10

Republican Constitutionalism and Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka: Towards an Ontological Account of the Sri Lankan State

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"...history begins with a culture already there"
– Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*.

"...human beings must create the social and political realities on which their existence depends" – Bruce Kapferer, *The Feast of the Sorcerer*.

Introduction

The defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009 by the Sri Lankan State and the subsequent unfolding of the Rajapaksas' dynastic project has precipitated an extraordinary resurgence in Sinhalese (Buddhist) nationalism both within civil society and as an official State narrative in Sri Lanka.[1] The Sri Lankan cum Sinhalese Buddhist State (hereafter 'Sinhalese State') that President Rajapaksa is fashioning draws on the symbolic capital proffered by the fetishised cultural forms of Sinhalese nationalism and has been highly successful in consolidating a monopoly on the means of force within the island, focusing on the military and existential encompassment of the Tamil people.[2] There is thus little sign that the President or the government has any intention of pursuing a strategy of constitutional reform as signposted by liberal constitutionalists in Sri Lanka.[3] The Parliamentary Select Committee proposed by the government (as a mechanism for proposing a formula for constitutional reform) will as with the previous All Party Representative Committee (APRC) initiated by President Rajapaksa end up in all likelihood being another diversion

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[1] While Mahinda Rajapaksa is the President, his brother Gotabhaya is the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, while another brother Basil is a Cabinet Minister and finally Chamal is the Speaker of Parliament.

[2] International Crisis Group (2011) *Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Harder than Ever,* Report N°209 (Brussels): p.15.

[3] Asanga Welikala, Rohan Edrisinha and Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu have in the last fifteen years been at the forefront of advocating a settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis through a constitution that is both strongly rights-based, but also one that re-draws the hierarchic state in a federal direction. See R. Edrisinha & A. Welikala (Eds.) (2008) *Essays on Federalism in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: CPA).

designed not only to manipulate domestic opinion but the international community as well.

This is then an apt moment to return to the period between 1970-1975 which marked the emergence of a more authoritarian State, one that was underpinned by the demise of the Dominion of Ceylon and the birth of Republic of Sri Lanka through the 1972 Republican Constitution in May 1972. While maintaining the Westminster system of parliamentary government of the 1948 Soulbury Constitution, the republican constitution consistent with Sir Ivor Jennings' hostility to a justiciable bill of rights, bizarrely provided for a chapter on fundamental rights that was non-justiciable. This was merely one illiberal feature of many that characterised the 1972 Constitution, for if Jennings had opposed a bill of rights in the 1948 Constitution, on the grounds that they were contra to British (Commonwealth) constitutional traditions, the justification for the absence of such a provision in the 1972 Constitution was that it would inhibit the capacity of the State to act in the 'national interest', particularly with reference to the distribution of resources.[4] In the end, while the economics of distribution were ill-thought out, it was the inherently Sinhalese nationalist tenor of both the debates in the Constituent Assembly, as well as the actual text of the constitution that propelled a new phase in the Tamil struggle for equal civil rights. If it is possible to point to one moment that precipitated the demise of constitutional Tamil nationalism that had since the early 1950s coalesced around the Federal Party and their campaign for a federal/devolved reordering of the unitary State – a State which contra the rhetoric of Sinhalese nationalism had only been consolidated since the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of the 1830s – it is arguably the promulgation of the 1972 Constitution which marks that moment. It thus signalled the apotheosis of the Buddhist revolution of 1956, as well as the capitulation of the Left to such reactionary political forces. It was however apt that Mrs

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[4] In an interview with Pieter Keuneman in August 1990, who was Secretary General of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka and a Cabinet Minister between 1970-76, he informed me that the government's hostility to a justiciable bill of rights was motivated by a concern that the courts would interfere with the UF government's economic agenda.

Bandaranaike, the widow of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike was at the vanguard of the latest phase of the Buddhist revolution.

My analysis of this moment of constitution-making seeks to contextualise it within its conditions of possibility. The 1972 Constitution is replete with a particular cultural inheritance: when held in front of a mirror its reflection is a testament to the primordial consciousness of Sinhalese nationalism. It is merely one moment that speaks or rather refracts the ontological ground of the cosmic order of Sinhalese Buddhism. My task is threefold. First I present a brief account of Bruce Kapferer's ontological reading of Sinhalese nationalism, which contra much of the literature in the sociology of nationalism takes the question of *consciousness* seriously.[5] Secondly I take Kapferer's approach to parts thus far ignored, the constitutional imaginary of Sri Lanka's postcolonial history, particularly the debates surrounding the introduction of the 1972 Republican Constitution. The constitutional imaginary has been since self-government was achieved in 1931 under the Donoughmore Constitution, a key domain for the competing claims of Sinhalese, Tamils and others – claims that reveal the motivating power of cosmological metaphors. The introduction of the 1972 Constitution is one such moment and here I contextualise it within the genealogy of Sinhalese nationalism, a discursive horizon that has informed State practices since 1948. What many have identified as the Bonapartist strategy of President Rajapaksa has its antecedents in the 1972 Constitution which insulated the executive and legislature from judicial scrutiny – the executive presidency introduced under the 1978 Republican Constitution has merely enhanced this process, notwithstanding the reintroduction of a highly constrained form of judicial review under that constitution.[6] Thirdly I argue that the ontological ground of Sinhalese nationalism is contingent upon its *modernity*, that this very same ontological ground made possible a pre-European State imaginary that was not centralised but thoroughly devolved or rather *galactic* in structure. In the idiom of the contemporary

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[5] S. Kemper (1991) *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP): p.11.
[6] A. Kadirgamar, 'S*tate Power, State Patronage and Elections in Sri Lanka*' (2010) *Economic & Political Weekly*, XlV(2): pp.21-24.

federal State for those liberal constitutionalists who advocate something beyond the failed Thirteenth Amendment (failed largely because of the centralising logic of the unitary State within which its framework for devolution is embedded) as a means of addressing the claims of the Tamil political leadership to internal self-determination, then the ontological ground of the *galactic* polity provides the necessary intellectual and historical resources.[7]

The Ontological Ground of Sinhalese Nationalism

Tamil political rhetoric unless conforming to the parameters established by the Sinhalese State has for most of Sri Lanka's postcolonial life been the subject of *demonisation*. By this I mean that Tamil political actors/activists who articulate a reasoned argument in favour of establishing a separate State through a non-violent campaign of political persuasion and dialogue (akin to Jurgen Habermas's idealised communicative processes in a deliberative democracy) are subject to an inevitable barrage of personal vilification that questions not only the legitimacy of such claims, but also the *being-in-the-world* of Tamils and others who make such claims.[8] As with the present, the logic of *demonisation*, a trope particularly visible in the mythic and ritual world of Sinhalese Buddhism, was also particularly redolent in the Sinhalese responses

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[7] These claims were most recently articulated by the leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Rajavarothiam Sampanthan in mid-2012, although their somewhat clumsy presentation has provided Sinhalese nationalists and the agents of the state with enough rope to characterise them as tantamount to a declaration of intent in favour of external self-determination. The latter as far as the TNA is concerned remains the option of last resort in the event that the Sri Lankan state fails in the post-war project of substantive devolution to the north and east of the island. See http://groundviews.org/2012/05/29/itaks-plan-of-attack-the-breakout-strategy/#comment-44975.

[8] E.O. Eriksen & J. Weigard (2004) *Understanding Habermas: Communicating Action and Deliberative Democracy* (London: Continuum). A cursory glance at the polemical *demonisation* directed at Tamils who articulate claims to the possibility of a separate state suggests the overdetermined, wholly phantasmatic structure of Sinhalese nationalist responses to such claims. See http://groundviews.org/2012/05/29/itaks-plan-of-attack-the-breakout-strategy/#comment-44975; http://groundviews.org/2012/05/31/on-the-nonsense-of-being-united-andnoror-unitary/.

to the amendments posed by the Federal Party in the Constituent Assembly between 1970-72. Once the metaphor of the demonic is re-valued within the world of lived political and social realities that were radically disjunctive of the ritual and mythic *past* of their origins, the consequences are often overdetermining, particularly once effected through the bureaucratic State.

At the apex of the cosmic order of Sinhalese Buddhism stands the Buddha and below the Buddha, the world of the gods, headed by the four guardian deities of the island, Natha, Vishnu, Kataragama, and Saman.[9] Beneath them stand the world of other powerful deities and lastly the world of the demonic inhabited by disordering spirits and ghosts. Within this layered cosmos the Buddha is seen as pure, while demonic beings vary in their polluting capacity depending on their degree of orientation towards the Buddha and his teaching. This orientation in turn is determined by their capacity to personify the disordering and ordering potential of the cosmic order. Consequently the Buddha and the demonic both define the boundaries of existence, the point of entry into non-existence or extinction. The demonic constitutes an intrinsic/intimate aspect of the cosmic order of Sinhalese Buddhism, that which threatens its hierarchical *telos* and an agent who once transformed into a force of benevolence is integral to the re-hierarchialising logic of the cosmic order. In the context of a Buddhist healing rite, possession by demonic forces is tantamount to a fragmentation of the cosmic order, and restoration of the patient to health is synonymous with a re-ordering of the cosmos.

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[9] Natha, derived from the Mahayana cult of *Avalokitesvara* is the highest of the gods and in Sinhalese Buddhist tradition is "characterized as continually contemplating the teachings of the Buddha and as being so unattached to the matters of existence, that he is expected by the Sinhalese to be the next Buddha (*Maitri*)...Vishnu is conceived of as the protector of Buddhism on the island; Kataragama is closely linked with the ancient Sinhalese Buddhist resurgence against Hindu Tamil domination; and Saman is the god of Adam's Peak...the site of Buddha's footprint and the Buddha's first visit to Sri Lanka": B. Kapferer (1991) *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka* (Washington, DC: Berg Publishers & Smithsonian Institution Press): p.159; J.C. Holt (1991) *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (Oxford: OUP).

Moreover, "the innumerable Sinhalese deities and demons are inversions, refractions or transformations of the possibility of each other, by virtue of their common constitution" [10] in the five elemental substances, earth, water, fire, wind and ether. The deity *Suniyam* for example "combines in his being the highly dangerous and polluting aspect of the demonic (in which case he is referred to as *Suniyam Yaka*) with the protective and purifying aspect of the deity (and when this is dominant, he is referred to as *Suniyam devatava*)." [11] This transformational capacity alludes also to "their often highly ambiguous character as they appear to everyday Sinhalese consciousness." [12] Furthermore, that demons and gods can on occasion reveal "their ontological opposites, supports the general view...that deities and demons constitute multiple refractions of the possibilities underlying the process of cosmic unity." [13]

The demonic is then *immanent* in the divine and *vice versa* and this ambivalence symbolises "both the order and disorder of the cosmos and the corresponding condition of the world of human beings as this is constituted within the encompassing cosmic order." [14] While an encompassing unity can at any moment "break down into a less unified and more fragmented form," [15] these very same deities "in their power of transformation can change a threatened disorder into

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[10] Kapferer (1991): p.162.

[11] Ibid: p.164. '*Yaka*' is the archaic Sinhala word for '*demon*' and the root of '*devatava*', *devata* signifying those supernatural beings "who are transitional between the classes of deity and demon": ibid. In the contemporary Sinhalese nationalist imaginary, the Tamil other has descended to the status of a *yaka* who must by analogy be subordinated within the cosmic state invoked by the Sinhalese ritualists in the *Suniyama*: B. Kapferer, '*Ethnic Nationalism and Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka*' (2001) **Communal/Plural** 9(1): pp.34-67 at pp.59-60; B. Kapferer (1997a) **The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power** (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): pp.73-81. There is a degree of slippage between these metaphors of subordination and transformation and the eugenic trope in modern Sinhalese nationalism which advocates the possibility of breeding out the genetic element of 'Tamilness.' The assimilationist logic of the Sinhalese state has recently found expression in the form of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa: see http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/6696.

[12] Kapferer (1991): p.164.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid: p.173.

[15] B. Kapferer (1998) **Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia** (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press): p.12.

order."[16] As with the restoration of the cosmological order from its fragmentary potential, "[t]he demonic and the destructive conditions of existence are also the source of the regeneration of the hierarchical order of society."[17]

In his account of the *Suniyama* (a significant anti-sorcery ritual among Sinhalese Buddhists in the southwest of the island) the reordering of the patient into a coherent being is "conditioned by the ordering principles of the coherent Buddhist state and society."[18] The consequence of the destruction of the cosmic palace at the end of the ritual is that the "cosmic state is made internal to the person, its principles vital to internal coherence."[19] The cosmic State of the ritual is in a mimetic relationship with the rituals of State, the masquerade of power characterised as an *Asokan Persona*.[20] These rituals were hierarchical in nature, having a genealogy that can be traced back to the Pali Canon as well as to the performative structure of kingship in the Buddhist polities of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. [21] As an ontic category, the structural and performative logic of these State rituals was motivated by the ontological ground of the Buddhist cosmic order, particularly its hierarchical aspect. The potentiality of an ontological horizon that is fundamentally *virtual* in nature, finds a contingent mode of actualisation, in the performative and structural logic of these State rituals, which although fundamentally hierarchical and totalising in intent, also actualised a State order that was *galactic* or decentralised in nature.[22]

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[16] Kapferer (1991): p.173.

[17] Kapferer (1998): p.12.

[18] Ibid: pp.67-79.

[19] Ibid: p.76.

[20] The *Asokan Persona* does not aim at the historical description of Asoka's rule, but rather is an ideal type *cultural paradigm* that describes a set of hierarchical ritual practices associated with Asoka's rule and their subsequent evolution in the Buddhist polities of South and Southeast Asia. M. Roberts (1994) *Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers): pp.57-72.

[21] Ibid: pp.60-72; J. Strong (1983) *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana* (New Jersey: Princeton UP).

[22] B. Kapferer, '*Sorcery and the Beautiful: A Discourse on the Aesthetics of Ritual*' in A. Hobart & B. Kapferer (Eds.) (2005) *Aesthetics in Performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience* (New York: Berghahn Books): p.130-31.

Even as they reinforced a hierarchical relation between Buddhist kings and the laity, these rituals of State were also practices of world renewal that regulated temporal relations between Buddhist kings, society and the Sangha, as well as re-hierarchialising the cosmic order. In the pre-British period these State rituals received their performative force in the all-encompassing logic of Buddhist kingship as depicted in the Pali chronicles. Kingship became a functional link between the cosmological and the temporal world.[23] The role of a *cakkavatti* king foretold in the Buddhist account of the origins of both the social and the State (in the *Agganna Sutta*) is that of a "virtuous wheel-rolling world ruler who…in his exalted capacity maintains in human affairs as much of the dharma…" as possible.[24] This is a totalising claim for the role of Buddhist kingship, one that lends itself to easy capture and ideological transformation by the centralised colonial State of the 19th century.[25]

The *cakkavatti* kings who modelled themselves as Asokan monarchs were cosmocreators, the embodiment of both the Buddha and the dhamma, the objective of which was to lead not just him but those he ruled on the path to *nibbana*.[26] Integral to the "metaphors of cosmic rebuilding and personal restoration"[27] is not the exclusion of evil, but its subordination as a benign entity, a force that no longer has the capacity to challenge the hierarchical social and State structure that the cosmic order conditions. The violence of re-formation that is intrinsic to both the *Suniyama*, as well as the cosmo-mythic tales of Sinhalese kings like Vijaya and Dutthagamani ultimately leads to a "transcendent equanimity",[28] which in the postcolonial Sinhalese nationalist imagination has been existentially

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[23] S.J. Tambiah (1976) ***World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity against a Historical Background*** (Cambridge: CUP): p.108.

[24] Ibid: p.38; S. Collins, '*The Lion's Roar on the Wheel-Turning King: A Response to Andrew Huxley's "The Buddha and the Social Contract"*' (1996) ***Journal of Indian Philosophy*** 24(4): pp.421-446 at pp.421-46.

[25] Kapferer (2001): p.33-67; Tambiah (1976): p.62.

[26] A. Huxley, '*Buddhist Law as a System of Religious Law*' in A. Huxley (Ed.) (2000) ***Religion, Law and Tradition: Comparative Studies in Religious Law*** (London: Routledge Curzon): pp.129,138-140; M. Aung-Thwin (1985) ***Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*** (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press).

[27] Kapferer (1998): p.76.

[28] Ibid.

challenged by the Tamil demand for radical autonomy cum separation in the northeast of the island.[29] The violence that regenerates the Buddhist State order re-encompasses the victim of sorcery, or the mytho-historical figures of Sinhalese Buddhist history as benign beings. It is an "ordering violence" that forms or reforms "the wholeness and health of the state, the person of the state, and…the person within the state."[30]

The Sinhalese rituals of healing and the myths of Sinhalese kingship are "variations within the one culturally and historically formed cosmological understanding."[31] Hence "the principles that condition the inner being of the person are also those that condition"[32] social and political relations that surround the person. In the contingent flesh and blood world of the social this ontological horizon and its valuation of good and evil realises its full potential meaning in "its active conjunction with lived realities"[33] in the material world. As an ontology of the everyday

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[29] Ibid: pp.57-65. The *Mahavamsa* records that Dutthagamani defeats the Tamil ruler Elara and thereby restores Sinhalese Buddhist kingship to Anuradhapura in the 2nd century BCE. The narrative form that this account takes is oft repeated in the Pali Chronicles – Sinhalese hero-kings mimic the Buddha's earlier act of claiming the island for the dhamma, their violence regenerative as they confront and defeat Tamil rulers and hence restore Buddhist rule to the island. While a literal reading of the *Mahavamsa* appears to justify violence towards a cultural *other*, a more nuanced reading conscious of the ontological ground of the text would suggest that the author may have been alluding to the "ethical dilemma involved in Buddhist kingship": S.C. Berkwitz (2004) **Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka** (Leiden: E.J. Brill): p.78. Such nuance is wholly absent in the Sinhalese nationalist reading of the Pali Chronicles which project onto them an epistemological problematic, reading them for what they said about the world of their discursive production: V.E. Daniel (1996) **Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence** (New Jersey: Princeton UP): pp.43-45.

[30] Kapferer (1998): p.78; C.R. de Silva & T. Bartholomeusz (1998) **Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka** (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press): p.11.

[31] Kapferer (1998): p.76; R. Obeyesekere (1991) **Jewels of Doctrine: Stories of the Saddharma Ratnāvaliya** (New York: New York State UP): pp.x. Kapferer notes that "myths and practices of magic and sorcery announce the dynamic of this ontology [and] the vital processes engaged in the construction and destruction of human being and their realities": Kapferer (1997a): p.3 (my interpolation).

[32] Kapferer (1998): p.76.

[33] Ibid: p.80.

the Buddhist cosmic order not only generates the force of transformation intrinsic to healing rituals, it also conditions the transformative logic of *modern* Sinhalese nationalism. *Modern* Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism shares a common ontological ground, an ontological commonality that "establishes a metonymic exchange of meaning." [34] Sinhalese Buddhist mythology, Sinhalese Buddhist healing rituals, and *modern* Sinhalese nationalism draw on a "logical connection with the ontologies of being,"[35] the practices of the everyday. Thus, the constitution of meaning in practice is an actualisation of a potential that is integral to the ontological dimensions of the *virtual*.[36] Its penetrative capacity enables this ontological ground to generate nationalist meaning in relation to a number of *performative* modes that would otherwise be devoid of nationalist import.[37]

Such is the metonymic dynamic of the cosmic order's ontological ground that "in some healing rites, the exterior and flattening power of the demonic is sometimes represented as Tamil."[38] The practices of modern Sinhalese nationalism enable such events to expand their meaning "beyond their immediate practical concern of ending a patient's affliction. The affliction of a patient and household [become] open to broader interpretational import, a metaphor of exteriority grounded as political actuality and patient reality"[39] the demonic agent morphing into a *demonised* (Tamil) other who threatens not only the integrity of the Sinhalese subject, but the integrity of the Sinhalese nation too.

It is the contingent nature of the ontological that makes for a complex relation between the cosmic order, myth, the rituals of State and what appears the triumphant moment of colonial *modernity*. The force of this ontological scheme gives increased vitality to a set of relationships that colonial/post-colonial *modernity* framed through an Orientalist lexicon that privileged the categories of positivist

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[34] B. Kapferer, '*Remythologising Discourses: State and Insurrectionary Violence in Sri Lanka*' in D. Apter (Ed.) (1997b) **The Legitimization of Violence** (New York: NYU Press): p.186, fn.10.
[35] Kapferer (1998): p.19.
[36] Kapferer (2005): pp.134-35.
[37] Kapferer (1991): p.9.
[38] Kapferer (1997a): p.290.
[39] Ibid.

historiography. This historiography mapped the population of the colony through a taxonomy of race and place which once appropriated by the Sinhalese nationalist movement had devastating consequences for ethno-territorial relations between Sinhalese and Tamils in the post-colonial period.[40] Under British rule the *governmentalisation* of identity, people and place marked the entry of a new colonial bureaucratic order and the concomitant generation of a set of relations that were reified through the bureaucratic State.[41]

While this emerging colonial historiography was a thoroughly contingent *regime of truth*, an "ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and the specific effects of power attached to the true,"[42] its consequences were far reaching.[43] Once claimed by the Sinhalese nationalist movement from the late 19th century this historiography effaced the various past historical actualisations of a *virtual* ontological ground. Thus was born modern Sinhalese nationalism. This process of reimagining the past, driven by a modern episteme, drew lines of unity between a non-cosmological understanding of space cum territory, *race,* and an Orientalised Sinhalese Buddhism.[44] Through this modern episteme, the British colonial State and anti-colonial Sinhalese nationalists reconstructed the Pali Chronicles (privileging a mode of reading which stressed their value as a medium for *seeing the world*), reimagining them as vocalising a Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-cultural community cum nation that had existed prior to European intervention in Sri Lanka's history.

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[40] A. Abeysekara (2002) *Colors of the Robe* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press): p.20.

[41] D. Scott (1999 *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (New Jersey: Princeton UP): pp.23-52.

[42] Foucault cited in P. Jeganathan, '*Authorizing History, Ordering Land: The Conquest of Anuradhapura*' in P. Jeganathan & Q. Ismail (Eds.) (1995) *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: SSA): p.109.

[43] M. Foucault (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge): p.49.

[44] Sri Lanka's Buddhist polities delineated space through a relatively non-bounded *galactic* configuration, discussed below. See S.J. Tambiah (1992) *Buddhism Betrayed: Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press).

Modern Sinhalese nationalism however has never been wholly *modern*. The epistemological moment of the 19th century never effaced the continued resonance of a set of older practices that were ontologically grounded. Rituals that were intrinsic to the Asokan and post-Asokan State were transformed through the imaginary of the bureaucratic State, the cosmic order becoming "active in state processes towards greater centralisation, totalitarian action, and the way its agents and agencies react to events in the environment of the state."[45]

Sri Lanka's post-colonial present has its antecedents in the colonial imaginary. While the colonial State was not strategically immune to making links with the ontological possibility of Asokan State rituals, for the Sinhalese nationalist movement of the late 19th century it appeared natural.[46] While in the pre-British period the presence of the *cakkavatti* "gave a certain fixity to the textual model of Asokan authority...[i]n the colonial and post-colonial eras the possibilities multiplied." [47] Thus it became possible for the post-colonial Sinhalese constitutional imaginary to be directed at ensuring that the *modern* Sinhalese Buddhist nation remains whole and unified *vis-à-vis* the disordering Tamil claims for radical autonomy.

Classical Asokan rituals (now mediated through a modern bureaucracy) have become intimate with the Sinhalese nationalist imaginary. Hence religion and race became the criteria of difference that "overrode practices and beliefs that Sinhalas and Tamils shared."[48] Categories that were ontologically grounded now became increasingly reified through a taxonomic process that was the handmaiden of the late colonial bureaucratic State, thus rendering meaning which was partially fluid wholly concrete. This was not so much a case of effacing the cosmic, but rather a matter of the bureaucratic transformation of the cosmic. It was also an ideological process by which the past was elided with the present. Old pre-

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[45] Kapferer (2001): p.57.
[46] Roberts (1994): p. 107.
[47] Ibid. British rule involved a fundamental "reordering of Sinhalese social and political relationships" within the overarching confines of the "ideological and symbolic order of the colonial state": Kapferer (1991): p.31.
[48] Kemper (1991): p.159.

colonial signifiers discovered novel import within the bureaucratic territorialisation of the colonial and postcolonial State.[49]

Critically though the relation between the ideological terrain of Sinhalese nationalism and its ontological ground, ideas that are brought into an ideological relation "may have a grounding in a variety of different ontologies."[50] However where mythic traditions are read through an epistemological prism in the formation of *ideology* it becomes possible for one aspect (the hierarchical for example) of an ontological ground to "become dominant in the historical ideological process and to provide the inherent logic for ideological coherence."[51] Ideology in my usage refers to an array of cultural practices (such as the discursive economy of Sinhalese nationalism) whose coherence could contingently achieve hegemonic status.[52] Ideology must be understood on its own terms – for both leaders and the ruled reveal a commitment to the myths, rituals and grammar of modern Sinhalese nationalism – as an ontic revaluation within an ontological frame that is actualised in the historical processes of Sinhalese nationalism.

The primordialism that Kapferer alludes to as conditioning the essentialist logic of modern Sinhalese Buddhism *qua* nationalism alludes to a process by which the imaginary of the modern Sinhalese Buddhist nation is partially re-sacralised through a modern episteme. The religious aura that the modern Sinhalese Buddhist nation acquires was only possible by virtue of the systemic revisionist project of the Buddhist reform movement of the late 19th century. Sinhalese nationalism, *qua* Buddhist *modernism*, was thoroughly derivative of Western *modernity*. It directed significant energy into reimagining Sinhalese Buddhist

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[49] Kemper (1991): pp.139-40.
[50] Kapferer (1998): p.80.
[51] Ibid. Given that the ontology of Sinhalese Buddhist myth is one of the everyday (of healing rituals for example) such an ontology (in which good is *immanent* in evil and ultimately encompasses evil) is made "relevant in the motion of a historical world and once subservient to such a world can come to have a more determining force": ibid.
[52] E. Laclau & C. Mouffe (2001) **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics** London: Verso): pp.x-xi.

historiography, as well as the 'sacredness' of Buddhism.[53] The dominant organising trope of modern Sinhalese nationalism became race. Thus, Sinhalese Buddhist revivalists such as Anagarika Dharmapala and others after him such as Walpola Rahula in the 1940s were highly selective in their *modernist* reconstruction of the past.[54] The subsequent reification of categories such as 'Sinhalese' and 'Buddhism' and the transformation of the revivalist moment into a nationalist movement changed the basis on which Sinhalese claims about the organisation of the State would be made. While the Pali Chronicles expressed a specific Theravada consciousness, the impact of the revivalist movement together with the Aryan theory of race meant that in future the Chronicles would become subjected to an epistemic revaluation that projected race on to the events of the past.[55]

I agree with Kapferer that the ideational transformation of the Buddhist cosmic state (as described in the *Aganna Sutta* and performatively brought to life in the *Suniyama*) into "the context of modern usage can intensify destructive potentialities of contemporary state bureaucratic processes."[56] This is what I now consider with respect to the seamless genealogy of Sinhalese nationalism.

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[53] Contra Chatterjee, it does not appear that the *sacred* was as autonomous a sphere as he suggests given its circumscription within a *modernist* narrative: P. Chatterjee (1993) ***The Nation and its Fragments*** (New York: Princeton UP): p.6.

[54] B. Anderson (1991) ***Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*** (London: Verso): p.111; W. Rahula (1974) [1946] ***The Heritage of the Bhikku*** (New York: Grove Press).

[55] Kemper (1991): pp.135-60.

[56] Kapferer (2001): p.59; R. de Silva Wijeyeratne, '*Buddhism, the Ashokan Persona and the Galactic Polity: Re-thinking Sri Lanka's Constitutional Present*' (2007) ***Social Analysis*** 51(3): pp.156-178; R. de Silva Wijeyeratne, '*Ambivalence, Contingency and the Failure of Exclusion: The Ontological Schema of the 1972 Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka*' (1996) ***Social and Legal Studies*** 5(3): pp.364-81.

The Seamless Genealogy of Sinhalese Nationalism

In the 1930s D.S. Senanayake initiated a policy of resettling landless Sinhalese peasants in the borderlands of the northeast as well as in the centre of Tamil habitation in the Eastern Province. There is a seamless genealogy between these policies, their continuation from the 1950s on and the most recent examples of the sustained dispossession of the Tamils (and now Muslims) from their ancestral lands under President Rajapaksa since the end of the civil war in 2009. [57] As Minister for Agriculture D.S. Senanayake invoked the protection of the Sinhalese peasantry, and drew on the rhetoric of restoring the Sinhalese to the Rajarata, [58] when in 1937 he initiated a programme of land resettlement in the Rajarata or what the Tamil imaginary knew as the Vanni.[59]

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[57] Minority Rights Group International (2007) '*One Year On: Counter-Terrorism Sparks Human Rights Crisis for Sri Lanka's Minorities*' (London: MRG); Centre for Policy Alternatives (2009) *Trincomalee High Security Zone and Special Economic Zone* (Colombo: CPA); B. Fonseka & M. Raheem (2010) ***Land in the Eastern Province: Politics, Policy and Conflict*** (Colombo: CPA). This land has been expropriated with a view towards either resettling Sinhalese families or developing niche tourist resorts over which there exists no local accountability, including tourist resorts controlled by the Sri Lankan armed forces: D. Rampton, '*Development, Humanitarianism and the Spectre of Colonization in the Eastern Province*', International Seminar on Humanitarian Action in the 'Undeclared War' in Sri Lanka, 22nd September 2009, Geneva, Switzerland.

[58] Restoring the Sinhalese to the *Rajarata* was also synonymous with restoring Buddhist sacred places in the *Rajarata*. This would become an intensely passionate confrontation between the colonial State and monks who had been immersed in Dharmapala's Sinhalese nationalist renaissance in the late 19th century. It was initially focused on the restoration of Anuradhapura as a sacred place *par excellence*: Kemper (1991): pp.142-43. The logic of restoration was organised around an epistemic problematic whose focus was one of producing a Sinhalese Buddhist identity organised around race at the expense of ethnic and religious *others*. Such acts of discovery are analogous to the subordination of the disordering potential of demonic agents that challenge the Buddha from the margins of the cosmic order, in the Eastern Province the discovery of sacred places playing an "expressive role in establishing the spiritual unity of the island while they simultaneously enabled its political unification": ibid: p.137. Tamils' claims for the recognition of Hindu sacred places in the east have been met with contempt and racialised derision by Sinhalese archaeologists and epigraphers: R. Hoole (Ed.) (2001) ***Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power*** (Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)): pp.75-78.

[59] Roberts (2004): p.72.

The resettlement of landless Sinhalese in the borderlands of the northeast then brought into sharp focus the contested imaginaries of the Rajarata/Vanni. The Vanni was an area of shared identities between Sinhalese and Tamils. Furthermore such categories did not even have the same emotional purchase that it did in the south or the north of the island, the latter the centre of Tamil culture. It had also been the historic site of polities that had exhibited some autonomy from both the Jaffna and Kandyan kingdoms at different historical moments. The Vanni chieftaincies had come into being following the collapse of the Buddhist polity centred on Polonnaruva in the 13th century and while many were Tamil some were also Sinhalese and Vadda (indigenous people of the land).[60] Following Polonnaruva's collapse the majority of the Sinhalese population began a southward drift which culminated in the Kandyan kingdom that emerged in the 16th century. By the 16th century the Vanni was composed of the remainder of older Sinhala speaking people, people who had their origins and identified with the Vaddas (some of whom had become Sinhalese), and the descendants of South Indian migrations between the 13th and 17th century.[61]

The relationship of the Vanni chieftains to both the Jaffna kingdom in the 14th century and the Kandyan kingdom from the 16th century was tributary in nature, a characteristic of sub-polities that were at the periphery of a much larger *galactic polity*.[62] Tribute or gift giving was a feature of the relationship that the Vanni chiefs exhibited towards the Kandyan kings.[63] However the subordinate relationship of the Vanni chieftaincies was not static for the very nature of a galactic polity allowed for

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[60] Ibid; Kemper (1991): p.138; K. Indrapala, '*The Origin of the Tamil Vanni Chieftaincies of Ceylon*' (1970) **Ceylon Journal of the Humanities** 1: pp.111-140.

[61] Roberts (2004): pp.72-73.

[62] Ibid: p.74; S. Arasaratnam, '*The Vanniar of North Ceylon: A Study of Feudal Power and Central Authority, 1660-1760*' (1966) **Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies** 9: pp.101-112 at p.103.

[63] Roberts (2004): p.75. The *Culavamsa* records that a Sinhalese *cakkavatti* had to subdue Vanni chiefs who were also Sinhalese.

"paradoxes…pulsations and oscillations"[64] between the centre and the periphery.[65]

These historical nuances that were central to understanding the Vanni were eschewed by Senanayake's land resettlement policy. His policy also had colonial antecedents: the 1856 Irrigation Ordinance began the process of restoring a number of irrigation systems in the Rajarata. In the 1870s Governor Gregory began a process that would continue into the years before the Great War when he initiated a number of "irrigation projects in the cause of peasant welfare."[66] Looking back from the 1930s, in Yagirala Pannananda's imaginary, Gregory's rule resembled that of early Sinhalese kings for he made "Anuradhapura the centre of the North Central Province, renovated ancient tanks and viharas, such as the Ruvanvalisaya which Dutugamunu had built, and established an allowance for monks to look after such places."[67] Here was an instance of British Governors' engagement in a performative revaluation of meaning within ontological ground, such that the meaning of an ancient system (the symbiotic relation between kingship and *karma*) was made relevant to a modern audience.[68]

Colonial/postcolonial *modernity* seamlessly inhabited the same discursive space as the pre-European imaginary, and shifted the register of its activation to that of the bureaucratic order, and herein resided the possibility of an overdetermined (fetishised and reified) reproduction of the pre-European imaginary.[69] The shift in register however functions through the logic of inversion;

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[64] Tambiah cited by Roberts, ibid: p.75.
[65] Ibid: pp.74-77; K.M. de Silva (1981) *A History of Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: OUP): p.99.
[66] Kemper (1991): p.139.
[67] Ibid: p.101. In his extension of the *Mahavamsa* covering the period 1815-1935, Pannananda focuses on British Governors who are either the subject of adulation or critique depending on their relationship to the welfare of the Sinhalese: H.L. Seneviratne (1999) *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): pp.133-34; Kemper (1991): pp.95-104.
[68] In the 1920s Governor Herbert Stanley was welcomed by the Vidyodaya monks in a manner that invoked his status as a *cakkavatti* king: Seneviratne (1999): pp.131-33.
[69] Kapferer (2001): pp.48-63. Like Dharmapala, Pannananda makes a fetish of the desire for Sinhalese *unity*: Kemper (1991): p.100.

modernity is legitimated in a revalued understanding of the past, the past being ideologically read as static and seamlessly continuing through to the colonial/postcolonial present. If British Governors (and the performative power of the rituals they partook in prior to the severance of the link between the colonial State and Buddhism made this possible) could draw on the same ontological ground as *cakkavatti* kings then it was inevitable that Sinhalese notables could do the same.[70] In the absence of *unifying* Sinhalese heroes Pannananda opined that "the best one can hope for are leaders who resemble ancient kings,"[71] a political narrative embraced by postcolonial Sinhalese leaders.[72]

Transforming the aesthetic imaginary of the postcolonial State was integral to the Sinhalese nationalist movement. The genius of this transformation, one that transforms the articulating relationship between the State and the governed (Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, etc) resides in the fact that its ontological grounding is also the horizon of the everyday, one that orients the "interpretation of lived experience"[73] – the rituals of healing are testament to the logic of shifting registers. Once it informs the institutional practices of the State and the Sinhalese Buddhist nation, practices that challenge assumptions integral to the being of both the State and the nation "also attacks the person at his or her ontological depth, at the very source of being and existence in the world."[74] Once the practices of the Sinhalese Buddhist nation engage the person at this ontological depth, and passions are fired, it is possible for the destruction of people to take on an annihilatory logic.

Only in such terms can we conceptualise the *telos* of the Sinhalese State from the 1950s on. In the 1950s Sinhalese Buddhist civil servants organised themselves into a group called the *Dutthagamani*

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[70] Kemper (1991): pp.100-101.

[71] Ibid: p.100

[72] Kapferer (1998): pp.85-86. In the late 19th century Senanayake's family had fabricated a genealogy to King Parakramabahu I who had briefly unified the island in the 12th century. It was Parakramabahu's association with irrigation construction and agricultural production that Senanayake sought to emulate: Kemper (1991): pp.61-63.

[73] Kapferer (1998): p.83.

[74] Ibid.

Rahas Sanvidhanaya (Dutthagamani's Secret Organisation) in order to campaign against Christian influence in the Ceylon Civil Service (CCS), an elite core of highly educated and Anglicised Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers, who controlled the administrative machinery of the State. When the *Pancha Maha Bala Mandalaya* began to campaign for S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's SLFP, they took "oaths to protect Buddhism"[75] standing in front of Dutthagamani's statute in Anuradhapura. [76] Cosmological metaphors were thus redolent with the organisations that challenged the liberal bourgeois postcolonial settlement of 1948.

These interests ensured Bandaranaike's victory in the 1956 general election. His victory was ontologically grounded in cosmic metaphors, the auspiciousness of his victory coinciding as it did with the *Buddha Jayanthi* was reinforced by popular tradition which "associated Bandaranaike's victory with the belief that King Diyasena would appear at the *Buddha Jayanthi*, conquer Anuradhapura with a great army, and re-establish a Buddhist polity,"[77] an association that became more pertinent after his slaying by a Buddhist monk in 1959.[78] On securing power in 1956 Bandaranaike announced that Sinhala would become the official language of the State, thus ensuring at the stroke of a pen (given the administrative rules that were implemented subsequent to the Official Language Act) that non-Sinhala speaking minorities would be placed at a disadvantage in seeking employment and promotion in the public sector if they failed to pass a Sinhala language exam.[79]

The apocalyptic tone of the parliamentary debates on the introduction of Sinhala as the official state language drew on the same ontological ground as the debates about citizenship in the late

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[75] Kemper (1991): p.126.

[76] The *Pancha Maha Bala Mandalaya* brought together a coalition of Sinhalese school teachers, Sinhala language writers, Buddhist monks and *ayurvedic* doctors and representatives of the Sinhalese peasantry who campaigned for the introduction of Sinhala as the sole official language and hence the sole medium of administration in the island.

[77] Kemper (1991): p.164.

[78] King Diyasena was a mythical *Maitreya* figure in the Sinhalese Buddhist imaginary.

[79] Hoole (2001): pp.38-41.

1940s that disenfranchised a section of the Tamil population.[80] The justification for elevating Sinhala to the status of official state language, like the earlier disenfranchisement of tea estate Tamils in the late 1940s drew on the cosmological metaphor of reordering a fragmented *state of being/being-in-the-world*, one challenged by the existential threat of the Tamil *other*. Only by *restoring* both Buddhism and the Sinhala language to its pre-colonial status could the State, much like the Sinhalese victim of sorcery, be reborn. The parliamentary debates projected the Tamil language as possessive of the demonic capacity to eviscerate Sinhala and by implication the Sinhalese people, just as in the cosmic order demonic agents threaten the ordering logic of the Buddha.[81]

Indirectly invoking the encompassing logic of the cosmic order in which the Buddha encompasses the fragmenting force of demonic forces, the Official Language Act marginalised the demonic potential of the Tamil language to both extinguish the Sinhala language, and divide the Sinhalese Buddhist nation. Just as the Buddha ultimately encompasses the demonic, Sinhala encompasses Tamil in a hierarchical relation. The ideological force of the Official Language Act was driven by an ontological ground that constituted its inner "structure of reasoning."[82] The parliamentary debates about the official language reveal an interpretational possibility latent in the ontological ground of the cosmic order, the performative structure of the debates drawing on the metaphors of unity, fragmentation and reordering, the *restoration* of Sinhala (and by implication Sinhalese cultural and literary traditions) to pre-eminence simultaneously reordering the cosmos.[83]

The passage of the Official Language Act signalled the motivating power of a reiterative cultural logic, one that has structured the discursive and non-discursive practices of the State for much of the 20th century and beyond.[84] The hierarchical aspect of the cosmic order, capable of making a seamless link with the hierarchical logic

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[80] De Silva Wijeyeratne (1998): pp.37-68.
[81] De Silva Wijeyeratne (2000): pp.319-44.
[82] Kapferer (1998): p.45.
[83] De Silva Wijeyeratne (2000): pp.319-44.
[84] While the Thirteenth Amendment to the 1978 Constitution declared Tamil an official language, its implementation has bordered on the non-existent: see D. Nesiah (2012) *Tamil Language Rights in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: CPA).

of the unitary State forged in the 19th century, has provided an ontological ground for the practices of the State, an ontological ground now mediated by a highly bureaucratised centralised State, whence once it was mediated by a classical Buddhist State that was *galactic* in nature. Tamil opposition to both discriminatory legislation and State practices that marginalised them further has been fashioned as "ontologically foreign and threatening to the hierarchical and encompassing unity of the state."[85] Those who advocated a federal and secular constitutional model in the early 1970s were thus fashioned in this manner.

Republicanism and the Rise of Tamil Separatism

The United Front coalition was formed as a coalition of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Ceylon (CPC). Dudley Senanayake's UNP-led government of 1965-70 had underestimated the social forces that the Buddhist revolution of 1956 had set in motion, class realignment, the emergence of a new left in the form of the JVP and a resurgent Sinhalese nationalism. Hostility to the Soulbury Constitution was motivated by what the left and the Sinhalese nationalist right perceived as a colonial compromise which maintained an umbilical cord to the Westminster Parliament and the British Crown.[86] These links were of more symbolic effect – even the Privy Council had failed to strike down legislation that was *prima facie* in violation of Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution – than real. However symbolic capital was precisely what Sinhalese nationalism, like any nationalism, relied on in order to generate a programme of radical change that would be advanced by the United Front.

Having secured over 75% of the seats in the House of Representatives on under 50% of the popular vote, the new government declared a Constituent Assembly would draft a new

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[85] Kapferer (1998): pp.100-101.
[86] A. Welikala, '*The Sri Lankan Republic at Forty: Reflections on the Constitutional Past and Present*', **Groundviews**, 25th May 2012, available at: http://groundviews.org/2012/05/25/the-sri-lankan-republic-at-forty-reflections-on-the-constitutional-past-and-present/

republican constitution. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Minister for Constitutional Affairs was Dr Colvin R. De Silva of the LSSP. In the process of drafting the 1972 Constitution he was however outmanoeuvred by Sinhalese nationalists "heading the committees in charge of different aspects of the constitution." [87] Notwithstanding this, the Federal Party submitted a memorandum requesting a debate on establishing a federal State, parity of status for the Tamil language, and a resolution of the citizenship status of the Indian Tamils.[88]

The Federal Party advocated the decentralisation of executive, legislative and judicial powers through a federal State structure. It advocated this reordering of the unitary State on the grounds that it would enable the ethno-cultural diversity of the island's population as well as their institutional needs to find expression in a less hierarchical manner. This was unanimously opposed by the government and the UNP opposition, now led by J.R. Jayewardene.[89] Sinhalese parliamentarians spoke with a unified voice against any institutional devolution, maintaining it would fragment the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and by implication the Sinhalese Buddhist nation. Prominent Sinhalese nationalist MP, Prins Gunasekera, gave voice to the Sinhalese fear of federalism in observing that:

> "For over 2000 years the Sinhala people have lived in Ceylon. To them Ceylon is their motherland. This motherland was frequently invaded from South India...The history of Ceylon tells us that the Sinhala people fought incessantly against Indian *invaders* to keep this country for themselves...[and] the Sinhala people look upon the Tamil people now inhabiting the Northern and Eastern provinces as descendants of the *invading* forces whom they have been fighting to keep this country for themselves. This...explains why the Sinhala people fight

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[87] A.J. Wilson (1994) *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: A Political Biography* (London: Hurst & Co.): p.115.
[88] R. Edrisinha, M. Gomez, V.T. Thamilmaran & A. Welikala (2008) *Power-Sharing in Sri Lanka: Constitutional and Political Documents, 1926-2008* (Colombo: CPA): pp.238-47.
[89] *Constituency Assembly Debates*, Vol. 1, No. 12: Col.385-440.

against all proposals to grant concessions [such as federalism] to the Tamil people."[90]

A Federal Party parliamentarian countered this Dharmapalite narrative by observing that the "question of federalism is the question of respect [for] the dignity of groups and individuals, however weak, however small and however insignificant they may be"[91] Inevitably the combined forces of the Sinhalese majority united against the Federal Party, and Article 2 of the new constitution declared that 'The Republic of Sri Lanka is a Unitary State'.[92] Whereas under the Soulbury Constitution the State had been only implicitly unitary, under the 1972 Constitution it was explicitly so. Gunasekera's speech was emblematic of the Sinhalese nationalist elision of past and present, the Tamil desire for a federal State synonymous with the Tamil incursions of the pre-European past. Gunasekera's rhetoric revealed almost no historical sense of the organic transformation of various South Indian *others* into Sinhalese Buddhists. It was, rather, an ideological gesture that projected the Tamils, both past and present, as *invaders* from the periphery of the Sinhalese imaginary who threatened the hierarchical order of the unitary Sinhalese State – a trope common to common to Sinhalese nationalism.

The performative structure of Gunasekera's speech was commonplace ever since the Donoughmore Constitution in the 1930s. While Gunasekera's account is an ideological distortion of the past, it is also, more importantly, constitutive of a specific contemporary *reality*; when Sinhalese political actors speak of the past through the trope of Tamil *invasion* they act reflexively, speaking the world which they and others already occupy.[93] Gunasekera's ideological distortion is laden with ontological import. Like the Sinhalese victims of possession who are attacked by demonic beings from the margins of the Buddhist cosmos, but who ultimately encompass the agents of demonic fragmentation, constant watch must be maintained against the demonic claims of

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[90] ***Constituency Assembly Debates***, Vol. 1, No. 13: Col.473, my emphasis, my interpolation.
[91] ***Constituency Assembly Debates***, Vol. 1, No. 12: Col.397
[92] Article 2 of the 1978 Constitution similarly declares Sri Lanka to be a unitary State.
[93] Kapferer (1998): p.96.

federalism that manifests itself from the northeast periphery of the Sinhalese State. It is the hierarchical order of the unitary State that encompasses the demonic potential of Tamil political actors and transforms that demonic potential into a benign state of being that no longer threatens the State's hierarchical logic. Just as the Sinhalese victim of sorcery is encompassed and made whole by the ordering principles of the Buddhist cosmic State, the ordering logic of the unitary Sinhalese State (and its bureaucratic capacity) similarly encompasses and makes whole the Sinhalese Buddhist nation, the latter subordinating evil potentiality (the Tamils) into a benign entity.[94] This dynamic struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils that Gunasekera projects refracts the cosmological struggle between the Buddha and the demonic; a struggle which similarly sees hierarchy restored by virtue of the Buddha's greater encompassing power.

The Tamils would further be humiliated in the debate about language policy in the Constituent Assembly. A weak Sinhalese consensus had emerged that any approach to the use of Tamil would have to be within the framework of the Official Language Act and the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act. The debates over language in the Constituent Assembly focused on the proposed amendment by the Federal Party that the constitution should provide for both Sinhala and Tamil to be official languages, to be the language of the courts and the language of legislation.[95] Following the defeat of the amendment, the Constituent Assembly then proceeded to reinforce the hierarchical relation between Sinhala and Tamil, Sinhala becoming the 'official language' under Section 7 of the constitution.[96] Under Section 8(1) the use of Tamil was to be in accordance with the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, but under Article 8(2) any "regulations for the use of the Tamil language made under the Tamil Language (Special

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[94] Ibid: pp.74-75.

[95] *Constituent Assembly Debates*. Vol. 1, No. 27: Col. 1973-2002; Vol. 1No. 28: Col. 2084-2156; Vol. 1No. 29, Col. 2208-2287; Vol.1, No. 30: Col. 2365-2391; Vol.1, No. 31: Col. 2520-2564.

[96] Similarly, under Article 18 of the 1978 Constitution, Sinhala is the 'Official Language' of Sri Lanka, but Article 19 provides that the "[n]ational languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil." This was merely a symbolic gesture acknowledging the violence perpetrated against the Tamil language under the 1972 Constitution.

Provisions) Act...and in force immediately before the commencement of the Constitution shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the Constitution but shall be deemed to be *subordinate* legislation" (emphasis mine). This hierarchical subordination of the Tamil language was reinforced by Sections 9, 10 and 11, which provided that:

> 9 (1) All laws shall be enacted or made in Sinhala.
> (2) There shall be a Tamil translation of every law so enacted or made.
>
> 10 (1) All written laws, including subordinate legislation in force immediately prior to commencement of the Constitution, shall be published...in Sinhala and in Tamil translation as expeditiously as possible...
> (3) Unless the National State Assembly otherwise provides, the law published in Sinhala under the provisions of subsection (1) of this section, shall, as from the date of such publication, be deemed to be the law and supersede the corresponding law in English.[97]
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> 11 (1)   The language of the courts and tribunals...shall be Sinhala throughout Sri Lanka and accordingly their records, including pleadings, proceedings, [and] judgements [*sic*],...shall be in Sinhala (my interpolation).[98]
> ...[Th]e National State Assembly *may*, by or under its law, provide otherwise in the case of institutions exercising original jurisdiction in the Northern and Eastern Provinces..."[99] (my emphasis).

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[97] The 1978 Constitution similarly repeats this hierarchical structure, but redressed the inequality in some measure by providing Tamil with constitutional guarantees.

[98] Section 11(1) reproduced the Language of the Courts Act 1959, by which court decisions throughout Sri Lanka, including in the Northern and Eastern Provinces had to be given in Sinhala.

[99] Under Article 24(1) of the 1978 Constitution the official language was to be the language of the courts throughout Sri Lanka, but Article 24(1) also provided that "the language of the courts exercising original jurisdiction in the Northern and Eastern Provinces shall be Tamil and their records and proceedings shall also be in the Tamil Language." Although the relation between the Sinhala and Tamil languages in the 1978 Constitution still remains hierarchical, in that the official language is given privilege, the practical effect of these new provisions was to attenuate the effects of the Language of the Courts Act.

While Section 11(3) provided for pleadings, applications and petitions to be made in Tamil and for proceedings to take place in Tamil in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, a Sinhala translation was to be made in all such cases. Although no provision for practical purposes was made for a Tamil translation to be made of court proceedings in Sinhala taking place throughout the rest of the island, it was possible under Article 11(4) for a Tamil speaker to obtain a Tamil translation of "any such part of the court record as he may be entitled to obtain according to law."[100] The underlying metaphor of Sections 9, 10 and 11 was one of encompassment.[101] Sinhala as the language of legislation and the courts stands in a hierarchical relation to both Tamil (as a language of translation) and English (as a language superceded by Sinhala).[102] The 1972 Constitution marked the triumph of Sinhalese linguistic nationalism which was not undone until the Sixteenth Amendment (to the 1978 Constitution) in 1988; although in practice the new policy of bilingualism has received little institutional support from a Sinhalese controlled bureaucracy.

Early in the Constituent Assembly debates, Buddhist activists secured an important victory. Since the publication of the Buddha Sasana Commission Report in 1959, Buddhist activists had been seeking the elevation of Buddhism to the State religion. In the course of the debates the government proposed that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by section 18(1) (d)", which guaranteed the "freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." [103] Responding, the Federal Party proposed that the State shall "protect and foster all religions." This elicited a furious response and the Sinhalese nationalist sentiments of the Constituent Assembly prevailed, with the effect of elevating

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[100] Article 24(3) of the 1978 Constitution.
[101] Wilson (1994): p.115.
[102] Article 24(4) of the 1978 Constitution as amended by the Sixteenth Amendment provides for the use of English in court proceedings, on the direction of the Minister of Justice.
[103] Now in Articles 9, 10 and 14 of the 1978 Constitution.

Buddhism to the semi-official confessional of the State under Section 6 of the constitution.[104]

Both J. R. Jayewardene and W. Dahanayake cited the Kandyan Convention of 1815, to assert that there was a seamless link between the British Crown's obligations that Buddhism would 'be maintained and protected' and the present desire to elevate Buddhism to a 'foremost place' within the State. What had been a statement motivated by the contingency of colonial conquest and the desire of some of the Kandyan Chiefs to be rid of their Tamil ruler became, in this ideological gesture, a historical antecedent for the contemporary elevation of Buddhism to a semi-official confession. Such a gesture is only possible by reducing the pre-European interpretation of the relation between Buddhist kingship and the dhamma to one of instrumentality. The burden placed upon the State echoed with Sinhalese Buddhist historiography; its historical antecedent is the post-conquest building programme of King Dutthagamani who restores Sinhalese Buddhist kingship to Anuradhapura. Having defeated the Tamil ruler, he initiates a meritorious building programme in honour of the Buddha, an act of cosmic stabilisation. Dutthagamani's actions are (in a manner that is analogous to the order of ritual in the *Suniyama*) designed to reunify the person (royalty or laity) with the hierarchical order of the Buddhist (cosmic) State. In Dutthagamani's actions power is exercised with a specific *telos* in mind: the subordination of the demonic that is antithetical to the ordering force of the cosmic order. In seeking to *foster* Buddhism the State, like Dutthagamani, seeks to engage in acts of cosmic stabilisation against the fragmenting demonic potential of other religions, which stand hierarchically encompassed by the *Buddhadhamma*. The State's obligation to *foster* Buddhism, is like Dutthagamani's building programme, essentially *karmic*, refracting a cosmological account of history in which beneficence or suffering is dependent on the actions of the past and the present. Thus the State transforms its own immanent demonic and hence disordering potential through its obligation to foster Buddhism. The ontological ground of the Sinhalese myths of State indicates that the virtuous Buddhist State

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[104] ***Constituent Assembly Debates***, Vol. 1, No. 14: Col. 640-699. For a more detailed account of this aspect, see in this volume, B. Schonthal, '*Buddhism and the Constitution: The Historiography and Postcolonial Politics of Section 6.*'

is born of an immanent movement in which evil is overcome from within. The demonic is reconstituted as a higher non-demonic form through the logic of the cosmic order itself – a movement through order, fragmentation and reformation. In its statist obsessions the 1972 Constitution ensured that in the three areas (the structure of the State, language rights and the place of religion) where the Federal Party had the capacity to disorder the encompassing force of the Sinhalese State, the Tamils stood thoroughly encompassed.

Once the Federal Party's constitutional amendments were rejected, it withdrew from any further deliberations of the Constituent Assembly and in October 1972 Chelvanayakam resigned his parliamentary seat seeking to re-contest his Jaffna seat as a mini-referendum on Tamil accession to the new constitution.[105] The government contrived to delay the by-election by three years and in the intervening years Tamil youth groups started preparing for a guerrilla campaign against the state. Simultaneous to the formation of the Tamil New Tigers in 1972 by a group of Jaffna-based students that included Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Federal Party, the remnants of the Tamil Congress, and other Tamil groupings formed the Tamil United Front (TUF) and began to flirt with the prospect of external self-determination for the Tamil-dominated northeast. The TUF put forward a 'Six Point Plan' which they anticipated would form the basis of negotiations with the government. It was a formula outlining the principles of liberal constitutionalism on matters such as language rights, a secular State and decentralisation; but the government was not open to a dialogue over the principles of liberal constitutionalism.[106] The 1972 Constitution thus became a vehicle for the triumph of Sinhalese popular sovereignty, a crowning moment for Buddhist activists, which by 1973 propelled the Tamil youth movement

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[105] International Crisis Group (2009): p.3; Wilson (1994): pp.118-19. The anti-liberal sentiments of the constitution were most starkly manifest in the termination of post-enactment judicial review of executive and administrative action: see, in this volume, N. Jayawickrama, '*Reflections on the Making and Content of the 1972 Constitution: An Insider's Perspective*'; J. Wickramaratne, '*Fundamental Rights and the 1972 Constitution.*'
[106] Wilson (1994): p.124; K.M. de Silva (1986) *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka, 1880-1985* (Lanham: Univ. Press of America): pp.256-58.

into firing its first shots against the State.[107] The epistemic violence that the constitution conveyed to the Tamils, Tamil-speakers and non-Buddhists was clear; it was, as with the reforms of 1956, a clear transmission of the reified tropes of Sinhalese Buddhist popular culture into an authorising *grundnorm*.[108] It restructured how the Sinhalese State, nation, and its people *ought* to see the relationship between themselves and their competing sites of disordering *alterity* in a thoroughly ethno-majoritarian direction that played a significant role in precipitating the drift of Tamil nationalism in a separatist direction.[109]

In between 1975-77 the United Front government disintegrated. First in 1975 the LSSP was expelled from the coalition and by the end of 1976 the breach between the SLFP and CPC was irrevocable. Cynically the SLFP tried to negotiate a deal with an increasingly frail Chelvanayakam and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to extend the life of Parliament on condition that the government address the discrimination that confronted the Tamils. When Chelvanayakam died in March 1977 the negotiations came to an end. In the election of July 1977 the UNP under J.R. Jayewardene won a landslide, decimating the SLFP and leaving the LSSP and CPC with no parliamentary representation. The TULF,

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[107] Wilson (1994): p.136. With the promulgation of the republic, the Ceylon Administrative Service was reconstituted as the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS). The Public Services Commission, which ensured impartiality in governance, had been an important component of the Soulbury Constitution, was also abolished and the SLAS was brought under the control of the Cabinet, provoking the resignation of a significant minority of the CAS. The ensuing politicisation of the public service has intensified since the 1970s, resulting in an inevitable decline in impartiality among senior public servants.

[108] The discourse of constitutionalism in Sri Lanka is therefore structured around an inherent ambivalence, as the figure of the Tamil *other* operates as an internal limit preventing the constitution from ever achieving a full identity with itself. S. Žižek (1991) *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso): pp.109-12.

[109] Asanga Welikala has noted that "the Constituent Assembly drafted a constitution that seemed to only reflect the constitutional worldview of the Sinhala-Buddhist majority, in terms of the 'foremost place' for Buddhism, the privileged constitutional status for Sinhala, and of course the unitary state that was instantiated in both structural and symbolic terms. It thus added to the illegitimacy of the entire post-republican constitutional order from the perspective of a plural polity, an argument that has been made by Tamil nationalist and especially Tamil separatist voices with more validity than should be the case": Welikala (2012).

under its new leader, Appapillai Amirthalingam emerged as the official opposition, an opposition committed to Eelam.

When J.R. Jayewardene became Prime Minister in 1977, one of his first acts was to further centralise executive power with the introduction of the executive presidential system by the Second Amendment to the 1972 Constitution (consolidated by the 1978 Constitution enacted shortly thereafter) with Jayewardene becoming the first executive President. While there was a marginal alleviation of the most onerous forms of anti-Tamil discrimination that had been put in place by SLFP-dominated governments between 1956-77, Jayewardene's period of government witnessed the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 and then the failure to adequately implement the Thirteenth Amendment of 1987 which gave life to the Provincial Councils, the most developed model of decentralisation yet introduced, as a means of granting limited self-government to the Tamils and Muslims of the northeast.

Intrinsic to his self-imaginary Jayewardene invoked the tropes of Asokan monarchy, especially its centralising aspect, seeing himself as the successor to a line of Buddhist kings from Vijaya, the mytho-historical founder of the Sinhalese polity.[110] He failed to grasp the irony of this claim as Vijaya was never consecrated a Buddhist monarch. These Asokan pretensions, echoed by his Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, sought to draw a link between the virtues of Jayewardene's rule and that of Asoka's, the *modernist* refraction of Asokan rituals signalling an ontological revaluation such that in an *ideological* gesture, Asoka becomes integral to the thoroughly modern moralisation of the hierarchical dynamics of the Sinhalese state.

The invocation of Buddhist virtue did not extend to the development of a policy framework that would address Tamil grievances. By the early 1980s an armed Tamil youth insurrection in the north was imminent. Jayewardene exploited this and his inaction precipitated the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983. Tamil separatism was analogous to a demonic disordering force that threatened the physical integrity of the body of the Sinhalese

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[110] Kemper (1991): pp.169-72.

nation. Just as Jayewardene like Sinhalese leaders before him invoked tropes of cosmic hierarchy into his rhetorical flourishes and used it to justify his authority, it was the same cultural logic that structured the regenerative violence directed against the Tamils in 1983. Refracting the logic of a healing ritual, acting "with the force of their own cosmic incorporation"[111] Sinhalese rioters fragmented "their demonic victims, as the Tamils threatened to fragment them, and by doing so resubordinate and reincorporate the Tamil demon in hierarchy."[112] Violence of such a nature, by restoring the integrity of a fragmenting Sinhalese social order, also restores the personal integrity of the Sinhalese individual cum collective as both individual and national anguish are transcended in the ordering force of hierarchy.

The institutional agenda of the current incumbent of Temple Trees draws on the genealogy of a Sinhalese nationalist past. The post-war Sri Lankan State that is emerging is a militarised actualisation of the Sinhalese nationalist imaginary initially put to brilliant performative use by Rajapaksa's political hero, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, in 1956.[113] The Rajapaksas like previous Sinhalese leaders have cultivated a political persona that is steeped in conceptions of cosmic hierarchy – thus either consciously or unconsciously like previous Sinhalese leaders seeking to refract the aura of Sinhalese Buddhist kings. While hierarchy in the context of classical Buddhist kingship has an ontological ground, once its form and content are mediated through a modern bureaucratic order the consequences can be overdetermining. Contemporary Sinhalese practices which invoke cosmological tropes, legendary kings, and mythic heroes can generate Sinhalese nationalist meaning by transforming the local production of such tropes into the national arena with devastating consequences.

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[111] Kapferer (1998): p.101.
[112] Ibid: p.101.
[113] The teleology of the State under the Rajapaksas is classically Bonapartist: Kadirgamar (2010): pp.21-24.

Buddhist States and Galactic Polities

In the classical Buddhist polities of pre-British Sri Lanka the rituals of royal legitimisation were subject to constant expansion.[114] Many of these revolved around the worship of alleged relics of the Buddha and a symbolic expansion of their ontological status, so that by the "twelfth century the tooth and bowl relics [of the Buddha] were being treated as the symbols of legitimate kingship."[115] By the 14th century this had developed into the *Asala Perahara* (procession), a festival of renewal.[116] It was a powerful "ritual of protection that was understood to be a recharging of [the] cosmic power"[117] of kingship, which in turn refracted the ontological status of the Buddha as a "sovereign regulator."[118]

By the Kandyan period, kingship and State power were firmly embedded within a Buddhist cosmological frame. This was the culmination of a number of developments in the polities preceding the Kandyan kingdom. From the 5th century, the king was venerated as a *bodhisattva*, and by the 10th century, at the end of the Anuradhapura period, the notion that kings imagined themselves as kinsmen of the Buddha was firmly entrenched.[119] The consequence was that kingship refracted the aura of the Buddha himself. It was a dynamic that was reinforced in consecration cum coronation ceremonies known as *abhiseka*, which were sometimes performed annually. These ceremonies, at which nobles and others paid homage to the king, turned kings into gods and were essentially "rituals of integration"[120] by which the king

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[114] H.L. Seneviratne (1978) ***Rituals of the Kandyan State*** (Cambridge: CUP): pp.90–114.
[115] Roberts (1994): p.67.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Roberts (2004): p.60.
[118] Tambiah (1976): p.52.
[119] Kemper (1991): pp.48–49; A. Wickremeratne, '*Shifting Metaphors of Sacrality: The Mythic Dimensions of Anuradhapura*' in H.B. Reynolds & B.L. Smith (Eds.) (1987) ***The City as a Sacred Centre: Essays on Six Asian Contexts*** (Leiden: E.J. Brill): pp. 45-59; R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, '*The Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in the Ancient and Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka*' in B.L. Smith (Ed.) (1978) ***Religion and Legitimacy of Power in Sri Lanka*** (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books): pp.96-106.
[120] Roberts (1994): p.68.

would be accorded the status of a Buddha. The rituals confirmed the king's geographical reach as ruler of the whole island, taking the form of a *dipacakravarti* (universal conqueror of the island).[121] The renewal of sacral power was synonymous with the renewal of profane power in the here-and-now world of the socio-political domain.[122]

The myriad forms of obsequiousness that marked the Sinhalese Buddhist social order were also replete in the spatial organisation of the Sinhalese Buddhist polities. What was striking about these polities was the manner in which their physical layout also drew on cosmological metaphors and pantheons, as the cosmos was symbolically refracted in the material domain of the galactic polity.[123] The ontological potentiality of this cosmic order was such that "Mount Meru became a paradigm for the spatial organization of state, capital, and temple"[124] in both Sri Lanka and Buddhist Southeast Asia.[125] In the Theravada Buddhist world the cosmic axis of the polity was usually centred on a "relic of the Buddha, or on the palace of the king, the representative of the Sakra, the king of the gods."[126] In its geographical construction, the Kandyan kingdom mirrored the world of the gods; the ontological ground of the cosmos refracted in the Kandyan landscape, "its architects (the rulers) were seeking to partake of the power of the gods."[127] The organisation of space drew on the ontological potential of the cosmic order. Building programmes initiated by Buddhist kings, such as Dutthagamani and Parakramabahu I in the 2nd century BCE and 12th century CE, respectively, were meticulous in drawing on the sacred organisation of cosmic space. Such actions were at the heart of righteous Buddhist kingship leading to the acquisition of karma,

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[121] Roberts (2004): pp.46–47.
[122] Roberts (1994): p.69.
[123] R. Heine-Geldern, '*Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*' (1942) **Far Eastern Quarterly** 2(1): pp.15–30.
[124] J.S. Duncan (1990) **The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom** (Cambridge: CUP): p.48.
[125] P. Wheatley, '*The Suspended Pelt: Reflections on a Discarded Model of Spatial Structure*' in D.R. Deskins, Jr. (1977) **Geographic Humanism, Analysis and Social Action**, Michigan Geographical Publications, No.17. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan): pp. 47-108.
[126] Duncan (1990): p.50.
[127] Roberts (1994): p.67.

which in turn would have a "cumulative effect [that] would compound blessings"[128] on the laity. Through such meritorious acts, individual kings were giving effect to the principles of righteous Buddhist rule (*dhammiko dhammaraja*), kingship establishing a link between the domain of the gods and the material world.

However, in their administrative functioning, these polities, which established a binary relationship between Buddhist kingship and the cosmic order, were non-centralised structures. They were pulsating entities, so that within "each major or minor principality, there were checks and balances such as duplication within administrative 'departments', interlocking and contesting factional formations of patrons and clients, and devolutionary processes of power parcelization."[129] There was an inherent tension between the claims of *virtual* cosmic sovereignty, as embodied in the holistic nature of Buddhist kingship, and the actual dynamics of State practice.

In its structure, Asoka's Empire has been characterised as a galactic polity.[130] At first glance, it seems as if Asoka exercised centralised political and economic control over the empire.[131] The disparate placing of the inscriptions and Pillar Edicts is seen "as evidence of actual direct control of a far-flung empire."[132] While this image attests to a form of *dhammic virtuality* in which the metaphor of an all-encompassing cosmic sovereignty is presented as the basis of Buddhist kingship, in actuality Asoka's Empire was much more diverse. Far from been a centralised monarchy, this vast Empire was more likely to have been a "galaxy-type structure with lesser political replicas revolving around the central entity and in perpetual motion of fission or incorporation."[133] At its apex stood the "king of kings subsuming in superior ritual and even fiscal relation a vast collection" of subordinate polities.[134]

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[128] Ibid: p.60.
[129] Tambiah (1992): p.173.
[130] Tambiah (1976).
[131] R. Thapar (1961) **Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas** (New Delhi: OUP): p.95.
[132] Tambiah (1976): p.70.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.

This model is consistent with the *cakkavatti* monarch, who as a "wheel rolling world ruler by definition required lesser kings under him who in turn encompassed still lesser rulers."[135] It is likely that the "raja of rajas was more a presiding apical ordinator rather than a totalitarian authority between whom and the people nothing intervened except his own agencies and agents of control."[136] Sections of the Pali Vinaya "suggest that the political systems of at least eastern India [which incorporated its capital Pataliputra] during the time of early Buddhism were constituted on galactic lines."[137]

To the extent that the cosmos constitutes an interlocking whole, with the Buddha at the centre and the gods and the demons inhabiting the outward layers, with the Buddha ultimately capable of encompassing these other beings, this process of cosmic contestation oriented the bureaucratic processes of the pre-colonial polities. The Kandyan kingdom refracted this diffuse cosmological order in its administrative arrangements. In terms of administration, the "royal domain surrounding the capital city of Kandy was made up of nine small districts…under the charge of officials called *rate mahatvaru*."[138] Around the central domain, there were twelve provinces, "an inner circle of smaller provinces and an outer circle of larger and remoter provinces."[139] Just as the authority of the Buddha is subject to fragmentation by the demonic forces that inhabit the margins of the cosmos, the authority of the king "waned as the provinces stretched farther away from the capital."[140] This allowed for the *disava* (provincial governor) of provinces on the Kandyan periphery and semi-periphery to assert a degree of autonomy from the centre.[141] This devolutionary dynamic was also replicated at the level of administration for the Temple of the Tooth, as functionaries were divided into the "outer and inner groups", the outer being concerned with general administration and the inner with ritual

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid: pp.70–71.
[138] Tambiah (1992): p.173.
[139] Ibid: p.174.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Seneviratne (1978): p.114; Tambiah (1992): p.175.

work."[142] Such a devolutionary dynamic extended to the use of non-Kandyans (Muslims and Sinhalese from the coastal plains of the island) in specialist roles within the Kandyan administration. This attests to an image of a galactic polity that reproduced its modes of administration at different levels of remove from the centre.

These devolutionary dynamics were ontologically grounded in the potentiality of a cosmic order that refused an absolutely determining hierarchical moment. The cosmic order fluctuated between moments of unity, fragmentation, and reordering, and this was refracted in the dynamic relation between the centre, the semi-periphery, and the periphery of the Kandyan kingdom. Concomitant with Asoka's Empire, the centre of Kandy was constructed to "mirror both the world of the gods and the cities of the *cakravartis*."[143] The organisation of the central domain of the city resonated with the cosmic order, of which kingship was an integral aspect. The hierarchical intent of the cosmic order conditioned the very architecture of the Kandyan kingdom and its environs. The ontological status of the cosmic order was such that the "city as a whole…was as a heaven to the kingdom as a whole."[144]

In its daily functioning, the Kandyan kingdom, like the earlier Buddhist polities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, actualised the concept of universal Buddhist kingship. However, while hierarchical intent informed daily politics and State practice in these polities, in their actual functioning they exhibited "both dispersed and unitary moments."[145] In the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta*, the Buddha is reputed to have said that on conquering new territory, the *cakkavatti* king tells his vassals "to govern as you did before,"[146] so that the conquered became client kings. The decentralised patron-clientelism that marked the Kandyan kingdom – and the galactic polities in general – may have been given canonical import by the devolutionary imperative that the

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[142] Tambiah (1992): p.174.
[143] Duncan (1990): p.107.
[144] Ibid: p.117.
[145] R. Inden (1990) *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell): p.229.
[146] Collins (1996): p.429.

Buddha, at least by implication, attributes to Buddhist kingship in the shadow of conquest.[147]

In practice, the model of the *cakkavatti* king gave rise to a galactic polity that revealed the ontological potentiality of a cosmic order that refused closure. The consciousness of the galactic polity, as revealed in the administrative practices of the Kandyan kingdom, was lost in the governmental logic of the modern unitary State shaped by the British from the 19th century. This was a unitary state driven by the interests of British mercantile capital, and as such it could not be legitimated by recourse to the hierarchical intent of the Kandyan kingdom, for example, as is common in modern Sinhalese nationalist rhetoric. Ironically, the British recognised the relative autonomy that the Kandyan kingdom had in relation to the rest of the island, with the result that between 1815 to the 1830s the Kandyan Department administered Kandy.

What modern Sinhalese nationalism imagines as a centralised State that has existed from time immemorial is fundamentally the product of the British colonial bureaucratic order of the 19th century. The violent force with which this argument has been prosecuted for much of Sri Lanka's postcolonial life (such that an encompassing violence has become the dominant metaphor in the performative logic of the State) reveals an overdetermined logic.[148] This logic is ontologically grounded in a cosmic order which while fundamentally diverse, lending itself to multiple possibilities, has come to be projected through the practices of the centralised State. Thus cosmological metaphors are realised through the "contemporary technologies of the state,"[149] not in their essential diversity, but as a unified singular echo. Such metaphors once removed from their ritual imaginary or genealogy in Buddhist historiography and captured by a modern bureaucratic order

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[147] The Buddha almost certainly is engaged in a parody on the horrors of war tinged with irony: Tambiah (1976): p.46. In this context it is interesting to note that Hindu-Buddhist thought had no idea how to extinguish a conquered territory "as a sovereign entity, or to annex it in the modern sense": H. L. Shorto, cited in ibid: p.111.

[148] International Crisis Group (2010) *War Crimes in Sri Lanka*, Report N°191 (Brussels).

[149] Kapferer (2001): p.61.

have the capacity to generate violent and murderous consequences.[150]

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[150] At the time of writing these bureaucratic orders "are in the process of taking a more corporate form, operating far more intensely than before in the familial and managerial interests of a new elite that is detaching the state from its previous colonial/imperial nexus and affiliating itself more closely with China": B. Kapferer, '*The Aporia of Power: Crisis and the Emergence of the Corporate State*' (2010) **Social Analysis** 54(1): pp.125-151 at p.135.