the ‘Sinhalese’ when faced with an ‘other’ like the Moors. These Christians were not considered ‘guests’ in the way the Moors or even the Tamils were in Ceylon, but they were at best only second-class ‘hosts’. Thus, I tend to use the broader term ‘Sinhalese’ in this chapter. Importantly, in the last chapter it was the Buddhist dimension of the Sinhalese identity that was brought to the fore; in this chapter, communal conflict is shaped by ethnic difference. This applies to the Sinhalese, but also to the Moors: it is their wider cultural, economic, and even racial features that are relevant, rather than their religious identity.

To contextualise the socio-economic grievances discussed in this chapter it is necessary to provide an impression of the changed socio-economic context in Ceylon by the late nineteenth century. Patrick Peebles observes that a ‘dual economy’ increasingly operated in Ceylon, comprising a modern, capitalist colonial economy and a traditional subsistence agriculture economy that developed in isolation of one another.¹ In the first decades of British colonial rule, the export of cinnamon – as since the days of the Portuguese – was the coloniser’s primary

¹ Patrick Peebles, *The History of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2006), p. 72.

economic activity.² Then, beginning with coffee in the 1830s, and spreading to tea, rubber and coconut by the 1850s, the cultivation of agricultural crops for export took on unprecedented importance.³ The coffee and tea trades were overwhelmingly controlled by British planters and export companies, who oversaw the processing and shipping of these products.

The new coconut, rubber and cinnamon plantations were largely owned by Low-Country Sinhalese and a handful of Ceylon Tamils.⁴ Additionally, the plumbago (graphite) mining industry developed across the Western, Southern, Sabaragamuwa and North-Western Provinces in the nineteenth century, and was almost exclusively controlled by the Sinhalese.⁵ Other non-European-run industries included the extraction and sale of gems spearheaded by Moors and Sinhalese. By the mid-nineteenth century, traders of Indian descent who were increasingly migrating from India took control of the import-export and wholesale trade of certain essential goods.⁶ These ‘merchant capitalists’, predominantly from Bohra, Memon and Parsi backgrounds but also Moors, imported foodstuffs such as rice, flour, dried fish, sugar, ‘currystuffs’ such as lentils and onions, and kerosene oil. They exported products grown in Ceylon including pepper, arecanut, tobacco, arrack, timber, and gems.⁷ These merchant capitalists thrived by supplying ‘everyday necessities’ that the British were not attempting to monopolise.⁸ C.R. de Silva observes that in contrast to British rule in India, British economic policies in Ceylon actually facilitated the rise of an ‘indigenous entrepreneurial class’ that had not really existed before.⁹

² De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 307.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 360-369.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁵ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 300.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 270.

⁷ S. Muthiah, *The Indo-Lankans: Their 200-year Saga* (Colombo, 2003), p. 90.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ C.R. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: A History* (New Delhi, 1987), p. 12.

The wholesale trade and the growth of the plantation, gem and other raw material industries hastened the monetisation and commoditisation of Ceylon's economy.¹⁰ Such monetisation and commoditisation had mixed implications for much of the local population. P.V.J. Jayasekera argues that the development of new industries sped up the disintegration of the rural economy in the densely populated parts of the island.¹¹ Typically, the subsistence agriculture that sustained much of the peasantry did not translate into self-sufficiency, and many villages had to 'import' rice from beyond village boundaries but also from South India.¹² In an already precarious economic position, many peasants were forced off their lands when a 'land rush' was driven by those few capitalists accumulating wealth from the economic expansion in Ceylon. Thus, peasants often abandoned their cultivation and sought employment in the plantations or mines. The decline of paddy cultivation created a further reliance on imported rice, among other foodstuffs, which in turn brought peasants into closer contact with Moor traders who specialised in this petty retail trade at the turn of the twentieth century.

Finally, as road, rail, and telegraph networks expanded, there was rapid urbanisation across towns such as Colombo, Kandy, Matale, Gampola, Kurunegala and Ratnapura.¹³ Colombo, for instance, attracted immigrants (including immigrant Sinhalese from other districts) due to 'the fact that Colombo is now the port of call for steamers' and provided opportunities for dockyard workers, labourers and traders.¹⁴ The total population of the Colombo district showed an increase of 16.8 percent between 1871 and 1881, and an increase of 14 percent between 1881 and 1891. By 1891, the Colombo Municipality contained around one-sixth of the population of the Western Province, and comprised Buddhists (31%), Christians (32%), Muslims (25%) and

¹⁰ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 194.

¹¹ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 301.

¹² De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 314-315.

¹³ Except Ratnapura, all these towns saw growing ethno-religious violence around the turn of the century (Chapter 1).

¹⁴ Lee, *Census of Ceylon 1891*, p. 13.

Hindus (12%).¹⁵ Wards within these towns became polyglot, multicultural, and multireligious sites, and brought diverse groups of people into densely populated areas like Pettah and the Fort.

The changes to the economy and the growth of a local ‘middle class’ disrupted the status quo in terms of caste and occupation.¹⁶ In the context of a more commercialised and capitalised economy, together with new ideas of ethnicity and racial fitness, different ethno-religious groups competed with the ‘other’ to adapt to the new socio-economic conjuncture, alongside confronting the ‘other’ over religious symbols/spaces/activities. Ethno-religious competition manifested in the marketplace through a need to show entrepreneurialism, thrift, sobriety, and self-discipline, reminiscent of Max Weber’s Protestant work ethic. Importantly, what the Moors (and often, the British) embraced as ‘a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital...as an end in itself’, the Sinhalese perceived as a ‘philosophy of avarice’.¹⁷ The Sinhalese viewed such economic competition and changes in class and wealth primarily through an ethno-religious lens.

The first two sections of this chapter explore the economic and social grievances of the Sinhalese in respect to the Moors as a concrete demonstration of the cultural reassertion explored in the last chapter. I test many of the claims by placing Sinhalese perceptions against available evidence in terms of the economy and demographics. I also explore how the charges brought against the Moors by the Sinhalese compared with colonial perceptions of the Moors. This involves assessing how far the British represented an ‘alternative witness’, and the extent to which the British were influenced by their own racialised notions and, indeed, their Sinhalese informants.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁶ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*; Michael Roberts, *Caste conflict and elite formation: the rise of a Karāva elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931* (Cambridge, 1982).

¹⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, 2001), p. 17.

The third section of this chapter focuses on the manifestation of Sinhalese grievances in the forms of vilification and discrimination. It explores propaganda portraying Moors in terms of ‘hostile stereotypes’, developing the theme of the racialisation of group identification.¹⁸ The Moors were repeatedly depicted as the ‘Jews of Ceylon’ by both influential Sinhalese actors and state actors. The comparison of Moors to Jews not only pertained to trade and commerce, but also to their implied transnational status. Ameer Ali has discussed the comparison of Moors with Jews; yet he does not offer any analysis on the use of antisemitic epithets. In fact, he employs them when he writes, ‘without any commitment towards the native population, the Shylockian methods of Indian Moor business competition not only created resentment...etc.’¹⁹ It is the roots of these antisemitic sentiments that enable (or make potent) such comparisons that I explore in depth.

The section concludes by analysing why the colonial state failed to detect growing Sinhalese antagonism, freely expressed in the press, towards the Moors. It discusses the colonial state’s preoccupation with the English-language press by critiquing David Scott’s framework of ‘colonial governmentality’ and contrasting the state’s neglect of vernacular publications with the colonial practice of vernacular-press monitoring in India.²⁰

To identify the grievances, I rely on several newspapers published in Sinhala (and which were often proudly ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’ in nature and in name) from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, including *Sinhala Bauddhya*, *Sinhala Jatiya*, *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, *Lakminipahana*, *Dinamina* and *Sihala Samaya*. Various histories of the 1915 pogrom suggest

¹⁸ Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (London, 2016), p. 114.

¹⁹ Ameer Ali, ‘Muslims in harmony and conflict in plural Sri Lanka: A historical summary from a religio-economic and political perspective’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 34/3 (2014), p. 234.

²⁰ David Scott, ‘Colonial Governmentality’, *Social Text* 43 (1995), pp. 191-220.

that anti-Moor sentiments emerged in the months leading up to the pogrom.²¹ By contrast, I suggest that such sentiment had a longer history than generally appreciated, and date it back to the 1860s. Such sentiments, like the episodes of ethno-religious violence discussed in Chapter 1, substantially increase from the 1880s onwards.

There is minimal circulation data from this period to gauge the popularity of such newspapers. Arnold Wright notes in 1907 that the weekly circulation of *Sarasavi Sandaresa* was 8,000, and the bi-weekly circulation of *Sihala Samaya* was 3,000.²² The editors of a number of these newspapers such as *Sinhala Bauddhya* and *Sinhala Jatiya* were well-known personalities such as Anagarika Dharmapala and Piyadasa Sirisena, who were influential ideologues among Sinhala-Buddhists. Their articles or newspapers were likely to have been borrowed by those who did not buy them themselves, circulated and read aloud to others as they interacted at shops, in the streets, and temple grounds.²³ As shown in Chapter 2, newspapers were a ‘site where ideas about modernity and tradition converged’ – where modern technologies of print could be used for disseminating traditional and culturally conservative ideas.²⁴ The fact that most of these newspapers were censored, and even fined, in the aftermath of the 1915 pogrom by the British state is further evidence that, at the time, these newspapers were considered to be influential.

A. Economic Grievances Against the Moors

Stereotypes of the Moors in economic and demographic contexts

Sinhalese grievances with Moors included the claims that the Moor population was growing in Ceylon; that they were increasingly penetrating remote parts of the island; and that the Moors exploited the Sinhalese poor. Were grievances reflected in the relative numbers of Moors and

²¹ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations*, p. 199.

²² Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, pp. 318-19.

²³ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 39.

²⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 40.

Sinhalese, and in their visibility? How much did cultural differences shape perceptions and what other factors may have influenced group behaviour? This section explores what lies behind these claims and tests certain hypotheses within an overarching framework of ethno-religious competition.

(1) National demographics

Numerically, the Sinhalese were the largest group on the island. Yet, they constantly aired concerns about the increasingly ubiquitous presence of Moors who were believed to be growing in number. Anagarika Dharmapala claimed in 1898 that, ‘Moor people are increasing... Sinhalese are decreasing 25 per thousand for a year’.²⁵ Dharmapala blamed the British for such migration. He wrote,

During the Dutch period, Mohammedans were allowed to remain in the island only a number of months in the year. Under the English administration the outcasts of Southern India are allowed to immigrate into the island, and thousands of them have made homes herein. The sons of the soil, the pure lion-armed Sinhalese, who number 2,092,885, are allowed to perish.²⁶

In this statement, there is a sense that the Moors have multiplied in Ceylon, like parasites, while the hosts, the ‘sons of the soil’ must fight for their survival.²⁷ The Superintendent of the 1901 Census Ponnambalam Arunachalam does, however, offer some form of empirical basis for Dharmapala’s claims. Arunachalam wrote, ‘this increase [in the Moor population] is due mainly to immigration from Southern India, 12 per cent of the Moors being India-born’.²⁸ He further

²⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 4 February 1898.

²⁶ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 483. In reality, there were Moors that were permanently settled on the island during Dutch rule. Meanwhile, the use of gendered language reflects the centrality of masculinity in Sinhalese nationalist discourse. See Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Nations in an Imperial Crucible’, in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2007), p. 194.

²⁷ This is my term, developing my host-parasite hypothesis.

²⁸ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 84. This phenomenon of Indians (including Muslims) migrating to British colonies was evident elsewhere as in Burma from the late nineteenth century onwards. Muslims ‘represented the largest population increase of any religious group’ in Rangoon between 1881 and 1901. See Green, ‘Religious Economy of Colonial Burma’, pp. 175 and 183-184.

observed that these Indian Moors came over to Ceylon in growing numbers solely for the purposes of trade.²⁹ They tended to travel from South India by mail steamer, as well as by rail in the newly combined boat mail (train and steamer).³⁰ Modernisation and the expansion of travel networks had in some way enabled a faster movement of Indian Moors to Ceylon.

However, Dharmapala's overall claim about the 'perishing' of the Sinhalese did not correspond with official Census data. In 1881, there were 184,000 Moors, and by 1911, the number of Moors stood at over 260,000, a 41 percent increase in 30 years.³¹ Yet the Sinhalese population was expanding throughout this period too, from 1,846,600 in 1881 to 2,715,500 in 1911, showing a 47 percent increase in the same period. The overall Moor population, then, was increasing essentially in line with other groups. In absolute and relative terms, the Sinhalese population was not falling behind.

(2) Dispersal

Sinhalese nationalists repeatedly made claims that Moor traders could be found practising their trade in even the remotest villages in Ceylon, where their presence was previously unknown. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, by 1907, the colonial state was deferring to Indian Moors in Gampola as they were increasingly perceived as the primary traders in that town, and they asserted their presence through control of the space surrounding their mosque. The belief that the Moors (among other 'outsiders') had established themselves across the island was allegedly

²⁹ Arunachalam, *Census of 1901*, p. 212.

³⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 4 March 1914.

³¹ Denham, *Census of 1911*, pp. 195 and 233. The Census of 1911 was considered more accurate than the 1901 Census or those before, due to the way in which data was gathered and classified by the enumerators (although I occasionally use data from 1901 for comparisons).

evident by 1909: ‘Wherever you go in Lanka, in each and every village the main traders are either Moors...Tamils or other such outsiders [*paradesi*]’.³²

In describing the Moors’ shift from transient trader to more settled resident, Dharmapala claimed: ‘These Moors start their business by coming to a village with some tobacco, dried fish, and some gunny bags of rice. By using words like “*ralahami*” [a respectful term] these Moors cheat the foolish Sinhalese and develop their business.’³³ Jayasekera notes that for centuries already, the Moors had plied their trade in villages across the island.³⁴ Similarly, Ameer Ali observes that Moors had, even prior to the development of the railways and road network, travelled into distant villages, albeit as ‘travelling salesmen’.³⁵ Had something changed, then, to make their presence more noticeable? Or were the Moors gradually settling and residing in new villages?

There is no disaggregated data at the local level to show whether the Moors lived among the Sinhalese in these villages where they set up or whether they remained apart. Caste hierarchies could determine residential patterns for certain Sinhalese. However, Moors were not bound by caste restrictions, nor were the more recent migrants tied to any particular district or ancestral land.³⁶ Given the claims that Moors often bought up Sinhalese boutiques and homes – discussed further below – it is possible to surmise that Moors ‘fitted in’ to the existing set up of shops and houses in such villages, and therefore lived among the Sinhalese.

³² The term *paradesi* suggests that the Moors/Tamils in question do not have a claim to the land on account of their belonging elsewhere. *Sihala Samaya*, 14 October 1909.

³³ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 483.

³⁴ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 306.

³⁵ Ali, ‘Muslims in harmony’, p. 234.

³⁶ McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims’, p. 445.

The prevailing sentiment that Moor traders were making physical headway into the villages was occasionally corroborated by the English-language press. In September 1880, the *Ceylon Observer*'s correspondent in Anuradhapura noted that Moors were moving away from the coast to the rural heartlands of the North-Central province: 'the Moors of Puttalam who come here to trade have become a pest to the poor villagers, so much so as to be intolerable'.³⁷ By 1909, Government Agent Vaughan's Administration Report for the North Central Province observed that 'trade...is chiefly in the hands of the Moors'.³⁸ It was noted at the Planters' Association Annual Meeting in 1894 that even within provinces Moors would go from village to village, tightening their control over trade in specific products.³⁹ Moor traders were then active across and within provinces. The Planters' Association also observed the replacement of the 'old coast Chetty' in the upcountry by Moors by 1908, an observation that supports Sinhalese views.⁴⁰

It was not only Moors who were noticeably settling away from the coast and moving into remote villages. Low-Country Sinhalese traders, who also benefited from the growing economy, moved into the interior, and were becoming the 'main commercial rivals' of Moors.⁴¹ The Superintendent of the 1911 Census Denham notes that 'The Kandyan Sinhalese relies almost entirely on the Moorman or Low-Country man to supply him with anything which he cannot obtain from his own field'.⁴²

Despite the migration of the Low-Country Sinhalese to the 'upcountry', the Moors' migration was arguably more noticeable in part due to their dress (such as the distinct style of sarong worn by Moor men, distinctive sarees worn by Moor women, and the fez cap worn by richer Moors),

³⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 25 September 1880.

³⁸ Reported in *Ceylon Observer*, 22 June 1910.

³⁹ *Ceylon Observer*, 21 February 1894.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1908.

⁴¹ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 306.

⁴² Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 471.

and the construction of mosques. Curiously, in Figure 1 below, the ‘average’ Moor man is pictured wearing a hat different to the fez, affirming the idea suggested in the previous chapter that the fez was considered a ‘national headgear’ mostly by elites.

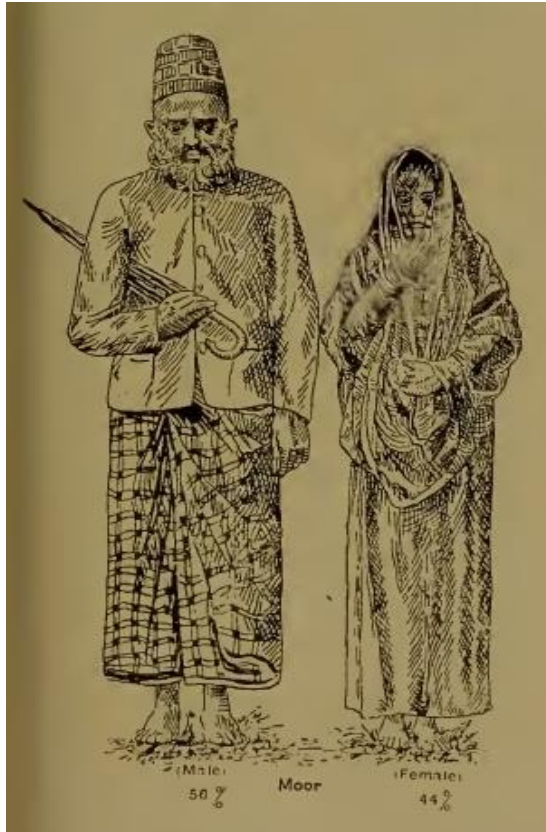


Figure 1: Moor man and woman, *Census Report of 1911*

Dharmapala ‘othered’ Moors who moved into the interior of the island by comparing them to transient scavengers. In a poem he wrote in 1911 on ‘Others’ in Ceylon, he claimed Moors: ‘Like a crow, go from village to village selling anything – money, potatoes, yams, paddy etc’.⁴³ His simile to describe Moors in this stanza, ‘like a crow’, was more commonly heard in the Sinhala refrain, ‘There is no place where the Moorman and the crow cannot be found’, which was well known by colonial administrators such as Denham.⁴⁴ Indeed, Arthur N. Strong, a Ceylon Civil Service officer present in the island at the time of the pogrom later reflected on

⁴³ *Sinhala Baudhdya*, 14 October 1911.

⁴⁴ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 234.

the cause of the violence, ‘the economic element entered into it because everywhere you went you’d get the *thambi*: “marakkalaya kaakka nathi thanak naa” [There is no place where the Moorish crow isn’t found/ there is no place where the Moor and the crow are not found].’⁴⁵ The British were then familiar with harmful Sinhalese stereotypes of Moors and occasionally deployed them. Following the pogrom, in August 1915, Governor Robert Chalmers claimed, ‘the Hill people of the Kandyan Provinces have no commercial aptitudes; local trade is in other hands – chiefly of Mohammedans.’ Rather than this claim being rooted in reality, it was more likely a perception of the Governor – perhaps influenced by the elite Sinhalese who occasionally advised him.⁴⁶ Indeed, Low-Country Sinhalese were almost certainly taking a growing share of trade: the Census Reports of 1891 and 1921 highlight the relative increase in Sinhalese engaged in commercial activity (42% in 1891 and 60% in 1921) compared to the ‘Muslims’ (37% in 1891 and 32% in 1921).⁴⁷

The term used by Strong, ‘Thambi’, was the Tamil word for younger brother, and a derogatory term used initially by the British. It was later adopted by the Ceylonese to describe itinerant traders who were typically Muslim.⁴⁸ The etymology of ‘Marakkalaya’, meanwhile, and its derogatory intent is less straightforward. Ceylon Moors were typically referred to in Sinhala as ‘Marakkalayo’ (plural). However, scholars such as Dennis McGilvray and colonial contemporaries such as J.C. Van Sanden (whom I disagree with) have argued that ‘Marakkalayo’ was the Sinhala term to describe Indian Moors as ‘boat people’ who came from

⁴⁵ Interview with Arthur N. Strong, conducted by Michael Roberts on 15 December 1965, Michael Roberts Oral History Project (MROHP). Strong was an additional police magistrate and acting Government Agent in Ratnapura at the time of the pogrom.

⁴⁶ Parliamentary Papers (1916), Cm. 8167, ‘Correspondence Relating to Disturbances in Ceylon, Governor to Secretary of State, 11 August 1915.

⁴⁷ Using Census data, Jayasekera asserts that the Moors were losing their trade dominance to the Low-Country Sinhalese. Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, pp. 306-7.

⁴⁸ M.A. Nuhman, *Sri Lankan Muslims: Ethnic Identity within Cultural Diversity* (Colombo, 2007), p. 46; McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims’, p. 434. Today, this term specifically refers to Sri Lankan Muslims in a derogatory manner.

outside Ceylon.⁴⁹ In the Sinhala press, between 1864 and 1915, the words ‘Marakkalayo’ and ‘Hambayo’ were used inter-changeably, but at other times were used to refer specifically to Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors respectively. For example, a poem in the *Sihala Samaya*, 8 November 1906, uses the term ‘Marakkala’ to refer to Moors in general, and ‘Hamba’ to refer to Indian Moors in particular. ‘Hambayo’ was unambiguously a Sinhala racial slur to describe Indian Moors. While ‘Marakkalayo’ and ‘Thambi’ were often used to write derogatorily of the Moors, such use did not always indicate antagonism, and should be considered relatively more neutral than in today’s context.⁵⁰ For instance, prominent Ceylon Moors writing at the turn of the twentieth century, including I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, used the Sinhala term ‘Marakkalayo’ for Ceylon Moors as if it was rather neutral.⁵¹

The Moors’ ‘Exploitative’ Trade Practices

The Sinhalese blamed the Moors for their loss of income and land from perceived unfair trading and ‘extortionate’ moneylending practices. P.V.J. Jayasekera assumes that the Low-Country Sinhalese were ‘no doubt...adopting the same business methods as the Muslims’.⁵² Yet this parallel was rarely reflected in the Sinhala press. Crucially, it was in a context of competition that the Sinhalese increasingly portrayed Moors as ‘parasites’ in trade who were encroaching on the space of the Sinhalese ‘hosts’. It was not just the Sinhala papers that accused the Moors of exploitative trade practices. The English-language press occasionally accused the Moors of extortion over land issues in another example of congruence between the Sinhalese and the

⁴⁹ McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims’, p. 434; J.C. van Sanden, *Sonahar: A Brief History of the Moors of Ceylon* (Colombo, 1926), p. 120. The ‘marakkars’ were a group already identified as such in the sixteenth century, who were occupied in seafaring, trade, and piracy across the Malabar coast.

⁵⁰ Shamara Wettimuny, ‘The Colonial History of Islamophobic Slurs’, History Workshop Online (7 September 2020), <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/colonial-history-islamophobia/> (2 August 2022).

⁵¹ I.L.M. Abdul Azeez, *A Criticism of Mr. Ramanathan’s “Ethnology of the ‘Moors’ of Ceylon”* (Colombo, 1907).

⁵² See Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 307.

British.⁵³ The poem below was published on the front page of *Sihala Samaya* (a paper established and edited by W. Steven De Silva since 1902) in 1906.

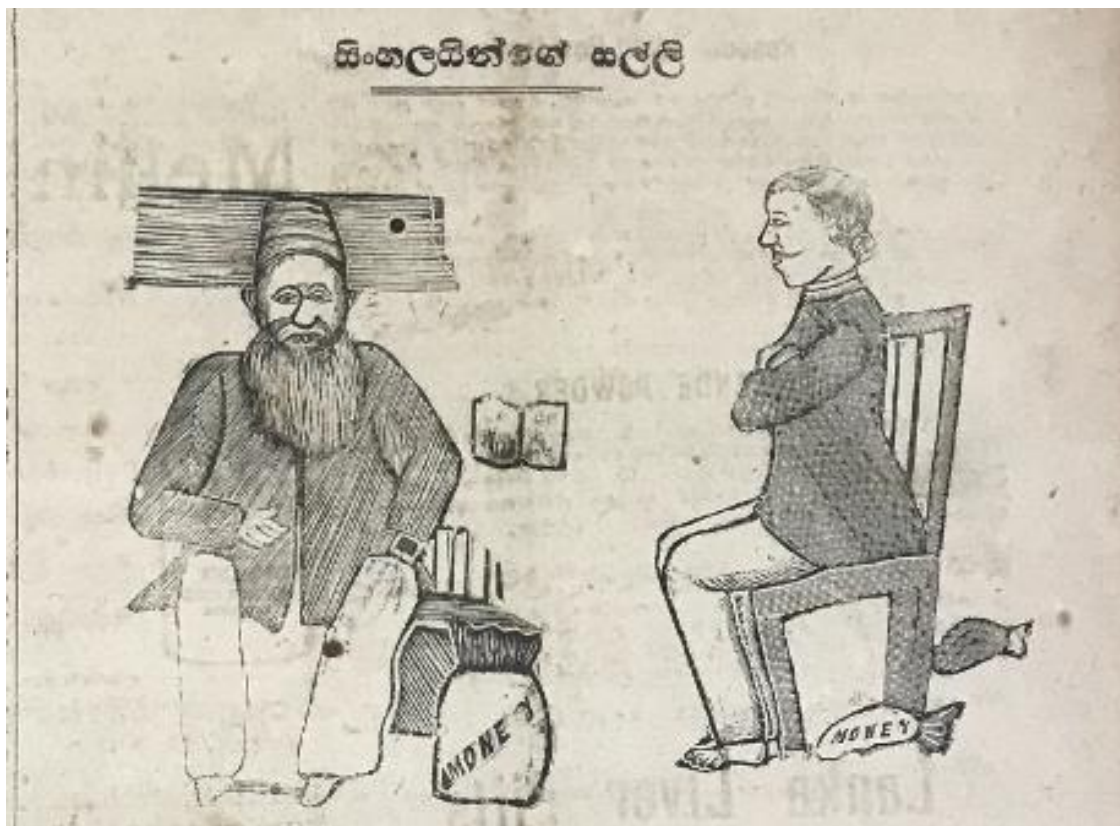


Figure 2: *Sihala Samaya*, 8 November 1906

Titled ‘Sinhalese People’s Money’, the poem’s image depicts a Moor – recognisable by his fez – sitting beside a large sack of money.⁵⁴ Next to him is a Sinhalese, with a substantially deflated bag of money. This poem contains many of the themes central to the Sinhalese economic grievances regarding the Moors. It states:

Baby Indian Moors [hamba petiyo] buy 12 match boxes for 10 cents and sell them for 12 cents. They keep 2 cents for themselves. From this method they earn a lot of money. Our people happily give money and buy clothes from the Hambayo.

From the time the Hambaya is an infant until he is an old man, he is only thinking about earning money through various methods. Without any fear or doubt, they

⁵³ See for example *Ceylon Observer*, 25 September 1880.

⁵⁴ It is curious that the bags of ‘money’ are so identified in English. Perhaps this reflects the relatively recent monetisation of the economy, that accompanied British economic policies.

continue doing that even today. They can do this because the Sinhalese sit staring at the ground without making a noise and neglecting their duties.

There was anger directed towards Moors for making excessive profits (by selling goods at a price 20 percent higher than which the Moors originally bought them at). But Sinhalese anger was not so much directed at the practice itself but *who* was doing it – the Moor – as opposed to the Sinhalese. There was a sense of ethno-religious competition and frustration on the part of some Sinhalese that their ‘own’ lacked the entrepreneurial mentality of the Moors. This sentiment that profits, like the land, ‘rightfully belong’ to Sinhalese, was reflected in various newspapers. One correspondent complained in the *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, ‘in our country the profit from commerce goes to Marakkalayo [and] Hambayo.’⁵⁵

The language of ‘our country’ is juxtaposed with the Moors who allegedly came from abroad and made their fortune in Ceylon. This insider-outsider dichotomy is reflected in an editorial from June 1870, which argued that the Sinhalese had never been successful in trade abroad in the way ‘outsiders like the Tamils and Marakkalayas can live anywhere and do any occupation to survive’.⁵⁶ The editor noted that such ‘outsiders come to Lanka and get so many benefits’. Yet rather than adopting the tone that is visible after the 1880s (i.e., recommending boycott or their expulsion), the editorial simply notes that the ‘government should collect extra tax from the *demalaa*, *hambankaara*, and *nattukottivaadeen* who come from abroad’.⁵⁷

Did any cultural realities underlie the purported relative differences in commercial aptitude and enterprise? Buddhist traders viewed the Sinhalese disdain for trade as a profession as the reason

⁵⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 15 August 1884.

⁵⁶ *Lakrivikirana*, 18 June 1870.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

they were losing out to other ethno-religious groups in Ceylon.⁵⁸ Such traders (and the authors of such poems/articles) had come to a realisation that Sinhalese contempt for trade was directly benefiting the Moors.

It is possible that the Moors' way of doing trade or 'business' was indeed somewhat different to that of the Sinhalese, not by virtue of their ethnicity or religion per se but simply because of certain cultural differences regarding commercial activity. Scholars have sometimes noted that racial stereotypes about the commercial acuity of other 'mercantile ethno-religious diasporas' such as the Jews, might have had a basis in reality. Abigail Green refers to immigrant Sephardic Jews who flourished in Ottoman lands, in part due to 'linguistic skills, cultural adaptability, commercial know-how and extensive networks.'⁵⁹ It is likely that many of the Indian Moors who were peddling their goods in Ceylon had been traders in regions of India. Their trilingual language capabilities were likely to have benefitted their import-export trade between South India and Ceylon, where Tamil, Sinhala, and even English (in dealing with the state) were required.

As per the 1911 Census, around 42 percent of Ceylon Moors and 15.6 percent of Indian Moors 'engaged in the production of raw materials' – compared with 89.5 percent of Kandyan Sinhalese and 57.8 percent of Low-Country Sinhalese.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, 43.4 percent of Ceylon Moors and 58.5 percent of Indian Moors were enumerated as traders – compared with 4.3 percent of Kandyan Sinhalese and 29.7 percent of Low-Country Sinhalese.⁶¹ Moors in Ceylon

⁵⁸ Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change*, p. 15. Jayawardena also notes that landowning feudal families were disparaging of trade. See Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 49. Such contempt for trade was comparable to certain aristocratic British attitudes.

⁵⁹ Abigail Green, 'The British Empire and the Jews: An Imperialism of Human Rights', *Past & Present* 199 (2008), p. 179.

⁶⁰ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 466.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

who were *not* engaged in agriculture appeared to focus largely on trade and commerce, suggesting a cultural affinity for trade, particularly among Indian Moors. In discussing the movement of Indian origin traders to British Kenya, Sana Aiyar refers to the ‘racially endogamous trade practices’ of Indian Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs who established themselves as ‘the petty bourgeoisie in the colony’, and, between 1911 and 1931 monopolised around ‘90 percent of internal trade in currency’.⁶² Aiyar suggests, for example, that these traders’ networks of credit and supply were a feature of ‘mercantile diasporas’. Similarly, in Ceylon, the Moors may have been more successful in certain trades and obtained higher relative gains from commerce because of the networks they may have built from such trade with their places of origin.

Meanwhile, conflicts over class and culture were often reframed through an ethno-religious lens in the broader condemnation of Moors. For instance, the Sinhalese ruefully juxtaposed the ‘cunning’ Moor with the ‘foolish’ Sinhalese. The trope of the ‘foolish Sinhalese’ may have stemmed from a lack of familiarity with features of the recently introduced capitalist system, including the monetisation of the rural economy, and the Sinhalese reluctance to participate in the commodification of labour in the plantation economy. Highlighting both the Sinhalese entitlement complex and their existential fears, a correspondent to *Sarasavi Sandaresa* argued, ‘various foreign nations like Moors come to this country, and after realising the Sinhalese’ weak points, trick the foolish Sinhalese, become rich by doing business and make Sinhalese people their slaves.’⁶³ Alongside the accusations of ‘trickery’ and cunning, was the Sinhalese claim that Moors would ‘chase’ away anyone who attempted to hold them accountable. Dharmapala’s verse on Indian Moors illustrates this point:

⁶² Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), pp. 73-74. Indian Moors in Ceylon, unlike Indians in Kenya, however never made ‘subimperialist claims to parity with Europeans’, and could not have been viewed as ‘fellow colonists’ of the white man in Ceylon.

⁶³ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 8 April 1898.

Hambaya

Give one nickel and get four more by trickery
If women come close, we will scold them in foul language, and chase them away,
By doing so we can accumulate the cents of the Sinhalese.⁶⁴

The reference to the harsh treatment of (presumably) Sinhalese women by Indian Moors suggests that Moors treated these women disrespectfully, and that Sinhalese women often traded with Moors. Moors were known for selling cooking wares such as pots and pans, and thus would have sold goods directly to the women, who were expected to do most of the cooking.

Newspaper correspondents' commentary on the Moors' thrift, particularly when compared with the 'excess' of the Sinhalese (who were thought to have spent excessively, for instance, on wedding clothes) does not appear to be outright criticism as the practice is considered worthy of imitation.⁶⁵ Ethno-religious competition is evident in this regard as the commentary displays a mixture of praise and reprehension for the 'work ethic' of Moors (and indeed, some Tamils too). Though the Moors' thrift could not be considered exploitative, it was viewed as miserly – and blocking others from earning an income. For instance, by washing their own sarongs when they were soiled, 'not even the local dhoby [washerman] gets a cent!'⁶⁶ Moors were noted for their lack of pride in taking on menial work, and subsisting off basic items such as water and rice.⁶⁷ These qualities, ordinarily reflective of hard work and dedication (and therefore praiseworthy), were viewed by Sinhalese as means through which Moors could ultimately 'overtake' them.

⁶⁴ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 14 October 1911.

⁶⁵ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 2 January 1915.

⁶⁶ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 21 February 1899.

⁶⁷ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 4 October 1898.

In contrast to the Sinhalese disdain for the Moors' work ethic, the British rewarded Moors. The Government Agent (GA) of the Central Province noted in December 1913 that Moors, the chief holders of licenses for the sale of cacao, 'went about the villages and advanced money to the villagers for their produce. They bought a basket of eggs before the hens had laid them'. Due to their proactive trading, the GA did not wish to 'cut down their licenses'.⁶⁸ The Sinhalese were aware of the British appreciation for the Moors' entrepreneurial nature and leveraged that knowledge. For example, although Dharmapala criticises Moors for their exploitative trade practices when writing to the Sinhala press, he commends their work ethic when writing to the colonial state:

I have in my lectures and speeches delivered in Ceylon invariably held up as an example of energy, industry, perseverance, usefulness, cleanliness the Muhammedan [sic] trader to the indolent, ignorant, illiterate Sinhalese villager, who wastes his time in the village shop and more than that I have invited the village Moorish trader to criticise the Sinhalese character, whenever I had the opportunity to make him speak after my lecture.⁶⁹

Dharmapala made this claim as he refuted the colonial allegation that he may have instigated the 1915 pogrom. He, therefore, unsurprisingly commends Moors in this particular letter and trumps up his 'appreciation' for them. The language used to describe Moors in Dharmapala's letter mirrors the language used by the colonisers in their appreciation of the 'entrepreneurial' Moor. Yet, there is perhaps a degree of sincerity in this letter, as it clearly fits with his overall logic of ethno-religious competition.

⁶⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 4 December 1913.

⁶⁹ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 721.

Occasionally, Moors were accused of cheating their Sinhalese customers by selling low-quality goods.⁷⁰ More often, however, Moors were portrayed as aggressive in reclaiming debts – intrinsically connected to their ‘exploitative’ practice of moneylending to the Sinhalese. The poem referred to above, ‘Sinhalese People’s Money’ contains a stanza that reflects the perceived costs of borrowing money from Indian Moors.

In Lanka, it is the Sinhalese people who live here. When the Sinhalese do not have money, they go to the Hambayo to ask for money even though they insult and humiliate us for not having money. They ask them ‘aren’t you Sinhalese? Isn’t this your country? Why don’t you earn any money?’ – Why are we losing our self-respect?⁷¹

The Sinhalese are perceivably twice humiliated. They are reminded that Ceylon *is* in fact their land, yet they are imagined to be held to ransom by Indian Moors, who mock them while they lend them money. Even the British occasionally commented on the power of the Moor moneylender over the Sinhalese. Arthur Strong, cited above, recalled Sinhalese feelings towards the Moors: ‘they were the moneylenders. They were the creditors. Everybody owed them money. And – well, this [the pogrom] is a good opportunity for wiping out of debts.’⁷² In 1899, a time ethno-religious violence was escalating between Sinhalese and Moors (see Chapter 1), a ‘Mohammedan’ moneylender was murdered by his ‘long-suffering victims’. Even though his killers were sentenced to death, ‘they considered they had rid the world of a tyrant and were proud of the fact’.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 28 April 1899.

⁷¹ *Sihala Samaya*, 8 November 1906.

⁷² Interview with Arthur N. Strong, MROHP.

⁷³ *Ceylon Observer*, 7 June 1899.

The loss of land to Moors was a central concern for Sinhalese, exacerbated by their existential fear that they were losing what was traditionally or ancestrally theirs.⁷⁴ Moors allegedly accumulated the property and goods of the Sinhalese by servicing their greed, vanity, and vulnerability. In 1912, one correspondent argued that the Sinhalese enabled Moors to take over their lands – simply because the buyer offered ‘five rupees more’ than what a Sinhalese was willing to buy it for.⁷⁵ Another correspondent rued, ‘some people pawn valuables to Moors and buy things like dress materials. After this, for fear of loans and harassment, these villagers sell their silver, gold or land to the same Moors for a little money...and lose their lands’.⁷⁶ It was not just Moors though, who accumulated peasant lands, but also Low-Country Sinhalese and local village headmen.⁷⁷ Arthur Strong reminisced, ‘half my time was taken up with protecting the villager from the exploitation, not of an alien government, but of his own people. Land-grabbing [Sinhalese] proctors’.⁷⁸

K.M. De Silva observes that Sinhala-Buddhist ‘entrepreneurs’ aimed to de-legitimise their Moor competitors by weaponising ethno-religious identity to gain market advantage and acquire land.⁷⁹ It was arguably in the context of competition to acquire land that some Sinhalese (who intended to acquire such land) advocated against the sale of ‘Sinhalese lands’ to Moors. A correspondent appealed in June 1913, ‘do not sell Sinhalese lands to non-Sinhalese, they come from abroad and make Lanka their home, and become powerful while we are weakened.’⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Including lands to which people were tied to by caste or kinship. For further reading on the complexities of land tenure and its close relationship with the ‘kinship system’, see Edmund R. Leach, *Pul Eliya: A Village in Ceylon: A Study of Land Tenure and Kinship* (Cambridge, 1961).

⁷⁵ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 21 May 1912.

⁷⁶ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 21 January 1898.

⁷⁷ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, pp. 309-10.

⁷⁸ Interview with Arthur N. Strong, MROHP.

⁷⁹ De Silva, *History of Sri Lanka*, p. 475.

⁸⁰ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 17 June 1913.

This discourse appears to emerge more clearly at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century.⁸¹ It was not Moors alone who were accused of buying Sinhalese lands. The ‘kochi demala’ (Malayali Tamils from Cochin), for example, were also condemned for coming to Ceylon from India, accumulating wealth and taking over Sinhalese properties in villages.⁸² This example relates to a much more longstanding trope of Sinhalese vulnerability to the ‘demala’ (Tamils). This idea of the foreign ‘parasite’ threatening the space occupied by the humble Sinhalese villager was then not unique to the perception of the Moor – although the number of Moors who could afford to do so was possibly higher than the Cochin Tamils.⁸³ Crucially, the Moors were framed as parasites, or in Jayasekera’s words, an ‘alien community’, in the broader context of Low-Country Sinhalese and other wealthy Sinhalese, such as headmen and local chiefs, attempting to accumulate the same land for themselves.⁸⁴

The Sinhala press was leveraged as a powerful tool to de-legitimise Moor traders and promote Sinhalese traders. For example, L.A. Wickremeratne observes that the *Sarasavi Sandaresa* was financially assisted by Sinhala-Buddhist traders who wielded influence within the wider Buddhist revivalist movement and competed with Moor (and Tamil traders) particularly in the import trade.⁸⁵ In this context, ethno-religious identities were subtly weaponised in the press. A letter to the *Sarasavi Sandaresa* in 1899 cautioned, ‘We Sinhalese must remember that the Moor has always been jealous of us. He does not have a country or village that he can call home anywhere on earth. But he is shrewd and often misleads our people with his put-on humble

⁸¹ *Dinamina*, 2 March 1915.

⁸² *Sinhala Baudhdya*, 14 January 1911.

⁸³ Such perceptions of the ‘other’ were similarly shared by the Jaffna Tamil community. For example, the Tamil nationalist ‘Ceylon Patriot’ publication noted that trade in grain and cloth in Jaffna was monopolised by ‘foreign’ Indian Moors (and Nattukottai Chetties), who as ‘undisputed masters’ are the cause of ‘the general poverty of Jaffna’. Thus, there appear to have been parallels in the way majority communities (distinct to specific areas) were threatened by minority ‘foreign’ traders. *Ceylon Patriot*, 8 September, 1896.

⁸⁴ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 312.

⁸⁵ Wickremeratne, *Religion, Nationalism, and Social Change*, p. 14.

manner.’⁸⁶ By highlighting the ethnic or religious authenticity of the Sinhalese, these correspondents de-legitimised Moors as ‘alien’ and ‘other’. Yet, the host-parasite metaphor contains a paradox. While the so-called ‘host’ seeks to identify and ward off the ‘parasite’, the principal actors who posture as ‘hosts’, and who call for the expelling of parasites, appear to be just as parasitic – or exploitative – of the ‘vulnerable’ villagers. It is evident that the economic rivals of Moors were seeking to expunge them from market spaces only to exploit those very markets and communities to whom they claimed an ethno-religious affinity; the principle of ethno-religious competition would suggest that land for sale should not be sold to Moors but to Sinhalese.

Colonial administrators, including Leonard Woolf (who worked in the Ceylon Civil Service between 1904 and 1911), appear to have been aware of the dual exploitation of villagers by both Moors and Sinhalese. In his insightful fictional novel, *The Village in the Jungle*, he captures this paradigm by observing,

the Moorman boutique-keeper, had supplied clothes to be paid for in grain, with a hundred per cent interest, at the time of reaping; the fat Sinhalese Mudalali [‘rich trader’]...had supplied grain and curry stuffs on the same terms...The villagers neither obtained nor expected any pity from this horde...With their little greasy notebooks, full of unintelligible letters and figures, they descended upon the chenas; and after calculations, wranglings, and abuse, which lasted for hour after hour, the accounts were settled, and the strangers left the village, their carts loaded.⁸⁷

Inherent in this narrative is the sense that the villager is exploited at every turn by capitalist forces, who use technicalities, interest rates, and their superior wit to further oppress the naïve, debt-ridden villager. Although Woolf makes note of the ethnic identities of these oppressors,

⁸⁶ Sarasavi Sandaresa, 20 January 1899.

⁸⁷ Leonard S. Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* (London, 1913), p. 31.

he hardly differentiates between them in terms of their callousness regarding the plight of the poor.⁸⁸

Moors were perhaps condemned most for their 'exploitative' trade practices during times of economic crisis. Kumari Jayawardena, who highlights the role of economic factors in the 1915 pogrom, observed that economic crises could direct the hostility of peasants and urban and plantation workers 'against traders of minority groups'.⁸⁹ In October 1866, anti-Moor (and anti-Nattukottai Chettiar) riots broke out when the failure of the rice harvest in India meant that only one-fifth of the normal quantity of rice was imported from India into Ceylon.⁹⁰ With a tripling in the price of rice in certain parts of Ceylon, Indian Moors and Chettiars, traditionally associated with the import of rice from India, were targeted.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the colonial state remained relatively indifferent to such rising prices and the economic impact on the Ceylonese. On 21 October, rioting broke out in Colombo, and eventually spread to Kandy and Galle.⁹² There was no overt ethnic or religious element behind the violence – even some Moors and Chettiars were accused of looting shops out of anger and desperation, alongside Sinhalese. In fact, an analysis of coverage in the leading Sinhala newspaper of the time, *Lakminipahana*, reveals that no racialised language was used to discuss the inflation of goods, alleged profiteering, and rioting that ensued. This can be contrasted with the highly racialised language used regularly in newspapers just two decades later. As was evident in Chapter 1, the earlier periods studied in this thesis (1850s-1870s) represent a different context. Class antagonism could result in violence, yet the violence was not necessarily driven by ethno-religious

⁸⁸ The lack of distinction between these oppressors may in part be attributed to a certain colonial disdain for local populations.

⁸⁹ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 272.

⁹⁰ John D. Rogers, 'The 1866 Grain Riots in Sri Lanka', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29/3 (1987), p. 500.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 504-505. *Lakminipahana* and *Lakrivikirana* carried reportage of the grain riots and the strikes in Colombo due to the scarcity of rice on 24 October and 26 October 1866 respectively.

difference. According to Rogers, the root cause of the riots was ‘outrage at the behaviour of the merchants, who were widely believed to be hoarding supplies’.⁹³ The crisis subsided shortly after, but the lesson was clear. High prices of essential items such as rice deeply affected villagers as well as the urban and semi-urban poor. Drastic changes in price could trigger a violent backlash.

Like the failure of the rice harvest in India, other natural disasters triggered economic crises in Ceylon. Indian Moors were alleged to have profiteered off such destitution and incurred the resentment of victims who perceived themselves as doubly victimised. For example, when floods left hundreds of houses under water in Kolonnawa and its neighbourhood, a resident of Kolonnawa wrote, ‘avaricious Coast Moormen who have boutiques here, have raised the price of foodstuffs’.⁹⁴ Far from empathising with their neighbours, Indian Moors were accused of opportunism. There is, however, the likelihood that inventories were damaged by the floods and that prices were raised due to shortages. I discuss the impact of the economic crisis created by the First World War on Sinhalese-Moor relations further in Chapter 5.

B. Moor ‘Complicity’ and ‘Gain’ from the Spread of European Cultural Influences

The Buddhist revival included the rejection of several European cultural practices or influences that were viewed as damaging to Sinhala-Buddhist customs. Influences such as alcohol were perceived as causing the loss of cultural dignity, pride, and respect.⁹⁵ Two other influences that were abhorred were the adoption of European dress and the consumption of meat. Blame was apportioned to four layers of society. First, Europeans were blamed for introducing the customs or habits that were ‘not right for the Sinhala name’.⁹⁶ Second, the anglicised elite were blamed

⁹³ Rogers, ‘1866 Grain Riots’, p. 506.

⁹⁴ *Ceylon Observer*, 8 October 1913.

⁹⁵ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 14 May 1912.

⁹⁶ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 30 March 1915.

as the group that most engaged in eating meat and adopting Western dress, given their desire to mimic the coloniser and their financial ability to do so.⁹⁷ Within this elite group, women were particularly blamed for attempting to wear European dress – a visible symbol of the dilution or decline of Sinhalese culture.⁹⁸ Third, villagers were ‘accused’ of indulging in alcohol – spending the little money they had – at the taverns that mushroomed across the island.⁹⁹ The argument was that these people had been ‘duped’ into following ‘a style of living unsuited to the country or the earning capacity of the people...All these have sought to imitate the dress, the diet and the customs of Europe.’¹⁰⁰ Last, the Moors were blamed for their role in facilitating the spread or adoption of these customs – to their financial benefit – while abstaining from these customs themselves. This role constituted a dual affront to Sinhalese pride.

Clothes in Ceylon did not carry the same connotations of submitting to or resisting authority as they did in colonial India but did, to some extent, symbolise resistance to colonial rule.¹⁰¹ Yet, in contrast to India, Ceylon had already undergone centuries of European rule prior to British colonial rule. Therefore, Ceylon had a longer tradition of ‘Europeanized, or sewn clothes’.¹⁰² By the late nineteenth century, Low-Country Sinhalese men and women were particularly noted for their adoption of such European dress.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Sihala Samaya*, 29 August 1912.

⁹⁸ Janaki Jayawardena, *Cultural Construction of the ‘Sinhala Woman’ and Women’s Lives in Post-Independence Sri Lanka* (PhD thesis, University of York, 2002), p. 195.

⁹⁹ Some planters attempted to shut taverns down as they felt that the increase in alcohol consumption by plantation labourers damaged productivity. However, due to the substantial government revenue earned from arrack sales, the planters failed in their attempts. See Duncan, ‘Embodying colonialism?’, p. 330.

¹⁰⁰ W.A. de Silva, ‘Public Opinion and National Progress in Ceylon’, *Ceylon National Review* Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1908), p. 77.

¹⁰¹ Bernard Cohn, ‘Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century’, in A.B. Weiner and J. Schneider (eds.), *Cloth and Human Experience*, (Washington, D.C. and London, 1989), pp. 312-313. Cohn posits that clothes were fundamental to the construction of identities and the ‘Indian nation’. Christopher Bayly, too, describes how clothes became a visual representation of anti-colonial nationalism. See Christopher Bayly, ‘The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930’, in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 285-322.

¹⁰² Nira Wickramasinghe, ‘Fashioning a Market: The Singer Sewing Machine in Colonial Lanka’, in Daniel T. Rodgers, Bhavani Raman, Helmut Reimitz, *Cultures in Motion* (Princeton, 2014), p. 145.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

The Moors' loyalty to their own 'national dress' and therefore to their 'ethno-religious identity' was contrasted with the Sinhalese failure in this regard.¹⁰⁴ The Moors' insistence on wearing the fez even in British institutions like the Supreme Court – as discussed in Chapter 2 – was viewed with some resentment by the Sinhalese. Dharmapala, addressing a gathering of the Sinhala People's Society, said to look at the Moors in Ceylon: 'they do not dress like foreigners [interestingly, Moors are not considered 'foreigners' in this moment]. They all wear traditional Muslim clothes.'¹⁰⁵ The ability to differentiate between the Moors and other groups by their dress was also an irritant for the Sinhalese. One newspaper correspondent claimed, 'whenever there is a meeting with all kinds of nations, they could easily differentiate their people from their national customs, their dress, and from their names whether they are...Muslims...people who live as Sinhalese must first be Sinhalese in their dress and name'.¹⁰⁶ These Sinhalese who chose to wear European dress were viewed as lacking in 'authenticity', whereas the Moors remained true to their origins.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, the Moors were often the retailers of European clothing products, and therefore financially profited from such European influences. The fabric business, according to an article in *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, was in the hands of the Moors (and the Malays). It was argued that these 'foreigners' earned their profits from the Sinhalese and took it back to their own countries.¹⁰⁸ To counter this trend, the Sinhalese adopted a two-pronged campaign. First, they emphasised that adopting European clothes and discarding the *sari* was expensive and contributed to the

¹⁰⁴ Even prior to the adoption of the fez, the Moors wore 'traditional' clothing like the sarong, rather than shirt and trousers, except in elite circles.

¹⁰⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 11 December 1894.

¹⁰⁶ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 30 March 1915.

¹⁰⁷ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 23 July 1897.

economic drain of the Sinhalese.¹⁰⁹ Second, Sinhalese businessmen heavily advertised wearing the *sari* as the national dress for Sinhalese women. The focus on women is an example of how national sentiment was located in women's bodies, and stemmed from 'the identification of women as the "true essence" of national and cultural identity' in particular contexts.¹¹⁰ For instance, D.D. Pedris and Sons – one of the bigger retailers of *saris* imported from India – released a calendar to promote the *sari* as the national dress.¹¹¹ Notably, Henry Pedris, son of D.D. Pedris, was tried by court martial and executed for allegedly inciting attacks against Moor-owned shops in Pettah during the 1915 pogrom.¹¹² One of the largest shops damaged by the crowds allegedly instigated by Pedris included a direct competitor: Crystal Palace, a large Ceylon Moor establishment comprising multiple departments including a 'drapery and millinery, gentlemen's outfitting, etc.'¹¹³

Meanwhile, as with European clothing, Moors were resented for *not* indulging in or even retailing alcohol.¹¹⁴ Critics argued, 'the money spent on distilling and selling arrack, amounting to lakhs, come from poor Lankan people, not from the Mohammedan'.¹¹⁵ But the critique did not end there. Alcohol consumption and drunkenness were perceived as harming the Sinhalese' ability to compete economically with Moors and increasing their reliance on Moors for trade.¹¹⁶ This sense of competition was reflected in Temperance movements occurring worldwide at the turn of the twentieth century. Such Temperance movements often linked alcohol consumption with the (in)ability of a 'race' to prevail in competitions for jobs.¹¹⁷ In Ceylon, one

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 October 1888.

¹¹⁰ Sinha, 'Nations in an Imperial Crucible', p. 193.

¹¹¹ *Lakminipahana*, 17 May 1913; Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 276.

¹¹² Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 276.

¹¹³ Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 31; Allister MacMillan, *Extracts from Seaports of India and Ceylon* (New Delhi, 1928, 2005), p. 483.

¹¹⁴ *Sihala Samaya*, 2 April 1913.

¹¹⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 6 November 1884.

¹¹⁶ Rogers, 'Cultural nationalism', p. 336.

¹¹⁷ Marie Sarita Gaytán, 'Drinking difference: Race, consumption, and alcohol prohibition in Mexico and the United States', *Ethnicities* 14/3 (2014), p. 439.

correspondent put it bluntly in an article to *Sinhala Bauddhya*, claiming that ‘Hamba and Marakkala people’ come to towns to accumulate goods, not to drink. He also claimed that alcohol was destroying the Sinhalese youth whom he strongly advised to give up alcohol, and to take up a ‘far more pious’ occupation, such as trade.¹¹⁸ The fact that Moors were ‘getting ahead’ in trade while the Sinhalese fell behind in an inebriated stupor reflected how central to daily concerns their trade rivalry with Moors was.¹¹⁹

The consumption of meat in general, and beef in particular, by Sinhala-Buddhists was blamed almost equally on Europeans and Moors. Doctrinally, Buddhists were supposed to be vegetarians, and were alleged to have been so until the arrival of the Portuguese.¹²⁰ How strictly this was the case is questionable: evidence from Robert Knox suggests that the consumption of meat was considered morally problematic during the Portuguese period but some may have indulged in it.¹²¹ Regardless, it was evident that local groups in Ceylon, including some Sinhala-Buddhists, adopted the ‘European’ practice of eating meat.¹²² Dharmapala described his own school experience with ‘my wine-drinking, meat-eating and pleasure-loving missionary teachers’, an experience he looks back on with open disgust.¹²³ However, in 1923, he blamed ‘[t]he followers of Islam [who] have introduced the slaughter of cattle into the peaceful isle’.¹²⁴ Blaming Europeans on the one hand, and Moors on the other, suggests that the target of Dharmapala’s criticisms could vary depending on the context in which he was writing.

¹¹⁸ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 11 July 1914.

¹¹⁹ Some Moors also criticised the drunkenness of the Sinhalese. In 1864, Abdullah Mohameth claimed that the Sinhalese, whether rich, poor, high or low caste, were all addicted to drinking alcohol, and that such addiction should cease. *Lakminipahana*, 27 July 1864.

¹²⁰ F. Otto Schrader, ‘On Ahimsa and Vegetarianism, Mainly in Buddhism’, *Ceylon National Review* 3/9 (1910), p. 1.

¹²¹ Robert Knox, *An historical relation of the island Ceylon* (London, 1681), pp. 30, 74 and 87.

¹²² Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: history, culture, political economy* (New York, 2004), p. 70.

¹²³ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 684.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Influential actors from other ethnic or religious groups also noted the adoption of such ‘European habits’ that were advanced by Moors. Statistically, more than two-thirds of all butchers and meat sellers in Ceylon in 1911 were ‘Muhammadans’.¹²⁵ Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote, ‘Up to recent times the Sinhalese have been to all intents and purposes vegetarians...most persons invariably avoiding it (and beef entirely); others would not object to eating venison, etc., killed by Muhammedans. There was certainly no regular trade in meat, no butchers and no butchers’ shops such as are now to be seen.’¹²⁶ Coomaraswamy was a half-Tamil, half-English intellectual, who was committed to the idea of preserving Ceylon’s ‘indigenous arts, crafts, and social traditions, including language,’ which were being destroyed ‘by the competition of cheap machine-made materials [and] the neglect of surviving architectural traditions’.¹²⁷ A transnational actor (who was educated in England), he moved from Ceylon to India, where he identified with the *swadeshi* movement – the Indic variant of the ‘traditionalist’ cultural reaction to modernity and colonialism.¹²⁸

This practice of eating meat (as well as drinking alcohol and adopting European dress) was cause for concern in India as well, and preoccupied Hindu revivalists and Hindu nationalist organisations such as the *Arya Samaj*. Hindu aversion to the consumption of meat presumably united the Hindus and the Buddhists, in both India and Ceylon. Once again, as with religious processions, there was a dividing line between Indic and monotheistic groups in Ceylon over the consumption of meat. Coomaraswamy wrote, ‘so much the sadder it is to observe that in modern times the practice of eating flesh has greatly increased in Ceylon and in India.’¹²⁹ Dharmapala, too, was disgusted by what he saw in India as well as Ceylon, writing in 1925 that

¹²⁵ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 474.

¹²⁶ Ananda Coomaraswamy, ‘Vegetarianism in Ceylon’, *Ceylon National Review* (1908), p. 126.

¹²⁷ Dharmadasa, *Language, Religions, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, p. 204; Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (New York, 1908; 1956), p. 255.

¹²⁸ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Coomaraswamy, ‘Vegetarianism in Ceylon’, p. 128.

‘Indian Christianity is synonymous with butchery and alcoholism...They do not want to give up alcohol and meat’.¹³⁰

Finally, the Sinhalese were likely to have been further antagonised by the fact that Moors also profited financially from the increasing consumption of meat. The attack on butchers’ stalls in Anuradhapura in June 1903, described in Chapter 1, may have been driven by a plethora of factors.¹³¹ The act of destruction would have been perceived as bearing more than just moral weight in cleansing the ‘sacred city’ of impure, foreign influences. It would also have dealt a financial blow to Moors.

C. Manifestation of Sinhalese Grievances: Vilification and Discrimination

In the manifestation of Sinhalese grievances, Moors were stereotyped in some cases to justify discrimination against them. The stereotyping of Moors was, however, not unique to the period under consideration. Alexander McKinley has analysed the longer-term deployment of stereotypes about Muslims in Sinhala literature. The earliest stereotypes date back to the pre-colonial period in around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and referred to the transient nature of Moor traders.¹³² As the Moors became more settled, and entered the Kandyan regions as a result of displacement by the Portuguese and the Dutch from the coastal provinces, the Moors began to be stereotyped as ‘religious others’, in a precursor to the context studied at the turn of the twentieth century.¹³³ He reveals that Muslims (typically Moors) were stereotypes in Sinhala village dramas as early as the seventeenth century, for example, as ‘wicked’ for killing bullocks to sell.¹³⁴ In the nineteenth century, a new stereotype of Moors as ‘Jews’ emerged. I

¹³⁰ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 778.

¹³¹ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 277.

¹³² McKinley, ‘Merchants, Maidens, and Mohammedans’, p. 2.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1. McKinley explicitly criticises Lorna Dewaraja’s portrayal of pre-1915 Sinhalese-‘Muslim’ relations as undisturbed ‘ethnic harmony’.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

inquire into the origins of this antisemitic discourse and ask whether it demonised Moors to the point of raising Sinhalese cries for their expulsion from Ceylon.

Vilification: Moors as 'Jews'

I take a comparative approach to ask whether the Moors were portrayed as Jews because they occupied a similar socio-economic niche to Jews abroad that rendered them vulnerable to the resentments and persecutions of others under certain conditions.¹³⁵ I also take a connected history approach to examine where the antisemitic discourse of Moors as 'Jews' came from. I employ Lisa Moses Leff's conceptualisation of antisemitism, which refers to 'the late-nineteenth-century political mass movement aimed at limiting Jews' newly won political rights, social integration, and economic activities' – a conceptualisation that reflects the changed socio-political and economic position of Moors in Ceylon by the late nineteenth century.¹³⁶ For instance, the treatment of the recently settled or itinerant Indian Moors as 'shrewd' in business echoed attitudes towards Jews in Western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁷

The hostile stereotyping of Moors as Jews was most evident in Anagarika Dharmapala's letter written in June 1915:¹³⁸

The Muhammedans, an alien people, who in the early part of the 19th century were common traders, by Shylockian methods became prosperous like the Jews. The Sinhalese, sons of the soil, whose ancestors for 2358 years had shed rivers of blood to keep the country free from alien invaders...are in the eyes of the British only vagabonds...The alien South Indian Muhammedan comes to Ceylon,

¹³⁵ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, (Princeton, 2004), p. 1.

¹³⁶ Lisa Moses Leff, 'Liberalism and Antisemitism: A Reassessment from the Peripheries' in Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam (eds.), *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: A Global History* (Basingstoke, 2020), p. 23. Despite the existence of a broader application of the term to mean anti-Jewish prejudice, I specifically use this narrower conception of 'antisemitism'.

¹³⁷ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, pp. 191-92, Green, 'The British Empire and the Jews', p. 187, Mitch Numark, 'Perspectives from the periphery: the East India Company's Jewish Sepoys, Anglo-Jewry, and the image of "the Jew" in Nina Caputo and Bryan Mitchell Hart (eds.), *On the Word of a Jew: Religion, Reliability, and the Dynamics of Trust* (Indiana, 2019), p. 256.

¹³⁸ For more on 'hostile stereotypes' of Jews, see Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p. 114.

sees the neglected illiterate villager, without any experience in trade...and the result is that the Muhammedan thrives and the son of the soil goes to the wall.¹³⁹

Explicit in this statement is the aggressiveness and cunning of the Moor trader; the increasing prosperity of the ‘alien’ who, like the Jew, amasses wealth at the cost of the original or rightful inhabitant of the land.¹⁴⁰ Where did the hostile stereotype of the Moor as ‘Jew’ come from? And why did Dharmapala specifically use terms like ‘Shylockian’ in his correspondence with colonial officials?

Dharmapala’s use of a hostile antisemitic stereotype was likely to have stemmed from his contact with the Theosophical Society, which had its foundations in North America and Europe, as well as through his own extensive travels in the West during a time of rising antisemitism.¹⁴¹ For example, Helena Blavatsky, who was a mother-like figure to Dharmapala, has been accused of antisemitism, and his exposure to her views may have resulted in some transference.¹⁴² Harshana Rambukwella observes that Dharmapala’s use of antisemitic rhetoric ‘could potentially be a strategy of gaining sympathy by invoking a longstanding European stereotype of the “scheming Jewish merchant”’.¹⁴³ But sympathy from whom? The letter was intended for the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Andrew Bonar-Law, in Whitehall, but there is no evidence that Bonar-Law himself was antisemitic.¹⁴⁴ However, it is reasonable to suggest that Dharmapala envisaged that a British official would be likely to ‘appreciate’ the connotations of the term ‘Shylockian’.

¹³⁹ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 207.

¹⁴⁰ Compare with portrayal of Jews as ‘aliens’ in antisemitic discourse. See Leff, ‘Liberalism and Antisemitism:’, p. 44.

¹⁴¹ Michael Jerryson and Iselin Frydenlund, ‘Buddhists, Muslims and the Construction of Difference’ in Iselin Frydenlund (ed.) *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* (Singapore, 2020), p. 280.

¹⁴² Isaac Lubelsky, ‘Mythological and Real Race Issues in Theosophy’, in Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (eds.) *Handbook of Theosophical Current* (Leiden, 2013) p. 335. For Dharmapala’s relationship with Blavatsky, see Ruth Harris, ‘A Tormented Being’ (unpublished paper shared with me by the author, June 2022).

¹⁴³ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 66.

¹⁴⁴ Jehuda Reinharz, ‘The Balfour Declaration and Its Maker: A Reassessment’, *The Journal of Modern History* 64/3 (1992), p. 470.

It is also likely that Dharmapala intended for copies of his letter to reach a Sinhalese audience as it well did. Did the negative comparison of Moors with Jews draw on wider antisemitic sentiments prevailing among Sinhalese in Ceylon? Elsewhere, Dharmapala used antisemitic language in his scathing attacks on Christianity that were unlikely to win sympathy with the British: he called Jesus a ‘half-insane Jew’, and Christianity ‘Semitic Monotheism’.¹⁴⁵ Crucially, in his landscape view of world religions the ancestry of the three Abrahamic religions is emphasised (for example, ‘Judaism and Jehovah are inter-dependent’). There is a genealogy, then, by which Moors *can* be the Jews of Ceylon.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Dharmapala’s use of such language elsewhere besides his strategic appeal to the British is significant – it appears that antisemitism had infected him on a more personal level.

A ‘Sinhalese Memorial’ sent to the Governor of Ceylon and the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Whitehall in September 1915 contained a similar comparison (that may have been influenced by Dharmapala’s letter). The Memorial contained the claim, ‘the Coast Moors have never been popular among the other inhabitants of the Island, and have been regarded very much in the same way as the Jews used to be regarded in Western countries’.¹⁴⁷ It appears that Moors’ ‘personal traits’ were portrayed by some Sinhalese as reflecting those of Jews – particularly their perceived ‘ubiquity’ and ‘pugnacity’.¹⁴⁸ Why did anti-Jewish caricatures resonate in Ceylon, and how was such discourse, which was very familiar in Europe, used in such a far-removed context?

¹⁴⁵ Roberts, ‘Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat’, p. 1008. Like Dharmapala, others paired Judaism with Christianity in antisemitic tracts.

¹⁴⁶ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 157.

¹⁴⁷ Sinhalese Memorial, 25 September 1915, D.R. Wijewardene Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Ameer Ali, ‘Muslims and Capitalism in British Ceylon (Sri Lanka): the colonial image and community’s behaviour’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 8/2 (1987), p. 319; The epithet Prusin uses is ‘omnipresent’. Alexander Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914-1920* (Tuscaloosa, 2005), pp. 28, 30 and 110.

There was no significant Jewish population on record in Ceylon during this period in contrast to nearby regions such as the Bene Israel community in West India and the Bombay Baghdadi Jews, and the Jewish community in Cochin.¹⁴⁹ The Census of Ceylon for 1911 recorded only eight Jews.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Jewish administrators did not play as significant a role in Ceylon as they did in India.¹⁵¹ The most renowned was arguably Leonard Woolf. However, Woolf's 'Jewishness' does not appear to have been particularly visible, and during his time in Ceylon at least, he was 'avowedly atheist [and] dogmatically anti-religious'.¹⁵² Meanwhile, Jewish business interests were limited to the legacy of the Rothschild tea estate in Pussellawa, which had been established in 1841 but sold in 1873, and Jewish gem speculators who came to Ceylon for the auction of oysters at the pearl fisheries.¹⁵³ In this context, antisemitism would have been an imported construct, rather than a response to actual interactions between Sinhalese and Jews in Ceylon, which would have been negligible. How did antisemitic views cross continents into Ceylon?¹⁵⁴

The key importer of antisemitic sentiment was undoubtedly the British through the influences of colonial education, the spread of missionaries and the new print media. There is evidence, for example, that contact with Europeans and European colonial powers in the Middle East led to a rise in antisemitism. Bernard Lewis notes the 'blood libel' accusation emerged for the first

¹⁴⁹ Mitch Numark, 'Constructing a Jewish Nation in Colonial India: History, Narratives of Dissent, and the Vocabulary of Modernity', *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 7/2 (2001), p. 89; *Ceylon Observer*, 4 March 1885.

¹⁵⁰ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 240.

¹⁵¹ Stephanie Chasin, *Citizens of Empire: Jews in the Service of the British Empire, 1906-1940* (PhD thesis, UCLA, 2008). p. 4.

¹⁵² Luke Reader, 'A Jew of a rather peculiar sort: Leonard Woolf, Jewishness, and a public 20th century life' *Jewish Culture and History* 19/3 (2018), p. 237.

¹⁵³ *Ceylon Observer*, 27 March 1873; *Ceylon Observer*, 4 October 1902; 21 March 1904. Gabriel and Moritz Worms, nephews of Nathan Mayer Rothschild managed the interests of the Rothschilds in Ceylon.

¹⁵⁴ Nirenberg sheds some light on how such discourses might have 'travelled' and been instrumentalised. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition* (New York, 2013).

time in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century with the ‘Damascus Affair’ in 1840 and became ‘commonplace’ thereafter.¹⁵⁵ He also observes that ‘from the 1860s onward there was an ominous growth of European-style antisemitism among the Christian communities of the empire.’¹⁵⁶ In Ceylon, I believe, the Anglicised Ceylonese would have to look no further than the first privately-run English newspaper – *Ceylon Observer* – which was taken over and edited by the Baptist A.M. Ferguson, and his nephew John Ferguson between 1859 and the early 1900s.¹⁵⁷ In the following sections, I highlight the influence or the position of the *Ceylon Observer* in the dissemination of antisemitic tropes in Ceylon, some of which had a long history in British literature.

The hostile stereotyping of Jews was widespread in European discourse and Victorian literature.¹⁵⁸ ‘Crafty’ Fagin in *Oliver Twist* is one such example.¹⁵⁹ Dharmapala’s reference to Shylock, a Shakespearean construct from the Elizabethan period, was also a commonly used stereotype to describe Jews in Britain as ‘the personification of capitalism and materialism’, or an ‘eternal parasite’.¹⁶⁰ There is every reason to imagine that such well-known items of English literature circulated at least among the English-speaking Sinhalese in Ceylon in the early twentieth century. Elite Christian schools such as Trinity College, Kandy were ‘anchored in English public school custom’, and boasted, for example, a Literary Association, which would have engaged with Shakespeare and Dickens. At the school’s first prize giving in 1872, graced by Governor W.H. Gregory, three scenes from ‘*The Merchant of Venice*’ were performed.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Jews were accused of ritually murdering a Christian monk and his servant in Damascus. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (New Jersey, 2014), p. 158.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁵⁷ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, p. 302.

¹⁵⁸ Brian Cheyette, *Constructions of ‘The Jew’ in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 269.

¹⁵⁹ Gilbert A. Pierce, *The Dickens Dictionary* (1878), p. 100; Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p. 77.

¹⁶⁰ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p. 113; Cheyette, *Constructions of ‘The Jew’*, p. 253.

¹⁶¹ J. Mangan, ‘Imperial Origins: Christian Manliness, Moral Imperatives and Pre-Sri Lankan Playing Fields’ *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27/1-2 (2010), p. 433.

Trinity College, Kandy was, at the time headed by Reverend Richard Collins, a Cambridge graduate.¹⁶² Indeed, the Merchant of Venice appears to have been staged repeatedly in Colombo by both the British community and the Anglicised Sinhalese community.¹⁶³ Thus, among both the British and the Sinhalese elite, the epithet of the ‘Shylockian Jew’, as wielded by Dharmapala, was a familiar figure.

The British in Ceylon, moreover, actively used the epithet of ‘the Jew’ to describe Moors in Ceylon.¹⁶⁴ This British usage may have stemmed from a habitual tendency to conflate Moors and Jews as Semites, or from an instinctive comparison between the two ‘racial categories’. The editor of the *Ceylon Observer* claimed of the Moors, ‘their Semitic origin is clearly traceable in their features’.¹⁶⁵ The British in India, meanwhile, stereotyped non-Jewish native populations (such as Bohras and Marwaris) as Jews for their involvement with the occupations typically associated with Jews – including the sale of clothes and moneylending.¹⁶⁶ Significantly, then, the British seem to have used the term ‘Jew’ comparatively, to designate a certain socio-economic type. Similarly, the editors of the *Ceylon Observer* appear to have repeatedly attempted to hammer home a comparison between Moors and Jews due to their ‘professions’, and (as far as evidence suggests) coined the phrase ‘the Jews of Ceylon’ to refer to the Moors.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹⁶³ *Ceylon Observer*, 7 January 1907; *Ceylon Observer*, 2 August 1912.

¹⁶⁴ Ali, ‘Muslims and Capitalism’, p. 318.

¹⁶⁵ *Ceylon Observer*, 9 May 1888.

¹⁶⁶ Numark, ‘Perspectives from the periphery’, pp. 263-264.

The metaphor describing Moors as ‘the Jews of Ceylon’,¹⁶⁷ and its variations, such as ‘Jews of the East’,¹⁶⁸ ‘Ceylon Jew’,¹⁶⁹ ‘Jews of the island’,¹⁷⁰ and ‘Jewish Moors’¹⁷¹ featured at least sixteen times between 1866 and 1910 in the *Ceylon Observer*. For example, an article from November 1866 noted, ‘the Moorman population of Colombo, whose addiction to the pursuits of jeweller, shopkeeper, and pedlar, has attached to them the designation of ‘the Jews of Ceylon’. In March 1908, an article carried an antisemitic trope in addition to that of the pedlar, when it claimed, ‘Jewish Moors, going about ostensibly to sell cloths, but who are in reality money-lenders. Neither the rice-selling nor the cloth-selling was the ulterior motive. The object in view was usury.’¹⁷² The editors of the *Ceylon Observer* crudely drew parallels between Jews and Moors, not only in terms of their socio-economic niche but ‘racial characteristics’. For example, an article contained, ‘as the Jews are in Europe, so are the Moormen in Ceylon, keen, cunning, and eager in accumulating money, which, when once obtained, is as perseveringly retained, whatever their wealth may be, pretending poverty’.¹⁷³ In various other articles, the editors or contributors to the *Ceylon Observer* introduced antisemitic tropes to illustrate a broader point, typically regarding moneylending. For instance, one article claimed, ‘under our present law of mortgage there are some modern “Shylocks” among us who quite take “the shine” out of the old “Jew of Venice”...by a bit of sharp practice “shent per shent” can be made’.¹⁷⁴ The term ‘Jew’ was used as an insult to any trader who was strict on due payments, or who charged ‘exorbitant’ rates.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 30 November 1866; 4 July 1877; 23 August 1880; 31 August 1881; 2 December 1882; 6 January 1883; 25 May 1882; 9 May 1888; 28 December 1882; 11 February 1889.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 February 1870; 9 September 1910.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 August 1889; 17 March 1897.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 December 1899.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1908.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4 July 1877.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 July 1870.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1873; 17 November 1874.

Notwithstanding the antisemitism of the *Ceylon Observer*, in other quarters the British colonial perspective of the Moors in Ceylon appeared to be positive, and the comparison of Moors to Jews was not a sharply negative comparison. As discussed above, the British were generally appreciative of the economic ethos of the Moors. A Special Commissioner appointed during the period Ceylon was governed by Martial Law following the 1915 pogrom, James Devane, observed that ‘the Moors are the Jews of Ceylon...who live by their wits rather than by their hands’.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Devane is the first person to have called the events of 1915 a pogrom (see Introduction), perhaps due to the parallels he drew between Moors and Jews. Devane compared them in terms of what he understood was their unique sense of enterprise. This was not an uncommon position in Victorian British discourse, which saw a role for Jews in promoting commerce and civilisation in, for example, the Ottoman Empire. Evidently, a philosemitic discourse existed alongside antisemitism in Victorian Britain.¹⁷⁷ Abigail Green notes that within the British Empire, the Jews were viewed to some extent ‘as a commercial diaspora’, who were economically ‘useful’.¹⁷⁸ However, Devane’s reliance on the metropolitan stereotype of Jewishness causes him to overlook the fact that the majority of Moors in the Eastern Province of Ceylon were actually farmers who lived ‘by their hands’.¹⁷⁹

The British also compared the pre-colonial trading success of the Moors to ‘the Jews in Europe in the Middle Ages’, while commenting on the nature of relations between the Moors and other groups on the island.¹⁸⁰ Denham in the Report of the 1911 Census claimed, ‘The feeling towards them was very much the same as that felt towards the Jews,’ except, that in contrast, the Moors [Muslims] ‘were in most places in the East at the same time a conquering and a proselytizing

¹⁷⁶ TNA, CO 882/10/128, Report of Commissioner Devane.

¹⁷⁷ Green, ‘The British Empire and the Jews’, p. 181.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 175 and 180.

¹⁷⁹ Ismail, ‘Unmooring identity’, pp. 77-78; Numark, ‘Perspectives from the periphery’, pp. 257-258.

¹⁸⁰ Denham, *Census of 1911*, p. 234.

power'.¹⁸¹ However, the British, in contrast to the Sinhalese, seemed to value the qualities that the Sinhalese detested in the Moors – their indefatigable pursuit of profit. In the Middle East and North Africa, 'Jews emerged as key intermediaries for the British in these areas – both as local partners for British merchants and as employees of the growing consular corps'.¹⁸² Furthermore, Christian Zionists believed in 'the civilizing influence of the Jews exerted in an extra-European context,' wielded through 'their commercial flair'.¹⁸³ In Ceylon, the Moors (who did not play any significant role in bureaucratic administration) were valued for their role in trade and economic growth. Perhaps, then, there was some nexus between the 'civilisation through commerce' discourse projected onto the Jews, and the colonial perception of the Moors in Ceylon.

Ameer Ali observes that there were certain areas of business that were common to both Moors and Jews. For example, he highlights the similarities between Moors and Jews in terms of their experience in the 'peddling business' and the gem industry.¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, the Moors conducted trade in gems with Jewish businessmen during this period. In 1909, a successful Moor gem trader did business in Paris with Victor Rosenthal, and in London with Pittar Leveson and Company, both leading jewellery merchants and organisations.¹⁸⁵ Ali does not, however, comment on the fact that some Jews in Britain were associated with high finance as well as these 'petty' trades. In Britain, in an example of the nexus between anti-colonialism, antisemitism and anti-capitalism, Jewish money and power, and families such as the Rothschilds were targeted in J.A. Hobson's antisemitic discourse in a chapter entitled 'Economic Parasites of Imperialism'. Hobson wrote,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Green, 'The British Empire and the Jews', p. 179.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁸⁴ Ali, 'Muslims and Capitalism', pp. 318-319.

¹⁸⁵ A.H. Macan Markar, *Short Biographical Sketches of Macan Markar and Related Families* (Colombo, 1977), p. 14.

United by the strongest bonds of organisation, always in closest and quickest touch with one another, situated in the very heart of the business capital of every State, controlled, so far as Europe is concerned, chiefly by men of a single and peculiar race, who have behind them many centuries of financial experience, they are in a unique position to control the policy of nations.¹⁸⁶

Of course, the comparison between the Moors and Jews was not always coherent, which is to be expected from mediated stereotypes that are employed as rhetoric. Moors in Ceylon were not barred from certain types of livelihoods the way Jews were in parts of Europe.¹⁸⁷ Ali also argues that although Moors were associated with moneylending – underscored by Dharmapala’s reference to Shylock – their numbers were insignificant compared to Jewish moneylenders in Europe.¹⁸⁸ Crudely comparing the Moors and Jews was then a convenient means of ‘othering’ the Moors, similar to the manner in which Jews were being ‘othered’ elsewhere. Indeed, the imperfection of the stereotype suggests that the real analytical comparison may be the sense of jealousy and mistrust aroused by a group that was viewed as ‘thriving’ off the capitalist order.

The othering of the Moors, like the Jews, also included scapegoating them for the economic misery experienced by many Sinhalese. It is, in fact, possible to draw parallels with the Jews – the quintessential scapegoats in history – and the scapegoating of Moors.¹⁸⁹ The language used to describe Moors in Sinhala newspapers often portrayed them as parasites, as taking over or buying land from the Sinhalese, and trapping the Sinhalese in servitude. Similarly, newspapers in Romania, for example, in the late nineteenth century, accused the Jews of threatening the very existence of the majority population. One popular Romanian newspaper asked in 1870:

¹⁸⁶ J. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York, 1902; repr. Cambridge, 2010), p. 64.

¹⁸⁷ Ali, ‘Muslims and Capitalism’, p. 318.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Geoffrey Alderman, ‘The Jew as Scapegoat? The Settlement and Reception of Jews in South Wales Before 1914’, *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 26 (1974), p. 66.

‘Who can force us to take to our bosom a half-million charlatans to suck our blood, become owners of our property and then treat us as slaves in our own country? That will never happen.’¹⁹⁰ Following the 1871 Odessa pogrom, the Governor-General reported to his superiors that: ‘[f]rom the crowds of Christians were often heard the words, “The Jews mock Christ, they get rich and they suck our blood”’.¹⁹¹ These references to the sucking of blood can be compared with epithets used in the Sinhala press to describe the Moors, such as ‘bloodsuckers’ and ‘vipers’, and reflect my conceptualisation of a ‘host-parasite’ dynamic between the Sinhalese and the Moors.¹⁹²

The most damning allegation against the Jews in the nineteenth century was arguably the ‘blood libel’ accusation, the claim that Jews drank the blood of Gentile children during Passover.¹⁹³ These accusations framed Jews as ‘barbaric’. Accusations of ritual murder of humans did not feature in anti-Moor discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Ceylon. Yet there appears to be a parallel in the framing of Moors engaging in ‘barbaric’ (and un-Buddhist) practices, such as cattle slaughter.¹⁹⁴ All these devices ultimately ‘othered’ the Moors and set them up as scapegoats.

Discrimination against the Moors

There were two prominent campaigns in respect to the calls for discrimination against the Moors. One was the call to ‘Buy Sinhalese’, and the other was the call to boycott the Moors.

¹⁹⁰ *Romania Libera*, 11 June 1879, cited in Leff, ‘Liberalism and Antisemitism’, p. 46.

¹⁹¹ John Doyle Klier, *Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 359.

¹⁹² Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁹³ Hillel J. Kieval, ‘The Blood Libel’, in Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, Kalman Weiser (eds.), *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism* (Cham, 2021), pp. 53-64.

¹⁹⁴ In fact, Moors were scapegoated for stereotypes of animal cruelty (including animal husbandry) as early as 1829. McKinley, ‘Merchants, Maidens, and Mohammedans’, pp. 7-8.

(1) 'Buy Sinhalese' campaign and its extensions

The campaign that called on the Sinhalese to 'Buy Sinhalese' was most prominent at around the turn of the century. This campaign could be compared with elements of the early *Swadeshi* movement in Bengal that emphasised being 'kind and attentive to one's neighbour' – helping your own creed and kin.¹⁹⁵ But crucially, in India, the *Swadeshi* movement aimed to undermine British commercial dominance and exploitation by promoting indigenous production (that competed with British industry). Ananda Coomaraswamy, who had moved to India as a *Swadeshi* activist, wrote on the context in India: 'True Swadeshi would have attempted to preserve the status of our skilled artisans and village craftsmen, for the sake of the value to our country of men *as men*.'¹⁹⁶ The conflict regarding trade and production was not ethnicised in the way it was in Ceylon, and was targeted against British or European production. One reason for this was because the 'Ceylonese' (as opposed to 'Sinhalese') anti-colonial movement was relatively weak, and never gained currency beyond a small elite circle. In Ceylon, the campaign aimed to highlight the 'Sinhaleanness' of traders, to encourage buyers to choose them over their Moor competitors. Nira Wickramasinghe has argued that advertisements – 'avidly read' by Ceylon's 'large literate population' – undoubtedly shaped their worldview.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, in the context of the 'Buy Sinhalese' campaign, advertisements were one mechanism to encourage such choices; below is a particularly interesting example. The most successful gem traders in Ceylon at the time were the Moors, and so this Sinhalese trader went to financial pains to advertise his ethnicity.

¹⁹⁵ Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, p. 200.

¹⁹⁶ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras, 1910?), p. 19.

¹⁹⁷ Wickramasinghe, 'Fashioning a Market', p. 147.

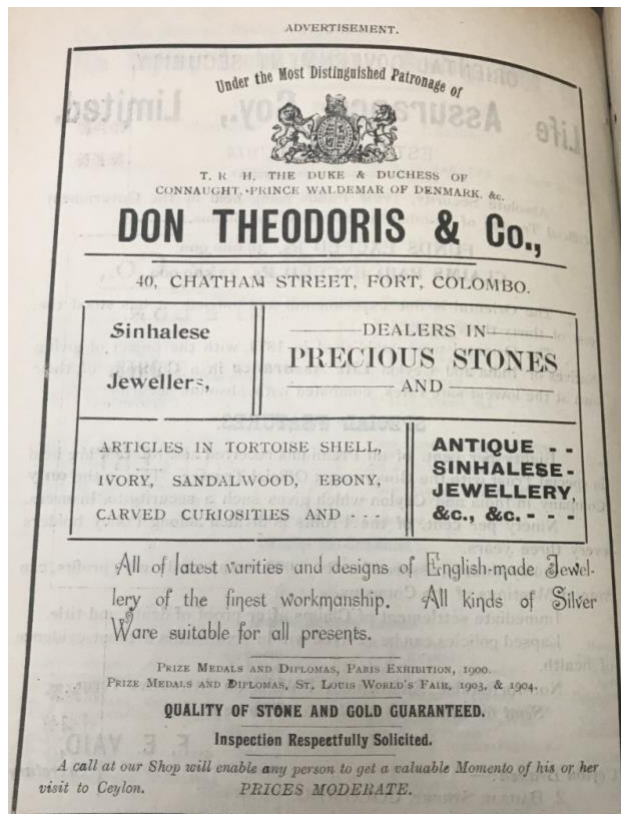


Figure 3: Don Theodoris & Co Advertisement, *Ceylon National Review* 3/8 (1909)

Indeed, Rambukwella suggests that Dharmapala's views on Moors may have derived from 'family concerns', which 'had a strong trading-merchant basis'.¹⁹⁸ The Hewavitarnes were of carpentry and furniture industry wealth. They became the main promoters of the 'short-lived *Swadeshi* movement' in Ceylon that was aimed at encouraging trade between the Sinhalese.¹⁹⁹ The following advertisement by the Hewavitarnes' furniture company, H. Don Carolis & Sons, reminds viewers to 'Support Home Industries'. The British did not produce much furniture during this period, so it is likely that the term 'home' is used to distinguish between furniture produced abroad or sold by 'foreign' traders. By exploiting the idea of 'home' and therefore, the 'authentic', certain Sinhalese traders sought to grow their businesses.

¹⁹⁸ Rambukwella, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 65.

¹⁹⁹ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, pp. 103 and 329.



Figure 4: H. Don Carolis Advertisement, *Ceylon National Review* 3/8 (June 1909)

Newspapers also contained similar advertisements that encouraged patronage of Sinhalese establishments; some directly asked the reader, 'is it not one's duty to patronise hotels of one's own race?'.²⁰⁰ Another advertisement reminded people 'never forget to be patriotic and buy goods from Sinhalese traders'.²⁰¹ Patriotism was viewed as necessary in this period of economic competition between ethno-religious groups, and was accordingly associated with the 'Buy Sinhalese' campaign.

Alongside this 'Buy Sinhalese' campaign was the added exhortation to 'Hire Sinhalese'. According to Jayawardena, the importer of paper and stationery, N.S. Fernando, only employed Buddhists in his store.²⁰² It was frequently noted that the Moors supported the Moors – a fairly

²⁰⁰ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 6 January 1899.

²⁰¹ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 11 July 1914.

²⁰² Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 276.

widespread sentiment regarding successful minorities.²⁰³ Even the British noted this tendency. Daniel Joseph, a planter in the Matale Planters' Association observed the 'remarkable fellow-feeling among the...Moor butchers [who] banded together and were having their own way in the prices they fix for mutton and beef'.²⁰⁴ To counter such perceived (ethno-religious) collusion, some Sinhalese pushed to establish their own boutiques and hire within their ethnic group, to reduce Sinhalese unemployment and increase wealth among the Sinhalese.

A mechanism to dissuade the public from buying from the Moors and to encourage them to 'Buy Sinhalese' was the formation of Sinhalese trade associations. The stated reason behind establishing associations such as the 'Sinhalese Development Association' was the 'losses and difficulties caused by foreign Moors to Sinhala men...The main idea in this association is to put aside the three religions Catholicism, Protestantism and Buddhism, and get together as Sinhalese in Lanka to develop trade and cultivation'.²⁰⁵ In the call to unite against the Moors, religious differences within the Sinhalese community were cast aside.

W.A. de Silva, a prominent Buddhist nationalist, wrote a series of letters to *Sihala Samaya* between March and April 1914 encouraging the Sinhalese to stop paying interest for money borrowed from the 'Marakkalayas' and 'Hambayas' by forming and investing their money into private limited associations.²⁰⁶ He recommended that associations for farmers, traders and carpenters be set up along the lines of British trade associations.²⁰⁷ De Silva reminded the Sinhalese that even though the Moors did not have formal associations of their own, they had

²⁰³ Ulrich Wagner, Oliver Christ, Thomas F. Pettigrew, Jost Stellmacher and Carina Wolf, 'Prejudice and Minority Proportion: Contact Instead of Threat Effects' *Social Psychology Quarterly* 69/4 (2006), pp. 380-390.

²⁰⁴ *Ceylon Observer*, 28 January 1912.

²⁰⁵ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 4 October 1898.

²⁰⁶ *Sihala Samaya*, 2 April 1914.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

‘market committees’ through which they could work together and address any issues arising between the Moors.²⁰⁸ To ensure the success of such a mechanism, the ‘rich Sinhalese’ were expected to contribute to the establishment of trade associations, and even plantation associations. Meanwhile, ‘poor Sinhalese’ were told to ‘swallow their false pride and accept labourer jobs like the Tamils’.²⁰⁹ Each had to play their part in ‘racial’ self-strengthening. Once again, it is important to note that to beat the Moors, the Sinhalese often resolved to emulating the Moors.

(2) Boycotting Moor Trades

Unsurprisingly, the second campaign of discrimination in this period was the campaign to boycott Moor establishments (which was incidentally also a staple antisemitic reaction in places like Germany and Poland).²¹⁰ The campaign dates to at least the 1880s.²¹¹ The *Ceylon Observer* – here extending sympathy to the Moors – claimed that even Temperance associations were being used to ‘rouse up race prejudices by crying down the poor Coast Moormen and trying to induce people to boycott them’.²¹² Strategies to take the Moors’ business away from them were discussed in the Sinhala press. One correspondent advised, ‘foreign customers make up only 2 percent of customers to Moors’ boutiques. So it is easy for the Sinhalese people to take their business away [as the rest of their customers are Sinhalese].’²¹³ The underlying objective behind the boycott campaign was to ‘rid this nation of these rascals, stop patronising their boutiques, and establish boutiques of your own.’ The writer of this article instructed readers to ‘advise

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 April 1914.

²⁰⁹ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 2 April 1886.

²¹⁰ David Feldman, *Boycotts Past and Present: from the American Revolution to the campaign to Boycott Israel* (Cham, 2019).

²¹¹ Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 138.

²¹² *Ceylon Observer*, 30 September 1904.

²¹³ *Sinhala Baudhdhya*, 11 July 1914.

your friends and neighbours against associating with them.’²¹⁴ He added that if someone chose to associate with the Moors, then the Sinhalese should ‘cut off all ties’ with such people too.

This all-encompassing nature of the boycott aimed to ostracise the Moors from all aspects of economic life in Ceylon. A poem published in *Sinhala Jatiya* on 13 January 1914 entitled ‘Don’t!’ is a long list of instructions regarding actions Sinhalese should *not* do, in connection with the Moors:

Don’t let heathen temples be built.
Don’t get caught to the death traps [cunning plans] of the Hambayas.
Don’t buy goods from their boutiques.
Don’t sign their promissory notes.
Don’t give them boutiques.
Don’t give them money.
Don’t sell them land.
Don’t pawn your goods to them.
Don’t lend them money.
Never take their rent.
Never take ‘ralahami’ titles from them [don’t let them flatter you by calling you ‘ralahami’].
Never take ‘lady’ titles from them [don’t let them flatter you by calling you ‘haaminey’]
Never get them to call you ‘mister’.
In short, don’t take anything from them! Don’t!! Don’t!!!

- D.A.H. Liyanaarachchi²¹⁵

It is not clear how widespread the boycott campaign was; it was possibly most prevalent in the Western and Central Provinces where the Indian Moors were better established. Furthermore, the success of this campaign is questionable, as often there was a sense of dismay expressed in newspaper articles at the tendency of the Sinhalese to continue patronising such establishments, despite calls to boycott them. The fact that such repeated calls for boycott had to be made also

²¹⁴ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 28 April 1899.

²¹⁵ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 13 January 1914.

suggest that any boycotts that may have taken place were likely to have been short-lived. A concerned citizen of Jayawardenapura wrote to the citizens of Panadura,

It is with sadness that I see Panadura left by proud Sinhala-Buddhist citizens to the Moors...If intelligent people like you do not know that letting our lands be taken over by foreigners ruin our nation, then what can other Sinhalese do?...I am expecting you all to do your duty and take Panadura town's business into Sinhalese hands.²¹⁶

Interestingly, Sinhala-Buddhists are advised to lead the way for the less 'intelligent' members of 'our nation', the Sinhalese Christians, even though some Sinhalese Christians openly discriminated against the Moors. One newspaper correspondent, presumably a Sinhala-Buddhist, commended the action that Christians took against the Moors in a particular area: 'our Catholic friends in the Kanuwana area have banned their people from doing any transactions with Moors, or buying anything from Moors' shops'.²¹⁷ Given the religious violence involving Catholics, Buddhists and Moors in Chapter 1; religious revival discussed in Chapter 2; and socio-economic competition suggested above, Sinhalese Catholics and Buddhists appear to have had conflicts with the Moors in terms of their religion *and* ethnicity. The salience of identity markers, whether religious or ethnic, or both, shifted as priorities and grievances shifted. The Sinhalese, by the turn of the century, had found common ground with Hindus over the issues of meat and alcohol, and Moor intolerance to their sound worship. However, in later decades they would clash with them (as Tamils, and therefore also Christian Tamils) over representation and language. The Moors, who up until the mid-nineteenth century, were viewed as relatively harmless, had by the beginning of the twentieth century come to be perceived as posing a far greater threat to the Sinhalese than any other ethno-religious group on the island.

²¹⁶ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 8 July 1913.

²¹⁷ *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, 31 January 1899.

In the aftermath of the 1915 pogrom, the Moors experienced a sustained boycott of their trade. A. Majid, a Muslim writing from London, complained in a letter to the Governor in Ceylon and the Colonial Office in London that even after the violence of May-June 1915 had ended, ‘worst of all, steps are being taken to boycott Moslem traders.’ Majid further reported the fears of the Moors, who felt ‘the Moslem trade is completely ruined, and the shame is great.’²¹⁸

The Limitations of Colonial Governmentality

Given these extensive discussions in the Sinhala press about their grievances with the Moors, what was the level of awareness of the colonial state? The state promoted the English-language press as a tool of governance and control.²¹⁹ In Michel Foucault’s history of ‘governmentality’, he discussed ‘modes of organization’ that were used ‘to manage a population’.²²⁰ David Scott’s theory of colonial governmentality, influenced by Foucault, posits:

[A] more public circulation of reason would serve to undermine and break down the supports of native knowledges, to disqualify them. It would, in effect, help to put in place a public sphere in which only certain kinds of knowledges and not others could circulate with any efficacy; a sphere in which fluency in these knowledges (in part determined by the ability to point out the unreason in the old) would be a condition of participation; and in which participation would be the only rational and legal way of exercising influence in what now counted as politics.²²¹

For Scott, the key function of the discourse on ‘public reason’ was colonial management and promoting a ‘modern’ form of life.²²² Yet, the state’s focus on the English press, and its relative neglect of the vernacular meant that it was largely unaware of the extent to which Sinhalese

²¹⁸ A. Majid to Colonial Office, 22 November 1915, TNA, CO 882/10.

²¹⁹ For an analysis of the purposes of the earliest English newspapers in Ceylon see, Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, pp. 306-308.

²²⁰ Graham Burcell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michael Foucault* (Chicago, 1991), p. 102.

²²¹ Scott, ‘Colonial Governmentality’, pp. 209-210.

²²² Scott does not elaborate on the ways in which colonial discourse was riven with tensions. For instance, the antisemitism of the English press did not fit with the language of ‘reason’.

animosity towards Moors was rising along economic lines. The state also appeared uninterested in developing any discourse promoting governmentality through the vernacular, and therefore any anti-Moor rhetoric in the vernacular news proceeded untroubled. Crucially, while the British encouraged the Moors' 'enterprising' nature in trade, they neglected to evaluate the extent to which the majority community on the island viewed the Moors as an economic threat. The state also appears to have either ignored or disregarded alerts in the English press, such as the *Ceylon Observer*'s reportage of 'extortion' by Indian Moors and the animosity of villagers to such traders; they were simply uninterested in the impact of such behaviour on the local population.

Colonial neglect was more to do with complacency than with resources. In India, for instance, the Raj prioritised monitoring vernacular discourse for indications of subversion or dissent from the period following the Indian Mutiny of 1857.²²³ Indeed, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal argue that in India, various communal groups wanted to 'gain the attention of a colonial state minded to disburse differential patronage', and accordingly, 'publicists needed to dip their pens in the ink of community.'²²⁴ Thus, the vernacular press was filled with narratives of communal difference in terms of religion and customs, with the expectation that the state would be monitoring such columns (mostly in search of signs of sedition).²²⁵

By contrast, in Ceylon, the Sinhala press was not geared to a colonial audience. It arguably was not even intended for the English-educated Sinhalese elite because they could not read Sinhala.²²⁶ Janaki Jayawardana posits that the target audience of such Sinhala newspapers were

²²³ *Indian Newspaper Reports, c1868-1942, from the British Library, London* (Marlborough, 2005).

²²⁴ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, p. 68.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Jayawardana, *Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman'*, p. 195.

the urban working class and ‘rural elite’.²²⁷ It is possible, then, that those elites on whom the British relied for the ‘pulse of the people’, did not actively follow or engage with Sinhala press discourses. In fact, even when the Sinhala press *did* want to engage the attention of the state, some Sinhalese complained ‘as for the local press, the Government...did not read the newspapers. How then was the voice of the people to make itself heard?’²²⁸

By 1907, the British applauded themselves for the spread of vernacular newspapers, in the belief that the emergence of such newspapers ‘testifies to the spread of education among the Sinhalese, as well as to the growth of a healthy public spirit.’²²⁹ Importantly, the particulars of such a ‘public spirit’ did not become concern for the colonial state until the 1915 pogrom erupted.

Conclusion

Overall, Sinhalese grievances with the Moors, in the context of demographics, dispersal and trade practices were not necessarily grounded in reality. Instead, the Sinhalese themselves were growing in number. Sinhalese traders from the Low-Country were moving into the Kandyan provinces alongside the Moors and competing over the same markets and land. From the Kandyan Sinhalese perspective, it is possible that the Moors may have become more visible, due to the Kandyans’ reliance on Moors for goods, food, and loans. There were also some comments from British officials that corroborated certain Sinhalese complaints. Meanwhile, some Indian Moors may have benefitted from regional networks and linguistic skills, but their numbers were relatively small compared to the Sinhalese. Little else was fundamentally different about the Moors’ demographics and economic activity when compared with Sinhalese

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ ‘Reform of the Ceylon Legislative Council Proceedings of the Chilaw Association’, *Ceylon National Review* 8 (1909), p. 52.

²²⁹ Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, p. 306.

population growth and the behaviour of their traders. It was, then, increased commercial competition that undergirded Sinhalese economic grievances with the Moors.

Importantly, antisemitic tropes were not principally associated with popular anti-Moor emotion among Sinhala-speakers. Judaism was not a familiar image in daily Sinhalese life and there is no evidence that antisemitic stereotyping was deployed in Sinhala newspapers. However, the bilingual nationalist Dharmapala appears to have personally held antisemitic prejudices. Furthermore, the Anglicised Sinhalese who were familiar with antisemitic stereotypes may have taken from such stereotypes a language with which to illustrate their hostility towards the Moors. This borrowing is reflected in Dharmapala's letter to the Secretary of State and the Sinhalese Memorial, which were penned in English. Crucially, in such exchanges with the British, antisemitic language seems to have been specifically used to appeal to what Dharmapala and others may have viewed as colonial prejudices. Meanwhile, these English-language antisemitic stereotypes are likely to have been repurposed to frame the prejudicial, although not specifically antisemitic, language Dharmapala employed when expressing grievances about the Moors in the Sinhala press. Conveniently, the 'new' British-imported tropes of Moors as Jews overlapped with extant anti-Moor tropes (such as that of the 'grasping trader') that had a longer history in the Sinhala press and literature.

Therefore, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed various manifestations of antagonism towards the Moors, including their vilification in the press, and concerted efforts to boycott their trade in an attempt to exclude them from economic life. If the primary audience of these press discourses were the urban working classes and the rural elite, did the peasant, the plumbago pit miner or the railway worker feel similarly about the Moors? Did they read these newspapers or hear these speeches being made? It is not always possible to accurately gauge

the extent to which the grievances discussed in this chapter influenced or reflected public sentiment. It is possible to assume that – when they reached the latter audiences mentioned above – the views expressed in articles or speeches resonated with large factions of the Sinhalese community and, therefore, influenced them and their behaviour. The contents of an interview with a Sinhalese rioter in the pogrom reflect the extent to which press discourses percolated through Sinhalese society. The interview, conducted by a journalist of the *Ceylon Morning Leader*, was reproduced in Tamil in *Muslim Nesan* on 9 June 1915, shortly after the worst excesses of the pogrom had ended.²³⁰

The journalist asked why this ‘riot’ took place and the Sinhalese respondent answered that the Indian Moors (the primary targets of the violence) were ‘a very bad group’. He explained that Indian Moors benefited by opening shops in Sinhalese areas, where they would sell goods worth 3 cents at 6 cents to Sinhalese customers. Meanwhile, they would sell the same goods at 3 cents to people of their own race. The journalist asked why, then, do the Sinhalese continue to buy from them – why did they not open their own shops? The Sinhalese man responded that the Indian Moors were able to still attract the Sinhalese to their shops, and even though other Sinhalese opened shops of their own, the Indian Moors continued to profit. At this point, the journalist pushed back rather forcefully and stated: ‘that is your problem. You have to find proper ways to beat them at business’. The Sinhalese rioter appears to have dejectedly responded, ‘that does not work, we tried to already. I belong to an association here, which I give 5 cents to a month...A branch of this association opened 5 shops. But all of them have failed.’ The journalist probed this difference in success – ‘what is the reason for the progress of the Indian Moors’ shops?’ The Sinhalese ruefully quipped, ‘Hah! There is no unity among our

²³⁰ The original *Ceylon Morning Leader* newspaper is not available in the SLNA or British Library. The British Library is missing papers for 3-6 and 8 June 1915, when the interview is likely to have been published.

race unlike among other races. There is no answer to the question ‘why don’t you all join together and work?’²³¹ Ethno-religious competition was, at least for some, at the core of anti-Moor violence.

A Moor newspaper reproducing the interview of a Sinhalese rioter and a journalist of the *Ceylon Morning Leader* may not be considered an entirely objective source, and therefore may have distorted the conversation. However, the alleged grievances of the Sinhalese rioter are extremely familiar in terms of content, and echoes the grievances discussed throughout this chapter. He holds the perceived lack of unity among the Sinhalese as partially responsible for their inability to compete with the Moors. In fact, it is curious that there is no mention of the immediate trigger for the violence: a conflict regarding the use of sound worship in a Buddhist procession on 29 May 1915. If this interview is anything to go by, the economic grievances held by the Sinhalese in the years prior to the 1915 pogrom undoubtedly contributed to the animosity towards the Moors. This animosity culminated in deadly violence.

Ultimately, this longstanding Sinhalese frustration towards the Moors and their role in the economy existed alongside violent contestation over symbolic religious space. Given this long history of ethno-religious tensions in both the economic sphere and over religious space, was the pogrom foreseeable, and even preventable? The next chapter first discusses the Gampola Perahera Case and assesses how it weighed upon the events of May-June 1915 – the focus of the rest of the chapter.

²³¹ *Muslim Nesan*, 9 June 1915.

Chapter 4: The 1915 Anti-Moor Pogrom

The religious violence explored in Chapter 1 did not occur in a vacuum. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, religious revival among Sinhala-Buddhists and Moors resulted in heightened group consciousness and assertion vis-à-vis other ethno-religious groups, including Catholics, in Ceylon. At the same time, British economic policies (such as the permission to buy land in Pettah and Fort) that enabled Moors to advance in trade and commerce created a new fault-line of tension between Sinhalese and Moors. Thus, between the mid-to-late nineteenth century and 1915, Sinhalese and Moors were clashing in both the religious and economic spheres. The 1915 pogrom tends to be isolated from this longer historical context. Instead, much of the existing historiography on the 1915 pogrom, with the exception of scholarship by Michael Roberts, tends to focus on the events of the Gampola Perahera Case as the starting point for the violence that would ensue in Kandy some years later.

Two contemporary books by Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Armand de Souza were published in the aftermath of the pogrom in 1916 and 1919 respectively. These books provided detailed descriptions on the outbreak of violence targeting Moors, and the subsequent state repression of the Sinhalese. Ramanathan's book on *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon*, a meaningful attempt by the only elected representative of the Ceylonese people, was the earliest and therefore most influential analysis of the pogrom.¹ However, due to its purpose of securing justice for the Sinhalese in the aftermath of state suppression, it downplayed the violence experienced by the Moors, and in its opening sentence condemned 'the intolerance and aggressiveness of a small section of the Muhammadans known to the Sinhalese as "Hambayas"', a claim that I seriously

¹ I discuss Ramanathan's election as the Educated Ceylonese member of the Legislative Council in 1912 further in the next chapter.

consider.² Descriptions of the rioting and looting is second-hand, as Ramanathan was abroad at the time of the outbreak of the violence and returned to Ceylon by the time the state had begun suppressing the violence.³ Elite Sinhalese figures such as H.L. de Mel gave Ramanathan statements regarding the violence although they too were unlikely to have witnessed the violence first-hand. In this context, some Moor contemporaries of Ramanathan expressed their distrust of him. For instance, physician and future politician M.C.M. Kaleel claimed that ‘Ramanathan, with his record of anti-Muslim acts and utterances, was no friend and only wanted to mislead [Moors].’⁴ In his time, then, Moors found him an unacceptable witness. Meanwhile, the next publication on the pogrom by de Souza, *Hundred Days in Ceylon Under Martial Law, 1915*, was sponsored by the Sinhalese Memorial Committee that formed in September 1915 to demand a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the state’s response to the pogrom.⁵ The book was intended to be circulated in Britain. Accordingly, it provided extensive description of the brutal repression of Sinhalese, which ranged from physical violence, extortion and blackmail, hostage taking, extra-judicial executions, sexual harassment, theft, incarceration under inhumane conditions, and flogging.⁶ Thus, much of the outrage was focused on this sequel to the pogrom. Today, when public memory and nationalist discourse tends to highlight only the Sinhalese plight, these contemporary books fail to offer a holistic perspective.

From the late 1960s onwards, scholarship on the pogrom focused on causes, and to a lesser degree, consequences. One of the most recent works on causes of the pogrom is George Rowell’s 2009 article that argues unequivocally that ‘it was the Sinhala Buddhists who organised the pogrom and the hail of anti-Moor propaganda beforehand’, citing the

² Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴ M.M. Thawfeeq, *Memories of a Physician Politician, Dr. M.C.M. Kaleel: a Biographical Sketch* (South Croydon, 1987), p. 83.

⁵ P.T.M. Fernando, ‘The Post Riots Campaign for Justice’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 29/2 (1970), p. 259.

⁶ De Souza, *Hundred Days*, pp. 118-122 and 146-147.

organisational capacity of various (typically Sinhala-Buddhist) *samāgam*/associations.⁷ These *samāgam* may well have been important in fanning the flames of anti-Moor sentiment, particularly once it is placed within the longer chronology of violence between Sinhala-Buddhists and Moors (Chapter 1) in many places where *samāgam* were established. Perhaps some *samāgam* emerged in the early twentieth century as a response to Indian Moor-led intolerance of processions. In that context, it is also necessary to recall that anti-Moor sentiment, freely expressed in the papers, pre-dated the existence of some of these *samāgam*. In terms of causality at the level of discourse, the *samāgam* did *not* pioneer anti-Moor discourse.

Rowell asserts that the ‘symptoms of orchestration’ included the presence of gangs, simultaneity of attacks on Moors, rumours, and organisation by members of the Sinhala-Buddhist movement. His evidence for ‘pre-arrangement’ is entirely based on colonial sources, on the basis that rioters did not leave evidence behind. Sources such as Inspector General of Police (IGP) Herbert Dowbiggin are unreliable due to their interest in covering up their own failures; the military had to be deployed to restore ‘order’ as the pogrom could not be contained by the police alone.⁸ By claiming serious pre-organisation actors, who should have prevented the worst excesses of the pogrom, attempted to deflect blame from themselves. While Rowell’s argument that there was some level of organisation during the pogrom is convincing, I diverge from his analysis with regard to the extent to which the pogrom was organised *prior* to the initial violence on 29 May 1915.

Regarding the pogrom’s consequences, in 1994, Michael Roberts asserted that ‘previous studies of these “riots,” including mine, have paid limited attention to the experience of the Moors.’⁹

⁷ Rowell, ‘Ceylon’s Kristallnacht’, pp. 619-648.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 636.

⁹ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 188.

The reasons he gives for such omissions include the fact that the Moors were found in certain cases to have made false allegations against the Sinhalese (and were thus unreliable victims); that the ‘nationalist climate of opinion in the 1960s’ led to the ‘selective decoding of data’, and that ‘the empiricist quest for “facts”’ excluded ‘experience and suffering’.¹⁰ To address this limitation, Roberts attempts to convey the terror felt by Moors – but he primarily uses British colonial reports to do so, alongside the Mohammedan Member in Council, Abdul Rahiman’s report, which was a record collected on a tour of affected areas after the fact. Most colonial reports from Government Agents and their assistants were compiled weeks or even months after the pogrom. The credibility of these accounts may have been damaged by (i) a need to justify state in/action, and (ii) inaccuracies due to the long period between experiencing events and committing them to paper. Meanwhile, Rahiman’s tour took place a few days after the violence had subsided, and he received his information second-hand from victims. His report remains a good source even though it is discredited by scholars as ‘vengeful’ in tone – as he is assumed to have set out on a mission to secure retribution for Moors.¹¹ While the subsequent Sinhalese experience was certainly traumatic, in this chapter I focus on the nine days of the pogrom to try and write back the experience of Moors into the historiography.¹²

The vernacular sources used in this chapter have not previously featured in the historiography, perhaps due to the language of composition (most historians who have written on the 1915 pogrom have mostly used English sources). I analyse *Muslim Nesan* and *Islam Mittiran*, two newspapers that published weekly news on the violence during and after the pogrom between May and July 1915. In addition to Tamil-language newspapers, I use reportage by Sinhalese

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The perjury and extortion by certain Moors is expanded on in De Souza, *Hundred Days*, pp. 118-122.

¹¹ Charles S. Blackton, ‘The Action Phase of the 1915 Riots’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29/2 (1970), p. 243.

¹² Disturbances were reported on 7 June in the Kurunegala and Puttalam districts, on 8 June in Kurunegala and on 11 June in the Chilaw district. Apart from this belt of the country, violence had ceased generally throughout the island on 6 June. Shooting Inquiry Commission (SIC), SLNA, Ceylon Sessional Papers 1916-1917, p. 32.

journalists. Of course, these sources will have their own biases. However, I shall show that these three groups, as strongly divergent in interest and sympathy as they were, nevertheless corroborate each other in several ways. Importantly, the Sinhala reportage corroborates much that is reported in colonial sources and Moor newspapers, and in fact, offers more detail on violence targeting Moors. These papers remind its audience who the original victims of the pogrom were. Meanwhile, I use eye-witness testimonies of Moors who gave evidence before courts martial, the Police Inquiry Commission (PIC) and the Shooting Inquiry Commission (SIC), despite concerns that they were unreliable.¹³ The testimonies made by Moors offer a glimpse into the horror of the pogrom, at a time the state was largely missing in action. The chapter attempts to explore what caused large groups of Moors to flee their homes across the island to seek refuge in Colombo, and others still to flee to India.

The Reports of the PIC (1916) and the SIC (1917) are two important colonial sources that offer insights into Moor experiences and the response of the state to the pogrom.¹⁴ The PIC was appointed by the Governor in October 1915 to investigate the failure of the police to prevent the pogrom, and the SIC was appointed in October 1916 to investigate the extra-judicial killings of ten Sinhalese by colonial actors in suppressing the pogrom. These inquiries offer a record of events and decision-making available for posterity. Had it not been for the record of these two inquiries much of what transpired during the pogrom, and why, may have been lost in history. Historians such as P.V.J. Jayasekera, A.P. Kannangara, George Rowell and Michael Roberts have drawn, sometimes extensively, on evidence in the PIC (Kannangara also makes a one-off

¹³ Nira Wickramasinghe and Alicia Schrikker, who write on the reliability of court testimony in a very different context, claim that '[w]hile the statements made in court appear through the mediated voices of the arbitrators and translators and the content of the petitions may contain lies and inaccuracies, much can be learned from their form and their silences about the antagonistic parties as well as about the bureaucratic logic of the colonial state'. Nira Wickramasinghe and Alicia Schrikker, 'The Ambivalence of Freedom: Slaves in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78/3 (2019), p. 500.

¹⁴ Police Inquiry Commission (PIC), SLNA, Sessional Paper 16, 1916.

reference to the SIC, while Jayasekera, Rowell and Roberts do not use it). Yet neither of these sources have been used to give voice to the Moor victims of the pogrom or explain the state's shift from inaction to excess. I deploy these two sources with due caution in this chapter and the next.

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of the Gampola Perahera case, which is one of the key short-term causes of the violence. The rest of the chapter chronologically charts the incidents and antagonisms that heighten during the first half of 1915 and suggests that the chances of violence breaking out in Kandy in May 1915 were greatly enhanced by the provocations of Indian Moors in the days and months before the pogrom (endorsing Ramanathan's position on causation). Importantly, in the weeks following the pogrom, various Special Commissioners appointed by the government to suppress the violence and Government/Assistant-Government Agents offered their varying assessments of what the real cause of the violence was. These interpretations of the motives behind the violence include the effect of caste and social dislocation, personal grievances with and obligations to Moor traders, commercial rivalries, loot, participation of criminal gangs, conspiracy, and religious fervour.

Historians who have written on the pogrom have tended to focus on a particular narrative – such as economic factors, or caste, for instance – that appears to them most central, and they are able to cite specific colonial officials' interpretations as sources that support their analysis. I argue that *all* these factors co-existed, and while religious competition was the immediate cause of violence on the morning of 29 May, other factors such as economic grievances were perhaps, ultimately, able to galvanise a larger number of perpetrators of different ethnicities and religions across the island. I also suggest that the humiliation felt by Sinhala-Buddhists, due to the Moors' repeated disruptions of their processions in what Sinhala-Buddhists

considered ‘their land’ undergirded the violence. It was not just the confrontations in recent years but a long-term sense of victimhood, felt by the Sinhala-Buddhists over 40 years of violent disruption by both Moors *and* Catholics, that created a sense of ethno-religious competition and the need to assert themselves.

Shielded by the ‘anonymity of the collective’, individuals manifested their resentment towards Moors for individual reasons.¹⁵ There is evidence that ‘outsider’ rioters travelled across districts and provinces to attack Moors. Yet, like in the case of mob action leading up to partition in India, in Ceylon too, ‘former neighbours and those proximate and known to each other became lethally hostile’.¹⁶ It appears that disparate acts of contestation between Moors and Sinhalese (but also non-Sinhalese) over time snowballed in May-June 1915 into a major episode of mob action. Thus, the violence derived from multiple factors and coalesced to produce a ‘pogrom’ as opposed to a ‘riot’. In the broader horizon of the ‘pogrom’, in which every individual grievance could be accommodated, widespread violence manifested against Moors.

A. Gampola Perahera Case

First, it is necessary to consider the immediate background to the pogrom, and the question of provocation and ‘intolerance’ as suggested by Ramanathan. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gampola was the scene of religious violence between Indian Moors and Sinhala-Buddhists in May and October 1907. The Ambagamuwa Road Mosque was originally built in 1858 by the Indian Moor Cassim Marikar Sulima Lebbe, and expanded in the 1880s.¹⁷ Intermittent disputes over processions had taken place since the 1880s; but it was in 1907 that they escalated into

¹⁵ For more on the anonymity of the collective, see Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, 2021). p. 238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242. If we are to take the comparison with intimate violence in India in 1947, the British in Ceylon in 1915 too were ‘spared its fury’, an analysis I contend with more in the following chapter. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁷ Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 2.

violence.¹⁸ In 1911, Low-Country Sinhalese traders organised a trade boycott against Moors to protest obstructions made to the Wallahagoda Devale's (an important Buddhist shrine in Gampola) processions.¹⁹ The conflict came to a head in 1912 when the Basnayake Nilame (Chief Incumbent) of the Wallahagoda Devale and the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance District Committee attempted to secure a procession licence for the Esala Perahera that began in August 1912. The Esala Perahera was celebrated in July or August to appeal to deities for rainfall and typically lasted five days. The Esala Perahera of the Wallahagoda Devale 'regularly passed through the town of Gampola on its way to the river' where a 'water-cutting ceremony' was conducted.²⁰ Along this route, the procession typically passed two mosques, the Kahatapitiya mosque patronised by Ceylon Moors, and the Indian Moor-patronised Ambagamuwa Road Mosque in Gampola (the mosques are 1.5km apart). The President of the Committee wrote a letter to the Government Agent for the Central Province G.S. Saxton claiming,

Although the Kahatapitiya mosque is the oldest of the two, those concerned in that mosque have no objection to the usual tom tom being beaten opposite their mosque whilst the Coast moormen who are the worshippers in the mosque at Gampola seem to obstruct the performance of the religious festival of this ancient temple with all the pomp and grandeur attached to it from ancient times. They seem to think that they are entitled to stop the beating of the tom tom opposite their mosque and I understand that last year the Local Board at Gampola has posted up two boards at a distance of 100 feet on either side of the mosque warning that the beating of tom tom should be stopped between those two posts [sic].²¹

¹⁸ G.A. Central Province to President, Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance Committee, 10 October 1912, SLNA, Kandy, 21489, Buddhist Temporalities - Wallahagoda Devalee Perahera.

¹⁹ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 325.

²⁰ Appendix II- The Gampola Perahera Case, D.R. Wijewardena Collection, Sinhalese Memorial. This ceremony is believed to 'control the element of water in the environment'. The *kapurala* (ritual priest) of the devale stands in a temporarily constructed structure in the river until an auspicious moment, when he 'cuts' into the water with a sword (to open the skies for rainfall), while lay participants of the procession bathe in the water that is believed to purify them. See Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (New Jersey, 1988), p. 166.

²¹ Desp. No. 1197/14, 17 August 1912, SLNA, Kandy, 21489.

Reflected in this statement is a resentment of the sense of entitlement that Indian Moors had to the space surrounding their mosque despite being relatively newer inhabitants of Gampola. Indian Moor behaviour is also clearly identified as different to that of Ceylon Moors. Furthermore, Indian Moors leveraged colonial legislation (the Police Ordinance) to restrict sound worship outside the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque. Saxton responded that a procession license would be issued on the basis that music would be stopped fifty yards on either side of the mosque, and that he ‘personally d[id] not see any hardship in the Buddhist [sic] in their processions being required to stop their tom-toms for a short distance, in order to show consideration for the religious feelings of other people’.²² This consideration for the religious feeling of Indian Moors appears to be that of a civil servant attempting to balance religious feelings on both sides, and taking a ‘secular’ decision. The Sinhala-Buddhists, by contrast, seem to have expected the government to play a more assertive and traditional role (previously played by the Kandyan monarchy) in protecting Buddhist rites, particularly given the safeguards enshrined in the 1815 Kandyan Convention.

Nevertheless, the Committee appear to have tried to be reasonable in their response. They reminded Saxton that ‘[f]ormerly the procession went at any time it wished but since this disturbance [in 1907] the time selected was one during which no service was held at the mosque, which was always before 12 noon’. The Committee President even pointed out the compromise by Ceylon Moors at the ‘Mekkan Sohonge’ (likely the Kahatapitiya Mosque), which allegedly did ‘not so much as hold its service in the day of the procession lest they disturb the Dewale [sic] procession.’²³ Finally, they argued that ‘the Buddhists never raise any objection to the Mohammedans taking their Pagodas and their Hobson Jobson [Muharram] festivals by the side

²² Desp. No. 21489, 27 August 1912, SLNA, Kandy, 21489.

²³ Desp. No. 1258/14, 2 September 1912, SLNA, Kandy, 21489.

of any Buddhist places of worship’, making an argument for equality before the law and mutual respect. Regardless, the Committee attempted compromise and were ‘prepared to take the procession at any time you fix even at a disadvantage to us, but we ask that we may not be deprived of the privilege granted and enjoyed by us for so long a time for the pleasure of a handful of Moors who had come and fixed a mosque of theirs by the side of a road which had been used from time immemorial as the route for the procession.’²⁴ The fact that it was a new mosque established by relatively recent arrivals to Gampola/Ceylon particularly rankled the Committee, who felt their longstanding traditions were disrespected. Yet, their appeals to the colonial state were denied, and the Committee instructed the Basnayake Nilame of the Devale to take the procession along another route to avoid the mosque.

The Basnayake Nilame, B. Ellekewela, initially agreed to take another route but eventually decided not to hold the procession. In July 1913, he instituted an action against the Government Agent in the District Court of Kandy.²⁵ The Gampola Perahera Case and the ill-feeling it generated among Kandyan elites is well-established in the historiography. However, perspectives from lay participants of the procession have not featured in the analysis although they reflect the sense of humiliation and indignity felt by certain Buddhists. For instance, the *Rankira Dawulkaaraya* (lead drummer) of the Wallahagoda Devale perahera noted ‘the Basnayake Nilame said we should go from a different road, but we didn’t like his suggestion to change our traditions... From the day this devale was built, our family have played drums for this procession.’²⁶ The pressure brought to bear on the Basnayake Nilame, importantly, came bottom-up. Dingi Raala, another participant in the perahera, claimed, ‘If we stop the drumming for any reason, the *deviyo* [gods] get angry. In the last 20 years, on no date have we stopped the

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Proctors Goonewardene and Wijegoodewardene to Attorney General, 23 July 1913, SLNA, Kandy, 21489.

²⁶ *Dinamina*, 14 May 1914.

drumming'.²⁷ Such claims reflect the supernatural dimension of such processions, and the religious semiotics of tom-tom beating as discussed in Chapter 1. The sacrality of the procession brought with it frightening repercussions for non-observance according to those who participated in it. There is no evidence the colonial authorities followed the Sinhala press on this issue, but even if they did, they were likely to have underestimated its relevance to Sinhala-Buddhist feelings. Considering Sinhala-Buddhist resistance to complying with the colonial decision, and while the matter was adjudicated in the Courts, the Wallahagoda Esala Perahera was not held for the years 1912, 1913 and 1914.

In June 1914, a Sinhalese Christian judge and eminent nationalist historian, Paul E. Pieris, held in favour of the Wallahagoda Devale.²⁸ In his judgment, he cited the protections guaranteed to Buddhist rites in the Kandyan Convention of 1815 as a binding and unalterable pact, and argued that the Government Agent's actions violated Sinhala-Buddhists' rights.²⁹ This verdict was received triumphantly by the Sinhala-Buddhists, and there is evidence that it emboldened Sinhala-Buddhists elsewhere – who were naturally following the Gampola Perahera case – to take action against the state. On 27 July 1914, for instance, Sinhala-Buddhists in Badulla called a meeting to 'consider steps to be taken to conduct the annual Perahera through its usual route past the Mohamedan Mosque, Bazaar Street, Badulla, according to ancient rites, in view of the G.A.'s order to conduct it past the Mosque without music and tom tom within 50 yards from it'.³⁰ At the meeting it was resolved to enforce Sinhala-Buddhists' rights 'by an action at law against the Crown' based on 'the provisions in the Kandyan Convention of 2nd March, 1815'.³¹

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Pieris authored major works on the Portuguese in Lanka, and, notably, was the organiser of the National Day celebrations of 1913. His Christianity did not interfere with his patriotism, and his education at Cambridge appears to have fostered his nationalist ideology. See James T. Rutnam, 'The Rev. A.G. Fraser and the riots of 1915', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 1/2 (1971), p. 183.

²⁹ Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law*, p. 4; court proceedings reported in *Hitavadi*, 8 July 1914.

³⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 30 July 1914.

³¹ *Ibid.*

However, the euphoria was short-lived. Anton Bertram, the Attorney General, appealed the verdict before the Supreme Court, which overturned Peiris' decision on 2 February 1915.

Roberts contends that the British could not politically afford to leave Peiris' verdict to stand as it could set a dangerous precedent in which other British legislation relating to the former Kandyan Kingdom could be challenged.³² The British Walter Shaw and Sinhalese Christian T.E. Sampayo were the two Supreme Judges presiding over the case.³³ Justice Shaw held that 'not...every local custom of particular towns or districts should for ever remain unaltered'.³⁴ He also argued that rights reserved by the Convention are 'now controlled and varied by the provisions of the Police and Local Boards Ordinances', reflecting the colonial belief that the Convention was *not* immutable but like any treaty, subject to interpretation by the government and judiciary.

The elation following the District verdict could only be matched by the despair following the Supreme Court verdict.³⁵ The editor of *Hitavadi* claimed 'a death blow has been struck on the Kandyan Convention'.³⁶ In response to the reversal of the Peiris judgment, the Buddhist Protection Association, which in the past helped to develop schools, applied to the Court to appeal to the Privy Council in England.³⁷ The application was granted and the Association prepared a fundraiser to appeal to the Privy Council in London.³⁸ Both Low-Country and Kandyan Sinhala-Buddhists were involved in this effort, although the editor of *Hitavadi* hinted

³² Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, pp. 173-174.

³³ Sampayo, unlike Peiris, was 'thoroughly ashamed' of Sinhalese nationalism, likening it to 'poison'. In this context, his support for the overturning of Peiris' verdict is not surprising. Rutnam, 'Rev. A.G. Fraser', p. 183.

³⁴ Basnayake Nilame v. the Attorney General (1915) 18 NLR 193, p. 197.

³⁵ 'Gampola Perahera Case Apall Vibhagaya' and 'Peraherakata baadhaa kiriimak', *Sinhala Jatiya*, 9 February 1915.

³⁶ *Hitavadi*, 24 February 1915.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 2 March and 3 April 1915.

³⁸ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 16 and 23 February 1915.

that the lowlanders showed more commitment and engagement.³⁹ In contrast to the coverage of the Supreme Court verdict in the Sinhala press, the Ceylon Moor press, namely the *Muslim Nesan* and *Islam Mittiran* did not report much on the Gampola Perahera case, suggesting that Ceylon Moors did not consider it a victory for *them* as they were distinct from the Indian Moors.

The perception that the Kandyan Convention had been violated was exacerbated a few weeks later in the context of the centenary of its signing on 2 March 1915. The state's failure to abide by what was understood as the colonial settlement a century before undoubtedly stirred nationalist sentiment.⁴⁰ In the past, perceived violations of the Kandyan 'contract' had resulted in violence. For example, the rebellions of 1817-1818 and 1848 were due – at least in part – to the perception that the British were reneging on their promises made in the Kandyan Convention. In May 1815, shortly after the Convention was signed, temples in Kataragama were found to be plundered by the British, rather than protected. Kataragama eventually became a 'critical site for the rebellion that followed'.⁴¹ The state's renewed pledges to abide by the Convention following the 1848 rebellion (see Chapter 1) led to a period of relative stability between the coloniser and colonised Buddhists.⁴² In March 1915, just weeks after the Supreme Court verdict, nationalist sentiment in connection with the terms of the Convention soared. A flurry of articles, including one lamenting 'The Day of the Loss of our National Independence', were published to commemorate the occasion.⁴³ Anagarika Dharmapala's editorial on the 'Awakening of the Ceylonese' in *Sinhala Bauddhya* observed that, while over the last 25 years Sinhala-Buddhists had developed a sense of patriotic awareness, the previous few months had

³⁹ *Hitavadi*, 21 April 1915.

⁴⁰ Blackton, 'Action Phase', p. 235.

⁴¹ Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Cosmopolitanism and indigeneity in four violent years: the fall of the kingdom of Kandy and the Great Rebellion revisited' in Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds.) *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017), p. 199.

⁴² Rogers suggests that the resurgence in nationalist sentiment related to the new formation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. See Rogers, *Crime, Justice, and Society*, p. 158.

⁴³ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 2 March 1915.

been crucial in giving them a greater consciousness regarding their race and religion.⁴⁴ The government, by contrast, appeared woefully detached from the pulse of the people. It marked the occasion with the presentation of a *pintaliya* (water container for pilgrims) to the people of Kandy.⁴⁵ The Governor's address reflected the chasm between colonials and subjects: 'A hundred years have proved the wisdom of their [colonial] action, and have been fruitful in promoting the general welfare of the Kandyan peoples.'⁴⁶

The following month in April 1915, National Day – which was first observed at the same time as Sinhala and Tamil New Year in 1913 in Colombo and Kandy – was celebrated more widely across the island. In 1913, mostly Sinhala-Buddhists and (Anglican) Christians participated in National Day celebrations, and they encouraged Catholics and Hindus to join in 1914. Notably, one contributor to *Lakminipahana* argued that 'if it is a celebration of nationalism, there is no necessity for Mohammedans to join'.⁴⁷ No explicit reason for their exclusion was provided. The idea that Moors (in general) stood outside the emerging concept of the 'nation' seems to have spread by National Day in 1915. There is no record of Moors participating in these celebrations, which were also observed in Galle, Katugastota, Panadura and Chilaw.⁴⁸ The Colombo celebration at Victoria Park was addressed by elite Sinhalese leaders like F.R. Senanayake and H.L. de Mel, and attracted an audience of 20,000.⁴⁹ These celebrations, which were tinged with anti-colonial expression, are likely to have been observed by the British with some trepidation, but were allowed to go ahead unhindered. In these months, there was substantial anti-Moor propaganda in popular publications such as the *Sinhala Baudhdya* and the *Sinhala Jatiya*.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 205.

⁴⁶ 'Report of G.A. Central Province' *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1915* (Colombo, 1916), p. B1.

⁴⁷ *Lakminipahana*, 25 April 1914.

⁴⁸ Diary of Government Agent, Central Province, C.S. Vaughan, 13 April 1915, SLNA, Lot 18/46. The *Muslim Nesan* paper published on 15 April makes no mention of National Day but announced the auspicious times for the New Year, which started at 3pm on 13 April.

⁴⁹ Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 2 March 1915.

However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the state was not monitoring the vernacular press in any serious way. In fact, it was only during the Police Inquiry Commission's investigations that the Criminal Investigation Department 'received evidence as to the existence of newspaper articles in the vernacular press and of societies in the villages, the tone and objective of which were most mischievous.'⁵¹ Meanwhile, Temperance association and other society meetings continued to take place and discussed the upcoming Vesak festival. For example, the Kithulgala Enlightenment Society met on 28 April to discuss the route their Vesak carol cart would take.⁵² It also discussed the use of sound worship from morning until evening, Dhamma preaching at night, and carol singing until dawn.⁵³ Such plans were typical of celebrations of Vesak, in Kithulgala, as in Kandy. In Kandy, however, these plans would be disrupted by Indian Moors.

B. Vesak Perahera

In the weeks leading up to the Vesak Perahera in Kandy, Indian Moors had already obstructed another procession. As described in Chapter 1, on 4 May 1915, Hanafite Indian Moors from the Castle Hill Street (CHS) Mosque had attacked a Hindu procession. According to Perumal Kangany, a Hindu who had obtained a license for the procession:

[At] about 4.30pm, when the procession came to the Castle Hill Street – King Street Junction some Coast Moors and Afghans who were congregated in the street near the newly erected mosque in Castle Hill Street (apparently by design) attacked one of Karavam carriers...and threatened to assault the members of the procession. The procession thereupon took another route and after parading certain streets came to Trincomalie Street and on nearing the Mosque at King Street-Trincomalie Street junction, was met by a large crowd of Pathans and Coast Moormen who began throwing stones on the procession party besides attacking with sticks [sic].⁵⁴

⁵¹ PIC, SLNA, p. viii.

⁵² Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 14.

⁵³ *Hitavadi*, 26 May 1915.

⁵⁴ Appendix III – Riots in Kandy, Affidavit of Perumal Kangany, 9 November 1915, D.R. Wijewardene Collection, Sinhalese Memorial.

This aggression towards Hindus, despite the latter bearing a license, may have been a consequence of the Supreme Court verdict, which possibly encouraged Indian Moors to express their intolerance of sound worship in the vicinity of their mosques (as Ceylon Moors had done in the Balangoda Riot in March 1915). It would certainly have left an impression on the Hindus of Kandy, who later turned on Indian Moors during the pogrom.



Figure 1: Castle Hill Street Mosque, circa 1905

Figure 1 above is an earlier photograph of the CHS Mosque, towering above the boutiques surrounding it. Indian Moor traders originally built the mosque in the early 1890s, and much of the boutiques on the same side of the road appear to have been owned by Moors.⁵⁵ In addition to attacking the Hindu procession, these Indian Moors ‘tried to prevent the Buddhists from erecting an alms hall on a vacant Municipal site which they had used for many years past for

⁵⁵ Ameer Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 19.

this purpose on the Wesak Day.’⁵⁶ This was on the grounds that ‘they were likely to suffer loss in their trade’. Paulu Fernando of Kandy, who applied for a permit to build a temporary alms shed, claimed that ‘these [Moor] traders rather than being losers were likely to be benefited by reason of this alms shed drawing an unusually large number to the locality who were likely to patronise the boutiques of the Moors. I verily believe therefore that the objection was intended to vex and annoy the Buddhists’.⁵⁷ In the end, the Sinhala-Buddhists paid compensation to the Moors to erect their alms sheds. They appear to have accommodated the Indian Moors in the lead up to the Vesak Perahera.

An article published in *Sinhala Bauddhya* a day before the Vesak Perahera described the significance of Vesak and its traditions, and the role played by Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala in getting the state to declare it a national holiday (there was no mention of the role played by Olcott in a Sinhalesed-retelling of this process).⁵⁸ The author claimed that for Sinhala-Buddhists there was no more special a day in the year than Vesak. There was nothing political in the article, however, and no mention of the Gampola Perahera Case or potential tensions over the procession route.

Inexplicably, between 4 May 1915 (the day on which the attack on the Hindu procession took place) and 20 May 1915, the state had changed the terms of procession licenses. For instance, on the procession form granted to S. Sivapramam on 20 May for a procession from Kataragama Devale on 27 May 1915, a new clause specifically added that ‘all noise and music must be

⁵⁶ Affidavit of Paulu Fernando, 7 November 1915, D.R. Wijewardene Collection, Sinhalese Memorial.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 27 May 1915.

stopped within 100 yards of a mosque'.⁵⁹ The colonial logic behind this change has not survived (perhaps intentionally) in the colonial archive: why did the police add this new clause?

Despite violence in early May 1915 instigated by Indian Moors against Hindus, the state changed the language of the procession license to specify the silencing of music near 'mosques' rather than 'places of worship' more generally. No historian has speculated on why this was the case. Perhaps there was an unspoken calculation that appeasing Indian Moors – who had potentially strong links with Indian Muslims – was important against the backdrop of the First World War. This angle is explored further in Chapter 5. Was there a campaign by influential Indian Moor traders, as in the case in Gampola 1907, when the Government Agent chose not to 'disturb' the primary traders in town (Chapter 1)? Or was there an overriding state concern to maintain stability in terms of the religious peace (which had previously turned violent) particularly in the context of the First World War raging in the background beyond Ceylon? It is likely to have been a combination of both, together with colonial antagonism towards sound worship and an overzealous application of the law. I discuss the colonial logic and decision-making in the next chapter, and do not investigate it further here.

According to certain processionists, 'it would be practically impossible in a small town like Kandy with so many places of worship belonging to different faiths to enforce the hundred yards rule during all hours of day and night' (see Figure 2). For scale, the CHS Mosque is 20 feet across the road from Salgado's bakery (that is discussed further below).

⁵⁹ Appendix III- (B) Ceylon Police, Procession Form 27 May 1915, D.R. Wijewardene Collection, Sinhalese Memorial.



Figure 2: Re-drawn map of Kandy circa 1915 showing certain places of worship by the author and Thilini Perera (2021)

Nevertheless, the Vesak Perahera went ahead on the evening of 28 May ‘without disturbance’.⁶⁰ The events that followed have typically been discussed using second-hand sources, including Ramanathan’s book and the Diary of the Director of Agriculture, R. N. Lyne, who was not present at the scene.⁶¹ Although first-hand accounts of the trigger event have been discussed in the historiography, they have not been read alongside Ramanathan’s narrative that has created an alternative version of the event.⁶² This chapter attempts to reconstruct the fateful events of

⁶⁰ SLNA, Diary of Government Agent, Central Province, Vaughan, 28 May 1915.

⁶¹ Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 16.

⁶² Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. vii.

28 and 29 May in granular detail to highlight who cast the first stone and why, and the scale of the violence that was then unleashed.⁶³ It relies on the sworn testimony of Inspector Felix T. Coore, the senior policeman on the ground when the violence erupted.⁶⁴ I also cross-check this narrative with the reportage in the Sinhala press in the following days, to identify whether Coore's narrative is disputed by contemporaries.

After the central Perahera was completed, processionists planned to take carol carts through the town, in a customary act of devotion that dated back at least 25 years.⁶⁵ They applied for two carol licenses for later that evening, including permission to go and 'sing opposite Salgado's bakery, which is practically opposite the Mosque'.⁶⁶ Merennege Mathes Salgado was a Low-Country Sinhalese originally from Panadura, who had made his money in arrack. He established his bakery on Castle Hill Street (as shown in Figure 2) in 1886.⁶⁷ Like the Indian Moors, he was a recent migrant to Kandy, and his bakery was a new establishment that reflected an inflow of capital from non-local traders.⁶⁸ As a significant benefactor of Buddhism in Kandy, Salgado was granted the honour of having carol parties sing outside his bakery on the night of the Vesak Perahera.⁶⁹ It is likely that public merit-making (by supporting Buddhism financially) was partially aimed at buying respectability, and countering the unmeritorious (and indeed, un-Buddhist) associations with being an arrack merchant. The carol parties were granted permission by Superintendent of Police C.L. Tranchell to sing after midnight, by which time there was assumed to be no worship services on at the CHS Mosque. Inspector Coore and three constables were on duty at Castle Hill Street to 'see that no disturbance occurred' there,

⁶³ Ali correctly identifies that 'Buddhists attacked the mosque'. Ali, '1915 Racial Riots', p. 1.

⁶⁴ As there was no clarification about his religion at the time of his oath as in the cases of Buddhists, it can be assumed Coore was a Sinhalese Christian.

⁶⁵ Appendix III (c)(1), Evidence of E.L. Wijegoonawardane, 9 November 1915, DRWC, Sinhalese Memorial.

⁶⁶ Appendix III (b), Evidence of Police Inspector F.T. Coore, 29 May 1915, DRWC, Sinhalese Memorial.

⁶⁷ Jayawardena, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ This is a clear example of socio-economic change and rivalry in a growing town like Kandy.

⁶⁹ DRWC, Evidence of E.L. Wijegoonawardane.

‘especially near the mosque’.⁷⁰ When a carol party arrived at the junction of King Street and Castle Hill Street at about 11pm, he asked them to ‘stop singing and music as they were within 100 yards of the mosque and people were in the Mosque’. The music was stopped, but the people following the carol party ‘began shouting and making noise up to the junction of Colombo Street and Castle Hill Street...I remained opposite the mosque and allowed none to come close...the carol party passed quietly, that is to say, not making music, but shouting with the others.’ In this precursor to the event, the Sinhala-Buddhists obeyed the law by refraining from playing music, but emotions were running high.

The two photographs below are not of the Vesak Perahera in May 1915; unfortunately, no photographic evidence has survived into the archives. However, these photographs feature the Esala Perahera, in around 1900 and again in 1910, passing through many of the roads that the Vesak Perahera and the carol carts would have passed through. For example, Figure 3 features King Street, which is perpendicular to Castle Hill Street and the scene of much commotion in 1915. Importantly, Figure 4 shows the extent to which Perahera crowds would have dominated the streets, and highlights how completely overwhelmed the handful of policemen (and Moors) on the night would have been.

⁷⁰ DRWC, Evidence of Inspector Coore.



Figure 3: Kandy Perahara, a Procession on Elephants carried through by the Kandyan Chiefs, circa 1900



Figure 4: Esala Perahera procession in Kandy, circa 1910

Two and a half hours later, at around 1.30am, the two carol parties that were to sing at Salgado's bakery approached Castle Hill Street. When they were about 200 yards away from the Mosque, Coore warned the representatives of the carol parties not to allow shouting and yelling (that was accompanying the permitted music). As he did so, he 'saw two Sinhalese chasing and beating a Moorman. I arrested and sent them to the Police Station'.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the carts were only about 100 yards away from the mosque by this point, at which time Coore ordered the music be stopped. Two Sinhala-Buddhists, E.L. Wijegoonawardane and P.B. Ratnayake asked Coore to allow the carts to go to Salgado's bakery, and they assured him there would be no disturbance. Coore responded that he would not allow it unless they cleared 'the whole crowd beyond the Junction', which he estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000 people. This number can also be contrasted with the estimated 50 Indian Moors gathered at the mosque.⁷² Wijegoonawardane and Ratnayake were unable to clear the crowd, so Coore suggested diverting one carol cart 'round King Street to Katukelle to draw some of the crowd'. In this diversion of some of the crowd (which is likely to have angered those who believed the permission license was all that was required to sing), Coore 'tried to turn back the remaining cart'. This second cart 'made a curve to the right, as if turning round.' At this point, Indian Moors at the CHS Mosque yelled out 'hoo, ha, ho', hooting and jeering at the Sinhala-Buddhists, in a way that 'mimic[ked] the Sinhalese cries of just before'.⁷³ The second cart that Coore thought he had turned away 'did not turn completely about but was sideway on'. Meanwhile, the first cart that he thought had been sent away 'rushed from King Street to Castle Hill Street and passed the stationary cart'. Coore's effort to stop it was in vain and the crowd of many thousands followed the cart. The cart that had stood stationary sideways now followed the crowd. Coore ran in front to stop the carts and was almost opposite the mosque 'when a hail of stones came all over the place into

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 15.

⁷³ DRWC, Evidence of Inspector Coore.

buildings, several fell among the Moors standing on the steps'. These stones were likely thrown by the Sinhala-Buddhists as they seemed aimed at buildings occupied by Moors.

This is a crucial narrative that contests Ramanathan's claim that 'a number of stones and empty bottles fell on the [Sinhala-Buddhist] people, hurled from the upper storeys of two boutiques near the mosque and from the platform of the mosque'.⁷⁴ In Ramanathan's narrative, Indian Moors from the mosque and their boutiques attacked the Sinhala-Buddhists with stones first, whereas in Coore's narrative, himself and Indian Moors were attacked with stones by the Sinhala-Buddhists. Ramanathan, as highlighted previously, was not in the country and his record is second-hand at best (although he was unlikely to have spoken to the rioters who were on the scene). He is likely to have got this narrative from the 'Sinhalese Memorial' document that was prepared in September 1915. The Sinhalese Memorial contained, 'It would appear that just then the Coast Moors jeered and hooted, and the ignorant classes of Buddhists, assembled on the spot, got exasperated and rushed forward. The Muhammedans threw stones on the advancing crowd'.⁷⁵ Once again, language like 'ignorant classes' suggests an attempt to distance the elites involved in preparing the Memorial from the violence that ensued. It is also likely that they tried to cast blame on the Indian Moors for escalating the episode by throwing stones. In that context, overall, Coore's testimony appears to be the more reliable one (Ramanathan notes that, in fact, 'during all this disturbance there were no more than one Inspector and six constables' on the scene').⁷⁶ Indeed, the Sinhala newspaper *Dinamina* published on 31 May 1915 reported, 'there were two carol groups chanting praises of the Buddha. Another group of people followed them, and at around midnight when stones were

⁷⁴ Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law*, pp. 7-8. Other scholars like Ameer Ali provide the correct chronology of events without highlighting Ramanathan's misrepresentation of the chronology and the distortion it may have caused to decades of public understanding of the pogrom.

⁷⁵ DRWC, Sinhalese Memorial, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law*, p. 8.

thrown there was a great commotion among the crowd'.⁷⁷ This Sinhala newspaper's reportage did not contradict Coore's testimony by blaming the Indian Moors for casting the first stones; instead the phrasing as to who threw stones is ambiguous.⁷⁸ The English *Times of Ceylon* narrative by contrast overtly blamed the Sinhala-Buddhists: 'all went well till about 1.40...where the carol party attacked a Tamby's boutique. Meanwhile the other carol party came on the scene and joined forces, when it is alleged that the Mohammedans threw stones at the Buddhists'. Despite this slight difference, the initial violent aggressors (as hooting is not tantamount to violence) were the Sinhalese.⁷⁹

Coore then 'received one stone on my temple (shows swelling and wound)', before noting that in response to the Sinhala-Buddhist attack, 'I saw bottles being thrown into the crowd below from two upstairs houses on either side of the road belonging to Moormen'.⁸⁰ Unable to control the crowd, Coore ran to the 'the Club' some metres away to inform the Superintendent. More constables arrived on the scene while he was away. When Coore returned to the scene after several rioters had been arrested, he noted that 'Twenty-five boutiques were broken into, property removed, windows, doors, furniture, etc., smashed and goods thrown out into the street. The mosques at Trincomalie Street, King Street and Castle Hill Street had been rushed and damage done to them all.'⁸¹ Importantly, in those early hours of 29 May, some Afghans who also worshipped at the Castle Hill Street mosque were also attacked due to their presence at the mosque.⁸² However, there is no record of Afghans experiencing violence in the days that followed.⁸³ The next morning, Government Agent Vaughan described the damage to the CHS

⁷⁷ 'Venath samuuhayodha e passe gamankaloya madhyama raathri kaalayedhi gal-geseema hatagathvita samuhayaa athara mahath kelambeemak ethiviya'. *Dinamina*, 31 May 1915.

⁷⁸ *Times of Ceylon*, 29 May 1915.

⁷⁹ Hooting as a signal of victory may have deeply humiliated the Sinhalese.

⁸⁰ DRWC, Evidence of Inspector Coore.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² SLNA, Diary of Government Agent Vaughan, 4-5 August 1915. Afghans in Kandy cited their victimhood at the CHS Mosque attack as a means of avoiding Riot Compensation payments after the pogrom ended.

⁸³ De Souza, *Hundred Days*, p. 28.

Mosque: ‘doors, windows, screens, and lamps smashed, and the floor littered with broken glass, clubs, pieces of iron piping, and stones. The stones were of a large size, and must have been brought from a distance’. Tranchell appears to suggest that the violence was pre-planned if the carol party crowd had with them stones not typically found on Castle Hill Street.⁸⁴ Yet he does not provide any evidence to back this claim, and it cannot be taken as proof that there was a conspiracy behind the attack. For much of the next day, 29 May, there was quiet. That the initial ‘riot’ resembled the episodes of religious violence in Chapter 1 is reflected in Reverend Fraser of Trinity College’s pamphlet regarding his first-hand experience of the pogrom. He observed that in the ‘riot’ (Fraser’s term) on the morning of the 29th, ‘none of us felt much sympathy for the Moors or any indignation against the Sinhalese. No one had been killed or hurt, and the Moors had brought the attack on themselves, by their religious intolerance’.⁸⁵ Colonial actors clearly did not make much of the initial violence and dismissed it as yet another ‘riot’. Fraser would go on to give evidence to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies and became embroiled in a public debate with E.W. Perera on whether the pogrom was an organised Sinhala-Buddhist conspiracy or not.⁸⁶

In November 1915, Fraser gave evidence before the PIC that he did not see ‘any definite pre-organisation’ of the pogrom. Then in 1917, in a letter to D.B. Jayathilaka (a Sinhalese nationalist defender of the Sinhalese unjustly imprisoned during martial law), Fraser wrote ‘there was in my opinion no doubt that the riots were organised in advance’.⁸⁷ He eventually declared in 1921 that his only position on the origins of the pogrom was that it was caused due to ‘religion’ and ‘economics’ and that he did not blame the Sinhalese. Fraser’s repeated shifts in opinion reflect the unreliability of colonial testimony in analysing the degree to which there

⁸⁴ It is not clear how far away such stones would have come from.

⁸⁵ James Rutnam, ‘Rev. A.G. Fraser’, p. 190.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-182.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 158 and 155.

was organisation behind the pogrom.⁸⁸ Crucially, George Rowell does not engage with this debate nor with James Rutnam's article which highlights the ambivalence of colonial actors in claiming there was pre-organisation/conspiracy, when Rowell claims there is evidence that the pogrom was pre-planned. Rather than using vernacular sources (to any significant degree), Rowell relies on the records of colonial actors or indigenous government appointees that may have been co-opted by the state. These sources ranged from the unreliable (such as IGP Dowbiggin's record of inflammatory anti-Moor speeches made at *samāgam* without reference to how he obtained it) to the unrealistic. An example of unrealistic testimony is the claim by the Kandy Kacheri Mudaliyar (a co-opted government appointee) that he was old acquaintances with a Wanawahala 'rowdy' from near Colombo, and that such a rowdy informed him, a government official (!) that they had travelled to Kandy 'especially to see the [CHS] mosque being broken' and were to return home after meeting their objective. Given that both class and caste distinctions were firmly upheld in Kandyan society and among government appointees, it is unbelievable that this Mudaliyar maintained such amicable links with a 'thug' from Colombo.⁸⁹ Thus, Rowell's sources used to claim there was pre-planning and organisation of a pogrom *prior* to the events of 29 May 1915 are problematic.

My position leans on the theoretical argument by Donald Horowitz, who writes generally about riots/pogroms rather than with reference to Ceylon in 1915. I believe the hours between the end of the initial 'riot' at 4am, and 8pm that same evening represented the 'lull' Donald Horowitz theorises. The lull is the crucial period between a 'precipitating event' and the time at which its impact is 'felt and forces are mobilised for the assault'.⁹⁰ He observes that 'the lull is a time for precautions by the authorities and for organisation by the initiators'.⁹¹ It appears that the hours

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸⁹ Rowell, 'Ceylon's Kristallnacht', p. 631.

⁹⁰ Donald Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Delhi, 2002), p. 89.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

between around 4am and 8pm that evening was the lull in which Sinhalese mobs amassed, during which time the state did not appear to expect further violence.⁹² I accordingly challenge George Rowell's thesis that there was a pre-planned conspiracy for an attack against the Moors *prior* to events of 29 May; in fact it seems more likely that any orchestration that occurred took place during this lull. Horowitz argues that 'the fact that the lull is generally a very brief interval suggests that most riots are the improvised work of ephemeral leadership that rises to the occasion'. In the case of the 1915 anti-Moor pogrom, I would argue that the violence that followed *was* improvised, rather than part of a pre-planned conspiracy, as believed by certain contemporaries and scholars.⁹³

Indeed, violence broke out once again at Colombo Street (near the CHS Mosque) after nightfall on 29 May.⁹⁴ By this time, a growing number of Sinhalese thronged the streets in mobs.⁹⁵ Superintendent Tranchell and a sergeant failed to disperse a crowd of around 200 men armed with knives and clubs.⁹⁶ The mobs had gathered in response to 'rumours that the Moors were planning attacks on the Sinhalese'.⁹⁷ There may have been some truth to these rumours, as that evening, according to E.L. Wijegoonawardane, Moors 'threw stones at the stores of one Mr. W.B. Soysa, in Colombo Street'.⁹⁸ Yet this gathering of mobs escalated tensions in Colombo Street, from where Tranchell and his sergeant had fled under a 'shower of stones and sticks [that] were thrown at [them]'.⁹⁹ In the absence of any police presence, an Indian Moor shot at an 18-year old Sinhalese boy named Kira (who died en route to hospital) from the upstairs of a

⁹² As far as the state was concerned, the violence outside the CHS Mosque was yet another episode of communal disturbances during processions.

⁹³ Rowell, 'Ceylon's Kristallnacht', pp. 619-648.

⁹⁴ SLNA, Diary of Government Agent Vaughan, 29 May 1915.

⁹⁵ Appendix III – Affidavit of D.E. Weerasooria, 11 Nov 1915, DRWC, Sinhalese Memorial.

⁹⁶ Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 18.

⁹⁷ DRWC, Evidence of E.L. Wijegoonawardane.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 18.

boutique.¹⁰⁰ It is not clear from the evidence whether this Moor shot down at the mob in response to the fact that ‘shops were broken into, goods were taken and set on fire in the street’, as reported in *Dinamina*.¹⁰¹ This Sinhala newspaper suggests that *after* the assault on Moor shops, ‘a Sinhalese man was shot dead’. It is likely that the Indian Moor lived in one of these upstairs houses above his own boutique, as seen in Figure 5 below. It may be assumed that the shooting was somewhat defensive if his home or boutique was under attack by these mobs, and that the shooting further escalated the violence.

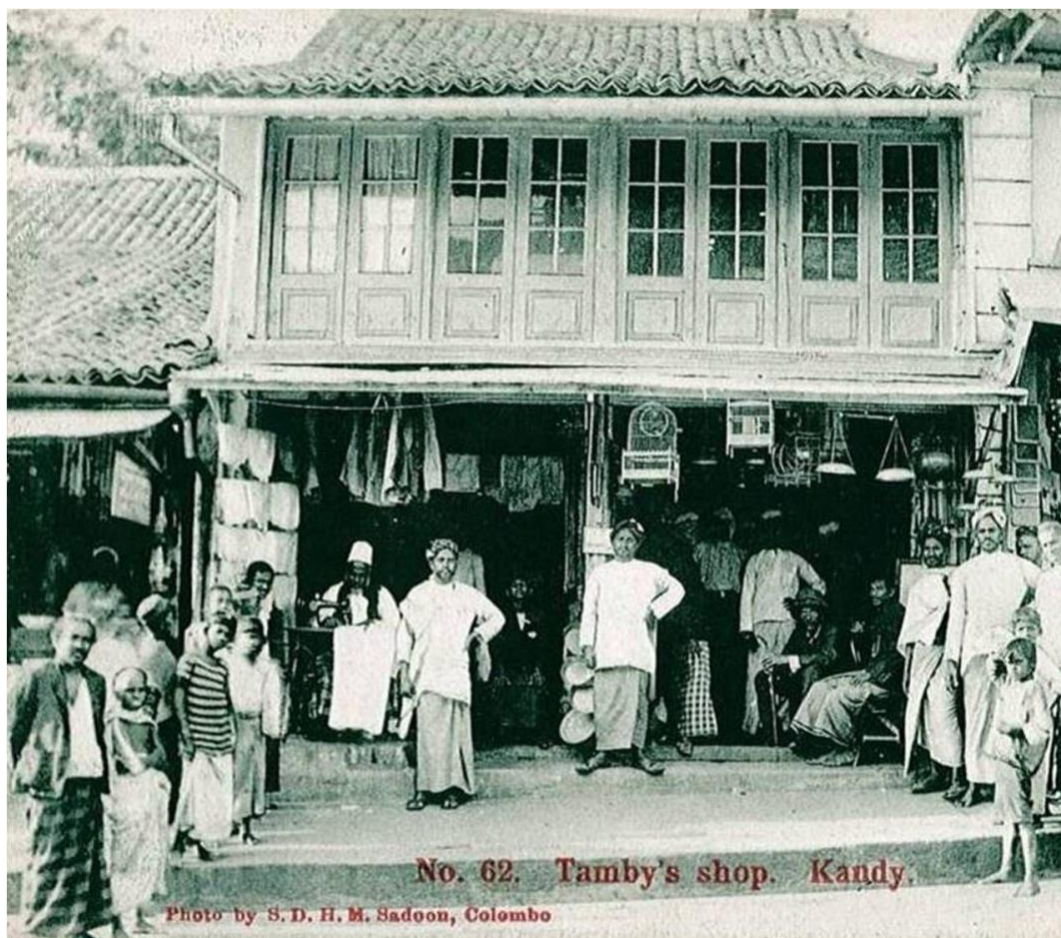


Figure 5: Tamby's shop, Kandy, circa 1905

¹⁰⁰ *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 1 June 1915.

¹⁰¹ *Dinamina*, 31 May 1915.

C. Moor Experiences during the Pogrom

The following day, on 30 May, a Moor stabbed a Sinhalese government clerk near Mahaiyawa.¹⁰² Immediately after the stabbing, Sinhalese mobs near the Town Hall ‘broke loose’ and four men were killed.¹⁰³ There is no breakdown of the identities of the victims, except that they included both Sinhalese and Moors. From this point onwards, it becomes difficult – for both the colonial state and the historian – to keep track of the death toll and the identity of victims as such monitoring does not appear to have been a priority.¹⁰⁴ Back at Hill Street (near Castle Hill Street), another Sinhalese mob had killed a Moor and injured a Moor priest at the ‘Hill Street Mosque’, which is presumably the Meera Makkan Mosque.¹⁰⁵ This mosque was a Sufi mosque worshipped at by Moors; the violence done to a Sufi mosque and priest has not previously been acknowledged in the historiography. Elsewhere and overnight, ‘shops in the town were vandalised and set on fire’.¹⁰⁶ Anti-Moor violence, however, was no longer confined to Kandy. Rioting had already spread away from Kandy town to Getambe, three miles out on Peradeniya Road where police ‘found bonfires burning in the road’.¹⁰⁷ Rumours, as scholar A.P. Kannangara observed, fuelled a lot of the violence during the pogrom.¹⁰⁸ The scope of the rumours ranged from the local to the national: for example, Vaughan had to give evidence in police court that he did *not* give instructions that Moors were to be expelled from Ceylon!¹⁰⁹ This rumour, prior to it being refuted, may have encouraged Sinhalese to attack Moors with the false assumption that their actions were approved of by the state. I discuss similar rumours further in Chapter 5. On 31 May, a cry rang out ‘that the Temple of the Tooth [Maligawa] was

¹⁰² DRWC, Affidavit of E.L. Wijegoonawardane. No motivation is suggested in any of the sources.

¹⁰³ DRWC, Affidavit of D.E. Weerasooria.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the difficulty in calculating death tolls in such types of violence, and why official death tolls tend to be unrealistically low, see Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ SLNA, Diary of Government Agent Vaughan, 30 May 1915.

¹⁰⁶ *Dinamina*, 31 May 1915.

¹⁰⁷ SLNA, Diary of Government Agent Vaughan, 29 May 1915.

¹⁰⁸ Kannangara, ‘The Riots of 1915’, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ SLNA, Diary of Government Agent Vaughan, 7 June 1915.

being broken by Moors which drew a large crowd of Sinhalese to defend the Maligawa'.¹¹⁰ This was fictitious but highly evocative and would have triggered a belief that the Sinhalese had to protect Buddhism because the colonial state no longer did. At the more local level rumours were carried by men, on bicycles, who instigated fear and organised anti-Moor violence.¹¹¹ While the Sinhalese, originally gathered for Vesak, were the primary perpetrators of violence, it is worth noting that around 70 people arrested for rioting in Kandy were Tamils.¹¹² The participation of Tamils, who may have been Hindu, may have been a spontaneous outburst against Indian Moors who had earlier that month obstructed their procession to the Kataragama Devale. By the second day of rioting, an exodus of Moors from Kandy began. D.E. Weerasooria, a Buddhist proctor of the Supreme Court reported that by 30 May Indian Moors were 'in great fear, apprehensive of an attack by the Sinhalese mob', and some were 'anxious to leave Kandy'.¹¹³ Indian Moor families were loaded onto trains and many headed for India via Thalaimannar.¹¹⁴ They went to ship agents to get tickets to travel from Colombo to India through Thuththukudy; 100 managed to get tickets to travel in the top deck of the ship on 7 June for example.¹¹⁵ The exodus of Moors can be assumed thus to be in their many hundreds. Those who did not have the option of fleeing to India remained in temporary shelters in Kandy, such as in the Town Hall. Private efforts increased; Trinity College Kandy, under the direction of Reverend Fraser, housed over 300 people.¹¹⁶ Others still left for Colombo, where thatched huts and sanitary facilities were organised as temporary shelters for Moors fleeing the upcountry.¹¹⁷ The pogrom had begun in earnest.

¹¹⁰ DRWC, Affidavit of E.L. Wijegoonawardane. Rumours surrounding the destruction of other places of worship by Moors were effective in convening, for example, Catholics in Wattala who rang their church bells and gathered to defend churches. See Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 39. For more on how rumours form an 'essential' component of pogroms, see Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, pp. 74-82.

¹¹¹ Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern*, p. 116. Wickramasinghe cites Ramanathan's book as her source.

¹¹² Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 265.

¹¹³ DRWC, Affidavit of D.E. Weerasooria.

¹¹⁴ *Dinamina*, 2 June 1915.

¹¹⁵ *Muslim Nesan*, 8 June 1915.

¹¹⁶ *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 2 June 1915.

¹¹⁷ *Muslim Nesan*, 8 June 1915.

Curiously, the *Muslim Nesan* papers for both 29 May and 30 May do not report on the violence that erupted in Kandy. The 29 May paper had probably already been sent for printing at the time the violence broke out (Figure 6).¹¹⁸ However, by that evening, news would have reached Colombo. It is indeed a glaring oddity that the 30 May newspaper did not cover such news – perhaps a reflection of just how distinct from Indian Moors the Ceylon Moors at *Muslim Nesan* saw themselves. The attack on Indian Moors, still limited to the violence in Kandy by the end of the day on the 29th (at which time the paper for the 30th would have gone to print), was not deemed worthy of coverage for Ceylon Moors. It is possible that there were more sheets to this newspaper that did not survive into the colonial archive, which may have only preserved the front page (however, the editor’s name and publication details appear at the bottom of each paper, which suggests that is the end of the paper).

¹¹⁸ Figure 6 reveals the poor condition the *Muslim Nesan* newspaper, held at the SLNA, is currently in. Volume 1 of the *Muslim Nesan* 1915 (January-June) is badly damaged and not accessible to the public. By accident, on 23 May 2019, I was served Volume 1 along with Volume 2 (July-December) at the archives, and managed to photograph it. My photographs remain the only (accessible) evidence of how *Muslim Nesan* reported the 1915 pogrom.

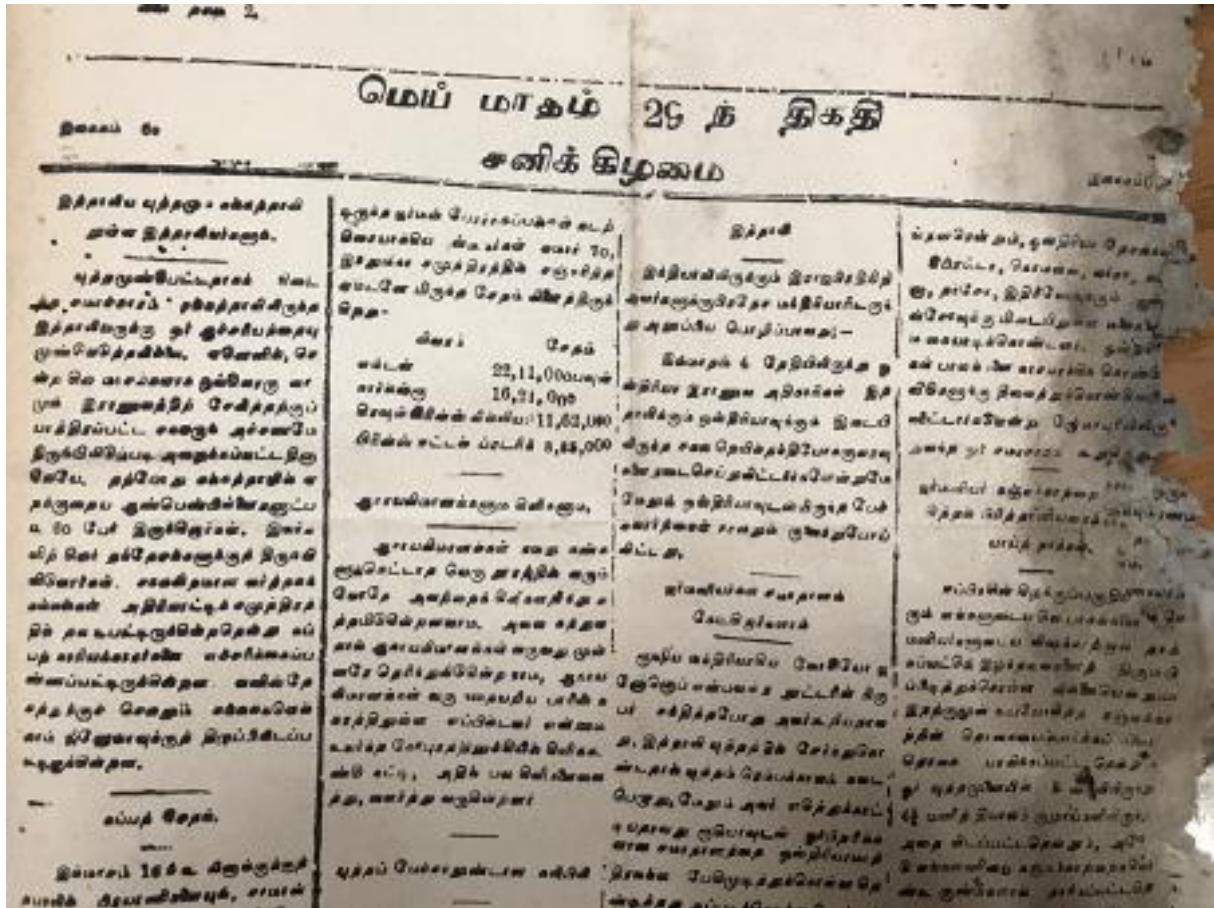


Figure 6: Muslim Nesan, 29 May 1915

Despite a slow response to the pogrom, on 31 May, however, *Muslim Nesan* began reporting on the “Kandy riot” (*kalaham*).¹¹⁹ The reportage reveals a real sense of surprise at the attacks against the Moors, and the disconnect between the Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors due to the former’s lack of awareness of rising tensions between Indian Moors and Sinhala-Buddhists over processions. Rather strangely, the rest of its column space remained dedicated to covering the First World War. The violence may have reached Pettah where the *Muslim Nesan* office was located by 31 May because there were no newspapers printed between 1 and 6 June. On 7 June, the paper covered the ‘Colombo uprising’, which it claimed had begun to settle by this date. Over the following month, the newspaper covered the looting of shops, injuries and hospitalisations, and the police response to the violence.

¹¹⁹ *Muslim Nesan*, 31 May 1915.

The fate of the other leading Moor newspaper, *Islam Mittiran*, is clearer. On 1 June, when Pettah was ablaze with violence, the office of *Islam Mittiran* was broken into at around 5.30pm.¹²⁰ The rioters broke or removed all the printing machines and typewriters, temporarily affecting the publication of that paper between 2 June and 16 June.¹²¹ They also broke open a cupboard and looted books, money, clocks and clothing items, suggesting it was both an act of criminality and silencing the Moor press. When *Islam Mittiran* resumed publications, editorials referred repeatedly to the ‘atrocities’ (*koduncheigaikal*) committed by ‘mobs’.¹²²

Indeed, violence did reach Colombo in the Western Province by 31 May, catalysed by news from Kandy but also a localised quarrel at a Moor-owned teashop frequented by railway workers.¹²³ Kumari Jayawardena analyses the role of the working class together with the unemployed and urban poor specifically in this violence in Colombo.¹²⁴ Her claim that the rioting, led by these groups, could be compared with ‘mob activity rather than religious rioting’ was however dismissed by Michael Roberts for bypassing data in literature by P.V.J. Jayasekera and Roberts, and reducing the agency of assailants to mere clients of elite businessmen.¹²⁵ Roberts, instead, emphasises the participation of broader swathes of the population, identifying at least 28 different types of occupational backgrounds of Sinhalese stirrers/assailants/looters in the pogrom, including businessmen, notaries, teachers, traders, landed proprietors, monks, and headmen.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ *Islam Mittiran*, 16 June 1915.

¹²¹ *Muslim Nesan*, 9 June 1915.

¹²² *Islam Mittiran*, 23 June 1915.

¹²³ *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 1 June 1915

¹²⁴ Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors’, pp. 229-230.

¹²⁵ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 190. Curiously, *Muslim Nesan* reported on 7 June 1915 that in Moratuwa, certain rioters looted goods and took them to the houses of wealthy individuals (where the goods were later discovered).

¹²⁶ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 193.

The economic angle of the violence was certainly significant; in places like Ratnapura, where there was intense rivalry between Sinhalese and Moor gem merchants, a lot of anti-Moor violence took place.¹²⁷ Yet Jayasekera notes that many of the Sinhalese, including leading businessmen who instigated or even participated in the attacks, were Buddhist, highlighting the unambiguously religious nature of the violence.¹²⁸ Moreover, Jayasekera, Roberts, and A.C. Dep also note the participation of Christians in the violence, including Catholics along the North-Western belt leading down towards Wattala.¹²⁹

Roberts also highlights the ‘odd occasion’ when Moors shot or killed Sinhalese, such as in Kandy the day the pogrom began.¹³⁰ The list of those sentenced to imprisonment by court martial published in October 1915 includes their religion (such as ‘Catholic’, ‘Buddhist’ and ‘Mohammadan’), and implies that it was not just Sinhalese who were perpetrators, nor were Moors only victims.¹³¹ The wider spread of the violence and havoc wreaked against the Moors in five of the nine provinces is amply discussed by Jayasekera, Dep, Roberts, and Charles Blackton, who offer a description of violence by district. Importantly, Jayasekera observes that the incidence of violence had a correlation with areas where Sinhalese ‘had been rapidly brought under the commercial economy’, and concentrated in the densely populated, urbanised Western Province.¹³² This map of places under Martial Law (which was declared on 2 June), illustrates the areas to which the pogrom spread.

¹²⁷ *Muslim Nesan*, 8 June 1915.

¹²⁸ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 329.

¹²⁹ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, pp. 266-267; Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 39; Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 184.

¹³⁰ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 187.

¹³¹ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Desp. No. 21, Chalmers to Secretary of State, 13 October 1915.

¹³² Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 321.

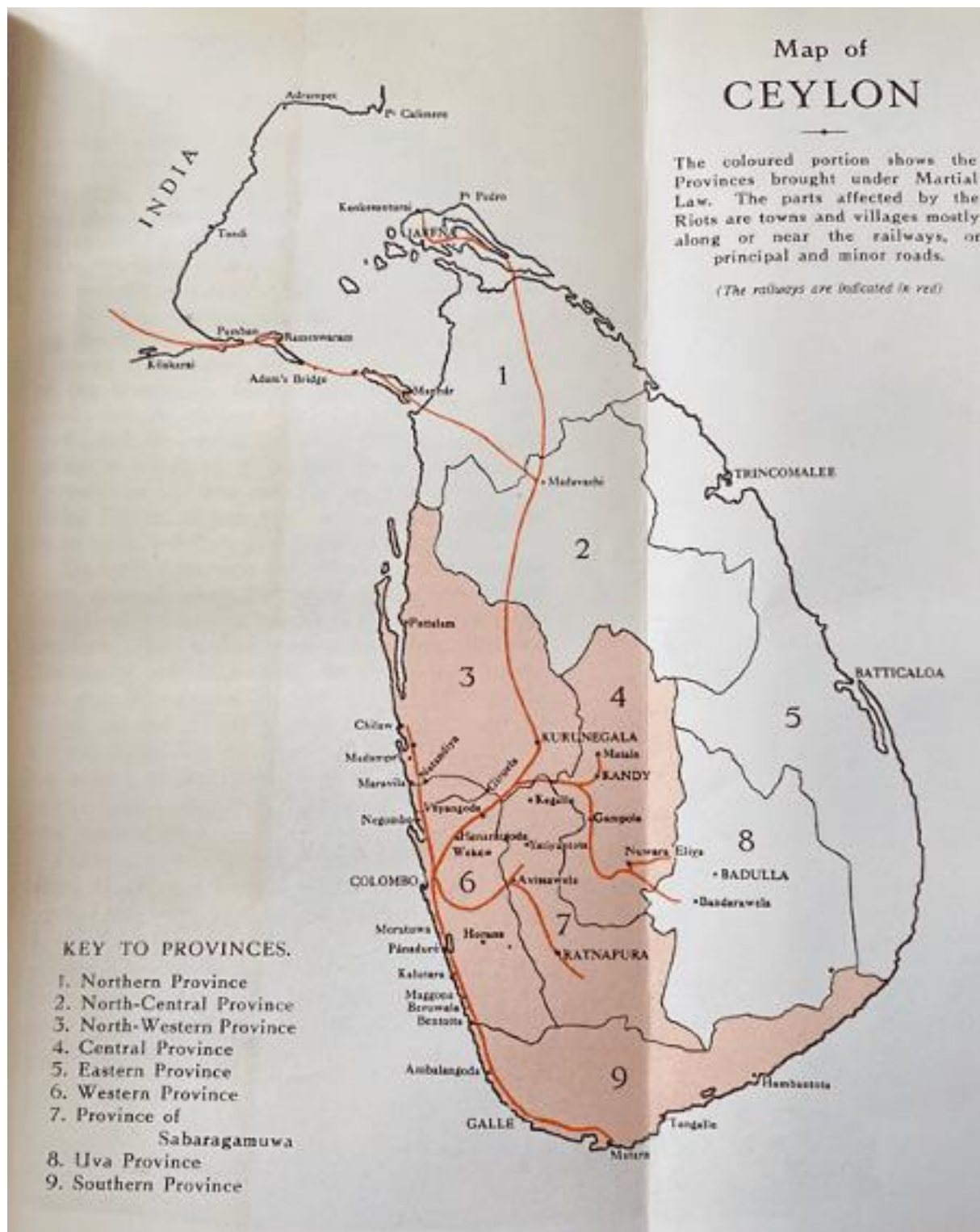


Figure 7: Map of Ceylon, in Ramanathan, Riots and Martial Law (1916)

Looting, Destruction of Mosques, Rape and Murders

In the chaos that unfolded during the pogrom, Moors were on the receiving end of looting, assault, rape, murder, and watched their mosques being destroyed. As will become clear, located in the different types of violence sustained by Moors were the different antagonisms that undergirded the pogrom: for example, there appears to have been revenge sought for Indian Moor intolerance and attacks on polytheistic religious processions, as well as for the perceived hoarding of goods and profiteering, and extortionate moneylending practices by Indian Moors. Ceylon Moors, meanwhile, were eventually targeted perhaps because they belonged to the broader trade rivalry between Sinhalese and Moors. Widespread pillaging, for instance, would have been driven by poorer segments of the population, who struggled to afford their daily foodstuffs, and saw Moor traders as exacting gatekeepers of goods necessary for survival.¹³³ This section however does not focus on why there was pillaging or other types of anti-Moor violence, but on how such pillaging (and other violence) was experienced by Moors.

By 2 June, anti-Moor violence had spread across the Central Province to Katugastota, Matale, Teldeniya and Gampola, where several shops were ‘demolished’ and Moors were ‘harassed’.¹³⁴ In Thalawakelava near Nuwara Eliya, most of the shops had been burned down, with damages estimated at 30,000 rupees.¹³⁵ *Muslim Nesan* reported an ‘insurrection’ against Moors in Galle, while in Beruwala Moors were killed, their places of worship destroyed and their shops robbed.¹³⁶ An editorial in *Islam Mittiran* reflected on 23 June 1915 that the ‘riots’ (*kalaham*) should also be known as the ‘robbery’ (*kollai*), given the scale of looting witnessed.¹³⁷ Looting included taking small possessions, to stealing cows, and appropriating entire properties. For

¹³³ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 200.

¹³⁴ *Dinamina*, 2 June 1915. I rely on reportage from *Dinamina* as by this time, the state had censored a number of other Sinhala newspapers. *Dinamina* was also banned by 7 June.

¹³⁵ *Muslim Nesan*, 8 June 1915.

¹³⁶ *Muslim Nesan*, 7 and 23 June 1915.

¹³⁷ *Islam Mittiran*, 23 June 1915.

example, a case was later brought forward against a Buddhist monk who had cordoned off the entire property of Ahmed Lebbe Aalim Mohammed Asim of Welikada with barbed wire.¹³⁸ In Galle town, Moor boutiques were broken into, looted, and set on fire.¹³⁹ However, not all attempts at arson were as successful as others. In Matale, looters broke into a boutique, ‘piled the rice &c. on the road and tried to burn it’. Unfortunately for the looters, they ‘poured over it a tin of Gingelly oil instead of Kerosine which would not burn.’¹⁴⁰

Several women, sometimes accompanied by children, participated in looting. In Colombo for instance, many stores were dynamited, but many were first emptied of their contents before being set on fire. While the stores blazed in the background, the women looted – collecting and carrying away goods that were strewn on the ground outside the boutiques.¹⁴¹ Often, these women were clearly identified as Sinhalese: one report of looting came weeks after the pogrom had subsided. ‘An elderly Sinhalese woman and her two sons’ were caught looting a Moor’s house in Thimbirigasyaya.¹⁴²

Violence in Colombo escalated beyond looting. In Pettah, all Moor trades remained closed until 10 June.¹⁴³ The *Ceylon Morning Leader* referred to ‘wild scenes in Pettah’ which became the ‘centre of attack’.¹⁴⁴ *Dinamina* carried a description of the violence targeting Indian Moors in Pettah and other areas:

The riots started escalating again yesterday morning [1 June]. Roads in areas such as Pettah, Maradana, Grand Pass...etc. were full of Sinhalese and Mohammadans

¹³⁸ *Muslim Nesan*, 30 June 1915.

¹³⁹ Riots in Galle District June 1915, TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Ceylon.

¹⁴⁰ Diary of the G.A., North-Western Province, June 1915, TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Ceylon.

¹⁴¹ De Souza, *Hundred Days*, p. 25.

¹⁴² *Muslim Nesan*, 4 July 1915.

¹⁴³ *Muslim Nesan*, 10 June 1915.

¹⁴⁴ *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 2 June 1915.

(*mahamath-kaarayo*).¹⁴⁵ In Pettah, Hambayo were protecting the Hamban-kaarayen's mosque for fear of it being demolished. They injured Sinhalese people going on the road by throwing stones at them. Sinhalese people also beat Hambayan with clubs whenever they saw them. The wounded on both sides were taken to hospital by government officials...Several people from both sides were reported dead in the battle (*satana*)... Many Mohammadan shops were demolished and damaged...Sinhalese on the road were injured when Mohammadans threw molten lead and bottles from upstairs houses. Many shops belonging to Hambayan were set on fire by Sinhalese...The Hambayan's tea and rice shops where people used to eat and drink at were smashed...Hambayan's grain shops...seem to have totally disappeared...It is said that several well-known shops with extremely valuable goods belonging to Mohammedans were looted.¹⁴⁶

This reportage is exceptionally valuable as it highlights, from the Sinhalese perspective, the damage caused to Moors by Sinhalese: it cannot be disregarded as a sympathetic retelling of events by either colonial officials or Moors. The reportage highlights that Indian Moors were the primary targets of the violence, and that they fought back with deadly violence too.¹⁴⁷ In Kandy, for example, evidence given to the Police Inquiry Commission by Abdul Rahiman Cassie Lebbe observed, 'On the night of the carol parties the crowd threw stones only at the boutiques of the Coast Moors. At least I saw them throwing stones at several boutiques opposite to my house, which were owned by Coast Moors.'¹⁴⁸ People in Kandy knew which boutiques belonged to Indian Moors and were clear about whom their anger was directed towards.

However, Indian Moors did not remain the sole targets of Sinhalese violence, as in the blur of the pogrom, Ceylon Moors were eventually attacked. For instance, the *Dinamina* report says, 'On hearing the news that the Marakkalayas had joined them [Hambayas] in the riots, the Sinhalese broke into Marakkalayas shops and looted them. As we write this news, we have heard that several houses belonging to Hamba-Marakkalayanta were set on fire between

¹⁴⁵ In this excerpt, I keep the Sinhala label 'hambayan' used for Indian Moors as an example of how the press differentiated between the different ethnic Moors.

¹⁴⁶ *Dinamina*, 2 June 1915.

¹⁴⁷ Roberts notes that though in certain cases Moors shot/killed Sinhalese, most attacks involved violence targeting the person and property of Moors. Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 187.

¹⁴⁸ Evidence by Abdul Rahiman Cassie Lebbe, SLNA, SIC.

Kosgashandiya and Diwulgashandiya.’¹⁴⁹ To some extent, it appears that the broadening out of violence to Moors in general is partially a result of the way in which anti-Indian Moor violence provoked Moor solidarity. According to Abdul Caffoor – a Ceylon Moor who owned a boutique in Bulatkohupitiya – Kirindage Arnolis (a Sinhalese accused of rioting) had appeared on ‘the eve of the riots’ (after the initial outbreak at Kandy), and claimed ‘[r]iots will take place here, but the boutiques of the Ceylon Moors are not to be attacked’.¹⁵⁰ Arnolis was said to have visited Caffoor’s shop at least twice a week, and may not have felt exploited or aggrieved by Ceylon Moors. Despite Arnolis’ promise, however, Caffoor’s boutique was, in fact, broken into on the night of 2 June, perhaps by men that Arnolis could not control. The Town Arachchi of Bulatkohupitiya, Cassie Lebbe, reiterated that most of the boutiques attacked in Bulatkohupitiya belonged to Indian Moors, but the following night, ‘the boutiques that were left undamaged were damaged. One belongs to me, and the others belong to Abdul Caffoor, Muna Neine and Mapala Tamby, all Ceylon Moors.’¹⁵¹ Personal ties or connections are likely to have spared certain Moors from violence, particularly at the time the pogrom spread to certain villages and districts. They may even have received a degree of protection from their neighbours. However, and possibly owing to the participation of outsiders in mob violence, these distinctions or exceptions are likely to have faded in a moment of ‘collective excitement’.¹⁵²

Although Moors in general eventually came under attack, other minorities, including those involved in petty trade, did not. Kannangara observes that in Gampola, Hindu Chettiars and Tamils watched as Sinhalese attacked Indian Moor boutiques, while in Colombo Bohras,

¹⁴⁹ *Dinamina*, 2 June 1915.

¹⁵⁰ Evidence given in the case of Kirindage Arnolis, SLNA, SIC,

¹⁵¹ Evidence by Cassie Lebbe Ibrahim Lebbe, SLNA, SIC.

¹⁵² Stanley Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (California, 1997), p. 81.

Tamils and Chettiars were unscathed by the violence.¹⁵³ Non-Moor bystanders distinguished themselves by leaving information about their ethnicity or religion outside their properties. For example, the word Sinhala was written in chalk on doors of several houses, and some had identifiers in English. The door of one house had written in English 'I am a Tamil man'.¹⁵⁴ On 3 and 4 June, the police identified Vesak lanterns and Buddhist flags hung out, such as on Norris Road, Colombo (which the police felt had been put up after Vesak celebrations had ended). Furthermore, in the targeting of Moor property, some efforts went into preserving valuable booty from the attack. Mohideen Saibo's boutique (which was the principal boutique in Deraniyagala) and straw shed were burned on 4 June.¹⁵⁵ Before the shed was set on fire, 50 rubber boxes were removed from the shed to a neighbouring boutique to avoid their destruction. The boxes apparently belonged to the Udapolla estate, of which the Superintendent was a non-Moor, Mr. Selwyn. These incidents show that once the pogrom had begun, some degree of organisation went into whom and what to loot, and likely involved the exchange of information, inside knowledge and details of possessions and ownership. It is also clear that despite the criminality obviously involved, looters only wanted to target Moors, and not others such as Mr. Selwyn.

In addition to targeting shops and houses, mosques were also attacked. Such attacks give witness to the non-economic grudges held against Moors by rioters. On 2 June, for example, the state had to send troops to block a mob from Wanawaasala that was trying to demolish a mosque, while guards were set up at the mosques near Symmonds Road, Maradana and in Cinnamon Gardens.¹⁵⁶ Following his inspection of affected areas, Mohammed Macan-Markar

¹⁵³ Kannangara, 'Riots of 1915', p.158.

¹⁵⁴ Evidence of Mr James Harcourt Daniel, Deputy Inspector General for Police, SLNA, PIC, p. 13.

¹⁵⁵ The store was looted before it was burned according to two eyewitnesses. See Evidence given in case of Serahamy and Pugoda Peter, SLNA, SIC.

¹⁵⁶ *Dinamina*, 3 June 1915.

in a letter dated 19 June 1915 to Governor Chalmers reported that ‘several places of worship have been blown up by dynamite’.¹⁵⁷ All over the island, Moors rushed to defend their mosques. The mosque at Godapitiya was dynamited while the ‘village was in flames’. So powerful was the explosion at the mosque that ‘the cocoanut [sic] trees around it had been felled so as to fall on the roof. There was one dead Moorman in the compound while eight others were seriously injured. Two of the latter died subsequently’.¹⁵⁸ Assistant Government Agent of the Southern Province, G. Browning observed that the attack was triggered by a rumour that two Buddhist Priests had been killed by Moormen at Weligama, a powerful and familiar image that would have mobilised large crowds. Moors in Mutwal guarded the Jumma Mosque and were prepared to fight until the last man. Crucially, these men took a decision for their women that, ‘rather than be ravished [they] should jump into the wells and commit suicide, leaving only the children’.¹⁵⁹ Although this was not eventually necessary, it is unlikely that women were given much agency in deciding their fates. The largest Indian Moor mosque – the Red Mosque – was targeted by rioters repeatedly in June 1915 as it stood proudly in the middle of Pettah as a symbol of an Indian Moor presence and success. Despite multiple attempts to damage it, however, Indian Moors and the police were able to protect the mosque.¹⁶⁰

Moor women, meanwhile, have not featured in any analysis of the pogrom. The oft-repeated statistic of four ‘ascertained’ rapes is the only detail provided on the experience of women during the pogrom.¹⁶¹ Their identities and their attackers remain unknown: there is no indication that these women ever received justice. The actual figure would have been higher, as much violence against women in the early twentieth century was likely to have gone unreported for

¹⁵⁷ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Mohammed Macan-Markar to Chalmers, 19 June 1915.

¹⁵⁸ Report of AGA, Southern Province, 14 June 1915, TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Ceylon.

¹⁵⁹ Thawfeeq, *Memoirs of Kaleel*, p. 84.

¹⁶⁰ *Muslim Nesan*, 21 June 1915.

¹⁶¹ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 117, Kannangara, ‘Riots of 1915’, p. 158, Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, p. 2.

reasons including fear, shame, and social stigma. Abdul Rahiman, in his letter to Governor Chalmers, contends that facts regarding the rape of Moor women ‘are largely suppressed for obvious reasons’.¹⁶² By contrast, Armand de Souza provides shocking detail on the treatment of Sinhalese women – wives, mothers, and daughters of Sinhalese accused of participating in the violence – at the hands of the colonial state.¹⁶³ For example, Sinhalese women were taken hostage by the state (and physically manhandled by Punjabi soldiers used to suppress the pogrom) until their husbands turned themselves in. Helena Wijesinghe testified that she was dragged out of bed at 4am and taken to the police station in her nightdress under threat of being shot for resisting, and kept on the bare floor until her husband surrendered around 36 hours later.¹⁶⁴ The featuring of Sinhalese women’s plights but not those of Moor women shows the perspective in the key contemporary sources that shaped overarching narratives on who the ‘real victims’ of the 1915 pogrom were. The only other glimpses of Moor women’s experiences are contained in reports written by men. For example, Mohammed Macan-Markar claimed that in Weyakada, ‘Moorish women and children had fled, to the jungle, where they had remained for three days helpless.’¹⁶⁵ Peer Tamby, for instance, in providing evidence against a Sinhalese accused of plunder, claims that his mother, wife and children were evacuated to the jungle while he remained in the neighbourhood of the boutique.¹⁶⁶

Yet women’s narratives can be found at the margins of courtroom evidence. For instance, a 12-year-old Moor girl and her mother called Merra Amma gave evidence about the murder of their father/husband that they witnessed while he worked in his shop.¹⁶⁷ Women in Piadigama, bordering the Galle municipality had sought shelter in a house, as the local mosque was attacked

¹⁶² W.M. Abdul Rahiman to Chalmers, 1 July 1915, SLNA, Lot 65/224.

¹⁶³ De Souza, *Hundred Days*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Parl. Pap. (1916), Mohammed Macan-Markar to Chalmers, 19 June 1915.

¹⁶⁶ Evidence of Peer Tamby, SLNA, SIC, p. 50.

¹⁶⁷ Court Martial Evidence, 26 June 1915, TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Ceylon.

and three houses nearby were set on fire. As the Moor men and police were trying to extinguish the fires, they ‘heard shrieks from the houses where the women were, and the noise of the stones rattling on the roof’. The rioters disappeared as the men approached. These women were then given shelter at the stores of Mr. Bailey, the Manager of the Morgan Crucible Company in Gintota, 1.5 miles away.¹⁶⁸

Women too, were among the thousands of Moors who fled their homes and sought shelter in Colombo. The grounds of the Maradana Mosque in Colombo were transformed into a refugee camp. The picture below is one of only three known photographs from the 1915 pogrom that add body (literally) to what were previously only words in the historiography on the experience of Moors. Women and children, the often-forgotten victims of the violence, remain huddled in the photograph’s foreground, while behind them are policemen, and men seated outside hastily-built shelters. L.B. David, a European man writing for the *Times of Ceylon* illustrates the circumstances of the displaced Moors:

Rows of cadjan sheds were quickly run up, while a number of canvas tents, lent by sympathisers were also utilised for the accommodation of families. The religious uses of the mosque were temporarily suspended, and it was transformed into huge caravanserai where men, and children with characteristic oriental adaptability made themselves at home [and] as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Numbers more found shelter in the school building on the premises. In all, 4,000 people were estimated to have availed themselves of the relief provided...tense and tearless suffering [was] noticeable on every face...The mosque presented a pathetic picture with groups of men, women and children huddled together and occupying every foot of available space.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Galle District, June 1915.

¹⁶⁹ ‘A Moor Refugee Camp in Colombo, *Times of Ceylon*, Christmas Supplement 1915.

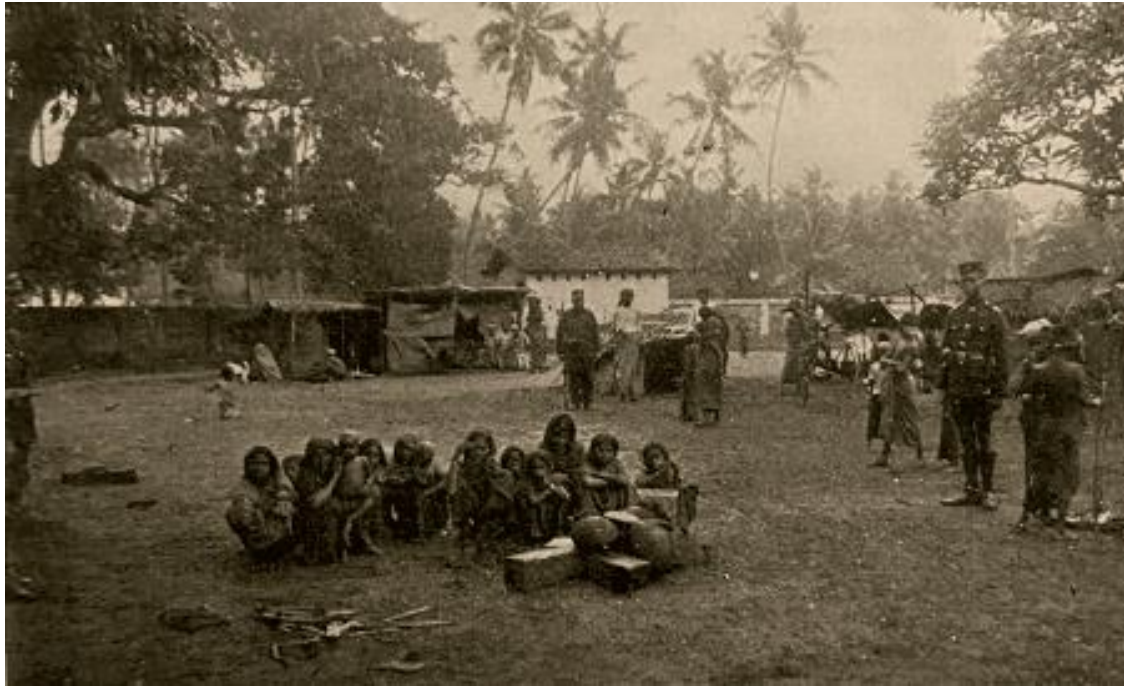


Figure 8: 'Some of the refugees in a corner of the Mosque grounds', Times of Ceylon, Christmas Number 1915

The other two surviving photographs, published in David's article, include Figure 9 below, in which the Moor in the foreground appears to be treated for head injuries, while other Moors, recognisable by their fezzes and other head coverings, watch on quietly from the side-lines.



Figure 9: 'Mission of Mercy amongst the Moslems. Some of the "nurses" dressing the wounded'. Times of Ceylon Christmas Supplement 1915

As with the rape of women, much of the detail on the murders of Moors are reduced to statistics. Glimpses into the terror of Moors in their final moments can be gleaned through evidence provided to courts. For instance, in the burning of Abram Saibo's tannery in Welikada on 2 June, it is possible to reconstruct the experience of two Moors, Madrasa and Noordeen, who were hunted and killed by Sinhalese attackers.¹⁷⁰ At about 2pm on the day, a crowd of around 50 men broke into the tannery. Six men dragged two of the employees out of the tannery, while other employees either hid or ran outside. One struck Madrasa with a club on his face and killed him when he refused to tell them where the money was. Another attacker cut Noordeen's back with a knife. Another man set fire to the straw shed at the tannery, and 'put some burning straw on the body of' Noordeen before shooting him through his chest while he lay on his back. Witnesses, including Abdulla, a clerk at the tannery, and Sinnatamby, a Tamil labourer at the tannery, claimed to watch both victims die. Their bodies were discovered at about 6pm that evening by Sub-Inspector of Police Candappah, and their bodies were inspected by De La Harpe, the acting Judicial Medical Officer.

The official death toll of Moors in the pogrom is just 25.¹⁷¹ Yet this death toll is likely to be a gross underestimation. Comments made about the death toll by a diverse set of contemporary observers at the time hint at a much higher death toll. For instance, on 8 June 1915, *Muslim Nesan* reported 46 dead Moors, including 23 corpses left at the Maradana (police) mortuary and eleven at Maradana General Hospital. In addition to these corpses, the reportage noted that 'many could not be brought to the mortuary and were returned to the earth [buried]. If these are calculated as 60, together with the 46, [the loss of life] will be a large sum'.¹⁷² Moreover, even the British acknowledged the possibility of a much higher death toll. Governor Chalmers wrote

¹⁷⁰ WO 141/11, Court Martial Evidence, 26 June 1915.

¹⁷¹ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, p. 48.

¹⁷² *Muslim Nesan*, 8 June 1915.

despatches to Whitehall that admitted that British officials were not focused on the body count and instead were prioritising quelling the violence. In that context, he conceded:

It is by no means impossible that the real number is considerably larger...the bodies of murdered Moors may have been consumed in burning buildings or hidden in the jungle. The fact that many coast [Indian] Moors returned to India at the time of the riots makes it impossible to argue that the disappearance of a Moorman necessarily means that he has been murdered, but it is probably safe to draw that inference in some cases.¹⁷³

Such doubt around the official death toll reflects the colonial regime's lack of interest in subject populations. Scholarly narratives, too, simply reproduce the colonial estimate of the Moors' death toll. By contrast, the nationalist historiography has had a disproportionate focus on the carnage unleashed on the Sinhalese by colonial officials (and non-official 'volunteers') in the belated suppression of the pogrom. The result is that more attention has been paid to them than to the Moors.¹⁷⁴ The failure to revise the death toll of the Moors is then due to both the lingering influence of empire through the production of sources, and the influence of nationalism.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

The pogrom had both long and short-term origins. Religious revival and economic rivalries had established long-term dislike, distrust, and competition between Sinhalese and Moors. In the lead up to the pogrom, the Gampola Perahera Case and the Supreme Court verdict in February 1915 were felt as a humiliation by many Sinhalese. As Sinhala-Buddhists and as the majority community they were denied their right to observe their religious rites due to what they saw as

¹⁷³ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, p. 47.

¹⁷⁴ Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, pp. 537-542; *Sri Lanka: Reflections of History* (Colombo, 2012).

¹⁷⁵ Rowell, 'Ceylon's Kristallnacht', p. 620; Ali, '1915 Racial Riots', p. 2. Certain journal articles or book chapters refer to the figure 39 as the death toll based on a conflicting report by Governor Chalmers that appears to have included some non-Moors as well. See for example Blackton, 'Action Phase', p. 249.

the interference of Indian Moors and the state's deliberate application of the law in favour of Indian Moors.

In the months between the Court's verdict and the Vesak Perahera multiple events occurred generating cycles of nationalism and more humiliation. The centenary of the British occupation, the celebration of National Day, and more Indian Moor attacks on religious processions contributed towards the rising tension. The refusal of Indian Moors to compromise on the issue of procession licences, and even in the setting up of alms sheds traditionally associated with peraheras (on the grounds that Indian Moor boutiques would lose income) would undoubtedly have aggravated the Sinhalese, who attempted to accommodate Indian Moor worship practices.¹⁷⁶ When violence erupted on the morning of 29 May 1915, it may have initially appeared (to the Moors and the state) to be one more religious 'riot' in a long line of precedents dating back to 1853. However, subsequent events transformed the violence at Castle Hill Street Mosque from a riot into a pogrom. Death, destruction, loot, arson, and pillage tormented Moors between 29 May and 6 June during the violence that followed.

Crucially, distinctions between Ceylon Moors and Indian Moors appear to have been important initially to both the Sinhalese and to the Moors themselves. In that context, the religious assertion on the part of Indian Moors was key to the early stages of the pogrom. Overall, although (Indian and Ceylon) Moors' bodies and mosques were attacked, it was their shops that incurred the wrath of most rioters. These establishments were broken into, looted, and set on fire to hurt the Moors through the structures that had, perhaps, hurt the rioters most.

¹⁷⁶ The instrumental decision to hold processions after worship hours at the CHS Mosque was part of negotiating with the state, to secure a license.

It appears that the Sinhala-Buddhists as well as other ethno-religious groups including Tamils and Christians participated in targeted violence against the Moors either out of spontaneous outburst or opportunistic revenge. There are no comprehensive statistics that provide a breakdown of rioters by religion or ethnicity. Yet disparate data provides an impression of the involvement of Christians, Hindus, and Tamils for example. In the list of those 358 people who were sentenced to imprisonment by court martial, religious identity was included. Nine Christians and two Hindus were convicted.¹⁷⁷ Between 60 to 70 Tamils (primarily ‘rickshaw coolies’) were among 300 arrested for rioting in Kandy.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, there is ample discussion in the historiography on the widespread participation of Catholics along the North-Western coastal belt. Although most rioters were Sinhalese and Buddhist, it is significant that there were several pockets of violence driven by Tamils and Sinhalese Catholics. The drivers of violence then were not simply restricted to the disruption of the Vesak Perahera by any means. Indian Moor provocation in Castle Hill Street is important but the violence it triggered was so disproportionate that other dynamics must have been involved. Resentment due to impediments on Hindu processions, and longstanding trade-related grievances between Moors, Catholics and Tamils also contributed to the growing climate of ethno-religious competition. Against the backdrop of the First World War, which is explored in the next chapter, all these factors came to the fore in the malaise of the pogrom.

By framing the pogrom against the backdrop of decades of religious revival, economic competition, and the Gampola Perahera Case, it would appear to the historian that violence of great proportions was somehow likely, if not inevitable. Once the pogrom had been suppressed by mid-June 1915, an editorial in *Islam Mittiran* claimed, ‘[t]he authorities are making sure the

¹⁷⁷ Five ‘Mohammadans’ were also convicted. While their ethnic identity is not clear, it is possible that these were Moors who were opportunistic in looting during the pogrom or violent towards Sinhalese in a non-defensive manner. Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Governor to Secretary of State, 13 October 1915.

¹⁷⁸ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 265.

rioters are punished for their immoral deeds...they are protecting the Mohammeden community and making sure the rioters who cause them an inconvenience are sent to prison. We are incredibly indebted to the officials.’¹⁷⁹ Some Moors appear to have been satisfied, early on, with the state’s response. The Sinhalese, by contrast, recall it as giving rise to a period of the most egregious injustice. The next chapter attempts to explore how the state responded to the violence and asks why it was not prepared for the events that took place.

¹⁷⁹ *Islam Mittiran*, 16 June 1915.

Chapter 5: Ceylon in the First World War

The previous chapter explored the outbreak and spread of the pogrom. This final chapter ‘zooms out’ from the minutiae of the violence and situates the drivers of the pogrom and the state’s response within the broader geopolitical context in Ceylon at the time: the First World War. I demonstrate how increased scarcity caused by the War – and Sinhalese perceptions that Moors were exploiting the crisis for their own profit – amplified anti-Moor sentiment among the Sinhalese, specifically with respect to their pre-existing economic grievances. I also examine how pressures and assumptions that flowed directly from the global context of the War impacted the colonial state’s response to the pogrom, shifting it from initial inaction to eventual excess.

The historiography on the colonial state’s role in the pogrom is confined to a narrative of British force. Influenced by nationalist sentiment, it focuses on the ‘brutal’ suppression of the pogrom, and the ill-treatment of the Sinhalese who were perceived by the state as rising up against the state in an orchestrated act of sedition.¹ This overarching narrative fails to identify that the police did not react decisively enough to quell the initial outbreak of violence, and also ignores the reasons why state actors resorted to extra-judicial killings towards the end of the pogrom.² Using the lens of the First World War, this chapter also analyses the two distinct phases of the state’s response. It also considers evidence of British perceptions on whether the pogrom was a pre-cursor to an anti-colonial movement.

¹ Dewaraja, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*, p. 157; K.M. De Silva refers to the state’s ‘inexplicable harshness’ towards the alleged leaders of the pogrom. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 475.

² Even some scholars of ‘1915’, such as P.T.M. Fernando, inadvertently advance this narrative by focusing solely on the ‘mishandling’ of the ‘riots’ in terms of the declaration of Martial Law and excessive force, rather than exploring in any depth the failure of the state to prevent the violence from escalating when it initially erupted. P.T.M. Fernando, ‘The British Raj and the 1915 Communal Riots in Ceylon’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 3/3 (1969), pp. 245-255.

The wider historiography of the First World War has increasingly shifted from studying the national experiences of the Great Powers to ‘understudied locations’ in Europe and Central Asia.³ With the expansion of the sub-discipline of global history, new perspectives from Africa, Latin America, and Asia have emerged, offering fascinating insights into colonies at the periphery of war.⁴ Since the centenary of the War, there is new scholarship (including in languages other than English) on colonies in the periphery, such as those in the Indo-oceanic space, away from North Africa or other colonies more traditionally associated with the War.⁵

Ceylon is one such ‘colonial periphery’ that has not yet featured in the new historiography on the global First World War.⁶ The principal reason for its omission is that it was not considered to have been a theatre of war, nor was it perceived as having contributed in terms of materiel in any significant way. Yet, the War impacted the local functioning of the colonial state and daily life in Ceylon. The only official history of Ceylon in the First World War is contained in Charles Lucas’ *The Empire at War*. This history was written ‘by and for an imperial elite’.⁷ The editor Charles Lucas was a senior British civil servant and a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. The chapter on Ceylon, meanwhile, was furnished with information from Reginald Stubbs (the colonial secretary in Ceylon who played a relatively aggressive decision-making role in suppressing the pogrom as shown below) and other Britons.⁸ It contains useful official data but provides no illustration of what life was like for local populations. Lucas’ claim, ‘the war taken

³ G. Barry, E. Dal Lago, and R. Healy (eds.) *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries in World War I* (Leiden, 2016), p. 2.

⁴ Ashley Jackson (ed.), *The British Empire and the First World War* (Routledge, 2016); Jay Winter (ed.), *Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2014).

⁵ Pierre-Eric Fageol, “Colonial Boches”. Asian traders under popular vindictiveness in Reunion Island during the Great War’, *World Wars and Contemporary Conflicts* 3/243 (2011), pp. 5-34.

⁶ Barry et al, *Small Nations*, p. 9.

⁷ Ashley Jackson, ‘Sir Charles Lucas and *The Empire at War*’, *The Round Table* 103/2 (2014), p. 172.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

as a whole did not inflict much suffering upon the peasantry of Ceylon' is dubious at best.⁹ Despite being islanded, Ceylon was not hermetically sealed from the impacts of the War.

By placing the pogrom within the analytical prism of global War, this chapter explores issues of causation, as well as the agency of indigenous actors. Most importantly, it asks questions about the impact of contingency on colonial structures. Adrian Gregory observes that the term 'Glocal' stresses 'the co-presence of universal and particularising tendencies', and that certain 'globalising tendencies' may 'only be comprehensible' in their 'local manifestations'.¹⁰ It is on the 'Glocal' that this chapter focuses. I argue that had it not been for the War, the state was unlikely to have adopted many of the harshest measures taken, including implementing martial law. Certain historians such as Kumari Jayawardena, P.V.J. Jayasekera, and Charles Blackton have commented on how the War featured in setting the context for the violence and the state's response, but their emphasis differs from mine. For example, Jayawardena highlights the state's suspicion of Dharmapala, foreign Theosophists, and Indian nationalist thought that may have influenced the Sinhalese during the War.¹¹ Within the limited explicit focus on the War in terms of the existing scholarship on 1915, there is no discussion of the reasons behind the state's interest in maintaining Moors' loyalty. Contextualising the pogrom in terms of the War is vital to understanding the entire episode.

The study of anti-colonial resistance and rebellion through various means including uprisings and espionage is increasingly becoming a feature of new scholarship set around the War, and focuses on places such as Central Asia, West and North Africa, Singapore, and India.¹² In and

⁹ Charles Lucas, *The Empire at War*, Vol. 5 (Oxford, 1926), p. 370.

¹⁰ Adrian Gregory, 'Globalising and Localising the Great War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017), p. 234.

¹¹ Jayawardena, 'Economic and Political Factors', p. 230.

¹² Alexander Morrison, *The Russian conquest of Central Asia: a study in imperial expansion, 1814-1914* (Cambridge, 2021).

beyond India, for example, a global South Asian community was formed to resist the British Empire. Transnational movements such as Ghader and the Khilafat movement also belonged to this community.¹³ The French Empire was similarly under pressure; Jonathan Krause observes that ‘nearly every major French colony in Africa and Asia experienced some notable anti-colonial rebellion’ during the War.¹⁴ Crucially, he argues that despite the plethora of factors underlying such rebellions, ‘they were all ultimately tied to the realities brought forth by the First World War.’¹⁵ Anger in Algeria, for example, was aroused over French recruitment of Algerians to service ‘the bloody killing fields of Europe and the Middle East’.¹⁶

Anti-colonial rebellion was evident across British colonies and areas of influence too. In 1914, Ghadar revolutionaries, driven by a determination to rid India of British rule sought German support across the globe, from North America to Siam.¹⁷ Leveraging Siam’s wartime neutrality, these revolutionaries would ‘slip across the Burmese border’ to turn Punjabi Muslim and Sikh policemen of the Burmese Military Police against the British.¹⁸ Siam, despite being nominally independent, is another often-overlooked hotbed of anti-colonial intrigue, owing to Britain’s influence over the region and the Thai King. For example, in 1915, Vietnamese revolutionaries in Siam exploited wartime cleavages for their own nationalist struggles against the French, by requesting money from German and Austrian consuls to fund a ‘border uprising in French Indochina’.¹⁹ Further afield, in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, nationalists who had long sought to establish an independent Irish Republic took advantage of Britain’s distraction by the

¹³ Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Penguin, 2020).

¹⁴ Jonathan Krause, ‘Islam and anti-colonial rebellions in North and West Africa, 1914-1918’, *The Historical Journal* 64/3 (2021), p. 675.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 691.

¹⁷ Heather Streets-Salter, *World War One in Southeast Asia: Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism in an Era of Global Conflict* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

War and launched an insurrection that was brutally quashed.²⁰ The War then caused greater strain and exploitation of colonies, and it also presented opportunities to manifest longstanding resentment of colonial influence and rule, and to organise rebellion because the empire was weakened.

In this chapter, however, I argue that Ceylon does not fit into this broader pattern of anti-colonial rebellion, despite an egregious episode of violence breaking out during the war and involving state actors in its suppression. As I will show, the targets of the 1915 pogrom at no point involved the British or the state, despite the colonial administration having such concerns (and despite reports of anti-colonial slogans being shouted throughout the affected provinces).²¹ In 1915, on the ‘hundredth year’ of ‘suppression by the British’, these Sinhalese nationalists who formed a majority felt emasculated, lacking in agency, and unable to express their ‘real’ authority over the island.²² The pogrom provided an opportunity for Sinhalese nationalists to attack colonial actors and buildings. Yet perhaps due to fear of reprisals, the Sinhalese were constrained in their actions against the state. Rather than contest Michael Roberts’ claim that Sinhalese ‘chauvinist violence was a political act, an indictment of the British Raj’, I add that *despite* such animosity to the British, the pogrom was never intended to physically target the British.²³ Instead, violence against a despised minority was one of the few means at Sinhalese disposal to exercise agency. Thus, in Ceylon, when the harsh realities of War brought pre-existing inter-communal tensions – such as economic grievances – into sharp focus, protests, rioting and looting, specifically targeting traders perceived as ‘alien’ occurred. This places it in

²⁰ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916*, (Oxford, 2016).

²¹ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 205. Four colonial officers reported on anti-colonial slogans such as ‘there is no more British Government, there is no more British flag; British rule endeth on the 27th’. Individually held anti-colonial sentiments (perhaps widely shared) during the pogrom were clear, yet such sentiments did not manifest into any concerted form of anti-colonial violence.

²² *Sinhala Jatiya*, 5 January 1915.

²³ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 207.

the same category as events in Mauritius and Reunion as will be borne out below.²⁴

Positioning the pogrom within the context of the War is important for several reasons. First, Ceylon was part of an Indian Ocean theatre of war that saw both action and intrigue; this activity arguably encouraged the perpetrators of violence to attack the Moors, as some Sinhalese assumed Moors supported the Ottomans, who were at war with the British. Second, the leveraging of religious networks by Ceylon's Moors and Indian Muslims was considered a threat to the British Empire's broader stability in Wartime. Finally, and emerging from questions of agency and loyalty, Ceylon appears to have been the exception to various other colonial settings that saw a correlation between the War and efforts towards decolonisation.

The state's response to the pogrom convinced many Sinhalese (and some Tamils) of the need for greater self-government, and ultimately the need to assert Independence.²⁵ This sentiment, held by leading Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist figures, is reflected in the emergence of two national organisations – the Ceylon Reform League in 1917, and the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 (which grew out of the aforementioned Ceylon Reform League and the pre-existing Ceylon National Association) – that articulated the 'Ceylonese' need for a larger share in governance and responsibility.²⁶ It bears reiterating that, nevertheless, such an assertion was not tantamount to the anti-colonial rebellions that occurred in other parts of the British Empire. Importantly, this argument contradicts the position of colonial historian Charles Lucas, who asserted in his volume published eight years after the war that 'the riot...left no aftermath of

²⁴ Fageol, "Colonial Boches", p. 6; Manorama Akung, 'World War I in Mauritius', *World Wars and Contemporary Conflicts* 3/255 (2014), pp. 9-26.

²⁵ Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*; P.T.M. Fernando, 'The Post Riots Campaign for Justice', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 29/2 (1970), p. 256.

²⁶ Lakshman Marasinghe, *Evolution of Constitutional Governance in Sri Lanka* 2nd ed (Colombo, 2018), p. 43; Ponnambalam Arunachalam, 'Our Political Needs' in Harshan Kumarasingham (ed.) *Speeches and Writings of Ponnambalam Arunachalam* (Colombo, 2019); Michael Roberts, 'Introduction: Elites, Nationalisms and the Nationalist Movement in Ceylon' in Michael Roberts (ed.) *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress and Nationalist Politics in Ceylon 1929-1950*, Vol. 1 (Colombo, 1977).

disloyalty among any elements of the population'.²⁷

Furthermore, this chapter complicates the existing literature on the struggle for Independence, which tends to focus on the constitutional wrangling that takes off in the 1920s, and gained momentum during the drafting of the Donoughmore Constitution (in force 1931-1947) and Soulbury Constitution (in force 1947-1972).²⁸ Longer histories of constitutional reform in the lead up to Independence tend to focus on the various reforms of the state from 1832 to 1833 (the period of the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms) onwards.²⁹ Lakshman Marasinghe refers to the 1912 Crew-McCallum Reforms (which expanded the Legislative Council and introduced the elective principle), for example, and then moves on to the Temporary Constitution of 1921 and the Manning Reforms of the 1920s.³⁰ 1915 does not appear to be a major focus in that literature.

Importantly, at least at the elite level, there appears to have been Sinhalese-Tamil consensus that was critical of the state's response to the pogrom, as highlighted by the central role played by Ponnambalam Ramanathan in attempting to secure justice for innocent Sinhalese arrested and killed during the pogrom. As discussed in Chapter 4, Ramanathan's book *Riots and Martial Law* specifically emphasised Indian Moor aggression and the wrongful victimisation of the Sinhalese. Ramanathan criticised state failures during the pogrom in strong speeches made in the Legislative Council (in his capacity of the only elected 'Educated Ceylonese' member following the Crew-McCallum Reforms) as explored below. He also embarked on an

²⁷ Lucas, *Empire at War*, p. 362.

²⁸ Harshan Kumarasingham, 'A Democratic Paradox: The Communalisation of Politics in Ceylon, 1911-1948' *Asian Affairs*, 37/3 (2006), pp. 342-352; Wickramasinghe, "Divide and Rule", pp. 75-92; Jane Russell, 'Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931-1947', *Ceylon Historical Journal* 26 (1982) pp. 344-351.

²⁹ Marasinghe, *Constitutional Governance in Sri Lanka*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-58.

international campaign of justice in Britain from November 1915 to January 1916, where he presented the case of the Sinhalese (and not the Moors) to British audiences including parliamentarians and Colonial Office actors.³¹ A decade later, this elite consensus appears to have broken down – and it is that breakdown that much of the constitutional reform literature focuses on. The moment in which a clear elite solidarity emerged in response to the state’s excess in 1915 is omitted from the broader analysis of inter-communal relations and the struggle for greater representation. One aim of this chapter is therefore to reassess the impact of War, and the 1915 pogrom in that longer process of constitutional reform and Independence.

Some of the sources used in this chapter are unique insofar as they have not been used by historians writing on 1915 and include private letters between Governor Chalmers and his friend, Reginald McKenna, *Times of India* reportage, the diary of a captured German sailor, maps and files from the Admiralty, including reports from Naval Intelligence Operators, and a photograph from a Prisoner of War (P.O.W.) camp in Ceylon. This diverse set of sources shed light on a major global history that has thus far not been explored from the perspective of a colonial periphery, while contributing to a more nuanced understanding of events in mid-1915.

A. The Exacerbation of Sinhalese Economic Grievances

Ceylon, like several other colonies, was expected to contribute to Britain’s war effort. Certain colonies played crucial roles in the War, and in return, attained some privileges. In India, for example, ‘war service’ was a meaningful opportunity for Indian nationalists to test their ‘political self-governance and ability’.³² Support for the British war effort was also viewed in India as an opportunity to advance ‘longstanding political grievances: constitutional reform,

³¹ Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*, pp. 66-69.

³² Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War: 1914-1918* (Delhi, 2018), p. 67.

increased individual freedom, and professional advancement for Indians in the administration' as recognition of the huge contributions and sacrifice made by Indians.³³ By contrast, Ceylon's involvement in the War was much more limited, in terms of active service on the frontlines or in the bureaucracy.

On the one hand, the War Office discouraged military recruitment from Ceylon. There is no discussion of the reasons for not recruiting locals from Ceylon except by Lucas, who observes that as per War Office standards, Sinhalese and Tamils were not considered to be 'of suitable physique' – a reflection of the Empire's policy of using race to determine who was fit to serve in imperial armies and who would be excluded.³⁴ Lucas claims that recruitment was 'confined to Europeans' as the War Office was not 'at the time prepared to accept [Ceylonese] for service' anywhere except in Egypt 'for reasons of climate and physique'. For instance, Captain C.L. de Zylva of the Ceylon Light Infantry was rejected for service on the Front due to his 'mixed descent'.³⁵ Being a Burgher, and 'only' half white made him less reliable as a soldier on the front. The Sinhalese were completely disregarded as servicemen, possibly based on longstanding Orientalist tropes of them as 'lazy' and 'indolent'.³⁶ In India, the British favoured certain Martial Races such as Punjabi Sikhs and Nepalese Gurkhas as physically suitable and politically reliable.³⁷ Notably, South Indians such as Tamils and Telegus, like the Ceylonese, were not recruited (until the end of the War when the demand for manpower could not be met by those deemed 'suitable') due to the influence of the Martial Race theory.³⁸ In the long-term,

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁴ Lucas, *Empire at War*, p. 357.

³⁵ Secretary of State for the Colonies Harcourt to Governor Chalmers, 8 March 1915, TNA, FCO 141/1822, Ceylon Confidential Despatches, Mar-Apr 1915. De Zoysa was eventually sent as part of the Ceylon Sanitary Company during the Mesopotamia campaign when the demand for men outmatched the availability of 'suitable' recruits. See Ceylon Sanitary Company, 1917-1919, TNA, WO 95/5036-6.

³⁶ For instance, John Ferguson claimed, 'any contrivance for saving human labour has a great attraction to Sinhalese Buddhists'. See Ferguson, *Ceylon in 1903*, p. 58.

³⁷ Heather Streets-Salter, *Martial races: the military, race, and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester, 2014).

³⁸ Roy, *Indian Army*, p. 51.

however, the absence of compulsory recruitment from local populations in Ceylon arguably ensured their loyalty towards the British in terms of the overall War effort.

On the other hand, the War Office encouraged financial contributions from Ceylon, which in turn made significant efforts to raise funds.³⁹ On 18 November 1915, the Secretary of State for the Colonies was informed that the Legislative Council of Ceylon passed an ordinance that empowered the Governor to contribute 100,000 pounds sterling annually for a period of ten years as a contribution to the cost of war.⁴⁰ In early 1917, this figure was increased to 200,000 pounds sterling annually (a total of 2,000,000 pounds sterling).⁴¹ Although Ceylon's contribution in terms of manpower, materiel, and money paled in comparison with that of India's (which sent 943,000 men overseas), such financial sums were a considerable portion of the island's gross domestic product.⁴² To compare, the total value of India's direct contribution and loans to Britain during the war was 596 million pounds.⁴³ With a population of 315 million, the War cost India around 1.89 pounds per head.⁴⁴ If Ceylon contributed the full amount it pledged, with a population of 4,424,295 in 1915, the war would have cost around 0.50 pounds per head.⁴⁵ The diversion of such funds away from the local economy is likely to have had an impact on the deteriorated economic situation in May 1915.

Due to its position to the south of a clearly British-controlled subcontinent, Ceylon was not dependent on trade for raw materials with (colonies belonging to) other Empires in the way

³⁹ Ceylon was not unique in this respect. Other British colonies, such as Mauritius also made a more significant contribution in the financial sphere than the military sphere, due to the British reluctance to accept fighting 'men of colour' from the island. For more on the racial policy of the War Council in Mauritius, see Akung, 'World War I in Mauritius', pp. 9-26.

⁴⁰ *The Western Gazette*, December 10, 1915.

⁴¹ Ceylon Legislative Council, 27 November 1918, SLNA, Hansard 1918.

⁴² Harper, *Asian Underground*, p. 209.

⁴³ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Indian Economy and Society during World War One', *Social Scientist* 42/7-8 (2014), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Arvind Gupta, 'Indian Contribution to the First World War', *Journal of Defence Studies* 8/3 (2014), p. 123.

⁴⁵ 'Vital Statistics – Estimated Population', *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1915*, p. L3.

other colonial peripheries were. For instance, German East Africa was affected by the banning of ‘interim currencies’, which were only accepted as payment in Portuguese East Africa.⁴⁶ By contrast, the 1914 Ceylon Administration Report reflected the government’s confidence in Ceylon’s ‘internal prosperity’ that would ‘render difficult the fomentation of civil disturbance’.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as elsewhere, Ceylon’s trade patterns were dislocated by the War, in no small part due to threats to shipping from German raiders (discussed below), but also due to floods, and bad harvests across Asia.⁴⁸ This combination of nature and war disrupted supply lines from India and contributed to goods shortages in Ceylon.

Meanwhile, it was deemed necessary to keep certain raw materials out of enemy hands. As war broke out in August 1914, an Ordinance relating to the Exportation of the Necessaries of War was published in the Government Gazette, banning the export of arms, ammunition, and provisions which may be used as food.⁴⁹ The export of products such as plumbago to Germany, or cocoa to the Netherlands (which was finding its way to Germany) was banned.⁵⁰ By October 1914, ‘the exportation of Plumbago to all foreign destinations ha[d] been prohibited in Ceylon...to keep supplies of Ceylon Plumbago out of the hands of the enemy’.⁵¹ Restrictions on plumbago exports caused the plumbago economy to suffer, and many pits (mines) were closed as a result, causing significant unemployment in the areas they were located (such as in the North-Western Province, and Kegalle in the Sabaragamuwa Province). Workers, including ‘women and children, engaged in sorting this mineral’ were laid off.⁵² Plumbago pit workers

⁴⁶ Stuart Mitchell, ‘Jan Smuts, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in German East Africa’ in Jonathan Krause (ed.), *The Greater War: Other combatants and other fronts, 1914-1918* (New York, 2014), p. 107.

⁴⁷ The War, German Trade, and the Merchandise Marks Act, *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1914* (Colombo, 1915), p. 219.

⁴⁸ Harper, *Asian Underground*, p. 214.

⁴⁹ 21 August 1914, *Ceylon Government Gazette, 1914* (Colombo, 1915).

⁵⁰ TNA, FCO 141/1817, Ceylon Confidential Despatches November - December 1914.

⁵¹ Undersecretary of State, Foreign Office to Downing Street, 2 March 1915, TNA, FCO 141/1822, Ceylon Confidential Despatches March - April 1915.

⁵² *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1914*, p. 1/A2.

who retained their employment were paid only once in three to six months!⁵³ Thus, these workers, who barely eked out an existence on already depressed wages, were arguably among the most vulnerable in the economy at the time of the 1915 pogrom.⁵⁴ The pit workers participated in the pogrom as per the testimony of Harry Burden, Assistant Government Agent in Kegalle.⁵⁵ The economic hardships they suffered help explain why they may have targeted Moor traders whose goods they could not afford.

In addition to the closure of plumbago pits by industrialists, planters were tightening their belts and did not employ as many labourers on the plantations.⁵⁶ For example, around half the plantation workers in the Southern Province were laid off.⁵⁷ Similarly, the railways, Public Works and the Survey Departments employed fewer labourers as they operated at a significantly reduced service.⁵⁸ Some factory workers in Colombo worked only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and newly hired staff were laid off.⁵⁹ The report of a demonstration by disgruntled railway workers at the office of the Ceylon Railway's general manager was published on 3 March 1915 in the *Ceylon Morning Leader*.⁶⁰ The average rate of 'praedial' wages fell between 1913 (pre-War) and 1915. In 1913, the average praedial wage per annum in Colombo was Rs. 400-600, and in Kandy was Rs. 180.⁶¹ In 1914, the average wage per annum in Colombo was Rs. 180-500, and in Kandy was Rs. 196. By 1915, the average wage per annum in Colombo had dropped further to Rs. 125-250, and in Kandy to Rs. 150-200.⁶² These factors

⁵³ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 324.

⁵⁴ Jayawardena, 'Economic and Political Factors', p. 224.

⁵⁵ Evidence of H.A. Burden, Assistant Government Agent Kegalle, Report of Shooting Inquiry Commission (SIC) SLNA, Ceylon Sessional Papers, 1917.

⁵⁶ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 314.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 314. Jayasekera cites the diary of the Government Agent, Southern Province, 31 January 1915.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁵⁹ *Islam Mittiran*, 6 January 1915.

⁶⁰ Cited in Kannangara, 'Riots of 1915', p. 149.

⁶¹ Praedial labourers in this case refers to agricultural labourers. *Ceylon Blue Book for 1913* (Colombo, 1914), p. U3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. V3.

contributed to growing unemployment and poverty by mid-1915. At the same time, ‘after the declaration of war the prices of food stuffs went up’ at a significantly higher rate to which food prices had already been rising in the previous decade.⁶³ As the War progressed, the cost of imported articles increased due to the ‘growing shortage of supplies and of means of transport’.⁶⁴ The real value of goods, including currystuffs, imported from India decreased between 1913 and 1914 by Rs. 20,451,939.⁶⁵ This shortage of imports would have had a knock-on effect on prices, driving them up due to scarcity. In this context, the government eventually criminalised the ‘undue’ inflation of prices and tried to prevent opportunistic traders from creating ‘artificial scarcity’.⁶⁶

As some of the principal traders managing the import of goods from India, Indian Moors were accused of hoarding goods and inflating prices at a time of growing hardship for poorer segments of the population.⁶⁷ This allegation was not new, as highlighted in Chapter 3, and echoed previous claims made in Sinhala newspapers that Indian Moors had no sympathy for the poor villager when maximising their own profits. There is no official data on the price of currystuffs sold at the village level. However, there is evidence that the shortage of imports from India, which Indian Moors managed at the village level, translated into higher prices. For instance, ‘the price of most articles of diet rose, for the Sinhalese, of the Galle District at least, depend in a great measure on imported food: rice, to supplement that locally-grown, Maldivic fish, onions, chillies’.⁶⁸ In the Central Province, the price of these necessities rose by about 20 percent, according to the Government Agent, following the declaration of War.⁶⁹ Thus the

⁶³ *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1914*, p. A2; Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change*, p. 313.

⁶⁴ Lucas, *The Empire at War*, p. 370.

⁶⁵ *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1914*, p. A35.

⁶⁶ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, pp. 314-316; De Souza, *Hundred Days*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁷ Jayawardena, *Labour, Feminism and Ethnicity*, p. 272.

⁶⁸ Report of the Government Agent, Southern Province, 19 May 1915, *Ceylon Administration Reports 1914*, p. C3.

⁶⁹ Report of the Government Agent, Central Province, 27 May 1915, *Ceylon Administration Reports 1914*, p. B5.

alleged profiteering of these traders (which may not have been entirely of their own doing in the context of the War) between late 1914 and mid-1915 was arguably one of the factors that contributed to the antagonism that undergirded the 1915 pogrom. Commenting on the causes of the anti-Moor violence, the authors of the ‘Sinhalese Memorial’ to the Governor of Ceylon and the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Whitehall claimed,

the petty [Indian Moor] trader has shown too great a tendency to raise prices whenever a plausible pretext for so doing presented itself. Last year when the War broke out, he sought to exploit the situation by raising the prices of necessities. This was at a time when the labouring and other poorer classes had been to some extent affected by the depression in the chief industries in the hands of the permanent population, and it naturally excited much resentment among the people.⁷⁰

Governor Chalmers wrote, ‘even in Ceylon, the war has had its effect in raising prices, and, in a peasant country where retail prices are expressed in cents and half cents...even a slight rise in customary prices is both felt and resented by the customer’.⁷¹ Chalmers, in fact, connected the ‘pre-existing feeling towards Mohammedan traders...with the recent resentment against rising prices’. The government appears not to have been completely unresponsive to the alleged ‘profiteering’ of Indian Moors. Indeed, the ‘Sinhalese Memorial’ reveals, ‘in more than one instance the authorities had to interfere with this attempt on the part of the petty trader to turn to his own benefit a situation of grave difficulty to the whole country’.⁷² Yet the ‘interference’ of the state may have strategically aimed to divert attention away from its own shortcomings and inability to maintain consistent food supplies. The Memorial does not specify these ‘instances’ of state intervention. However, the Government Agent for the Central Province observed,

⁷⁰ Sinhalese Memorial, 25 September 1915, DRWC, p. 2.

⁷¹ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Governor to Secretary of State, 11 August 1915.

⁷² Sinhalese Memorial, DRWC, p. 2. Meanwhile, the diaries of the Government Agents in the North-Western and Southern Provinces show that ‘revenue officers and headmen warned wholesale and retail dealers [about profiteering] and kept a close vigilance over the retail prices’. Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 316.

the outbreak of the war with Germany on August 5 produced far-reaching effects even in these remote hills...The petty traders [possibly including but not restricted to Indian Moors] of the district endeavoured to foster a panic and profit by raising the prices of food stuffs, but the publication of the Government Proclamation of August 7, simultaneously in every bazaar of this district...had the effect of checking this tendency in some measure.⁷³

The exact proclamation is not specified; either of two proclamations that were issued on 7 August 1914 in the Government Gazette could have been the one referred to. The first proclamation may have had a calming effect as it pertained to the government's increased budget for contingent spending between October 1914 and September 1915.⁷⁴ The second, by contrast, was more punitive in nature and may have been used as a deterrent to profiteering: it was an ordinance to consolidate and amend the Laws relating to the identification and supervision of habitual criminals. In October 1914, the government authorised respective Government Agents to distribute land for chena cultivation to villagers to grow their own crops given the shortage of imports.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the government conducted 'personal inspection[s] of the principal rice stores in Kandy' and ensured that prices were not unduly high compared with Colombo prices.⁷⁶ In Matale, the Assistant Government Agent ordered the publication of price lists outside every shop from January 1915 onwards.⁷⁷ Despite the government's (limited) efforts, economic conditions worsened, and Indian Moors were liable to be viewed by Sinhalese as unethical and immoral for artificially raising prices and hoarding goods during the War. This perception was not new but was magnified during the experience of the War.

⁷³ Report of the Assistant Government Agent, Central Province, 1 April 1915, *Ceylon Administration Reports 1914*.

⁷⁴ Ordinance 463 of 6 August 1914, *Ceylon Blue Book for 1914* (Colombo, 1915).

⁷⁵ *Ceylon Independent*, 17 October 1914, cited in Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 314.

⁷⁶ Report of the Assistant Government Agent, Central Province, 1 April 1915, *Ceylon Administration Reports 1915*.

⁷⁷ Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*, p. 317. Jayasekera's sources are the Assistant Government Agent for Matale's reports in the Hansard for January and February 1915.

This specific antagonism around the issue of food shortages and prices – a causal factor also alluded to by Kumari Jayawardena – may explain the looting of Moor-owned stores for goods such as rice during the 1915 pogrom.⁷⁸ In fact, Buddhist monks who appealed to the colonial state for leniency towards the Sinhalese after the pogrom observed, ‘the rowdy element...suffering from great want and scarcity of money thought this to be an excellent opportunity to replenish themselves by looting the boutiques of the Mohammedans, for it was they whom...were regarded as responsible for the rise in prices of food-stuffs’.⁷⁹ The Sinhala newspaper *Dinamina* reported on 2 June 1915 that in Colombo, Indian Moor tea shops and rice stalls where people used to eat and drink were attacked and set on fire. These are some of the places rioters would have patronised previously, and encountered high prices that were increasingly difficult to afford.⁸⁰

Elsewhere in the world, shortages, inflation, and the perceived hoarding and profiteering by Asian/Muslim traders during the War triggered a range of backlashes, such as protests and physical violence in Reunion Island.⁸¹ As in the targeting of Moor enterprise in Ceylon, Pierre-Eric Fageol observes ‘popular vindictiveness’ in the attack of Arab traders’ shops, which were ‘symbols of the success of Asian traders’.⁸² In an observation that would resonate in Ceylon, Fageol notes that hostility ‘against communities of Asian origin in Reunion Island is symptomatic of the tensions exacerbated by the Great War in a society that is nevertheless multicultural and mixed’.⁸³ However, it is very telling that non-Moor Asian traders in Ceylon, such as Bohras, Chettiars, and Memons, as well as Chinese and Japanese traders were not

⁷⁸ Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors’, p. 228.

⁷⁹ Letter to Chalmers from Sri Dhammaratne Padhan Nayake Thera et al, 12 July 1915, TNA, WO 141/11, Riots in Ceylon.

⁸⁰ *Dinamina*, 2 June 1915.

⁸¹ Fageol, “Colonial Boches”, pp. 5-34.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

harmed during the pogrom. Bohras, for example, had been criticised by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1911 in the verse of a poem for their import trade in rice, chilli, and mung beans from India. Their ‘crime’ was taking away that portion of trade from the Sinhalese.⁸⁴ However, during the War and prior to 1915, there were no overt accusations of these groups being involved in price fixing even if they had to pass on inflated prices or took other opportunities to profit. Such practices are likely to have occurred at a time of high inflation among petty traders of any background – not just Indian Moors. However, the violent targeting of Moors specifically is due to the overlap of such perceived opportunism and prevailing anti-Moor discourses.

In the weeks following the pogrom, Chinese and Japanese traders gave evidence to the Medical Officer of Health, Colombo that they ‘had not been disturbed by the recent riots, and had no intention of giving up business or leaving Ceylon’, contrary to rumours circulating in the city.⁸⁵ Indeed, the Health Officer observed that the Japanese merchants in particular were ‘quick to take advantage of this rumour [that they were going to carry on forced sales and leave Ceylon], and have fostered it by selling certain of their old stock at slightly reduced prices.’⁸⁶ The opportunism of those traders did not in any way attract a backlash such as that experienced by Moors. Thus, it appears that although economic grievances and tensions were fundamental causes of the pogrom, they were interpreted through emotional or discursive lenses that were ethno-religious in character.

B. Impact of the War in Terms of State Inaction

At the time of the War’s outbreak, Ceylon was considered relatively safe and stable. Thus, due to the lack of a need to maintain a large garrison on the island, British troops who were

⁸⁴ *Sinhala Bauddhya*, 14 October 1911.

⁸⁵ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Enclosure 3 in No. 9, Medical Officer of Health, Colombo, to the Chairman, Municipal Council, Colombo, 29 June 1915.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

garrisoned on the island were quickly despatched to other fronts.⁸⁷ A double company of infantry that was ‘armed, equipped, and paid by the colony’ was despatched in November 1914 to Egypt, where it saw active service as a fifth company alongside the Wellington infantry battalion of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Anzac division.⁸⁸ This mobilisation of British troops stationed in Ceylon to serve in the various fronts explains the shortage of senior policemen in the island at the time the pogrom began on 29 May 1915. Indeed, on 11 August 1915 – during the first debate of the Legislative Council since the pogrom – Ponnambalam Ramanathan criticised the police for their inefficiency as the pogrom began. He blamed the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Herbert Dowbiggin, who, not having anticipated any such outbreak of violence during the Vesak Perahera, released three out of fifteen Assistant Superintendents ‘into the Army for service at the front in the months of March, April, and May’.⁸⁹ Importantly, it was at this debate that both Ceylonese and European members of the Council suggested that the failure of the police was the reason the initial outbreak of violence morphed into a large-scale pogrom, and recommended the establishment of a Police Inquiry Commission.⁹⁰

As suggested in the previous chapter, the police had adequate forewarning of trouble regarding Vesak processions in Kandy. Between January and May 1915 there had already been four ‘riots’ begun by the Moors (see Chapter 1 for the chronology of riots) over the use of sound in polytheistic processions. Competition and assertion between Indian Moors and Buddhists over religious space were central to the build-up of tension in 1915. Vesak processions were to be monitored by the state as per the procession licences granted under the Police Ordinance (that were necessary due to Indian Moor intransigence regarding music in front of the Castle Hill

⁸⁷ East Indies telegrams 27 July – 30 September 1914, TNA, ADM 137/12.

⁸⁸ Lucas, *Empire at War*, p. 357.

⁸⁹ Debate on 11 August 1915, *Ceylon Legislative Council Hansard, 1915* (Colombo, 1916), p. 395.

⁹⁰ PIC, SLNA, Ceylon Sessional Papers 1916, pp. ii-iii.

Street Mosque). The presence of Indian Moors at the mosque beyond midnight, by which time prayers had typically ended, suggests they were ready to ‘defend’ their mosque in case the musical instruments of the processions were not silenced. In that context, the presence of only four policemen to control crowds ranging between 3,000 and 4,000 processionists was woefully inadequate. However, this lack of policemen on duty at Castle Hill Street was out of necessity more than choice and can only be understood in the context of this mobilisation of troops for the War.

In addition to the lack of policemen, the state’s initial inaction was due to a crisis in leadership. At the time of the outbreak of the violence the mind of the premier colonial official, the Governor, was likely to have been weighed down by developments on the Western Front, highlighting the connections between a global war and a local emergency. Governor Chalmers’ two sons had been fighting with the 2nd Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, and the Grenadiers since 1914.⁹¹ However, both sons died fighting in Europe in May 1915, with the second son succumbing to injuries on the front on 25 May, just four days before the pogrom erupted. Their deaths are likely to have affected the Governor’s state of mind – likely a combination of both shock and grief – and his ability to respond to a national crisis in Ceylon a few days later.⁹²

Beyond Chalmers’ personal loss, his general suitability for colonial governance (and thus his ability to respond to a pogrom) from a colonial perspective may be questioned. He was a scholar of Buddhist and Pali studies, and a civil servant in the British Treasury prior to his only posting in a colony. Chalmers appeared quite thrilled at his appointment as Governor of Ceylon in 1913, to take charge of a colony that was likely considered a ‘plum posting’ at the time. He

⁹¹ Chalmers to McKenna, 8 March 1915, Churchill Archives, GBR/0014/MCKN 9/5.

⁹² Blackton, ‘Action Phase’, p. 239. Further details on Chalmers’ frame of mind are lacking as the Diary of the Private Secretary to the Governor 31 May-6 June 1915, and the Governor’s diaries are no longer available at the SLNA (assumed damaged).

commented, ‘this is a pleasant land, and I like the people’.⁹³ Indeed, Chalmers’ sense of security in Ceylon even at the outbreak of the War is reflected in a letter he wrote cheerfully in March 1915 to his friend and colleague, the Home Secretary Reginald McKenna, ‘[I] am on the top of the heap all right in my Lilliput’ – a phrase that succinctly reflects the nature of Orientalism that pervaded the British civil and foreign service.⁹⁴ Inherent in the metaphor of Ceylon as Lilliput is the idea that Chalmers was the larger-than-life Gulliver, compared with the diminutive Lilliputians/locals – whom, at the time of writing at least, were well ‘under control’ or ‘tamed’. Notions of Ceylon as a ‘model colony’ clearly pervaded those who served on the island. Given the perception of Ceylon as peaceful, the administrators sent to govern, including Chalmers, may have had less colonial governance experience. The despatch of such ‘administrators’ in the early twentieth century can be contrasted with the experienced military men who were sent to Ceylon in the earliest decades of British rule. Governor Robert Brownrigg (1811-1820), for example, had served briefly in the American War of Independence before being sent to Jamaica (where he married into a slave-owning family), and later being promoted to Lieutenant-General in Britain.⁹⁵ It could be argued, perhaps, that the Colonial Office was comfortable sending less militaristic men to Ceylon.⁹⁶ With the contingency of ethno-religious violence occurring at an island-wide scale not previously seen during British colonial rule, these administrators failed to maintain peace and stability in terms of saving lives of the Moors initially targeted in the pogrom. Chalmers’ lack of experience in colonial governance, together with his personal family loss in the month the pogrom erupted, helps explain the crisis in leadership and the multiple failures of the state during this period.

⁹³ Chalmers to McKenna, 8 March 1915, Churchill Archives, GBR/0014/MCKN 9/5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Nishantha De Silva, *The Goddess Brownrigg took Back Home with Him*, (Unpublished article, December 2021), p. 8; ‘Obituary – Gen. Sir R. Brownrigg, Bt. G. C. B’, *The Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle* 103 (1833), pp. 179-180.

⁹⁶ Blackton, ‘Action Phase’, p. 235.

Indeed, the state's muted response to the outbreak of localised violence in Kandy between 29 and 31 May enabled violence to spread to five of the nine provinces. On 1 June, this lackadaisical response to the pogrom was justified in the Governor's correspondence with Whitehall: 'I do not attach political significance to the outbreak... There is no ill feeling against Government, nor any desire either to molest Europeans or to damage railways or non-Moslem property'.⁹⁷ This statement reveals a certain colonial apathy with respect to domestic disturbances that did not threaten the stability of the state. However, as other colonial administrators became involved with decision-making, the risk assessment regarding British security changed. Crucially, when the British began to perceive the violence as a campaign of foreign subversion targeting the state, they moved rapidly and ruthlessly to suppress further violence. The state took the violence more seriously only once it believed that there was a threat to its own stability.

C. Impact of the War in Terms of State Excess

Fears of Anti-Colonial Rebellion

In contrast to Chalmers' original assessment of the violence, Colonial Secretary Reginald Stubbs feared that there was more to the violence than simply anti-Moor sentiment. Stubbs was convinced that 'the riots were a rebellion against British rule'.⁹⁸ He blamed emerging nationalist leaders, whom he described as 'a set of skunks – mostly I regret to say men educated in Europe – one or two Cambridge men among them if stories are true'.⁹⁹ Stubbs' position is an important reminder that the 'colonial state' was not a monolithic structure but one that was riven with difference and doubt.

⁹⁷ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Governor to Secretary of State, 1 June 1915.

⁹⁸ Stubbs to Collins, 8 June 1915, TNA, CO 54/782; Fernando, 'The British Raj', p. 249.

⁹⁹ Stubbs to Collins, 8 June 1915, TNA, CO 54/782.

Concerns of anti-colonial sentiments are unlikely to have been divorced from broader Asian rebellions taking place around the same time against the backdrop of War. For instance, in February 1915 the British encountered a mutiny in Singapore and cries for simultaneous uprisings from ‘Lahore to Dacca’.¹⁰⁰ In Singapore, the (all-Muslim) Indian 5th Light Infantry regiment mutinied against the British on 15 February. Tim Harper observes that the mutiny was based on the incorrect belief that a redeployment of the regiment to Hong Kong was actually ‘a feint to send them to Egypt against the Ottomans’, to fight against their coreligionists in the First World War.¹⁰¹ The uprising began at the Alexandra Barracks and spread to China Town, Tanglin Camp and other parts of Singapore, and the targets of the violence were specifically British officers. The violence was merciless and British men were killed on even the most hallowed of colonial spaces – golf courses and carriages. The mutiny evoked colonial fears reminiscent of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, which led to concerns over the safety of European women and children.¹⁰² Similarly in Ceylon too, panic among the wider European community was widespread during the pogrom. For example, European women and children living in the Kegalle district were evacuated to Colombo for their safety.¹⁰³ With hindsight, Legislative Council member and Police Inquiry Commissioner S.C. Obeyesekere observed that despite the fears for their safety, ‘hardly any Europeans were seriously injured by the mobs’.¹⁰⁴ However, the recent experiences of Britons in places like Singapore were likely to have weighed on the minds of colonial officials in their interpretation of the 1915 pogrom.

Real and Imagined German Threats to Ceylon

¹⁰⁰ Harper, *Underground Asia*, p. 254.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁰³ Anderson to Long, 26 May 1917, SLNA, SIC.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Rider’ by S.C. Obeyesekere, SLNA, PIC, p. xiv.

In addition to the British experience of nearby rebellions, the government briefly entertained fears of German intrigue in Ceylon: paranoia and rumour were rife in the island, including suggestions of a German conspiracy embedded in the 1915 pogrom.¹⁰⁵ Once again, the reasoning acquires weight when set in a global perspective, for elsewhere, Germans had penetrated Indian nationalist circles including exiles abroad.¹⁰⁶ Kumari Jayawardena highlights the active support and financial assistance given by the Germans during the War to various anti-British associations in India.¹⁰⁷ Even in Singapore, there was evidence of attempts at intrigue by German companies based in Singapore.¹⁰⁸ There was similar concern in Ceylon that Germany was conducting a ‘revolutionary programme’ to undermine the British war effort.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, from the day Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Ceylon was put on high alert for German cruisers and armed steamers that ‘may get on [the] Indian trade route’.¹¹⁰ German subterfuge was already evident when on 9 August Naval Intelligence Officers in Colombo and elsewhere were informed that cyphers containing the ‘peace code’ were captured by Germany, and that there was a ‘danger of false messages being forwarded to Consular Reporting Officers by German agents’.¹¹¹ The most significant threat to Ceylon’s security from Germany came in the form of the notorious *Emden*, a German cruiser that terrorised various colonies and Allied shipping in the Indian Ocean between September and November 1914. On 13 August 1914, the *Emden* was despatched to work as a ‘commercial raider’ in the Indian

¹⁰⁵ Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors’, p. 230.

¹⁰⁶ Harper, *Underground Asia*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁷ Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors’, p. 230.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰⁹ The scholarly term ‘revolutionary programme’ refers to Germany’s tacit support for the fomentation of anti-imperial discontent in various colonies such as India, as well as in other non-European theatres such as Mexico and Central Asia. See Hans-Dieter Kluge, *Irland in der Deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik und Propaganda vor 1914 und im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), pp. 122–24; Felix Kloke, *Von innen schwächen – von außen besiegen. Aufstände im Feindesland als Instrument Deutscher Kriegsführung im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Telegram from Admiralty to Commander in Chief East Indies, Colombo, 4 August 1914, TNA, ADM 137/12.

¹¹¹ Telegram from Commander in Chief East Indies, Colombo to Admiralty, 6 August 1914; Telegram to Intelligence Officers, inc. Colombo, 9 August 1914, TNA ADM 137/12.

Ocean.¹¹² A month later, Naval Intelligence, Colombo, reported an Italian steamer's sighting of the *Emden* with four captured vessels, roughly sixteen miles south-east of False Point in the Bay of Bengal.¹¹³ Within days of its sighting, *the Emden* had sunk five British ships and delayed shipping along the Colombo-Singapore trade route.¹¹⁴

Despite the British Admiralty's best efforts, the *Emden* continued to wreak substantial damage across the Indian Ocean, including the 'shelling [of] the Burma Oil depot in Madras harbour on 22 September, and then sinking the Russian cruiser *Zhemchug* and the French torpedo-boat-destroyer *Mousquet* during the battle in Penang harbour in Malaya on 28 October 1914.'¹¹⁵ During this period, the diary of Petty Officer Plotz of the *Emden* (later a P.O.W. onboard H.M.A.T. Orvieto) reveals just how close to Ceylon's ports the *Emden* really was.¹¹⁶ By 23 September, the *Emden* sailed around the east coast of Ceylon, and towards Galle in the south-west.¹¹⁷ Some citizens in Galle fled inland, fearing shelling similar to that in Madras, while others 'thronged the ramparts' by the Galle lighthouse to 'witness the unusual sight of six big steamers' believed to have been chased by the *Emden*.¹¹⁸ On 25 September, the *Emden* sank a British steamer around 130 miles off Colombo, after which it returned to a position 40 miles off Colombo, and captured the British steamer 'Tymerik'.¹¹⁹ The '*Emden*'s Exploits' grabbed headlines, and details of how Allied ships were captured seized the attention of the Anglicised public in Ceylon in the following weeks.¹²⁰ The threat of German attacks on the island seemed very real at this time – something that previous scholarship has not acknowledged, and was one

¹¹² Jarosław Suchoples, 'The birth of the legend: The odyssey of the cruiser *Emden* as presented by German daily newspapers, 1914–1915', *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29/3 (2017), p. 545.

¹¹³ Telegram from Intelligence Officer, Colombo to Admiralty, 14 September 1914, TNA, ADM 137/12.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1914.

¹¹⁵ Suchoples, 'The birth of the legend', p. 545.

¹¹⁶ 'The Cruise of the S.M.S. *Emden*', TNA, ADM 137/21, Merchant Vessels Captured by German Cruisers, 1914-1915, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ *Ceylon Observer*, 24 September 1914.

¹¹⁹ 'The Cruise of the S.M.S. *Emden*', TNA, ADM 137/21, p. 9.

¹²⁰ *Ceylon Observer*, 6 October 1914.

that impacted the colonial logic in responding to the pogrom. The map in Figure 1 highlights how close to Ceylon's shores the *Emden* travelled and the disruption it would have caused alongside normal shipping routes.



Figure 1: Merchant Vessels Captured by German Cruisers 1914-1915, Part of Admiralty Chart No. 748 showing operations of *Emden* in red and usual trade routes in green, August to November 1914

On 22 September, the day of the attack on Madras, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Harcourt informed the Governor of Ceylon that a deputation from the Britain-based Ceylon Association had raised the alarm of German espionage in Ceylon. It was their ‘firm conviction that [the] success of “*Emden*” [was] due to information supplied from Colombo, and urged that in existing circumstances all Germans should be removed to [the] interior’.¹²¹ This information

¹²¹ Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of Ceylon, 22 September 1914, TNA, ADM 137/12/10, fo. 528.

triggered a backlash against German individuals and companies in Ceylon that was to last until the end of the War.¹²² Civilian internment was introduced on 26 October 1914.¹²³ German P.O.Ws brought over from captured steamers as well as suspicious German and Austrian nationals (including women, as pictured in Figure 2 below) were eventually rounded up and sent to a P.O.W. camp in Diyatalawa, a hill station in Ceylon.¹²⁴ German and Austrian religious figures, including Buddhist monks and Catholic priests, were also deported to Australia for internment, and not allowed to re-establish a ‘settlement’ in Ceylon even after the War.¹²⁵

¹²² However, from the declaration of War in August, Germans in Ceylon were rounded up, registered and released on parole after signing a bond of neutrality. See Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 3.

¹²³ Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi, *Enemies in the Empire: Civilian Internment in the British Empire during the First World War* (Oxford, 2020), p. 114.

¹²⁴ Deportation of Germans Jul-Sept 1915, TNA, CO 54/784, Despatches – September 1915.

¹²⁵ German and Austrian Missionaries, TNA, CO 323/662/21, Ceylon, German and Austrian Missionaries, December 1915.



Figure 2: German women in captivity in a British internment camp, probably in Ceylon, with a colonial soldier, 1914

Although the *Emden* never attacked Ceylon, it triggered suspicion around German intrigue in Ceylon that would eventually re-emerge in the colonial state's assessment of who was behind the 1915 pogrom. Writing in March 1915, Chalmers informed Reginald McKenna in Whitehall, 'I had a storm burst on me because of Winston's gobermouches being stuffed up with fatuous gossip, about Germans in this place, from retired senilities from the storied East.'¹²⁶ Winston Churchill was First Lord Admiralty at the time (having succeeded McKenna), and a political

¹²⁶ Chalmers to McKenna, 8 March 1915, Churchill Archives, GBR/0014/MCKN 9/5.

rival of McKenna (who had succeeded Churchill as Home Secretary)! This ‘fatuous gossip’ was likely connected with the warnings given to the Secretary of State by the Ceylon Association in London discussed above during the *Emden*’s raids. Somewhat characteristically, Chalmers appears (rightly) not to have taken such rumours seriously and dismissed it as ‘all moonshine – which clashed with the local sunshine for a space; but I have got them all under’.¹²⁷ At the height of the pogrom, however, whispers about German intrigue were taken more seriously.

As the pogrom spread across multiple provinces, the government briefly viewed it as a potential German conspiracy. Special Commissioner R.W Byrde in his Special Report on the violence in Colombo claimed that he ‘received indirect evidence that a leaflet containing a portrait of the Kaiser with Dharmapala as his Chief Priest had been distributed at the time of the Wesak [festival]’.¹²⁸ However, Byrde failed to find any physical evidence of such a leaflet and did not believe there were ‘ostensible signs of German influence’.¹²⁹ Importantly, the portrayal of the Kaiser as a sponsor of Sinhalese nationalism and anti-Moor sentiment did not align with global realities. The German Kaiser had in 1898 declared himself ‘Protector of the Islamic World’ and was known among certain Muslims as ‘Hajji Guillaume’ following his alleged conversion to Islam.¹³⁰ While this image of the Kaiser as Hajj Guillaume was embraced by Muslims in places such as North Africa, there is no evidence of any conspiracy between the Sinhalese (or specifically Dharmapala) and the Kaiser. Other British contemporaries, such as Reverend Fraser of Trinity College, Kandy believed that Dharmapala fanned the flames of the pogrom through his writings (from Calcutta) but did not connect his role with the Kaiser.¹³¹

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Byrde to Colonial Secretary, 27 August 1915, TNA, CO 54/784, Ceylon, Despatches, September 1915.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Mahir Saul and Patrick Royer, *West African Challenge to Empire: Culture and History in the Volta-Bani Anticolonial War* (Ohio, 2002), p. 97; Krause, ‘Islam and anti-colonial rebellions’, p. 681.

¹³¹ Rutnam, ‘Rev. A.G. Fraser’, p. 155.

Concerns of German subversion in Ceylon did not remain confined to colonial officials on the island and indeed percolated through the annals of British government even in their reappraisal of the violence. In a debate at the House of Commons on 21 July 1915, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State informed the house that ‘it is quite possible that German intrigues were at the bottom of the rising in Ceylon’.¹³² This perception, and the recent memory of the *Emden*’s raids, appeared sufficient to convince the state to mercilessly quash the pogrom – for fear that agent provocateurs encouraging prolonged instability could be detrimental to Britain’s global war effort. Importantly, and despite the short-lived nature of the suspicion, it was fear of a German ‘conspiracy’ against the British that occupied colonial minds, rather than the question of a Sinhalese conspiracy against the Moors, that has preoccupied historians.¹³³

Recruitment of ‘Unofficial Volunteers’ and Implementation of Martial Law

The state’s brutal suppression of the pogrom, when it belatedly began, did not take place with the participation of existing law enforcement actors alone. As discussed above, much of the regular forces in Ceylon had been committed to the War and only a small number remained on the island.¹³⁴ Of those remaining forces, some were required to guard interned German prisoners and to maintain defences around Colombo. The 28th Punjabi Regiment was garrisoned temporarily in Ceylon on their way to France and was at the state’s disposal, but there were ‘no officers to command them’.¹³⁵ As a result, the General Commanding the Troops, H.H.L. Malcolm and IGP Dowbiggin had several ‘gentlemen, either volunteers or civilians, sworn in

¹³² House of Commons Debates, 5th series, Vol. 73, cols. 1558-9 (21 July 1915). By the time this statement was made in London, colonial officials in Ceylon were more assured that there was no such German intrigue.

¹³³ Rowell, ‘Ceylon’s Kristallnacht’, pp. 628-635.

¹³⁴ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Governor to Secretary of State, 15 June 1915.

¹³⁵ SLNA, SIC, p. xviii.

as special constables'.¹³⁶ Others were appointed special commissioners and Unofficial Justices of the Peace. However, 'they were all Volunteers, who are not, like Officers of the regular Army, familiar with the King's Regulations'.¹³⁷

Elizabeth Kolsky refers to this type of actor as the 'third face of colonialism': those who were neither colonial officials nor (Ceylonese) subjects.¹³⁸ These 'non-officials', usually British, were not employed by the state, but had access to British power and generated substantial revenue for the colonial economy.¹³⁹ For example, Frederick Sudlow was a tea broker in the Colombo Fort and Albert Sly was a planter.¹⁴⁰ It was not just British volunteers who were brought in to suppress the pogrom, but Americans too. Dr. Atkins Smith, an American dentist, was sworn in as a Special Constable and a Justice of the Peace for all 'disturbed districts' following the outbreak of the pogrom. These unofficial, untrained, and untested men were given broad powers to make decisions of life and death. In the words of Sudlow, 'we thought the occasion demanded the shooting of the men, and we did so'.¹⁴¹

Responsibility for the appointment of volunteers and the powers accorded to them lay with the IGP and General Malcolm. Their decision to appoint volunteers was justified on the grounds that there was a shortage of trained men, who had been despatched to the War's various fronts. The necessities of global War affected the availability of law enforcement actors in Ceylon, resulting in their wholly inappropriate replacement by non-professional troops. It is the actions of these men that were scrutinised by the Shooting Inquiry Commission in 1916, over a year after the pogrom had taken place. The Commission inquired into ten cases of shootings by these

¹³⁶ SLNA, SIC, p. xviii.

¹³⁷ Anderson to Long, 26 May 1917, SLNA, SIC.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 5.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Appendix A, Notes of Evidence, SLNA, SIC, p. 98.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

volunteers and found that each case involved illegal executions of Sinhalese men between 8 and 15 June 1915.¹⁴²

In addition to recruiting volunteers, General Malcolm attempted to arrest the deteriorating situation on 2 June 1915 by declaring martial law.¹⁴³ This declaration brought into operation the Imperial Order in Council of 26 October 1896 that conferred special powers on the Governor during an emergency to place all persons in the colony under military law.¹⁴⁴ Thus, officers of the Crown could take necessary action for the protection of the Colony in 1915 in view of the existence of an ‘actual state of war’.¹⁴⁵ What exactly was meant by this was not clarified: it may have referred to both the pogrom and the wider War. Martial law was lifted only on 30 August 1915 – almost three months later. The lawyer of W. A. de Silva, a Sinhalese nationalist figure arrested on 21 June, submitted an application to the Supreme Court for a writ of *habeas corpus*. The lawyer A. St. V. Jayawardene stated that the proclamation of martial law had ‘*ipso facto* expired’ based on the ‘alleged tranquillity of the country’, and thus martial law could not be justified solely by the existence of the ‘war in Europe’.¹⁴⁶ The Chief Justice, in his response, claimed that such a phrase was ‘clearly inaccurate’ as:

the war exists far beyond the limits of Europe. The whole Empire is at present at war, and its resources are being drawn upon in all directions for military purposes. Ceylon, therefore, as well as England, is in an actual state of war.¹⁴⁷

In that context, the Chief Justice dismissed the writ application by invoking the notion of a global war to justify the prolonged suppression of the island and the punitive measures taken to

¹⁴² SLNA, SIC, p. xvi.

¹⁴³ Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁴ Article III (1), TNA, CO 537/269, Order-in-Council of 26 October 1896.

¹⁴⁵ Application for a writ of Habeas Corpus for W.A. de Silva, 28 June 1915, TNA, FCO 141/1832, Ceylon Confidential Despatches, January 1916.

¹⁴⁶ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Desp. No. 8, Governor to Secretary of State, 1 July 1915.

¹⁴⁷ Application for a writ of Habeas Corpus for W.A. de Silva, 28 June 1915, TNA, FCO 141/1832.

quell the pogrom. If Ceylon's local populations did not actively participate in the War abroad, it was brought home to those across the island through the Chief Justice's skilful legal manoeuvring. As a consequence, numerous Sinhalese nationalist figures and Temperance leaders, who were later released without any charges, were unjustly imprisoned in squalid conditions for much of the remaining period governed by martial law.¹⁴⁸

Maintaining Local Loyalty and Regional Stability

Notably, the government was not immediately concerned by any potential fallout from the excesses committed against Sinhalese perpetrators of the pogrom and innocent detainees. The lack of a global community to which the Sinhalese could appeal was surely one reason this was so. By contrast, the government was much more concerned about the plight of the Moors, not so much for the direct impact of the pogrom on this group (as it originally dismissed the violence as localised, longstanding conflict), but for the potential wider repercussions in India. Thus, the state's excess, in terms of the indiscriminatory crackdown on Sinhalese, including the imposition of compulsory reparations from all Sinhalese (discussed further below), was in part driven by the desire to placate Moor sensibilities and their coreligionists in India. In this instance, therefore, the colonial logic did not follow an Islamophobic course, refraining from acting on the rumours 'industriously spread' to Governor Chalmers. The rumours, Chalmers noted, suggested that since Britain was at war with Turkey, to whom the Moors were partly loyal, the 'Government really wanted the Mohammedans roughly handled and eventually removed from the island'.¹⁴⁹ Why was managing the loyalty of the Moors so important in the context of the War?

¹⁴⁸ E.W. Perera, *Memorandum upon recent disturbances in Ceylon* (London, 1915), p. 57.

¹⁴⁹ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Desp. No. 15, Governor to Secretary of State, 11 August 1915. There is no evidence for such a belief having circulated among the Sinhalese even though such rumours reached the Governor.

The British Empire had the largest Muslim subject-population at the outbreak of war, and thus Turkey's entry into the war in October 1914 – led by the Ottoman Sultan/Caliph of Islam – posed a significant threat to British Muslim-subjects' loyalties to the King. Elsewhere in the British empire and other European colonies, colonial actors entertained real fears of Islam. Revolutions, depositions of sultans, and anti-colonial conflicts in Africa that were undergirded by religion had all contributed to such fears.¹⁵⁰

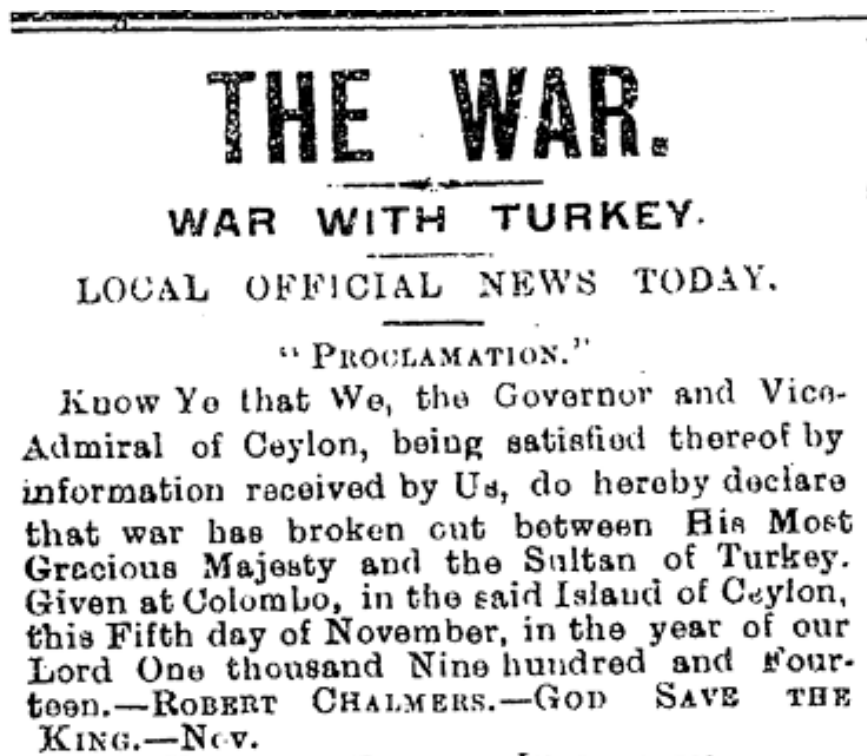


Figure 3: Proclamation of War with Turkey, *Ceylon Observer*, 12 November 1914

For the British, the situation was far more tenuous in India than in Ceylon due to its more sizeable and politically active Muslim community. In response to Turkey's entry into the War, and the proclamation of war between the King and the Sultan (see Figure 3 for the announcement in Ceylon), the British made an announcement to Indian Muslims guaranteeing Jeddah and the Holy Places in Arabia immunity from attack by the Allies.¹⁵¹ Indian Muslims

¹⁵⁰ Krause, 'Islam and anti-colonial rebellions', p. 677.

¹⁵¹ Desp. No. 43202 'Relations with Turkey', 5 November 1914, TNA, CO 323/638, Despatches Nov-Dec 1914.

themselves were aware that their loyalties were likely to come under suspicion by the British. Indeed, the Raj was actively gathering intelligence on the attitude of Muslim public opinion in India in response to the outbreak of war between Britain and Turkey.¹⁵² Thus, leading Muslims, including the Aga Khan (who influenced education in Ceylon), the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Begum of Bhopal, Nawab of Rampur and Nawab of Tonk sent declarations of loyalty to the Raj. Similarly, public bodies of Muslims telegraphed resolutions asserting their loyalty, including from the All-Indian Moslem League, the Bombay Presidency Moslem League, and the Punjab Moslem League.¹⁵³

Ceylon's Muslims followed suit, possibly in response to the Aga Khan's appeal to 'Moslems in India and His Majesty's other Dominions' sent on 4 November 1914.¹⁵⁴ Although in peacetime the British had tolerated the 'dual loyalty' of Moors to both the King and the Ottoman Sultan, as discussed in Chapter 2, such tolerance could not be assured during the War. On 5 November 1914, W.M. Abdul Rahiman, the Mohammedan Member in the Ceylon Legislative Council, forwarded a resolution to the Governor that was passed 'at a large and representative meeting of Muslims in Ceylon' in Colombo. Notably, the religious identity marker 'Muslim' and not the ethnic marker 'Moor' was used as the group label in this instance – as it concerned their global identity and their connections with the broader 'Muslim world'.¹⁵⁵ The resolution declared that the Muslims represented at the meeting 'humbly beg to express their entire and whole hearted loyalty and devotion to the British Throne and the Person of His Majesty the King Emperor'.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, mosques around the island, such as in Kandy, Hambantota and

¹⁵² Desp. No. 44616 'War with Turkey: Moslem attitude in India', 13 November 1914, TNA, CO 323/638, Despatches Nov-Dec 1914.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Desp. No. 42906 'Turkish Situation', 4 November 1914, TNA, CO 323/638, Despatches Nov-Dec 1914.

¹⁵⁵ There were around 3,000 people at the meeting, which included several Malays and even some Afghans. *Ceylon Morning Leader*, 6 November 1914.

¹⁵⁶ Resolution from Abdul Rahiman, 5 November 1914, TNA, CO 323/644, Mohammedan Loyalty 14 Dec 1914.

Batticaloa offered prayers ‘for the success of the British Army in the great conflict’.¹⁵⁷ Unbeknown to the British, who were not monitoring the Moor-run Tamil-language press, there was a marked difference between the overt reactions of the Moor elite – who quickly pledged their loyalty to the King (perhaps for a combination of strategic and sincere reasons) – and the popular Moor response to Turkey’s involvement in the war. Between January and June 1915, for example, there was an unambiguous preoccupation with Ottoman progress in the War.¹⁵⁸ In May 1915, a case regarding a brawl between Moors and Christians was heard in court; the dispute erupted at a tea shop when the Moors who were speaking supportively of Turkey could not accept what the Christians said about Turkish losses (probably at Gallipoli, where a campaign had begun the previous month and heavy losses inflicted on Turkey on 12 May).¹⁵⁹ The vernacular press, as also discussed in Chapter 2, was owned and largely consumed by elite Moors (given the limited literacy rates among the broader Moor population). Thus, elite Moors were ‘managing’ the colonial state while maintaining their pre-existing sense of ‘dual loyalty’ to both the Crown and Caliph.

Yet, the British appear to have gone to significant lengths to preserve the loyalty of the Moor population throughout the course of the War. In fact, in 1916, the colonial government repeatedly deferred to Moor petitions to prevent Ahmadi missionaries from Qadian in the Punjab from entering Ceylon, on the grounds that they were apostates and posed a threat to public order in Ceylon.¹⁶⁰ Despite multiple assurances from the British government in the Punjab that the Ahmadis were an entirely peaceful group – and recommendations to allow such entry – the colonial government in Ceylon refused to grant permission. Crucially, it was not the

¹⁵⁷ *Ceylon Observer*, 5 and 12 November 1914.

¹⁵⁸ For example, see *Muslim Nesan* and *Islam Mittiran* publications between January and June 1915 for weekly reportage on the war, with a strong focus on Ottoman progress.

¹⁵⁹ *Muslim Nesan*, 29 May 1915.

¹⁶⁰ Shamara Wettimuny and Gehan Gunatilleke, ‘Orthodoxy and Order: The Denial of Religious Liberty to Ahmadis in Colonial Ceylon’, *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 43/1 (2022), pp. 1-24.

Ahmadis who threatened a disturbance to public order but the Moors – in protesting their entry to Ceylon. Nevertheless, the state penalised the Ahmadis in this context, in large part to appease the Moors whose loyalty they valued.¹⁶¹

When anti-Moor violence erupted in 1915, the government sought to censor the news and prevent it reaching other Muslims in India. Concern about repercussions from the global Muslim community, particularly the large population based in India, appears to have driven such a decision. By 31 May 1915, just two days into the violence, Governor Chalmers had ‘taken steps to prevent any sensational accounts of “religious disturbances” being published or telegrams referring to the attacks on the mosques being telegraphed to India – where Mohammedan feeling might be exacerbated by these disturbances as being directed against their places of worship and religion’.¹⁶² On 7 June, the *Times of India* complained about the delay in receiving telegrams with news on the violence due to the Censor, and the need to supplement details from the Ceylon papers, which it still had access to.¹⁶³ Chalmer’s censorship order was reiterated on 7 June, when the Chief Censor (E.B. Denham) ordered that photographs of the violence could not be sent to the *Times of India* without his permission (and none were sent).¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, news travelled abroad, including through the circulation of the *Times of Ceylon* and Muslim newspapers written in Tamil (that probably eluded the Censor). For example, news on the loss of Moor life reported in the Tamil-language *Muslim Nesan* on 9 June 1915 is instantly recognisable in the *Times of India* as an English translation.¹⁶⁵ News also reached Indian Muslims through Malabar Moplabs who were doing business in Colombo and

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, Governor to Secretary of State, 31 May 1915.

¹⁶³ *Times of India*, 7 June 1915.

¹⁶⁴ Police Riot File Vol. 2 - order dated 7 June 1915, cited in Dep, *Ceylon Police*, p. 92.

¹⁶⁵ *Times of India*, 10 June 1915. The cutting and pasting of newspaper articles as a form of solidarity across the Global South had its precedent in 1848, when Mauritian newspapers shared details of the Matala Rebellion using reportage from the *Ceylon Observer*, *Examiner* and *Ceylon Times*. See Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (London, 2020), p. 328.

had ‘escaped from Ceylon’ to Malabar.¹⁶⁶ According to reportage in *Islam Mittiran* on 16 June 1915, the news ‘worried Muslims around the world’ as the Moors in Ceylon faced adversities ‘not faced anywhere else at this time’.¹⁶⁷ The commentary added that Moors had flourished under British rule; however, now they were being treated ‘close to garbage’. It ended, ‘we only hope the government will put a stop to this’. On 23 June 1915, the *Islam Mittiran* editorial reiterated that ‘the government will be held accountable for the plight of poor Muslim British citizens’.¹⁶⁸ The violence had ended by the time these articles were published. Thus, this commentary, which newspaper editors may have assumed was being read by the British (there is no evidence it was), is likely to have referred to expectations of justice. Indeed, local Moors were aware of the impact such a communication would entail in terms of security in the British Raj and leveraged this threat against the government. W.M. Abdul Rahiman curtly informed Chalmers in July 1915 that,

Ordinarily an attack on a Mosque is among Mohamedans [sic] deemed sufficient cause for effective retaliation, and my duty should have been to appeal to the Mohamedan World for assistance. In the present trouble, as Your Excellency has taken the whole matter into your hands, and in spite of the War in Europe every possible step is being taken for the vindication of the Mohamedan cause here, I have advised my community and they are content to leave their grievance with Your Excellency.¹⁶⁹

This letter, containing a threat veiled in the language of belief in British justice and unwavering loyalty, was taken seriously by the government. The government bore this threat in mind as late as December 1915. In pursuing redress for damages incurred by Moors, Colonial Secretary

¹⁶⁶ *Times of India*, 12 June 1915.

¹⁶⁷ *Islam Mittiran*, 16 June 1915.

¹⁶⁸ *Islam Mittiran*, 23 June 1915.

¹⁶⁹ W. M. Abdul Rahiman to Chalmers, 1 July 1915, SLNA, Lot 65/232, Despatches the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor.

Stubbs (by then also the Officer Coordinating the Government following Chalmers' premature departure from Ceylon¹⁷⁰) added,

I learn from trustworthy sources that the Moslem community in India are following with much interest the course of affairs in this island, and there can be no doubt that any action which could possibly be construed as indicating any intention to minimize or condone the wanton outrages to which their co-religionists in Ceylon have been subjected would have an effect upon their minds which it would not be wise to ignore.¹⁷¹

Indeed, the *Times of India* report from Madras on 11 June 1915 noted that mosques in Calicut, Mahe and other places in India were offering daily prayers for their coreligionists in Ceylon.¹⁷² The Indian press lamented that 'calculated attack[s]' had taken place against 'a defenceless and inoffensive race' and that the 'duty of the authorities is plain' – to ensure such violence is never repeated.¹⁷³ In this context, the government passed the Riot Damages Ordinance, No. 23 of 1915, which imposed a charge on all males between the ages of 18 and 55 in districts affected by violence, subject to certain exemptions for two years between 1916 and 1917.¹⁷⁴ In effect, as victims of the riots were exempt from this charge, and the violence took place in predominantly Sinhalese-populated provinces, it was a tax imposed on mostly Sinhalese men.¹⁷⁵ It is difficult to assess how committed the British in Ceylon would have been to providing redress for the Moors in the absence of the latter's transnational connections in India. However, in the already fragile wartime context, an overarching objective of maintaining

¹⁷⁰ Chalmers' recall to Britain in December 1915 was interpreted by many Sinhalese as a reaction by the metropole to the mishandling of the state's response to the pogrom. See Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*, p. 23. However, it was more likely to relate to the fact that his friend and colleague Reginald McKenna was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in May 1915. Indeed, Chalmers rejoined the Treasury after leaving Ceylon. See Return of Sir Robert Chalmers to the Treasury, 1915, TNA, T 170/66.

¹⁷¹ Stubbs to Bonar Law, 22 December 1915, SLNA, PF 2745, Memorial re appl of a Royal Commission in the Riots.

¹⁷² *Times of India*, 12 June 1915.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Fernando, 'The Post Riots Campaign for Justice', p. 256.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

loyalty and stability in the Raj shaped the nature of the British response to the pogrom in Ceylon.

It resulted in what was widely perceived – in Ceylon and abroad – as unjustly harsh conditions being imposed on the Sinhalese (including those who did not participate in the pogrom), as by virtue of their ethnicity all Sinhalese men in particular districts had to contribute to a substantial ‘riot damage compensation’ payment scheme. For those who had not participated in the violence and were already suffering from unemployment and higher prices triggered by the War, these costs were likely to have been unbearable and unjustifiable. The Sinhalese viewed these actions, derived from British justice for the Moors, as cruel and inequitable. These actions arguably convinced many Sinhalese, including emerging nationalist leaders, that the time had come to seek either further foreign intervention – through the form of a Royal Commission of Inquiry – or greater self-governance.

Once martial law had been lifted a ‘Public Meeting’ was held on 25 September 1915 to organise against the state. The meeting was allegedly attended by thousands of Sinhalese people. A ‘Sinhalese Memorial’ was produced as a result of the meeting.¹⁷⁶ It was a large dossier containing sworn statements, copies of licenses and other documents used to build up a case against the state for its excessive response to the 1915 pogrom.¹⁷⁷ The allegations against state actors ranged from physical violence (including group floggings), arbitrary imprisonment and extortion, to summary executions.¹⁷⁸ The Memorial was signed by 52 men who claimed to be representatives of the Buddhist and Christian Sinhalese in attendance at the meeting, as well as

¹⁷⁶ The absence of non-Sinhalese in this meeting is perhaps the first step in the shaping of the narrative that the pogrom was solely between Sinhalese and Moors (as opposed to including Tamil aggressors, for example).

¹⁷⁷ DRWC, Sinhalese Memorial, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ The harsh treatment of the Sinhalese is very well covered in the existing literature, including most recently in Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*.

‘all Sinhalese districts in the Island and belonging to all classes of the Community’. As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, while this did not constitute anti-colonial rebellion, it was an openly anti-colonial position adopted for the first time during the War.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

In terms of the costs of mobilisation for the War, the absence of colonial demands on local manpower to supply the frontlines meant that anti-colonial sentiment was not nurtured in Ceylon in the way it was elsewhere, such as in India and Algeria.¹⁸⁰ The experience of War in and beyond India, for Indians, and the enormous demands on their manpower and materiel with insufficient returns at the end of the War, fed into the Indian nationalist struggle that led to Independence. By contrast, many of these factors, such as ‘war service’ were irrelevant to the Ceylonese experience of the War. Ceylon’s sacrifices during the war were undoubtedly less than other colonies, as they were largely financial in nature. Paradoxically, British opposition to physical Ceylonese participation in the War may have actually secured the population’s general loyalty in the long run. Indeed, it is difficult to identify a *direct* connection between the First World War and decolonisation in Ceylon.

However, there were indirect connections that are no less vital to consider. When widespread violence erupted in Ceylon during the War, it was not directed at the state. Even though the state was clearly unprepared for violence (against a minority group), and the Sinhalese could have taken advantage of such disarray to land a blow to the state, it did not. Anti-colonial rebellion, despite years of anti-colonial discourse and growing nationalist sentiment reflected in Sinhala newspapers and Temperance movements, did not feature at any point during the War

¹⁷⁹ The emphasis is on the period of war. Anti-colonial positions and protests had previously existed, such as during the Temperance movement.

¹⁸⁰ Krause, ‘Islam and anti-colonial rebellions’, p. 691.

or the targeting of Moors. As far as state-society relations went, at this point, Ceylon's subjects were considered a model colony by the British. However, first, the War played an important part in triggering the 1915 pogrom, in terms of creating the difficult economic conditions that undergirded an aspect of the violence. Second, the War contributed to the state's heavy-handed response to the pogrom that went beyond persecuting the perpetrators of anti-Moor violence, and this appears to have sparked the desire for Independence among a much larger section of the populace. The colonial logic for such suppression was, crucially, based not just on the security situation on the island, but in terms of wider implications for stability in India among the Muslim population there.

The Police Inquiry Commission in 1916 and the Shooting Inquiry Commission in 1917 had already investigated the failure of the police and certain extra-judicial killings by volunteers. The findings of these two Commissions appeared to support demands for a broader Royal Commission of Inquiry into the handling of the pogrom. Prabodith Mihindukulasuriya observes that as a transnational, multi-religious and humanitarian campaign for justice took form in Britain and Ceylon, the Sinhalese 'for the first time' voiced their desire for 'such a Constitutional Reform as shall bring the Government of Ceylon into closer touch with the nation's life and feeling'.¹⁸¹ Ultimately, the campaigners failed to secure the establishment of a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the state's actions. However, P.T.M. Fernando argues that in this process, 'the nationalist movement of Ceylon which had hitherto been dilettante now became focused and purposeful'.¹⁸² For instance, the new demand by campaigners for constitutional reform reflected nationalist developments taking place in Ceylon, including the establishment of the Ceylon Reform League in 1917.¹⁸³ In a speech to its sister organisation,

¹⁸¹ Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*, p. 96.

¹⁸² Fernando, 'Post Riots Campaign for Justice', p. 266.

¹⁸³ Mihindukulasuriya, *British Christian Humanitarian Organizations*, p. 97.

the Ceylon National Association on 2 April 1917, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam in his capacity of President, demanded ‘representative and responsible government...and [an] effective share in the administration of the country’.¹⁸⁴ The change in the hearts and minds of Sinhalese people in particular following the state’s suppression of the pogrom has been compared to the aftermath of the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 and the Amritsar Massacre in 1919.¹⁸⁵ In Ceylon, it caused an indelible rupture in the relationship between rulers and the ruled.¹⁸⁶ The Reform League and Ceylon National Association would eventually evolve into the Ceylon National Congress, which spearheaded Ceylon’s campaign for constitutional reform and eventually independence from 1917 onwards. Notably, in 1919, the former two organisations made a joint statement highlighting the state’s excess as part of their case for constitutional reform to the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

In 1915 the bureaucracy thoroughly misunderstood some local disturbances such as occur in every part of the British Empire, saw in them a deep conspiracy against British rule, and resorted to violent measures under Martial Law, resulting in the summary execution of scores of innocent persons and the punishment by Courts Martial of hundreds of others.¹⁸⁷

Although the campaign for justice had long ended by 1919, the injustice continued to weigh on the minds of nationalists. Therefore, an understanding of the 1915 pogrom is incomplete without the context of the First World War. Although Ceylon remained largely loyal to the Crown during the War, the state’s response to the pogrom – shaped by the exigencies of War – undergirded demands for a more empowered populace, and encouraged future agitation for

¹⁸⁴ Ponnambalam Arunachalam, ‘Our Political Needs’ speech in 1917, in Harshan Kumarasingham (ed.) *Speeches and Writings of Ponnambalam Arunachalam* (Colombo, 2019) p. 360.

¹⁸⁵ Blackton, ‘Action Phase’, p. 235.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Kearney, ‘The 1915 Riots in Ceylon: A Symposium – Introduction’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29/2 (1970), p. 221.

¹⁸⁷ *Case for Constitutional Reform in Ceylon* (Colombo 1919), SLNA, Lot 5/325, Desp. No. 689 of 29 September 1919, Joint Committee of the Ceylon National Association and the Ceylon Reform League, p. 167.

greater self-government, and ultimately, independence. The War therefore not only impacted the pogrom but also the future direction of Ceylon's sovereignty.

Conclusion

In reorienting the history of the 1915 pogrom, this thesis positioned the pogrom within a genealogy of ethno-religious violence between 1853 and 1915. It contextualised Sinhalese-Moor violence by analysing the Buddhist and Islamic revivals, socio-economic changes in Ceylon, and competition in the marketplace. Buddhist processions increasingly passed through newly constructed mosques, as individuals from across and beyond the island settled in rapidly growing towns and villages. Meanwhile, transnational connections and the global conjuncture brought to Ceylon important foreign actors such as Colonel Olcott, Madame Blavatsky, and Arabi Pasha, who in turn had considerable influence over local actors including Anagarika Dharmapala and Siddi Lebbe. These personalities, through their speeches and publications, helped shape the imagined communities of the Sinhalese and Moors at the turn of the century. Dharmapala in particular carved out an active role in defining the island's ethno-political trajectory that would have far-reaching consequences in terms of ethno-religious competition in Ceylon.

The colonial state and its machinery (including the judiciary and the police) vacillated in terms of its position on religious freedom, creating further confusion between and among ethno-religious groups on the island who clashed over sacred spaces, objects, and activities. In the instances the state intervened in a local dispute, it was on the grounds of maintaining stability and order, with the overarching objectives of creating conducive conditions for economic growth or preserving the security of the colonial state and its interests.

This thesis has made three contributions to the historiography on the pogrom. First, it has focused scholarly attention on the history of the Moors, including their identity formation, their

religious assertion, and their experiences during the pogrom. This focus is a deliberate intervention that seeks to disrupt popular narratives that have overwhelmingly highlighted the plight and suffering of the Sinhalese during the period of martial law following the pogrom. Meanwhile, scholarly research has prioritised causes over the course of the pogrom, leaving the histories of the victims unexplored. The experience of women, in particular, had never been discussed until now.

The primary victims of the pogrom, the Indian Moors, have never recorded their stories. Two subsequent developments may help explain the absence of their narratives. First, the newly independent state passed the Ceylon Citizenship Acts of 1948 and 1949, which denied citizenship to those in Ceylon who could not show proof of birth in Ceylon or documentation confirming the ‘registration of persons’ going back ten years.¹ This legislation particularly affected Indian Tamils and Indian Moors. Overnight, around 800,000 people of Indian origin found themselves without citizenship. The Act triggered an exodus of many people from these two groups from Ceylon to India.² Those who remained were rendered officially stateless. Second, from the 1950s onwards, Indian Moors gradually ‘disappeared’ as the category of Moor (and thus the distinctions between Ceylon and Indian Moor) was increasingly replaced by the religious identity marker ‘Muslim’ for group identity. This marker accommodated all ethnic Muslims who professed the Islamic faith.³ Perhaps due to such migration and assimilation, Indian Moor history in Ceylon has been largely undocumented.

In January 2020, after delivering a seminar on ‘The Colonial State’s Response to the 1915 Pogrom’ at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Kandy, I was approached by Ms.

¹ Farzana Haniffa, ‘Activism in a Time of Uncertainty: Revisiting the Good Minority Classification Today’, *Dr. A.M.A. Azeez Memorial Oration* (2020), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Shifaya Maraikar who said she was the great-great granddaughter of Assen Ali Muhammad Merra Lebbe, who, she claimed, built the Castle Hill Street Mosque in the 1890s.

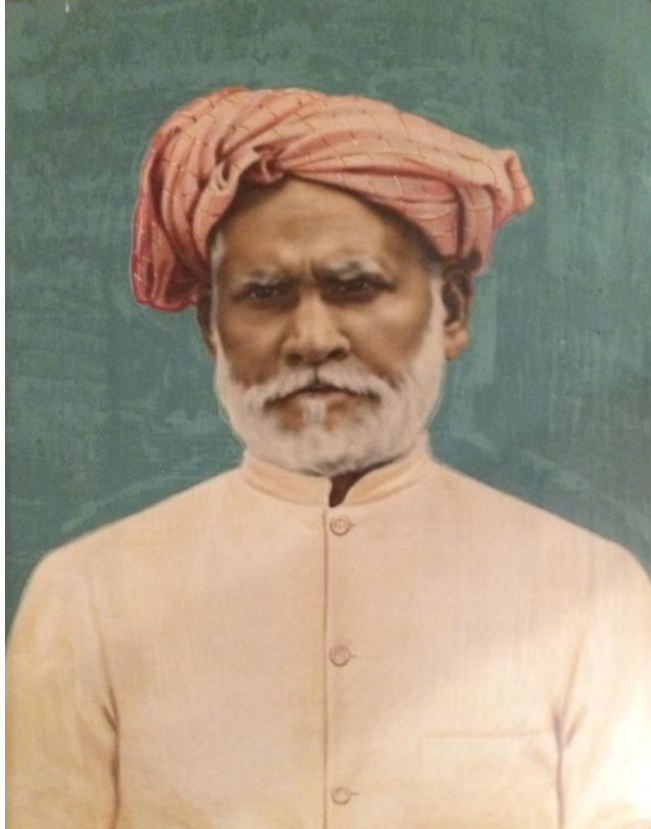


Figure 1: Painting of Assen Ali Muhammad Merra Lebbe

He had come to Ceylon with his brother in the mid-nineteenth century from India and made his fortune after developing a humble vegetable and wholesale supply business in Kandy.⁴ Notably, in the painting above (Figure 1) he is portrayed wearing a distinctive Indian headgear. He does not seem to have adopted the red fez that his Ceylon Moor contemporaries wore. Little else is known about Merra Lebbe or his experience during the pogrom, even within Ms. Maraikar's family. Once the pogrom had been quelled by the state, those Indian Moors who remained in Ceylon are quite likely to have wanted to put the episode behind them. Three decades later, the

⁴ Email correspondence with Shifaya Maraikar, 27 January 2020. For further information, see 'Assen Aliyar Muhammad Nagoor Meera', *The Muslims of Sri Lanka* (1 March 2006) <https://slmuslim.blogspot.com/2006/03/assen-aliyar-muhammad-nagoor-meera.html?m=1> (2 August 2020).

Sinhalese state legislated to confirm their ‘alien’ status and even more Indian Moors would have returned to India. I believe that many of the survivors took their experiences with them. This thesis, then, represents the first attempt to write back their histories into our understanding of 1915.

The second contribution I make is more specifically in terms of the historiography on causality behind the 1915 pogrom. Despite the existence of scholarly analysis on the Gampola Perahera dispute, and competition between the Sinhalese and the Moors against the general backdrop of religious revivalism and urbanisation, 1915 has been viewed as a moment of rupture between two communities that typically enjoyed peaceful relations.⁵ These historians may have been guided to some extent by the reactions of the colonial state, who appeared to have been unaware of the growing animosity between the Sinhalese and Moors: in the language of the colonial state during the early days of the pogrom, the Buddhists ‘in normal times...[do not] bear any special ill will towards Mohammedans’.⁶

I adopted a longitudinal lens that analysed the development of ethno-religious tensions more broadly between diverse groups in Ceylon from 1853 onwards, and identified an acceleration of ethno-religious violence from the 1880s onwards. The notion of Ceylon as a ‘model colony’ that was held by the British colonial state has already been disputed by historians such as Kumari Jayawardena, Sujit Sivasundaram and Nira Wickramasinghe.⁷ My research develops the existing scholarship by identifying a total of 43 episodes of ethno-religious violence

⁵ Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, pp. 149-212; Ali, ‘1915 Racial Riots’, pp.1-20; Jayasekera, *Social and Political Change in Ceylon*; Kannangara, ‘Riots of 1915’, pp. 130-165.

⁶ Parl. Pap. (1916), Cm. 8167, No. 1, Governor to Secretary of State, 31 May 1915.

⁷ Sivasundaram, ‘Cosmopolitanism and indigeneity’, pp. 194-215; Jayawardena, *Perpetual Ferment*; Wickramasinghe, ‘Many Little Revolts or One Rebellion?’, pp. 170-188.

(including those already 'known' in the historiography) between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

It is with this longer analysis of ethno-religious violence and recurrent conflict between Sinhalese and Moors from the 1860s onwards that I nuance my argument on the causes of the pogrom. The assertiveness of Christianity over the nineteenth century (that pre-dates Moor assertiveness) was an important background feature in fostering religious competition. In that context, while it has been necessary to highlight the extent of Moor suffering during the pogrom, it is equally important to critically examine how Moor (and Catholic) intransigence and violent antagonism towards polytheistic religious practices in the half-century that preceded the pogrom may have encouraged widespread participation in the pogrom. Indian Moors, in particular, repeatedly acted as agents of obstruction towards processions that engaged in sound worship. In fact, the stubbornness of the Indian Moors at the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque can be contrasted with the more accommodative practices of the Ceylon Moors at the Kahatapitiya Mosque in Gampola in 1907. This contrast highlights the difference in behaviour between the more recently immigrated Indian Moors and the long-established Ceylon Moors.

My thesis examined the discourse in the Sinhala press and offered new insights on the pogrom. Much of the grievances held by the Sinhalese towards the Moors were aired freely in the Sinhala press, enabling the construction of a genealogy of grievances, which reached fever-pitch in 1915. Curiously, the coloniser offered the Sinhalese a vocabulary of antisemitism through which to frame their economic tensions with the Moors in their exchanges with the state, even though such a vocabulary did not drive Sinhala discourse. Additionally, and unbeknown to the British, an indigenised language of the 'host-guest' dynamic, which I have re-interpreted as more akin to a 'host-parasite' dynamic, was developing in the Sinhala press. This language

organically bore parallels with the antisemitic language of the British. This parallel might have led some Sinhalese to believe that the colonial state would not react strongly to the assault on the Moors in 1915. Indeed, there is a sincere sense of surprise by the Sinhalese when the state belatedly responded with huge force to suppress the pogrom.

The Sinhala press, however, is not just a repository of Sinhalese frustrations that offers insights into the majority group's preoccupations with minorities in Ceylon. It also confirms narratives that a historian may typically not expect of it. For instance, the scale of the violence targeting Moors and the utter destruction wreaked during the pogrom is most vividly described in the Sinhala press. In fact, until the Sinhala press was censored, it even offered more detail than the English-language or Moor-owned press. The triangulation of trilingual sources in this thesis has enabled a more representative consideration of the history of the 1915 pogrom.

In 1915, then, Sinhala-Buddhists (among others) unleashed nine days of violence against Indian Moors (and later Ceylon Moors) as a sort of 'guti-kama' (beating), a term Pradeep Jeganathan uses to describe Sinhalese violence in another context.⁸ In the 'lull' that followed the original outbreak of violence on 29 May 1915, it is likely that some planning occurred, perhaps leveraging the organisational capacities and networks of the Buddhist *samāgam*.⁹ Rumours that tapped into longstanding Sinhalese insecurities were deployed, and defenders of the Buddhist faith and 'Sinhala nation' were mobilised. The violence was revengeful, representing the release of pent-up frustration and rage at being humiliated repeatedly by the Moors. Humiliation and indignity in terms of disruptions to religious processions over decades appear to have turned the Moors into a despised 'other' that had to be expelled or devastated in 1915. Ethno-religious

⁸ Jeganathan, 'A Space for Violence', p. 64.

⁹ Rowell, 'Ceylon's Kristallnacht', pp. 619-648.

competition (and the influence of British discourses on ‘race’) helped fuel this sense of wounded dignity. Meanwhile, the pogrom became an opportunity to settle old economic debts, literally and figuratively, and explains the involvement of Catholics and Tamils in the pogrom. My research has accordingly provided vital context around the long-term changes in inter-communal relations in Ceylon.

Finally, I explored the impact of the First World War on the pogrom – in terms of how Sinhalese grievances towards Moors were exacerbated during the War, and how the global context shaped the state’s initial inaction and eventual excess. This analysis is an important new dimension to the scholarship; it relates to the causes, course, and consequences of the 1915 pogrom. The War is referred to in the scholarship as having created economic shortages.¹⁰ But it also led to a shortage of police officers and other law enforcement actors, such as Justices of the Peace and magistrates, which shaped the pogrom in several ways. Chapter 5 additionally highlighted how regional British security concerns impacted its decision-making in Ceylon, and how Moors leveraged their religious networks in India to ensure that the colonial state belatedly ensured a degree of justice for the Moors. It is in this complex context of wartime exigencies and deep insecurity about local security that the British declared martial law and violently suppressed the Sinhalese. This period of repression ultimately triggered the search for an alternative to British rule and blew wind into the sails of a hitherto stagnant constitutional reform movement.

Reflections and Relevance

My research is important not just for other historians working on Ceylon and ethno-religious violence in South Asia more broadly, but also for scholars studying the current crisis of violence and discrimination against Muslims in Sri Lanka. In the post-armed conflict period between

¹⁰ Jayawardena, ‘Economic and Political Factors’, pp. 223-233; Blackton, ‘Action Phase’, pp. 235-254.

2012 and 2019, the harassment of Muslims escalated. Meanwhile, the Easter Sunday bombings by Islamists in 2019 exacerbated Sinhala-Buddhist suspicions of the broader Muslim community (as they, unfortunately, ‘confirmed’ much of what Islamophobes accuse Islam of), leading to further cycles of discrimination and violence against this minority.¹¹ Anti-Muslim rhetoric today bears parallels with the language of a century ago, while the means to harm the Muslims are eerily similar. For instance, Farzana Haniffa observes the use of economic boycotts to harm the Muslims economically, alongside the organisation by Sinhalese business collectives on Facebook for ‘shops and land for sale to be shared only with Sinhalese’, rendering it ‘almost impossible’ for Muslims to rent space.¹² It is worth recalling the poem ‘Don’t’ from Chapter 3 that rings familiar:

Don’t let heathen temples be built.
Don’t get caught to the death traps [cunning plans] of the Hambayas.
Don’t buy goods from their boutiques.
Don’t sign their promissory notes.
Don’t give them boutiques.
Don’t give them money.
Don’t sell them land.
Don’t pawn your goods to them.
Don’t lend them money.
Never take their rent.
Never take ‘ralahami’ titles from them [don’t let them flatter you by calling you ‘ralahami’].
Never take ‘lady’ titles from them [don’t let them flatter you by calling you ‘haaminey’]
Never get them to call you ‘mister’.
In short, don’t take anything from them! Don’t!! Don’t!!!

- D.A.H. Liyanaarachchi¹³

¹¹ Amarnath Amarasingham and Lisa Fuller, ‘Sri Lanka is burning – again’, *The Washington Post*, 17 May 2019, accessible at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/17/sri-lanka-is-burning-again/>.

¹² Farzana Haniffa, ‘How the Easter Sunday Bombings Left Sri Lanka’s Muslims with No Path Forward’, *The Wire*, 18 October 2019.

¹³ *Sinhala Jatiya*, 13 January 1914.

This poem was published in *Sinhala Jatiya* on 13 January 1914, before the pogrom. The poem advocates boycotting Moor boutiques, not selling them land, and not allowing them to rent land either. The lines of economic discrimination are almost identical to present-day anti-Muslim campaigns. Importantly, several economic grievances presented in the poem are preceded by an antagonism over sacred space: the construction of ‘heathen temples’ [mosques]. At the turn of the twentieth century, overlapping insecurities regarding religion and economics combined in the campaigns to alienate Moors. In Sri Lanka today, religion and economics continue to undergird Sinhala-Buddhist hostility towards Muslims. For instance, there is suspicion around the construction of mosques, particularly those that are viewed as funded by foreign Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ For many Sinhala-Buddhists, Saudi funding is sensationally associated with ‘Wahhabi’ expansionism and violent networks.¹⁵

Sinhalese fears regarding changed demographics (Chapter 3) and the relative growth of the Moor population vis-à-vis the Sinhalese have similarly continued into the present day. In twenty-first century Sri Lanka, widespread claims that Muslims try to ‘sterilise’ Sinhalese men and women forcibly and secretly (to ‘out-populate’ the Sinhalese) reached fever-pitch between 2018 and 2021. In the ‘Dr. Shafi case’, a Muslim doctor was falsely accused of sterilising over 1,000 Sinhalese women at the state-owned Kurunegala Teaching Hospital. No evidence has been produced against the doctor in a court of law to date.¹⁶

At the same time, several Sinhala-Buddhists remain suspicious of the other monotheistic group, the Christians, as representative of the West and expanding through the ‘unethical conversion’

¹⁴ Mohamed Faslan and Nadine Vanniasinkam, *Fracturing Community: Intra-group Relations among the Muslims of Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2015), p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Amnesty International, ‘From Burning Houses’ pp. 38 and 57. Dr. Shafi, who was sent on permanent leave after his arrest, has since been reinstated and awarded salary arrears.

of Buddhists.¹⁷ Serious anti-Christian violence may not have been possible under British colonial rule, yet, in the post-colonial period and specifically in the last few decades, there has been sustained anti-Christian violence and harassment.¹⁸ Monotheistic groups, then, remain an ‘other’ in Sri Lanka and are viewed as inherently expansionist and backed by foreign powers, which exert their influence through charities, universities, and places of worship.

Buddhist militant groups, such as the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS), which have been responsible for incitement of violence against Muslims since 2012 (but continue to operate with impunity under successive governments), are leading critics of Islamic attire.¹⁹ The burqa and the niqab, worn increasingly by some Muslim women since the 1980s are viewed as an ‘Arabised’ form of dress and therefore un-Sri Lankan. The hostility towards an ‘Arabised’ form of Islamic attire by the BBS can be contrasted with Dharmapala’s admiration for the Moors’ proud adoption of the distinctly Ottoman fez in the early 1900s. Under British rule, differentiation (from European dress) was seen as important. In post-colonial Sri Lanka, assimilation is emphasised. The BBS, and other Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists, have repeatedly told Muslims that if they are not happy to adjust to Sri Lankan cultural practices, they should ‘go back to where they came from’, believed to be the Middle East.²⁰ This language of un-belonging resembles the ‘host-parasite’ language from the turn of the twentieth century, while the threat of, or need to evict, the ‘other’ remains consistent across the century. However, the host-parasite dynamic of the colonial period is no longer applicable to the post-colonial context, in which Sinhala-Buddhists enjoy state power. Instead, a ‘host-intruder’ dynamic, in which the Muslim ‘guest’ is perceived to become an ‘intruder’ who through their commercial prowess ‘undermine[s] the dominance of

¹⁷ Verité Research, *Silent Suppression*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 6-8

¹⁹ Dhammika Herath and Harshana Rambukwella, *Self, Religion, Identity and Politics: Buddhist and Muslim Encounters in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2015), p. 13.

²⁰ For more on rising anti-Muslim sentiment in present-day Sri Lanka, see Amnesty International, ‘From Burning Houses’, p. 47.

the host', is more appropriate for the present-day, and reflects a major anxiety of the Sinhala-Buddhists.²¹

The history of the 1915 pogrom and ethno-religious violence in Ceylon is not a straightforward one with fixed aggressors, provocateurs, and victims. Instead, for at least 62 years, cycles of intolerance and violence shaped Sinhalese-Moor relations. Confrontations over religious space and the marketplace came to a head in May 1915, when the Indian Moors, for the last time on record, disrupted a Buddhist procession. There are no recorded Moor disruptions to Buddhist processions following the 1915 pogrom. It appears that the Sinhalese cowed the Moors into 'their place' as 'guests' in Ceylon with the frenzied violence of the pogrom. In fact, the Gampola Perahera Case, which had been elevated to the Privy Council in England prior to the pogrom, was settled out of Court by 1918 following compromise from the Indian Moors who agreed to allow processions to pass the Ambagamuwa Road Mosque without interference.²² Similarly, in contemporary Sri Lanka, repeated episodes of violence and discrimination against Muslims have reminded them of their marginalised status.²³ Yet the Easter Sunday Bombings remain a deadly reminder that such intolerance and violence can be cyclical. If we are to break this harmful cycle, we first need to understand the origins of this conflict. In the exploration of the genesis of fractured Sinhalese-Moor relations, my thesis bears lessons for both historical scholarship and contemporary debates.

²¹ Gehan Gunatilleke, *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, 2018), p. 70.

²² Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*, p. 175.

²³ Shamara Wettimuny, 'The Colonial History of Islamophobic Slurs', History Workshop Online, (7 September 2020), <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/colonial-history-islamophobia/> (2 August 2022).

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