TACKLING CHALLENGES FOR THE SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS IN THE WAKE OF THE EASTER SUNDAY ATTACKS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 **INTRODUCTION**

06 **SRI LANKA'S CONFLICTED SOCIETY**

07 **THE CASE OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS**

09 **MUSLIMS AND THE COLONIAL PERIODS**

011 **ISLAMIC REVIVALISM**

015 **CONCLUSION**

017 *AUTHOR PROFILE*

018 *ENDNOTES*

024 *REFERENCES*

TACKLING CHALLENGES FOR THE SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS IN THE WAKE OF THE EASTER SUNDAY ATTACKS

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INTRODUCTION

On the 21st of April 2019, Easter Sunday, multiple explosions rocked the Sri Lankan cities of Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa, leaving over 200 dead and hundreds wounded.[1]

These were the worst terror attacks to hit the island since 1996 when the Central Bank[2] was attacked by the Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) during the 30-year old war that ended in May 2009. For many Sri Lankans, the attacks – the first in 10 years after a period of relative peace – brought back not only memories of the violent conflict which had engulfed the country, but also new worries for the future.

As it transpired the terrorist perpetrators were from a local radical Islamic organisation that would eventually be linked to ISIS, the local Muslim community came under intense scrutiny and backlash. The government banned women from wearing the niqab (face covering) as part of emergency regulations and the general public and security forces increased harassment of the community (Irshad, 2019). The worst fears of the local Muslim community of a violent backlash against them were realised when, a few weeks after the attacks, Muslim-owned property was destroyed and a Muslim civilian[3] killed at the hands of mobs (Amarasingam & Fuller, 2019) in a wave of anti-Muslim violence in several parts of the island.

The backlash against the Muslim community has come after years of weakening community relations and heightened tensions between Muslim and Sinhalese communities in particular, following the end of the 30-year civil war in 2009.[4] The government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has been struggling to articulate a mechanism and process to channel grievances and deal with the root causes for the LTTE uprising in a political system that was already weak in upholding fundamental rights and representation for minorities. In addition, post-conflict reconciliation and trust-building between the various communities at the grassroots level were not prioritised, as the GOSL focused on constitutional reforms and establishing mechanisms to deal with transitional justice. The reactions since the Easter Sunday attacks, exposed that weakness,[5] given the lack of prioritisation given to grassroots community relations and the failure to deal with trust deficits and misperceptions between communities.

Community tensions across the island were at an all-time-high as the 10th anniversary commemorating the war's end coincided with the marking of a month since the Easter Sunday attacks. Sri Lanka has been prone to violent conflicts every decade since the 1970s,[6] so there is a real fear that the island is on the brink of another outbreak of violence. The urgent question now is how to ensure that previous mistakes are not repeated.

For the Muslim community in particular, the events of 21/4 mark a watershed moment for Muslim identity and representation in Sri Lanka. Almost overnight, being a Muslim has become an accusation as well as a religious affiliation. Many organisations and individuals have had to respond in the public sphere to address the demonisation of a whole religion because of the actions of a few.

For the Muslims of Sri Lanka, this accusation was, and remains, a double-edged sword impacting their religious and ethnic representation, their relationship with the other communities, and their transnational relationship to Muslims from outside the country. In the light of growing Buddhist ethno-nationalism, especially after the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009 and in the wake of the Easter Sunday attacks, Muslims have been burdened with defending a religious identity and an ethnic representation that has become institutionalised since the time of the British rule in the country but open to scrutiny, especially in their relationship with the global community of Muslims. There have now been calls[7] for the Muslim community to 'reform' and become 'moderate' to show their 'Sri Lankan identity' *(India Times, 2019)*.

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However, these demands for reform and demonstrable allegiance are accompanied by a sense of anger, frustration and despair, because it is difficult to fully understand the identity of the Sri Lankan Muslim and where the 'Muslim' fits into the Sri Lankan national consciousness. This apparent vacuum of understanding the reality of the Muslim lived experience in Sri Lanka is not made any easier by global dynamics and geopolitics around Islam and Muslims, thereby exacerbating a scenario where Muslims in Sri Lanka are now viewed with suspicion, especially following the Easter Sunday attacks.

Though the backlash from the Easter Sunday attacks has been particularly intense against the Muslim community, it mirrors violent incidents in Sri Lanka in recent history which signify a rising Islamophobic tension and the worrying incitement to violence (Bengali, 2018). This echoes narratives that have been present in mainstream Western media for a long time where Islam is seen simply as a religion of unintelligible crazed violence perpetrated by mass-murdering fanatics. This type of sentiment, common in the West, is now common in Sri Lanka and is increasingly reflected in the media coverage as well as mainstream narratives in Sri Lanka (Mazumdaru, 2018).

After 71 years of independence, Sri-Lanka is still in search of a constitutional framework that will satisfy the aspirations of all its citizens and deliver an environment of peace and harmony to engage its human and natural resources for the development of the country. The place of minority communities, such as the Tamils and Muslims is at stake, as is the formation of a comprehensively inclusive national identity.

In particular, it is important for those calling for a rethink of Sri Lankan Muslims' identity to firstly understand its history and context in order to suggest future steps. Without understanding the past, it will be difficult to move forward. This need for introspection that people have been calling for must be holistic and whilst it is rightly

undertaken by the Muslim community in the first instance, it is important that this is a conversation that takes place across all communities as well.

SRI LANKA'S CONFLICTED SOCIETY

It is not the intention of the author to provide a detailed history of Sri Lanka,[8] suffice to say, that recent history will have to be revisited briefly to provide the necessary context for community relations, identity and representation today. It is crucial to provide a broad picture of the causes behind the previous conflicts to understand the tensions between the communities and identify the pertinent issues for the future.[9]

Like many post-colonial societies, Sri Lanka drew on pre-colonial culture, including religion, to form a national identity after gaining independence in 1948, hence the increasing visibility of Buddhist monks in political activism (Deegalle, 2007). The legacy of the colonial period has been blamed by most analysts for sowing the seeds of ethnic division in independent Sri Lanka. British rule fostered and emphasised a new concept of colonial identities,[10] weakening the process of ethnic assimilation that had existed previously (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 1999). Sinhala nationalism emerged in the 19th century as a counter-colonial movement that used Buddhist identity to mobilise popular support against Christian missionaries and later British capitalist interests, especially regarding Indian immigrants who came to work on the plantations[11] (Moore 1989). Sinhala nationalism was also fuelled by what was seen as the excessive political demands of Tamil leaders and the disproportionate power and position Tamils had gained under British rule.[12]

Upon independence, it was inevitable that the Sinhalese would redefine ethnic relations to their advantage and establish a voting system along ethnic lines.[13] Consequently, constitutional arrangements at independence lacked sufficient safeguards for minority rights.[14] However, it was not until 1956 that the full political logic of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism would be realised, when the opposition party campaigning on an uncompromising nationalist platform of "Sinhala Only",[15] was swept into power. Their victory effectively reversed the preferential colonial treatment of Tamil elites. However, it also led to the marginalisation of minorities along with decades of confrontation between the Tamils and Sinhalese. This in turn set in motion a process which dropped Tamil as an official language, and consequently prevented Tamil speakers, mainly from the minority Tamil and Muslim communities, from having equal legal status.

Tamils were now the ones who felt excluded by the language policy and its effects on the availability of public sector jobs and services and started their largely non-violent civil disobedience by democratic Tamil parties,[16] but it was clear that Sri Lanka's path had been intertwined with the concept of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.[17] It also set a trend in Sri Lankan politics of 'political upmanship' where the main opposition party would wreck attempts by the party in power to ensure that the country would not benefit from government decisions made at critical junctures.[18]

By the 1970s, it was clear that the Government was pressing ahead with its attempts to relegate the position of Tamils (and other minorities) in state sectors, and later in the private sector, thereby exacerbating ethnic tensions. Gradually, civil disobedience led to the emergence of small militant Tamil groups,[19] and the first demands for a separate Tamil state as a bargaining position in the hope of reaching a compromise of a devolution package[20] were made. This was something that the State would never accept, as it was felt that this would lead to national fragmentation.

In 1983, politically motivated anti-Tamil riots in Colombo were sparked by the murder of 13 policemen by the LTTE, leading to the murder of as many as 1000 Tamils and the displacement of thousands of others.[21] A

major shock, this pogrom against the Tamils provided an opportunity for marginal militant Tamil groups to gain new supporters and to internationalise their struggle. The eighties and nineties proved to be violent episodes in Sri Lanka's young history[22] as the LTTE emerged as the predominant force amongst Tamil militant groups. In particular, with the defeat of the Indian Peacekeeping Force,[23] the mass displacement of Muslims from the north in 1990,[24] and the assassination of key Sri Lankan political and military leaders and Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Ghandi in 1991, the LTTE emerged as one of the world's most ruthless terrorist organisations, with its use of suicide bombers and recruitment of child soldiers.

Despite many peace negotiation attempts in the nineties, the conflict persisted until 2002, largely as a result of the global environment,[25] a Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) was signed, leading to the longest period of peace since the early eighties. A sense of unease persisted despite relative normalisation in the north and east – and the cessation of violence and retaliatory killings undertaken as a result of the weakness of enforcement and accountability outlined by the CFA.[26] With a subsequent change in government in 2005, there was a push to eradicate the LTTE militarily before any political solutions could be considered. This indeed came to pass in May 2009.[27]

In the post 2009 era, there have been at least three incidents[28] of anti-Muslim violence as a result of rising nationalist Sinhala Buddhist sentiments. The Easter Sunday attacks now pose a new challenge for the country in terms of a potential return to conflict.

THE CASE OF SRI LANKAN MUSLIMS

Sri Lankan Muslims constitute about 9.1% of the total population according to the 2012 census. This is the first census taken in 11 years (and the first after the end of the conflict in 2009). For the first time, there are no approximations for figures from in the North and East as there were in 2001 (ICG, 2007b).[29]

Muslims and their communities are scattered all over the island and do not account for an absolute majority (50% plus one) of the population in any district of Sri Lanka (see figure 1).[30] Because of this, and their historical legitimacy, the ethnic identity of the community has evolved so that it is neither Sinhalese nor Tamil, leading to an "anomalous position in Sri Lankan ethno-nationalist identity politics" (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007, p.1). This is despite the fact that the vast majority of the Muslim community speak Tamil but reject their linguistic identity in favour or a religious identity as their ethnic marker (Nuhman M. A., 2007).

The history of Islam in Sri Lanka is one of cultural, economic and geographical diversity which has led to the development of a heterogeneous community with diverse interests and "plural political adaptations at the local level" (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007, p.2). Yet the historical narrative of Sri Lankan Muslims is relatively unknown and in fact "there has been a dispute about the precise date of the arrival of Muslims in Sri Lanka and the start of their settlement." (Asad K., 1993, p.2).

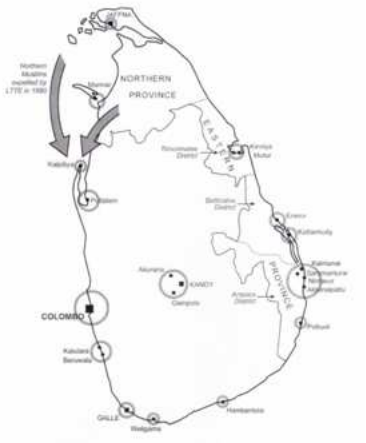

Figure 1:
Important sites of Muslim population in Sri Lanka (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007)[31]

Motivated by commerce, Arab merchants were not only able to settle and marry locally within the Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of 4th, 5th & 6th century South India and Sri Lanka respectively, but also established dominant economic positions in port settlements such as Calicut and Colombo, in return for revenue raised for the kingdoms (McGilvray 2011).[32] In addition, as a result of increasing commercial and cultural contact with Muslims from Malaba, a new South Indian element was added to the composition of the Muslim community of Sri Lanka, thereby losing its exclusive Arab character (Asad K., 1993). It is worth noting that Arab / Muslim sailors, travellers and traders who came to Sri Lanka did not bring with them their families with them, but often chose to marry from the local Sinhalese and Tamil population, converting them to Islam, and perhaps justifying the need to reframe the discussion around with reference to 'Tamil' or 'Sinhala' Muslims.

Thus, historical sources indicate that even before the emergence of Islam at its origins, Arab traders arrived on the island, where they settled and married local women. This pattern of migration continued once Islam emerged on the Arabian Peninsula and introduced the religion to communities on the island. Islam's arrival on the island had more to do with where the traders landed than with any specific ethnic identity. It could exist within mixed Sinhala and Tamil communities. It's worth noting that this is very much in keeping with other communities on the island: historical narratives demonstrate Sinhala and Tamil communities themselves are a result of inter-marriage.

This analysis challenges how the Muslim community is described, classified and self-identifies in Sri Lanka. It firstly identifies that parts of the community may be descended from Tamils and Sinhalese, with religion as a unifying factor. It also points to heterogeneity of the community in terms of cultural practices and understanding, with many Muslims in the East displaying different cultural practices[33] to those in Southern parts of the country.[34]

However, this difference is somewhat ambiguous and poorly understood, and thus poses many challenges to the development of identity and representation of the Muslim community by themselves and others. The first challenge is that as a result of this historical understanding, most Muslims in Sri Lanka classify themselves as the descendants of Arabs or 'Moors,'[35] despite its postcolonial derogatory overtones.[36] Due to the fact Arab migrants were Muslims, the concepts of faith and ethnicity became fused over time, so a racial link became a religious link, thereby ascribing a racial homogeneity to a community perceived as such: the "Sri Lankan Muslim." Yet even this concept of homogeneity is misleading, because it does not do justice to the other ethnic communities within the Muslim community. For example, Malays, who are descendants of people from Java who were brought to Sri Lanka by the Dutch, a fair number of Indian Muslims who had migrated from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka for the purpose of trade and then settled down and small communities of the Memon,[37] and Bohra Ismailis,[38] all of whom contribute to the heterogeneity of the Muslim community (D. B. McGilvray, 2011, D. B. McGilvray, 2008). This diversity is not reflected in the concept of the 'Sri Lankan Muslim', adding further to the confusion.[39]

The homogeneity of a 'Muslim' as an identity also has a global significance in terms of an affiliation with fellow believers around the world in what is known as the Ummah (al-Ahsan, 1992). This theme has problematic connotations for many Muslim communities who are minorities, both indigenous and migrants, since the discussion of the Ummah is an intellectual predicament of the Muslim world that finds itself often at odds with the concept of nationalism or the nation-state. This is because it is assumed that their 'loyalty' is not to the nation they live in, but rather 'extraterritorial' to a wider transnational Muslim community (Parekh, 2008).

This binary understanding of 'Muslim'

"The periods of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule were especially harsh for the Muslim community, not only due to restrictions being placed upon the practice of their faith, but also due to the threat they posed to the European monopoly of overseas trade"

identity thus becomes a challenge for the Sri Lankan Muslim community as they profess their Sri Lankan identity (and sense of belonging) and tackle the issue of religious representation and possible transnational affiliation of which they are accused. Whilst Nuhman (2007) charts the discussion on this issue which concludes that the definition and concept of the Sri Lankan Muslim identity has changed from a racial into a religious one over the past few decades, he himself (2007, 6) states that "In the Sri Lankan context, the term 'Muslim' has gained an ethnic sense and denotes a distinct ethnic group which consciously differentiates itself from the other major ethnic groups, namely, the Sinhalese and the Tamils".[40]

This implication by default has wider ramifications because it can be seen to justify a primordialist narrative which implies that the 'Sri Lankan Muslim' are 'newcomers' to the island tracing their history back about a thousand years, unlike the Sinhalese and Tamil prehistory that can be traced back to at least the first millennium BCE (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007). However, "there are plenty of archaeological and historical records which have been unearthed in recent times, all of which establish the fact that the Muslims of Sri Lanka are as indigenous to its soil as the Sinhalese and Tamils" (Ali, 1997, p.254).

This identity crisis compounded by history means that there is a challenge in classifying the Muslims simply based on 'Arab' heritage which was further complicated during the colonial period by encounters and reactions from this period. It also means that the ethnic identification of 'Muslim' that had been hitherto justified from a primordialist perspective, can be misleading and needs to be challenged.

MUSLIMS AND THE COLONIAL PERIODS

The periods of Portuguese[41] and Dutch[42] colonial rule were especially harsh for the Muslim community, not only due to restrictions being placed upon the practice of their faith, but also due to the threat they posed to the European monopoly of overseas trade. There were limitations placed on the movement of Arab and Persian traders, especially during Portuguese rule in the 15th century (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007). As a consequence, there was greater interaction between the Muslims of Sri Lanka and the Muslims of South India who were mostly Tamil speaking as well as ethnically Dravidian. This explains why the overwhelming majority of Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil and not Arabic, Persian or Sinhalese as their mother tongue (Ali, 1997).[43]

By the beginning of the British occupation of Sri Lanka, the Muslim community was already in the process of identity construction (and deconstruction that constituted a 'Sri Lankan Muslim'. One of the key catalysts for political galvanisation must be understood in a wider context as Muslims (particularly those from the elite) were confronted with rising Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu consciousness in response to the British occupation. "Ethnic consciousness developed among Muslims also in response to the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism" (Nuhman M. A., 2007, p.135) which was additionally sustained by competition in trade and commerce.

The main proponent of this agitation was Anagarika Dharmapala who became the face of the Buddhist revivalist movement and the ideologue for Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. "His conviction was that Sinhala Buddhists were the 'sons of the soil' and the minorities were 'alien' people" (Nuhman M. A., 2007, p.101), and none were more hated than the

Muslims whom Dharmapala referred to as 'shylocks' (Ibid).[44] This antipathy towards minorities, and Muslims in particular, was also supported by the Sinhala mercantile class, who faced severe competition from the minority communities,[45] and who saw the movement as a useful opportunity to indirectly resist the colonial powers. It was with this support of the mercantile class that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists began to agitate against Muslims culminating in the first communal riots in 1915.

As a result, the Muslim community (led by 'leaders' from the elite based mainly in Colombo) was distinct in espousing their 'racial' Semitic identity comparable to the Aryan (Sinhalese), the Dravidian (Tamil) and Burgher (European mixed race) communities in Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2011). This put them on a collision course with the Tamil political elite in particular, who considered Tamil-speaking Muslims as an extension of their own community. In fact, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a Tamil statesman in 1888, used linguistic and ethnographic evidence to claim that not only were the Moors 'Muslim members of the Tamil race' (Ramanathan, 1888), but because they shared a great many cultural and linguistic traits resulting from conversion and intermarriage over the centuries, they should be represented by the Tamil leadership in the communal (racial) system of representation that had been instituted by the British colonial power.[46] This was soundly rejected by the Muslim polity of that time.[47]

For the elite Muslim community leaders, the term 'Moor' put forward by the Portuguese and then adopted by the Dutch and subsequently by the British, was not a mistake but deliberate, because the people they encountered in Sri Lanka were "a class of people who resembled in religion and other characteristics, the Arabs of Spain" (Nuhman M. A., 2007, p.128).[48] Hence the assertion was that Tamil was "not their inherently native language but merely a borrowed one and the language test cannot be applied to them when determining their racial origin or ethnicity" (Ibid, p.131).[49]

There is also a political context underlying this disagreement with Ramanathan's thesis in the sense of political appointments to the legislative council, set up by the British between 1833 and 1912 to engage with all ethnicities within Sri Lanka. Previously a representative of the Tamil-speaking community represented both Tamils and Muslims (Ramanathan himself), but was later reformed in 1889 when a Muslim-nominated representative was included in the council (Ameerdeen, 2006), leading many analysts to claim that his opposition was a political gambit in order to retain representation and power for himself (Ibid, Ali 1997, McGilvray 2011).

Ali (1997, 259) states that by arguing the case that "Muslims had no separate ethnic identity, they were Tamils in origin and that their interests could be looked after by Tamils", Ramanathan's claim provoked the Muslim elites of that time to establish "the claim that the Muslim community had a separate identity and that they were neither Tamils nor Sinhalese but Moors of Arab origin".[50] These claims served to articulate a racial distinction from Tamils and assert a religious identity whilst developing and preserving the emergence of the Muslims as a politically conscious minority. In doing so, the Muslim political elite tried to safeguard their socio-political interests, whilst ignoring the lived reality on the ground.

Needless to say, the British administration did not agree with Ramanathan's assertions and created a seat for the Muslim representative. By "institutionalising Muslim difference, the British, in a crucial sense, helped 'create' Muslim identity" (Ismail Q.

"For the elite Muslim community leaders, the term 'Moor' put forward by the Portuguese and then adopted by the Dutch and subsequently by the British, was not a mistake but deliberate"

M. 1995, p.73). Even if it did not actually create it, certainly this acceptance by the British colonial administration provided the Muslim community with agency[51] with which it's identity would grow.[52]

ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

The concept of political representation and ethnic nationalism cannot be examined without also looking at the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, which started during the same time. Like their Buddhist and Hindu counterparts that had emerged in an anti-colonial and anti-Christian wave, Muslim elites seized the opportunity to emulate a religious consciousness (Ismail Q. M., 1995) and create awareness of a religious ideology which slowly evolved at the end of the 19th century as a religiously oriented ethnic ideology. "Muslim revivalism arose basically to consolidate elitist[53] interests through creating wider community awareness in response to Sinhala and Tamil revivalist programmes and encouraged by their activities" (Nuhman M. A., 2007, p.104). Largely led by an elite group representing the affluent mercantile class and the emerging middle class that mainly centred around Colombo and Kandy, this group drew inspiration from the Turkish, Egyptian, and Indian revivalist and political movements of that time (Nuhman M., 2002).[54] Islamic revivalism became an effort to unite Muslims spiritually and culturally based on Islamic principles, and provide the community with a sense of identity and purpose.

The catalyst of this change would come in 1883, when the British colonial power exiled 'Urabi Pasha from Egypt to Sri Lanka, bringing with him a new insight into a transnational Muslim identity and an intellectual boost to a Muslim identity. 'Urabi Pasha arrived at what was the culmination of a 'perfect storm' for the Muslim community. Staying on the island for nearly two decades, he[55] became an intellectual inspiration[56] for Muslims, leading to the revival of Arab / Muslimness[57] as well as a push for political activism. After five years, Muslims made their first public claims (in 1888-1889) to a distinct identity and Arab origin in response to Ramanathan's claims and staked an independent place on the legislative council.

The late 19th century witnessed the first wave of 'Islamisation' led by the educated Muslim elite of the time, anxious to counter Christian domination but also to promote and encourage the social mobility and ethnic consolidation of the Muslims. Through the establishment of Jamiyatul Islamiya in 1886, Islamic awareness was promoted among Muslims in order to consolidate Muslim identity and work towards the social and political progress of Muslims (Nuhman M. A., 2007). However, the rise of an identity constructed to give primacy to religion proved to be problematic for the emergence of a political identity: as religious identity acquired agency,without strategic political leadership, interest groups for religious identity were able to establish their dominance. For example, the development of "a pure Islamic identity" has manifested in the way traditional clothing is being abandoned in favour of clothing that is more Arab in nature[58] (McGilvray D. B., 2011).

Organisations like Jamaati Islami[59] and Tabligh Jamaat[60] in particular, which have historical roots in the Indian Sub-continent as a result of colonial interventions (Hirst, 2011), have been 'blamed' for the 'Islamisation' of Sri Lank over the last few decades. Their influence has been perceived largely as negative by analysts who suggest that this has led to a psychological conflict within the community (McGilvray D. B., 2011) in terms of a tension between the religious and cultural influences of global Islamic movements and local religious ideologies. However, to solely blame these two organisations for the large-scale Islamisation of the country is not only naive but fails to take into account other factors and contexts. Whilst it is true that both organisations are credited with playing positive roles in uniting Muslims under an Islamic umbrella to give political weight to a largely constructed religious identity (Imtiyaz A., 2012), it must

also be noted that increased social religiosity and display of religious clothing is the result of significant numbers of Sri Lankan Muslims, both men and women, who were employed on labour contracts in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Gulf Emirates, bringing back such customs on their return (McGilvray D. B., 2011). In addition, it's important not to discount the 'existential' crisis that the Muslim community faced due to the 'othering' caused by ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and the community's perception of the need to chart its own separate course. Hence, the evolution of religious identity is one of a 'perfect storm' in which multiple elements coalesced in the absence of a strong national identity as well as political leadership from within the Muslim community in dealing with the challenges it faced after independence.

However, it is with the expansion of global electronic media that the greatest influence and causal effect has arisen that has led not only to a heightened awareness of 'Muslim issues' around the world, and thus a greater sense of membership in the global community of all Muslims (the Ummah) but also a greater striving to develop a Muslim identity. This global pan-Islamic reformist quest for identity is part of a much more complex deeply-rooted malaise (Ramadan, 2012). The quest for such an identity has entailed a preoccupation with religion in terms of the framework, the structure of ritual, the rights and obligations of believers, prohibitions, the moral protection of the faithful, and so on, much in opposition to the perceived danger of cultural colonialism and alienation exacerbated by globalization.[61] Thus, contemporary Islamic discourse "has, however too often lost its substance, which is that of meaning, of understanding ultimate goals and the state of the heart" (Ibid, p.141).

Hence, the new pan-Islamic reformist quest for identity has lacked spirituality and the understanding of value systems, traditions, habits and culture. What this has ultimately meant is the development of an identity that is at odds with a Sri Lankan identity and departure from what was seen as a 'traditional Sri Lankan Muslim identity'.[62] "Discrediting traditional ritual practice is a common feature of new religious movements" (Haniffa, 2008, p.366), which has also meant the concept of framing one's own identity vis-a-vis the 'other'. Whilst the religious revival amongst Muslims has given them a greater appreciation of their own identity, it has also transformed relations with the ethnic 'others' (Ibid) and has been centred around the perception and propagation of piety in terms of their minority consciousness and the "cultivated distancing of the religious other and promoting a sensibility of community exclusiveness among Muslims" (Ibid, p.366).

One of the practical products of these new identity markers globally has been the development of the term "kafir" or infidel – as it functions today, to refer to religious others within the everyday language of the newly pious (Ibid).[63] What this means is that it maintains ethnic exclusivity (through religious otherness) and bolsters uniformity in personal and communal piety which ultimately affects the consideration of the Muslim community as part of a pluralistic society that includes people or other faiths (and ethnicity). Hence engagement with the other is minimal and often limited to instrumentally supplying the needs of everyday life, and does not extend to the qualitative social exchanges of an earlier era. What does become difficult with this dehumanising reduction of the 'other' that occurs in the midst of Islamic reformist groups though, is that "it is almost impossible for adherents to consider Muslims' problems as issues which are commonly shared with themselves, understood as part of a common 'Sri Lankan community'" (Haniffa, 2008, p.367).

In the wake of such ritualism and politicisation, as well as isolation, the thirst for meaning is often solved through mysticism. This new identity has also resulted in a resurgence of traditional popular Muslim Sufi mysticism in different forms, from the older traditional and ritualistic groups to

newer controversial shaykhs (McGilvray D. B., 2011). One explanation for this trend is that the polarising harshness of the new reformist teachings have offered ordinary people few answers to their spiritual pursuit of meaning, faith, the heart, and peace. Thus, the Sufi movements provide a kind of exile from world affairs, in contrast to the ritualistic traditionalism and the pan-Islamic reformist traditions. These seem to re-emerge within either the educated elites, middle class urban sector in search for meaning, or the poorer in the need for reassurance that verges on superstition (attributable to both sectors).

Whilst a majority of these diverse groups are respectful of norms, a substantial number of these circles also yield to the temptation of the cult of the personality of the shaykh or guide, or develop a culture of isolation, social and political passivity and loss of responsibility of taking action to solve social problems in the world (Ramadan, 2012). Hence these Sufi renaissance movements represent an expansion and diversification of religious expression but have also led to local religious conflicts that have arisen between heterodox Sufi groups and zealous orthodox Islamic reformers and provided another cause for alarm for the community.[64]

"There is a genuine cause for concern. The 'Islamisation' of communities has been propelled and bankrolled largely by Saudi Arabia and other petro-monarchies which propagate a certain type of ideology mainly of the 'Salafi / Wahabi' form, thereby leading to a straitjacket of thought and a scaffolding of authority"

In this, there is a genuine cause for concern. The 'Islamisation' of communities has been propelled and bankrolled largely by Saudi Arabia and other petro-monarchies which propagate a certain type of ideology mainly of the 'Salafi / Wahabi' form, thereby leading to a straitjacket of thought and a scaffolding of authority.

As a result of funding for mosques[65] and Muslim organisations over the last 30 years or so, there is now a greater influence of 'Saudi' Islam on the thinking of people in Sri Lanka. This has devalued classical Islamic tradition and narrowed religious and spiritual sensibilities (Allawi, 2009). "The concern with the minutiae of religious life, the micro-regulation of daily activity, the smugness that accompanies dogmatic certainty, the joylessness of a fastidious religiosity, the lack of interest or curiosity in the past or in multivariate aspects of Islam, have all crept into the religious culture of Observant Muslims" (Ibid, p.121). Thus, the culture of Islam becomes drained of vitality by a barren utilitarianism and a perception of a purity which divorces the natural diverse state of Islam and isolates it from the cultural inputs of the countries that it takes root in. This is an important issue of which to take serious stock as culture is intertwined with religion when complex questions of values, meaning, spirituality, traditions, and the arts are answered giving form to history, memory, nations, and identities (Ramadan, 2012). "Cultures, along with the religions that shape and nurture them, are value systems, sets of traditions and habits clustered around one or several languages, producing meaning: for the self, for the here, for the community, for life" (Ibid, p.140).

Consequently, the ideology of thought that is emerging currently in Sri Lanka is in fact linked to one of the more conservative forms of Islam that has tended to try to articulate a 'puritanist'[66] Islam that does not take into account culture and context. This imported puritanism leads to dysfunctional notions of self-identity and socio-religious othering is now a key question following the Easter Sunday attacks.

Furthermore, the quest for a 'purist' Islamic identity has been driven by the 30-year-old conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils and the political ramifications of the desire to differentiate oneself from the other; meaning visibly conformist puritanical Islam

suddenly also became an indicator of political identity and belonging. For example, Muslim girls' school uniforms are now designed with a hijab and in some cases include a face covering (niqab) that can be folded down when girls are walking between home and school, while boys' Western-style school uniforms include a Muslim cap as a way not of only identifying themselves as Muslim, but also serving as a political statement of identity.[67] In particular, the visually prominent hijab, has become a marker of cultural difference and religious affiliation in a multi-ethnic polity and less of a newly and consciously embraced personal piety (Haniffa, 2008). "Therefore the selfhood embraced is Muslim, but not always radically religious" (Ibid, p.357).

This disproportionately narrow focus on religious identity at the expense of broader social participation is concerning, despite reformist groups' efforts to generate interest and appreciation, and has also meant that thinking around the distinct socio-cultural aspects of Muslims as a minority have not kept pace with the political. This has resulted in a decontextualised and disjointed political entity.

Since ethnicity and religion are seemingly inseparable with regards to Sri Lankan Muslims, there has always been a challenge to the development of either category, as Islam is the primary marker[68] of the ethnic identity of Sri Lankan Muslims (Nuhman M. A., 2007).

These are some of the challenges[69] that the Muslim community is facing in the wake of the Easter Sunday attacks. If Muslims are unable to appreciate or understand this, serious consequences are inevitable.

CONCLUSION

An exploration of Muslim identity formation within the wider context of complex Sri Lankan socio-political dynamics is essential to any discourse on restorative justice and the creation of a post-Easter Sunday, post-conflict vision.

On the one hand, Sri Lankan identity formation was largely an elite-centric, second-order phenomena reproduced by ruling elites to secure government office, socio-political mobilisation and legitimacy. On the other, there are historical determinants related to the consolidation of nationalist identities in Sri Lanka, stressing in constructivist fashion, the role of colonial authorities and postcolonial elites in the social construction utilisation and political domination of identity (e.g. Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Jeganathan and Ismail 1995). Key to this emergence is the manner in which colonial rule, instrumentalising local nationalist mobilisation, transformed the logic of politics and identity, mapping potent governmental dynamics onto pre-existing communities with very different pre-colonial and early colonial logics of interaction.[70]

Hence, Sri Lankan Muslim identity was, and is, a reactive politico-cultural identity[71] that was constructed as a response to late colonial Sri Lankan politics. It was largely 'constructed', evolved, and transformed in response to the Sinhala and Tamil ethno-nationalism that emerged as a result of anti colonial movements, largely from the late 19th century. In this constructed identity, it became instrumentalised by primordial conceptions[72] and has become an ethnic identity embedded within a religious framework.

Thus, there is a paradox[73] in the Muslim identity and the Sri Lankan Muslim community which is at best a complex mix of different ideologies and thought processes. Faith is not only a theological marker (but also an identity marker and (a communal galvaniser), which means there remain tensions and faultlines along racial and religious lines.[74] By defining themselves as such, the identity of the Sri Lankan Muslim community has developed and evolved not only based on ethno-nationalist tendencies but also from a theological and spiritual basis, reifying an identity that is not singular and cohesive, but evolved influenced by global politics and a securitised lens.[75]

SO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The validity of the ethnic, as opposed to religious identity, and the evolution of the nexus between the two is the precise subject of this paper when addressing challenges for the future. "If identities are always constructed, then they can also be deconstructed, perhaps even reconstructed" (Ismail Q., 1997, p.95).

Current circumstances provide a new opportunity to begin discussion about multiple identities as elaborated by Sen (2006).[76] There must be a recognition of the plurality of the nation in terms of non Buddhist and non Sinhala people by mainstream Sinhalese. Equally, minorities need to rethink the concept of multiple identities and pluralism.

A holistic re-imagination of Sri Lankan Muslim identity, expression, and agency, and a new approach to the entire conversation is essential, beginning with re-imagining of the historical narrative. Muslims posit that, in fact, they have been existing and co-existing with other communities in Sri Lanka for the last 1000 years without any problem.[77]

However, these statements display an ignorance of intra-societal dynamical and their historical context. It implies an en-masse migration of a racial entity called 'Muslims', arriving, settling, and populating Sri Lanka.[78] At best, this is a disingenuous interpretation of the process which reinforces the "us and them" perspective. All the more so, as Islam arrived with Arabs and spread through inter-marriage. Alternative narratives are

misrepresentative. Unfortunately, the Muslim community is equally at fault as it reinforces the narratives that predicate current relations. This does not help ground the narrative of communal belonging and means that the basis of a conversation around identity becomes even more problematic moving forward due to historical misunderstanding. This reasoning also assumes that Muslims are one race which again is inaccurate. Muslims are a heterogeneous community from different races, ethnicities, languages and countries all bound by the simple, universal principles of Islam and its teachings.

The Muslim narrative has to change in Sri Lanka starting from this simple fact. Islam, not Muslims, came to Sri Lanka 1000 years ago.[79] The latter believe in the former including the Arab traders who came and settled in the country, interacted with locals and married local women (from the Sinhalese and Tamil community); Sinhalese and Tamil communities who converted to Islam; Muslim communities who came from Malabar in south India; communities who came to Sri Lanka as part of colonial migration and slave trade including Malays, Memons and Gujaratis and other forms of migration and trade through the ages. Thus, the Muslim community in Sri Lanka is a mosaic of people who are Moor[80] (if they want to claim Arab heritage), Memon, Malay, Bhora, Pakistani, Afghan, Tamil and Sinhala.

This must address the deconstruction of a religiously embedded ethnic identity, posing several challenges for the community and its relationships with others. The premise is that the reimagining of Sri Lankan Muslim identity must be one where Islamic reformism in piety and theology makes sense, in recognising the diversity and homogeneity of the Muslim community; in guiding an ethnic and local agency and expression, whereby cultural practices and traditions are enhanced, not replaced, by theology; to struggle for greater justice and against discrimination; to defend civil responsibilities and democratic processes, and restore the dignity of conscience and human values (Ramadan, 2004). The concept must be reclaimed so that there are not only 'Muslims' but a mosaic of heterogeneous multiple identities that have emerged and evolved, and although linked with religion, differ by region. There is a need for communal Muslim efforts to ensure improved relations that incorporate religiously principled, diverse, and culturally representative approaches.

In short, the Muslim community cannot be ignored or marginalised, (by the Tamil nor the Sinhala polity) when considering the future of Sri Lanka. However, their self-defined role is dependent on seeing themselves as part of the solution rather than an additional problem. This needs to articulate a comprehensive platform and identity (based on Islamic ethical principles of that takes the whole community and country into consideration.

Moreover, one cannot afford to be politically naive and must develop a sophisticated argument and agenda. It is easy to conflate terminology and ideology with radicalisation, violent extremism, and potential conflicts due to global concerns about the rise of conservative Islam. In this context, it is imperative that Muslims pay greater attention to legitimately aggrieved Sinhalese, in particular those living in areas where Sinhalese are the majority. While Muslims are clearly aware of the challenges they face, they must also be able to understand where they have gone wrong. There needs to be a realisation that exclusive social practices and values practiced among Muslims themselves have to be curtailed in order to facilitate potential conflict resolution.

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As a 'third party' in the complex ethnic politics of Sri Lanka, the Muslim community has been transformed under its influence and forced to define itself and seek its own discourse. However, this has also meant that there has been an element of naivety in how the community has conducted itself when trying to forge its own identity, particularly when simultaneously balancing the combination of external ethno-nationalist rivalries with the internal Islamic doctrinal conflict, i.e. how does the community defend itself against hegemonic actors whilst avoiding a global Islamist agenda? Muslims have struggled, and continue to struggle, to articulate their grievances from the conflict in a manner that is conducive to maintaining confidence with the other two parties and that could correct the current misconceptions about Muslims' place in the country after the conflict and after the Easter Sunday Attacks. This has to be also done whilst there is also a push for accountability on the state and the political entities to accept responsibility and be held accountable for lapses in responding to intelligence reports around the attacks which could have mitigated the casualties. Whilst questions have to be asked around identity and belonging of the Muslim community and questioning what could have led to people being radicalised, it doesn't abrogate responsibility from those charged with ensuring the safety and security of civilians.

This is the challenge facing not only the Muslim community in Sri Lanka but also others outside the community to create a system and processes that provide the space for those conversations to take place.

AUTHOR PROFILE

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Saleem has published in a number of journals, contributed book chapters and authored "Lessons from Aceh" (2008). He has an M.Eng from Imperial College, London, an MBA from U21 Global Singapore and a PhD from Exeter University where he explored the transformation of Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka.

ENDNOTES

1. Al Jazeera, 2019 – www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/world-leaders-condemn-easter-sunday-blasts-sri-lanka-190421074138039.html
2. At least 50 people were killed in this attack which at that time was one of the worst suicide attacks in the country (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/31/newsid_4083000/4083095.stm)
3. The community talks about at least 2 or 3 people being killed but the official version is that one person was killed.
4. On 18 May 2009, after nearly 30 years, the violent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) came to an abrupt end with the death of the LTTE Leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran (VP) after months of intense fighting which had triggered a massive humanitarian crisis and international condemnation mainly from the West.
5. A parliamentary select committee has since found that the police department, state intelligence services and others had failed in their duties to secure the country from the attacks and that the challenges for the Muslim community have been further compounded by the state polity's attempt to deflect accountability of its inaction to the fear about the Muslim community (Colombo Telegraph 2019)
6. There was a violent uprising by Sinhala youth in 1971 (http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=76058) followed by the start of the conflict in 1983 by the Tamils with outbreaks of conflict in the 1990s till the end of the conflict in 2009.
7. These calls have been made from outside and inside the community who were concerned about a visible religiosity of the Muslim community which many argue is alien to Sri Lanka. The term 'Arabisation' has been used based on the dress adopted largely by Muslim women. However there is an underlying narrative of the growing visibility of religiosity of the community. This is being equated with contributing towards the conditions that led to the terrorist attacks. Muslims are now being asked to rethink this identity as part of an overall aim to reduce the tendency towards extremism and by default violent extremism which it is assumed led to the terror attacks on 21/4
8. There are other more well-qualified people and well documented reports on the subject.
9. The author realises that this can be dismissed as gross simplification of the situation, however it is not the mandate of this paper to explore the historical causes of the 30-year old conflict or to explore in depth community relations. Rather, the aim is to explore this in relation to the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.
10. The British divided Sri Lanka into three main ethnicities: Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Muslims are classed separately because of a slight difference in culture, food and dress. Within the Sinhala and Tamil Ethnicities, there is a further division based on religion, e.g. Sinhalese Buddhists, Christians and Muslims; and within the Tamil community there are Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Again this is oversimplified and can be explored in more detail in a number of another publications.
11. As an example of this hostility towards Indian migrants, the first major act of government after independence in 1948 was to deny citizenship and voting rights to some 800,000 Indian workers. This was also supported by parts of the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership, undermining their own later claims for minority rights.
12. With Tamils having a disproportionate share of government, university and professional jobs – largely due to better education – many Sinhalese felt excluded from political and economic power. For example in 1956, Tamils were 30 % of the Ceylon Administrative Service, half the clerical service, 60% of engineers and doctors and 40% of the armed forces despite the Sinhalese being 70% of the population (Int. Crisis Group 2007).
13. It was the product of a contradiction between a democratic system in which 70% of ethnic voters were previously underrepresented in the State.
14. Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution, independent Ceylon's first, states: "No law shall make a person or any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable. No law shall confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions. Any law made in contravention of sub section (2) shall to the extent of such contravention be void". This only restricted parliament from enacting discriminatory laws but gave no protection against discriminatory practices (Int. Crisis Group 2007).
15. "Sinhala Only" was a policy to establish Sinhala as the single official language for government business within 24 hours of election and capture the votes of rural, Sinhala-educated elites.
16. In 1956 and 1958, peaceful Tamil riots were repressed violently and led to deadly anti-Tamil riots across the island.
17. By the end of the decade, most of the small community of English-speaking Burghers (descendants of Dutch and other European settlers) had emigrated, concerned they would no longer have a place in an independent Sri Lanka. (Int. Crisis Group 2007).
18. Between 1956 and 1970, in roles that were revered depending on who was in power, both major political parties (when they were in opposition) would manipulate Sinhalese parochialism to wreck any attempt by the party in power to foster communal accommodation. This is something that is still very much apparent in Sri Lankan politics today with the result that often when rival parties come to power, they tend to undo what has been done by the previous opposition government much to the detriment of the country.
19. It was at this stage that the LTTE began to gain primacy over many Tamil militant groups.
20. The devolution package was to give some autonomy to the northern and eastern territories (where Tamils were dominant)
21. Tamils migrated en masse, seeking refuge to places like Canada, the UK and the US thereby encouraging support for the 'Tamil' cause. It has been known as one of the darkest days in Sri Lanka's history and is often referred to as Black July, particularly as the security forces did very little to help the Tamils, supposedly on the

orders of the government. Subsequent evidence proved governmental and ministerial involvement in anti Tamil riots. In 2004, then president Chandrika Kumaratunge tendered a public apology for this act.

22. Between 1987 and 1990, the Sri Lankan Government was effectively fighting uprisings on two fronts: one in the north with the Tamils and one in the south with Sinhala youth influenced by leftist communist tendencies. Ethnic issues aside, many of the causes of Tamil and Sinhala militancy were strikingly similar – the frustrations of unemployed youth with a failing economy and a class ridden political system that offered no channel for their aspirations. In the south, the uprising was dealt with a brutality that set aside almost all pretense of legality with death squads, mass human rights abuses and disappearances. A similarly heavy-handed approach was also enacted in the North and has been part and parcel of the State mechanism (regardless of which party is in power) since then.

23. A disastrous attempt by the Indian government to interfere both militarily and politically in the conflict in 1987.

24. About 100,000 Muslims were given 24 hours by the LTTE (without warning or reason) to leave the northern province. They eventually settled around the capital Colombo or in an area called Puttalum (3 hours north of Colombo) where they have been in refugee camps ever since.

25. That is the US-led global War on Terror which saw the LTTE being blacklisted in several countries and opportunities for funding cease as a result.

26. There was uneasiness about the neutrality of Norway (which mediated) given the presence of a huge Tamil lobby there. In addition to this, the CFA insisted on respecting existing frontlines which left large tracts of territory in the north and east under LTTE control, leaving them to develop their own institutions and systems. In essence, a de facto State. In addition to this, there were repeated violations including attacks on rival Tamil parties, recruitment of child soldiers and attacks on border villages. The fear was that the LTTE were not serious about enforcing the CFA and mainly used the period to regroup.

27. The end of the conflict was controversial with the massive humanitarian crisis that triggered the displacement of about 280,000 people who were kept in refugee camps in the north looked after by the government and NGOs and international condemnation around human rights violations committed at the end of the conflict.

28. In 2014, 2017 and 2018.

29. The International Crisis Group (2007) states that though the figures from the 2001 census show the Muslim population at about 8% of the total, the proportion is not known exactly as the census did not include large parts of the Tamil population in the north and east where the LTTE prevented a full census being taken.

30. In two districts (44% in Ampara and 41% in Trincomalee in the Eastern province), they are the largest single ethnic group. In two other districts Mannar (North Western Province) and Batticaloa (Eastern Province), they account for more than 20% of the populations. Thus these four districts, which are in the east and northwest of the island, account for only about 1/3 of the total Muslim population (McGilvray D. B., 2011). The remaining 2/3 are scattered over the island with more conspicuous concentrations in the Western coastal districts of Colombo, Kalutara and Puttalam and in Kandy in the central highlands.

31. This is cited in both McGilvray (2011) and McGilvray and Raheem (2007) but has been obtained from an online version of the report by the same authors

32. For example, in the wake of Vasco da Gama's 1498 naval crusade against the 'Moors' of Calicut, the Portuguese encountered Muslim traders in Sri Lanka who were Tamil speaking, had links with Muslims in South India and more importantly, had "royal permission to collect custom duties and regulate shipping" (McGilvray & Raheem, 2007) in the major south-western ports under the auspices of local Sinhalese kings (Ibid). Asad (1993) describes how in thirteenth century A.D. a mission was sent by Bhavanekabahu 1 of Yappahu to the Sultan of Egypt headed by a "Prince of Ceylon" (Asad K.,1993, p.6) named 'Al-Haj, Abu Uthman'. What is particularly striking about this is not that a Muslim ambassador was sent on a mission to a Muslim court but the description of him as 'Prince' suggests a degree of eminence for a member of a 'recent immigrant' community (Ibid.)

33. This is often seen as being close to Tamil/Hindu practices by Muslims from other parts of the island (D. B. McGilvray, 2008)

34. For example, McGilvray (2008, 11) alludes to the 'matrilineal' zone on the east coast of the island, where matrilineal descent along with embedded cultural patterns such as the dowry, and 'matrilocal' residence are practised by both Tamil and Muslim communities, something that Muslim communities from other parts of the island do not necessarily practice. It is worth noting that despite the religious bind of being Muslim, there is definitely a difference in understanding and approach to the process. In many cases, this can cause misunderstandings and misperceptions to arise and is definitely not understood by the other communities who often see the Muslim community as one homogeneous bloc.

35. The concept of a Moor comes from 'Morisco', a term given to Arabs by the Portuguese as a derogatory reference to who they considered as rivals both in faith and in trade especially in the Indian Ocean (Imtiyaz & Hoole, Some Critical Notes on the Non-Tamil Identity of the Muslims of Sri Lanka and on Tamil-Muslim Relations, 2011) and was used to refer to people solely on the basis of religion and not origin.

36. In some cases especially during the British time, a further distinction was made between 'Ceylon' Moors and 'Coast' Moors, with the latter referring to those who came from South India under the British rule (K. Asad 1993).

37. An ethnic (linguistics) group that originated from lower Sindh near the Indus delta region. They are well respected Muslim Entrepreneurs, Philanthropists and Humanitarians in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere. Memons' general reputation for honesty, hardwork and innovation has contributed greatly to their commercial success. A mass settlement of Memons began throughout India at the start of the 19th century, and a few decades later they also emigrated beyond its borders, chiefly to the countries of the Indian Ocean basin. By the end of the 19th century, rich communities of Memons were appearing in the ports of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, in Ceylon, Burma and East South Africa. By the end of 19th century, a sizeable Memon

community was reported to have entrenched itself in East Asia. Memons also established themselves in the Republic of Mauritius. (Hussein and Bhoja 2006).

38. This is the main branch of the Bohra, a Musta'li sub sect of Ismā'īlī Shī'a Islam. While the sub sect is based in India, the Dawoodi Bohra school of thought originates from Yemen, under the guidelines from Fatimid. This small and unique community is made up of approximately 1 million Dawoodi Bohras worldwide. Dawoodi Bohras have a unique blend of cultures, including Yemeni, Egyptian, African, and Indian. (Blank 2001).

39. An additional problem is that the very definition of Muslim does not relate to an ethnic representation but to the religious affiliation of someone who has "become comfortable with the teachings of Islam and following them in every aspect of life" (Yakun, 1990, p.3). Thus, in Sri Lanka the concept of an ethnic 'Sri Lankan Muslim' is slightly misleading and confusing as it denotes ethnicity when the concept of a 'Muslim' is essentially an expression of faith. However, it also goes further than that as the Sri Lankan 'Muslim' ascribes a type of homogeneity beyond just religious practice to cultures, traditions, experiences and language which is made difficult by the heterogeneous nature of the geographical location and the lived experience of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

40. To qualify this statement, Nuhman (2007) highlights how other minority Muslim groups in Sri Lanka such as the Malays, Borahs and Memons primarily identify themselves by their distinct ethnic labels rather than the term Muslim and it is only the Sri Lankan Muslims that are meant to denote an ethnicity that is different and that excludes the other ethnic groups who profess an Islamic faith in a racial identitarian discourse.

41. One of the challenges though, is that much of the history of Sri Lanka during the Portuguese conquest owes a great deal to the records kept by the Portuguese themselves, which means that there is a bias in the narrative about Muslims due to trade and religious rivalry with the Portuguese (Asad 1993). Another effect of the Portuguese policies (by the 17th century) was to force Muslims living on the West coast of Sri Lanka to migrate inland to the Kandyan kingdoms. Subsequently some of these Muslims were then resettled in Tamil speaking Batticaloa in the east by the same kingdom as protection against Portuguese attacks. Ultimately, Muslims settled throughout all of the Sinhala regions of the island as well as on the east coast – where they intermarried with local Tamils and shared a common matrilineal social structure. Currently although about two thirds of the Muslim population live in the Sinhala regions of the island, the highest concentration of Muslims in the local population is on the East Coast (McGilvray 2008). Thus it is safe to say that Muslim ethnicity is a 'historical conundrum' (Williams 1951) as it seems to be a mixture of Arab, Persian, Dravidian and Malay blood of which 'the Dravidian element, due to centuries of heavy Indian injection, has remained the dominant one' (Ali 1997)

42. The Dutch sought to control Sri Lanka primarily for trade, and arriving from south East Asia, were able to infiltrate both the east and south of the Island. Again the Muslims were initially seen as 'rivals' in religion and trade (K. Asad 1993) with Muslims being forced out of Colombo to the coastal regions of the south, however by the eighteenth century, the initial hostility had declined. For example, there was an attempt to formulate a code for the laws and customs of the Muslim community in the island. According to Asad (1993, p.11), the reasons for this improvement of relationships between the Dutch and the Muslims was that "they were seen as fellow outsiders to Sri Lanka, therefore potential allies" and also to increase the trade.

43. Although this is now changing in modern Sri Lankan contexts where a large number of the new generation of the Muslim community (especially those in Colombo and the southern areas of the country) speak Sinhalese, as observed by the author through his interactions with friends and family.

44. Dharmapala, saw the struggle as one reflecting European nation-states in the lead up to the First World War, with economic interests interacting with cultural and religious awareness (J. L. Fernando 2008). At the beginning of the 20th century, Dharmapala sought to compare the war between British and the Germans with the 'war' between the Sinhala Buddhists and minorities, which led to "a recycling of pre-existing ethno-religious narratives with a racialized perspective" (Ibid,174).

45. Jayawardena (1990) details some of the situation in trade in the late 19th century where according to her, the main trade in Colombo was dominated by Muslims and other minorities.

46. This argument however neglected to take into account the Muslims settled amongst the Sinhalese in the West and South (and the subsequent conversions and intermarriage there) and was subsequently dismissed by Muslim community leaders as an academic excuse for the continued political domination of the Muslim community by the Tamil leadership.

47. This position by the Muslim community of distinguishing themselves from the Tamils, would later be justified in the wake of a bloody outbreak of anti-Muslim violence by Sinhalese mobs in 1915 when Ramanathan conspicuously defended the Sinhalese rioters in the Ceylon Supreme court (McGilvray 2011) and made representations to the King of England on behalf of the Sinhalese accusing the Muslim community of causing the riots. This action prompted Muslims to consider Tamil hypocrisy about 'Tamil-speaking' linguistic solidarity (Ameerdeen 2006).

48. Nuhman (2007) cites many writings from that time especially of I.L.M Azeez which says that the Portuguese also had been in India before visiting Sri Lanka. There they had encountered Muslims as well but had not given them the name of 'Moors' which was only given to the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

49. Ismail (1995) goes a bit further when he says, that to some extent the political elite of that time followed what the Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists had been saying about their Aryan and Dravidian (respectively) roots, by invoking the direct link to 'Arab blood' as the core of being a Moor. This statement served to represent the Muslim presence in Sri Lanka as "originating from a conscious migration to a place of symbolic importance to all Muslims" (Ibid, p.74). In doing so, the elite set the seeds for this culture of thinking within the Muslim community that somehow they did not belong and had come from outside. This sense of being 'foreign' still pervades much of the community's thinking today as well.

50. McGilvray and Raheem (2007, p.10) elaborate this further by stating that "this Moorish racial identity for Sri

Lankan Muslims was constructed to emphasise the idea that Muslims were peaceful Arab traders who valued the sanctity of the island whilst ignoring their maternal connections to Tamil wives and mothers and classifying the Moors' Tamil heritage as a borrowed trade language." Ismail (1995, 75) puts it more crudely in describing this when he says "it would appear that Arab men gave birth, by themselves, to the Sri Lankan Muslim social formation".

51. From 1920 onwards there were a series of reforms enacted for representation in the Legislative Council which provided mixed opportunities for Muslim political participation, though the number of Muslim representatives was increased to three. This was then finally changed in 1931 with the formation of a State Council consisting of elected and nominated members participating in the actual processes of decision-making through a legislative body (Ameerdeen 2006). However, one of the failings of the council was the lack of opportunity for minorities especially the Muslims to elect representatives based on their ethnic ration and thus the council was later amended to provide representation on the basis of a certain amount of area. This form of iterating the political representation of the minorities would continue to Independence in 1948 as well as much afterwards, becoming a catalyst for later communal problems (Ibid).

52. This also caused intra community challenges as from the 1920 onwards, various 'Moor' and 'Malay organisations began to emerge to compete for the political status of being the Muslim voice on the island (K. Asad 1993). These divisions had not been helped by the 1915 riots where for instance, the Malays had not been attacked. The British also ensured that the differences were extenuated when Malays were employed in the police force or in the government clerical service. However, by the end of the 1920s as political reform came in, it was clear that there were bitter differences between the 'Malay's and the 'Moors', which could be exploited but it eventually evolved into an all encompassing narrative about Muslim which was supposed to cover Moors and Malays.

53. Qadri Ismail (1995, 63) refers to this distinction when he describes Muslims not as an ethnic group or community but as a 'social formation', which are "not stable entities but sites of struggle over which (interest) groups would achieve hegemony over the formation and thus determine the nature of its (dominant) identity". In this case, Ismail points out that social formations refer to fissures and cracks and are sites of unceasing struggle and to interrogate class, gender and other interests involved. It is in this regard that Ismail represents the Muslim social formation as consisting of two 'distinct' groups, Southern and Eastern Muslims. It is the former that Ismail argues was the dominant and hegemonic community, with the elite (of middle and upper class Southern Muslim men), representing the entire formation in its own image as a peaceful trading community of Arab origin and being an 'other' to the other communities.

54. The initial ideological framework for Islamic revival and Muslim ethnicity started with the concept of education as the Muslim community was not willing to enter the modern education system introduced in the 19th century due to a number of reasons including the fear of Christianisation and the fear that education "could contribute materially little towards the improvement of the situation of the Muslims" (M. A. Nuhman 2007, p.108).

55. Pasha himself was interested in English education, seeing this as necessary for the development of the community and also recognising the paucity of modern educational provision for Muslims in Sri Lanka (K. Asad 1993). Coinciding with the establishment of the Aligarh university, as the first Muslim higher-level educational institution in India, as well as engagement with notable Indian Muslim scholars such as Sir Seyed Ahmed Khan, this gave the impetus for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka to start thinking seriously about education. By 1891, the Muslim educational society was established and a new school opened in Colombo in 1892 (Nuhman M. A., 2007).

56. The irony of Pasha's influence though is not lost on Sri Lanka, despite being responsible for the Islamic revival. Pasha's exile from Egypt came about because of his concept of patriotism and his thinking that 'Egypt for the Egyptians' (K. Asad 1993). So to some extent he also propagated love for the mother country and striving for freedom from foreign dominance. "He also propagated the idea that Sri Lanka should ultimately be administered by Sri Lankans" (Ibid, 50), which coincided with the rise of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist elements. Many of the Sinhala elites who were ultimately attracted to supporting these nationalist movements would have also come into contact with Pasha (Ibid), so it is an irony that if 'Urabi Pasha was a source of their inspiration, these nationalist elements would be later involved in the 1915 communal violence between the Sinhalese and the Muslims.

57. For example, male members of the elite began to publicly wear the Fez cap to identify their difference (Ismail 1995)

58. The perceived Islamisation of Sri Lanka comes from the visible appearance of a social religiosity on the ground in Sri Lanka in terms of the wearing of the hijab (by the women), the greater wearing of the Arab style thobe amongst the males, and a shift away from 'ancestral' rituals and practices by the community (McGilvray D. B., 2011). Many of these rituals are Sufi in origin but have become embedded in more rituals than fundamental points of worship within Islam.

59. Jammat I Islami is an Islamic organization based out of Pakistan which explores Islamic reformation with the hope of acquiring political leadership (Qazi 2017), however it is important to note that in Sri Lanka, the Jammat Islamic which was inspired by the organisation from Pakistan, has no political ambitions and is more interested in social welfare and the spiritual upliftment of the community

60. The Tablighi Jamaat was formed in India in the mid 19th century. The aim of the group is to create an atmosphere of spirituality, solidarity and purpose which involves reviving the faith of weaker Muslims (Taylor 2009)

61. One has to understand the context from the Middle East in which these reformist movements are being developed as resistance to globalisation and colonialism "as means of self-assertion, in direct proportion to the danger of cultural colonialism and alienation perceived and experienced in Arab societies" [Ramadan, 2012]. Thus the mere appropriation of pan-Islamic reformist

ideology, traditions and practices without taking into account the context of where they have originated from and also where they are being appropriated to, such as the cultural heritage of the pluralistic society of Sri Lanka for example, means that cultural fulfilment will not be achieved and there are divisive, exclusivist and sectarian claims to culture, religion and identity.

62. There have always been traditional differences among Muslims in Sri Lanka over issues of faith, most of which have not provoked serious conflict and have been accepted by religious leaders as part of a broader tolerance in the community. However, since the late 1980s there has been a strong growth in ultra-orthodox interpretations of Islam with a new identity that have provoked conflicts with other interpretations that have existed previously (ICG 2007b).

63. Some reformist groups have also gone to the extent of stating terminology identified with Islam is part of a strategy to place Islam at the centre of Muslim everyday lives. "It is an attempt thereby to foreground their Muslimness as the most fundamental defining characteristic amongst a populace that has a variety of different class linguistic, sectarian and regional allegiances" (Haniffa 2008, 366)

64. This split of the community within Sri Lanka between trying to maintain a link with the historic Sufi movements (often seen as deviant by newer movements) and the more well-organised ideological movements of Islamic revitalisation is not just based on ideological reasons but is also broken into class lines as well with the more affluent elites or the poor being affiliated with the Sufi and the middle and working class with the reformist movements. This also relates to a difference in education as many of the elites and the very poor may not have gone to school and would have inherited their status and the middle class going onto have higher education. Hence there is once again a mirroring of the differences that took place in determining the political identity of the Muslim community, with the elites on one side and the intelligentsia and activists on the other side. The counter argument to this criticism of the Islamisation process is that it has enabled a rediscovery of what Islamic identity, the proper norms for ritualistic practice and a benchmark of piety. However what is apparent is the majority of the middle and working class to whom the new ideologies have appealed, view this as a rebellion once again against the elites. It is this quest for a purer understanding of Islam, away from the elite definition that is driving this new religiosity and articulation of a new identity which on its own is fine except when it is being dominated by one ideology or line of thinking.

65. Another sign of departure from traditional worship and a mark of 'pan-Islamic' influence has been the wholesale demolition and reconstruction of historic older-style mosques in accordance with imported models of Islamic architecture. For example, the new, brightly painted 'gingerbread' mosques with multiple minarets and ornate Arabian-inspired rooflines are quite different from the simpler whitewashed mosques with shady verandas and dark teak-pillared prayer halls (McGilvray D. B., 2011, p.xx).

66. This push for a greater Islamic identity has seen an increased articulation of a 'pure' Muslim identity that is set in the context of religiosity (and religious practice) but also has transnational Muslim solidarity which is based on a strengthening of reactive identities as a response to the identity-stripping experience of the conflict, generational gaps and globalisation. However much of this is anecdotal and empirical and needs further rigorous study.

67. It is noteworthy that in Sri Lankan popular culture through the media or even at government events, any public display of the different identities shows either a bearded man in a cap or a woman with a hijab to show both the ethnic and religious identities of Muslims.

68. Another issue that is raised is that 'Muslim' is used by Muslims themselves as both a religious, political and a cultural signifier, taking it as their identifier under which they pressure for action on issues that allow them to take on the concern of an 'ethnic' community. 'Muslim' thus becomes at once a political, ethnic, cultural as well as a religious affiliation and this is replicated in academic discourse. The term 'Muslim Community' to describe all Sri Lankan Muslims implies a level of homogeneity across the heterogeneous ideological and geographical groups that constitute Muslims in Sri Lanka, in addition to the challenges of using religious labels as ethnic markers. Despite the huge diversity of the Muslim world, however, it is the case that a fundamental theme in Islamic discourse is based on the unity of Muslims, as differing communities united by faith; expressed through the concept of an ummah (community) that transcends internal divisions (al-Ahsan 1992). Because of this, narratives presented about Islam by Muslims err towards presenting the faith as unified and potentially monolithic, based on a perfected form revealed in the time of the Prophet Mohammad. Hence "... the key assumption of orthodox Islamic thought that doctrines have been set out in the unchangeable and faultless form of the Qur'an; and that therefore any belief of practice can be challenged only so far as it does not have a real basis in the original truths that were revealed to Mohamed" (Jacobson 1998, p.112) Consequently, for many Sri Lankan Muslims, this reflects how divisions are considered a 'private' layer of inter-community relations, and to the 'outside' there is a consensus to maintaining at least the veneer of unity, in keeping with the Islamic tenets of One God, One Faith. The replication of this conception of unified faith in discourse outside of the boundaries of Muslim communities can be seen in the articulation of a generally understood conception that there is such a thing as 'mainstream' Islam. This is most clearly seen when looking at views and practices of individuals, that might differ from the mainstream, as 'un-Islamic', against the principle tenets of Islam, and therefore outside of the mainstream of the faith and hence not fit to be representative of the community. This raises the issue of the 'good' vs the 'bad' Muslim as discussed earlier, whereby the conundrum of whether a 'bad' Muslim in terms of religious practice can be a representative of the Muslim community and thus be a 'good' Muslim, or whether the perspective of representation is linked to the religious practice of the individual.

69. There are a number of competing discourses and narratives within the Muslim communities. While the institutions formed by Muslims have been created by a generation looking to consolidate their identity and existence, there has definitely been a cross over with regards the religious practice. Consequently, younger

Muslims have begun to construct a narrative of religious practice that indicates that their "mainstream" practice of faith focuses on a return to the basics of Islam, away (and in opposition to) the cultural practices of the previous generations. The challenge for the Muslims is to articulate a national and ethnic identity whilst remaining true to the religious practices.

70. Colonialism sought to tame, isolate and ultimately displace the power of ethnicity, religion and patronage as a long-term project towards the governmental production of a 'liberal-secular-civic' population within a unified territorially integrated state. In both contexts, this signified the dissociation of state rule and administration from Buddhism ,and the seeking to replace ethnic law and custom within society with liberal practice. Yet there was an inherent contradiction as the colonial state also allowed certain communities to maintain their ethnic law and customs whilst also mapping, operating through and ultimately rigidifying the ethnic and religious divisions they encountered in both societies, including their reproduction in administration, political representation and legislation (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

71. The separate Muslim identity narratives involves an analysis of how it has undergone a political transformation based on colonial political representation and as a result of the actions of successive Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan governments post-independence. However in parallel to this, an identity fundamentally based on their Islamic belief and culture also developed (ICG 2007b).

72. In other words, looking at some of the available narratives around the Sri Lankan Muslim history, one sees a primordial conception alluding to this direct link with Arabs that preyed on ethno-symbolist continuity (Hutchinson 2005) but failed to understand the context of that time of political and social mobilisation by the elites and the colonial practice.

73. This duality construct of a 'Muslim' identity has become a challenge for the Sri Lankan Muslim community as they attempt to profess their Sri Lankan identity (and sense of belonging). By identifying themselves ethnically as 'Muslims' a late 19th century political construct- the Muslim political elites played on blurring the distinctions between faith as a theological marker (religious motivator) and faith as an identity marker (communal galvaniser). This meant that the Muslims energetically constructed their 'racial' identity as a distinct ethnic group that is founded on religious and cultural identity. They interchanged religious motivators and communal galvanisers as and when it suited them. Largely helped by a renaissance in Islamic theological movements and global thinking, the concept of Muslim representation in Sri Lanka evolved into theological and ideological formations on top of political representations

74. This is challenging with respect to the classification and representation of the Sri Lankan Muslim as an ethnic identity, whilst the generic definition of Muslim does not relate to an ethnic representation but to a religious connotation. Thus in Sri Lanka the concept of an ethnic 'Sri Lankan Muslim' is slightly misleading and confusing as it ascribes a homogeneity transcending religious practice to cultures, traditions, experiences and language which is made difficult by the heterogeneous nature of the geographical location of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, religious practices and traditions and often at odds with the concept of nationalism or the nation-state.

75. In the wake of rising religious consciousness by the Muslim community and by neglecting the necessary theological discussions necessary for developing identities, and contextualising faith and failing to provide leadership in articulating this, the sole aim of developing a separate identity for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka has fallen prey to the global malaise afflicting Muslims, which is the push for a 'pure' Islamic identity based on a theological construct but taking the identity of a global community/race, neglecting local contexts and cultures. This is a new phenomenon within Islamic teachings and history because there is no such thing as a pure community identity. There are different manifestations of Islam and Muslim communities united with a pure theological marker, of which the latter is mistaken to be the identity. It is this that is now causing global concerns and issues of the rise of 'conservative' Islam.

76. The encouragement and retention of multiple identities means that people have several enriching identities: nationality, gender, age and parental background, religious or professional affiliation (Sen 2006).

77. As is commonly mentioned in many public forums.

78. It presupposes that there is a noble race of people called 'Muslims' who decided one day to move to Sri Lanka, 1000 years ago, fell in love with the country, decided to settle, intermarry with the local people and it is their descendants who are living today in Sri Lanka making up the population of Sri Lankan Muslims and whose constituents are facing the problems of racism and xenophobia. This reasoning is completely simplistic, attributes homogeneity to a religion that thrived on heterogeneity, and simply does not consider the complexity of relationships and lived experiences between communities

79. So the narrative has to move away from a label of "Muslims who arrived a 1000 years ago" to something that faithfully and holistically represents the spectrum of Muslim ethnicity. This narrative which then presupposes everything else including a need for institutionalisation of identity based on race and which becomes confused with a need for religious expression cannot continue. It is this institutionalisation of Muslim identity intertwined with religious expressions of piety that has proven to be a dilemma for the community. Coupled with a growing international Islamophobia campaign, the Muslim identity and its expression became and still remains a challenge. This explains the attack on the elements that visibly describe the Muslim identity such as the halal certification, the issue of mosques and the dress code. All of these that show a visible religiosity of the Muslim community and therefore enables them to be visibly seen above the radar screen became a problem for the Sinhala nationalists. Thus, the critical juncture becomes a contested identity as the narrative of belonging to the nation was thrust on the Muslim. Muslims were challenged to show that they were part of the system and thus there became a lot of emphasis on explaining this.

80. Even the Moor label is slightly disingenuous because it assumes a direct and pure link with Arabs instead of acknowledging the intermarriage over centuries between communities.

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