

9 Spatial change and competition after the ending of armed conflict

I heard this kind of digging outside my house and woke up. It was dark and there were no lights for them to work with. It was a group of young people from the area. As soon as it got lighter they went off and then came again in the night. We had no idea what it was until a structure came up and we realized it was a Buddhist shrine. I couldn't understand why they were doing it in this way. For it was all done in the dark. If they want a Buddhist statue, we have no problem. Then someone said, 'But this is Christian property'.

(Fieldwork interview with June in 2012)

I focus in this chapter on the changes to the religious landscape of Sri Lanka after the ending of armed conflict in 2009 and the implications of these changes, concentrating on the former war zones of the North and East, but not excluding the predominantly Buddhist South. I draw on field visits to Sri Lanka in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2017, between which there were significant changes. The chapter, therefore, combines a narrative of my own observational experience after 2009, and that of the Sri Lankans I interviewed during these visits. I would repeat that all names have been changed to respect the anonymity of my participants.

The chapter recognizes Jude Lal Fernando's study, which argues that Sinhala Buddhist ethno-religious ideology demanded a 're-conquest' of the North and East after 2009 (Fernando 2013: 200) and Sasanka Perera's more recent work, *Warzone Tourism in Sri Lanka* (Perera 2016). With reference to Fernando, however, my own narrative argues that 're-conquest' was only part of the story. On the Buddhist side, the yearning to return to a perceived golden past where minorities recognized the prior claim of the majority community and so lived in harmony with it was more important than outright 'conquest'. On the side of the minorities, there was also a spirited, competitive response. With reference to Perera, in line with my narrative approach, I primarily honour my own journeys into the former war zones, presented at academic conferences since 2011,¹ and use Perera as supplementation. I begin with government-sponsored spatial changes immediately after the war before passing to war tourism, post-war spatial developments connected with religion in the South, the expansion of

Buddhist space in the North and East, and the self-affirmation of other religious communities, concentrating particularly on my themes of inclusivist subordination and rupture with pre-colonial patterns. Lastly, I survey Sinhala and Tamil response to these developments.

The ending of the war, the re-fashioning of space and war tourism

Mahinda Rajapakse, in his victory speech in May 2009, as I have already indicated, implicitly placed himself within the line of kings that had ‘defeated enemy invasions’, a self-definition that was reinforced by the honour given to him by the Malvatta and Asgiriya Buddhist monastic fraternities: ‘Universally Renowned Overlord of the Blessed Three Sinhala Regions’ (Fernando 2016: 272). The pre-colonial concept of *Sinhalē* was, therefore, consciously evoked at this point and in the years following. A plaque erected in 2011 at Lankāpotuna on the East coast, for instance, named him *Vishwa Keerthi* (Universal Pride) and ‘monarch’ of ‘Trisinhala’. Nevertheless, he also attempted inclusivity by using Tamil in his victory speech and promising reconciliation (Wickramasinghe 2014: 352).

In the months following May 2009, however, public space was moulded to express victory over the LTTE rather than reconciliation with Tamil communities. In the South, during the war, public space had been shot through with fear-filled tension. People feared that the bus they were travelling in or the road junction they were negotiating on foot would be the target of the next suicide bomber. Perera gives some of the strategies adopted by Sinhala families so that they did not travel together, so risking the death of all (Perera 2016: 73). After May 2009, this fear was removed. Internal tourism and pilgrimage recommenced. A trishaw driver, in the summer of 2009, pointed out to me the dramatically increased number of private buses parked outside Dehiwela zoo, close to Colombo. And for the first time since the 2002 ceasefire, Sinhala Buddhist groups could travel north to the island of Nāgadīpa and east to Sēruvila. According to Fernando, about half a million Sinhala people travelled along the A9 road to the North in the year after May 2009 (Fernando 2013: 206). For people in the North, however, the story was different. Thousands of Tamils who had escaped or survived the ‘cage’ (Weiss 2011) were confined to refugee camps. The land was under army control, with ongoing high security zones. The city of Jaffna limped towards some form of normalcy, with damaged buildings coexisting with new developments. The first government priority, however, was not residential housing but economic infrastructure improvement, through the rebuilding of roads and railways.

Those travelling within the island at this time could not fail to be reminded of victory. Anyone entering Colombo via the Kālani bridge saw a billboard displaying rows of red-bereted army personnel, unsmiling faces angled to the right, guns raised across their left shoulders, triumphantly represented as military heroes. Those passing Bandaranaike International airport saw a magisterial

cut-out of Mahinda Rajapakse, hand upraised. And those going north and east saw victory monuments. There had been monuments to the dead before the ending of the war, for example in Kandy. After May 2009, four victory monuments were erected: in Kilinochchi, the former LTTE capital; at Elephant Pass, the strip of land separating the Jaffna Peninsula from the rest of Sri Lanka; at Puthukkudiyiruppu near Nanthikadal Lagoon, close to the final battle and at Battaramulla close to the national Parliament. The Kilinochchi monument represented the LTTE as a forbidding, grey, concrete block into which a barrel-sized bullet had been fired. From one of the cracks that radiated outwards from the bullet, a pink, open lotus flower, symbol within Buddhism of purity growing from impurity, grew upwards. At Elephant Pass, four massive hands held up a cut-out of a united Sri Lanka, again topped by a lotus, this time with petals closed. The block on which this was raised was flanked by four lions. At Puthukkudiyiruppu, an elevated, more than life-size representation of a soldier's torso, muscular and belligerent, holding the Sri Lankan flag in his left hand and a gun in his right, lips parted in a cry of victory, greeted 'war tourists'. The monument at Battaramulla, a homage to 'war heroes', consisted of a column mounted on a base, surrounded by eight lions. Behind it, the names of 27,462 soldiers killed in the war were written on a granite frieze. The plaques on the column eulogized soldiers who 'sacrificed their lives for safeguarding the territorial integrity of the motherland' by 'eliminating mighty hostile enemies'.



Figure 9.1 Victory monument at Kilinochchi (2015).



Figure 9.2 Victory monument at Puthukkudiyiruppu (2012).

It replaced a peace monument, destroyed by the Rajapakses, which had represented the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities through three pillars. In all of these, two key symbols were foregrounded: the lotus and the lion, representing Buddhism and the Sinhalas.

Smaller tributes to the military as liberators also appeared, often explicitly linked with Buddhism. To take just two examples, in 2012, a *vihāra* in Somapura, near Trincomalee, on the border between what had been government and LTTE held territory, gave the military semi-divine status. The ‘guardstones’ leading to a shrine room in front of the *dāgāba* were life-size, pale-skinned military figures, one a soldier and the other, a Civil Defence Force member, each holding the tail of a lion. And, in 2015, when travelling by train from Kandy to Colombo, I noticed that one of the platforms at Doraluva Station boasted a life-size model of a crouching soldier surrounded by Buddhist flags. A similar ethos was created by the bus that shot past us soon after Somapura, as we headed away from the East, which had ‘Buddhist Country’ emblazoned on the front in English.

In direct continuity with the Sinhala imaginary that underpins this study, by 2017, a ‘Sinha le’ movement was adding to this ethos. Trishaws, private cars and other vehicles were boasting ‘Sinha le’ stickers, consisting of the lion image

from the Sri Lankan flag, without the strips representing the country's other communities, and 'Sinha le' underneath, the 'le' coloured in red. 'Le' in Sinhala can mean 'blood'. Formed in 2015, the movement took the name Sinhale Jathika Balamuluwa (Sinhala National Power or Powerholding) in 2016. Its General Secretary in 2017 was Madille Pagnaloka Thero.

To return to the immediate aftermath of war, LTTE memorialization of history in the North was obliterated. Monuments to individual war heroes and war cemeteries, such as that at Koppay, which the LTTE represented as holy 'temples' (Natali 2008), were destroyed by the army. Between 2002 and 2006, 'tourists' from the South had visited Koppay and monuments to LTTE heroes such as Kittu (Sathasivam Krishakumar) and Thileepan (Perera 2016: 50–65). After May 2009, they could not. The LTTE dead were spatially eliminated and, using Perera's words, 'the rebel's structures of memory became deliberate casualties of the post-war regime's interest in both rewriting history as well as reorganizing landscape' (Perera 2016: 77).

Yet, by 2012, the 'cage' was open for visitors. Perera has given a detailed analysis of the 'tourism' that resulted (Perera 2016). My 'tour', with Siva and a driver in 2012, went something like this. The first stop, travelling from Jaffna, was Prabhakaran's 'bunker' or jungle hide-out. The journey towards it was bleak with burnt vehicles and bombed houses by roadsides, and clouds of dust entering the car, since the road itself was still under construction. I was not prepared for the number of 'tourist' buses at the site. The queue of people to see Prabhakaran's underground rooms was so long that it would have meant an hour's wait at least. So I saw the site from ground level: the funeral house where martyrs were laid out for Prabhakaran's gaze; the bullet-proof sentry post; the camouflaged vehicle port; the top of the 'bunker' covered with strips of cloth from military combat uniform. Members of the army oversaw everything, evidently seeing it as endorsement of their victory. Siva, however, pointed to another message. People he had taken there before, had said, 'Look how simply he lived'. By 2017, it had been demolished.

From this site, we went through an area nearer to the last stand. Siva pointed out the affluence of the houses. People there had been doing well. The cultivation was good. But almost every building was in ruins. When the LTTE had quit an area, the army had bulldozed everything. It was against this backdrop that there was the sign, 'Welcome to 681 Infantry Area'. The next point of our 'tourist' circuit was the victory monument at Puthukkudiyiruppu, alongside which an army-run museum of LTTE artefacts, containing Sea Tiger boats, rockets, rocket launchers and other weapons, rusted and corroded, showcased victory but also the ingenuity of the LTTE. It was still there in 2017.

The road from this monument towards our next point – the site of a burnt-out ship, Farah 3 – was, for me, heart-breaking. Masses of burnt-out vehicles were piled up beside the road. Some would have belonged to refugees being pushed into the 'cage', perhaps with the hope that one day they would collect them. There were also LTTE vehicles. Some had been burnt twice, according to Siva – the LTTE burning their own vehicles so the army could not benefit from them,

the army burning all in their way. We then passed through what I can only call a wasteland. The ground was dry and without vegetation, strewn with a crowd of objects – fishing nets, piles of logs, burnt and twisted vehicles, concrete slabs, the remains of wells, burnt oil drums, a few ruined houses, buckets, plastic chairs and other personal effects. It was after going through this that we reached the Farah 3, a boat that had carried arms for the Sri Lankan military before it had been intercepted by the LTTE and then recaptured by the navy (Perera 2016: 114–116). The site had become another opportunity to promote victory. The army was running a food and picnic area close to the beach – Sinhala food only – and it was packed with people. When I was there, what was happening appeared to me to be voyeurism or triumphalism. I was wrong. As the Sinhala academic whom I will call Nimalka reflected, some who travelled there would have lost relatives in the army. To reach the ‘last stand’ was to see the landscape their relatives saw, to touch what their loved ones had touched, to glimpse the agony they had experienced. It was a way of coming close to them. In 2013, the ship was removed.

Another site visited by Sinhala ‘war tourists’ lay just south of Elephant Pass: a monument, overseen by the army, to Gamini Kularatne, a soldier who died in 1991, when disabling an LTTE bulldozer packed with explosives. In 2012, I noted the burnt-out bulldozer and the monument but did not stop. In 2015, stopping was imperative. The site was originally overseen by the LTTE with



Figure 9.3 The burnt-out hulk of Farah 3 (2012).

LTTE graffiti and a Tamil nationalist interpretation (Perera 2016: 30–31). After the war, it changed into a Buddhist nationalist shrine. Perera stresses the transformation of Kularatne into a ‘heroes’ hero’ (Perera 2016: 88–92). I saw it differently. To use a Buddhist term, Kularatne had been made into a *bodhisatta*, a Buddha-to-be. Some Sinhala visitors were plucking flowers from the opposite side of the road and placing them below Kularatne’s raised statue, as they would offer flowers to a Buddha image, and Kularatne himself seemed to rise from flowers, since flowering plants had been placed around his feet. To the left of the statue was the corroded, burnt bulldozer and a ‘Souvenir Gallery’, opened by the army in 2014. Apart from photos of Kularatne and the bulldozer, and a blown-up replica of the memorial stamp issued in 2001, viewers could see Kularatne’s plate, bedsheet and clothes, each displayed as if holy. They could also view a documentary, only in Sinhala, about Kularatne’s actions. If this had been a Roman Catholic site, canonization would have come to mind. The billboards on the road were only in Sinhala and English but, inside, there was a plaque in three languages about the gallantry honour awarded to Kularatne.

Fernando has pointed to an important aspect of Sinhala experience of the North and East after 2009. When pilgrimage had recommenced during the cease-fire between 2002 and 2006, pilgrims had interacted with Tamil traders, since the army had not yet moved into commercial enterprise. After May 2009, they interacted only with the military and military commercial enterprises. They could pass through the North without talking to a Tamil (Fernando 2013: 208), informed only by a Sinhala version of the war and its ending such as that presented at Kularatne’s ‘shrine’. For as Deegalle explains, the armed forces, after 2009, entered the commercial world, setting up businesses, overseeing cricket stadiums and operating commercial flights (Deegalle 2013: 25).

The South: Buddhist self-confidence and the spatial

In the years following 2009, there was an upsurge of renovations and expansions to Buddhist *vihāras* in the South and a plethora of new Buddha *rūpas* in public space, for instance at road junctions. The latter was an expansion of what Obeyesekere first noted after independence – the moving of the Buddha *rūpa* outside the household shrine and *vihāra* into public space (Obeyesekere 1970) – but I would argue that the most important driver in this case was the *Mahāvamsa* motif I mentioned earlier, drawing on Kemper: that the most authentic Buddhist response to the ending of violence is to make merit through enhancing the spatial presence of Buddhism. As Soma told me, the JHU sponsored some of the images but others were erected by traders or service-providers, for instance trishaw drivers, a contentious example of which was covered in the last chapter. Although this had begun well before 2009, Soma was convinced it had increased since May 2009.

As for southern *vihāras*, the sheer amount of renovation and new construction within them struck me in 2012, when I travelled by road from Dambulla to Colombo with a Sinhala driver whom I will call Kanu. *Vihāra* after *vihāra*

boasted new Buddha *rūpas*. Just south of Dambulla, an old *vihāra* stood on our right and, on the other side of the road, there was a new *dāgāba* and a board displaying an image of the large golden Buddha that would be erected. Just before Melsiripura, another old *vihāra* was planning to erect a standing Buddha on its largest rock. At the Pingalpota Prana Vihāra at Gokaralla, a magisterial Buddha in pale yellow had been erected in the foreground of the *vihāra*, dominating the other buildings, and, at Kadawata, a massive standing Buddha had been erected in front of a *vihāra* that had greeted people coming from the North for decades. Across the South of Sri Lanka, this has been repeated. In addition, there has been a programme sponsored by the Defence Ministry to build nine Buddhist *stūpas* in the island's nine provinces in appreciation of the 'noble service' rendered by the armed forces in defeating terrorism (Fernando 2013: 226–227).

This confident and joyful building has sometimes encroached into space linked with other religious communities. Both Soma and another Sinhala academic whom I will call Jaya saw the growth of Buddha *rūpas* as partly driven by the wish to compete with Christians. The story quoted at the beginning of this chapter about the covert erection of a free-standing Buddhist shrine in the hills above Kandy on property belonging to the Christian church, although some plots of land had been sold to Buddhists, illustrates this. The only reason June could suggest for the work having been done at night was that the diggers believed their actions would provoke Christians. In 2012, she told me that, after a grand opening, hardly anyone came to the shrine or tended it. By 2017, however, the Christian organization that owned the land had legally passed it to Buddhists. A local tourist hotel had sponsored a wall around the shrine and the whole looked more professional. Yet, June still insisted to me that it was not used devotionally. At Vesak, a local boy had put one lantern in the shrine – that was all. And the two factions, the hotel, the owner of which was a Roman Catholic, and local Buddhist residents, did not always agree.

I heard of numerous similar instances. A Christian leader whom I will call Philip told me in 2012 that in Matugama, Baptists had bought land for a church only to find that a Buddha *rūpa* was placed inside the property. Because of the ritual difficulties connected with removing such an image, they sold the land. From a Christian ordination candidate, I heard that, further south, near Buttala, another Protestant Church started a mission in a Sinhala and Muslim village. As soon as land had been bought for this, a Buddha *rūpa* was placed on the land opposite, not exactly an encroachment but a spatial statement asserting Buddhist presence.

I have already shown that sound was used as a tool of inter-religious competition in the nineteenth century and as an identity-affirming statement during the war. After the war, this continued and, according to some of my participants, increased. Donald told me of the situation in a North West Province village:

There are other kinds of invasions of space such as the invasion of sound. So, for instance, the chanting of Pirit on loudspeakers, which is not conducive to meditation and which distorts.... It serves very little purpose except

to say, ‘This is Buddhism. This is our right.’ This has provoked a reaction. So mosques will respond with the Call to Prayer. So there is this competition that is going on. In my village, there are four mosques and at 4.45 or 4.40 a.m. you will hear the Call to Prayer. And each mosque has its own system. As soon as this is over, you have the Pirit chanting from the local temple. And again I fear – however lovely it is and I love to hear it being chanted – the intention can be perceived to be, ‘If you make a sound, we will also claim the space as Buddhist’. And now recently the Catholic Church has begun a perpetual novena or something like that on Wednesday evening and you hear the singing of Marian hymns and the Mass being celebrated. So there is this continual bombardment and it does not serve devotional purposes.

Inter-religious competition in the South, however, has gone further than the placing of Buddha *rūpas* close to or inside Christian space, or the strategic use of sound. I take as illustration the call that came from the then chief incumbent of the Jambukola or Rangiri Dambulu Vihāraya (the Golden Temple) in Dambulla, Venerable Inamaluwe Sumangala Thero, that the Dambulla Khairiya Juma Masjid and the Bhadrakālī Amman Kovil should be removed from Dambulla, because they lay within a designated Buddhist sacred area, fairly close to the Vihāraya. After May 2009, Sri Lankan Muslims renovated many mosques and built new ones with overseas support. However, the Dambulla mosque was a modest structure, although Sumangala might have heard that improvements were planned. When I tried to find it in August 2012, I had difficulty. It was hidden from the road and did not rise above the modest buildings of the town. However, on 20 April 2012, these calls had led to members of the monastic Sangha and lay Buddhists, attacking but not destroying the mosque, and, on 28 October 2013, the Hindu temple was forcibly demolished. On 21 October, the roof had been removed and, three weeks before that, an image of the deity, Bhadrakālī, had been smashed and thrown into a well. Protests had been made by opposition parliamentarians and the devotees themselves, but to no avail. Even when devotees, accepting the inevitable, had asked for more time to perform the rituals necessary for the abandoning of a kovil, this was not granted.

The attacks were motivated by Sumangala’s conviction that, when Dambulla was made a Buddhist sacred area in the early 1980s, an act that Kemper rightly suggests was motivated by political rather than religious reasons (Kemper 1991: 179), ‘there was no provision for any religion other than Buddhism to have their own place of worship’ within its boundaries (Kannangara 2012). He cited Survey Department maps at this time that did not identify a mosque. The language he used to justify his stance appealed to a familiar motif, namely the need to defend the Buddhist heritage of Dambulla and the country against external threat. For instance, when a journalist, after the mosque attack, reminded Sumangala that Sri Lanka was a ‘multi-religious, multi cultural and multi ethnic society’, he replied, ‘What nonsense. You are speaking of a nonsensical society. This country has fourteen million Buddhists. How many Muslims are there?’ He added later:

Are you trying to wrest away our Buddhist rights? We have respected all. What we have here is none of that. It is about protecting the Buddhist legacy against the wresting of it... We are fighting to save the 2300 year old Buddhist heritage that is ours! They [Muslims] in turn are trying to wrest away our heritage.

(Ariywansha 2012)²

His solution was enforced spatial exclusion. Sumangala's methods were similar to those of the Budu Bala Sena (BBS – Buddhist Power Brigade), which was founded in 2012 as a break-away from the JHU. There is no space here to examine the BBS in detail. Suffice to say that its rhetoric has been anti-Muslim and anti-Christian, and its methods of operation have included belligerent attacks on Christian and Muslim space if any form of proselytization or anti-Buddhist activity was feared (Schonthal and Walton 2016; Stewart 2014). Neither Sumangala nor the BBS represent the majority Sinhala Buddhist voice but their activities are nevertheless significant in the context of this study.

By 2017, a small lake was all that could be seen at the site of the Bhadrakālī Amman Kovil. As Siva said, there were simply not enough Hindus in Dambulla to mount a strong opposition. The mosque, however, was still there, unchanged, and had police protection. From the outside, it was impossible to identify the one-storeyed, corrugated iron structure as a mosque. It was tolerated and protected but debarred from expansion or improvement.

The expansion of Buddhist space in the North and East after May 2009

To return to the North and the East and to an area wider than victory monuments and war tourism, some post-war spatial changes mirror the activities I have surveyed in the South. Fernando, for instance, cites an instance of a Buddha *rūpa* being placed provocatively close to a Christian church in the North (Fernando 2013: 217) and of amplified Pirit sessions on Poya Day in 'strictly Hindu, Muslim or Catholic areas', extending sometimes into the night (Fernando 2013: 211–213). I will not, however, concentrate on these. I focus in this section on: Buddhist shrines connected with army and navy camps; the expansion of existing *vihāras*; the redevelopment of ancient sites identified as Buddhist; the discovery or creation of new Buddhist sites and centres; and the Buddhicizing of sites that had not previously been exclusively linked with Buddhism.

Some spatial changes within these categories happened well before May 2009 and even before the beginning of the war, such as the developments I have already covered at Sēruvila and Kanturodai/Kadurugoda. The new Buddhist site at Dambakila Potūna/Matakal, to which I will return, was also identified well before 2009. During the war, Sēruvila became a place of quiet repose, according to Colin. Sinhala colonists living close to the site left, since it lay on the border between LTTE-controlled and government-controlled land, and Buddhist pilgrims rarely risked the journey. When the LTTE was defeated in the East in

2007 (Wickramasinghe 2014: 356–358), villagers started to return and pilgrims arrived. With this, a new Vihārage was started in 2008. In 2013, a 52-kilometre road between what had become Sēruvila Rājamahā Vihāraya and Somawathi Rājamahā Vihāraya (Polonnaruva) was formally opened by Basil Rajapakse, then Minister of Economic Development. A memorial plaque evoked Sri Lanka's dynastic past, declaring that it was opened, 'in accordance with the ancient Sri Lankan royal custom of discharging the responsibility of preserving and sustaining places of historical Buddhist worship'.

The growth of Buddha images (*rūpas*)

A Roman Catholic priest in the North, whom I will call Moses, told me that there had only been one Buddha *rūpa* on the A9 road between Vavuniya and Jaffna before the war – at Kilinochchi. During the war, Buddha *rūpas* accompanied the armed forces. Buddhist shrines were erected inside and sometimes outside army and navy camps, both in the North and the East. After May 2009, small camps were amalgamated with large ones. When a camp was closed, the Buddhist shrine sometimes remained. For instance, in 2012, a small Buddhist shrine stood on the roadside at Kodikamam, on the Jaffna peninsula. All that remained of the former army camp, however, was a small army checkpoint with a Buddhist flag attached to it, on the other side of the road. By 2015, both had been removed, although this may have had more to do with the reconstructed railway than sensitivity to Hindu sentiments. At Kallar, in the East, when a large camp closed, the Buddhist shrine that had stood outside it, opposite a modest Methodist church, was eventually removed. However, in 2012, a Buddha *rūpa* stood close to a Sinhala police checkpoint by the bridge leading north from the town, on an open stretch of beautifully tended land beside the water. It was the first or last thing a traveller saw on entering or leaving Kallar, a predominantly Hindu and Christian town.

In 2012, when I passed the larger amalgamated camps, Buddhist symbolism was only sometimes visible. North of Vakaraī, for instance, on the east coast, the most visible element of an army camp was the Buddhist centre inside it. It was pristine, designed as a village *vihāra* with *stūpa*, bodhi tree and Buddha *rūpa*. It was far larger than the one in a camp close to Habarana, in a more Sinhala area, where a fairly modest shrine was the first thing to meet the eye, although enhanced by the empty space surrounding it. In other army camps, no Buddhist symbols could be seen from the road. In 2015, however, I realized that my exposure to army camps was very limited. Moses told me that some camps were now deep in the jungle areas. Many Tamils were neither aware of them nor that family members would be brought to them. He added that a member of the military had politely told him:

Father, we expect problems in the North East and so the army will be present always. And soldiers are young people. They need their families. So we will bring them here. Families need schools. So we will build them.

They need food so we will bring shops. They also need documents signed so we will bring a *Kachcheri* [administrative office].

It was not only adjacent or inside army camps, however, that army-sponsored Buddha images were erected. In 2012, Rajasingham took me to Victoria Road, behind the Jaffna Central Hospital, to see two Buddhist shrines near a bodhi tree, placed there by the army when they had controlled the area. There were no devotees. ‘Of course not’, Rajasingham responded, ‘There are no Buddhists here.’ By 2017 the shrines had been removed.

Expansion of existing *vihāras*

Before the war, Buddhist *vihāras* existed in towns such as Kilinochchi, Jaffna and Kankasanturai, serving Sinhala and Tamils in the North. The Tissa Vihāraya in Kankasanturai, for instance, began in 1973, assisted by the police and army, with Delgalle Padumasiri Thera as incumbent. Through demonstrating empathy towards the problems Tamils faced, Padumasiri turned initial mistrust into friendship. Eventually more Tamils than Buddhists used the temple (Padumasiri 1986: 3), a fact that Siva confirmed: ‘Tamils liked him’. Padumasiri was forced to leave in the mid-1980s. The Nāga Vihāra in Jaffna, however, was probably the first *vihāra* to be established in the North in modernity. Although Buddhists now trace its existence to the third century BCE, by claiming that the bodhi tree sapling brought by Saṅghamittā stopped there on its journey to Anuradhapura, its modern incarnation began in the 1960s to cater for Sinhala Buddhists in Jaffna (Perera 2016: 31–33). Situated at a major junction, it was attacked and almost demolished in 1984. According to Siva, who experienced these events, militant youth groups were not responsible. It was a popular expression of anger that also targeted Sinhala bakeries, after the shelling, by government forces, of Our Lady of Refuge church, mentioned in the last chapter. The resident monks and most other Sinhala people still resident on the peninsula left. The rebuilding started after Jaffna came into government hands in April 1996.

In 2012, the Nāga Vihāra consisted of a mature bodhi tree, a newly painted silver *dāgāba*, a shrine room with what appeared to be fresh murals, a pilgrims’ rest under construction with a desk for donations, and a new *dēvāle* close to the entrance. In 2015, very little had changed. The pilgrims’ rest had advanced only a little. Donations were still being requested with the words, ‘Let us rebuild the historic Nāga Vihāra as a link between the North and the South’. In 2017, the new building had advanced further, with a team of workers on site, but was still far from completion.

For this study, the *dēvāle* – the ‘Pancha Maha Devalaya’ – is particularly significant. It is on the same level as the other parts of the *vihāra* and consists of a long, narrow hall with images of five deities, behind metal grills. In front of each is an ‘altar’ for flowers and lamps. Above each is a notice in three languages, with Sinhala on top, giving the name of the deity: ‘Lord Siva; Lord



Figure 9.4 'Lord Siva' at the 'Pancha Maha Devalaya', Nāga Vihāra (2017).

Vishnu; Lord Ganapathi; Lord Skandakumara; Sri Lakshmi'. In my visits in 2012, 2015 and 2017, offerings in front of these images were negligible and there were no devotees. For these were Sinhala representations of Hindu gods, crafted by Sinhala artists. As Siva told me, the faces had more in common with images of the Buddha than Hindu deities. The dark bronze colour that had been chosen for the bodies was also a Buddhist interpretation; Hindus would have chosen black. And some iconographic mistakes were present. The head of the serpent around Śiva, for instance, extended outwards from the breast, rather than from the neck. In 2017, some paper garlands, ribbons and strips of material had been attached to the grills but again the provenance was Sinhala. Hindus would have offered real flowers.

The intention of this *dēvāle* was to include Hindus within the *vihāra*, to affirm the predominantly Hindu nature of Jaffna, although Sinhala also worship the gods. However, its location near the entrance rather than within the centre of the *vihāra* suggests an ongoing subordination and what is present is a Sinhalaization of the Hindu, meaning that few Hindus would enter for devotional purposes.

Kilinochchi experienced a resident Buddhist monk well before the war, living in a simple *vihāra* centred around a bodhi tree. According to Siva, he had remained throughout the war, keeping the military at arms' length, and had been given *dāna* (gifts of food) by Tamils. Bavinck mentioned his educational work in 1992, judging it a 'remarkable oasis of inter-racial tolerance in the midst of a desert of intolerance and hatred' (Bavinck 2011: 243). After the ending of armed conflict, however, the monk left and army-sponsored redevelopment began. In 2012, the site was under construction. Through the gates, I saw a new Buddha *rūpa* to the left of the older shrine, an image of Saṅghamittā facing the bodhi tree, a new or renovated *dāgāba* under wraps and a newly painted gateway. In 2015, the *vihāra* was open between 10.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. The sign outside was only in Sinhala. The *dāgāba* was unwrapped and pristinely white, although the surrounding wall had not been renovated, and there was a new, open-sided shrine to the Buddha. What was striking, however, was the lack of signs of devotion or care of the complex. The ground was not swept and was hard on my bare feet. There were no lit lamps on the metal racks and no flowers in front of the Buddha *rūpas*. Two lay men were there but were not offering devotion. As I left, however, a Sinhala tourist bus from the South stopped. Further up the road was a renovated Hindu temple, lavishly painted in gold, carefully maintained and patronized, the work sponsored by the Sri Lankan government in an attempt at inclusivity.

The expansion of sites identified as Buddhist

I take as examples of the expansion of sites identified as Buddhist: Nāgadīpa (Tamil: Nainativu) and Kadurugoda (Tamil: Kantarodai) in the North; and Lankāpatuna Samudragiri Vihāraya, Verugal-Kal-adi and Sēruvila, in the East.

Nāgadīpa/Nainativu

Nāgadīpa/Nainativu, literally island of the cobra, is holy to Hindus and Buddhists. The Hindu temple, which, according to a Tamil archaeologist whom I will call Jeganathan, pre-dated the Buddhist *vihāra*, is dedicated to a mother goddess and her vehicle, the cobra. The Buddhist site is linked to *Mahāvamsa* narrative, which claims that the Buddha visited Nāgadīpa and overcame the 'nāgas', although Nāgadīpa, as already discussed, might have referred to the whole of the Jaffna peninsula. Bavinck mentions a navy camp there as early as 1988 and surmises that his own presence had once prevented the navy punishing the Tamils he was with, after the LTTE had killed a naval officer that morning (Bavinck 2011: 48).

To travel to Nāgadīpa/Nainativu, one has to cross two islands by causeway, Kayts and Punkudutivu, and then take a boat. On the journey, there is a sense of space and beauty as sky, land and sea meet. In 2012, however, ruined houses revealed how heavily contested the territory had been during the war. People were, nevertheless, returning. Restored Hindu temples and Roman Catholic shrines peppered the road – by 2017 almost all temples had been restored. Palmyrah trees, though, an iconic symbol of the Jaffna peninsula, were neglected, since few people, I was told, were prepared to tend them in their slow growth to maturity. In 2012, Buddha *rūpas* linked with navy check points stood at the entry to the first causeway and at the end of the second – ‘small acts of aggression’, according to Siva. New signs indicated ‘Nāgadīpa’ in English, not the Tamil, Nainativu. In 2015, however, I noticed signs in three languages – a small token of inclusivity – but the English transcription was, again, Nāgadīpa, and the Buddha *rūpas* at both ends of the second causeway were more sophisticated. In 2015, after the second causeway and the Buddhist shrines, a Hindu stood by the road offering ash to Hindu pilgrims.

In 2012, I travelled on a Sunday. Lines of vehicles were parked near to the small, rather perilous fishing boats that took pilgrims from Punkudutivu to Nāgadīpa. Sinhala and Tamil travelled together and were dropped at the Hindu temple. Buddhist pilgrims had then to walk or take a trishaw to the Buddhist site. The jetty at the Buddhist *vihāra* seemed out of use. In 2015, however, the boats were dropping pilgrims at the latter, moving only then to the jetty at the Hindu temple for the return journey. According to the Tamil historian whom I will call Ravikrishnan, the monk at the Buddhist temple had taken charge of the organization that transported people to the island by 2012. In 2015, I, therefore, concluded that the Buddhist side of the island was being given priority, honouring the traditional Buddhist practice of first offering devotion to the Buddha and only then worshipping Hindu gods. A faded billboard to the right of the restored jetty reinforced this message, but only in Sinhala, proclaiming at the top, ‘Welcome to this holy Buddhist place’ and, at the bottom, ‘Let us safeguard this Buddhist land for future generations’. A notice in Sinhala outside the enclosures of a bodhi and a banyan tree, went further in exclusivity: ‘In this holy land it is useless to chant anything else other than Buddhist bana (sermons)’.

My 2015 interpretation of the transport arrangements, however, was an over-reading. In 2017, conversations with boatmen and others who worked on the island indicated that they were not constrained to land at the Buddhist end of the island. Although boats always returned via the jetty near the Hindu temple, outward-going boats could choose where to land. Most went to the Buddhist side first, for pragmatic reasons; if they went to the Hindu side first they were then expected to go to the Buddhist side before returning to the Hindu side for the return. Pragmatism rather than ideology was at work.

The Buddhist site has two sections. The bodhi and banyan trees are on the sea side, together with: a statue of the monk who pioneered the building of the *vihāra*, Bramanawaththe Dhammakiththi (1915–2003), donated by P. Ramachandran, a Tamil philanthropist who supported the Buddhist temple for 60 years;



Figure 9.5 The Buddha under the hood of a cobra, Nāgādīpa/Nainativu.

a large painting of the Buddha's visit as recorded in the *Mahāvamsa*; and a three-dimensional image of the Buddha under the hood of a cobra. Little changed on this side between 2012 and 2017. On the other side, is a typical Sinhala Buddhist *vihāra* with a silver *dāgāba* and shrine rooms. In 2012, the monastic quarters were to become a museum and the main shrine room was still under construction, the internal Buddha image swathed in fabric. By 2015, there were noticeable changes, some army-sponsored. The main shrine room was freshly painted, with traditional decorated steps, a moonstone and two guardstones. Internally, the walls were covered in new murals, although I was told that one of Mahinda Rajapakse (the former president) had been removed. One mural showed the *nāgas* of *Mahāvamsa* narrative fleeing in fright. At the side, two others depicted three lay supporters (D.A. Seneviratne and his wife, and P. Ramachandran) and monks key to the *vihāra*'s history. Outside, there were several additions, including a glass-encased shrine holding a golden image of the Buddha, constructed by the northern army and inaugurated by the Army Commander of the North. Funds were being raised to create a higher decorative wall around the *vihāra*.



Figure 9.6 The Hindu Temple at Nainativu/Nāgadīpa.

The Hindu temple embodied a different aesthetic. Many lay people were dressed traditionally in white at the Buddhist *vihāra*. Those at the Hindu temple wore the brightest colours. It was a Tamil world; few Buddhists ventured inside. The complex had been renovated with the help of Indian craftsmen in 2011, the work completed by the beginning of 2012, funded without state or army help, through the donations.

Kantarodai/Kadurugoda

I have already mentioned the modern ‘discovery’ of Kantarodai, as I prefer to call it, in the second decade of the twentieth century and the reconstruction work of the Department of Archaeology from 1972 (Uduwara 1990: 175). Jeganathan shared with me in 2012 that the site should have been seen archaeologically as an extension of South Indian culture rather than Sinhala culture, a view confirmed by Thiagarajah, who argues that the cluster arrangement of *stūpas* at Kantarodai has parallels in India but not in Anuradhapura (Thiagarajah 2016: 52). When I visited Kantarodai in 2012, the site was overseen by the army and there were no other visitors. A lay person approached me as soon as I entered and pointed me towards a corrugated iron, army-constructed Buddhist shrine, telling me to remove my shoes. There was another shrine under a bodhi tree,

which gave the history of the site in Sinhala. So, although the site was under the Department of Archaeology as a place of historical rather than devotional interest, the army controlled it and the first thing I had to do was remove my shoes and offer devotion to the Buddha. Only after this was I shown the ruins. In 2015, several coaches of visitors arrived whilst I was there. Members of the military and others permanently at the site retained their shoes and, this time, I was not asked to remove mine but most ‘tourists’ removed theirs, demonstrating that they saw the site as a *vihāra*, proof for them that Sinhala Buddhists once practised in Jaffna. I was able to listen to, and, with the help of the friend accompanying me, understand what a member of the military said to one pilgrim group. He took the line of Mēdhānanda Thera, quoting him at least 15 times. His message, therefore, was that ‘Kadurugoda’ had been part of a Sinhala kingdom, inhabited by Sinhalas. Tamils had destroyed this kingdom and slaughtered the Sinhalas, creating an exclusively Tamil area and destroying Buddhism in the North.

Lankāpatuna Samudragiri Vihāraya in the East

During the armed conflict, the rocky island on which Lankāpatuna Samudragiri Vihāraya is built, was hardly recognizable as a Buddhist site, the location where Prince Dantha and Princess Hemamala are believed to have landed with the



Figure 9.7 The LTTE-blasted bridge to Lankāpotuna (2012).

Buddha's tooth relic. There were ancient steps, the base of a *stūpa*, ruined walls and the remains of some images. There was also a prominent Hindu kovil. As the grip of the LTTE on the East lessened, however, the site was transformed by the armed forces and lay donors. A magisterial golden Buddha, for instance, was erected in 2008, visible from the mainland. By the time of my first visit in 2012, it was a navy-controlled place of Buddhist pilgrimage. The atmosphere was relaxed and totally Sinhala, with groups of pilgrims eating under the trees near the sand and the bridge to the island. A navy-manned sentry post was situated at the foot of the bridge, which in itself embodied a war narrative. It had been upturned by an LTTE blast and pilgrims had to walk across its skewed form.

At the site itself, in 2012, there was a new bodhi tree, planted by the navy, and, apart from the golden Buddha, a new *dāgāba*, erected on the foundations of the ancient *stūpa*, and a pristine Buddhist shrine, encased in glass and flanked



Figure 9.8 Hindu shrine at Lankāpotuna (2015).

with two golden lions. Below the bodhi tree and shrine, beyond a banyan tree, a rock carving of a famous mural at Kālani Mahā Vihāraya, showing the arrival of the tooth relic, had been started. All notices were in Sinhala and only Sinhala postcards were available. At the foot of the steps leading to the *dāgāba* was a small Hindu shrine in a state of disuse. Colin told me he was convinced that it had been higher up the rock before the ending of the war.

By 2015, the skewed bridge, and thus remembrance of LTTE violence, was gone. The posts of a replacement rose from the water but pilgrims had to cross by boat, courtesy of the navy. More resources were available for sale – a wall hanging of the above-mentioned mural, a Sinhala DVD – and there were more Buddhist flags. The rock carving had progressed but was still not finished and, significantly, the Hindu shrine to Gaṇeśa, although in the same subordinate position, showed more signs of being maintained by Hindus.

Verugal (Kal-adi)

Close to Lankāpatuna is Verugal (Kal-adi), known for its Hindu temple. It also contains a site identified by Sinhala Buddhists as a former Buddhist rock monastery, because of brahmi inscriptions carved into the rock. During the war, it was



Figure 9.9 Buddha *Rūpa* on top of radio mast at Verugal (Kal-adi) (2015).

appropriated by the LTTE, who situated a radio station there, flying an LTTE flag from the top of the radio mast. At this time, there was also a Hindu kovil, at the top of the rock according to Colin and a Protestant clergyman I will call Sidney. After the ending of the war in the East, a Tamil-speaking Sinhala monk came to Kal-adi and lived in what had been an LTTE container. The Hindu kovil was demoted to a shrine at the foot of the rock and, by the end of 2008, a large plastic Buddha *rūpa* had replaced the LTTE flag at the top of the mast.

When I visited in 2012, the height of the metal mast and its slim diameter gave the Buddha *rūpa* an almost comical aspect. I spoke to the monk, outside his ‘container’, then adorned with Buddhist flags. He told me he was a doctor, to whom poor villagers came, but he was unwilling to talk long and pointed me up the rock. As soon as I started to walk, amplified Buddhist devotional chants were turned on. Yellow lines chalked into the rock identified the brahmi inscriptions, and the base of a *dāgāba*, surrounded by broken bricks and rocks, was clearly visible. At the foot of the rock, where a bodhi tree stood, a new perimeter wall had been built, its ledge holding numerous, mass-produced Buddha *rūpas*. That the Department of Archaeology was involved with the site was clear from a department notice that translated, in three languages, one of the inscriptions, a reference to donations to the monastery, dated to the fourth or fifth century CE.

In 2015, a Buddha image was still at the top of the mast and I think the same dogs lay under the trees at the base of the rock. The only person there was a member of the army. The site was much the same, except for a new shrine room half way up the rock, white-washed with a tiled roof and a golden Buddha *rūpa*. No other devotees were there.

Sēruvīla

To return to Sēruvīla, I have pointed out that it was re-developed before armed conflict began and that further developments took place after the LTTE was defeated in the East in 2007. By 2015, the new Vihārage, in Japanese style, was almost complete. Murals around the interior wall, which had been partially finished in 2012, were pristine, narrating the Buddha biography and episodes from Sri Lankan Buddhist history. Alongside them were photos of the *dāgāba*’s reconstruction. The three-dimensional image of the Buddha sitting under a bodhi tree at enlightenment, which inhabited the magisterial central space of the Vihārage, however, remained under red cloth. In 2012, I noted that the older plaques at the site were in three languages, for instance a memorial pillar from the 1970s, but that the newer signs were only in Sinhala. In 2015, the already-mentioned plaque to mark the opening of the road was, again, in three languages, an attempt at inclusivity. However, there was no attempt here to include Hindu deities in the main site. When I asked whether there was a *dēvāle*, I was pointed towards a temporary structure with a corrugated iron roof and open sides, dedicated to ‘Puliyar’ or Gaṇeśa, at a lower level than the rest of the complex, almost hidden from view.

In the expansion of existing *vihāras* and sites identified as Buddhist in the North and East, therefore, inclusion of the Hindu and Tamil Other was not uniform. At some sites, there had been an attempt to include the worship of gods in a way that was intended to welcome Hindus, albeit with subordination, as at the Nāga Vihāra. At other sites, however, there had been a demotion, the pushing of a Hindu kovil into a spatially lower position than it had been during the war or a strict maintaining of the kind of subordination that is found in many southern *vihāras*. The linguistic use of Tamil as a tool of inclusivity also varied, with a retreat from inclusivity at some sites.

The creation of new Buddhist sites

I could give numerous examples of the creation of new Buddhist sites but will restrict myself to Dambakola Paṭuna in the North, army-sponsored Buddhist sites on the A9 at Mañkuḷam and Kanakarayankuḷam, and two sites in the East in Batticaloa and Mutur.

Dambakola Paṭuna

Dambakola Paṭuna or Mātakal to people in Jaffna, is where Sinhala Buddhists now believe Venerable Saṅghamittā touched land, in the third century BCE, when she brought a sapling from the bodhi tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. In other words, it was the ‘Jambukolapaṭṭana’ (Dambukola), mentioned in Chapter 19 of the *Mahāvamsa*. According to Perera, there is no evidence to suggest that the site had been a place of pilgrimage in the past or that any local narrative linked Mātakal’s stretch of sand with Saṅghamittā’s arrival (Perera 2016: 38–40). He traced the site’s beginnings to the navy planting a sapling from the Anuradhapura bodhi tree there in December 1997 (Perera 2016: 40), a photo of which was displayed at the site in 2017. However, there was an earlier identification. Uduwara of the Archaeological Department, under the heading ‘Dambakola-Paṭuna’, stated that a memorial pillar was erected ‘at Sambutturai in the vicinity of the ancient seaport of Jambukola’ between 1970 and 1990 (Uduwara 1990: 168). I have no reason to believe that this was a different location.

To reach Dambakola Paṭuna, one passes through land that was heavily contested in the war (Bavinck 2011: 271), eventually becoming a high security zone, cleared of inhabitants. By 2012, my first visit, some land had been returned to its owners and small Roman Catholic shrines by the sea and the road indicated the beginnings of revived fishing practice among economically poor, predominantly Roman Catholic, fishing communities.

In 2012, the site was still under construction as a Buddhist place of pilgrimage and consisted of: a brilliant white *stūpa*; a well-established bodhi tree fronted with a shrine, consistent with a 1997 planting; shrine rooms, the interior decoration of which was incomplete; a glass-encased image of an alabaster-white ‘Arhant Sanghamitta Maha Therani’, carrying the sapling in a golden bowl; a

bronzed, three-dimensional replica of Saṅghamittā in a boat, being welcomed by King Devanampiyatissa, hands upraised in devotion, waist deep in concrete ‘water’ – inaugurated by the navy in February 2012; a rack for oil lamps; a concrete arch from which hung a bell; monastic quarters; billboards narrating the story of the site; and a small lagoon that looked as though it would contain a life-size replica of Saṅghamittā’s boat.

In 2012, the postcards on sale were only in Sinhala and the first signs I saw were in Sinhala, although I later noticed one in Sinhala and Tamil. The only notice in Sinhala, Tamil and English was below the statue of Saṅghamittā. One Sinhala billboard near the sand about Saṅghamittā’s journey from India to Sri Lanka was duplicated in English but not in Tamil. Adjacent to these was a Sinhala billboard showing the navy coming ashore, linking the site with the armed forces. It read,

You are able to visit this site because of the sacrifice made by the forces, who believed that the country was more important than their lives. The forces fought courageously against the enemy and should be remembered forever and they should not be forgotten.

The majority of pilgrims seemed to be from the South but there were also a few Tamils.

In 2015, there was a large pilgrims’ guest house adjacent to the site, a navy commercial enterprise. An entry board was now in Sinhala and Tamil. A three-tiered arch over the entry proclaimed ‘Sanghamitta Temple’ in three languages, with a Buddhist wheel at the top, and there was now a billboard in Tamil narrating the Saṅghamittā story. The billboard about the armed forces, however, was still only in Sinhala. The lagoon was now finished with a simple replica of an ancient boat in its waters. On the far side was a bronze statue of Saṅghamittā under a parasol.

By 2017, further changes had been made. The postcards for sale were still only in Sinhala. The old Sinhala board showing the navy, however, was gone. In its place was another, away from the sand, showing a seemingly traditional picture of Saṅghamittā descending from her boat but with a line of white-clad figures marching with elephants to the point of her disembarkation – the navy! Underneath the picture were words similar to those that had accompanied the previous board but with an addition: ‘Please meditate for a moment in order to remember those who sacrificed their lives to defend the country.’ A free-standing arrow pointed to a raised stone meditation platform, empty of people when I visited. A further board displayed photos, for instance of the planting of the sapling and the construction of the *dāgāba*.

To return to the shrine rooms, they are unusual in their inclusivity, going beyond the Nāga Vihāra pattern. There are three, in a line. In the centre, slightly set back, is one to the Buddha. On either side, at only a slightly lower level, are shrines to Gaṇeśa and Skanda/Kataragama, offspring of Śiva. In 2015, they were finished and, when I asked a naval officer why they honoured Hindu gods as



Figure 9.10 Shrine to Ganeśa, Dambakola Paṭuna.

well as the Buddha, he replied, ‘Tamils come to the site and they worship them’. He did not mention Sinhala devotion to the gods. In 2017, Gaṇeśa and Śiva were garlanded but with paper garlands, again indicating that this had been done by Sinhalas, not Tamils. If Tamils came to the site, therefore, they would find that the shrines to the gods, although spatially almost equal to the Buddha, inhabited a Sinhala world. According to Siva, they would also have found numerous grammatical mistakes in the Tamil language present at the site.

By 2015, the landscape external to the site had also changed, in response to Dambakola Paṭuna. From the lagoon, I saw what looked like a massive Buddha *rūpa* on its far side. Part of the complex, I thought, but it was not. It was an image of Śiva, complete a part from the painting of it and so still encased in wooden scaffolding. It was part of Sambunatha Easwara Sivalayane, a Hindu temple, constructed around an unusual banyan tree and home to a Saivite ascetic, who had apparently come there at the age of 15. In 2015, he was 92. Hindus had evidently donated money for this massive but not incredibly costly image, started in July 2013. From certain angles, it dominated Dambakola Paṭuna, which does

not have a large Buddha *rūpa*. I read it as a statement drawn in space and in height that the land on which Dambakola Paṭuna had arisen was not Buddhist but Hindu and that Hinduism would not be subordinated in its own territory. In 2017, the colour of the image was a uniform cream and the ascetic had died just months before. His wife remained and the temple was struggling to survive. The spatial statement of the image, however, was as potent as ever.

Not only Hindus but also Roman Catholics were making spatial statements. There had been a ‘Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, Mathagal’, before the war, by the sea near Dambakola Paṭuna, venerated by fishermen. After 2009, it was restored and expanded. In 2015, it consisted of a life-size re-creation of the Lourdes grotto painted in silver with a paved forecourt. In 2017, spaced around a larger forecourt area were life-size, dramatic, three-dimensional stations of the cross, painted in gold. There was also a new shrine surrounded in glass, containing a similarly life-size, bloodied figure of the dead Jesus, lying on white cushions. The whole site was a focus for piety and devotion. Also in 2017, just beyond the navy-controlled perimeter of Dambakola Paṭuna, a new shrine to St



Figure 9.11 Image of Śiva at Sambunatha Easwara Sivalayane (2017).

Anthony had been erected by the road in a similar bid to that mounted by the Śiva image – to claim space for religions other than Buddhism.

Whilst the Sambunatha Easwara Temple was struggling, the Hindu temple at Keerimalai, with its hot springs, on the way to Dambakola Paṭuna from Jaffna, was flourishing, with new constructions rising from the earth alongside the ruins of what the war had destroyed. On my visit in 2015, a notice giving the times for bathing in the springs was in three languages, this time with Tamil at the top, a small but significant act of resistance. Across the road, a tower or *gopuram* was rising. Near the springs, a new shrine area was under construction and a covered hall with open sides was being renovated. Peopled with devotees, the atmosphere was tranquil. By 2017, the area had been further transformed. The hot springs were being marketed as a tourist attraction. There was a pristine, brightly coloured ‘Sivapoomi Pilgrims Rest’, donated and constructed by the All Ceylon Hindu Congress, with an Art Gallery attached. The covered hall was complete and the many pilgrims were being offered a free vegetarian lunch. The *gopuram* was still unfinished but there was considerable progress.



Figure 9.12 Image of Hanuman at Maruthanamadam Aanjaneyar Kovil (2015).

Throughout the Jaffna region, in 2015, I saw other renovated Hindu temples, some with massive new images outside them, for instance the Maruthanamadam Aanjaneyar Kovil at Inuvil, which, by 2015, boasted a colossal external image of Hanuman, the very size of which could compete with any standing image of the Buddha in the country. It proudly used upward-forcing space to assert Hindu identity.

New Buddhist sites on the Jaffna–Kandy road

On the A9 road from Jaffna to Kandy, the first major new Buddhist site is at Mañkuḷam – the Sri Sugatha Vihāraya, built by the military and formally inaugurated in 2013. Adjacent to St Agnes’ Roman Catholic church, a mature bodhi tree probably sealed its location. It has all the elements of a southern *vihāra* but in more spacious proportions, including a brilliant white *dāgāba*, approached along a path with a golden orb feature half way along, from which two pathways



Figure 9.13 Sri Sugatha Vihāraya at Mañkuḷam (2015).

branched, one to the bodhi tree and one to a shrine. In 2012, it was under construction. I could only see a decorative wall around the bodhi tree. By 2015, it was complete and had a resident Buddhist monk. When I arrived, there were no devotees, only a Tamil boy, who was waiting for the monk, hoping he would again give him some sugar. Since an empty coach was parked there, from which a few young boys tried to attract my attention, I surmised that the monk might be elsewhere with the ‘tourists’.

Beyond Mañkuḷam, the next large Buddhist development is at Kanakarayan-kuḷam, opposite the camp of the 561 Brigade, the largest army camp in the region in 2012. It began with the planting of a sapling from the Anuradhapura bodhi tree (Fernando 2013: 201) on a grassy mound. By 2012, a Buddha image had been installed in front of the young tree and a plan of the envisaged complex was displayed. An army van was leaving as I arrived; entry was impossible. In 2015, I walked around an almost completed site in solitude. A member of the army rushed up after a few minutes, saying he had gone for a cup of tea. Apparently, there is always a soldier there. He did not attempt to give me its history, which, according to Fernando, would have included that the site was ancient and Buddhist (Fernando 2013: 205). As at Mañkuḷam, the proportions of the *vihāra* complex are far more spacious than in the South. The raised bodhi tree was now reachable by several flights of red steps, with guardstones and moonstones at their base. A raised glass-encased shrine to the Buddha was reached by grey steps. There was no *dāgāba* but



Figure 9.14 Dēvāles at Buddhist complex at Kanakarayan-kuḷam (2015).

there was a developed *dēvāle* section, at ground level and therefore lower than the bodhi tree and the Buddha shrine. It consisted of five separate shrine rooms, with a curtain over the front of each, to Durgā/Kālī, Viṣṇu, Kataragama, Pattini and Ganapati (*Ganeśa*). Again, I was struck by the implied subordination in the inclusivity present, although the shrines were far more sophisticated and more colourful than, for instance, at Sēruvila. I saw no evidence, however, of Hindus having worshipped at them.

New sites in the East

To move to new Buddhist sites in the East, in 2012, I was shown The Buddhist Centre, Jayanthipura, Batticaloa, which was located in a place where there were no Buddhists, only a Roman Catholic church and a Hindu kovil. In the early evening, the iron gates were closed but not locked. Inside, one person was sweeping the ground; no one else was present. The Protestant clergyman, who accompanied me, whom I will call David, explained that there had been a bodhi tree on the site, which had been neglected until the army and police intervened. At that point, the site consisted of two shrines, one under the bodhi tree. A large billboard in English and Sinhala indicated the centre. By 2015, when I visited with a person whom I will call Ranjani, the gates were open. The Centre – it was not a *vihāra* – was cleaner and its focus was still the two shrines. No one else was there. We noticed that loud speakers were attached to a tall iron bell tower and surmised that these would amplify Pirit. Some one-storeyed accommodation buildings had police uniforms hanging outside, indicating that those living at the centre were police. At 500 metres and at 50 metres from the centre there were notices pointing to the centre in Sinhala and Tamil, but not English.

North from Batticaloa, Pachchannoormalai is a ridge close to Mutur. It is the highest point in the area, overlooking Mutur on one side and a Roman Catholic village on the other. In 2012, one part of the ridge was being appropriated by a Buddhist monk for the building of what local people believed would be a *vihāra* with a Buddha *rūpa* at the ridge top. Little, however, had been completed. At the foot was an army post. The early morning climb was stiff. Newly constructed stone steps had been built halfway up the ridge and then I and a Christian worker, whom I will call Samuel, had to scramble. At the top, hung in three strategic positions, including on the highest tree, were Buddhist flags, staking out the territory. Whilst we climbed, Kanu spoke to the military and was told that the government did not want the *vihāra* to go ahead but that the monk was determined.

By 2017, there was still no Buddha *rūpa* at the summit. The steps up the hillside remained half complete but were neat and tended. At the foot of the steps, though, was a new lion archway, painted in white. Its two massive paws gripped the base stones of the arch. The front legs and a sculpted mane formed the sides and the face, the arch itself. Two fangs hung aggressively down from the mouth – a lion with teeth! Across the road, land had been cleared and a simple monastic cell built. It was a work still in progress.

Mutur has had a Buddhist *vihāra* for many years, serving, without problem, the small number of Buddhists there. The majority in Mutur, however, is Muslim and the town has numerous mosques. Samuel shared with me that, when a Muslim had asked the monk why he was there, on the ridge, the monk had replied, ‘We have been here 2,500 years. You have been here 500 years.’

The Buddhization of sites not explicitly linked with Buddhism before the war

My main example under the category of the Buddhization of sites that had not been linked to Buddhism before the war is Kanniyai – Kanniya in Sinhala – the hot wells near Trincomalee, where water, believed to be healing, has been present for centuries. One of the Tamil Hindu intellectuals in my group interview in Jaffna in 2012, who had lived in Trincomalee, pointed out that Hindu stories about the wells, starting with Rāvaṇa, had passed from generation to generation. He had visited them since childhood, had even performed the last rites for his mother there and remembered a temple to Gaṇeśa. Before he left Trincomalee, however, some seven years before, suddenly, people started saying that the site was not Hindu but Buddhist. The claiming of the wells for Buddhism, therefore, began before the ending of armed conflict.

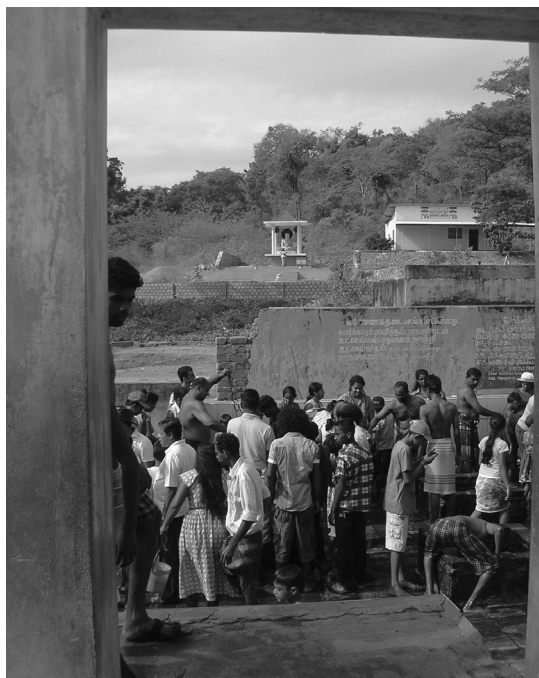


Figure 9.15 Kanniyai/Kanniya with Kanniya Vihāra behind the wells (2012).

In 2012, I visited on a Poya Day (full moon day). Crowds had come from all religious communities – Catholic nuns in blue habits, Hindus with ash on their foreheads, Buddhists, Muslims. Stalls lined the road to the wells, selling an eclectic mixture of recreational, non-religious items such as plastic ornaments, food and novelties. The message communicated at the site was that it was Buddhist. My tourist entry ticket, replicated on a large billboard at the entrance, stated in appalling English that the place was called ‘Kanniya’ and that the wells ‘have been used Anuradhapura period and it was situated at a Buddhist religion premises proved by archaeological evidences’. Adjacent to the ticket booth was a Buddha image against a banyan tree. Within the area of the wells themselves, there was a low-roofed ‘Sivan Temple’ but it was dilapidated and disused. If this



Figure 9.16 Stall in the car park at Kanniyai/Kanniya (2015).

had been a temple to Gaṇeśa, it contained no Gaṇeśa image. Dominating the bathing area was a new Buddhist development on an incline behind the wells, consisting of a Buddha *rūpa* sheltered by a structure to which loud speakers were attached, a small monastic block and an open-sided temporary structure from which a monk and a lay person were inviting donations. Kanu believed the stall-holders along the path were only Sinhala and overheard a Buddhist monk telling a group of Sinhala pilgrims that the Sinhala and Buddhism inhabited the site before Tamils.

By 2015, the road to the wells from Trincomalee had improved. A board proclaimed ‘Jesus Loves Gospel Ministry’ at one point along it, witness to the independent evangelical Christian presence in the East. In the car park, I noticed a stall, overseen by a Hindu, selling variously sized pictures for Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Krishna, Hanuman, Mary and the Buddha were there, together with the non-religious. Seeing me, a westerner, the stall-holder produced some Roman Catholic stickers. He was evidently proud of his inter-religious mix and was delighted when I praised it and asked to take photographs. No one religion seemed to dominate. There was an equal playing field.

At the wells, Buddhism was increasingly dominant. I fear the reason that the ‘inter-religious’ stall-holder was in the car park and not on the pathway to the wells was that he was Tamil and offered devotional items from all religions. On the path to the springs, two lay people and an elderly monk in a wheelchair, the



Figure 9.17 The ‘Sivan temple’ at Kanniyai/Kanniya (2015).

same one, I believe, who had been there in 2012, were requesting donations for what was now being called the Kanniya Vihāra.

At the entrance, in 2015, there was not one but three billboards, one on top of the other, in Sinhala, Tamil and English, the Sinhala one on top, replicas of the same ticket that had been issued to me in 2012, a nod to inclusivity but with a hierarchy. The ‘Sivan Temple’ was outwardly in the same state of disrepair but it was not unused. The interior walls had been painted and pictures had been placed on them, and a brick plinth had been built to hold ash receptacles. Several Tamils were using it. It was evidently a living Hindu shrine, although its subordinate positioning was as marked as ever it had been.

There were some new changing rooms in 2015, facilitated by the army. Only a few people were bathing this time, including some Muslims. Behind the springs, the Vihāra was more developed. The monastic quarters were supplemented by another, half-finished building and the whole area was more lavishly decorated with Buddhist flags. Again, there was a stall for donations.

On this visit, one café billboard on the pathway to the springs encapsulated the inclusivist subordination that I would suggest is present at Kanniyai. It offered both Sinhala and Tamil lettering but the Sinhala letters were much larger. At Kanniyai, a Hindu shrine is present, but spatially subordinate to the Buddhist development and in an outwardly dilapidated condition, without a Hindu priest. And the one stall that sold images from all religions was relegated to the car park.



Figure 9.18 On the path to Kanniyai/Kanniya: café Billboard (2015).

Let me finish this empirical section with another stall. I passed it on the way to the renovated Konneswaram Temple in Trincomalee, which is reached by walking through the headquarters of an army regiment. It was overseen by a Sinhala Buddhist and, at first, I saw only Buddha *rūpas*, because these were foregrounded. So, I asked this stall-holder why only Buddhas were being sold on the way to a Hindu temple. He then pointed to the less obvious pictures and images behind the Buddhas, which related to the three other religions of Sri Lanka: a picture of Mary, another of Krishna and even an Arabic symbol. Unlike the Tamil-owned stall at Kaniyayi, this stall had a hierarchy.

What I find striking from my observations in several research visits is the number of times I have evoked the concepts of inclusivist subordination and exclusivism. The pre-colonial Sinhala imaginary that I analysed in Chapter 1 through the lens of inclusivist subordination, was not only alive but vibrant after May 2009, tinged, however, with elements of the exclusivist, the lineage of which I trace to colonialism.

Sinhala and Tamil perspectives on these developments

I stated in the AAR paper mentioned in the Introduction that symbols, when perceived outside an agreed ‘insider’ frame of reference, are interpreted in diverse ways, conditioned by power relationships, as well as political, economic and religious factors. The developments I have outlined are interpreted in very different ways by Sinhala Buddhists, and Tamil Hindus and Christians. And within each religious and ethnic community, there is diversity.

I begin with Sinhala perspectives. I have already stressed the importance of pilgrimage to the Sinhala Buddhist imaginary and also the fear that Buddhism’s very existence in Sri Lanka will always be threatened. Pilgrimage, when it recommenced after May 2009, was undertaken with a sense of celebration that the unity of Sri Lanka had been protected. For many who undertook it, the redevelopment of ancient Buddhist sites and the discovery of new ones was joyfully affirmed. Gunadheera’s words are apposite:

The influx into Jaffna is a consummation devoutly to be wished and built upon, not be despised and grumbled at. The visitors are motivated by a sense of curiosity and the momentum of a new found freedom of movement. It would be unfair to attribute motives of triumphalism behind their visits. They were never at war with the Tamils and are happy that the common obstacle to national integration has been removed.

(Gunadheera 2011: 142)

A monk, whom I will call Dhammavimutti, spoke similarly in 2015:

After the war people were more free to come from Jaffna to the South and vice versa.... There was a feeling among those who went to the North that they needed to see Buddhist sites in the northern areas to be flourishing.

This was very normal. Buddhism is a missionary religion. It has elements of growing, just like Christianity and Islam. So Buddhism needs to expand, maybe in the form of development or making a social contribution. Therefore, it was natural that places identified as Buddhist were developed. We see this in other religions too.

Dhammavimutti, however, said later,

We have to accept that the majority in other regions are Tamil or Muslim and so it is not good to establish a Buddhist monastery where Tamil people live by force, except where missionary activities are done in a non-harmful way.

Yet, he also stressed that ‘the authorities’ had a right to investigate historical sites. A prominent monk in Vavuniya said almost exactly the same to me in 2012. He disagreed with those who erected Buddha *rūpas* where there were no Buddhists. A lay Buddhist academic, whom I will call Roshan, added another perspective:

Identities are highly contested. In history, it is certainly possible for a place to move from being Buddhist to being Hindu and for a Hindu place to become Buddhist. And certain places can have multiple identities. Within Buddhist culture, we have Hindu and Buddhist shrines going together. The way I look at it is that these are not really sacrosanct places in the sense that they cannot be changed. My personal view is that unless a place is very blatantly violated, which is unacceptable, simply because you place a Buddhist image somewhere does not make the place sacred.

He illustrated the latter point by citing what he called a ‘funny instance’ when people protested against garbage dumping in a particular place by clearing it and placing a Buddha *rūpa* there, which effectively prevented any further dumping. All these participants resisted the idea that Sinhala pilgrims were being triumphalist. They were simply joyful. What they criticized was forcible imposition of Buddhism in the North and East.

A Sinhala development worker, feminist and a cat-lover, whom I will call Anjali, however, was far more direct, sharing that, on one journey to Jaffna before the ending of the war, she had followed a massive Buddha *rūpa* in the back of a lorry up the A9. For her, placing Buddha *rūpas* in non-Buddhist areas could be compared to the actions of a tomcat ‘pissing to mark its territory’. She was fully aware that her simile was objectionable but insisted I should include it, declaring that asserting Sinhala Buddhist dominance in non-Buddhist areas was ‘a contradiction of Buddhism itself’. ‘For this to be happening’, she added, ‘in a period of supposed reconciliation is a contradiction in terms’.

Nevertheless, I also met with resistance in the South to the thought that Tamils resented the presence of Buddha *rūpas* in the North. In 2012, for

instance, a Sinhala Buddhist woman, whom I will call Nirmala, accused Tamil Hindus of wrong-thinking, when I shared this possibility. She continued, 'Can't Hindu temples be built in the South? Why then shouldn't *vihāras* be built in the North? Why should people resent the placing of a Buddha image by a bodhi tree in Jaffna?' She then asserted that there should be more Sinhala colonization in the North and more inter-faith marriage. She was certainly not alone in thinking this.

Some Sinhala Christians and Buddhists in the South were also keen to stress that Buddhist and indeed Hindu fears concerning the religious Other in the post-war context had to be taken seriously. For instance, a Protestant clergyman, whom I will call Mark, said in 2012:

Churches have moved into the Vanni after the war. Churches have never had a presence there. Either they began as a relief organization and then set up a church or they used contacts they had in the IDP camps. So the very same criticism that is made of Buddhists can be made of Christians. This is done by small groups that mainline churches have no control over. In principle it means that there are diverse groups exploiting the situation for religious expansion and this needs to be stopped and investigated. Buddhism is very visible in most areas because it has military backing. Christians are more low profile but they are still exploiting.

And Soma stressed the depth of the fear among some Buddhists towards Muslims, attributing the cause to socio-economic as well as religious factors:

There is also a Buddhist fear especially in urban areas of Muslim groups setting up mosques. In Dehiwela [close to Colombo] ... a lot of posters appeared protesting against Muslim fundamentalists coming into the neighbourhood. About two months ago [from August 2012], some Buddhist monks led a group of people and surrounded a prayer centre for Muslims. Actually that prayer house was not a mosque. People assembled there and offered prayers. But Buddhists are saying that these are mosques or will become mosques and they feel threatened by this. This is linked with an interesting development in urban neighbourhoods. There are a lot of Muslims who buy urban property and settle down. So then you see Muslim families in traditional Sinhala areas. And there is a cultural clash because Muslim men wear long cloaks and Muslim women wear the chador. Buddhists see this as a cultural invasion. So then Buddha statues are placed in order to reclaim space, Buddhist space ... it is an act of resistance as well as reassertion.

In the South, therefore, the perspectives I met among Buddhists varied from indignation that Tamils could possibly feel threatened by Buddha *rūpas*, to criticism of the placing of Buddhist symbols where there were no Buddhists, to the assertion that the Buddha image, in some contexts, could be an act of resistance

against a perceived threat. In 2017, I was also pointed towards the work of Galkande Dhammānanda Thera, an academic historian at Kelaniya University, who, according to one Roman Catholic priest who worked with him, ‘was creating a silent revolution on the ethnic issue and inter-religious dialogue’ through stressing both the dangers of essentializing ethnic and religious identities, and the need for inter-religious and inter-ethnic conversation.

To move to Hindus and Christians in Tamil majority areas, I was surprised at the unanimity between them in both 2012 and 2015. In 2012, anger and resentment was uppermost. In 2015, this had largely been replaced by helplessness and resignation, combined with the wish to reclaim space.

Most Tamils made a distinction between the Buddha’s teaching and the political Buddhism that was linked with Sinhala nationalism. Towards the former there could be respect and even love. Towards the latter, in 2012, there was anger and resentment. As Rajasingham said,

As Hindus of Jaffna, we have no hatred to any religion. We go to other places of worship. Even Sinhala people come to our temples. In Buddhist temples, there are Hindu statues. It is the politicians who are spoiling it.

A Roman Catholic priest in Jaffna, whom I will call Kingsley, chose to have a Buddha *rūpa* in his study, through respect for the Buddha’s teaching, but he also spoke about a ‘Buddhist invasion’, a ‘cultural invasion’. He was happy to have a *rūpa* at home but declared he would protest against one in the street. ‘It will make people hate Buddhism’ he added. He also shared an instance of successful popular pressure. A Buddhist *rūpa* was being erected in a Catholic area. The local people appealed to their parish priest, who appealed to the bishop, who appealed to the army and the building was stopped. He interpreted this as part of a drive to claim Jaffna, as well as the whole country, for Buddhism. Mobilized civil society groups could do something, he insisted, but little would happen without political change.

Another Roman Catholic priest, whom I will call Peter, pointed me to the Tamil Buddhist epic, the *Manimekhalai*, which is about a dancing girl who becomes a Buddhist nun, and claimed the atmosphere at ‘Mātakal’ – he refused to say ‘Dambakola Paṭuna’ – was peaceful and sacred. The Buddha image was not offensive to him, he declared. It had been holy to many Tamils in the past and Tamil Buddhists must have helped Saṅghamittā. For him, the image of the Buddha could be an aid to meditation and reflection, even in public space. Yet, he also insisted that there had been a political ‘de-sacralization’ of Buddhism. For him, Buddhist symbols now indicated imperialism and war, particularly those along the A9 road. They were a betrayal of Buddhism. In my ongoing conversation with him in 2017, he claimed, ‘The moral impact of Hinayāna Buddhism has been negligent. Tamils see Buddhists as not living up to their core principles.’

Similarly, a Tamil academic, whom I will call Vishwa, shared with me that he had once commented that, if the Buddha came to Sri Lanka now, he might

‘commit suicide’ or be hanged as an imposter, because Buddhism had become so ‘twisted’. Ravikrishnan, therefore, voiced an awareness that was repeated to me continually in the North: ‘I primarily see putting up Buddha statues as not about Buddhism but as an act of Sinhala Buddhist ideology, in terms of capturing space in the North.’ Jeganathan added, when speaking of the planting of bodhi trees, ‘What is the big idea? To show their political presence, not their religious presence.’

Yet, there was also some awareness of Sinhala Buddhist imaginaries. A member of my group interview in Jaffna pointed to the histories that cast Tamils as invaders. ‘If you ask the present generation of Buddhist priests’, he declared, ‘they believe the Tamils destroyed their tanks, destroyed their civilization, and chased them out of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva’. He added later, ‘And they [Sinhala Buddhists] have passed on their anger and waited for an opportunity to give it back.’

A Hindu educationalist, based in Jaffna, whom I will call Balan, explained it in this way, referring to ‘the *Mahāvamsa* mindset’:

There is this view, ‘This is our land’. This is the only land we can have as Theravāda Buddhists. You can have other lands ... 2009 is the landmark. In the post 2009 scenario, this is going on unabated [erecting *vihāras* in areas where there are no Buddhists]. Buddhist places of worship come up like mushrooms. And there are historians to say that these are Buddhist places. They can create places and distort history. I will be right in saying that the Buddhist masses are not with them. They are not malicious.... But the politicians and those who want to sail in the crest of Buddhist nationalism, they are taking this forward. And this is what is disturbing. We have a state that is not willing to be impartial and will condone some of these things. They behave as the victors. We are the vanquished.

Several of my participants mentioned the fact that bodhi trees are frequently found in Jaffna, the seeds spread by birds. They even grew on rooftops. Jeganathan stressed to me that the tree was not only a Buddhist symbol but was also linked with Śiva. But the remark I heard most frequently was, ‘Wherever there is a bo tree, they, the Sinhala people, have to place a Buddha statue and they plant new trees also’ or ‘Wherever there is a bo tree, the government likes to make it a sacred place’. It was said almost flippantly but masked anger and hurt. One member of my group interview in Jaffna said:

You have to understand the politics of Buddhist temples. Once you have a bo tree and image, you can bring down at least two priests and service families. Then you need technicians. So it’s a ploy for minoritizing the minorities. So you will see Buddhist temples in every strategic place. Sometimes it’s funny. Somewhere in 2009, in Trincomalee, they brought two or three lorry-loads of Buddhist statues, given by China, and for days and days, they were going around trying to find places to put the statues.

He ended with the phrase, ‘Encroaching Buddhas’, at which point, another member of the group said, ‘Conquering Buddhas’ and all agreed. ‘This is a conquering!’ they stressed. ‘These are acts of aggression.’ I met this again and again in my interviews. A humanitarian worker in the East, whom I will call Joyce, for instance, told me that, although it may salvage Buddhist conscience, enforcing Buddhist images in non-Buddhist areas was ‘a reinforcing of defeat’. Moses went further: state-sponsored Buddhist expansionism was ‘obscene, not nice’. Several of my participants, Daniel for instance, therefore, claimed that, if Tamils found a Buddhist site or a bodhi tree, their first impulse would be to hide or destroy it.

Another concept was introduced by David. He stressed that what was happening was not only an invasion but a trivialization of space. Daniel, on the other hand, linked it to an erasing of history, a denial of remembrance. The development of towns such as Kilinochchi and the possibility of colonization would erase the fact that there was ever a war, and government destruction of LTTE cemeteries meant that Tamil remembrance was being pushed underground into people’s homes.

Implicit within the view that the Buddha image was a symbol of defeat was the fear that it was the prelude to further government-sponsored Sinhala colonization to change the demography of the North and East. Fears about colonization, as I have shown, were present well before 2009 and were realized in eastern towns such as Trincomalee and Ampara, and around Buddhist sites such as Sēruvila. After May 2009, these fears increased, with some justification, as two reports from the Centre for Policy Alternatives on demographic changes in regions such as Vavuniya and Mullaitivu (Fonseka and Raheem 2011) and on continued post-war land occupation by government forces (Fonseka 2016) attest. Fernando cites the Madhu Road Housing Scheme, which followed the reconstruction of a *vihāra*, where, out of 50 houses, 40 were given to Sinhala families, five to Tamils and five to military officials (Fernando 2013: 207), a proportion that exceeded that envisaged by Gunaratne.

One particular fear in 2012 was that the Sri Lankan government sought to change the demography of the whole country to reflect Gunaratne’s proportions. As Siva stated, numerous stories had circulated about this and truth was difficult to separate from rumour. However, fears had been high enough for parliamentarians of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) to voice their concerns in Parliament in 2011. Basil Rajapakse, then Minister of Economic Development, denied the allegation that there was forced colonization of Sinhala families in the North, stating, ‘You should remember that it was the LTTE who evicted the Sinhalese, Muslims and your own people from the North. The government has paved the way for their return’ (Newline of the Government of Sri Lanka, Thursday, 8 September 2011).

This did little to allay fears. Balan claimed of the Sinhala people in 2012:

They are trying to alter history – to create their own history. And one of the main Tamil charges is the conscious and planned attempt to change the

geographical and ethnic distribution. There is a conscious and malicious attempt to alter it and to say the North and East is not the homeland of the Tamils but the homeland of everyone. This is a planned affair. The minorities get the beating. We are not against Buddhists or Sinhalese settling down in our areas. The bakers used to be Sinhalese before 1973. We have no quarrel with those who come here to work as much as we go elsewhere to work. But when the Government backs them ... the consequences will be very painful, undesirable and negative.

Jeganathan agreed 'If Sinhala people come to live in the North, they have every right to bring in symbols of worship ... but impose it and bring about forced settlement protected by the army, nobody likes it.' Exactly the same was said by Moses in 2015, 'We are not against Sinhala people coming on their own but when the state gives them assistance, then we are worried. Earlier there were Sinhala mechanics in our villages and there was no problem'.

Fear and insecurity characterized many of these responses. As Ravikrishnan said in 2012:

People believe that, even if these projects [building Buddhist centres] were genuine, it is too early and too fast. Should this be a priority now, when there are other problems? So this is where the suspicion comes in. During a transition period, such work is problematic. So once things have stabilized, when Tamils are secure in the North and East, Tamils might be prepared to see these as genuine projects.

Siva put it this way:

We are a multi-religious society. So any religious community must have its protected space to propagate its faith and mobilize its constituency. It's a democratic right as laid down by the United Nations. Devotees also must have the right to go anywhere and propagate their religion. But how is this to be done? It should not be done through state patronage and through organized transfer of people from the South to the North to change the demography.

These opinions were voiced in awareness that the North had one bargaining disadvantage – the depopulated nature of the Vanni. So Ravikrishnan explained in 2012:

The Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse said quite recently that he does not think that the Northern Province belongs to the Tamils ... it's a statement confirming that he wants to see a change in the Northern Province.... Part of the concern is that the Vanni is highly depopulated – from about 400,000 to 200,000. Half of the population has moved or been killed. I think that the government is trying to keep the Vanni as a place that people will

want to move from.... So one of the things in terms of colonization, unlike in the 1950s and 1960s where colonization was justified for agricultural reasons, is that it is now being justified for reasons of national security.

Moses expressed something similar, when he spoke of Tamil youth wanting to escape Sri Lanka:

If you look at the demographic spread in the North, the population per square mile is very low. After the war, it has gone down further. In the South it is very high. Looking at it from the point of view of social justice or natural justice, we consider this as our homeland but when the Sinhala people see a huge land mass, a fertile area, empty, you can understand. And if people won't stay here, for us to say that others can't come in, it looks very contradictory. I have told people in the North this. We have a land mass here that is undeveloped. But security is our basic problem.

There are also several historical 'facts' that Tamils believe Sinhala Buddhists ignore. One is that Buddhist sites discovered in the North of the country were also Tamil Buddhist sites and another, that the lowest strata of archaeological evidence across the country is South Indian. Donald Kanagaratnam, in the mid-twentieth century, challenged Paranavitana's representation of northern inscriptions as an old Sinhalese form of Sanskrit, because it disregarded, for instance, the purely Tamil nature of a word used for chiefs who donated caves for Buddhist monks – *paramuka* (Kanagaratnam Undated: 31–33). Schalk, later, similarly accused Paranavitana of denying 'a Tamil substratum in insular Brāhmi Prakrit inscriptions' (Schalk 2002: 46). Hoole, drawing on other academic sources, later still, accused him of fabricating interlinear inscriptions (Hoole 2015: 364–365), arguing that the game of the 'Archaeology Department' was to turn 'Buddhist remains that were contiguous with South India ... into Sinhala Buddhist ones' (Hoole 2015: 364). Thiagarajah went as far as to accuse the Department of Archaeology of purposely renovating the *stūpas* at Kantarodai so that they mirrored the round structure of southern *stūpas* rather than ascertaining whether they could have been similar to those at Amarāvati; the base of the *stūpas* could have supported either model and the cluster pattern of their distribution favoured Amarāvati (Thiagarajah 2016: 250–252).

Among my participants, Jeganathan did not doubt that Saṅghamittā had landed from India in the North but he sought recognition that Tamil Buddhists might have been involved rather than what he saw as the default Sinhala position: that when Buddhist sites or artefacts were discovered in the North, they were automatically judged to be Sinhala. Several of my participants argued that Tamil Buddhism was Mahāyāna, although Schalk, an expert on Tamil Buddhism, claimed the evidence was inconclusive, although Mahāyāna *influence* was possible (Schalk 2002: 84). Peter, for instance, insisted that the *Manimekhalai* was a Mahāyāna text,³ Vishwa that some Tamil Buddhists would have 'become' Sinhala at the time of Hindu revivalism and Mark that it was pure speculation to

judge whether an ancient site represented Sinhala or Tamil Buddhism, since the country had not been ethnically divided at that time. Kingsley, however, believed it was dangerous for Tamils to argue too strongly for Tamil Buddhism in the North, since ‘Sinhala people will not accept it’. As for archaeological strata, Jeganathan insisted to me that archaeological findings suggest that, about 1000BC, a megalithic culture was brought to the North by the people of South India, ‘which peopled the whole of Sri Lanka from Pt Pedro to Hambantota’.⁴ Buddhism was a later entrant and converted many throughout the country, the majority of whom would have been of South Indian origin.

Another point that my Tamil participants felt was ignored was the suffering they had undergone during the war. Siva became quite emotional at the shrine to Kularatne. The key question for him was how Sri Lankans should remember the war and what they should remember. These were his words:

Anyone killed in the war needs to be commemorated but the question is how. The television documentary at the shrine arouses an extreme Sinhala nationalist feeling and gives the impression that the war was against the Tamils – all Tamils. This is not the way to bring reconciliation. The military is doing this to present themselves as liberators of the country. Yet, hundreds and thousands of others were killed and massacred during the war – innocent Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. It could be 100,000. We don’t know the exact amount. Yet, there is no monument to commemorate them.... It is sending a very bad message to the South about the causes of the war. The war was not caused by the Tamils.

In another context, he said to me that reconciliation will only come in Sri Lanka when Tamils are able to commemorate the Sinhalas who died and when Sinhalas are able to commemorate the Tamils who died in the war.

Where Tamil Hindu and Tamil Christian perspectives diverged was over the issue of the Christian missionary legacy. I heard several examples of Hindu self-assertion in this context. David told me that, in February 2012, the Hindu principal of Vincent Girls High School in Batticaloa, which had been a Methodist school, although then part of the government system, had placed a statue of Sarasvatī in the school. There was protest and it was removed but it caused rancour among the pupils, who were Christian, Hindu and Muslim. Kingsley pointed to tension in Jaffna because foreign ambassadors and international visitors tended to go to the Catholic bishop rather than Hindu leaders, in the absence in 2012 of a Hindu Council. And Mark pointed to the ‘Hindu exclusivism’ that had emerged in Jaffna University. After 2009, ‘Hindu exclusivists’ had been brought into positions of authority by the EPDP, working with the government, and the new vice-chancellor had declared that Hindu culture would be given a special place at the university. He also pointed to the trend of installing Hindu statues in former Christian missionary schools and changing their names, demonstrating that the Vincent Girls High School incident was not isolated.

I also asked my participants what the implications of these spatial changes were for Sri Lanka's future. In 2012, Daniel claimed that the encroachment of the Buddha *rūpa* and the number of Sinhala pilgrims to the North and East were revealing to Tamils attitudes they had feared but had not actually witnessed before, causing them to exclaim, 'This is what Sinhala people do and feel when they're free.' 'In front of their eyes', he continued, 'Sinhala people were seeing the whole island as theirs.' He believed it proved to some people that a certain aspect of the LTTE representation of reality had been correct. His implication was that what the LTTE had fought for may become more attractive, even for those who had been critical of the organization. A Tamil Christian ordinand said something similar, again in 2012, 'What really caused the war is reappearing by these kind of actions and it is creating conflict in the communities.'

Others predicted a Hindu Revival that would be less accommodating of the religious Other. Balan, for instance, saw new divisions arising along religious lines. 'After 1956', he said, 'the nation was divided on ethnic lines. But now another dimension is being added to it. It will be divided on religious lines'. Similarly, Soma, in the South, stressed that his Muslim and Hindu friends were extremely worried about the parallels they saw between Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in the 1950s and the present. Identity politics rooted in religion was gaining the upper hand, he believed.

Vishwa, in 2012, on the evidence of what his children were saying at home, spoke of the conversations he believed were happening in schools. He compared them to conversations that had happened when he was young, before the conflict became armed, since they indicated that school-children were again plotting ways of attacking the Sinhala people. He added:

In another 10–15 years there might be a group that will be ruthless. There cannot be another LTTE ... not another large military movement. But a terrorist movement could be formed and that is far more dangerous than a military movement. That is a possibility if this problem is not solved.

In 2012, some of my participants, David for instance, stressed that people in the North and East felt that they could not protest, because of army involvement in the spatial changes. Others such as Kingsley were more positive and stressed the need for civil society organizations across religious lines to 'stand together against the Buddhist issue'. In 2015, however, a sense of helplessness was more pronounced. Vishwa claimed that a 'learnt helplessness' had developed. People were getting on with their lives because they realized they could 'do nothing'. Others pointed out that fewer articles about Buddha images appeared in the media, whereas in the years immediately following 2009, they had appeared almost every day. Moses stressed that his congregation did not want to antagonize the military, since it could backfire: 'Our community is a small one – What can we do?' Only Siva pointed to the ongoing need for dialogue, the need, for instance, for Tamil and Sinhala academics to come together to discuss the reality

of Tamil Buddhism. Renovation of Hindu temples and expansion of Christian churches, however, continued apace.

By 2017, as I have shown, some contentious Buddhist statements had been removed from Jaffna itself and the army was less in evidence than in 2015. The ‘learnt helplessness’ mentioned by Vishwa had been channelled into restoring Hindu temples and working for material benefits. Yet, resentment was still present. Peter, for instance, was eager to speak to me again in 2017 to insist that my book must give space to the ‘violence of political Buddhism’, even whilst saying that he considered himself to be both a Christian priest and a Tamil Buddhist, and that the churches had made ‘a terrible mistake’ by not being humble enough to learn from the non-violent message of ‘the Buddhist scriptures’.

Conclusion

My data has shown that the post-2009 spatial changes in Sri Lanka have had a profound effect on the North and East of the country. In these areas, many Tamils are aware of Sinhala Buddhist emotive frameworks. Vishwa, for instance, commented on his relationships with Sinhala people with great poignancy:

At a personal level, Sinhala people will do anything for you... If you become a personal friend, they will help you. But they have this fear that they are the most isolated people in the entire world. It’s a question of existence.

However, there is profound disagreement with the material and spatial expressions of this sense of isolation or what Rāghavan termed ‘ontological insecurity’, stretching from historiography to archaeology, school textbooks to bodhi trees, and from cultural identity to the path towards peace.

Notes

- 1 For instance: ‘Religion, Space and Conflict in Post-War Sri Lanka’ (Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions, 2013); ‘Religion, Space and Reconciliation: A Case study from Post-war Sri Lanka’ (European Society for Intercultural Theology and Inter-Religious Studies, 2013); ‘Buddhism, Space and Conflict in Colonial and Postcolonial Sri Lanka’ (UK Association for Buddhist Studies, 2013); ‘Religion, Space and Conflict: The Case Study of Sri Lanka’ (Edinburgh University, 2016).
- 2 For a more detailed examination of this incident as a case study see: Elizabeth J Harris, ‘Buddhism and the Religious Other: Twenty First Century Dambulla and the presence of Buddhist Exclusivism in Sri Lanka’ (forthcoming), which developed a paper given at the International Association for Buddhist Studies, Vienna, August 2014, on ‘Buddhism and the Religious Other: Six Responses in Text and Tradition’.
- 3 The best analysis of the *Manimekhalai* is Monius (2001).
- 4 For academic appraisals of this see Thiagarajah (2016: ix–xviii); Sittrampalam (2005); Indrapala (2005).

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