

**EDUCATION IN THE LANGUAGE OF CONFLICT: LINGUISTIC AND  
SOCIAL PRACTICE AMONG SRI LANKAN ETHNIC MINORITY YOUTH**

**By**

**Christina Parks Davis**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Anthropology)  
in The University of Michigan  
2011**

**Doctoral Committee:**

**Professor Judith T. Irvine, Chair  
Professor Thomas R. Trautmann  
Professor E. Webb Keane, Jr.  
Associate Professor Barbra A. Meek**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, Thomas G. Davis and Elizabeth N. Davis

## **Acknowledgements**

I owe my gratitude to the students, teachers, and principals at the two schools where I conducted my primary research, which I refer to as Hindu College and Girls' College. In the year and a half that I spent visiting these schools, I was exposed to some of the most creative, resilient, and determined people I have ever met. I learned more from my daily interactions at these schools than could ever be fully expressed within the confines of this dissertation. I would like to particularly thank the students in the 2007 Grade 11 class at Hindu College. At Girls' College, I would like to thank the students in the 2008 Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, as well as the Grades 9 and 10 English-medium classes. I would also like to thank the dedicated members of the Kandy Zonal Department of Education, and all the Kandy and Colombo teachers who took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me.

This dissertation represents a collaborative work between my Sri Lankan research assistants and me. I am grateful to Kumudhini Nadesan for sharing her insights and experiences with me. It is rare to find someone who thinks so actively and critically about language and social difference. I would like to thank Udayaluxmi Jeyaraman for her patience in dealing with the hundreds of hours of sometimes barely audible recordings. I also want to thank my Sinhala teacher, Bandara Herath, who helped facilitate my research and deepened my knowledge of Sri Lankan history and society.

There were many others who have substantially contributed to this project. I want to thank Shoba Palninathan for including me in everything that she did—from research trips to tea plantations, movies at Peradeniya University, and tea with her family in Badulla. I also owe my thanks to Sasikumar Balasundaram for his support of my project, both in Sri Lanka and the US. I would also like to express my thanks to Namil Nizan, Irshad, Anushka Pilimatalawwe, Madhu Karunarathne, and Indika Jayaweera for all their help and guidance. Though I will leave them unnamed here, I am grateful to all the members of the congregation at the Peradeniya chapel.

During my fieldwork, two families were kind enough to allow me to stay in their homes. The Desilva family, including their cook, Michael, provided me with care and support, not only for the two months in which I lived with them, but throughout my fieldwork. I also owe my thanks to the Pillai family, with whom I lived for seven months. I will never forget our conversations over topics such as educational inequality, jungle survival skills, and Harry Potter on the porch, the roof, or during the evening news. Though I didn't actually live with them, my daily visits to the Mubarak residence were vital for both my research and my overall well-being.

I also owe my thanks to many who helped me in Colombo. I would like to express my appreciation to Sutami Ratnavale, whose guest house provided me with a home away from home in Sri Lanka. Her guidance was crucial throughout my stay in Sri Lanka. I also owe my thanks to Gayatri, not only for taking me to my first Tamil-medium school, but for making me feel a part of her family. I would also like to acknowledge Father Sidney Knight for all of his help.

During the course of my research I was guided for two professors: Dr. S. Sandarasegaram from Colombo University and Dr. M. Anes from Peradeniya University. Dr. S. Sandarasegaram gave me valuable insight into the Sri Lankan educational system, and Dr. Anes taught me about the history and society of Sri Lankan Muslims. I would like to express particular thanks John Rogers at the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS) who showed generosity and patience in helping me set up my research project in Sri Lanka. Though I had initially come to Sri Lanka with only small Sinhala language grant from AISLS, the Colombo staff put in tremendous effort to assist me. I would like to especially thank Mrs. Ira Unamboowe and Mr. M. de S. Weerasooriya, who enabled me to obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct research in Sri Lankan schools. I would also like to thank Tissa Jayatilaka at the U.S-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission for his help and guidance throughout my research period. In Sri Lanka and the US, I received valuable advice from well-seasoned Sri Lankan scholars including Anne M. Blackburn, Jeanne Marecek, Daniel Bass, Ian Barrow, Dennis McGilvray, and John Richardson. I also benefitted from conversations with Elizabeth Frantz, whose ethnographic research coincided with my own.

My research in Sri Lanka was based on a decade of research and language study in India. I want to express my utmost appreciation to Dr. K. Karunakaran for introducing me to the Tamil language in the fall of 2000. In helping facilitate my language study and research in India, guiding my dissertation research, and welcoming me into his home, he proved to me much more than a language teacher. I also owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. L. Ramamoorthy, who generously tutored me in Tamil in the summers of 2004 and 2005, and, in a wonderful twist of fate, came to the University of Michigan to teach Tamil from

2008-2009. During this period, he helped me to analyze and prepare the final transcripts for this dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge James Lindholm at the University of Chicago, whose teaching methods allowed me to grasp Tamil grammar in a way that I never had before. I would also like to thank all of my Tamil teachers over the last decade, including Dr. Shanmugam, Dr. C. Sivashanmugam, and Dr. T. Muthukrishnan at Bharathiar University in Coimbatore; Dr. Barathy, Dr. Sundar Kalaiyappan, Mrs. Jayanti, and Mr. David at the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AIIS) in Madurai; Dr. Natanasabapathy, Dr. Ganesan, Dr. Chandramohan, and Dr. Nataraja at Annamalai University in Chitambaram; and Dr. L. Ramamoorthy and Dr. G. Ravishankar at the Pondicherry Institute for Linguistics and Culture. I would also like to thank the office staff, librarians, and graduate students at Bharathiar University and Annamalai University for all their help with my Tamil studies. I would like to particularly thank Dr. Kalai Selvi Sivakumar, who took me under her wing at the very beginning of my studies, and has remained my friend since.

At the University of Michigan, I would to convey my gratitude to my dissertation committee members, Judith T. Irvine, Thomas R. Trautmann, Webb Keane, and Barbra A. Meek. They have all mastered the art of knowing when to give encouragement and when to give critical feedback. I appreciate the way in which they pushed me to develop my ideas further. In addition to my committee members, there were other professors who also helped me develop my work, including Bruce Mannheim, Erik Mueggler, Barbra Metcalf, Farina Mir, Sumathi Ramaswamy, and Michael Lempert.

My intellectual experience at University of Michigan was enriched by conversations with other anthropology students working in South Asia including Laura

Brown, Katherine Martineau, Frank Cody, Daniel Bass, Sonia Das, and Erika Hoffman. I would also like to particularly acknowledge Sherina Feliciano-Santos and Laura Brown for being my companions and intellectual sparring partners throughout the dissertation writing process, which can be bleak and difficult at times. I would also like to thank Claire Insel, Anna Genina, Kirstin Swagman, Aparna Ramakrishnan, Heloise Finch, Guillermo Salas, and Jessica Smith for sharing their ideas with me. Finally, I would like to thank the members of the University of Michigan linguistic anthropology lab for their feedback.

Financial support for this project was provided by the Fulbright Institute of International Education, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS), and by a University of Michigan Department of Anthropology Research Award. Through the U.S-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission, I was able to obtain institutional affiliation in the Arts Faculty at Peradeniya University.

I would like to thank my parents for their support and patience. They not only took interest in hearing every detail of the dissertation experience (from the problems I had trying to write my first grant proposal to the giant spiders infesting my room in Kandy), but even came to visit me in Sri Lanka, providing their own opinions and observations. Finally, I would like to thank Canaan Albright for his love and humor.



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## **List of Abbreviations**

AIIS	American Institute of Indian Studies
AISLS	American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
GCE	General Certificate of Education
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
ICES	International Center for Ethnic Studies
NEC	National Education Commission
NIE	National Institute of Education
NRC	Non-Roman Catholic
RC	Roman Catholic
SLFP	Sri Lankan Freedom Party
TMVP	Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (the Tamil People Liberation Tigers)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNP	United Nationalist Party
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance

## **Abstract**

### **Education in the Language of Conflict: Linguistic and Social Practice among Sri Lankan Ethnic Minority Youth**

**By**

**Christina Parks Davis**

**Chair: Judith T. Irvine**

This dissertation explores the production and maintenance of difference among Tamil and Muslim adolescents in Kandy, Sri Lanka, under the conditions of an ongoing civil war between the Sri Lankan government and a Tamil insurgency group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In Sri Lanka, the national education system has contributed to the creation and perpetuation of conflict through its connection to political and economic inequities. In addition, by segregating students on the basis of language medium, ethnicity and religion, it has served to promote interethnic enmity and mistrust. In this project, rather than assuming that educational institutions are the primary sites for socializing Tamil-speaking adolescents into social differences, I investigate how social differences and conflict are being discursively configured across educational, familial, and peer contexts. My research addresses the following four interrelated themes: 1) educational policy and its relation to sociolinguistic, ethnic, and

religious divisions, 2) the discursive configuration of social difference among adolescents and adults, 3) how adolescents employ interactional strategies to manage the constraints of school settings and Sinhalese-majority public spaces, and 4) the way in which both adolescents and adults, in their interactions in the home, convey underlying assumptions about social difference and conflict. Throughout the dissertation, I chart the relationship between language ideologies (beliefs or ideas about language and its relationship to social formations) inherent in explicit assertions and those that are more underlying (Irvine 2001; Silverstein 1979). I argue that Tamil and Muslim adolescents are constructing “cosmopolitan” futures which are not based on ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, or religion, but educational status and ties to urban centers. Beneath this, however, are deeply problematic divisions between ethnic minority groups and the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: “Kandy is Our Place. You are Puttalam.”

I was six months into my research with the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class at Kandy Girls’ College,<sup>1</sup> when I observed an argument between two girls. That day, all the Hindu and Christian girls had gone to their respective religion classes, while the Muslim girls remained in the classroom, as their Islam teacher was on leave. Nadira and Faiza, aware that I had turned the recorder on, came and sat next to me in the back corner of the classroom. After talking with them for a few minutes, I moved from participant to ratified observer. Within earshot of me and the other girls in the class, Faiza started joking to Nadira that if there was a bomb in Kandy, their upcoming exams would be cancelled. This comment was made in the context of the recent bombings that had occurred throughout the Sinhalese-majority South,<sup>2</sup> including one in proximity to Kandy town. Nadira was trying to participate in the joke, but Faiza, enjoying the attention of her classmates, would not let her get a word in. Finally, Nadira shouted out:<sup>3</sup>

(The English phrases are in italics. The use of the emphatic (*emph.*), and the exclusive first person plural pronoun (*excl.*) are marked.)

(1) <b>Nadira:</b> enakku kanNDi ile baamb vekkoonu. enakku kanNDi ile baamb vekkoonu. [ <i>anaa...</i> ]	(1) <b>Nadira:</b> I want to keep a bomb in Kandy. I want to keep a bomb in Kandy, [ <i>but...</i> ]
(2) <b>Faiza:</b> [kaNDi engaDa naaDu.] niinga puttaLam. KaNDi engaDa naaDu.	(2) <b>Faiza:</b> [Kandy is our ( <i>excl.</i> ) place.] You are Puttalam. Kandy is our ( <i>excl.</i> )

<sup>1</sup> In South Asia, primary and secondary schools are often called “colleges.”

<sup>2</sup> In Sri Lanka the Sinhalese-majority South is often distinguished from the North and the East. The North is majority Tamil, and the East has an approximately equal proportion of Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese (McGilvray 2008).

<sup>3</sup> See chapter five for a more complete account and analysis of this interaction.

(3) <b>Nadira:</b> Hello, Hello. naanu(m) poRandadu skaNDi, <i>birth place</i> skaNDi.	place. (3) <b>Nadira:</b> Hello, Hello. The place where I was born is Kandy, [my] <i>birth place</i> is Kandy.
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As the interaction ensued, Nadira and Faiza began to argue about their respective rights to claim Kandy as their “*naaDu* (place).”

<p>(4) <b>Faiza:</b> <i>birth place</i> kaNDi enDadukku niinga puttaLattula poRandiinga.  (5) <b>Nadira:</b> puttaLattula poRakkala <i>birth place</i> kanNDi. enakku skaNDikku urima irukku. DaDaa kaNDi, mama daa(n) puttaLam. naa(n) ippa kaNDi illadaa(n) iikkiReen. naa(n) skaNDikkudaa(n) viruppam. ungaLukku appaDi sol... appaDinDa niinga baTTicola.  (6) <b>Faiza:</b> baTTikola vaa irundattukku naa(n) poRandadu ingee daa(n).  (7) <b>Nadira:</b> naanu(m) poRandadu inga vaLandu <i>two, three years</i> inge daan irundeen. <i>Fourth</i>kkku daa(n) ange pooneen.  (8) <b>Faiza:</b> sari. <i>two, three years</i> daanee. naa(n) irukkavee illa baTTikola vila  (9) <b>Nadira:</b> ippa <i>five years</i> aa irukkuRee(n)  (10) <b>Faiza:</b> naa baTTikola vile irukkavee ille, kaNDi engaDa kaNDikku maTTu(m) edaavadu naDanduccenDaa Nadira va daa(n) kolluvee(m).</p>	<p>(4) <b>Faiza:</b> You say your <i>birth place</i> is Kandy but you were born in Puttalam.  (5) <b>Nadira:</b> Puttalam is the place where I went. Kandy is [my] <i>birth place</i>. I have rights to Kandy. Daadaa is Kandy, maamaa (emph.) is Puttalam. I am now in Kandy (emph.). It’s Kandy (emph.) I like. You can’t say it like that. If it is like that, then you are from Batticaloa.  (6) <b>Faiza:</b> For being in Batticaloa, I was born here (emph.).  (7) <b>Nadira:</b> I was also born here and I grew up here (emph.) for <i>two, three, four years</i>. On the fourth year, I went there.  (8) <b>Faiza:</b> Okay. <i>Two, three years</i> (emph.). I (emph.) have never lived in Batticaloa.  (9) <b>Nadira:</b> I’ve been in Kandy for <i>five years</i>.  (10) <b>Faiza:</b> I have never been in Batticaloa. Kandy, in our (excl.) Kandy only if something happened, I will kill Nadira (emph.).</p>
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For Faiza and Nadira, the immediate issue in the interaction was not the idea of planting a bomb in Kandy, but Nadira’s right to claim that she is a Kandy girl. In line 10, however, Faiza brings the argument back to the issue of violence by commenting that if something were to happen in Kandy, she would kill Nadira. Faiza was born in Kandy to a father from Kandy and a mother from Batticaloa, in Sri Lanka’s eastern region. Because of the dominance Tamils from the North and East have held over other Tamil-speaking groups since the colonial period, the North and East are often associated with



educational prestige and “good” Tamil. Nadira, though she insists that she was born in Kandy, had moved to Kandy two years before from the Muslim-majority coastal town of Puttalam, just northwest of Kandy. Puttalam is often associated with a stigmatized Tamil, which is linked with Muslims. At the beginning of the interaction Faiza states that if there were a bomb in Kandy, their exams would be cancelled. In line 1, Nadira takes this a step further by declaring “I want to keep a bomb in Kandy. I want to keep a bomb in Kandy, but...” In line 2, Faiza interrupts Nadira, claiming that she is Puttalam, and not Kandy. The assumption behind Faiza’s statement is that it is only okay to joke about bombing Kandy if it is your own “*naaDu* (place).” As an indication of how these girls received this interaction, the next day in school Faiza approached me and asked, “*sandaiya naan win paNiTTeen illaya?*” (I won the argument, didn’t I?)

Sinhalese, who are mainly Theravada Buddhist, make up approximately three quarters of Sri Lanka’s population. They speak Sinhala, which is an Indo-European language related to the languages of North India. The largest minority group is Tamils, the majority of whom are Hindus.<sup>4</sup> They speak Tamil, a Dravidian language also spoken in South India. Tamils have been historically differentiated into two groups (or sub-ethnicities). Alternatively referred to as “Sri Lankan” Tamils, “Ceylon” Tamils, or “indigenous” Tamils; North (Jaffna) and East (Batticaloa) Tamils settled on the island 2,000 years ago.<sup>5</sup> They currently reside in the northern and eastern regions and in urban centers in the Sinhalese-majority South. Up-country (*malaiyaha* or *malainaTTu*) Tamils,

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<sup>4</sup> There are significant Roman Catholic and Protestant (commonly referred to as Non-Roman Catholic (NRC)) populations among both Tamils and Sinhalese.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I have chosen to refer to Tamils from the northern and eastern regions as “North and East” Tamils, as terms such as “Sri Lankan” Tamil imply that other Tamil groups are not Sri Lankan citizens, or do not have a rightful place on the island. When I refer to “Sri Lankan” Tamils, I am referring to all Tamils living in Sri Lanka.

who are also referred to as “Indian” Tamils, “estate” Tamils, or “plantation” Tamils, came from South India during the British period (1815-1948) as laborers in the coffee, tea, and rubber plantations in the South-Central Highlands.<sup>6</sup> Until 1988, the vast majority of Up-country Tamils were denied citizenship. Currently about 70% of Up-country Tamils still reside on tea plantations, with others living in cities and towns throughout the Up-country, the North and East, and the Sinhalese-majority South (Bass 2009; Daniel 1996). The second largest minority group is Muslims, some of whom are descendants of Arab traders who settled on the island 900 years ago; and others who are descendants of Indian traders of more recent origin (Little 2003). Muslims reside in a significant concentration in the East (which is majority Tamil-speaking), and in scattered pockets throughout cities, towns, and villages in the Sinhalese-majority South.<sup>7</sup> Though the majority of Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, they define themselves as a separate ethnic group, on the basis of religion rather than language (Nuhuman 2007).<sup>8</sup> Since the early 1980s, Sri Lanka has been ravaged by an ethnic conflict, primarily between the Sri Lankan army and a Tamil insurgency group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Since the post-independence period, Sri Lankan schools have been segregated on the basis of language medium, ethnicity, and religion. A former Christian missionary, currently Buddhist, national school, Girls’ College is located just outside of the center of

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<sup>6</sup> The terms *malaiyaka tamizh* and *malainaTTu tamizh* (widely translated as Up-country Tamil) have been growing in popularity among this group since the 1990s. Rather than the terms “Indian” Tamil, which contrasts them with so-called “Sri Lankan” Tamils, this term emphasizes their attachment to the hill-country region as the basis for their socio-cultural and political identity (Bass 2009). Some Tamils of recent Indian origin, such as those who have never resided in the hill-country, however, reject these terms. For example, a Colombo housekeeper I knew whose grandparents had come to Sri Lanka from South India in the 1940s to work as street-cleaners in Colombo prefers to refer to herself as an “Indian” Tamil.

<sup>7</sup> In 1990, the LTTE expelled thousands of Muslims from Jaffna. Much of this population is still living in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps in Puttalam and nearby areas.

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in Tamil Nadu, Tamil-speaking Muslims identify themselves as “Muslim Tamils.”

Kandy town. Girls' College is one of a small number of government schools in Sri Lanka that, with Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams, combines students from all major ethnic and religious groups. But while Girls' College seeks to explicitly promote a "pluralistic" identity, in everyday practices the Tamil-medium stream, which consists of Tamil and Muslim students, remains isolated from the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school. Though Tamil-medium students are highly multilingual, they rarely interact with Sinhalese students, either inside or outside the classroom.

The interaction above occurred in June 2008, during a particularly heightened period in the ongoing ethnic conflict. Seeking to bring about a military solution to the ethnic conflict, the Sri Lankan army was in the midst of a large-scale campaign to infiltrate the last LTTE strongholds in the northern Vanni region.<sup>9</sup> In May 2009, after months of brutal combat costing the lives of thousands of soldiers and civilians, the Sri Lankan government declared victory over the LTTE. The fighting was mostly confined to the northern and eastern regions. However, throughout the Sinhalese-majority South (including Kandy), there were frequent suicide, bus, and roadside bombings. In light of an ongoing rumor that the LTTE was planning to bomb Kandy national schools, security at Girls' College was particularly tight.

At the time of this interaction, Faiza and Nadira's mention of the bomb was not particularly notable to me. However, a few weeks afterwards, a Peradeniya University student from Jaffna town,<sup>10</sup> an area that had been severely impacted by the civil war, spotted the transcript of the interaction while glancing through my notebook.<sup>11</sup> He

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<sup>9</sup> The Vanni refers to the mainland area of the Northern Province, just south of the Jaffna Peninsula, which covers Mannar, Mallaitivu, and Vavuniya districts, as well as most of Kilinochchi district.

<sup>10</sup> Peradeniya University is located just outside of Kandy town.

<sup>11</sup> To protect my research subjects, in my notes I always used aliases for teachers and students, and did not

seemed immediately shocked and disturbed by the girls' reference to planting a bomb in Kandy, and asked me (in English), "Why would they say that?"

Within Sri Lanka, Kandy has complex and often contradictory associations. Located in the center of the tea plantation region in the south-central highlands, Kandy was the site of the last independent Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom, which was annexed by the British in 1815, consolidating their rule over the entire island. At the same time that Kandy, which is majority Sinhalese, has high symbolic value for Sinhalese Buddhism and the Buddhist state, it is also a highly multilingual and multiethnic urban center, with Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims living together in the same residential neighborhoods. Kandy is an important center for trade with the surrounding tea plantation region, and, like most large Up-country towns, it is a second-tier government center, employing both Sinhala- and Tamil-medium administrative personnel (Tambiah 1986). In this encounter, why are Nadira and Faiza arguing about their respective rights to claim Kandy as their *naaDu* (place)? And, what is at stake in this argument?

### **Configuring Difference and Conflict**

This dissertation explores how Sri Lankan Tamil and Muslim adolescents (ages 14-17) are discursively configuring difference and conflict during a period of national unrest and outright conflict. In Sri Lanka, language and educational policies, as related to the perpetuation of inequity and difference, have been implicated in both the causes and the perpetuation of conflict. During the colonial period, Jaffna Tamils received privileged access to missionary education and, as a result, held civil service and professional jobs disproportionate to their percentage of the population (Tambiah 1986). In the post-independence period, newly elected Sinhalese-majority governments sought

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use the names of the schools where I was conducting research.

to even out these inequities by passing policies to improve access to education and employment for all Sinhalese (at the direct expense of ethnic minority groups). Their language and religion were incorporated into the nation's official policies, and they benefited from improved access to government and professional employment. The LTTE's eventual fight for justice and self-determination was motivated by the government's reluctance to incorporate Tamil minorities into the Sinhalese Buddhist state, and grant them just distribution of resources (discriminatory measures specifically targeted education and employment) (Sorenson 2008). Sri Lanka's post-independence educational policies were extremely successful in making education available to all children regardless of socioeconomic background and region of residence (Little 2003). However, in contrast to other postcolonial nation-states (such as India), by segregating students on the basis of language medium (and therefore ethnicity) and religion, national educational policies have acted to explicitly reinforce divisions among students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and through this, perpetuated conflict (de Silva 1999; Perera et al. 2004).

In the future, the national education system will play a large role in whether or not the conflict will persist or be ameliorated beyond the recent military defeat of the LTTE. But while educational institutions are crucial in inculcating youth into social divisions, it is also important to consider how youth—in their homes, neighborhoods, and peer-groups—are exposed to multiple, and sometimes competing, models of difference (Agha 2005b). In this dissertation, I examine configurations of difference among Tamil-speaking groups (including Up-country Tamils, North and East Tamils, and Muslims), and between Tamil-speaking groups and the Sinhalese-majority. I investigate the

complex ways in which adolescents interact and inhabit different social domains, and how they draw on models or ideologies from different arenas to discursively configure social difference and conflict. I also consider which aspects of these patterns are grounded in the specific historical moment of my research period, and which are more lasting. This dissertation argues that Tamil-speaking adolescents are acting to discursively align themselves with an idea of a cosmopolitan Kandy which transcends linguistic, ethnic, and religious differences. Underlying this, however, are problematic moral divisions between ethnic minority groups and the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

I draw on research conducted among Tamil-speaking (Tamil and Muslim) students (Grades 10 and 11, ages 14-17) enrolled in two government schools in Kandy, Sri Lanka: Hindu College, a Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school; and Girls' College, a Buddhist national school with Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams. While all students at Hindu College are of the same ethnic group (Tamil), Girls' College combines students from all major ethnic and religious groups. In addition, while most Hindu College students are from lower-class backgrounds, Girls' College students are from a much broader range of class backgrounds. Finally, while Hindu College comprises both genders, Girls' College is a girls' school.

This dissertation begins by focusing on educational institutions and expands outward. Firstly, I look at how national educational policies, when instituted at the level of individual schools, act to instantiate and reinforce sociolinguistic, ethnic, and religious divisions among students. Secondly, I link the interactional and the institutional by looking at how schools become sites for the contestation of different models of correct or appropriate speech or "legitimate" language (Bourdieu 1991), and through this, power

hierarchies. Thirdly, I analyze how adolescents draw on models and ideologies from different arenas to discursively reconfigure widely circulating categories of difference. Fourthly, I consider how students employ interactional strategies in their peer groups to manage the demands of both school settings and Sinhalese-majority public spaces. Finally, I explore how adolescents and adults, in their interactions in the home, are conveying underlying assumptions about social difference and conflict.

Drawing on recent approaches in linguistic anthropology, I employ a language ideological approach to the study of multilingual language practices and social differentiation. The concept of language ideologies has proven to be highly useful in allowing scholars to link social forms and forms of talk (Woolard 1998). Silverstein (1979:193) defines language ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” With a more socio-cultural focus, Irvine (1989:255) defines it as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” Building on past scholarship in sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1964; Labov 1972), studies in language ideology further our understanding of the way language is used to indicate the social identity of speakers by making linguistic variation stand as a basis for social differentiation (Errington 2000; Ochs 1992; Silverstein 1998).

Writing against traditions in sociolinguistics and ethnography that have looked at sameness and similarity, language ideological studies emphasize attention to borders and boundaries. In contrast to past work focusing on the “speech community” as a bounded sociolinguistic unit, Irvine and Gal (2000:75) examine the way in which “identity is produced by ideas of opposition between culturally defined groups, and by practices that

promote exclusion, divergence, and differentiation.” In this analysis, I explore the way in which conditions of conflict can elucidate language ideological processes, and their relationship to ongoing linguistic and social change.

As part of delineating a language ideological approach, Irvine (2001:25) argues that language ideologies are to “be investigated independently of the distribution of sociolinguistic facts, not as a substitute for them.” Drawing on Silverstein (1979), she further suggests that studies of language ideologies must consider both explicit metalinguistic assertions, and the “terms and presuppositions of metapragmatic discourse” (2001:25). I suggest that in situations where social differences are particularly weighted (such as the politicizing of sub-ethnic and ethnic categories in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict), formerly taken-for-granted assumptions about language and its relationship to social formations are problematized (Kroskrity 1998, 2000). But, what is the relationship between configurations of difference that are available for explicit commentary and those that are more underlying? In addition, how do we chart the relationship between culturally and historical specific construals of language and more enduring social forms (Woolard 1998)? Over the past decade, language ideological studies have focused more on the content of language ideologies (and their relevance for power hierarchies or political processes) than on such semiotic dimensions of language ideological processes (Philips 1998). In this project, I employ a multivocal approach to the study of language ideological processes, which considers the relationship between the pragmatic and the metapragmatic, as well as that between explicit metalinguistic assertions and the “terms and presuppositions of metapragmatic discourse.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As Philips (1998) observes, this approach is not simply one that we take in the data analysis, but was involved in the data collections as well.



### **Why are Nadira and Faiza Arguing about their Rights to Kandy?**

In the opening segment, I asked why Nadira and Faiza were arguing about their right to claim Kandy as their “*naaDu* (place).” I found that in the Tamil-medium stream at Girls’ College, while teachers are emphasizing deeply entrenched sociolinguistic divisions among Jaffna Tamils, Up-country Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese; the Grade 10 Tamil-medium girls in their interactions with one another are acting to define themselves in a way that is not restricted by ethnicity, sub-ethnicity (Up-country Tamil vs. North and East Tamil), or religion, but belonging to an idea of Kandy as a multiethnic and multireligious urban center. As part of this process, though Jaffna Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim Tamil have long been recognized as salient Tamil varieties, they are imagining an emergent “normative” spoken Tamil that is not linked to ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, caste, or religion, but to educational level and ties to cosmopolitan centers.<sup>13</sup>

It may seem peculiar to some readers that during this heightened period in the ethnic conflict, these girls would circumvent the politically charged divisions among Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese. For these girls, is class and educational status, as related to their linguistic performances, replacing ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, and religion as dominant modes of difference? A glance below the surface reveals that this situation is not what it may initially seem. In fact, for Tamil and Muslim youth, ethnic differences run very deep.

Though the Grade 10 girls’ aspirations to be cosmopolitan may involve an imagining of a multilingual and multiethnic Kandy, these imaginings do not entail belonging to the Sri Lankan nation-state. I show how, through an indexical process, the

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term “normative” rather than “standard” as the term “standard” can imply the existence of a single ratified linguistic variety.

girls are mapping differences among their Tamil-medium classmates onto differences between the Tamil-medium stream and the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school (as well as Kandy society). As opposed to girls from peripheral areas, Kandy girls are cosmopolitan, well educated, multilingual, and as such, coexist well with the Sinhalese. While this imagining of Kandy is specific to the place itself (as a multiethnic urban center with a firm middle class and elite educational institutions), it also has leaky boundaries with the global world. To belong to Kandy is to move competently within the city itself, as well as elsewhere. Most of these girls do not assume that they will spend the rest of their lives in Sri Lanka, but consider migration for higher education, employment, or marriage to be a very real possibility. I suggest that while these girls may construct social configurations that appear to challenge the salience of ethnicity and religion, divisions between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking groups are extremely pervasive and will not be easily appeased.

## **The Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict**

### **Shifting Identifications**

Throughout this dissertation, I seek to ground my analysis of the contemporary ethnic conflict in deeper historical, political, and socio-cultural processes. In Sri Lanka, it was not until the 1950s that ethnicity—as based on language rather than race, religion, or locality—emerged as a primary mode of socio-cultural and political identification (Daniel 1996; Rogers 1994; Spencer 1990). In the following, I discuss how the ethnicization of identity in Sri Lanka emerged as the result of three main processes: the politicizing of racial categories during the British period; the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim revivalist movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and the

political and economic processes that occurred in Sri Lanka on the eve of independence (Rogers 1994; Spencer 1990).

### **The Census and the Politicizing of Racial Categories**

There are several pertinent contrasts between British colonial rule in Sri Lanka and India. While caste was seen as an important component of the knowledge concerning India (Trautmann 1997), in Sri Lanka, race rather than caste was of central importance (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Rogers 1994). Thus, just as the census can be seen as changing how caste operated in Indian society (Cohn 1987), in Ceylon, the census supported an understanding of society based on ethnicity (Bass 2009).

Highly influenced by racial theory, social variety in Sri Lanka was interpreted in biological terms. Thus, groups with different languages, religions, customs, and dress, were thought to comprise distinct “races” (Daniel 1996). The three main “races” delineated in the census included the following (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:27):

Sinhalese (Kandyans and Low-country)  
Tamils (Ceylon and Indian)  
Moors<sup>14</sup> (Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors)

Other “races” included the Veddas, Burghers (divided into Dutch and Portuguese Burghers), Malays, Eurasians, and Europeans (1990:27).

Beginning in 1833, the British organized political representation on the basis of racial categories (with only some of the above categories becoming politically significant). In 1833, a common administration for the whole island was set up, consisting of a government by the Governor and Legislative Executive Councils. The British appointed three natives to be unofficial members of the Legislative council. The three individuals who were chosen were a Low-country Sinhalese, a Burgher, and a

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<sup>14</sup> Moor was a term that the British used to refer to Sri Lanka’s Muslim population.

Tamil. In 1889, two additional members were added to represent Kandyan Sinhalese and Moor populations. Though the constitution of the Legislative changed in the next decades, some degree of communal representation remained until 1931, when it was abolished in favor of territorial electorates (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

As was also the case in India, the administrative division of the island according to language contributed to territory-based struggles. Under British administration, areas with a majority of Sinhala speakers were administered in Sinhala, and areas with a majority of Tamil speakers were administered in Tamil. These administrative boundaries would have a large impact on post-independence political formations. In fact, the demarcation of Tamil *Eelam* in the North and East, first articulated by the Federal Party in 1956, almost perfectly corresponded to the administrative boundaries of the colonial era (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

### **Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim Revivals**

The religious and cultural revivals among Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims in the middle and late nineteenth centuries were also critical for the consolidation of their separate ethnic and political identities. Though differing from one another in various ways, the Buddhist and Hindu movements can be broadly understood as reactions to the dominance achieved by Christianity and Christians (who were engaged in aggressive proselytizing practices) during the colonial period (Roberts 1979; Samaraweera 1979). By contrast, the Muslim revival, which started a few decades later, was more of a response to the emerging Tamil and Sinhalese identities than to missionary practices (which did not particularly target Muslims).

In the middle and late nineteenth century there was a Buddhist revival led by a

non-peasant intelligentsia under the leadership of educated Sinhala Buddhists and monks from the Sinhalese Low-country (Obesekere 1979). As Nissan and Stirrat (1990) observe, the emphasis on Buddhism was intertwined with a wider cultural assertion that included race and language. Though rooted earlier, the revival was partially facilitated by the arrival of Colonel Olcott, Madame Blavasky, and other Theosophists in 1880. In the next decades, new Buddhist socio-educational and religious associations were formed. In addition, Buddhist schools were started (which stood in competition with Christian missionary schools). Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), who provided leadership to the movement, had a strong conviction that the Sinhala Buddhists were the sons of the soil and that minorities were “alien” people (this ideology would define Sinhala Buddhist nationalisms of later decades) (Nuhuman 2007:101). Additionally, ongoing British archeological investigations in the Dry Zone area of Sri Lanka (which had been the seat of the ancient kingdoms of the island), as well as the discovery of ancient chronicles dating back 1,500 years (written by Buddhist monks and telling primarily of royal exploits in relation to Buddhism), were used for Sinhalese to prove their superior race, language, and civilization (which rivaled the British). Emerging from this movement was a view that the Sinhalese constituted a unique race with a common language (Sinhala) and religion (Theravada Buddhism) (Nissan and Stirrat 1990).

At the same time as the Buddhist revival, there was a parallel movement of Hindu revival among Tamils in both India and Sri Lanka. As among the Buddhists, “Hindu reformism was characterized by open denunciations of Christianity, by a denigration of Western ways and by a movement to regenerate the Hindu (Saiva) religion” (Roberts 1979:228). In Sri Lanka, the revival was primarily rooted in Jaffna, where there had been

a strong Christian missionary presence. The revival was championed by Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879), who also spread the movement to South India. Navalar translated literary works to encourage the use of the Tamil language and spread Hindu Saiva principals. In addition, he also founded several Hindu organizations, such as the *Saiva Paripalana Sabhai* (formed in 1888), and founded several Saiva schools in Jaffna (Nuhuman 2007). It is important to realize that despite the fact that the Buddhist and Hindu revivals emphasized separate Tamil and Sinhalese political identities, the development of these identities were primarily directed toward the British. As Nissan and Stirrat (1990:32) state, “It was only later, after independence, that the British were to be replaced by Tamils as the ‘dangerous other’ implied in much of the self-conscious proclamations of Sinhala identity and community.”

The Muslim revival movement was immediately spurred by the 1883 arrival of Arabi Pasha (1839-1911), an exiled Egyptian rebel leader. In the years that followed, Arabi Pasha, interacting with local Muslim leaders, served as a motivator. Similar in character to the Buddhist and Hindu revival movements, the movement focused on establishing schools (such as Al Madurasathuz Zahira, which was founded in 1892), and reinterpreting and purifying Islamic doctrine (Roberts 1979).

During the late nineteenth century, Muslims started to consolidate a separate ethnic identity from Tamils, with whom they shared a first language. Debates between prominent Tamil and Muslim leaders played a large role in this process. The main figure in the debates was a Tamil Hindu named Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who was a member of the legislature. In a paper entitled the “The Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon,” read before the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1888, Ramanathan employed

physical, social, and cultural evidence to argue that Muslims originated from South India and were of the same race as the one to which he belonged. This, in turn, implied that Muslims comprised a Tamil group that had converted from Hinduism to Islam (Nuhuman 2007; Samaraweera 1979).

Ramanathan's paper proved particularly controversial, as it emerged in the middle of negotiations to convince the governor to add a Kandyan Sinhalese and a Muslim to the legislative assembly (which was achieved in 1889). Muslims were particularly furious with Ramanathan's case, as it challenged their right to separate political representation. Muslim political leaders, such as Abdul Azeez, responded to Ramanathan with their own counter-arguments, emphasizing their Arab heritage to deny that Tamils and Muslims were of the same race. They explained the fact that the majority of Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil by explaining that it has been a "lingua franca" in the region at the time when Arab migrants reached South India, and that it had simply been adopted for convenience. They strongly discounted the physical resemblance of the Muslims to Tamils and stressed the "Arabic profile" of Muslims. They did not deny the mixture of Tamil and Muslim blood, however, explaining that some of the Arab traders had intermarried with local Tamil women (Nuhuman 2007; Samaraweera 1979).

### **The Post-Colonial Period**

It was in the decades before independence from the British that the growing sense of Sinhala and Tamil identity interacted with specific political and economic processes to set the stage for conflict. These included the communal franchise and the economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s. In the pre-independence period, issues over the franchise forced Tamils into more extreme communal positions. In the years between 1920 and 1948,

there were several commissions of inquiry regarding whether a communal provision should be built into a system of universal franchise (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Deeming “communalism” in politics to be retrogressive, the British favored a constitution broadly based on the Westminster pattern, which would ignore the issue of sectional representation (following a one-person, one-vote framework). Sinhalese were generally in favor of this system, as they knew that because they represented such a clear numerical majority, their political dominance would be secured. Tamils, on the other hand, saw such a system as discriminatory, and continually demanded an electoral system that would protect the “rights” of the minorities. It was during negotiations over successive constitutions that Tamils started to emphasize their racial and cultural differences from the Sinhalese (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Roberts 1979).

During this same period, economic issues also contributed to heightening communal sentiment. With the growth of the plantation economy in the middle of the nineteenth century, large numbers of Tamils from South India arrived to work on the plantations in the South Central Highlands. At the same time, Tamils from the North and East migrated to the South for professional and civil service employment. When an economic crisis in the 1920 and 1930s brought about high levels of unemployment, Sinhalese groups responded by demanding that Tamils (either from India or the North and East) be removed from Sri Lanka. By 1927, Sinhalese unionists unsuccessfully demanded the repatriation of Indian labor (Nissan and Stirrat 1990:33), but by independence in 1948, the Sinhalese-majority government had succeeded in forcing large numbers of Indian Tamils to repatriate to India.

Already in the 1930s and 1940s, ethnic hostilities as tied to access to resources



(communal representation, employment, and education) were gaining momentum. As Roberts (1979:179) states, “Those ethnic groups in a numerical minority feared a future that would bring Sinhalese political domination with its attendant economic dimensions. The Ceylon Tamils, on the other hand, were perceived to have a disproportionate share of posts in that holy of holies, government services: thereby providing the Sinhalese with a grievance and battle cry.” However, it was not until the mid 1950s that the Tamil-Sinhala conflict would fully emerge (Spencer 1990).

### **Situating my Research**

Since the 1980s, there have been a number of attempts to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict. In 2002, the conflict met a brief repose when the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE signed a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire agreement. However, by early 2006, the ceasefire had been officially dissolved. This research was conducted in 2007 and 2008, during a period of heavy combat in the East and North, and frequent suicide bombings, bus, and roadside bombings throughout the island.

The upsurge in violence can be seen as partly spurred by President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s election in 2005. While the previous president, Chandrika Kumaratunga, had sought to address Tamil grievances by setting up a new constitution with a devolved federal set-up, Rajapaksa, a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist (who also belonged to the SLFP), vowed to maintain a unitary state structure. In addition, he was also expected to lead a harsher government line toward the LTTE. His election caused many Tamils to lose confidence in the possibility of finding a political solution to the conflict (de Silva 2007).

The ceasefire began to crumble with renewed violence in late 2005, and by the

middle of 2006, Sri Lanka had descended into all-out war. In 2002, the LTTE had controlled large amounts of land in East and North (excluding the Jaffna Peninsula).<sup>15</sup> When the LTTE attempted to assassinate the army chief in April 2006 and the defense secretary in December 2006, the army responded by launching a major military offensive in the East. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, the army used the reclaiming of a small piece of land in the East known as “Toppigala” to declare victory over the entire Eastern region. As is well known in Sri Lanka, the military successes in the East are directly attributable to the army’s collaboration with Karuna, the former leader of the LTTE’s Eastern wing, who had broken off from the LTTE in 2004 to form the *Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal* (TMVP), or the Tamil People Liberation Tigers. Following their successes in the East, the Rajapaksa government, now seeking an outright military solution to the conflict, started a large-scale operation to take over the last LTTE-held territories in the Vanni region in the North, at the cost of many military and civilian lives. By early 2009, it was clear that the LTTE could not maintain its territory. Resisting the sustained government offensive, the LTTE chose to retreat to a small area south of the Jaffna Peninsula, along with the civilian Tamil population under its control. In May 2009, the Sri Lankan government, after infiltrating this area and killing the chief commander of the LTTE, Prabhakaran, and several other top officials, declared victory over the LTTE. Though perhaps an end to the war, as a political solution that addresses the grievances of Sri Lanka’s ethnic minority groups is yet to be found, it does not represent an end to the conflict.

### **Kandy: A Historic Place of Retreat**

Historically, Kandy has been a place of retreat. During the Anuradhapura period

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<sup>15</sup> The Sri Lankan government has controlled the Jaffna Peninsula since 1995.

(third to ninth century AD), there was a significant Sinhala Buddhist civilization in Sri Lanka. This state, however, was continuously under pressure from South Indian Tamil-speaking Hindus. One particular Tamil king, Elara, ruled Anuradhapura for over forty years in the second century BC, until he was defeated by the Sinhala-Buddhist King Dutuganunu. Pressure from Tamil invaders eventually forced the kingdom to retreat southward, first to Polonnaruwa, then to various other capitals, until the last phase of Sinhalese independence, which centered on Kandy (Roberts 1979).

Previously, the central mountainous region of Sri Lanka had never been well developed, highly populated, or a civilizational center. As de Silva states, “The region, known as Malayarata, was important only as an occasional centre of resistance against foreign invasions and as a haven for insurrectionists and outlaws” (de Silva 1981:134). Initially a client kingdom of the Kingdom of Kotte, Kandy established itself as an independent force during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To ensure its survival, it occasionally allied with the Jaffna Kingdom in the North,<sup>16</sup> as well as Portuguese (1594-1612) and Dutch (1685-1708) colonial rulers. In the 1590s, the two most treasured relics of the Buddha, the tooth relic and the alms bowl (traditionally kept in possession of the king at the chief administrative center on the island and associated with the continuity of Sinhalese kingship) passed into the hands of the Kandyan rulers.<sup>17</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Kandy also served as a place of retreat for coastal Muslim traders, who suffered severe persecution by the Portuguese and the Dutch, who

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<sup>16</sup> The Jaffna Kingdom established itself in the thirteenth-century, and prospered in the early part of the fourteenth century. It maintained its independence until it was conquered by the principal Sinhalese kingdom, Kotte. It later recovered its independence and survived until 1620, when it was conquered by the Portuguese (de Silva 1981:127).

<sup>17</sup> Today the tooth relic is kept at the Dalida Maligawa (the Temple of the Tooth) in the center of Kandy town.

considered them to be bitter rivals in trade (Nuhuman 2007:32). As an indication of the complexity of the Kandyan Kingdom, from 1739 until it was defeated by the British in 1815, it was ruled by the Nayakkar dynasty. The Nayakkars belonged to the Vaduga caste, a Telegu-speaking group originally hailing from Madurai in South India (de Silva 1981).

Highly multifaceted in the pre-colonial era, Kandy took on its full character as a multiethnic and multilingual urban center with the arrival of the plantation economy during the British period. The beginnings of British rule contributed to creating an insular effect among the Kandyan Sinhalese. As Roberts (1979:133) states, “The substitution of British control for Nayakkar rule had the effect of reinforcing and deepening the commitment to the old society, and to institutions, secular and religious, associated with it.” With the plantation economy (coffee and, later, tea) in the mid-nineteenth century came an influx of social groups—British planters and missionaries; Moor and Chetty traders; Low-country Sinhalese traders, laborers, settlers, clerks; and Indian plantation laborers. The arrival of these new groups created resentment among the Kandyan Sinhalese, who, by the end of the twentieth century, had a “firm conviction that they were the survivors, so to speak, of a patrimony lost—a perception that had considerable foundation in fact” (Roberts 1979:133). Resentment was not only targeted toward the British, but the Low-country Sinhalese as well. Kandyan Sinhalese feared that the Low-country Sinhalese would dominate the new electoral constituencies in the Kandyan district (a fear that was confirmed in the 1920s) (1979:133). But in the decades that ensued, Kandyan sectional nationalism dwindled with the rise of pan-Sinhalese nationalism, which pitted Sinhalese as a unified social group against Tamils (who were

much less internally unified). The distinction between Kandyan and Low-country Sinhalese, however, is still highly linguistically, socio-culturally, politically, and economically salient (Daniel 1996).

Today, Kandy and other Up-country towns are among the only places in Sri Lanka where Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims reside in the same residential neighborhoods.<sup>18</sup> Tambiah (1986), in his treatise on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, makes a correlation between the co-presence of Sinhalese and Tamils in certain geographic areas and the potential for violence. He maps out the areas with significant Sinhalese and Tamil populations, which he terms sensitive areas. These include Colombo and its suburbs; the Central provinces (including the towns of Kandy, Matale, Badulla, Ratnapura, and Nuwara Eliya); and the Eastern districts, including Vavuniya, Trincomallee, and Amparai (1986:9-12). Rather than necessarily equating the co-presence of Tamil and Sinhalese (not to mention Muslims) in Kandy with the potential for violence, I suggest that Kandy, as an ethnically mixed urban center with strong ties to Sinhalese Buddhism, the Buddhist state, and the larger tea plantation region, is a particularly pressing site for the study of shifting identifications (among Tamil-speaking groups, and between Tamil-speaking groups and the Sinhalese Buddhist majority).

### **From Policies to Practice: The National Education System, Ethnic Difference, and Conflict**

For post-colonial nation-states, language planning and educational policies have been intimately linked with conflict. The equation of language and nation, widely recognized as an ideological red herring (dated to Herder and eighteenth-century German Romanticism), has been essential to nation-building efforts (Hornberger 2002; Silverstein

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<sup>18</sup> In Colombo, by contrast, Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims tend to reside in separate neighborhoods.

1996). As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994:60) note, the one-nation/one-language formula was exported through colonialism to become a dominant model around the world today, structuring state policies, challenging multilingual states, and underpinning “ethnic struggles to the extent that the absence of a distinct language can cause doubt on the legitimacy of claims to nationhood.” Keane (2003: 510) aptly describes the attraction that a national language holds for a national government: “...a modernist and development oriented position tends to portray a standardized national language as a vehicle of the movement toward universality, bringing peoples together in a global ecumene.” It is within the political apparatus of the nation-state, in turn, where minority languages are construed as problematic (Bauman and Briggs 2000; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 1998). The issue of a national language is deeply intertwined with educational policy, as education is often considered to be the primary vehicle for the imparting of the national language, and through this, achieving national integration (Bourdieu 1991; LaDousa 2005). State-run educational systems become vehicles for social exclusion, either intentionally or not. This is because minority groups only have access to the educational resources that the state can provide. By contrast, majority groups, because of their political and/or economic power, have access to both state-run and private educational resources (Collins 1988; Ogbu 1987; Tollefson 2002).

The Sri Lankan case provides valuable insights into the relationship between language and educational policies, post-colonial nation-building, and conflict. In contrast to other post-colonial contexts where the English language was promoted because of the economic and educational opportunities it offered (such as Canada and the US), in Sri Lanka (as in Malaysia and Iran), policy-makers sought to return to the vernacular in

response to the disparities suffered during colonial rule (Canagarajah 2005). In the immediate post-independence period there was considerable contention between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority (who held the political power), and Tamil-speaking minority groups, some of whom had privileged access to resources during the British period (namely Jaffna Tamils). While a more equitable distribution of resources could have been possible, it was the newly elected Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) government's implementation of language and educational policies with the sole aim of benefiting the majority group that precipitated the conflict (Sorenson 2008; Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986).<sup>19</sup> In national contexts where segments of the population speak different languages, the mass availability of "mother-tongue" education can have a positive result in enabling access to education for all. This, in turn, can facilitate equity, if not unify students. However, in the Sri Lankan case, the separation of students by language medium, and through this, ethnicity, served to reinforce ethnic and religious differences, and through this, perpetuate conflict (de Silva 1999; Perera et al. 2004; Wickrema and Colenso 2003).

In delineating the Sri Lankan case, I not only trace the relationship between national language and educational policies and conflict from the post-independence period to the present, but also evaluate the recent educational reforms passed by the Sri Lankan government to promote "national unity and integration." I contribute to existing literature on language planning and policy by looking at how national educational policies are applied in local practices. In doing so, I not only focus on classroom

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<sup>19</sup> The SLFP first came to power 1956 and since then has been one of the two largest parties in the Sri Lankan political arena.

interactions, but broader school-based social practices as well (extracurricular activities, assemblies, and students' interactions away from teachers).

The majority of literature on youth, education, and social inequality is confined to North America. This study provides a historical, socio-cultural, and political comparison with this research. While research in Canada and the US associates the learning of heritage languages with the positively construed maintenance of ethnic identities (Das 2008a, b), I show that in Sri Lanka language medium policies (which required ethnically Tamil students to study in the Tamil-medium) have perpetuated discrimination.

### **Multilingual Schools and the Contestation of “Legitimate Language”**

Bourdieu (1991) illustrates the importance of education and state-level standardization in the creation and reproduction of sociolinguistic hierarchies, which are likened to economic hierarchies. Bourdieu argues that it is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a linguistic market, dominated by the “official” language. In his concept of “legitimate” language,” Bourdieu argues that schools and the family, as kinds of cultural institutions, are the primary sites for the reproduction of “legitimate” language and, consequently, the perpetuation of social inequalities. According to Bourdieu, the agents of the regulation and imposition of “legitimate” language are teachers, acting through the institution of the school. As Bourdieu (1991:45) writes, teachers are “empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification.”

A prominent critique of Bourdieu’s theory of “legitimate language” is that while he allows for the existence of multiple linguistic markets, he does not allow for



alternative or counter “legitimate” languages. Several scholars argue that within multilingual situations, there are often multiple and competing norms of “legitimate” language (Heller 1996; Jaffe 1999; Woolard 1985). I suggest that rather than presuming that schools perpetuate a single “legitimate” language/code, ratified by the state, they should be considered crucial sites for the contestation of multiple norms of “legitimate” languages, and through this, power hierarchies. I show how teachers, in their interactions across various spaces in the school (the school grounds, canteen, classrooms without students), are acting to engage with, negotiate, and contest different models of “legitimate” language, and through this, institutional hierarchies. I explore the disjuncture between teachers’ ideologies concerning what counts as the “best” Tamil speech, and the way that they are actually correcting and evaluating students’ speech in the classroom (Meek 2010). Drawing on Meek (2010), I suggest that by exploring such disjunctures between explicit language ideologies and the ideologies involved in practice, it is possible to see how subtle sociolinguistic shifts are occurring.

### **Discourse in Institutional Settings**

In studies of discourse in institutional settings (such as legal, medical, and educational discourse), a central issue has been how to define the object of study—temporally, spatially, and in terms of participants. For example, does privileging formal institutions serve to devalue what happens outside of them? How can we connect what occurs in institutional settings from what occurs elsewhere? Woolard (1985:742), in reference to her research in Catalonia, has argued that “authority is established and inculcated not most importantly through schools and other formal institutions, but in primary relations, face-to-face encounters, and the invidious distinctions of informal,

everyday life.”

Rather than distinguishing schools and other formal institutions from what Woolard (1985) terms “everyday spheres,” I suggest that it is more productive to explore how power and authority are negotiated across multiple and interrelated interactional spheres (whether inside formal institutions or outside of them). Gal’s (2002) theorization of the “public/private” distinction is particularly useful in drawing attention to how participants interactionally construct social spheres in relation to salient ideological distinctions. She argues that rather than viewing the “public/private” distinction as attached to separate spheres (such as the office or the home), this distinction is fractally enacted by participants through indexical signs across different contexts of use (2002:79).

Studies of discourse in institutional settings within linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics have mainly conceptualized these settings as bureaucracies, focusing on the way in which bureaucrats exert authority over their clients through their control of talk (Erickson and Schultz 1982; Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez 1971; Philips 1983). While useful in exploring the way that power, authority, and legitimation are produced through language, this literature paid little attention to the relationship between discourse in bureaucratic settings and elsewhere (see Philips 1998). Recent work in linguistic anthropology has significantly expanded this field by tracing continuities in the ideologies underlying discourses inside and outside of formal institutions (such as classrooms and courtrooms) (Mertz 1998; Philips 1998). Philips (1998; 2000), through her concept of primary and secondary sites, provides a way in which to bring institutional and non-institutional discourse into the same analytical framework. Drawing on research in a Tongan courtroom, Philips calls for an approach to the study of language ideologies

that considers both the primary sites, where the objects of language ideologies are located, and secondary sites, where metacommentary occurs which serves to reconstitute the initial object (2000:245).

Drawing on Mertz (1998) and Philips (1998), this project explores how students are employing models or ideologies from different arenas to configure social differences. Instead of assuming that the distinction between formal institutions and “everyday” spheres is necessarily the most crucial (Gal 2002), I look at which distinctions emerge as meaningful, and to whom. In my analysis of social interactions, I attend to the micro-processes by which participants make alignments with respect to each other and objects of discourse, which has been defined as stance (see Irvine 2009). I do not only consider the alignments that individuals make in multiparty talk, but the uptake of these alignments. By focusing on processes of alignment/disalignment over interactional events, I show the processes by which meaning is being solidified or gelled (Agha 2005b, 2007; Silverstein 2005; Wortham 2005).

### **Beyond Schools**

As all education can be thought to be mediated by language use, linguistic anthropological approaches to educational institutions have played an important role in illuminating educational phenomena, as well as broader socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic processes (Wortham 2008). Viewing the classroom as emblematic of school-based practices as a whole, many linguistic anthropological studies of education have focused exclusively on classroom interactions. In this analysis, I expand these studies by situating issues of education and linguistic dominance in a broader context. Drawing on research among Kandy ethnic minority adolescents, I explore the relationship between

educational institutions and students' lives outside of them (Heath 1983; Philips 1983).<sup>20</sup>

Linguistic anthropological studies of adolescence have tended to focus on peer groups as a unit of analysis. While some studies explore how adolescents, within their peer groups, draw on language and other semiotic resources to configure social identities (Eckert 2000; Rymes 2001); others more specifically target peer groups as sites for engaging with, negotiating, and contesting social inequalities (Bailey 2000; Bucholtz 2001; Rampton 1995; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Shankar 2008). I add to this literature by considering peer groups in relation to different social domains. Drawing on research on adolescents' interactions in school, familial, and peer group contexts, I suggest that for students, the most relevant contrast is not necessarily between interactions in school and non-school settings; but interactions where adults are privy and those in which they are not-privy.

### **Rethinking Adolescence**

Influenced by such foundational studies as Mead (1928) and Malinowski (1922), a large literature in anthropology has focused on adolescence as a developmental life stage, framing young people as yet-unfinished human beings (Bucholtz 2002). More

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<sup>20</sup> In the early 1980s, a number of studies forged a link between students' lives inside and outside of school, looking at how students' socio-cultural backgrounds shaped their performances in mainstream educational contexts (Heath 1983; Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Hull and Shultz 2002; Philips 1972, 1983). For example, Heath (1983) compares literacy practices inside and outside of school in two communities, Trackton and Roadville. She shows how literacy practices at home have a large impact on students' performances in school. For Trackton students, activities such as the reading of bedtime stories promote specific problem-solving skills and particular scientific orientations that prepare children for the learning of the skills promoted in schools. In Roadville, by contrast, ways of communicating at home were not as compatible with expectations of their performances in schools. Philips (1972, 1983) situates classroom interactions in a broader context in order to understand the reasons why Native American students are silent in the classroom. She argues that the students' silence results from an incongruity in cultural conventions among Native Americans and mainstream schooling contexts. While mainstream schooling places an emphasis on individual displays of knowledge at different points in the learning process, Native communities understand knowledge as collective and as something to be performed publicly only after it is mastered.

recently, literature in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, rather than assuming that young people are in the process of assuming ready-made adult roles and identities (Garret and Lopez 2002), has focused on the social and cultural practices by which they shape their social worlds (Eckert 2000; Bailey 2002; Mendoza-Denton 2008). Such work has particularly focused on the production of youth identities under conditions of colonization, migration, mobility, and globalization (Alim 2004; Bucholtz and Skapoulli 2009; Garcia-Sanchez 2005).

In order to emphasize the specificity of the experiences of my research participants (who are ages 14-17, Grades 10 and 11) from those immediately younger or older, I have chosen to use the term “adolescence” instead of “youth.”<sup>21</sup> Rather than seeking to generalize about adolescence as a life-stage, I advocate an approach that considers the continuities and discontinuities in the experience of adolescence as related to the specific socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts; and that also takes into account the experiences and trajectories of individual students.

Though the schooling experience certainly cannot be considered to be the same for all the students in my study, the Sri Lankan educational system can be thought to structure students’ lives in specific ways. The experiences of students in Grades 10 and 11 are unique in that they are entirely focused on preparing for the national General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-Level (O-level) exam (as modeled after the British system), the results of which have a large impact on their future trajectories. Students are required to pass the O-level exams in order to go on to the Advanced-level (A-level), which includes Grades 12 and 13. Though education certainly does not

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<sup>21</sup> Because of the association of studies of adolescence with developmentalist-oriented approaches, Bucholtz (2002) has advocated replacing it with the more general youth studies.

directly correlate with employment (as large numbers of university graduates are among the unemployed), students who do not pass their O-level exams face difficulty obtaining even the lowest-level jobs. As Eckert (2000) notes in relation to the US, the transition from primary to secondary school is a crucial period in which students, rather than taking their role as students for granted, realize that their academic performances will impact their future life trajectories. The students in my study are firmly entrenched in the schooling experience, but, as they contemplate finishing Grade 11 and moving on to the next stage in their lives, their non-school-related social networks are also expanding (as a result of their increased freedom and responsibility).

In addition to formal education, adolescents' experiences and trajectories are shaped by a much broader range of factors including, but not limited to, their life experiences, ethnicity, religion, class, and socioeconomic level. It is well known that war can alter the experiences of childhood and adolescence (Bernat 1999; Diouf 1996; Peters and Richards 1998). Most of the students in my study have not been directly affected by the war, but have been living with the ongoing conflict for virtually their entire lives. Though all Sri Lankans, regardless of ethnicity, are impacted by the conflict, the experience of ethnic minority students is particular in that these students are subject to increased scrutiny and suspicion in the Sinhalese Buddhist state. The degree to which adolescents feel at risk is related to their class, socioeconomic level, social networks, sociolinguistic resources, and how secure and established their families are in Kandy town.

In sociolinguistics, adolescence has been identified as a crucial period for linguistic innovation (Eckert 2000; Kerswill 1996; Milroy and Milroy 1985). Some

scholars have argued that adolescence marks the point at which patterns of variation come into their own as socially meaningful (see Chambers 1995). Eckert (2000:8), however, argues that adolescence “does not signal a sudden awareness of the social function of variation, but the adaptation of an already robust sociolinguistic competence to a new set of social meanings.” In addition to being a crucial time for linguistic innovation, it is also a time when adolescents, in response to expanding social networks, are configuring their own identities in relation to those of others. In Sri Lanka, it is during this period when ethnic minority adolescents are weighing their own possibilities and limitations in a society fraught with internal conflict.

There is now a considerable body of literature exploring linguistic and social practices among youth in Tamil Diasporas in Canada and the UK (Cheran 2000; Cheran et al. 2007; Daniel 1996; Das 2008a, b; Fuglerut 1999; McDowell 1996; Wayland 2004). However, few studies have looked at how processes of migration, mobility, and globalization impact youth who remain in Sri Lanka. The adolescents involved in my study are not mobile at this particular moment in their lives, but are nonetheless influenced by processes of migration, mobility, and globalization (via mass-media, education, consumerism, etc.). Since the colonial period, upper-class Sri Lankans have been migrating abroad (Europe, North America, India, and Southeast Asia) for higher education or employment. In the past thirty to forty years, new migration patterns have emerged. Since 1983, nearly 300,000 North and East Tamils have sought political asylum in North America, Europe, and Australia (Cheran 2000). In addition, beginning in 1976, streams of Sri Lankans have been migrating to the Gulf States for work (Gamburd 2000). The adolescents involved in my study, as influenced by family

members and other acquaintances that have gone abroad, view life outside of Sri Lanka as a very tenable possibility. Prominent studies of migration, mobility, and transnationalism have theorized the disintegration of cultural, temporal, and spatial boundaries under globalization (Appadurai 1996; Bhaba 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). But, as Bucholtz and Skapoulli (2009:2) suggest, “although transnational and global cultural identifications unquestionably carry a certain ideological force, it is in local spaces and communities that identities are tried out, embodied, and adapted in order to be made coherent.” In this project, I concentrate on adolescents’ linguistic and social practices in order to look at how they draw on local and translocal influences to navigate their social worlds.

### **A Linguistic Anthropological Approach to Conflict and Difference**

A significant body of literature on conflict in South Asia and beyond has focused on manifestations of physical violence (military campaigns, riots, suicide bombings) and the ethnic nationalist or religious ideologies motivating these acts (Brass 1996; Das 1990; Pandey 1992, Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986). In this dissertation, rather than explicitly focus on the immediate victims of violent acts, I employ a linguistic anthropological approach to consider the experiences of adolescents and adults who are living with the ongoing threat of violence in their lives.

In the Sinhalese-majority South, Sri Lankans have been dealing with regular incidences of violence (suicide bombings, bus, and roadside bombings, disappearances) for almost three decades. For both children and adults, violence is naturalized—part of the everyday. But at the same time, manifestations of the conflict (violence and interethnic tensions) are not always the same, but shift with changing socio-cultural,



political, and historical circumstances. Rather than assuming that all individuals experience violence the same way, I focus on socially-occurring talk in order to see which events and circumstances emerge as meaningful, and to whom. I ground this analysis within the specifics of the particular historical moment, as well as consider the more enduring aspects of the conflict and its relationship to conceptualizations of difference.

A linguistic anthropological approach not only allows me to see how conflict is enmeshed in the way that adults and adolescents are configuring social differences, but also to see how assumptions about difference and conflict are created and perpetuated in socially-occurring interactions. In chapter seven, I show how members of a Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslim family draw on multiple resources such as code, volume, pitch, reported speech, and poetic parallelism to construct Sinhala “voices” as both distinctive and morally problematic. I argue that involved in the use of these “voices” is a moral stance, where the Sinhala “voice,” and the Sinhalese themselves, are associated with suspicion and violence.

## **Sri Lankan Studies**

### **Socio-Cultural and Historical Studies**

Sri Lanka has proven to be a very rich site for research in social and cultural anthropology. Foundational monographs have explored caste (Pfaffenberger 1982, Roberts 1982, Yalman 1967), kinship (Obesekere 1967; Tambiah 1958), and religion (Kapferer 1983; Obesekere 1984) in rural and village Sri Lanka. Since the outbreak of the ethnic conflict in the early 1980s, studies of Sri Lanka have largely turned their attention to the socio-cultural, historical, and political consequences of violence and

conflict (Daniel 1996; Tambiah 1986; Spencer 1990; and Whitaker 1997, 2007).

Through integrating a study of historical and political structures with a situated study of everyday life, this dissertation contributes to Sri Lankan studies. In addition, while many studies focus on a single ethnic or sub-ethnic group, this project is concerned with relations among Tamil-speaking groups, and between Tamil-speaking groups and the Sinhalese-majority (see also Daniel 1986; McGilvray 2008). Because of the way that language policies and linguistic identification have been directly at issue in the conflict, and the way in which language is a primary means of constructing and negotiating difference, a linguistic anthropological approach to the study of contemporary Sri Lanka is particularly pressing.

### **Sri Lankan Tamil Sociolinguistics**

Most of the literature on varieties of Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka has come out of Jaffna University. Irvine and Gal (2000) discuss how linguistics' own ideologies determine the way that they represent sociolinguistic situations. Highly invested in the superiority of Jaffna Tamil over other Sri Lankan varieties, Sri Lankan sociolinguistic literature tends to treat Jaffna Tamil (alternatively referred to as "Sri Lankan" Tamil or "Ceylon" Tamil) as representative of the Tamil sociolinguistic situation in Sri Lanka as a whole. There are numerous grammatical studies of Jaffna Tamil (Gair and Suseendrarajah 1981; Thananjayarajasingham 1974, 1977), as well as studies comparing Jaffna Tamil with varieties of Tamil spoken in South India (Suseendrarajah 1999), and with Sinhala (Karunatilake and Suseendrarajah 1973, 1975).<sup>22</sup> While some scholars have recently provided accounts of Muslim Tamil varieties (Nuhuman 2007), there is

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<sup>22</sup> Suseendrarajah (1990:6) argues that though Tamil has coexisted with Sinhala for centuries in Sri Lanka the interaction between these two languages have been mostly one sided, with Tamil influencing Sinhala. However, it is very likely that it works the other way as well.

very little on Up-country Tamil varieties. This dissertation contributes to sociolinguistic literature on Tamil by providing a situated study of Tamil linguistic practices both inside and outside of institutional contexts. I suggest that in urban centers in the Sinhalese-majority South, such as Kandy, as consistent with broader socio-cultural, economic, and political shifts, “normative” spoken Tamil varieties are emerging, which are a mix of Jaffna Tamil, Batticaloa, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim Tamil varieties.<sup>23</sup>

In the sociolinguistic literature, Jaffna Tamil is recognized as a variety of Tamil originally spoken in the northernmost region of the country (the Jaffna Peninsula). Suseendirajah (1999) discusses how as a result of relative isolation from Indian Tamil varieties, Jaffna Tamil has developed unique lexical and grammatical features. He writes that the differences between Jaffna Tamil and varieties of Tamil spoken on the Indian continent are so great that “mutual intelligibility between these two groups is impaired to a remarkable degree” (1999:2).<sup>24</sup> As related to Jaffna’s reputation as a center for Tamil language and culture, in both Sri Lanka and India, Jaffna Tamil is often ideologically associated with being the most “pure,” “literary-like,” and “grammatical” form of Tamil. Several linguists have sought to counter this widely circulating ideology by showing that Jaffna Tamil is as colloquial as any other spoken dialect (1999:5).

Batticaloa Tamil is a variety of Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka's East, which is socio-culturally, linguistically, and historically distinct from the North (McGilvray 2008). Though Batticaloa and Jaffna varieties differ (especially in terms of lexico-semantics and pronoun systems) (Suseendirajah 1999), in Sri Lanka’s South, Jaffna and Batticaloa

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<sup>23</sup> I am not assuming that these can be isolated as discrete varieties.

<sup>24</sup> This impaired intelligibility, however, is far more often the case for mainland Tamil speakers than for Jaffna Tamil speakers, who have had continuous exposure to other Tamil varieties (most notably through mass-media). Because of phonological, intonational, and stress features that are similar to Malayalam, mainland Tamil speakers sometimes mistake Jaffna Tamil for Malayalam (Suseendirajah 1999).

Tamil are sometimes collapsed onto one another (referred to as “Jaffna” Tamil or “North and East” Tamil). It is common for North and East Tamil to be contrasted with Up-country Tamil, as an indication of the historical, sub-ethnic, caste, class, and socio-economic differences between these two groups.

In the existing literature, Up-country Tamil, which is centered in the tea growing areas of the South-Central highlands, is considered to be most closely related to the varieties of Tamil spoken in India. Suseendirajah (1999) notes, however, that Up-country Tamil has significantly diverged from Indian Tamil varieties because Up-country Tamils have lost contact with the mainland, and because a section of the population has become bilingual in Tamil and Sinhala. But what Suseendirajah (1999) and others have not considered, is how Up-country Tamil has been influenced by contact with other varieties of Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka. Because of the almost complete monopoly of Jaffna and Batticaloa Tamils in education in the colonial and post-colonial periods, the influence of Jaffna and Batticaloa varieties on Up-country Tamil (as well as Muslim Tamil) is very significant.

Sri Lanka’s Muslim population is settled in urban centers, coastal areas, and scattered throughout Sri Lanka’s Sinhala-speaking rural areas. While Muslims in the Tamil-speaking East tend to be monolingual in Tamil, Muslims in the Sinhalese-speaking South (including Kandy) are usually bilingual in Tamil and Sinhala (Nuhuman 2007). In sociolinguistic literature, Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil is distinguished from other varieties of Tamil in terms of lexicon (Arabic and Sinhala borrowings), phonology, morphology, and syntax (Nuhuman 2007; Suseendirajah 1999). In Kandy, Muslims are often highly skillful at codeswitching between “normative” Tamil forms and “Muslim” Tamil, which

they see as invaluable to their separate ethnic and religious identity. In addition, while Tamils define the Tamil language on the basis of “purity,” Muslims in the Sinhalese-majority South, in response to this, define it on the basis of its “heterogeneity,” and thus welcome Sinhala and Arabic borrowings (see chapter three).

In this dissertation, I explore the ideologically mediated process by which “normative” spoken varieties are emerging in Kandy. I Draw on Milroy (2001), who characterizes standardization as a process that is continuously in progress. As Milroy (2001:534) states, “there cannot be in practical use any such thing as a wholly standardized variety, a total uniformity of usage is never achieved in practice.” Milroy also notes how the “standard”/ “non-standard” dichotomy is an ideologically driven dichotomy. In this dissertation, I show that while Jaffna and Batticaloa Tamil still maintain status as “prestige” varieties, as related to the shifting hierarchies among Kandy Tamil-speaking groups; in Kandy “normative” spoken Tamil varieties are emerging that mix features from Jaffna, Batticaloa, Up-counry, and Muslim Tamil.<sup>25</sup>

## **Methodology**

In January 2007 and from June 2007 to September 2008, I conducted fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork within and beyond school settings in Kandy, Sri Lanka. During the first month of my research, I met with the staff at the Colombo Fulbright Center and the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS) about the feasibility of my project. Before I could begin visiting schools, I needed to obtain permissions from the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education at the national level. With the assistance of AISLS, I was able to obtain this approval by late January 2007.

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<sup>25</sup> There is also some question as to whether these varieties of Tamil should be considered koines or “normalized” varieties (See Watt and Milroy 1999).

From June to August 2007, I conducted a survey of educational institutions in Colombo and Kandy. After visiting a range of government and private schools in Colombo, I began a survey of Kandy schools. I met with the principals and teachers and observed classes at all Tamil-medium (both Hindu and Muslim) government schools in Kandy town, as well as a selection of bi-and multi-medium national, assisted, and private schools. I supplemented my observations of individual schools by conducting informal interviews with members of the Tamil-medium Kandy Zonal Ministry of Education (which included the directors of all of the Tamil-medium subjects). I also attended programs associated with the Zonal Ministry of Education, including teacher training programs.

From September to December 2007, I conducted research at Hindu College, a mixed Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school located in the center of Kandy town. Though I observed the activities of the school as a whole, I particularly focused on the Grade 11 class, which was preparing to take the GCE O-level exam. Focusing on six target students—three girls and three boys—I observed and recorded students' and teachers' linguistic and social practices during lessons, as well as before, after, and in-between lessons, for three to five hours a day, five days a week. In order to get a broad view of the school, I also spent three hours each week sitting in the principal's office, where he allowed me to observe his interactions with teachers, parents, members of the Zonal Ministry of Education, and other visitors. I supplemented my participant-observation with unstructured interviews and conversations with students, teachers, and the principal. In addition to regular classroom activities, I also attended school-related activities such as competitions, religious programs, cultural shows, and prize-givings.

After the Grade 11 students completed their O-level exams in December 2007, I moved on to my research at Girls' College. From February to August 2008, however, I continued to visit Hindu College once a week, where I observed and recorded students in the incoming Grade 11 class, met with teachers and the principal, and met with members of the outgoing Grade 11 class, who would occasionally come by the school. During this period, I also taught English once or twice a week to the Hindu College Principal and a Principal from another Tamil-medium Hindu school in Kandy, which proved invaluable for learning about the broader context of Tamil-medium education in Kandy, as well as their life experiences and struggles. In addition, I also attended second-language Tamil classes that these two principals were teaching to police officers and government administrators. This served to supplement my study of the "official" language policy in Sri Lankan government schools.

In addition to my research in school-settings, I also observed and recorded Hindu College students outside of school. Partly because of their limited financial resources, Hindu College students were generally reluctant to invite me to their homes. There was an expectation that if I came to their homes, they would have to provide me with tea and snacks or an elaborate meal, which they knew would be difficult for their families. Within the first month of my research, however, a few of the girls started regularly inviting me to their homes, as well as to run errands with them after school. Because of gender norms, the boys did not feel comfortable inviting me to their homes, or walking around with me in public. However, as the boys enjoyed being recorded, I decided to use a different research methodology with them. With the principal's permission, I asked two of the boys to carry an mp3 recorder and record their interactions in different non-

school settings.<sup>26</sup> These two boys recorded their conversations with their classmates while walking through Kandy town, as well as interactions during after-school tuition classes, in shops, and at home. After the Grade 11 class completed their O-level exams, for the remainder of my research period I was able to stay in touch with most of the girls and a few of the boys.

From February to August 2008, I conducted research at Girls' College. I made my first contact at Girls' College through my Sinhala teacher, Bandara Herath, whose wife was a teacher at the school. He suggested that in addition to conducting research, I also teach a few English classes. On my first meeting with the Girls' College Principal, she arranged for me to teach English to the Grades 9 and 10 Tamil-medium classes. Though my research at Hindu College was conducted primarily among the Grade 11 class, the principal said that it would be better for me to conduct research with the Grade 10 classes, as my presence in the classroom would distract the Grade 11 students' O-level exam preparation. Thus, the age range of my project widened to include students from ages 14 to 17 (Grades 10 and 11).

At Girls' College, combining my research with teaching was extremely helpful in enabling me to have a ratified role within the school. While my research was focused on the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, I also observed and recorded students' interaction in the Grade 10 English- and Sinhala-medium classes. I also periodically visited other Tamil-medium secondary school classes (Grades 6-11), as well as A-level (Grades 12 and 13) arts, science, and commerce classes. I observed and recorded the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students in the classroom (in the presence or absence of a teacher), as well as other spaces around the school, such as the school grounds and canteen. I focused on

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<sup>26</sup> Chen (2007) makes use of a similar methodology.



three target students, Nadira (Muslim), Faiza (Muslim), and Kavitha (Tamil). I supplemented my observations of these students by spending one to two hours a day interacting with teachers in the Tamil-medium staff room. Because of my role as an English teacher, I was frequently asked to judge English-medium elocution, debate, and drama competitions. Throughout my research period, I played an active role in all major school events and activities such as religious and cultural programs, prize-givings, the annual sports day, and field trips.

In contrast with Hindu College, it was much easier to interact with the Girls' College students in non-school settings. From July 2007 to March 2008, I lived in an annex above the house of a Girls' College Grade 10 Tamil-medium student (Kavitha, who was one of my target students). In addition to regularly interacting with Kavitha in the home, I also frequently visited the homes of my two other target students, Nadira and Faiza.

Following Schieffelin (1990), throughout this research, I treated the transcription process as ethnography. I worked with two assistants: Kumudhini Nadesan and Udayaluxmi Jeyaraman. Kumudhini, an Up-country Tamil Hindu, in addition to having taught English at several Tamil-medium Hindu provincial schools in Kandy (including Hindu College), also has a decade of experience teaching Tamil to foreign scholars and NGO workers. Partly due to the difficulties that she has faced in her own life, both professionally and personally, she has a particularly astute awareness of language and sociolinguistic difference. Udaya had just recently completed her BA in Tamil-medium geography at Peradeniya University, and before that she had done her A-levels at Girls' College. She is a particularly meticulous and careful person, with strong skills in Tamil,

Sinhala, and English. While observing and recording linguistic practices inside and outside of schools, I took extensive research notes. I would then meet with either Kumudhini or Udaya to listen to selected parts of the recordings. When there was a segment that one of us found to be particularly interesting, we stopped the recorder and discussed it at length. When the session was over, I then took notes on our transcription process, which I included with the transcript, as well as my notes from the original interaction. My Sinhala teacher, Bandara Herath, also helped me with the transcription and translation of my Sinhala recorded data, as well as providing me with valuable socio-cultural, historical, and religious context. In addition to my research assistants, throughout the transcription/translation process, I also sought the viewpoints of other research informants and friends.

During my fieldwork I received guidance from two professors: Dr. S. Sandarasegaram from Colombo University and Dr. M. Anes from Peradeniya University. Dr. S. Sandarasegaram, who is chair of the Education Department, and also advises the government on educational policy, proved to be an invaluable resource for understanding the structure of the educational system in Sri Lanka. Dr. M. Anes, a professor of Philosophy at Peradeniya focusing on the history and society of Sri Lanka Muslims, among other pursuits, taught me the educational history of Sri Lankan Muslims, as well the general history of Sri Lankan Muslims. Aside from this mentorship, my research was assisted by my extensive involvement with Peradeniya University undergraduate students. Regularly visiting the campus, I spent extensive periods of time interacting with students from various ethnic, religious, regional, and class backgrounds. I learned about their experiences with their education, their lives as students in Kandy, and their

goals for the future. Another experience that was vital to my research was my regular attendance of the Peradeniya University Non-Roman Catholic Church, where I was able to get to know Tamil students from the Up-country and the North and East. My exposure to students who had lived through the conflict in the North was particularly valuable in allowing me to understand the ethnic conflict in a wider context. In addition, the time I spent with an ethnically mixed group of young adults who volunteered at an International Non-Governmental Organization (I-NGO) near where I was living, provided valuable insights into multilingualism and interethnic relations.

The neighborhoods that I resided in enabled me to get a strong sense of Kandy's sociocultural and linguistic landscape, as well as give me exposure to different ethnic and religious groups. During the first month of my research, I stayed with a Sinhalese family who lives in an affluent, ethnically mixed neighborhood near Kandy Lake, in center of Kandy town. For the next eight months, I stayed with Kavitha's family in Dangolla, a neighborhood perched in the hillside halfway between the center of Kandy town and Peradeniya University. Dangolla has slightly stigmatized associations because of the particularly severe riots that took place during the 1987 JVP insurgency, as well as the slum that had been relocated there from the center of Kandy town in the 1990s. The neighborhood used to be home to a large number of Tamils, but over the years they have moved out (related to the rising cost of real estate as well as ethnic tensions), making the neighborhood mostly Sinhalese and Muslim. For the next seven months, I lived in an annex owned by the International Center for Ethnic Studies (IIES), located on Peradeniya Road in an ethnically mixed, affluent neighborhood not far from Kandy town. While living in this annex, I spent every evening with a Muslim family living across the street

whose four daughters all attend Girls' College. In addition to spending time in these Kandy neighborhoods, I also frequently travelled to students' homes outside of Kandy—in nearby towns, Sinhalese and Muslim villages, and tea plantation areas.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The dissertation begins at the level of national educational policies and extends outward. In chapters two and three, I show how national and local educational policies and practices are reinforcing ethnic divisions among students. In chapters four and five, I move beyond the level of national and local educational policies and practices and explore how Tamil-medium Girls' College teachers and students, in their interactions across school and non-school arenas, are acting to engage with, negotiate, and reconfigure configuring social differences. I argue that while teachers are reinforcing widely entrenched categories of difference—Up-country Tamil, North and East Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese—students are acting to reconfigure them in socially meaningful ways. In chapter six, drawing on my research at Hindu College, I explore peer networks in relation to different social domains. I suggest that the most relevant contrast is not necessarily between students' interactions in school and non-school settings, but between students' interactions in which adults are privy and not-privy. In chapter seven, I explore the way that speakers configure difference and conflict through employing the “voices” of others. I show how members of a Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslim family, in their interactions in the home, draw on multiple resources such as code, volume, pitch, reported speech, and poetic parallelism to construct Sinhala “voices” as both distinctive and morally problematic. In chapter eight, I discuss the situation of ethnic minority youth in the immediate post-war period. Drawing on the findings of my research within and

beyond school-settings, I also make suggestions for ways in which the Sri Lankan national education system can contribute to the easing of ethnic tensions among Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims, and by doing so, contribute to bringing about positive social change.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Language and Educational Policies, Inequity, and Conflict from the Post-Independence Period to the Present**

In this chapter, I examine the relationship among national educational policies, political and economic inequities, and conflict from the post-independence period to the present. During the British period (1815-1948), a bifurcated system of education developed, wherein local elites (mainly comprised of Low-country Sinhalese, Jaffna Tamils, and Burghers) were educated in fee-levying English-medium schools; while the masses were educated in non-fee levying vernacular (Sinhala and Tamil) schools (de Silva 1999). From independence to the early 1970s, Sinhalese Buddhist-dominated governments—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP)—made significant changes to educational policies which would have very long term consequences. These policies contributed to the creation of a mass-educational system, where all school-aged children were guaranteed a free education (Little 2003). As a result of this new system, the national literacy rate has risen from 60 percent in the 1950s to nearly 91 percent today (de Silva 1999), and the current net enrollment in primary school is close to one hundred percent (Sorenson 2008). However, despite these inroads, these policies did not result in a more even distribution of educational resources, nor did they serve to integrate students of different social (ethnicity, religion, class, urban vs. rural) backgrounds (Little 2003; Sorenson 2008).

In Sri Lanka, education is linked with conflict through its real or perceived

connection to political and economic inequities. In addition, by segregating students on the basis of language medium, ethnicity, and religion, it has served to promote interethnic enmity and strife (de Silva 1999; Perera et al. 2004; Sorenson 2008). During the colonial period, Jaffna Tamils received privileged access to missionary education and, as a result, held civil service and professional jobs disproportionate to their percentage of the population (Tambiah 1986). In the post-independence period, the Sinhalese-majority UNP and the SLFP governments sought to even out such inequities by passing policies to improve access to education and employment for all Sinhalese (at the direct expense of ethnic minority groups). Their language and religion were incorporated into the nation's official policies, and they benefited from improved access to government and professional employment. The LTTE's eventual fight for justice and self-determination was motivated by the governments' reluctance to incorporate Tamil minorities into the Sinhalese Buddhist state, and grant them just distribution of resources (discriminatory measures specifically targeted education and employment) (Sorenson 2008). Education and its relationship to public sector employment have been linked with violence not only for Tamil youth, but for Sinhalese youth as well. It was largely the failure of rural Sinhalese youth to get access to coveted civil service and professional jobs despite their newly acquired access to education that prompted a group of Sinhalese youth to form the *Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna* (JVP), which initiated violent insurrections to overthrow the government in 1972 and the late 1980s (Sorenson 2008).

Sri Lankan scholars and policy-makers alike have recognized the relationship between the segregation of the educational system on the basis of language medium, ethnicity, and religion and social unrest (Daniel 1996; de Silva 1999; Tambiah 1986). In

1997, the Sri Lankan government, explicitly acknowledging the link between the educational system and incidences of political violence among Tamil and Sinhalese youth, introduced new educational reforms designed to promote national integration (Sorenson 2008). These reforms included the institution of a new language policy which prescribed that all Sri Lankan students should be taught both official languages: Sinhala and Tamil (as part of a 1987 amendment to the constitution Tamil was declared a co-official language, and English was given status as a “link-language”). Five years later, another set of policy reforms, citing the demand for English in the global marketplace, called for the increased emphasis on the teaching of English in primary and secondary education (National Education Commission 2003).<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I survey the educational system in Sri Lanka today with respect to its broader inequities. I demonstrate that though Sri Lankan schools are officially organized on the basis of language medium (Sinhala and/or Tamil) and religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Christian), ethnicity (as linked with language medium) is the primary mode of organizing difference. I also delineate the disparities in educational resources available to urban and rural children, the rich and the poor, and among different ethnic groups. Secondly, I discuss how the effectiveness of the recent educational reforms. While the national educational policies directly link interethnic integration (through educational reform) with national integration, I do not make this assumption, but rather discuss the potential of the reforms to promote interethnic integration and mutual understanding (which may or may not result in national integration). I argue that the success of the reforms in meeting these goals is constrained by three factors: (1) the lack of sufficient motivation for the teaching of the



other “official” languages (mainly second-language-Tamil to Sinhalese students); (2) Sri Lanka’s “textbook-oriented” educational system (Kumar 1986), which discourages links between school-based social practices (such as extracurricular activities and school functions); and (3) the overall organization of the educational system which segregates students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. I ultimately suggest that as long as Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslims remain isolated from one another in educational settings, language policies and curriculum reforms can have little effect in bolstering interethnic integration and mutual understanding. I show how these policies, as they do not contribute to changes in the overall structure of education in Sri Lanka, can be considered to be merely additive rather than transformative (Bush and Saltarelli 2000).<sup>27</sup>

### **Educational Inequities and Conflict in the Post-Independence Period**

In this section, I survey the relationship between educational policies and conflict in Sri Lanka from the post-independence period to the present. As I discuss above, educational policies passed by Sinhalese Buddhist majority governments in the post-independence period were mainly aimed at increasing educational opportunities for all Sinhalese youth. In 1945 the Free-Education Act was passed. Influenced by similar policies in the U.K. at the time, it was intended to transform education from a “patrimony of the rich” to an “inheritance of the poor” (Little 2003: 91). At the same time, in order to provide good schools to rural areas, the government set up a system of Central (or national) schools in each electoral district. A system of scholarships was also initiated on the basis of merit and need, and hostels were opened so that children from any part of the country could attend these schools (Perera et al. 2004:392). By increasing access to

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<sup>27</sup> Bush and Saltarelli (2000:33) distinguish between additive and transformative solutions to ethnic conflict. Transformative solutions, they discuss, “change the underpinning logic and structures of behavior.”

English-medium education, these policies sought to equalize access to highly coveted civil service and professional jobs (mainly for the rural Sinhalese). However, as Jayasuriya (1969:475) describes the “rich continued to send their children to good government and government-aided schools without paying fees, while the masses continued to receive free the poor quality education that had all along been free to them.”

In 1956, the newly elected Sinhala SLFP government passed the Sinhala-Only Act, making Sinhala the only official language of Sri Lanka (Tambiah 1986:75). This act made Sinhala fluency a requirement for all government jobs. While Muslims (the majority of whom speak Tamil as a first language) were also adversely impacted by this act, it was particularly detrimental for Jaffna Tamils, who, as a result of scarce natural resources in the Jaffna Peninsula, had long relied on employment from civil service and professional jobs in the South. As a result of the impact of this policy, by the 1970s, the civil service, which had been largely Jaffna Tamil in the 1950s, was almost entirely Sinhalese (Tambiah 1986:75).

Concurrent with the Sinhala-Only Act, in response to growing pressure from Sinhalese voters to improve educational opportunities for all Sinhalese youth (especially for those in rural areas who did not have access to English-medium schools), the *Swabasha* (vernacular) Act was passed, which replaced English with Sinhala or Tamil in all government schools. Prior to 1956, children were segregated by medium of instruction as a consequence of the geographic distribution of ethnic groups. The majority of schools conducted education in the vernacular: Sinhala in the predominantly Sinhala-speaking South, and Tamil in the predominantly Tamil-speaking North and East. English-medium government or missionary schools existed mainly in multiethnic urban

areas in order to provide an education to an elite group of students. Following the *Swabasha* Act, the segregation of students by language medium became much more systematic and pervasive (Perera et al. 2004). In 1964, the government initiated the state take-over of denominational schools, contributing to the formation of a highly centralized educational system (Little 2003). The overall expansion of the educational system in the 1950s and 1960s opened up opportunities for all children to obtain an education in the vernacular. However, by segregating students on the basis of language medium and religion (and through this, ethnicity), these policies had detrimental consequences for interethnic relations (Sorenson 2008; Wickrema and Colenso 2003).

In the early 1970s, Tamils received an additional blow to their status and future prospects when the SLFP government passed new policies regulating university admissions on the basis of language. This meant that Tamil students had to acquire higher marks than their Sinhalese counterparts in order to obtain admission. A year later, a district quota system was adopted to compensate for children in rural areas who did not have access to high quality schools (Sorenson 2008). These new policies further exacerbated ethnic tensions, and served as an impetus for the formation of Tamil separatist groups. The Tamil Tigers (who later became the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE)), which emerged in the early 1970s, soon overtook similar groups to become the predominant Tamil insurgency group. In 1983, anti-Tamil ethnic riots – the so-called “Black July”—plunged Sri Lanka into a full scale civil war, primarily between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. As I have discussed, educational policies and their perceived relationship to broader socio-cultural, political, and economic inequities also contributed to the political mobilization of Sinhalese youth as well (de Silva 1999;

Sorenson 2008). Rural Sinhalese youth, who had limited access to education in the British period, greatly benefited from the new educational policies. Those who were admitted to universities had high expectations that they would be able to obtain lucrative employment and social mobility (Sorenson 2008:427). However, they discovered that the same urban westernized elite continued to have access to the coveted government and professional jobs, while they still struggled to make a living, existing in rural poverty or in squalid conditions in Colombo and other urban centers (Gunaratna 1990:65; Sorenson 2008:427). Influenced by socialist struggles elsewhere in the world, in 1965, the JVP, or Socialist People's Liberation Front, was founded with the aim of staging a socialist revolution. Universities and other educational institutions became primary sites for the recruitment of cadres and the enactment for political protests, as they were viewed as sites for the reproduction of abusive neocolonial power relations. In 1971 and the late 1980s, the JVP staged a violent insurrection to overthrow the government and combat capitalism and international interference. Today, the JVP has been incorporated into mainstream politics. However, they continue to have many supporters among Sinhalese university students, who are still involved in violent "ragging (hazing)" and political mobilization (Sorenson 2008:427).<sup>28</sup> In summary, the language medium and educational policies from the mid 1940s to the early 1970s were extremely successful in making education available to all children regardless of socioeconomic background and region of residence. But in spite of these advances, in perpetuating inequities among children of different social backgrounds, these policies contributed to the mobilization of Sinhalese

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<sup>28</sup> The ragging of first-year students is a very common practice among university students in Sri Lanka (and affects students of all ethnic and religious groups). Ragging is often organized by JVP-affiliated youth, and is related to grassroots political organization among university students. University students who are against ragging are termed "anti-raggers," which has strong political implications.

and Tamil youth in violent struggles for justice and self-determination (Sorenson 2008:425).

While the post-independence educational policies contributed to improving access to educational resources for all Sinhalese, Muslims and Up-country Tamils had little access to formal education until the early 1980s. During the colonial period, Muslim leaders had discouraged Muslims from pursuing education in missionary schools, fearing that they were vehicles for religious conversion (Nuhuman 2007). Thus, Muslims were mainly educated in madrasahs (a school attached to mosques where young men study theology). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, the growing urban-based Muslim middle-class shifted from pursuing mainly business and trade toward education and the professions (O'Sullivan 1999). During this same period, due to their alignment with Sinhalese-majority governments, Muslims groups began to grow in political prominence which, in turn, led to educational and other benefits. During his tenure as Minister of Education from 1960 to 1963 and from 1970 to 1977, the prominent Muslim leader, Dr. Badi-ud-din Mahmood, succeeded in getting the government to open Muslim training colleges, a new category of Muslim government schools, and fund the development of a curriculum for teaching Islam in schools (O'Sullivan 1999). Though the university quota system was detrimental to Tamils, it benefited Muslims, who had started to make significant advancements in formal education. While Tamils' admissions to universities went drastically down in the 1970s, for Muslims it went significantly up, and enabled them to enter the competition for government and private-sector jobs (O'Sullivan 1999).

From the colonial period until the early 1980s, Tamils living on tea plantations only had access to basic educational resources. The children of plantation workers were

educated in plantation schools, which were separate from the national education system. The quality of education at these schools was dismal in comparison with elsewhere. Because most Up-country Tamils were rendered stateless following the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act, Up-country youth had no choice but to attend plantation schools (Daniel 1996). The advancement of Up-country Tamils in education is a result of two factors. First, as a result of the state-takeover of plantation schools from 1977-1992, and improvements in the national education system as a whole, the condition of plantation schools drastically improved. Second, by 1988, the vast majority of Up-country Tamils regained citizenship, which enabled them to attend government schools and private schools (if they had the financial resources) in nearby towns and villages. Despite the remarkable advancement of Up-country Tamils in education in the past three decades, as related to their lack of financial or political power, Up-country Tamils still remain educationally underprivileged. Their status is immediately evident in higher education, where Up-country Tamils are significantly underrepresented in comparison with Sinhalese, Muslims and North and East Tamils. While there are now a significant number of Up-country Tamils entering universities in the arts faculty, there are few Up-country Tamils in the more traditionally coveted math, science and engineering faculties (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation). In addition, most of the Up-country students who gain admissions to universities were not educated in plantation schools, but in government and private schools. In the following section, I discuss the structure of the national education system.

## **The National Education System**

### **Centralization and Decentralization**

Educational policies passed in the post-independence period contributed to the creation of a highly centralized educational system. However, the structure of the educational system changed in 1987, when the Thirteenth Amendment to the constitution devolved the majority of responsibility for primary and secondary education to the provinces (Wickrema and Colenso 2003:3). Nevertheless, the educational system still remains centralized, especially in terms of policies and curriculum, which are overseen by the National Educational Commission (NEC) and the National Institute of Education (NIE).

The apex of the national education system consists of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Education and Cultural Affairs, and the Ministry of School Education. The chief function of these Ministries (along with the Ministry of Tertiary and Vocational Education) is the administration and development of general, tertiary, and vocational education at a national level, according to the policy guidelines of the NEC (Perera et al. 2004). Currently, the Provincial Minister and the Provincial Councils are in control of the educational management structures in each province. The NIE advises each Provincial Minister on the following matters: education, research, and development; curriculum design and development; teacher education; and the development of school management. The NIE is responsible for curriculum design and development for the general education sector in accordance with NEC policy guidelines. The NIE, in turn, relies upon the expertise of experienced teachers, subject specialists, and university professors, which, as the result of a recent policy, are currently drawn from all major ethnic groups (Perera et al. 2004).

In Sri Lanka, the overall aim of the education system is to provide all school-aged

children with an education. Though there may ostensibly be one unified vision, as Perera et al. (2004) discuss, in actual practices, educational policies are dependent upon the will of the political party in power, changing global educational trends, and public opinion. The NEC is responsible for the development of general educational policy guidelines, but central government ministries in charge of education often alter policies in accordance with their personal or political party agendas (2004). In addition, because there is a dearth of educational policy-makers in the provinces, the central government has been able to retain significant power in influencing provincial policy choices (de Silva 1999).

During the period of the ceasefire from 2002 to 2006, the LTTE held significant territory in Sri Lanka's North (excluding Jaffna) and East. In 2007, the LTTE lost its territory in the East. During the period of my research from 2007-2008, the LTTE still controlled a vast stretch of land in the northern Vanni region, just south of the Jaffna Peninsula. Though the Sri Lankan government considered education in LTTE areas to be under their official jurisdiction, the LTTE had built its own parallel state institutions, including a LTTE Department of Education which provided education to children in the areas under its control. Through these institutions, as Sorenson (2008:426) states, "the LTTE directly challenged the authority of the Sri Lankan state to define the Tamil nation and the Tamil person by providing an alternative social imaginary." Though a few of the Tamil students involved in my research had come to Kandy from LTTE controlled areas, the majority of Tamil and Muslim students had little relationship to the LTTE or its institutions.

### **Government School Structure and Admissions**

In Sri Lanka, the overwhelming majority of students (97%) attend government



schools. As of the 2001 school census, there were 10, 390 government schools, serving just over four million students, and staffed by 190,000 teachers (Wickrema and Colenso 2003:3). In Table 1, I show the distribution of government schools by type (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2002). In addition to government schools, there are also several categories of non-government schools (approximately 171 in total). Some of these schools are assisted by the government and thus responsible for implementing the national curriculum, while others are fully private. In Table 2, I present the distribution of non-government schools by type (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2002).

**Table 1: Distribution of Government Schools in Sri Lanka by Type**

Number of Schools	Type
9,509 (91.52%)	Provincial Schools (managed by provincial councils)
320 (3.08%)	National Schools (managed by the Ministry of Education)
561 (5.40%)	Pirivenas (Buddhist clerical schools)

**Table 2: Distribution of Non-Government Schools in Sri Lanka by Type**

Number of Schools	Type
33 (19.30%)	Non-fee-levying government Assisted Parochial Schools (mainly Christian)
38 (22.22%)	Private Fee-levying Schools
100 (58.48%)	International Schools (fee-levying schools which prepare students for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) exam in the U.K.

In Sri Lanka, the educational system consists of the following four levels:

- Primary Level-5 years-Grades 1-5
- Junior Secondary Level-4 years-Grades 6-9
- Senior Secondary Level-2 years-Grades 10-11
- Collegiate Level- 2 years- Grades 12-13

All government schools are Sinhala- and/or Tamil-medium. The curriculum for most subjects (excluding Tamil literature) is written in Sinhala and translated into Tamil.

Though by policy the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium curricula are supposed to be identical, this often does not occur in practice (with errors and deletions frequent in the Tamil-medium curriculum). As I will discuss below, translation issues are one of the factors that contribute to a lower overall quality of education at Tamil- vs. Sinhala-medium government schools.

Admission to primary and secondary schools is a result of both merit and non-merit based factors. Currently, Grade one admissions is non-merit based. However, in the last few years there has been an ongoing debate about whether or not to standardize Grade-one admission by instituting an admissions exam. In 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a memorandum submitted by Education Minister Susil Premajayantha to amend the existing year-one admissions formula to provide opportunities for children living in close proximity to schools (this applies to both national and provincial schools). The current admissions formula, which will be instituted in 2011, is included below (Ministry of Education, 2010a):

- Children who live in close proximity to the school: 50%
- Children of past students: 25%
- Children of public servants: 10%
- Children who have brothers and sisters studying in the same school: 15%

Modeled after the British system, the educational system is based on three national exams:

- Grade 5 Scholarship Examination
- General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary-level (O-level) Examination
- General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced-level (A-level) Examination

In contrast with Grade one admissions, secondary school admissions are largely based on

students' performance on the Grade 5 scholarship exam.<sup>29</sup> Admissions to the A-Level are based on students' performance on the O-level exams taken at the end of Grade 11. Admission to universities is on the basis of raw marks on the A-level exam (with quotas on the basis of medium of instruction and region). At present, the university system consists of only twelve national universities, six postgraduate institutes, and five other independent institutes, all controlled by the state (de Silva 1999:115). It is due to the lack of private universities that admissions is highly competitive, with only a small percentage of qualified A-level students granted admissions (around 12%). In Sri Lanka, level of education is not strongly correlated with employment, with huge numbers of university graduates among the unemployed. However, O-levels are required for most lower-level employment, and A-level are required for most middle- to upper-level employment (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation).

### **“Textbook Oriented” Educational Systems**

In Sri Lanka, as elsewhere in South Asia, classroom practices are consistent with what Kumar (1986), describes as “textbook oriented” educational systems. Kumar states that in such educational systems, the central government prescribes a textbook for each subject (all textbooks are free). The students, in turn, must have their own copy of the textbook for each subject, and must carry the textbook along with their notebooks. Whereas in less “textbook oriented” educational systems, such as the U.S., the teacher may only use the textbook as a guide, in “textbook oriented” educational systems lessons are entirely based on the textbook. As Kumar describes, the teacher spends most of the time simplifying or interpreting the textbook and familiarizing students with its content to

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<sup>29</sup> If a school includes both primary and secondary programs (Grades 1-11), students who are admitted to the school in Grade one can usually remain at the school through Grade 11. If students enter a different school for Grade 6, admissions is based on the national Grade 5 scholarship exams.

the point that it can be easily memorized for exams. The textbook also serves a structuring device in the classroom, used for routines like reading out loud, silent reading, comprehension exercises, recapitulation, homework, and tests (1986).

In “textbook oriented” educational systems, classroom practices are almost entirely geared towards preparing students for the national exams. As the exams are strictly based on the textbooks, the use of other pedagogical resources, as well as the development of competencies beyond the content of textbooks are highly discouraged (Kumar 1986; Wickrema and Colenso 2003). As I will discuss below, this disassociation of classroom and non-classroom practices discourages students and teachers from making use of recent educational reforms, such as the “official” language policy, as vehicles for improving interethnic relations. This is because rather than extending the learning of second-language Sinhala and Tamil into broader school-based social practices (such as school functions and activities and students’ free time), it is mainly restricted to the confines of the classroom.

Though the Sri Lankan educational system remains oriented around teachers (who apply “chalk and talk” techniques), there have been some recent reforms that have attempted to create a more student-centered and activity-based approach to teaching and learning. One of these reforms is the “Five E” method, which was introduced to Grade six and ten in 2007, and the rest of the Grades in 2008. The five E’s are: Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation (Nadesan 2007, in conversation). According to this method, after teachers present a lesson, students are left to do assignments in groups. When the students are finished with the assignment, it is corrected by the teacher (evaluation). Disfavored by many teachers, this policy is only

being sporadically instituted in schools.<sup>30</sup>

## **Educational Inequities**

### **The *Swabasha* Policy and the Segregation of Sri Lankan Students**

Sri Lankan schools are officially organized on the basis of language medium (Sinhala and/or Tamil) and religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Christian). However, for Sinhalese and Tamils, as mediated by the concept of “mother-tongue,” language medium is conflated with ethnicity. According to national policy, Sinhalese must study in their “mother-tongue,” which is Sinhala, and Tamils must study in their “mother-tongue,” which is Tamil. Muslims in the Sinhalese-majority South, however, who often claim that their “mother-tongue” is Arabic, or that they do not have a “mother-tongue” at all, can often choose to study in the Tamil- or Sinhala-mediums. These policies are consistent with the highly entrenched view that for Sinhalese and Tamils ethnicity is based on language (“mother-tongue”), and for Muslims, it is based on religion. The relationship between ethnicity, “mother-tongue,” and religion (see Table 3), is taught in schools as part of the national social studies curriculum.<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that Muslims define their ethnicity on the basis of religion and not language, ethnicity, as defined by language (“mother-tongue”), remains the dominant mode of ordering difference.

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<sup>30</sup> Several teachers in Tamil-medium schools commented to me that this method only works if students are capable of reading and understanding the assignments on their own. As many students only have partial literacy, the 5E method often fails. One Tamil-medium teacher commented that she does not like it that the stronger students have to spend so much time helping the weaker students. She stressed that the students really need as much of the teachers’ instruction as possible. I found that in schools with limited space the high noise volume makes group-work nearly impossible.

<sup>31</sup> I observed a Grade 10 geography class at a Tamil-medium Hindu School where students were being taught that for Muslims, ethnicity is based on religion, rather than language. Several students had particular difficulty grasping this concept, and had to ask the teacher for clarification.

**Table 3: The Relationship between Ethnicity, “Mother-tongue,” and Religion as Taught in the Sri Lankan National Curriculum**

Ethnicity	Sinhalese	Tamil	Muslim
“Mother-Tongue”	Sinhala	Tamil	Arabic?
Religion	Buddhist, Roman Catholic (RC), or Non-Roman Catholic (NRC)	Hindu, RC, or NRC	Islam

In Sri Lanka, 99.6% of government schools are single-medium: 70.6% Sinhala-medium and 28.7% Tamil-medium (see Table 4). These percentages more or less match the population statistics in the 2001 census (Perera et al. 2004). In all of Sri Lanka, there are only 65 schools which offer bi-media (Sinhala and Tamil) streams. In the last five years, many of these schools have also introduced English as a medium of instruction at the secondary level (Grades 6-11), as well as for some A-level subjects. These schools are not evenly spread throughout the island, but are predominantly found in ethnically mixed urban areas in the Western (Colombo) and Central (Kandy) Provinces (see Table 5) (Ministry of Education 2003) (see Table 5).

**Table 4: Distribution of Sri Lankan Government Schools by Language Medium**

Language medium	Percentage of Schools
Sinhala-medium	70.6%
Tamil-medium	28.7%
Bi-media	.7%

**Table 5: Distribution of Sri Lankan Bi-Media Schools by Province**

Number of Schools	Province
Western Province (including Colombo and its suburbs)	27
Central Province (including Kandy)	27
Southern	5
Northern	0
Eastern	1
Northwestern	2
North Central	1

Uva	1
Sabaragamuwa	2

All Sri Lankan schools, in addition to being either Sinhala- or Tamil-medium, must also have a religious affiliation (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Roman Catholic (RC), or Non-Roman Catholic (NRC)).<sup>32</sup> There is no policy that the majority of teachers should have the same religious affiliation as the school, but it usually occurs this way in practice (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation). Though somewhat rare, if the demographics of a particular school changes, the religious affiliation of the school can change as well. In Kandy and Colombo, there are several cases of former Christian missionary schools gaining a Buddhist majority, and becoming Buddhist schools. For example, in Kandy, a convent school, Scholastica, recently became a Buddhist school (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation). Because of their majority status, it is highly unlikely that Buddhist schools will ever lose their religious affiliations. Many Tamils, however, because of their lack of their political or economic power in relation to Muslims, fear that Muslims will try to gain a numerical majority at Hindu Schools and change them into Muslim schools (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation).

While most Sri Lankan students study with students of their same ethnic group, there are notable exceptions to this. In addition to the bi- and multi-medium schools, there are also conditions where students of one ethnic group may attend a school dominated by students of another. Though since the 1970s there has been a separate category of Muslim schools, large numbers of Muslims also study in Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian schools. While some Muslim parents send their children exclusively to Muslim schools, others prioritize the quality of their children's education over religious

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<sup>32</sup> This indicates all Christian religions other than Catholicism. Among both Sinhalese and Tamils, Pentacostalism is growing in popularity.

considerations. Sinhala-medium Muslims frequently study in Buddhist schools, and Tamil-medium Muslims study at Hindu Schools, particularly because Jaffna Tamil teachers still have a reputation for being the best teachers (Sandarasegaram 2007, in conversation).<sup>33</sup> It is also not unusual for Hindus to study in Muslim schools. Such educational choices are based on factors such as the proximity of the school to the students' homes, the available facilities, and the overall quality of the school.

While before the outbreak of the civil war in 1983 it was quite common for Tamils to study in Sinhala-medium schools, this is becoming rare (and only permissible at certain schools). Under some circumstances, Up-country Tamils from rural plantation areas are forced to study in Sinhala-medium provincial schools if there are no Tamil-medium schools nearby. Balasundaram (2008) discusses a particular situation of Up-country Tamil children studying in a Sinhala-medium school in a rural plantation area outside of Kandy. He shows how these students suffer harassment, are banned from speaking Tamil, and derided for not being able to pronounce particular Sinhala sounds (such as the initial /g/ which is realized in Sinhala but not in Tamil). Though there have been some cases of Sinhalese studying in Hindu Schools in Tamil-majority regions (such as Jaffna), at present, this is very rare. In summary, the overall organization of government schools on the basis of language medium and religion (and through this, ethnicity) has ensured the segregation of Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims in most, but not all, educational contexts.

### **The Uneven Distribution of Educational Resources**

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<sup>33</sup> I got a sense of the association of Jaffna Tamils with education when I spoke to two Muslim women in their mid 70s, who had grown up in tea plantation towns outside of Kandy. They said that when they were growing up, the only Tamils they knew were their Jaffna Tamil school teachers, and the Tamil estate workers. They said that while they were taught almost exclusively by Jaffna Tamils, none of the Up-country Tamils that they knew had any sort of education.



In Sri Lanka, the main discrepancies in the access to quality education in Sri Lanka are between the rich and the poor, urban and rural students, and among Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese students. In the last decade, there has been a growth of a new genre of schools, widely known as international schools. These schools have contributed to the emergence of a two-tiered educational system between those that offer a good quality English-medium education and those that do not. Originally opened to provide an education for children of expatriates, international schools burgeoned in the 1990s. There are currently more than a hundred international schools in Sri Lanka (de Silva 1999). Exclusively English-medium, international schools prepare students for the London GCE O- and A-Level exams. Though there is a significant range in the quality of education offered at international schools, on the whole, they are equipped with excellent teaching facilities, and, by offering good salaries, attract talented teachers. Because of their considerable fees, only a small proportion of Sri Lankan youth are able to attend these schools (de Silva 1999). Students who study at international schools and go on to obtain higher studies in the West are often ensured lucrative employment when they return to Sri Lanka. Even if international school students do not go abroad after they graduate, they still have access to some of the best employment opportunities in the private sector (de Silva 1999). The growth of international schools can be thought to fuel the perpetuation of an English-speaking elite (in contrast to the majority of the populace who are educated in the vernacular), with exclusive access to top level jobs. This hierarchy is fairly similar to that which existed in the British period.

In addition to international schools, there are two additional categories of nongovernment schools: fee-levying autonomous private schools; and non-fee-levying

government-assisted parochial schools (usually Christian); (de Silva 1999). The quality of education at these schools is generally superior to even the best government schools. However, the quality of English instruction offered is generally inferior to that offered at international schools.<sup>34</sup>

Within the category of government schools, there is a large discrepancy between national and provincial schools. National schools contrast with provincial schools in terms of superior facilities (amount of space, classrooms, and teaching equipment, etc.), and well as their more experienced and educated teachers (some holding B.A. degrees). A small number of students who excel on national exams (the Grade 5 scholarship exam and the O-level exam) can qualify gain admissions to top private, assisted, or government schools as scholarship students. But while this policy does contributed to lessening educational inequities between the rich and poor, it is important to realize that students who do well on these exams are usually those who have attended leading schools (which is tied to socio-economic level and class).

In Sri Lanka, educational inequities do not just exist between the rich and poor, but between students residing in urban vs. rural areas. In Sri Lanka, the best educational institutions, as measured by national exam scores, are located in urban centers. The discrepancy between access to education for students from urban and rural areas and the rich and poor are related, as wealthy parents, even if they do not already reside in urban areas (where the majority if industry, government and private sector jobs are located), can afford to send their children to urban boarding schools.

In national educational statistics, tea plantations schools are often included in the

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<sup>34</sup> There is also a category of schools called *piriven* schools. Originally intended to provide a free education for Buddhist monks, they also admit laypersons, and cater to disadvantaged and poorer groups in society (de Silva 1999).

category “rural.” As I mention above, though the quality of education on plantation schools has significantly improved in the last three decades, the educational standard on plantations schools is still lower than elsewhere. As an indication of the overall quality of education, in plantation areas the literacy rates remain far below the national average (Little 2003). Of the students who make the transition from O- to A- Levels (Grades 12 and 13), only .65 percent is from the estate sector (de Silva 1999). In addition, almost all Up-country students who go on to universities were not educated in plantation schools, but in private, assisted, or government schools in nearby towns.

Though a significant contrast exists between urban and rural areas, there are also significant disparities in facilities and quality of teachers within urban areas. For example, while many schools in the Colombo district have good facilities, certain pockets, such as slums and shanties (de Silva 1999), remain highly educationally deprived. For example, I visited a small Tamil Christian government school about a half a kilometer from one of Colombo’s main commercial junctions (in close proximity with some of the best schools in Sri Lanka). The school was attended by children who live in a Tamil majority slum area, two kilometers from the school. Without any city bus services, the children had to walk to school every morning, many without shoes, or without breakfast or lunch. The school had only very basic facilities, and lacked a math teacher, which is an essential subject for the O-level exam.

There is a significant disparity in the quality of education in Sri Lanka’s war-impacted areas in the North and East. While the general standard of education in these schools used to be very high, it has significantly declined in the last three decades. De Silva (1999:111), in the following passage, describes the impacts of the war on Jaffna

schools:

It is not simply that the conflict has damaged school buildings and disrupted classroom activity. The forced and voluntary migration of large groups of people has led to an increasing shortage of teachers. The overall teacher-pupil ratio and the graduate teacher-pupil ration are worst in the eastern and northern provinces. Whatever leads the Jaffna district had in terms of educational resources has largely eroded.

While Tamils from the North and East have been most severely impacted by the war, Muslims and Sinhalese have been impacted as well. For example, many of the Muslims displaced by the LTTE from the North in the 1990s are still living in refugee camps in Puttalam with limited access to education.

Educational disparities are not only tied to ethnicity, but also to medium of instruction. Though Tamil-medium schools and streams are officially incorporated into the national education system, they are in a structurally disadvantaged position. As I mentioned above, the translating of the majority of the curriculum from Sinhala to Tamil often leads to errors, omissions, and awkward translations in the Tamil syllabus. For example, during my research at Girls' College, the Grade 10 Tamil-medium history teacher discovered that a unit was missing from the Tamil-medium textbook which was part of the national O-level exam. To compensate for this, she spent weeks translating the Sinhala-medium unit into Tamil, and consulting with the Sinhala-medium history teacher to make sure she had understood it correctly (her Sinhala literacy skills were entirely self-taught). On top of such translation issues, though by policy there are supposed to be equal resources available for Sinhala- and Tamil-medium education, this is not the case I practice. For example, in the Kandy zone the O-level exam counselor was an exclusively Sinhala-medium position, meaning that students could not receive such counseling in Tamil.

Finally, the administrative division of schools by medium of instruction also allows for inequities in the distribution of government funding. Though I do not have access to any information regarding these discrepancies, in Kandy and Colombo I observed that the schools in the greatest visible disrepair, and with the fewest facilities (such as classroom space, desks and chairs, etc.), were invariably the Tamil-medium Hindu or Christian schools. This is also related to Tamils' lack of financial resources and political pull in relation to Sinhalese and Muslims. The discrepancy in the distribution of government funding to Tamil-medium schools is something that is widely accepted by Tamil-medium educators, who make considerable efforts to get donations from community members and international organizations (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO) to improve the facilities at their schools. Though it may be related to factors other than government funding (such as poverty and the impact of war), national O-level exam scores are much higher at Sinhala-medium schools than at Tamil-medium schools.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, inequities in the educational resources available in Sri Lanka are compounded by the existence of another educational institution, private tuition classes. Students with sufficient financial resources supplement their "formal" schooling with private tuition classes. Many students consider these tuition classes to be where their most crucial exam preparation takes place.<sup>36</sup> Students who cannot afford tuition classes can be thought to be at a marked disadvantage in preparing for national exams. Thus, not only do poorer students also attend lower-quality schools, but they are also hurt by their

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<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the competition for university admissions is less intense in Tamil-medium schools, making them the preferred choice for Muslims who want to attend universities.

<sup>36</sup> There is large range in the quality of tuition classes, from students studying with the most celebrated teachers, to those studying with a peer or family member. In many ways, the hierarchies within the educational system are reflected in the hierarchies among tuition masters. For example, most Tamil-medium teachers seek out tuition masters from Jaffna, as Jaffna has long been linked with educational prestige.

inability to attend tuition classes.

### **Recent Educational Reforms**

By segregating Sri Lankan students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, national education system has served to promote interethnic enmity and unrest (Daniel 1996; Tambiah 1986; Sorenson 2008). Tambiah (1986), himself educated in the pre-1956 period, compares the collegial climate of English-medium schools (which combined elite groups of students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds) to the segregated nature of Sinhala- and Tamil-medium schools today:

Previously Sinhalese and Tamil students studied together in those of the country's schools that taught in English—the urban schools in particular. In this environment it was considered improper by and large to invoke ethnic, caste, or religious affiliations, or let them interfere with interpersonal relationships, and with representation on the schools' teams and alumni associations.

Here, Tambiah (1986) describes Sri Lankan schools in the post-1956 period:

...contacts between Sinhalese and Tamil students were reduced to a minimum, and the distance served in time to convert difference into enmity and confrontation, and to create distrust, dislike, and fear between the youth that had never before been experience so vehemently in the island's cities and towns, including the capital city of Colombo itself.

In 1997, the Sri Lankan government, explicitly recognizing the link between the educational system and political violence among Tamil and Sinhala youth, passed a series of policy reforms designed to promote national cohesion. Among these reforms were revisions made to controversial subjects such as history and social studies, as well as the introduction of courses designed to promote peace and national integration. While the previous curriculum had propagated an exclusively Sinhala Buddhist imagining of the nation, the new curriculum sought to enforce a more multicultural perspective. The reforms also included a new language policy with Sri Lankan students required to learn

both official languages (Sinhala and Tamil). Five years after these reforms, in response to the demand for English in national and global markets, a new reform called for an increased emphasis on English in primary and secondary education as a “link language” (Perera et al. 2004:403). In considering the relationship between national language medium policies and political violence in Sri Lanka in the last fifty years, an important question remains: Will these new language policies, by bolstering interethnic understanding and communication, help repair some of the damage of the *Swabasha* policy, or does there need to be more substantial change in the overall organization of Sri Lankan schools? In the following discussion, I analyze these recent educational reforms, and lay out the main barriers to their success in promoting interethnic integration.

Though significant educational reforms were passed in 1972 and 1981, they did not address issues related to national integration. In 1990, the Presidential Commission on Youth Unrest Committee Report (1990) underscored some of the systemic features that had not been addressed in the educational system or in any of its introduced reforms. Highly influenced by the report, the 1991 NEC Report proposed nine national goals, which were also considered to be goals of education. Three of these goals specifically pertained to the achievement of national cohesion:

- The achievement of national cohesion, national integrity, and national unity
- The establishment of a pervasive pattern of social justice
- The active partnership in nation-building activities to ensure the continuous nurturing of a sensing of deep and abiding concern for one another

The report also identified five basic competencies on which education was to be founded. These included communication, ethics, and religion (Perera et al. 2004:397).

In 1997, The NEC introduced a comprehensive proposal for educational reforms (some of which were implemented in 1998). It covered the entire spectrum of education

from primary to secondary levels, with the expected outcome of achieving the national goals and the five competencies. Changes were proposed in the following areas:

- The system of teaching-learning
- Student guidance and counseling
- Subject curricula at all levels of schooling
- The design, production, and provision of textbooks
- School-based evaluation processes
- Teacher education

New planning tools and management structures were introduced, and new institutions were established to conduct policy-relevant research and advise the government (Perera et al. 2004:397).

Following the report, a process was put into effect to reorganize and improve the content of history, religion, and social studies curricula, which were considered to be the most controversial subjects. These curricula were also checked for any ethnic, religious, gender, or poverty bias (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Several new subjects were also introduced, with an intent to “develop the total personality of the child,” which included the ability to “build positive interpersonal relationships and accept diversity” (Perera et al. 2004:400; National Institute of Education 2006). One of the new subjects included a “citizenship education” course for Grades 6-9, which was designed to create “citizens full of competencies and good virtues” who will “admire the culture multiplicity and develop competencies and positive attitudes towards national integration” (Educational Publications Department 2005:vii). In addition, a new syllabus was designed for Grade 10 students which included sessions on democracy, decentralization and devolution, multicultural society, economic systems and relations, and conflict resolution in a democratic society. Grade 11 students would study law and justice, government, human rights, environmental problems, sustainable development, and international relations



(National Institute of Education 2006a, b).

According to the new language policy, both official languages (Sinhala and Tamil) would be taught to all school children as part of the core curriculum. At the junior secondary level (Grades 6-10), Sinhala and Tamil (Tamil for Sinhala students and Sinhala for Tamil students) would be taught as compulsory subjects. At the senior secondary level (Grades 10-11), the “other” official languages would be offered as elective subjects (Perera et al. 2004).

In 2003, the NEC released a report calling for the increased emphasis on English in primary and secondary education. Under the category of “Promotion of English Education,” the NEC report states the following (National Education Commission 2003):

In the context of the increasingly important role of English in the national and global environment, it is necessary to work towards the goal of providing equal opportunity to all segments of the population to learn English.

The report stated that though Sinhala or Tamil should continue to be the medium of instruction in primary Grades, “oral English should be strengthened to facilitate the development of communication skills” (National Education Commission 2003). The report also proposed that bilingualism should be promoted by using English as a medium of instruction at the secondary level in selected subjects such as mathematics, science, and information technology. In addition, the report made two specifications regarding the O- and A-level exams:

- Students of secondary Grades should be given the option to
- (a) Study any subject in the English medium in the GCE OL and GCE AL Grades subject to the availability of teachers, and
  - (b) Sit the GCE OL and GCE AL examinations in the medium of their choice

The report also passed several policy reforms to train teachers to teach in the English-medium (Ministry of Education 2003). Thus, in addition to the greater emphasis on

teaching English in primary and secondary schools, the reforms also allowed for the reintroduction of English as a medium of instruction. At the time of my research from 2007-2008, select Sri Lankan schools were offering English as a medium of instruction in certain subjects (usually math and science).

Overall, these new policies rely heavily on curriculum change and written textbooks with regard to their objective of “national integration and unity” (Sorenson 2008:430). As Stewick and Levinson (2007) suggest, one of the main problems with this approach is that values such as democracy and tolerance cannot be internalized by students through textbooks alone, but must be anchored firmly in the social structure and practices of the school.

The main assumption behind the “official” language policy is that if students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds can learn to communicate with one another in their respective “mother-tongues,” this will foster interethnic (and national) integration. In addition to the teaching of Sinhala and Tamil, English is also being promoted as an “interethnic” link language in addition to a global language. In the following discussion, I survey the potential of the new language reforms (the “official” language policy and the increased emphasis on English) to promote interethnic integration and mutual understanding. I do not assume that educational policies alone can ameliorate conflict, but argue that if implemented in a way that promotes interethnic understanding and communication, they have the potential to bring about positive results.

Firstly, the success of the new language policies strongly depends on students having the motivation to learn these languages, and teachers having the motivation to teach them. As English is in growing demand as a language for social and economic

mobility and global citizenship, there is sufficient impetus for the new English programs. The main challenge that schools face in implementing these programs is the dearth of Sri Lankan teachers qualified to teach in the English-medium (a direct result of the *Swabasha* policy). As Sinhala is the dominant language of Sri Lanka, Tamils already have sufficient motivation to learn Sinhala. In addition, in urban areas in the Sinhalese-majority South (such as Kandy and Colombo), many Tamils and Muslims are Tamil/Sinhala bilinguals, who regularly use Sinhala as an interethnic link language across numerous social domains. Because of Tamil's status as a minority language, and because of deeply rooted ethnic hostilities towards Tamils, it is not as clear that Sinhalese will be sufficiently motivated to learn Tamil. As evidence of this, I observed that many Sinhalese, though admitting to having a passive understanding of Tamil, exhibit strong aversions toward speaking it. For the policy to meet its goals of promoting "national unity and integration," it is not enough for Tamils to speak Sinhala, but Sinhalese must also learn to speak Tamil. If Sinhalese and Tamil students only speak to one another in Sinhala, the hierarchy of the majority over the minority (Tamils) is perpetuated, which breeds resentment. Thus, while English programs will likely burgeon over time (with more teachers acquiring the necessary training and resources); it is uncertain whether there will be sufficient motivation and educational resources for the successful implementation of the "official" language policy (Perera et al. 2004).

Secondly, the incorporation of these policies into school-based social practices (Stewick and Levinson 2007) is highly constrained by Sri Lanka's "textbook oriented" educational system. As teachers' main concern is to prepare students for the national exams (which are entirely based on textbooks), connections between the content of

lessons and other school-based social practices are discouraged. Integrating these languages into school-based social practices would not only involve organizing activities where students could apply what they had learned in class, but would also involve fostering a school environment conducive to interethnic communication and mutual understanding. In addition, as I further discuss in chapter three, these language policies must also be accompanied by a change in the way that languages are taught in Sri Lankan schools. Currently, though the curriculum does emphasize “spoken” language, classroom practices emphasize reading and writing skills to the exclusion of speaking (as oral communication is not tested on the national exams). Thus, in order for these language policy reforms to be effective in promoting interethnic integration, classroom practices need to foreground verbal communicative skills, and incorporate these skills into broader school-based practices.

The third constraint relates to the very organization of Sri Lankan government schools on the basis of language medium and religion (and through this, ethnicity). Since for the most part Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims do not attend the same schools, it is virtually impossible for “official” languages and English to function as tools for interethnic communication, as there are no in-school contexts for such communication to take place. As they do not contribute to changes in the overall structure of education, these recent policies can be considered to be merely additive rather than transformative (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). Though they are certainly a step in the right direction, they will not substantially contribute to the promotion of interethnic integration.

### **Directions for Reform**

In Sri Lanka, education can be thought to both reflect ethnic divisions as well as

perpetuate them. I suggest that the only way education can promote interethnic integration (and be a positive force for social change) is to follow the example of other nations plagued by ethnic conflict (e.g. Northern Ireland, South Africa), and begin the desegregation of schools. In Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestants had long been segregated in schools. Conciliatory educational policies (including the desegregation of schools) have been thought to contribute to the amelioration of the conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). As in the case of Northern Ireland (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Hayes et al. 2007), the desegregation of schools would not have to happen abruptly, but could take place gradually. One way to begin this process would be to increase the number of schools that offer bi-media (Sinhala and Tamil) streams. Academic and non-academic programs could then be introduced to increase interactions between Tamil- and Sinhala-medium students. Though the separate Tamil- and Sinhala-curricula could remain intact for crucial subjects, following the example of some bilingual schools in the urban US, a series of bi- or multilingual subjects could be introduced (Ogbu 1990). Though I do not recommend overhauling the existing exam system, bi- and multilingual subjects, rather than being included on the national exam, could be evaluated by individual schools (and subsequently added to students' electronic records). This would allow teachers to evaluate students on more than their written performances (such as their spoken language skills). Such a method would also encourage the link between classroom and broader school-based social practices.

In addition, interethnic integration and mutual understanding would be bolstered by taking steps to emphasize English as a tool for interethnic unity and integration. This could be done by instituting classroom and non-classroom activities where students are

encouraged to communicate with students from different ethnic backgrounds. In the next chapter, I build on these arguments by considering how the recent policies have been implemented in everyday practices at two government schools in Kandy, Sri Lanka: a single-medium provincial school, Hindu College; and a multi-medium national school, Girls' College.

## **Chapter Three**

### **From Policies to Practices: the Regimenting of Language Medium and Ethnicity in Kandy Schools**

This chapter considers how national educational policies pertaining to language and medium of instruction are regimented in local practices at two government schools in Kandy, Sri Lanka. In contrast to other multilingual postcolonial nation-states (such as India), in Sri Lanka, post-independence educational policies, by segregating students on the basis of language medium, ethnicity, and religion, have served to promote interethnic enmity and unrest (Daniel 1996; de Silva 1999; Tambiah 1986). As I discussed in chapter two, in the late 1990s, the Sri Lankan government, recognizing a causal link between the structure of the educational system and incidences of political violence among Tamil and Sinhalese youth (namely the ongoing ethnic conflict and the JVP insurgencies in 1972 and late 1980s), passed a number of educational reforms to promote “national unity and integration” (De Silva 1999:109; Sorenson 2008:429). In addition to curriculum reforms, the changes included the “official” language policy which prescribed that all government students be taught the co-official languages, Sinhala and Tamil (Tamil to Sinhala-medium students and Sinhala to Tamil-medium students) (De Silva 1999:109). Five years later, acknowledging the necessity for English in national and global markets another series of educational reforms proposed an increased emphasis on the teaching of English in primary and secondary education. In national policy discourses, both the teaching of the “official” languages and English as a global “link

language” are associated with promoting “national unity and integration.”

In chapter two, I pointed out that because students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are segregated in most educational settings, recent language policies (the teaching of “official” languages and English) have very little chance to promote interethnic integration and mutual understanding. However, the relatively small number of bi- and multi-medium schools, which combine Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students, have some potential to implement these policies in productive ways. In this chapter, I explore how the national language policies are integrated into the structure and practices of two schools in Kandy, Sri Lanka: a single-medium provincial school (Hindu College) and a multi-medium national school (Girls’ College). In addition, I also explore how language medium, ethnicity, and religion are regimented in everyday practice at these schools. I do not only consider classroom interactions, but also look at school-based social practices (how students interact with teachers and fellow students inside and outside of the classroom, what languages they speak with whom, etc.). Throughout my analysis, I ground local practices in larger socio-cultural, political, and economic inequalities between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking minority groups (Tamils and Muslims).

In the first part of the chapter, I show how the division between Sinhala- and Tamil-medium schools pertains not just to curricula, but involve socio-cultural, linguistic, religious, and political orientations. I suggest that Hindu College, as a Tamil-medium school, can be seen as morally distinct from the Sinhalese Buddhist educational



mainstream and from the nation as a whole.<sup>37</sup> I show that while Hindu College, like most Tamil-medium schools, offers both Sinhala and English, these languages are not integrated into any school-based social practices (such as extracurricular activities, assemblies, etc.). Visits to Sinhala-medium provincial schools and discussions with Sinhalese teachers and students, suggest that the sociolinguistic situation is similar to Tamil-medium schools; though Tamil and English may be taught, these languages are not integrated into broader school-based social practices.

In the second part of the chapter, I demonstrate how in spite of Girls' College's explicit attempts to promote a "pluralistic" environment inclusive of students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds (mirroring an imagining of the Sri Lankan nation), divisions between the Tamil-medium stream and the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school are constantly being reinforced. In everyday practices, the Tamil-medium stream, which consists of Tamil and Muslim students, remains isolated from the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school. Though Tamil-medium students are multilingual in Tamil, Sinhala, and English, they rarely interact with Sinhalese students, either inside or outside of the classroom.

Surveying the implementation of the recent language policies, I show that while in scholarly and popular perceptions English has long been associated with the blurring of ethnic and religious differences (Tambiah 1986), in the teaching of English as a subject, and in the newly introduced English-medium streams, students continue to be identified with their Tamil- or Sinhala- medium origins (which are conflated with the ethnic division between Tamils and Sinhalese). I also show how the Sinhala and Tamil

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<sup>37</sup> Though I focus on a Hindu school in this chapter, Muslim schools also represent distinct moral spheres. Though Muslim government schools teach national curriculum, in classroom practices the curriculum is combined with a focus on Islamic theology and practice.

second-language programs are being implemented in asymmetrical ways. Namely, while Tamil-medium students are expected to speak Sinhala, Sinhala-medium students are not expected to speak any Tamil. Thus, even in multi-medium schools, the constant reinforcing of ethnic divisions, as well as asymmetries in the implementation of these policies, prevent them from being applied in ways that promote interethnic communication and mutual understanding. I ultimately suggest that in the Sri Lankan education system, policies and practices pertaining to language and the medium of instruction not only perpetuate social inequalities by isolating Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students from one another in school settings, but also serve to reinforce the essentialized link between language medium (“mother-tongue”) and ethnicity, which extends far beyond educational contexts.

### **Second-Language Teaching: From the National Curriculum to Local Practice**

Before turning to Hindu College and Girls’ College specifically, I discuss issues related to the implementation of the “official” language policy (Sinhala and Tamil) in Sri Lankan schools. Tamil as a second-language is currently being taught in many parts of the world including India, Singapore, and Malaysia. It is also being taught as a “heritage” language in Tamil Diasporas in North America, Europe, and Australia (Das 2008a). The national Sri Lankan curriculum differs from the majority of these cases in that rather than focusing exclusively on “literary” Tamil, it incorporates both “spoken” and “literary” forms.<sup>38</sup> In Sri Lanka, the emphasis on “spoken” Tamil is rooted in the idea that if Sinhalese and Tamils can learn to communicate with one another in each other’s “mother-tongues,” it will promote “national unity and integration.” In Sri Lanka,

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<sup>38</sup> Das (2008a,b), who conducted research on Tamil heritage language schools among Tamils in Montreal, observed that while Sri Lankan Tamils only included written forms in their Tamil curricula, Indian Tamils emphasized both written and spoken forms.

the national Tamil-as-a-second-language curriculum is not only intended for schools, but is also used in programs geared toward government administrators and members of the police force and army working in Tamil-speaking areas (not only the North and East, but also in Up-country areas with large Muslim and Tamil populations, such as Akurana and Gampola).

It is because of the existing sociolinguistic hierarchies that the task of standardizing a “spoken” Tamil variety for inclusion into textbooks is a highly ideologically fraught task (Milroy 2000). The very process of including particular spoken forms within a textbook can serve to ratify these forms as the most “standard” or the “best.” Since the British period, the Tamil-medium curriculum has had a very strong Jaffna Tamil bias (because of the institutional domination of Jaffna Tamils in education). In the Tamil literature textbooks, for example, all of the poems and stories used to be from Jaffna Tamil authors. However, in the last ten years the National Institute of Education (NIE), as part of a larger project of removing bias in national curricula, has included literature from other Tamil-speaking groups (mainly Up-country Tamils and Muslims). However, the second-language Tamil curriculum is still solely based on what is widely recognized to be Jaffna Tamil. It is recognizable as Jaffna Tamil not only through the inclusion of “spoken” forms associated with Jaffna Tamils, but some of the vocabulary words are specific to the Jaffna natural environment (flora and fauna, food, and spices).

In Kandy, where the overwhelming majority of principals and teachers are Up-country Tamils and Muslims, the curriculum is a source of contention. Many Tamil-medium teachers expressed to me that they thought it was inappropriate for Sinhalese

students to learn Jaffna “spoken” Tamil when they reside in Kandy. But as I will show in this chapter, even teachers who explicitly objected to the curriculum still followed it. The only teacher I observed breaking away from the curriculum to teach Up-country “spoken” forms was a principal of a Tamil-medium school who was earning some extra money teaching Tamil-as-a-second-language to Kandy police officers.

Like the Tamil curriculum, the Sinhala-as-a-second-language curriculum also includes both “spoken” and “literary” forms. Though there is also some debate about which “spoken” variety to include in textbooks (the most salient sociolinguistic difference is the distinction between Kandyan and Low-country Sinhala), it is not as contentious as in the Tamil case. However, in both second-language Sinhala and Tamil classes, teachers focus on reading and writing to the sole exclusion of speaking (students write both written and spoken forms in class and on exams).<sup>39</sup>

As I will show, linguistics practices in Sinhala and Tamil-as-a-second-language classes generally differ, as most Tamil-medium students in Kandy already have spoken proficiency in Sinhala. Thus, while in a Sinhala-as-a-second-language class, Tamil-medium students may interact with the teacher in Sinhala, Tamil-as-a-second-language classes tend to be conducted solely in Sinhala (as Sinhalese students are reluctant to speak Sinhala and teachers refrain from encouraging them to do so). The differences in linguistic practices between these two second-language classes are more related to ethnic tensions and social hierarchies than to sociolinguistic competencies.

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the only Tamil as a second language classes I observed where the teachers focused on speaking were classes taught to Kandy police officers and government administrators (the teachers were two principals of Tamil-medium provincial schools). This seemed to be prompted by the students’ strong desire to learn to speak Tamil, and the teachers’ recognition of their immediate need to acquire this skill. Contrary to what one might imagine, the police officers and administrators were some of the most conscientious and dutiful students I have encountered. Many of them stayed after class, chatting with me and their teachers in Tamil.

## **Situating Kandy Government Schools**

As I discussed in chapter two, in Sri Lanka there is a great disparity in the educational resources available in urban vs. rural areas. Kandy, as similar to Colombo, has a large concentration of leading government and non-government schools. Kandy town is located in the Kandy district (one of three districts in the Central Province), and the Kandy zone (the educational administrative unit). While demographic information for the Kandy zone is not available, I present the ethnic makeup of the Kandy district according to the 2001 census. As is evident in Table 6, though Sinhalese represent a clear majority, there are also significant populations of Up-country Tamils, North and East Tamils, and Muslims (Department of Census and Statistics 2009). As based on the demographics information for the Kandy district (see Table 6), in Table 7 I approximate the percentage of Sinhalese vs. Tamil-speakers (inclusive of Sri Lankan moors, Sri Lankan Tamils, and Indian Tamils) in the Kandy district. I have not included Malays as only a small percentage of Malays speak Tamil as a first language. The demographic makeup of the Kandy zone likely differs from the Kandy district in having a slightly higher percentage of Sinhalese (Kandy town, of course, is a center for Sinhalese Buddhism and the Buddhist state). However, the demographics of Kandy town fluctuates throughout the day, as large numbers of Tamil-speakers from surrounding towns, villages, and tea plantation areas come into Kandy for trade, commerce, and education.

**Table 6: Ethnic Makeup of the Kandy District According to the 2001 Census**

(In the 2001 census, Muslims are referred to as Sri Lankan Moors, North and East Tamils as Sri Lankan Tamils, and Up-country Tamils as Indian Tamils. People of Malay descent, who generally prefer to classify themselves as Muslims, are included with Burghers, who are Sri Lankans of Dutch and/or Portuguese ancestry.)

Ethnicity	Population	% of the Total Population
Sinhala	77,560	70.48%
Sri Lankan Moors	15,326	13.93%
Sri Lankan Tamils	9,427	8.57%
Indian Tamils	5,245	4.77%
Burgher, Malay	2,489	2.26%

**Table 7: Approximate Percentage of Sinhala and Tamil Speakers in the Kandy District**

Sinhalese	77,560	70.48%
Tamil-speakers	31,498	28.6%

The government schools system in the Kandy zone comprises 80,477 students, taught by 4574 teachers. In Table 8 I present the distribution of government schools in the Kandy zone by type. As I discussed in chapter two, the majority of bi-medium schools in Sri Lanka are located in Kandy and the greater Colombo area. Of the 133 government schools in the Kandy zone, 125 (93.2%) are single-medium schools – either Sinhala or Tamil (Hindu or Muslim) – and 10 (6.8%) are bi-medium. Of these ten schools, six offer Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams (at the secondary level), and four offer only Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams (Ministry of Education, 2009).

**Table 8: Distribution of Government Schools in Kandy Zone by Type**

Total Number of Government Schools	133
National Schools	9
Provincial Schools	108
Piriven (Buddhist Clerical Schools)	13
Government Assisted Semi-Private Schools	3

In order to enable a cross-section of Kandy schools, I focused on a Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school (Hindu College), and a multi-medium Buddhist national school (Girls' College). To supplement this data, I also visited other schools in Kandy town and surrounding areas including the following: other Tamil-medium provincial and national schools (Hindu and Muslim); Sinhala-medium provincial and national schools (Buddhist); and multi-medium provincial, national, government assisted, and private schools (Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim). Though Hindu College and Girls' College vastly differ in the resources and quality of education offered, what these two schools share is that they both have status as Kandy "town" schools. As such, they have a high status in relation to comparable schools located outside of Kandy, and therefore attract talented teachers and students, as well as local resources. As Hindu College does not have A-levels (Grades 12 and 13), students who pass their O-level exams (about 50% of all students) can apply to do their A-levels at Kandy government, assisted, or private schools.<sup>40</sup> Every year, between one and three Hindu College girls go on to do their A-levels at Girls' College, in Tamil-medium arts, commerce, or science. Because Girls' College is an elite multi-medium school, for these girls, transferring from Hindu College to Girls' College presents a significant adjustment.<sup>41</sup>

### **Hindu College**

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<sup>40</sup> Students who do not pass their O-level exam the first time can retake it the following year. Students who do not go on to A-levels generally stay in the home, do vocational training, such as wood or metal working for boys or sewing for girls, or get low-level jobs.

<sup>41</sup> I had the opportunity to observe three Hindu College girls as they adapted to their first few weeks at Girls' College. When I observed them seeming to struggle over understanding the Sinhala announcements on the school intercom, they insisted that it was not a problem for them. One area where they admitted they were struggling was English class. At Hindu College, their English classes were conducted mostly in Tamil. At Girls' College, they had to adjust to a Sinhalese English teacher, who conducted the class exclusively in English (they said they had particular trouble understanding her accent). They also found that they were at a significant disadvantage compared to the girls who had done their O-levels at Girls' College and other comparable schools, and were already adapted to the school, and the teaching style of the teachers.

At the national, provincial, and zonal levels, Sinhala- and Tamil-medium education is administratively divided. At the level of the Kandy Zonal Ministry of Education, this means that Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students do not simply study in separate schools, but that they are also separated in government sponsored programs (such as competitions and exam preparation). Thus, while Tamil-medium students often have a sense of a shared experience with other Tamil-medium students, they feel isolated from Sinhala-medium students (even when they study in the same multi-medium schools).

Within Kandy, Tamil-medium education is in a peripheral position with regard to the Sinhalese Buddhist educational mainstream. When I asked Sinhalese people in Kandy town about Tamil-medium education, I found that many acted unaware of the existence of Tamil-medium schools. For example, when I asked a prominent Sinhalese academic about Tamil-medium schools in Kandy, he commented that while some larger schools have both Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams, there are no separate Tamil-medium schools in Kandy. I do not think this man and others were actually ignorant of the existence of Tamil-medium schools, but were simply refusing to acknowledge their legitimate presence within the Kandy educational milieu.

As an indicative of the peripheral status of Tamil-medium schools within Kandy town, when I first started my research I noticed that the three Kandy Tamil-medium Hindu provincial schools—Hindu College, Vivekananda, and Kalai Mahal—were all located in particularly inconspicuous places. Hindu College is situated along one of Kandy's main commercial roads, approximately a half kilometer from the center of Kandy town. Though centrally located, it lacks prominent signage. Because the narrow



building is packed in so closely with surrounding buildings, it is also very easy to miss. Vivekananda is situated inside an army base, not far from Hindu College. Over the years, the army base has slowly encroached on the school's land, to the extent that currently students and teachers have to pass through the base's main security gates to enter the school.<sup>42</sup> Kalai Mahal is located in a highly stigmatized neighborhood called Mahayyawa, located near Kandy's Central Cemetery and populated by low-caste Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims, the majority of whom work for the Kandy Municipal Council (which owns the land). While not far from the prestigious Anglican private school, Trinity College, to get to Kalai Mahal you have to walk up a hill towards a residential section of Mahayyawa. Thus, though these Kandy schools are located near the center of Kandy town, they are spatially removed from the symbolic heart of Kandy town, which is oriented around the *Dalida Maligawa* (The Temple of the Tooth), the Kandy Lake, and the main commercial district.

### **Regimenting Language Medium, Ethnicity, and Religion**

In this section I look at how language medium, ethnicity, and religion are regimented at Hindu College. I start with the demographics of the school, and move on to a discussion of everyday school-based social practices. I show that partially because of its status as a Tamil-medium Hindu "town" school, the Hindu College principal and teachers are focused on addressing the needs of Kandy Tamils (both Hindus and Christians) to the exclusion of other social groups (both demographically and socially). I also demonstrate that in its sociolinguistic, political, and moral orientations, Hindu College represents an almost exclusively Tamil sphere, removed mainstream imaginings

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<sup>42</sup> One of the reasons I chose to conduct my research at Hindu College as opposed to Vivekananda was because of security concerns having to pass through the army base on a daily basis.

of the Sri Lankan nation-state.

As a “town” school, Hindu College (like Vivekananda) is favored by parents over comparable schools on the outskirts of Kandy.<sup>43</sup> But while Hindu College’s exam scores had been lackluster in recent years, after the arrival of the new principal in 2006, they drastically improved. In 2007, Hindu College ranked in the top three of all Tamil-medium provincial schools in the Kandy zone.

At the time of my research, Hindu College had 285 students and 16 teachers. The building has very limited space, with Grades 8-11 located in a single main room on the ground floor of the school (with no dividers between the classroom spaces), and Grades 1-6 located in partially divided classrooms on the first floor. Teachers are mostly middle-class (their children attend national, assisted, or private schools), while students are lower class or below. Students describe their fathers as laborers, shopkeepers, and petty merchants, and their mothers as housewives or tailors.

On my first visit to Hindu College I noticed that by contrast with other Tamil-medium Hindu schools in Kandy town, Hindu College has a marked absence of other ethnic groups (Muslims and Sinhalese). With the exception of one Muslim teacher, who transferred to the school in 2007, all students and staff are Tamil. Among the teachers and students there is considerable religious (Hindu and Christian) and sub-ethnic diversity (Up-country Tamil and North and East Tamil). In Table 9, I present the demographic makeup of the teachers and students with respect to ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, and religion.

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<sup>43</sup> Because it caters to a specific neighborhood, which is highly stigmatized, Kalai Mahal doesn’t really have status as a town school.

In Kandy and surrounding areas, most Tamil-medium Hindu schools have at least one Sinhalese staff member who teaches Sinhala and/or English (Sinhala-medium students also have at least one Tamil or Muslim staff member who teaches Tamil). Hindu College, however, is the only school that does not have any Sinhalese faculty. At Hindu College, both Sinhala and English are taught by Mrs. Rose, an Up-country Tamil Hindu who studied in the Sinhala-medium.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to comparable schools, at Hindu College there is also a noticeable absence of Muslim students. When I asked the principal about this he said “*eDukka maTToom* (we will not take [them]).<sup>45</sup> He explained to me that Muslims have far more educational resources in Kandy town than Tamils. He said that if they started admitting Muslims they would try to dominate the school, and Tamils would have nothing of their own.<sup>46</sup> While Vivekananda also does not admit Muslims, Kalai Mahal does, because it caters more to its immediate neighborhood. In summary, at the time of my research, in terms of demographics, Hindu College was an almost exclusively Tamil (both Hindu and Christian) school. This, in turn, can be partially related to Hindu College’s status as a “town” school dedicated to meeting the needs of Kandy’s Tamil population. In the following, I go beyond demographics to look at how language medium, ethnicity, and religion are regimented in everyday practices.

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<sup>44</sup> When Sinhalese teachers teach in Tamil schools, because they can only teach Sinhala and sometimes English, they have a lighter teaching load than the other teachers. The other teachers often become resentful of the Sinhalese teachers, saying that all they do is hang out in the staff room and complain, and do not do any real work.

<sup>45</sup> Though Hindu College will not accept Muslim students, the principal did not seem to have any issues with having a Muslim teacher. There are very few Up-country teachers who are qualified to teach math and science. Because the Muslims science teacher filled this gap, she was very appreciated at the school.

<sup>46</sup> During my research at Hindu College, the principal arranged for students to get new Hindu College photo identification cards. The company sent the principal an example of what the cards would look like, including a sample photo, which happened to be of a Muslim girl in a *hijab* (which is part of the required dress code in Muslim schools). Upon viewing this card, a few of the teachers and I burst out laughing, at the immediate absurdity of a photo of a Muslim girl appearing in a Hindu College ID card (probably because Hindu College prohibits Muslims).

**Table 9: Ethnic, Sub-Ethnic, and Religious Makeup of the Hindu College Teachers and Students**

16 Teachers

Ethnicity:	15 (93.75%) Tamil		1 (6.25%) Muslim
Religion:	12 (75%) Hindu	4 (3.45%) Christian	1(6.25%) Muslim
Sub-Ethnicity (Of Tamil Teachers):	11 (80%) Up-Country	4 (20%) North And East	N/A

285 Students

Ethnicity:	285 (100%) Tamil		0 Muslim
Religion:	228 (80%) Hindu	57 (20%) Christian	0 Muslim
Sub-Ethnicity	265 (92%) Up-Country	20 (8%) North And East	N/A

At Hindu College, school-based activities were geared toward the school's orientation as a Tamil-medium, Hindu school. As in all government schools, the day begins with an interfaith prayer session (Hindu Students conduct a small *puja*, while Christian students pray at their desks). Every Friday morning, however, Hindu College has a special school program. Beginning at 7:00 a.m., there is a lengthy *puja* in the main room of the school. The stage, which usually serves as the Grade nine classroom, is transformed into a *puja* space. The *puja* is conducted by a Grade ten boy, whose father is a non-Brahmin temple priest. Simultaneously, the Christian students gather in an upstairs hallway space. Standing in front of a wall with a small cross and a single burning candle, students conduct a small Christian service. After the religious services, the students and teachers congregate in the main room for an assembly. The Muslim teacher, who during the *puja* stays in a small space at the side of the building (the space between Hindu College and the next building), comes out into the main room at this time. Every week a

student and a teacher each give a motivational speech. Afterwards, the principal gives a speech, in which he adds to the themes in the previous two speeches, and conducts administrative business. A frequent theme of these speeches is school pride, the tolerance of ethnic diversity, and the promotion of peace in Sri Lanka.

Throughout the year, Hindu College holds numerous school wide-events. Many of these events are oriented around Hindu holidays such as *Saraswati* (the goddess of wisdom) *Puja* and *Deepavali* (the Hindu festival of lights). Like all Tamil schools, Hindu College has an annual Tamil cultural program (*kalai vizha*), and participates in the national Tamil Language Day Competitions (Sinhala-medium schools participate in the National Sinhala Language Day Competitions). There are also numerous extracurricular activities for the students, many of which center around the Tamil language and Hindu religious practices.

As a Tamil-medium school, at Hindu College the content of all subjects besides Sinhala and English are conducted in Tamil. Though Sinhala and English are both taught as second-languages, the principal and teachers make little effort to incorporate them into broader school-based activities. The only instance where English is incorporated into school programming is the reading of the international news at the end of the Friday morning program. During my research period, the principal brought in a newspaper-reading table, which he would supply with three daily government papers: two Tamil, and one English. He did not supply any Sinhala papers. Thus, though the principal seemed to acknowledge the importance of English, particularly as global language, Sinhala (as a national language) was excluded from school-based practices.

At Hindu College, everyday social practices act to instantiate the school's (or that of Tamils as a whole) fraught relationship to mainstream Sinhala-Buddhist national imaginings. I observed that Hindu College principals and teachers would generally avoid politically charged topics in their school-based interactions. One of my research assistants, Kumudhini, who had taught English at Hindu College for ten years (she has since transferred to another school), said that when students make comments about the LTTE or other related topics, she tells them that it is inappropriate to talk about such matters in class. She added that as a teacher, she tries to "stick with the program," and not convey her own feelings of detachment with the Sri Lankan nation-state.<sup>47</sup>

As part of the government school system, Tamil schools would occasionally have to participate in national-level activities, which would often highlight schools' fraught relationship with mainstream national imaginings. For example, on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the Sri Lankan army gained control of the LTTE-controlled peak in the Eastern region, known as Thoppigala.<sup>48</sup> The government used this victory to symbolize the so-called reclaiming of the entire Eastern region from the LTTE. Many Sri Lankans were skeptical of this victory because they knew that the only reason the army was able to gain full control of the East was because the LTTE's Eastern branch (led by Karuna), which had broken off from the LTTE in 2004, had aligned with the Sri Lankan government. As part of the national "Thoppigala Victory" celebration, all government school teachers were required to take money from their own salaries, and bring the Sinhalese dish, *kiri baat* (milk rice). Kumudhini said that many Sinhalese schools did not do this because they did not consider it to be a real victory. Tamils schools did it, she said, as they were afraid not

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<sup>47</sup> Kumudhini was one of the few teachers to be explicit with me about her political views. However, it should not be assumed that all teachers share these views.

<sup>48</sup> "Thoppi" means "hat" in Sinhala.

to.<sup>49</sup> At Hindu College, a few teachers had brought *kiri baat* to school and quickly handed it out to students, without saying much about it. Later they complained that they had to pay for it out of their meager government salaries. A few months later, all government school teachers were asked to give a half-day salary for the development of the East. Though some teachers at Kandy Tamil schools said that they did not want to give it, a member of the Tamil-medium Zonal Ministry of Education said that all teachers would end up giving it, as they had no real choice in the matter.

The only time when the principal explicitly situated the school within the nation as a whole was in discussions concerning the uneven distribution of educational resources to Tamil-medium schools. The principal would frequently talk about the particular lack of facilities at Hindu College with respect to multi-medium national, assisted, or private schools. The principal and teachers at Hindu College were very aware of the students' internalized feeling of being disadvantaged, as related to their Tamil ethnic identities, their lower-class status, their lack of financial resources, and awareness of the school's meager facilities. In addition to struggling to improve Hindu College's rankings on national exams, the principal and teachers also struggled to instill confidence (*tan nambikkai*) and pride (*perumai*) in their students.

Teachers' and students' avoidance of politically charged topics was highly internalized. In my recordings of students' school-based interactions, the only time I heard students mention the LTTE was when the Grade 10 boys referred to a rival group of Grade 10 boys as "Tigers (*puli*)."

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<sup>49</sup> Tamil and Muslim teachers' insecure position (in terms of job security and overall safety) compelled them to comply with the Sri Lankan government on a number of matters, where many Sinhalese teachers chose to rebel. For example, when the teacher's union had a strike, many Sinhalese teachers wouldn't attend school. Tamil teachers, on the other hand, would still attend school, as they were afraid of the consequences.

related to politics or ethnic relations came up, students would often regurgitate terms from the curriculum. For example, when I asked one girl if she likes studying Sinhala, she answered, in a sarcastic tone, that she liked Sinhala as it is, “*namu sagotharar moli*” (our (inclusive) brother language) and that Sri Lanka is “*namu taay naaDu*” (our (inclusive) mother country). When I told my research assistant, Kumudhini, about this interaction, she commented that the student was simply spitting back terms from the national curriculum. Thus, the student’s response can be either interpreted as a way of avoiding my question, or a way of providing a sarcastic commentary on representations of the Sri Lankan nation in the official curriculum.

In summary, as a Tamil school, Hindu College has a fraught relationship to the Kandy educational mainstream, as well as official representations of the Sri Lankan nation-state. But rather than seeking to interrupt or challenge the existing educational system (which would not be realistic), the Hindu College principal and teachers were devoted to advancing Hindu College’s status with respect to other Kandy government schools; as well as improving the educational resources for Tamil students in Kandy town as a whole.

### **Teaching Sinhala and English**

All Hindu College students speak Tamil as a first language. With the exception of students from Tamil-majority plantation areas, most Hindu College students are bilingual in Sinhala, with some competency in English. As per the national policy, Sinhala is compulsory as a subject until Grade 10. Among the Grade 11 Hindu College class, half of the students elected to take health science rather than Sinhala. Many students told me that they chose health science because it is easier than Sinhala.



Interestingly, there were a significantly higher number of girls enrolled in Sinhala than boys (a higher number of girls pass the O-level exam than boys).

As is typical in provincial Tamil- and Sinhala-medium schools, though “spoken” Tamil is included in the curriculum, in her language classes Mrs. Rose focuses on reading and writing to the exclusion of speaking (speaking is not tested on exams). In accordance with the recent “Five E Method,” in her Sinhala and English classes, Mrs. Rose gives a short lesson, and then gives an assignment from the textbook. Though this method prescribes that students work in groups, at Hindu College students tended to work individually or in pairs. In her lessons and instructions for assignments, Mrs. Rose gives a phrase or sentence in English or Sinhala, followed by a Tamil gloss. When students ask the teacher for clarification, they almost always ask her in Tamil, only citing words and brief phrases in English and Sinhala (See chapter six for an example of an English class).

During my research I offered to help Mrs. Rose with her English classes. When I suggested that I teach an English conversation class, she said that it would be much more useful for me to teach an essay writing class to help prepare students for the O-level exam. For Mrs. Rose, the need to ensure that the students have the necessary skills to pass the exam prevents her from helping the students build spoken competencies in these languages. In addition, the overall noise volume in the classroom also makes attention to oral language even more difficult (the main classroom space is often so loud that you can only hear the person sitting right next to you). As I show, at Girls’ College, where the basic skill level of the students is much higher, teachers have more leeway to deviate from the immediate syllabus, and include more conversational elements in language classes (though this does not apply to second-language Tamil).

Because all Hindu College students are of the same ethnic group, it is not possible for the “official” language policy function as a direct tool for interethnic integration. However, by focusing on students’ “spoken” Sinhala and English skills, teachers could bolster students’ “interethnic” communicative competencies and skills (which could have a positive result on interethnic relations). As I have shown, because of curriculum’s sole focus on reading and writing, this is not occurring in practice.

As I will more fully discuss in chapter six, students’ language practices in interactions with one another sharply differed from classroom teacher/student interactions. While interacting with the teacher during class, students were expected to produce “*suttu*” (pure) Tamil. The only exceptions to this were in math or science classes, where the use of particular English terms seemed to index their knowledge of the material. By contrast, in their interactions with each other away from the earshot of teachers, students would mix Tamil, Sinhala, and English. As I further discuss in chapter four, the mixing of these varieties, as well as the use of nicknames and addressive terms labeled by teachers as “slang,” was one way in which students ideologically differentiated their own interactions from teacher/student interactions.

## **Girls’ College**

### **Regimenting Language Medium, Ethnicity, and Religion**

Before exploring the way in which the new language policies have been implemented at Girls’ College, I discuss how language medium, ethnicity, and religion are regimented in everyday practices. Originally a Wesleyan Missionary school started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Girls’ College is currently a Buddhist national school, with Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams. Girls College is among the leading girls’

educational institutions in all of Sri Lanka. The school is located on a main commercial road approximately one kilometer from the center of Kandy town. Because of its status as a national school, the level of security at Girls' College is very high. Every morning, students and staff enter the campus through a large security gate, where security guards check their bags with metal detectors. In accordance with official policy, only students and faculty are allowed to enter the campus. If parents need to enter the campus, they have to obtain permission in advance. To the left of the security gate is a chapel, which serves as a remnant of the school's Wesleyan missionary origin.<sup>50</sup> Girls' College has a large campus, with a sizeable office complex, auditorium, primary school, secondary school, and a separate science laboratory (a rarity for Sri Lankan schools).

Girls' College has a total of 3,961 students and 198 teachers. The school offers Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams for Grades 1-11, and for all A-level subjects. The recently introduced English-medium stream is offered in select subjects for Grades 6-11, and for A-level Commerce and Science, but not Arts (as there are not sufficient teachers). As consistent with Kandy demographics, the majority of the students in the school study in the Sinhala-medium. In Table 10, I present the number of Girls' College staff and students by language medium (as was listed in the 2008 Girls' College handbook).

**Table 10: Distribution of Girls' College Staff and Students by Language Medium**

201 Staff (statistics were not available for the English-medium stream):

Sinhala-medium	171 (82.5%)
Tamil-medium	30 (17.5%)

3551 Students:

Sinhala-medium	2990 (75.5%)
Tamil-medium	30 (14.2%)

<sup>50</sup> Though I never saw any students go into the church, some Non-Roman Catholic children said that they could go into the church to pray for a brief period on Friday mornings.

Girls' College's language medium policies reinforce the essentialized link between ethnicity and language (via the concept of "mother-tongue"). Consistent with national language medium policies, at Girls' College all Sinhalese are required to study in their "mother-tongue," which is Sinhala, and all Tamils are required to study in their "mother-tongue," which is Tamil. As opposed to some other Kandy schools, such as its "brother" school, Kingswood College, Tamils are explicitly barred from studying in the Sinhala-medium.<sup>51</sup> Muslims, by contrast, who often consider Arabic to be their "mother-tongue," or that they do not have a "mother-tongue" at all, may study in either the Tamil- or Sinhala-mediums depending on their "home language" and other factors.<sup>52</sup> Thus, while for Sinhalese and Tamils ethnicity (through the concept of "mother-tongue") determines the medium of instruction in which they can study, for Muslims it is more flexible. As I show, however, the concept of ethnicity, as directly linked with language ("mother-tongue"), remains the dominant way of ordering difference at Girls' College.

Though I did not take precise statistics on the ethnic makeup of the Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams, in Table 11, I present an approximation. The disproportionately large percentage of Muslims is related to four factors: 1) the fact that Muslims can be admitted into the Sinhala- and Tamil-mediums, 2) the high number of Muslims in the middle to upper-middle class area surrounding Girls' College (admissions is partially based on residential proximity, 3) Muslims' significant political and financial

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<sup>51</sup> One reason why Tamils may be restricted from the Sinhala-medium is because Girls' College offers a Tamil-medium stream. If they accepted Tamils into the Sinhala-medium stream, it would mean fewer available spots for Sinhalese. At Kingswood College, a small number of Tamils are admitted into the Sinhala-mediums stream, as they lack a Tamil-medium stream.

<sup>52</sup> During the period of my fieldwork, there was some contention among Muslims living in the vicinity of Girls' College who felt that the current principal was admitting fewer Grade one Muslim students into the Sinhala-medium stream than usual, as she wanted to preserve it for Sinhalese Buddhists. One family asked me to speak to the principle on their daughter's behalf, but I told them it was inappropriate for me to do so.

pull in Kandy town, and 4) the fact that Girls College is particularly coveted among Kandy Muslims (often favored over prominent Muslims Girls' schools such as Badi-ud Deen Mahmud).

**Table 11: Approximate Ethnic Makeup of the Girls' College Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-Medium Streams**

Language medium	Sinhalese	Muslim	Tamil
Sinhala-medium	90% Sinhalese	10 % Muslim	0
Tamil-medium	0	50% Muslim	50% Tamil
English-medium	80% Sinhalese	12% Muslim	8% Tamil

Girls' College opened its primary school (Grades 1-5) in 2001. Before this, Girls' College admissions were based on the national Grade five scholarship exam. As a result of this admissions policy, there tended to be a significant variation in the class, socioeconomic level, and regional origin of students (this still applies to Grades 8-11). Currently, admission is granted on the basis of an admissions formula. As this formula takes parent's educational level, proximity to the school, and other factors into consideration (see chapter two), students who are admitted in Grade one have more uniform middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds. As A-level admissions are based on the O-level exam, A-level students come from diverse social backgrounds.

As one of the few schools in Sri Lanka to offer Tamil- and Sinhala-medium streams, Girls' College makes a considerable effort to promote a "pluralistic," "multiethnic," and "multicultural" school identity. The first page of the new Girls' College website displays the following statement:<sup>53</sup>

Our school is one of the very few schools which represent a cross-section of our pluralistic community where children from multiethnic and multi-cultural backgrounds are trained to live together as one, humen [sic.] family."

But despite its efforts to promote a pluralistic school environment, Girls'

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<sup>53</sup> I have not cited this website as it would involve revealing the school's name.

College's majority Sinhalese Buddhist identity is reinforced in most of its daily activities. As a national Buddhist school, the dominant language of Girls' College is Sinhala. Though English is incorporated into many school activities, Tamil is entirely restricted to the Tamil-medium stream. The daily morning program, which is broadcast over the school intercom, consists of an interfaith prayer period (consistent with national policy), the singing of the national anthem in Sinhala (Tamil-medium students generally sing along in Tamil), and school announcements. Announcements are primarily in Sinhala, with some content in English (such as the reading of the sports meet results). The school day is completed with the singing of the school song, a Sinhala song written by a Girls' College teacher.

Throughout the day, there are frequent announcements made over the intercom in Sinhala. Tamil-medium students and teachers frequently complained that they could not understand the announcements, not because they were in Sinhala, but because the speakers were poor quality. Outside the main office is a newspaper-reading stand which is supplied with three national daily papers: two in Sinhala and one in English. I asked a Muslim English teacher why the school does not supply a Tamil paper, and one teacher responded by saying that Tamils do not really read Tamil papers, but read English papers instead (which is a class-based assumption).<sup>54</sup>

As consistent with its pluralistic identity, Girls' College makes a strong effort to celebrate multireligious and multiethnic national holidays. The school has special programs for Buddhist (*Vesak* Lantern Competition, and *Posom Bhakthi Gee*) and Hindu (*Nawarathri Puja*) holidays. During the celebration of Sinhala and Tamil New Year, the

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<sup>54</sup> Throughout the day, both students and staff come to peruse the papers. The Tamil-medium students tend to look at the Sinhala papers more frequently than the English paper. As I discovered, this is because the Sinhala papers include the cricket results.

school makes an effort to include both Sinhala and Tamil traditions. Though there are no programs for specific Muslim holidays, there is an annual “Islamic day,” which is taken very seriously by Muslim teachers and students. In addition, the teachers seemed to be very respectful of Muslims during the Ramadan fasting.

At Girls’ College, there are many school-wide programs to display school and national pride. A particularly important event in this regard is the annual Sports Day, which takes place at a nearby stadium. During the Sports Day, the four houses—Eaton, Langdon, Lawrance, and Somson—compete in numerous competitions. During my research the sports meet was repeatedly postponed because of security concerns (there was a rumor that the LTTE was going to bomb Kandy national schools), but finally happened a few months later. Though Sinhala- and Tamil-mediums students are divided for almost all of their extracurricular activities, the Sports Day events involve a unique ethnic and religious cross-section of students. The only event that is exclusively Sinhalese is the cadet core, which is trained by members of the Sri Lanka army.<sup>55</sup> But despite efforts to promote a multiethnic and multireligious school atmosphere, divisions related to ethnicity and religion are constantly being reinforced in everyday practices. In the following section, I show how these divisions are evident in the spatial organization of the school, students’ and teachers’ dress, and classroom and non-classroom practices. As is evident in my analysis, sometimes the division between the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams is the primary mode of difference, and other times it is the ethnic divisions among Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims.

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<sup>55</sup> The absence of Tamils in the cadet core is related to the exclusion of Tamils in the army more generally. During my research I lived with Kavitha, a Grade 10 Tamil-medium Hindu student whose father was a retired major in the Sri Lankan army (he joined the army before the ethnic conflict grew hot in the early 1980s). Kavitha said that she was interested in learning to march, but never considered joining the cadet core.

The divisions between the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams are immediately visible in the organization of physical space. Though some of the Tamil-medium classes are integrated with the Sinhala-medium classes, most of the Tamil-medium classes are located in a separate building. The school's staff rooms are also partially organized by language medium. When I asked students and teachers to name the different staff rooms, they would invariably mention a Sinhala-medium staff room (a large room above the main office, equipped with couches and an attached bathroom), a Tamil-medium staff room (a small room with only an old wooden table and some chairs), several different primary school staff rooms, and a science staff room (see chapter four).

Teachers' ethnic and religious affiliations are interpretable from their dress. In government schools all teachers are required to wear saris. At Girls' College almost all Sinhalese teachers wear Kandyan-style saris (instantiating the Kandyan Sinhalese identity of the school), and Tamil and Muslims teachers wear Indian-style saris. All Tamil Hindu teachers wear bindis, and Muslim teachers wear hijabs (they used to be restricted from wearing hijabs, but the policy recently changed).<sup>56</sup> As in all government schools, Girls' College students are required to wear school uniforms, consisting of a white button-down shirt and a white skirt falling just below the knee. In contrast with teachers, students' identities are only partially evident from their dress. Most Hindu girls wear small black bindis (*poTTu*), which identify them as Tamil Hindus. According to school policy, Muslim students are not permitted to wear hijabs (which are part of the required uniforms

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<sup>56</sup> About five years ago, a Muslim teacher who Girls' College was trying to hire refused to take the position if she could not wear her hijab. She had worn it at her last school, and didn't see why she couldn't wear it at Girls' College. After she was permitted to wear it, other Muslim teachers started to follow suit, with only a few choosing not to wear hijabs. On visits to the home of Faiza, a Grade 10 Tamil-medium Muslim girl, we made a regular practice of looking at Girls' College publications from ten years before to glimpse Muslim teachers without their *hijabs*.



at Muslim schools). On their way to and from school, however, some Muslims girls choose to wear white cotton pants to cover up their legs.

Language medium divisions are instantiated in both classroom and non-classroom activities. In classroom settings, Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students have virtually no contact with one another. As indicative of this, during eight months of regularly observing the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, I observed only a single instance when a Sinhalese student entered the classroom (she had come to get an English-medium girl for drama practice). The only Sinhalese adult who came into the classroom was the second-language Sinhala teacher. At Girls' College, students are not only separated in classroom settings, but for all extracurricular activities as well. The frequent singing, dance, drama, elocution, and debate competitions are strictly separated by language medium.<sup>57</sup>

There are many spaces around the school where students can converse during interval periods. The most common of these places is the school grounds, situated in front of the canteen (which was part of the auditorium building). During my research period, I rarely observed Tamil-medium girls interacting with Sinhala-medium girls. The only exceptions to this were Muslim students studying in the Tamil- and Sinhala-mediums, who interacted with one another freely (usually in Tamil). The reason that Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students do not interact with one another is not related to linguistic competency (as Tamil-medium students are proficient in Sinhala, Tamil, and English), but to their unfamiliarity and discomfort with one another.<sup>58</sup> It is likely that the discord and tensions between Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students is directly related to

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<sup>57</sup> I was invited to the Tamil and English competitions, but not the Sinhala competitions.

<sup>58</sup> I also noticed that in general students tended to mostly interact with students in their same classes. This is to be expected as students tend to be the closest with peers in their own classes. Another reason why they might not interact much with older or younger Tamil-medium students is because of firm ideas of seniority.

the growing intensity of the ongoing ethnic conflict. The Tamil-medium sectional head and vice-principal, Kohileshwari, commented to me that about a decade before Tamil- and Sinhala-medium students used to interact more with each other than they do now. She explained that as the ethnic conflict worsened over the last twenty years, so has the distance between Tamil and Sinhalese students.

When I first started observing the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students, I found it extremely surprising given their multilingual competencies that they seemed to interact with one another almost exclusively in Tamil (both inside and outside of the classroom). One of my research assistants, Udaya, who did her A Levels in the Tamil-medium stream at Girls' College, said that this is related to students' aspirations to be "professional," which entailed speaking what she described as "*suttu* (pure)" Tamil. Thus, at Girls' College norms of proper linguistic conduct in the Tamil-medium classroom extend into non-classroom interactions.

Girls' College Tamil-medium students are in a unique position: while they express great pride in being part of Girls' College as a whole, they are also aware of the subtle forms of discrimination to which they are subjected. Some forms of discrimination involve explicit exclusion from participation in school activities; and others involve more symbolic exclusion from the mainstream of the school. To illustrate this, I present examples involving both Tamil-medium teachers and students.

One day, I joined a number of teachers at an awards ceremony for Grade 10 students. I sat next to a Tamil-medium math teacher from Jaffna. When the principal gave out an award for an inter-school sports competition (which is different from the annual Sports' Day), the teacher whispered to me in Tamil (just quietly enough so the

Sinhalese teachers next to us could not hear her): “You know that they won’t take any Tamils on the sports teams, don’t you?” When I asked some Tamil students about this they confirmed it, saying that they would prefer to take dance and music over sports, anyway. Thus, while during the annual Sports’ Day events Girls’ College made an effort to display its multiethnic and multireligious identity, the sports teams implicitly exclude Tamil students.

Though Girls’ College also celebrates Hindu religious holidays, the Buddhist holidays are celebrated on the largest scale (it is a Buddhist school, after all). Students who are not Buddhist are not explicitly restricted from attending these events, but I never witnessed any Tamil-medium students attempting to do so. On one occasion, a Tamil-medium Muslim teacher told me that she wanted to take me to a Buddhist program. She did not regularly attend these events, but wanted me to get exposure to different religions. As we approached the doorway of the auditorium, several Sinhalese teachers turn around and gave us stern glances. We looked at each other, and without saying a word, turned around and headed back to the Tamil-medium staff room.

The Grade 10 Tamil-medium class would often get in trouble for shouting. Though they did not seem to be louder than any of the other classes, because their classroom is situated next to the main office, they were under particularly close observation. On one occasion, a Tamil Hindu student expressed to me that she thought they were getting in trouble not for talking loudly, but for specifically talking in Tamil (implying that the very act of speaking Tamil is offensive to Sinhalese teachers). On another occasion, I was standing in the hallway by the newspaper stand with two Grade 10 Tamil-medium Muslim students. A Sinhalese teacher came by and told them in

broken English to go back into their classroom and be quiet. I followed them back into the classroom. One of the girls told me that even though they all speak Sinhala the Sinhalese teachers treat them like they do not know Sinhala. In summary, both Girls' College Tamil-medium teachers and students seemed to be aware that they are prohibited from certain kinds of participation in the school, whether participating in events, or being treated as ratified Sinhala interlocutors. In this section, I have considered how language medium, ethnicity, and religion are regimented in at Girls' College. In the following section, I consider how the new language policies (the teaching of English and the official language policy) are being implemented.

### **Teaching English at Girls' College**

#### **English as a Subject**

Many Sri Lankans educated before the 1956 Swabasha Policy (which switched the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala or Tamil in all government schools) laud the ability of the English-medium education to transcend ethnic and religious differences. At Girls' College English is offered as a subject. In addition, as I have already discussed, in the last five years English has been reintroduced as a medium of instruction in select subjects from Grades 6-11, and for A-level science and math (but not arts). As I show in this section, because of the way they are being implemented, the English programs are failing to promote interethnic integration.

When I first met with the Girls' College principal she suggested that in addition to observing classes for my research, I would also teach English to the Grade 9 and 10 English-medium classes. She quickly introduced me to the English subject head, Mrs. Dawood, who would oversee my teaching. In her 60s, Mrs. Dawood is also one of the

most senior teachers at the school. Though teachers and students recognized her as having Malay heritage, Mrs. Dawood prefers to be identified as Muslim. In contrast with almost all the other Muslim teachers she does not wear a hijab, but simply an Indian-style sari, which makes her ethnic and religious background ambiguous (or even slightly Tamil, according to some Tamil Hindu teachers).<sup>59</sup>

Educated before the 1956, Mrs. Dawood considers herself to be a throwback to an earlier period. She often talks nostalgically about her English-medium education at Scholastica, a convent school in Kandy town which has since become a Sinhala-medium Buddhist school. Mrs. Dawood said that in contrast with the students today, her and her classmates never took notice of who was Sinhalese, Tamil, or Muslim. Though other teachers at Girls' College were equally committed to English teaching (all other English teachers were Sinhalese and Muslim, with the exception of one Up-country Tamil), Mrs. Dawood seemed the most concerned with promoting English as vehicle of interethnic integration. She told me many times that children need a strong basis in English, because it is an international language, and because it unites students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. She often told me that, by contrast, speaking Tamil was not good, as people associated it with terrorists.

During the time of my research, Mrs. Dawood was teaching English to Tamil- and English-medium secondary-school students. She also taught Sinhala-medium Islam, frequently codemixing between Sinhala and English in her lessons. Though proficient in both Tamil and Sinhala (she said that Tamil is the language she speaks to her mother, and that she learned Sinhala because it is the national language), she has a very strict policy

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<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Dawood had a callous on her forehead, which she said was from praying. She referred to it as her "Muslim bindi."

of only speaking English in the classroom. I frequently attended Mrs. Dawood's English classes, and never observed her using any Tamil or Sinhala. Mrs. Dawood also extends this policy to all her school-based interactions. The only occasions in which I witnessed her speaking Tamil or Sinhala at Girls' College was when she was talking with Tamil- or Sinhala-medium teachers who were not comfortable speaking English. Even in these instances, she would mix Tamil or Sinhala with a large number of English words and expressions.<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Dawood similarly tried to display a non-partisan attitude in all of her school-based practices. She said that rather than choosing to spend her free time in one of the staff rooms (which were partially organized by language medium/ethnicity) she spent all of her time by herself in the Islam room, where she would use the silence to work on grading. In addition, as she knew I was spending a particularly large amount of time observing Tamil-medium classes, she would frequently urge me to observe some Sinhala-medium classes saying, "Just go to Sinhala-medium class, Christina."

Currently at Girls' College, students study English in home classrooms. Thus, Tamil-medium students study English separately from Sinhala-medium students. About five years before, however, there had been a different policy. Under this system, Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students were grouped into different English classes based on their ability levels. Thus, English class provided an occasion where Tamil- and Sinhala-medium students would be integrated. A former principal, however, claiming that it was psychologically damaging for students to compete for placement in English classes, changed it to the current system. Mrs. Dawood and some Tamil-medium teachers said that they preferred the old system. They thought that because students had such widely

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<sup>60</sup> Because Mrs. Dawood was educated in the English-medium, she didn't seem to have a sufficient vocabulary in either Sinhala or Tamil in order to sustain academic discussions in these languages. This may be part of the reason why she didn't like to speak to teachers in Sinhala and Tamil.

different competency levels in English, it made practical sense. They also thought that mixing Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students together in the classroom would be beneficial for interethnic relations. When I asked why the school did not switch back to the old system, they said that it would be far too difficult from an administrative perspective. Thus, at Girls' College, the teaching of English as a subject is not being used as a way to integrate students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### **The English-Medium Stream**

Because of the dearth of qualified teachers, the English-medium stream is only available in select subjects, including English literature, math, science, and geography. Students who transferred to the English-medium from the Sinhala-medium have their own classroom (with teachers coming in to teach Sinhala- and English-medium classes). The students who transferred into the English-medium from the Tamil-medium, however, constantly have to travel back and forth between the English-medium classroom and their Tamil-medium classroom for their various subjects. Though one might think that students who transferred into the English-medium from the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium would have English class together, this is not the case. Rather, students who had transferred into the English-medium stream from the Tamil-medium stream study English with their Tamil-medium classes. While this policy makes sense for subjects not available in English, it seems unnecessary in the case of English classes. The logic behind it may have been based on the idea that students should study English through their "mother-tongue," but as Girls' College English teachers don't speak a word of English in any of their classes, this is irrelevant.<sup>61</sup> Like many of these policies, this

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<sup>61</sup> I observed some Grade 11 English-medium classes at Zahira College-Katugastota, a Muslim boys' provincial school with Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams. About half the students in the

particular policy seems predicated on an underlying assumption that Sinhalese and Tamils should not be educated together.

In the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, there were three girls studying in the English-medium: two Muslims and an Up-country Tamil Hindu. These girls operated almost like a floating unit, constantly shifting classrooms, never sure exactly where they should be at any given time.<sup>62</sup> While they seemed fairly well-integrated with their Tamil-medium classmates, they seemed distant from their English-medium classmates. During lessons students in the English-medium class spoke mainly English. However, when the teacher was absent, they conversed in Sinhala. Though all of the girls who had transferred into the English-medium stream from the Tamil-medium stream were proficient in Sinhala, they did not converse with the other students. The three girls mainly talked to one another in Tamil. Thus, students who transferred in from the Tamil-medium (such as these girls) were not treated like fully ratified classmates, and didn't appear to be building attachment with their English-medium classes.

In summary, rather than serving to blur ethnic and religious divisions, the English-medium program at Girls' College only serves to reinforce them. I observed that as consistent with the ideological separation between the Sinhala- and Tamil-mediums, Muslims studying in Sinhala-medium were conflated with the Sinhalese (incorporated

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English-medium class had come from Tamil-medium, and the other half from the Sinhala- medium. In contrast to Girls' College, these students had all of their English-medium classes together. For subjects that were not available in the English-medium, the class would be divided into separate Tamil- and Sinhala-medium sections. I found that to be a much better strategy, especially in encouraging camaraderie and bonding among the students. Almost all of the boys in the class were also proficient in Sinhala and Tamil, regardless of the language medium they studied in, so they often mixed all three languages (thus there was little sense of division between the Tamil- and Sinhala-medium students). One reason why the difference between Tamil- and Sinhala-medium students was not as charged at Zahira College (as compared to Girls' College), was because Muslims do not base their ethnic identities on the basis of language.

<sup>62</sup> These three students were so close that sometimes other students got confused and thought that the Tamil Hindu girl was Muslim.



within the mainstream of the school), and Muslims studying in the Tamil-medium were conflated with Tamils (often treated like they don't know Sinhala). In the following section, I consider the implementation of the official language policy at Girls' College.

### **The Official Language Policy**

At Girls' College, as per the national policy, Tamil-medium students are required to study Sinhala, and Sinhala-medium students are required to study Tamil (compulsory until Grade 10). However, there are significant asymmetries in the way that second-language Tamil and Sinhala are taught. Some asymmetries would be expected, as in Kandy most Tamil-medium students are already proficient in Sinhala, and not vice versa. But as I found, while second-language Sinhalese students are expected to be able to interact with teachers entirely in Sinhala,<sup>63</sup> second-language Tamil students are not expected to speak any Tamil (they just read and write Tamil). As I show, these asymmetries are related to ethnic hostilities and inequalities between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking minorities. After briefly discussing the Sinhala-as-a-second-language classes, I delve more fully into the Tamil-as-a-second-language classes.

At Girls' College all second-language Sinhala teachers are Sinhalese (and do not speak Tamil). Like the English classes, the content of the Sinhala classes are entirely in Sinhala. Though in accordance with the curriculum lessons are mostly geared toward reading and writing (including "spoken" Sinhala), teachers and students show a strong verbal rapport. Students would confidently ask the teacher questions in Sinhala, and receive clarification. Thus, while elsewhere Tamil-medium students may not be treated

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<sup>63</sup> Classroom practices are different from non-classroom practices, wherein Tamil-medium students are often treated like they do not know Sinhala.

like they were competent in Sinhala, in class they were treated like ratified Sinhala interlocutors.

At Girls' College, there were three Tamil-as-a-second-language teachers: a Muslim teacher, an Up-country Tamil teacher, and a teacher who described herself as half Up-country/half Jaffna Hindu. In order to get a sense of the content of the classes, and the way that teachers and students interact in the classroom, I describe my observations of two classes taught by Fatima, a young Muslim teacher.

I had made an arrangement with Fatima the day before to observe some of her Tamil-as-a -second-language classes. That morning, I met Fatima in the Tamil-medium staff room (where she came during her free time), and we headed over to the Grade eight Sinhala-medium classroom. Fatima greeted the students with “*vaNakkam* (a Tamil greeting)” and they immediately repeated back to her, “*vaNakkam maDam.*” She began the class by copying a series of sentences from the textbook onto the blackboard. As she wrote, the students quietly chatted with one another in Sinhala. I present these sentences below, with English glosses:

1. *ilai paccai niram* (green coconut water)
2. *naan annacip pazham saapitteen* (I ate pineapple)
3. *endu paadasalai KaNDiyila amaindulladu* (Our school is located in Kandy)
4. *ammaa sandaikkup poonaar* (mother is going to meet)
5. *itu panguni maadam* (This is *panguni* (the last Tamil month of the year) month)
6. *anil saaduvaana piraani* (Squirrels are gentle animals)
7. *tambi paadasaalaikku poonaan* (Little brother went to school)
8. *ematu naadu ilangai* (Our country is Sri Lanka)

When Fatima finished writing the sentences on the board, she read each sentence aloud in Tamil, and called on the students to give the meaning in Sinhala. Afterwards, she told the students in Sinhala to copy down the sentences and write down the Sinhala

translation. As they started the task, she sat down at a desk on the side of the classroom, and invited me to join her.

We chatted in Tamil while the students finished their assignment. She told me that because the students do not like it when she speaks Tamil (saying that they cannot learn that way), she teaches the class entirely in Sinhala. She said that the Sinhalese cannot speak Tamil, but the Muslims girls in the class speak Tamil very well. She explained that all Muslims can speak Tamil, as they speak it at home.

As they completed the assignments, the students came up, one by one, to have their assignments corrected. Fatima went through the students' notebooks with a red pen, and corrected the Tamil spelling and translation errors. As the students started to gather around us, she invited me to try to speak to the girls in Tamil. I directed some simple Tamil questions to a few of the Sinhalese girls (such as *kalaiyila enna saapiTTiinga?* (What did you eat in the morning?)), but they did not respond to me. Fatima pointed out a Sinhalese girl who had recently won a Kandy-wide Tamil-as-a-second-language competition, saying that her Tamil (referring to her writing) was excellent (though Fatima did not ask her to speak to me). Fatima then called over a group of three Muslim girls, who all sat together, and had them speak to me in Tamil. After speaking Tamil for a few minutes, we switched into English, talking about their future goals (to be lawyers). Fatima commented in Tamil that she does not like it when this happens, as with her limited English competency she is left out of the conversation.

When the bell rang, I went with Fatima to the Grade 7 Sinhala-medium class, which she referred to as her "*kollupaDi* (naughty)" class. At the beginning of class, she started to do some drills, where she said a Tamil word, and had the students repeat it,

testing their pronunciation. I noticed that the main pronunciation error that she targeted was the pronunciation of the Tamil letter “zh” in the word “*pazham* (fruit)” as /l/. Though most Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka actually pronounce “zh” as /L/ or //, in educational contexts, it is commonly targeted as an incorrect pronunciation. It is also common for this pronunciation to be associated with Up-country Tamils.

When this drill was finished, she gave the class an assignment to do from the textbook. In the chapter there was a drama written in “spoken” Tamil. Based on the drama, the assignment asked for students to group phrases into two columns: *ezhutta vazhakkam* (written style) and *peeccu vazhakkam* (spoken style). While the students started to work on the assignment, we chatted again. Fatima said that she found the syllabus unfamiliar and difficult. She said that this was because it is based on Jaffna Tamil (it includes “spoken” forms unique to Jaffna Tamil, as well as certain vocabulary that is specific to the Jaffna natural environment). She added that it was also because she is not used to “*suttu* (pure)” Tamil. She said that her family mainly speaks Tamil at home (she is still living with her parents and her sisters), but that they use Sinhala words for foods and spices. She contrasted Tamils and Muslims, saying that unlike Tamils, Muslims do not speak “good” Tamil—that for them, everything is a mix of Sinhala, Tamil, and Arabic. As is evident from Fatima’s statement, it was quite common for Muslims in the Sinhalese-majority South to differentiate themselves from Tamils by pointing to their Tamil linguistic hybridity.<sup>64</sup> The bell rang before the students had a chance to complete the assignment, and we headed back to the Tamil-medium staff room.

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<sup>64</sup> I observed numerous instances when Muslims would make efforts to differentiate themselves from Tamils, with whom they share a first language. In some instances, this would involve switching to Sinhala in the presence of Tamils. Once, on a hiking trip with a group of friends from an international NGO, I stopped at a tea shop in a plantation area with two Muslim boys, Namil and Irshad. When Namil brought

In addition to Fatima's classes, I also attended Tamil-as-a-second-language classes taught by Sasikalaa, the Up-country Tamil second-language Tamil teacher, but did not have an opportunity to attend any classes taught by the other teacher, who was having some personal problems at the time. Sasikalaa's attitude towards teaching Tamil as a second-language was a little different from Fatima's. In a discussion among Sasikalaa, Fatima, and me, Sasikalaa complained that the incorporation of both "written" and "spoken" Tamil into the syllabus makes the syllabus too difficult, because it is like having to learn two languages. Fatima agreed with her. Sasikalaa said that while "we (exclusive)" (meaning non-Jaffna Tamils) only teach written Tamil, Jaffna Tamils like to teach both "written" and "spoken" Tamil. Sasikalaa also commented that she does not like it that the syllabus is based on Jaffna "spoken" Tamil. When I asked Sasikalaa what variety she teaches in her classes, she said that she refuses to teach Jaffna Tamil, and only teaches Up-country Tamil. However, when I observed her classes, I did not notice her deviating from the syllabus in any remarkable way (given their tenuous position as new teachers within the school, this is perhaps not surprising).

The sharp asymmetries in the teaching of second-language Tamil at Girls' College are rooted in the idea that Sinhalese cannot, and should not, speak Tamil. This, in turn, is related to inequalities between the Sinhalese-majority and the Tamil-speaking minorities. In Kandy more generally, it was common for Sinhalese to declare that they do not know any Tamil. This statement in itself, however, is highly ideologically fraught. It is very likely that most Sinhalese living in Kandy have at least a passive (and maybe an

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the tea from the Up-country Tamil woman working at the shop, he said to her, in Tamil (referring to me), "*engalai maduri tamil pesuranga* ([she] speaks Tamil just like "us (exclusive)"). But when he took the tea and sat down next to Irshad and I, he immediately switched into Sinhala, commenting about the rainy weather. This particular switch seemed to work to show that even though he and Irshad speak the same language as the Up-country woman, they are essentially different.

active) knowledge of Tamil. During my research period, I observed numerous instances where Sinhalese showed that they knew more Tamil than they originally let on. For example, for one month I lived with a Sinhalese family in Kandy who had spent thirty years living on a tea plantation in Hatton (the father had been an estate manager). They nevertheless insisted that they didn't speak Tamil. While living at the house, I spent a lot of time conversing in Tamil with their beloved Up-country Tamil cook, Michael, who is a Tamil/Sinhala bilingual. One time during a Tamil conversation with Michael, when I inadvertently used the Hindi word for "meat" rather than the Tamil word, the mother, who was sitting nearby, immediately corrected me with the Tamil word.

In instances when I observed Sinhalese speaking Tamil, it was often in jocular contexts, similar to Hill's (1995b) characterization of mock Spanish. While living in Kandy, I spend some time with a group of young Sri Lankan adults (ages 20-25), who volunteered at an international NGO near my house. As one of the goals of the NGO was to promote peace and interethnic understanding, members were encouraged to communicate with one another in "all three languages:" Sinhala, Tamil, and English (not too different from the premises of the official language policy). Almost all of the Muslims and Tamils in the NGO were proficient in all of these languages. I often observed the Muslim members encouraging the Sinhalese members to try to speak Tamil. But when these Sinhalese members spoke Tamil, it would invariably involve repeating catch phrases from Tamil cinema and other slang phrases, such as "*enna Daa* (what (intimate address form))?" or "*poo Daa*" (get out (intimate address form))." They would also cite profanities or controversial phrases such as "*enakku garbamaa irukkee(n)* (I'm pregnant)." Interestingly, when I asked the Sinhalese members to translate some

profanities into Sinhala, a few told me that there are not any profanities in Sinhala (an absolute impossibility). Like Hill's (1995b) discussion of mock Spanish, by using Tamil in this way, these speakers were propagating covert forms of discrimination (i.e., the idea that Tamils are buffoons who say rude and inappropriate things).

One time when a Sinhalese member was yelling out some Tamil swear words, a Muslim member of the NGO took me aside and said that he had actually observed a few occasions when a Sinhalese member used Tamil in a "useful way." He told me a story about how they had recently gone on a trip to Batticaloa in the East (which is majority Tamil-speaking), and had observed this Sinhalese member asking a Tamil woman directions in Tamil when he thought nobody was watching him. He said that he was actually amazed that his friend had used Tamil in this way. He explained that when they all ended up talking to the woman, they found out that she had grown up in Kandy, and that she actually knew Sinhala very well. He said that they had all laughed at their Sinhalese friend for his diligent, but completely unnecessary effort. I also heard of several other instances of Sinhalese using Tamil during trips to Tamil-majority areas in the North or East, when they never use any Sinhala at home in Kandy.<sup>65</sup> These linguistic patterns are related to the idea that because Kandy is Sinhala majority (and a symbolic center for Sinhala Buddhism and the Buddhist state), it is all Tamils' duty to accommodate to Sinhalese by speaking Sinhala.

In summary, though the official language policy is premised on the idea that Sinhala-medium students learn Tamil, and Tamil-medium students learn Sinhala, in

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<sup>65</sup> As an example of this, one Sinhalese family I knew said that the only time they use Tamil is when they go to India, because if people think they are Sri Lankan Tamils, they will get discounted admissions. This shows that when the social context changes, people become less attached to their particular ideological aversions.

practice it does not occur this way. I suggest that by altering its basic policies, Girls' College can do a lot to promote the use of English as an interethnic link language. A first step could be to re-institute the former English-as-a-subject policy, where students are grouped into English classes on the basis of English ability (thus mixing Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students). In the next couple of years, Girls' College could try to fully implement the English-medium streams, making English available for all O-level subjects. This way, students could be fully incorporated into their English-medium streams (and not have to return to their Tamil-medium classes). Thus, rather than constantly substantiating language medium divisions, students could form bonds on the basis of belonging to the English-medium stream. In addition, Girls' College could also make an effort to implement more English-medium extracurricular programs that are not just restricted to the students in the English-medium streams, but available to the school as a whole. At Girls' College, programs that encourage Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students to converse with one another in Tamil and Sinhala would be extremely helpful. However, in contrast to English, the issues with the teaching of official languages at Girls' College are much more difficult to fix. Only with changing political circumstance (where Tamils are fully incorporated within the Sri Lankan nation), can second-language Sinhala and Tamil classes be implemented in more symmetrical ways.

### **Inculcating Ethnic Divisions**

In Sri Lanka, the new language policies are failing to contribute to the goal of promoting "national unity and integration," as they do not address the very structure of the educational system which segregates students on the basis of language medium, and through this, ethnicity. In Sri Lanka, most Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students study



in separate schools. As I have shown, even at bi- and multi-medium schools like Girls' College, which combine students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, the constant reinforcing of ethnic divisions, as well as asymmetries in the implementation of these policies (as related to social inequalities and ethnic hostilities), prevent these policies from being implemented in ways that promote interethnic communication and mutual understanding.

Overall, the regimentation of language medium policies in Sri Lankan schools serves to inculcate students into essentialized ethnic divisions. But its impact is not just limited to this; through institutionalizing the link between ethnicity and language medium, the educational system acts to objectify it, to make it tangible and real. The impact of this is not just limited to education, but extends elsewhere. In chapters four, five, and six, I move beyond the level of national and local policies, and explore how Hindu College and Girls' College students are acting to interactionally reconfigure social differences. In doing so, I consider the tensions between representations of difference inherent in local and national educational policies, and configurations of difference that are emergent in socially-occurring talk.

## Chapter Four

### **Ideologies of “Legitimate” Language, Linguistic Evaluation, and Disjuncture among Girls’ College Tamil-Medium Teachers**

In this chapter, I consider how Girls’ College Tamil-medium teachers, amidst the demographic and institutional shifts occurring among Tamil-speaking groups in the post-1983 period, are engaging with, negotiating, and contesting different models of “legitimate” language (Bourdieu 1991; Heller 2001), and through this, contesting institutional hierarchies. By exploring the disjunctures between teachers’ ideologies concerning with linguistic forms are the “best,” and the way in which teachers are correcting or evaluating students’ linguistic performances in the classroom, it is possible to see how subtle social shifts are occurring.

In the Girls’ College Tamil-medium stream, the most salient sociolinguistic divisions are among North (Jaffna) and East (Batticaloa) Tamils,<sup>66</sup> Up-country Tamils, and Muslims. During the British period, Jaffna Tamils, as a result of their privileged access to English-medium missionary education, held civil service and professional jobs disproportionately to their percentage of the population (Tambiah 1986). In the pre- and post-independence periods, Tamils from the North and East were able to maintain a near monopoly in Tamil-medium education. However, in the last twenty-five years, there

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<sup>66</sup> At Girls’ College there are numerous Jaffna teachers, but only a few Batticaloa teachers. While Jaffna and Batticaloa represent entirely different regions with separate histories, in the Up-country region they are often collapsed into the category North and East. In addition, sometimes Batticaloa is even subsumed into the category Jaffna. When I initially visited Tamil-medium schools in Kandy, I would ask the principals about teacher demographics. I found that Upcountry principals had difficulty distinguishing between teachers from Jaffna and Batticaloa because they subsumed them into the category North and East.

have been significant power shifts among Tamil-speaking groups. Following the outbreak of the civil war in 1983, large numbers of North and East Tamils fled Sri Lanka, seeking asylum in North America, Europe, and Australia (Daniel 1996). From 1983 to the 1990s, the number of North and East Tamils in the Sinhalese-majority South (as well as the North) significantly diminished (Devotta 2010).<sup>67</sup> During this same period, Up-country Tamils and Muslims, who had previously been educationally underprivileged, made significant strides in the national education system, and through this, were able to gain access to government jobs. While before 1983 there were only a handful of Up-country Tamil and Muslim teachers in the Central Province (where Kandy is the capital), they currently outnumber teachers from the North and East. But despite the fact that North and East Tamils are no longer in the numerical majority in education, they retain high status positions. In the Kandy Zonal Ministry of Education, North and East Tamils are more highly represented than Up-country Tamils and Muslims. In Kandy, the largest number of Jaffna teachers is not found in provincial schools, but at prestigious national, assisted,<sup>68</sup> or private schools. In addition, North and East Tamils tend to teach highly valued subjects such as math and science, whereas Up-country Tamils and Muslims teach arts. English, which is a subject that is associated with a lot of prestige, however, is more commonly taught by Up-country Tamils and Muslims than North and East Tamils.

In the first part of the chapter, I show how Girls' College Tamil-medium teachers are engaging with and negotiating different models of "legitimate" language. I look at how Jaffna teachers espouse how Jaffna Tamils is the most "original," "pure," and

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<sup>67</sup> In Kandy, there has been a recent influx of North and East Tamils fleeing the war and the 2004 Tsunami. However, the percentage of North and East Tamils in Kandy is still lower than it was before 1983.

<sup>68</sup> Assisted schools are semi-private schools that receive government funding, and thus have to follow the national curriculum.

literary-like variety. I show how Up-country and Muslim teachers, in turn, employ ideologies to argue why Jaffna Tamil is not the “best,” and, by doing so, challenge institutional power hierarchies. I also consider the processes by which Tamil-medium teachers recursively map Tamil sociolinguistic hierarchies onto hierarchies between Tamils and Sinhalese (involving the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state). Drawing on Meek (2010), I explore the disjuncture between teachers’ ideologies concerning what counts as the “best” Tamil speech, and the way that they are actually correcting and evaluating students’ speech in the classroom. I argue that this disjuncture between explicit language ideologies and the ideologies involved in practice, in turn, reflects a gap between widely circulating norms of “prestige” (based on the socio-cultural and institutional hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups), and the demographic and institutional shifts occurring in the post-1983 period.

### **“Legitimate” Language and Sociolinguistic Disjuncture**

As scholars of language and education have long observed, the way that language practices are evaluated is integrally tied to relations of power (Bourdieu 1977, 1991; Heller 2001). Bourdieu (1977) illustrates the importance of education and state-level standardization in the creation and reproduction of symbolic hierarchies that are similar to economic hierarchies. In his concept of “legitimate” language, Bourdieu (1991) argues that schools and the family, as kinds of cultural institutions, are the primary sites for the reproduction of “legitimate” language, and through this, the perpetuation of social inequalities. According to Bourdieu, the agents of the regulation and imposition of the “legitimate” language are teachers, acting through the institution of the school. As Bourdieu (1991:45) writes, teachers are “empowered universally to subject the linguistic

performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification.”

A central issue in Bourdieu’s concept of “legitimate” language is that though it allows for the existence of multiple linguistic markets, it does not allow for alternative or counter “legitimate” languages (Woolard 1985). As many scholars have observed, in multilingual linguistic situations there are often multiple and competing norms of “legitimate” languages (Woolard 1985; Heller 2001; Jaffe 1999). I suggest that rather than presuming that schools perpetuate a single “legitimate” language/code, ratified by the state, they should be considered crucial sites for the contestation of multiple norms of “legitimate” languages, and through this, power hierarchies. As one of a small number of government schools in Sri Lanka to offer Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium streams, Girls’ College brings together principals, teachers, staff, and students from diverse sociolinguistic, ethnic, religious, caste, and class backgrounds. As an elite national school, closely linked to both Kandy and the nation-state, it is thus an important site for the reproduction and contestation of multiple “legitimate” language(s).

Within the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams, there are competing norms of “legitimate” language, which are tied to institutional power inequalities. In the Sinhala-medium stream, the most salient division is between Kandyan and Low-Country Sinhalese. As a result of their privileged access to civil service and professional jobs during the British period, Low-Country Sinhalese, like Jaffna Tamils, have long held socio-cultural, economic, and political hierarchies over Kandyan Sinhalese, who was later to reap the benefits of formal education. Because Girls’ College is dominated by Kandyan Sinhalese, this hierarchy is inverted, with Kandyan Sinhala valued over Low-

Country Sinhala varieties, even though they are more ratified in the national curriculum.

The dominance of Jaffna Tamils in education had long been reflected in the national Tamil-medium syllabus. Until recently, all the pedagogical materials in the Tamil-medium syllabus were either written by South Indian or Jaffna authors. In the last decade, the National Institute of Education (NIE), as part of a program to remove bias in the curriculum, included materials written by Sri Lankan Tamil speakers from a variety of social backgrounds. The Tamil literature syllabus, for example, now includes poetry and stories written by North and East Tamils, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims. But while the Tamil literature syllabus includes such linguistic diversity, the second-language-Tamil syllabus is still based upon Jaffna Tamil. This is evident not only from the Jaffna “spoken” forms included in the syllabus,<sup>69</sup> but from inclusion of flora and fauna from the Jaffna natural environment. Despite the fact that it is currently only partially ratified in the national curriculum, in educational institutions in Kandy and elsewhere, Jaffna Tamil is still widely associated with being the “best” Tamil. However, while at Girls’ College Jaffna Tamil maintains status as a “prestige” variety, emergent Kandy “normative” Tamil varieties are closer to Up-country varieties (incorporating some Jaffna features). In this analysis, I show how, in everyday practices, the Girls’ College Tamil-medium stream is a site for the negotiation of “legitimate” language, and through this, sociolinguistic hierarchies.

While there are different norms of “legitimate” language in Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams, they cannot be thought to comprise distinct linguistic markets (Bourdieu 1991). Firstly, there are common linguistic and non-linguistic norms across all

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<sup>69</sup> As I discuss in chapter three, the second-language-Tamil syllabus incorporates both “spoken” and “literary” forms.

these three streams. Secondly, Sinhala- and Tamil-medium teachers and students recognize common social indexicals across Sinhala and Tamil speech (though they might not be congruent). Thirdly, in Tamil and Sinhala oratory, there are common norms of evaluation (as Tamil and Sinhala are both diglossic languages, students are evaluated on how well they produce “literary” varieties).

As I have discussed in chapter three, the Tamil- and Sinhala-medium streams do not exist on equal footing, but are hierarchically ordered with respect to one another. The Tamil-medium stream’s subordinate position with respect to the Sinhala-medium is evident in everyday practices. While the Tamil-medium stream is supposed to have a ratified role in the school (as consistent with its “pluralistic” image), in practice Sinhala is the dominant language. Almost all school-wide functions are conducted in Sinhala (with some English). The position of the Tamil-medium stream with respect to the Sinhala-medium stream is evident in the asymmetrical linguistic practices across both of these streams. Namely, while Tamil-medium students are expected to manage enough Sinhala to participate in the everyday functioning of the school (understanding instructions in Sinhala or attending school-wide functions conducted in Sinhala), Sinhala-medium students do not speak any Tamil (despite the fact that national policies dictate that they study Tamil as a subject).

At the time of my research, the English-medium stream was in the process of being implemented. It was available only in select subjects (including math, science, geography, and English literature) from Grades 6-11, and for Advanced-level (A-level) (Grades 12-13) math and science. I consider the English-medium stream to be only a partial stream, and thus not fully comparable with the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium

streams. Students, in their English-medium subjects, have to ascribe to different set of norms of “legitimate” language. However, I noticed that the full use of English was mainly confined to the classroom setting; outside of the classroom students tended to converse with teachers and fellow students in Sinhala or Tamil. In addition, though being in the English-medium gave students a privileged status (which was related to class and socio-economic level); they were still linked to their Sinhala- or Tamil-medium origins. Thus, while English-medium students had to comply with new norms of evaluation in their English-medium classes, they also were subject to Sinhala- and Tamil-medium norms of evaluation elsewhere.

### **Girls’ College Tamil- and Sinhala-Medium Teachers**

I was initially introduced to the Girls’ College principal through my Sinhala teacher, whose wife was a senior teacher at the school. Though I came to Girls’ College through Sinhalese contacts, upon discovering that I spoke Tamil, the Tamil-medium teachers enthusiastically welcomed me to join them in all of their daily activities. I found that as I grew closer to the Tamil-medium teachers, it became much more difficult to interact with the Sinhala-medium teachers (this was exacerbated by my limited proficiency in Sinhala). In this chapter, while I am mostly concerned with the way that Tamil-medium teachers are negotiating Tamil sociolinguistic hierarchies, I also attend to the dynamics between Tamil- and Sinhala-medium teachers (as well as how Tamil-medium teachers map their own internal differences onto the division between the Tamil- and the Sinhala-medium streams).

In their daily practices, most Tamil-medium teachers had very little interaction with Sinhala-medium teachers. Aside from brief encounters at the main office complex



or around the school grounds, the only space where Tamil- and Sinhala-medium teachers came together was the canteen. Located in the back of the sports field (in the same building as the auditorium), the canteen consisted of a counter where food and drinks were sold, and a large table for teachers to sit. Spending time in the canteen, it was easy to observe the way in which Tamil- and Sinhala-medium teachers interacted with one another. I found while some Tamil-medium teachers conversed freely with the Sinhala-medium teachers (in Sinhala or English), others noticeably kept their distance.

It was in common spaces like the canteen where my own positioning as a Tamil-speaking foreign researcher was especially problematic. Tamil-medium teachers would regularly invite me to come to the staff room for a cup of tea or a snack.<sup>70</sup> I got the sense that while some teachers were simply curious about me, other teachers clearly found it unsettling that I was speaking Tamil to Tamil-medium teachers, thus excluding them from the conversation. As an indication of this, a month into my research, a Tamil-medium Muslim teacher told that there was an ongoing rumor among the Sinhalese teachers that I was a CIA agent assigned to investigate discrimination against Tamil students. A few months later, several Tamil-medium students also asked me about this rumor.<sup>71</sup>

In the staff room, when a Sinhalese teacher asked who I was or what I was doing, I would respond by immediately dropping my conversation with the Tamil-medium teacher and addressing them, often describing my research project in a mix of Sinhala

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<sup>70</sup> The canteen carried foods that were associated with different ethnic groups. I found that even my own choice of food was contentious. When I ate *kiri baat* (milk rice), a food strongly associated with Sinhalese, Sinhalese teachers would give me glowing approval.

<sup>71</sup> I told my Sinhala teacher about this. He responded casually that it had been an issue when I first came to Girls' College but that after a few phone calls he was able to resolve it. I was amazed that he had addressed this potential problem without even informing me about it.

and English. Most of the Tamil-medium teachers would respond to this situation by making efforts to incorporate the Sinhalese teachers in our conversation, trying to set them at ease. Other teachers, however, would not even make minimal efforts to maintain collusion, thus putting me in a very awkward position.

When they were not teaching, most Girls' College teachers spent their time in the staff rooms, which were partially organized by language medium. When I asked students and teachers about the various staff-rooms, they would invariably name a Sinhala-medium staff room, a Tamil-medium staff room, a science staff room, and several primary school staff-rooms. The Sinhala-medium staff room is situated above the main office complex. Very large in size, it had several comfortable couches, tables, desks, and an attached bathroom. The Tamil-medium staff room was located in a separate building which also houses the Tamil-medium Grade 6 and 7 classrooms, Tamil-medium A-level arts and commerce classrooms, and the Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism rooms. Very small and simple in contrast to the Sinhala-medium staff room, it had a large wooden table, a desk for the assistant vice principal, Rajani, and some storage cabinets.

In addition to the divisions between Sinhala- and Tamil-medium teachers (which was mapped onto ethnicity), there were also numerous social differences among the teachers. Teachers differed from one another in terms of religion, sub-ethnicity (Kandyan vs. Low-country Sinhalese or Jaffna vs. Up-country), caste, class, socioeconomic level, educational level, and region of origin. Teachers' positioning with respect to one another is related to rank, seniority, educational level (whether or not they hold a B.A. degree),<sup>72</sup> and the classes that they teach (as I mentioned above, math and

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<sup>72</sup> As regional and ethnic quotas make it less competitive for Up-country Tamils to obtain university admission, North and East Tamils often feel that Up-country Tamil's degrees do not hold the same value.

science classes are valued over arts). As is considered to be a long Girls' College tradition, several teachers had connections to Peradeniya University (their husbands or relatives are university faculty or staff). However, due to their unequal representation at the university level, Sinhalese, North and East Tamils, and Muslim teachers tended to have more connections to universities than Up-country Tamil teachers. In fact, it is only within the last five years that Up-country Tamils have been gaining admission to universities in significant numbers.

In both the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams there were significant hierarchies between teachers who had competency in English and those who did not. In addition, teachers would often compare the wealthier teachers (*vasudi* (facilities)) with the teachers who struggle financially (*kashDam paTTraanga* (they struggle)). Another salient distinction was between teachers from Kandy town and those from more rural backgrounds. In the next section, I discuss the way that Tamil-medium teachers are engaging with, negotiating, and contesting sociolinguistic hierarchies. Before this, however, I discuss how the way in which linguistic practices are evaluated in the Girls' College Tamil-medium education is intertwined with ideologies of diglossia.

### **Sri Lankan Tamil Varieties and Ideologies of Difference**

In Sri Lanka (as well as South India), the way that sociolinguistic varieties are ordered is deeply bound with ideologies of diglossia, where, as I have discussed, a high variety, "*illakkiya* (literary)" Tamil, is contrasted with a low variety, "*kochai* (vulgar)" Tamil (see Appendix 2). One of the explicit goals of Tamil-medium primary and secondary education in Sri Lanka (as well as Sinhala-medium) is to socialize students into producing the "literary" register. This involves both writing and speech, i.e., oratory

(recitation, debate, and singing). While teachers and students consider the register of the classroom to be “literary” Tamil, in actual classroom practices students and teachers mix “literary” and “spoken” Tamil varieties (in addition, there is often some indeterminacy between what is “literary” and what is “spoken”). A common pattern that I observed at Girls’ College and elsewhere was that teachers would use a variety close to “literary” Tamil when directly referring to the subject material, but would use forms closer to “spoken” Tamil when managing the class (elicitation, discipline, and administrative tasks). Slippages in teachers’ and students’ attempts to sustain “literary” Tamil were also frequent. The only occasion when Tamil “spoken” forms are ratified in classroom practices is when reading stories, poetry, performing dramas, or singing folk songs that incorporate Tamil colloquial forms (see Annamalai 2007 for a discussion of “spoken” and “written” forms in the novel).

As related to the socio-cultural, political, and institutional hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups, in institutional contexts, as elsewhere, there is a widely circulating ideology that Jaffna Tamil is the most “pure,” “original,” and “literary” variety, contrasted with all other spoken varieties, which are *kochai* (corrupt). Through a recursive process, the High/Low distinction is often collapsed onto different varieties of spoken Tamil. Thus, Jaffna Tamil, in being the so-called most literary-like, becomes the high variety which is opposed to all other varieties. I outline this below:

High (*illakkiya*(literary) Tamil) > Low (*kochai*(vulgar) Tamil)  
Jaffna Tamil > all other varieties of spoken Tamil

In this chapter, I consider the disjuncture between teachers’ assertions about which Tamil varieties are the “best” and the way they are actually correcting and evaluating students on the basis of their speech. In addition, I also attend to the

disjuncture between the way that teachers' describe the sociolinguistic field, and their actual linguistic practices. My research on the latter was challenging, however, as in the conversations in which I was involved, teachers would often slow down or standardize their speech for me (a non-native Tamil speaker). However, what I did observe was that while Tamil-medium teachers were constantly emphasizing sociolinguistic differences, there was a lot of uniformity in their actual linguistic practices. With the exception of certain individuals, settings, and circumstances, in interactions with one another teachers tended to speak emergent Kandy "normative" Tamil varieties.

### **Negotiating "Legitimate" Language at Girls' College**

#### **Example One: "Her Tamil is Different!"**

The Tamil-medium staff room is a place where Tamil-medium teachers come to eat, pass time, catch up on work, chat, or even avoid students. It was almost always buzzing with talk (in Tamil) about academic and administrative matters, religion, politics, money, marriage, sex, and other topics. With Sinhala-medium teachers rarely entering, it was also a place where teachers could semi-freely talk about their issues and problems with Girls' College as a whole, or with Tamil-medium education in Kandy more broadly. Though Tamil-medium teachers differed from one another in very complex ways (related to ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, religion, caste, class, socioeconomic and educational level, and region or origin), they frequently distinguish themselves from one another in terms of the categories North and East Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim.

In this section, I focus on five interactions among Tamil-medium teachers in the Tamil-medium staff room and canteen. I look at how, through discussions of what constitutes the "best" linguistic forms (or "legitimate" language), teachers are engaging

with, negotiating, and challenging institutional power inequalities. In the first example, I show how teachers, through their discussion of sociolinguistic differences, implicitly order varieties of Tamil in relation to concepts of “literary,” “prestige, and “standard” languages.

On my first day at Girls’ College, I visited the Grade 10 Tamil-medium classroom, and met Geetha. A high caste (*motta veLallar*) Up-country Tamil Hindu, Geetha teaches Tamil and history. Quickly discovering that I speak Tamil, Geetha invited me to come to the Tamil-medium staff room. As she opened the doorway into the staff room, she said, “*idu tamizh medium staffs ellaa irukkiranga* (this is where all the Tamil-medium staffs are).” All the teachers wore “Indian” style saris, as opposed to the Kandyan saris worn by all the Sinhalese teachers. The two Muslim teachers wore hijabs. At Geetha’s instruction, I stood up and introduced myself in Tamil to the teachers. I told them that I had been studying Tamil for seven years, both in the US and in India, and that I had come to the school to do my dissertation research on how students use different varieties of Tamil, Sinhala, and English.

As soon as she hears my research topic, Geetha immediately states “Muslim Tamil is different, isn’t it?” Pointing to Rasha, an older Muslim home economics teacher who had come to Girls’ College a few years before from the Up-country town of Balangoda, she says, “Her Tamil is different.” Rasha responds by describing herself as speaking Balangoda Tamil rather than Muslim Tamil (thus emphasizing the regional rather than the ethnic difference). I show this in the following transcript:

a.

(1) <b>Geetha:</b> muslim tamizh vittiyaasam daanee. ivanga tamizh vittiyaasam. Rasha kadaikka sollunga, Rasha tamizh vittiyaasam daanee? (2) <b>Rasha:</b> naan Balangoda tamil, povomaa Balangoda	(1) <b>Geetha:</b> Muslim Tamil is different, isn't it? Her Tamil is different. Tell Rasha to speak. Rasha's Tamil is different isn't it? (2) <b>Rasha:</b> I [speak] Balangoda [Tamil]. Shall we go to Balangoda?
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b.

A little later, Jayanthi, a Tamil teacher from Jaffna, and Nabiha, a Muslim geography and Islam teacher from Kandy join the conversation. After Jayanthi introduces herself to me, Geetha remarks about Jayanthi's speech. Whereas Rasha is not very pleased about being described as speaking "Muslim Tamil," Jayanthi seems quite happy to be described as speaking "Jaffna" Tamil. Jayanthi asks me if her Tamil is different. Before I can even respond, Nabiha says that it is harder for me to catch the differences between different Tamil varieties.

(I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.).)

(6) <b>Geetha(to me):</b> ivaDa tamizh vittiyaasam daanee? (7) <b>Jayanthi(to me):</b> enDa tamizh vittiyaasamaa? illaya? (8) <b>Nabiha (to other teachers):</b> avakku kaNDupuDikka kashTam, engaLukkutaa(n) kaNDu piDikka eelu(m).	(6) <b>Geetha (to me):</b> Her Tamil is different, isn't it? (7) <b>Jayanthi (to me):</b> Is my Tamil different or not? (8) <b>Nabiha (to other teachers):</b> It's harder for her to catch it [the differences], but we (exclusive)(emph.) can.
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c.

The teachers all agree that they should dress me in a sari the next day. Rasha, using the word "*pasundu*," which is often emblematically associated with Muslim Tamil, comments that the sari will look beautiful. Jayanthi, the Jaffna teacher, then comments that I will not understand what "*pasundu*" means. Geetha, now having a perfect example of Muslim/Balangoda Tamil, yells out, "*pasundu, pasundu is azhahu*" (beautiful in more

“normalized” Tamil). Jayanthi then says “*vadivu*,” which is emblematically associated with Jaffna Tamil. Geetha, talking over Jayanthi, comments that “*pasundu*” is “Balangoda speech.”

(I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.).)

(11) <b>Jayanthi:</b> naanga kaTTi viDRam, vaangaLee(n)	(11) <b>Jayanthi:</b> Come, we will tie it!
(12) <b>Nabiha:</b> koNDu vaanga naalakki, naanga uDuppaaTTi viDRam.	(12) <b>Nabiha:</b> Bring it tomorrow. We will dress you!
(13) <b>Rasha:</b> nalla pasundaa iikkum	(13) <b>Rasha:</b> It will be very “ <i>pasundu</i> ”
(14) <b>Jayanthi:</b> pasundenDaa viLangaadu	(14) <b>Jayanthi:</b> If you say “ <i>pasundu</i> ,” she doesn’t understand.
(15) <b>Geetha:</b> ah....! pasundu, pasundu, azhahu!	(15) <b>Geetha:</b> Ah...! “ <i>pasundu</i> ,” “ <i>pasundu</i> ” is “ <i>azhahu</i> ”!
(16) <b>Jayanthi:</b> [vaDivu!]	(16) <b>Jayanthi:</b> [“ <i>vaDivu</i> !”]
(17) <b>Geetha:</b> [adudaa(n) BalangoDa peccu!] Christina adudaa(n) Balangoda peccu!	(17) <b>Geetha:</b> [That (emph.) is Balangoda speech! ] Christina, that(emph.) is Balangoda speech.

In this interaction, Geetha, in response to hearing that I am interested in studying how people use different varieties of Tamil, points out Rasha’s (Muslim/Balangoda Tamil) and Jayanthi’s speech (Jaffna Tamil). It is clear that while both of these varieties are considered to be different (indexical of Muslims and Jaffna Tamils, respectfully), only “*pasundu*” is positioned as a negatively valued “non-standard.” Rasha, disliking it that Geetha had isolated her speech, describes it as “BalangoDa” rather than “Muslim” Tamil.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in this interaction, Geetha and Jayanthi presuppose the valuing of different varieties of Tamils as “standard” or “non-standard” (either positively or negatively valued).

In this interaction, though Geetha and Jayanthi highlight emblematic differences

<sup>73</sup> Geetha would often make fun of Rasha's speech. A few times I observed Geetha, in the presence of Rasha, singing the popular Tamil film song with the lyrics, "*enakku asai, cinna cinna asai* (I have a desire, a little, little desire), pronouncing "*asai*" as "*ashai*." The realization of /s/ as /sh/ is a feature of Rasha's particular variety of Muslim Tamil. Rasha, older than Geetha and very dignified, would just ignore her.



among Jaffna, “Up-country,” and Muslim speech, there are few other observable differences in their speech. While Geetha and Rasha’ speech is similar, Jayanthi’s speech is slightly distinct in terms of intonation (the lack of a rising tone in interrogatives, which is typical in Jaffna Tamil) (see Suseendrarajah 1999). It was possible that the teachers were slightly simplifying or standardizing their speech to accommodate to me. While this example showed how sociolinguistic varieties are presupposed, the following four examples show how teachers’ explicit discussions and debates about which variety of Tamil is the “best.” In the next example, I show how Rajani, a Jaffna Tamil Hindu commerce teacher and Assistant Vice-Principal, espouses how Jaffna Tamil is the most “pure,” “original,” and “literary” variety.

**Example Two: Jaffna is the Most “Pure,” “Original,” and “Literary” Variety**

I observed that during discussion pertaining to the Tamil language, Jaffna Tamil teachers would often espouse how Jaffna Tamil is the most “pure,” “original,” and “literary” Tamil variety. I exhibit this with an example of conversation I had with Rajani. Over tea in the school canteen (there were no other teachers present at the time), I asked Rajani if she corrects Muslim students when they say “*iiki*,” a shortened form of the verb “to be,” “*irukku*,”<sup>74</sup> which is emblematically associated with Muslim Tamil. Rajani responds to me by explaining that Jaffna Tamil, as opposed to estate, Muslim, and Batticaloa Tamil, is the most “pure,” “original” and “literary” variety. As in Jayanthi’s speech in example one, other than the intonational features (the non-rising intonation in

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<sup>74</sup> Rajani and her husband, without children of their own, were raising a six year old Muslim girl, who lived next door (and had been abandoned by her mother and father and left with her aging grandmother). Rajani had used her influence at Girls’ College to get the girl admissions into Grade one. I noticed that though Rajani would often criticize the way the Up-country Tamils and Muslims speak, she never corrected the little girl when she used the non-standard variety “*iiki*.” This is why I asked her this question. As I had spent a lot of time visiting Rajani at her home, I felt comfortable interrogating her in this way. Many of the students in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class would say that though Rajani would talk about Jaffna superiority, at heart she was “sweet.”

interrogative phrases), there are few features that can be recognized as Jaffna Tamil.

Though originally from Jaffna, Rajani had been living in Kandy since she attended Peradeniya University. In her school-based linguistic practices she frequently switched between Jaffna and more “normative” Tamil varieties. As similar to other Jaffna teachers, it is likely that in speaking to me, she is employing features that would be recognized to be a “normative” Up-country Tamil variety.

(I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.))

<p><b>Rajani:</b> iiki nalla tamizh ille. kolokkiyal tamil, muslim aakkal peesiRa tamizh. viiTTula appaDi peesuvaanga. skuulla appaDi peesa kuDaadu. viiTTu peeccu. nalla tamizh irukku, esTeeT tamizh irukku, muslim tamizh irukku. yaazhpaana(m) tamizh, nalla tamizh. orijinal tamizh. illakkiya tamizh. muslim tamizh matta vazhakku. vazhakku enna nu teriyuma? saadaaraNa peesura tamizh batticaloa, esTeeT, muslim. yaapaana(m) tamizh daa(n) orijinal tamizh.</p>	<p><b>Rajani:</b> “iiki” is not good Tamil. It is colloquial Tamil, the spoken Tamil of Muslim people. They speak that way at home. In school you can’t speak that way. It is house speech. There is good Tamil, estate Tamil, Muslim Tamil. Jaffna Tamil is good Tamil. Original Tamil. Literary Tamil. Muslim Tamil is another variety. Do you know what a variety is? The normal spoken Tamil: Batticaloa, estate, Muslim. It is Jaffna Tamil (emph.) that is the original Tamil.</p>
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In this interaction, as consistent with the widely circulating ideology, Rajani ranks Jaffna Tamil over other varieties (conflating it with “literary” Tamil). But as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, while this ideology tends to surface in explicit discussions about language, it is only enacted in particular settings and circumstances (such as oratorical performances). In the next three examples, I show how three non-Jaffna Tamil teachers (two Up-country Tamils and a Muslim) argue against the view that Jaffna Tamil is the “best,” and, by doing so, act to interrupt institutional power inequalities. While Jaffna teachers often espoused the superiority of Jaffna Tamil in the

company of non-Jaffna teachers, Up-country Tamil and Muslim teachers tended to only challenge this view in the absence of Jaffna teachers. This is because of institutionalized hierarchy of North and East Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups.

**Example Three: “Jaffna Tamil is not the Best Tamil”**

One day I went to the canteen with Geetha (the Up-country Tamil and history teacher), Nabiha (the Muslim geography teacher from Kandy) and Raavi (a Math teacher from Batticaloa). We sat down on the far end of the long table. There were several Sinhalese teachers seated at the other end of the table, including a senior Sinhala-medium history teacher. Without acknowledging them, we sat down and Geetha, Nabiha, and Raavi became involved in a conversation about a Tamil-medium administrative matter. When Nabiha asked me if I was having trouble understanding Raavi’s Batticaloa Tamil, the conversation turned to the topic of language. Raavi started to comment about how Batticaloa Tamil, and not Jaffna Tamil, is the “best” Tamil, as it is closest to the “literary” variety (making the same kind of argument as Raavi in example two). Geetha responded to Raavi by saying you cannot say that one kind of spoken Tamil is better than another, as each has its own place in the Tamil language. She said that she had recently watched a Tamil television talk show (broadcast from Tamil Nadu) where there was a speaker from Chennai. She said that because his Tamil was so hard to understand (Chennai Tamil has a reputation for being very fast and having a lot of Telugu influence), they had to use a translator, translating from Tamil to Tamil.

In line 1, Raavi, still trying to make his point, adds that “*vaangoo* (come)” and “*poongoo* (go)” (command forms emblematic of Jaffna Tamil) are not Tamil. He says that “*vaanga*” (the standard command form) is Tamil. In line 2, Geetha starts to imitate

Jaffna Tamil by saying “*vaangoo, poongoo, irungoo* (sit).” Where they had established a common ground where they were arguing against the widely circulating view that Jaffna Tamil is the “best, Raavi interrupts this in line 3 when he points to Nabiha’s speech as a negatively valued “non-standard” (see Appendix 3 for an example of how Raavi became more critical about Muslim Tamil in the absence of Muslim teachers). By doing this, he changes the footing in the conversation. Likely because in this interaction all of the teachers are hyper metalinguistically aware of their own language usage (as well as my presence), they are speaking a “normative” Up-country Tamil.

In line 4, Nabiha immediately refutes Raavi, pointing out that not all Muslims speak like that. Geetha, in line 5, supporting Nabiha’s statement, points out that there are lots of different varieties of Muslims Tamil. She says that Kandy Muslims, Akurana Muslims, and Kalheena Muslims (Muslim majority towns around Kandy) all speak differently. She then starts to imitate Muslim speech. Nabiha supports Geetha’s statement, saying that there are twenty to twenty-five divisions within Muslim Tamil.

In line 7, Raavi, not directly responding to Nabiha or Geetha, changes the footing again by telling a story of his interaction with another Muslim teacher. He said that Zakkira Madam was speaking well, but at the end of the conversation, she asked “*pooRaa?*” He said that he initially couldn’t understand what she was saying, but later realized she was asking, “*poohapooringaLaa* (are you going to go?).” The deleting of finite verb endings is something that is common in varieties of Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil. In line 8, Nabiha defends Zakkira saying that her speech has improved since she first came to Girls’ College. She comments that when Zakkira goes home she can say “*pooRaa, poonaa, vaRaa* (examples of the omission of the finite verb ending),” but in

school she can't speak that way. She then turns to herself, and says that if she were to speak "*unmaiyaana* (real)" Tamil at home her family would laugh, and think that was speaking that way purposefully (and that she is proud).

(I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.))

<p>(1) <b>Raavi (in English):</b> vaango, poongoo. It's not a Tamil word. vaanga is Tamil.</p> <p>(2) <b>Geetha:</b> vaango, poongoo, irungoo</p> <p>(3) <b>Raavi:</b> NabihDa Tamizh idaviDa vittiyaasoo(m)</p> <p>(4) <b>Nabiha:</b> muslims ellaa(m) appaDi peesuRadille</p> <p>(5) <b>Geetha:</b> KaNDi Muslim onDu, akurana muslim onDu, kalheena muslims onDu peesuvaanga pooRaa, vaaRaa</p> <p>(6) <b>Nabiha:</b> irubathu irubathi anju pirivu irukkudu muslim bashayila</p> <p>(7) <b>Raavi:</b> oru naaL zakkira(a Muslim teacher in the school) maDattooDa kadaicca neeram nallaa kadaicca kaDaisyila "pooRa" enDu keeTTaa enakku viLangalla. piRahu taa(n) viLangiccu. poohappooRiingalaLa engiRatu taa(n) pooRaa enDu keeTTuRukka.</p> <p>(8) <b>Nabiha:</b> ave inge vanda piRahu konjam tirundiTTaa. viiTtukku poonaa pooRaa, vaaRaa enDutaa(n) kadaiikiRadu skuulukku vandaa appaDi ille.</p> <p>uNmaiyaana tamizh kadaicca engada aakkaL sirippaanga. veDDing hovusukku ellaa(m) pooy appaDi peesunaa sirippaanga. avanga ninaiikiRadu naanga veeNunnu peesuroonnu.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Raavi (in English):</b> "<i>vaango</i>," "<i>poongoo</i>." It's not a Tamil word. "<i>vaanga</i>" is Tamil.</p> <p>(2) <b>Geetha:</b> "<i>vaango, poongoo, irungoo</i>" (imitating Jaffna Tamil).</p> <p>(3) <b>Raavi:</b> NabihDa's Tamil is different than this.</p> <p>(4) <b>Nabiha:</b> Not all Muslims talk like that.</p> <p>(5) <b>Geetha:</b> Kandy Muslims speak one way, Akurana Muslims speak one way, Kalheena Muslims speak on way. "<i>pooRaa, vaaRaa</i>" (imitating Muslim speech).</p> <p>(6) <b>Nabiha:</b> There are twenty to twenty five divisions within the Muslim [Tamil] language.</p> <p>(7) <b>Raavi:</b> One day when I was speaking with Zakkira (a Muslim Girls' College teacher), she spoke well. At the end, she asked "<i>pooRa?</i>" I didn't understand. Only later (emph.) did I understand that she was asking "are you going to go (emph.) (<i>pooha poRingaLaa?</i>)?" by asking "<i>pooRaa?</i>"</p> <p>(8) <b>Nabiha:</b> After she[Zakkira] came here she changed a little. If she goes home, "<i>poonaa, pooRaa, vaRaa</i> (examples of Muslim Tamil expressions)" is said (emph.), but when at school it is not like that. If we (exclusive) speak real Tamil our people will laugh. If you go to a wedding house and speak like that they will laugh. They will think that we are speaking that way purposefully like that.</p>
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In the beginning of the interaction, the teachers create common ground in which they argue why Jaffna Tamil is not the “best” Tamil. However, when Raavi points out Muslim Tamil as “non-standard,” he invokes the hierarchy between Muslim Tamil and other Tamil varieties. Geetha makes the argument that not all Muslims speak the same way. Nabiha verifies this, also pointing out that Muslims speak differently in different contexts. By acknowledging that she speaks “*uNmaiyaana* (real)” Tamil in schools, she presupposes that a “standard” Tamil (as opposed to Muslim Tamil) is appropriate in school. By associating Muslim Tamil with her home context, she shows the positive value that it holds within her own community.<sup>75</sup> In the following interaction, I look at how Geetha and Kalai, the Tamil sectional head and assistant vice principal, in arguing against the notion that Jaffna Tamil is the “best,” make the connection between the “best” Tamil varieties, and the varieties that are “best” for teaching.

**Example Four: “Which Tamil is ‘Best’ for Teaching?”**

About two weeks later, I had a conversation with Geetha in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium classroom after she had finished teaching a Tamil class. That week I had been preparing a survey to distribute to the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students. In addition to including asking some basic information, I was also planning on asking about students’ views on language. In the context of our continued discussions about Tamil, I relayed to Geetha that one of the girls in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class (a Muslim girl with a mother from Batticaloa and a father from Kandy) had said that Jaffna/Batticaloa Tamil is the “best” Tamil. Geetha immediately retorted, “*adu suma solraanga* ([she is] just saying that).” She said that a lot of students have trouble understanding Jaffna Tamil (many

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<sup>75</sup> When Nabiha mentions her home context, she is not talking about the home she shares with her husband and daughter (where she consciously tries to speak a more “standard” Tamil), but her mother’s home.

students had also complained to me about this). She advised that on a survey if I am planning to ask students what Tamil is the “best,” I should do so in terms of comprehension, because only then would I get a useful answer. She suggested that on my survey I ask: “*paDippikka aciriyir enda tamizh nallum?*” (which Tamil is best for a teacher to teach?)

Geetha and I left the classroom, and joined Kalai in the canteen. There were several groups of Sinhalese teachers sitting around the table, including a Sinhala-medium history teacher. Geetha started to reiterate our recent conversation to Kalai. I was particularly interested in what Kalai would say about this issue because though she is from the Up-country (Hatton), she incorporates a lot of Jaffna Tamil in her speech (something that students, teachers, and parents had commented about to me). When I asked Geetha about this she said it is because Kalai studied Tamil with Jaffna Tamil faculty at Peradeniya University. When I asked a math teacher from Jaffna about it, she said she speaks this way because she is so powerful. In the following, Kalai reiterates Geetha’s point that the student was just saying that Jaffna Tamil is the “best” because of Jaffna domination. In line one, Kalai’s use of “*solloonum* (have to say)” is particularly marked as Jaffna Tamil. In Up-country Tamil varieties the final nasal consonants are usually dropped, and the vowel is nasalized (*sollano(m)*). Kalai continued:  
(the Jaffna Tamil feature is in bold)

(1) Jaffna domination irukkadinaale adu suuma solranga (2) nalla tamizh ingiRaangaLaam? viLangalannu solRaangaLaam (3) nalla tamizh illeennaa kaaraNam <b>solloonum</b>	(1) They are just saying this because of Jaffna domination. (2) They say it is good Tamil? Do they say they don’t understand it? (3) If it’s not good Tamil, they have to say a reason.
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As soon as Kalai completed the above statement, the Sinhala-medium teacher

joined our conversation. Showing that she had understood what we had been talking about, she started to tell us, in Sinhala, about how she had done a Tamil course at a university that had taught both “written” and “spoken” Tamil. She pointed out that the “spoken” Tamil that they teach is Jaffna Tamil (which is the case in the government second-language-Tamil curriculum). She then started to point out some of the differences between Jaffna Tamil and the Tamil spoken in Kandy. She said that Tamils in Kandy say “*veenam* (don’t need/want)” and Jaffna Tamils say “*veeNDaam*.” When I relayed this to my research assistant, Kumudhini, she said that the teacher had equated Jaffna Tamil with “written (or literary)” Tamil. Correcting the teacher, she said that “written” Tamil is “*veeNDam* (which the teacher had said was Jaffna Tamil),” Up-country spoken Tamil is “*veeNaam*,” and Jaffna “spoken” Tamil is “*vuNaam*.” This Sinhalese teachers’ statement is interesting because it replicates the widely circulating ideology that Jaffna spoken Tamil is the “literary” variety, and that Kandy Tamils speak more “colloquial” varieties (similar to the view Raavi expressed in example two). This interaction also shows how Sinhalese also evaluate Tamil linguistic forms in a way that may or may not be congruent with the way that Tamils are evaluating them. After talking for a few more minutes (about how long you should reuse cooking oil), we all left the canteen.

In this example, both Geetha and Kalai make the argument that what should be considered to be the “best” Tamil is not the variety that is the most “prestigious” (Jaffna Tamil), but the variety that can be best understood (Up-country Tamil), and therefore serves as the best medium of education. By framing the issue in terms of comprehension Geetha and Kalai thus deflate Jaffna Tamil’s status as the “prestige” variety.



In examples three and four, Batticaloa, Muslim, and Up-country teachers, in making arguments as to why Jaffna Tamil is not the "best" Tamil, employ various ideologies of language. I outline these below:

(1) In example three, Raavi argues that Batticaloa Tamil, rather than Jaffna Tamil, is the "best" as it is closest to the "literary" variety. Like Rajani in example two, he presupposes that the "best" varieties are the ones that are closest to "literary" Tamil.

(2) In example three, Geetha claims that you cannot say that one kind of spoken Tamil is better than another, as all varieties of spoken Tamil have their place in the Tamil language. This presupposes that though there may be a single literary language, all spoken varieties are equal to one another, and it can't be argued that one is better than another.

(3) In example three, Nabiha makes the point that Muslims switch in and out of different varieties of Tamil (Muslim Tamil vs. more "standard" varieties) based on appropriateness to context. This presupposes that because people have diverse linguistic repertoire, it is not possible to make one-to-one correlation between the linguistic variety a person deploys, and their identity.

(4) Finally, in example four, Geetha and Kalai argue that because language serves as the medium of education, comprehension is more important than "prestige." This underscores the referential vs. the socio-indexical functions of language.

As one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Sri Lanka, Girls' College can be considered to be an authorizing site for what linguistic forms are considered to be the "best." As I have shown, non-Jaffna Tamil-medium teachers, in their interaction with each other, and with me, employ various ideologies of language to

counter the widely circulating view that Jaffna Tamil is the "best." Though they are not actually reconfigure the categories themselves (Jaffna Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim), they are acting to negotiate and challenge their hierarchical ordering.

The previous four examples have focused on sociolinguistic hierarchies among the Tamil-medium teachers. But while the Tamil-medium stream is largely disconnected from the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school, teachers in their interactions with one another commonly related the Tamil-medium stream with the Sinhala-medium stream. In the next section, I focus on a series of interactions to show how two Up-country Tamil teachers, through recursive processes, map the Up-country/Jaffna division onto the division between the Tamil- and Sinhala-medium streams, and the division between the LTTE (the North) and the Sri Lankan state (the South).

**Example Five: "They Should Not Discriminate"**

One day I came into the Tamil-medium staff room and joined Geetha and Tilakavati (an Up-country Tamil English literature teacher) who were talking about the prestigious boys' private school, Royal College. Geetha pointed out that the majority of the Tamil-medium teachers at Royal College are from Jaffna. She added that Royal College teachers are always discriminating against the Up-country Tamil students, telling them that their speech is "*sariyille* (not okay)." Tilakavati looked over at me, and, switching into English, started to explain to me how Jaffna teachers discriminate against Up-country children. Geetha, who usually spoke to me in Tamil, followed Tilakavati's switch into English.

Having studied in an English-medium private school, Tilakavati is one of the only two Tamil (all Up-country) English teachers at Girls' College. The rest of the English

teachers are Sinhalese and Muslims. Because Tilakavati studied in the English-medium, in her interactions with other Tamil-medium teachers, she would often have trouble producing Tamil academic registers. I had observed that though she would often be very vocal in the company of Up-country or Muslim teachers, she was often silent in the presence of Jaffna teachers. My research assistant, Kumudhini, who is also an Up-country Tamil English teacher, told me that Tilakavati, in her teaching career, had been particularly beaten up by Jaffna Tamils. When I asked her why, she said that Jaffna Tamils often resent it when Up-country Tamils know English better than they do.

In the following interaction, Tilakavati and Geetha, in the absence of any Jaffna teachers, express their anger over what they often describe as “Jaffna domination.” Tilakavati and Geetha explicitly protest Jaffna Tamil teachers’ discrimination against Up-country students. Though not directly pertaining to language, this discrimination involves language as Jaffna teachers are evaluating Up-country students on the basis of their speech. In this interaction, while Tilakavati speaks much more quickly and fluently, Geetha speaks extremely slowly.

In line 1, Tilakavati says that rather than discriminating against Up-country students, Jaffna teachers should just return to Jaffna. By saying this, she is implying that Jaffna Tamils, in direct contrast with Up-country Tamils, do not belong in the Sinhalese-majority South. In line 2, Geetha comments that Jaffna Tamils do not want to return to Jaffna (probably because of the war or because of limited earning potential in Jaffna). In lines 3-10, they point out the irony that despite earning large amounts of money from Up-country students (from their teaching jobs in schools in addition to private tuition classes), Jaffna teachers are still discriminating against them, making it an exploitative

relationship.<sup>76</sup>

I respond to Geetha and Tilakavati by saying that the power dynamic between Jaffna and Up-country teachers is going to change. Tilakavati, in partial agreement with me, starts to comment that there are now a fair number of Up-country teachers, but Geetha interrupts her and says, “It’s not going to change. Early times, during the British government, they had lots of jobs, now...” But before she can finish her statement, Rajani, the assistant vice principal from Jaffna enters the room, and the conversation comes to an immediate halt.

- (1) **Tilakavati:** They are coming here and teaching. Than they should teach properly. They should not discriminate, saying, "you are Up-country, you are Jaffna." You can't do it. So they should go to Jaffna and work!
- (2) **Geetha:** They don't like to go to Jaffna, no?
- (3) **Tilakavati:** Then they should not discriminate.
- (4) **Geetha:** Here they are living luxury life. They have a lot of money from...
- (5) **Christie:** Foreign countries?
- (6) **Tilakavati:** [Up-country students]
- (7) **Geetha:** [Up-country students]
- (8) **Tilakavati:** Then they are scolding. How unfair is that!
- (9) **Geetha:** and tuition
- (10) **Tilakavati:** They are earning thousands of rupees through tuition, but they don't want these students to prosper.

### **Example Six: “They Will Arrest you as LTTE”**

Rajani walks past the main table towards her desk in the back of the room.

Concerned that Rajani had overheard our conversation, I point to my notebook, where I had written down some Jaffna Tamil verb forms from my Tamil class the day before, and I tell her how I had been studying the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. She glances at the notebook and reads out the linguistic forms with interest. Soon, however, she shifted gears and started talking to Geetha about an administrative matter.

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<sup>76</sup> Because they are associated with educational prestige, students prefer Jaffna tuition masters over Up-country Tamil or Muslims, particularly in Tamil, math, and science.

After Rajani left the room, to diffuse possible tension, I switch into English and joke with Geetha that I was going to study “Jaffna English,” a subject that Geetha likes to joke about. Geetha responds, "Jaffna English? We don't like." Just then, Tilakavati grabs my notebook from across the table and glances at the Jaffna Tamil verb forms. With an invigorated smile on her face, Tilakavati, in line 1, asks me, “What, you are speaking Jaffna now? You think their Tamil is the best?”

Recently, the British principal of a prominent Kandy private school had been forced to leave the country for his alleged support of the LTTE. Right after this, an Up-country Tamil teacher at the same school was arrested on suspicion of being LTTE, and had not been seen or heard from since. Invoking these events, in lines 1-5, Tilakavati warns me that if I continue to write Jaffna Tamil, “they” (meaning the Sri Lankan government) will arrest me as LTTE. This threat (which in itself, is real), is related to my presumed ranking of Jaffna Tamil over Up-country Tamil varieties. For Tilakavati, the fact that I had written down the Jaffna Tamil verb forms implies that I may think they are the “best” forms. Though Tilakavati had an invigorated smile on her face, it soon became apparent that she was quite serious.

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| <p>(1) <b>Tilakavati:</b> What, you are speaking Jaffna Tamil now? You think their Tamil is the best?</p> <p>(2) <b>Christie:</b> No, it's from my lesson yesterday.</p> <p>(3) <b>Tilakavati:</b> Don't write that. They will put you inside as an LTTE.<br/>(Geetha and Tilakavati laugh)</p> <p>(4) <b>Christie:</b> They might send me. If you don't see me, that's why.</p> <p>(5) <b>Tilakavati:</b> Yes. So don't write that, no?</p> <p>(6) <b>Christie:</b> Are you serious?</p> <p>(7) <b>Tilakavati:</b> Yes! Yes!</p> |
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In line 6, I ask Tilakavati if Sinhalese people can tell the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. She replies that they can detect these differences (especially

those who have worked in Jaffna). In line 10, she explicitly asks me why I wrote these forms in my notebook. When I tell her that it was for my research, she comments that the Sri Lankan government will not accept this excuse, thus reiterating her initial threat. Interspersed with this conversation, Geetha, in lines 9 and 14, switching into Tamil, comments that in Jaffna spoken English, “rain” is pronounced as “train.” By pointing this out, she makes Jaffna Tamils’ attempts to speak English seem ridiculous.

In line 15, to clarify her earlier statement, I ask Tilakavati if Sinhala-medium teachers can identify the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil. Tilakavati insists that they can, as they know Tamil. In line 17, I ask Tilakavati if Sinhalese think that Jaffna Tamil is the “best.” She explains that when Sinhalese learn Tamil, they learn Up-country and not Jaffna Tamil.

- (6) **Christie:** But Sinhalese people, do they know the difference between...?  
(7) **Tilakavati:** They know. People who have worked in Jaffna, they know.  
(8) **Christie:** They know?  
(9) **Geetha (laughing):** *enna? Jaffna pesura english, rain na train* (What? In Jaffna spoken English they say “train” for “rain.”)  
(10) **Tilakavati (to me):** Why are you writing this?  
(11) **Geetha:** Christina? (laughing)  
(12) **Christie:** For my research. I have to learn how to tell the difference between different Tamil varieties.  
(13) **Tilakavati:** They won't accept all your research. They will just think that all those things...  
(14) **Geetha:** *Jaffna Tamil english peesura rain, train...* (in Jaffna spoken English they say "train" for "rain")  
(Tilakavati and Geetha laugh)  
(15) **Christie (to Tilakavati):** Can the Sinhala-medium teachers here identify the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamil?  
(16) **Tilakavati:** Yes. Yes. Yes. Because we have Jaffna Tamil speaking people and Up-country Tamil speaking people, they can tell the difference. And most of the Sinhalese know Tamil. They know.  
(17) **Christie:** Do they think Jaffna Tamil is the best?  
(18) **Tilakavati:** No, They don't like it and they don't speak it. They speak the way we speak. They like us.  
(19) **Christie:** yes...  
(20) **Tilakavati:** They know that we are with them for a long time [sic.]. So they speak

the way we speak, so they very well know the difference from us and them, from the way that we speak they identify it.

The very fact that this interaction occurs in English can be seen as substantiating Tilakavati's and Geetha's critique of Jaffna/ Up-country domination. It shows that though Jaffna Tamils may laud their Tamil language over Up-country Tamils (justifying their superiority), Up-country Tamils have stronger competency in English, a language which enables privileged access to national and global networks. In the first part of the interaction (example five), Tilakavati, in the company of Geetha, argues that Jaffna Tamils have no right to discriminate against Up-country students, as they do not belong in the Sinhalese-majority South. In the second part of the interaction (example six), the Jaffna Tamil verb forms in my notebook prompt Tilakavati to explicitly turn to a discussion of linguistic forms. She claims that my very act of writing (or speaking) Jaffna Tamil will mark me as "LTTE" to the Sri Lankan government, and may lead to my arrest. By making this statement, Tilakavati directly maps the differences between Jaffna and Up-country linguistic forms onto political orientations. While Up-country Tamil forms index belonging in the Sinhalese-majority South, Jaffna Tamil forms indexes LTTE affiliation.

When I ask Tilakavati if Sinhalese people can even identify different Tamil varieties in lines 6 and 15, this causes the conversation to take a different turn. Tilakavati not only says that Sinhalese can identify the differences between Jaffna and Up-country Tamil, but that when they learn Tamil, they learn Up-country rather than Jaffna Tamil. Here, Tilakavati is not referring to the variety that is incorporated in the national Tamil-as-a-second-language curriculum (which is Jaffna Tamil), but the variety of Tamil Sinhalese use when they actually speak Tamil. Here, she uses linguistic forms to

substantiate the view that Up-country Tamils belong with the Sinhalese (in the Sinhala-majority South), while Jaffna Tamils do not (and should go back to Jaffna). Through a recursive process, the distinction between Jaffna and Up-country linguistic forms are mapped onto the distinction between the LTTE (exclusively Tamil), and the Sri Lankan nation-state (where Up-country Tamils and Sinhalese peacefully coexist). I outline this below:

Variety:	Jaffna Tamil	Up-country Tamil
People who speak it:	Jaffna Tamils	Up-country Tamils and Sinhalese
Political form:	LTTE (the North)	The Sri Lankan State (the South)

At Girls' College and elsewhere, it was common for Jaffna Tamils and Sinhalese to be linked in terms of class and educational prestige (in contrast with Jaffna Tamils and Sinhalese, Up-country Tamils are seen as poor and uneducated). By emphasizing Jaffna Tamils' political alienation from the Sri Lankan state (and how Up-country Tamils can live harmoniously within the Sri Lankan state), Tilakavati deflates the prestigious status that Jaffna Tamils have long held over Up-country Tamils. Noticeably absent from this conversation are Muslims. Here, Tilakavati and Geetha either exclude them entirely (the Up-country Tamil/Jaffna binary often excludes Muslim), or collapse them under the category Up-country.

As these examples indicate, though hierarchies between North and East and Up-country Tamils involve issues of sub-ethnicity, caste, class, educational level, region of origin, and English competency, among the Tamil-medium teachers, they are chiefly being articulated through the discussion of linguistic form (which is mapped onto other social categories). In considering the way that educational institutions are sites for the contestation of multiple norms of "legitimate language" an important question remains:



What is the relationship between the ideologies of what constitutes the “best” linguistic forms (as related to socio-cultural and political hierarchies), and the way in which these teachers are actually evaluating students’ speech in the classroom? What does this tell us about the relationship between explicit ideologies, and the ideologies inherent in everyday practice?

### **Evaluating Students Linguistic Performances in the Classroom**

At Girls’ College I found a discrepancy between teachers’ explicit ideologies about language, and the way that they are correcting or evaluating students’ speech in the classroom. Namely, while almost all of the Jaffna teachers at Girls’ College lauded the superiority of Jaffna Tamils in explicit discussions about language (see example one), in most classroom contexts, they did not seem to expect that students would produce varieties recognized as Jaffna.

I would often hear teachers comment that because the language of the classroom is “*illakkiya* (literary)” Tamil, differences in students’ “spoken” Tamil do not matter. But as I have already discussed, norms of producing only “literary” Tamil in the classroom are rarely met in practice. As I have already discussed, in the classroom both students and teachers mix “literary” and “spoken” varieties (for an example of this, see Appendix 2). In the classroom, “literary” varieties are generally only used in oratory (recitation, poetry, debate and singing), or when directly referring to the subject material. Thus while teachers may claim that they only evaluate students on the basis of their “literary” Tamil, I observed teachers frequently correcting students on their Tamil outside of immediate classroom teacher/student interactions (such as “off the record” questions to teachers, or in interactions among students).

The lack of expectations that students would speak Jaffna Tamil is related to the broad sociolinguistic situation of the students. Though there are a significant number of teachers from the North and East at Girls' College, there were very few North and East students. While some students from the North and East came to Girls' College as war or Tsunami refugees, most were born in Kandy to Jaffna parents, and tend to switch in and out of Jaffna and "normative" Up-country varieties depending on the situation and the participants involved. When I asked Jaffna teachers if the students speak Up-country Tamil, they would often reply that most of the students are from Kandy, and thus speak Up-country Tamil.

While I noticed that some of the Jaffna and non-Jaffna students incorporated certain emblematic Jaffna forms into their speech (such as "*vadivu*" for beautiful, or the non dropping of final nasalized consonants), on the whole, their speech was much closer to a "normative" Up-country Tamil than to Jaffna Tamil varieties. My two research assistants, Kumudhini and Udaya, both former Girls' College students, analyzed recordings of the speech of the girls in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class (in teacher-student and student-student interactions). They found that the speech of the two girls whose parents were from Jaffna was not noticeably different from any of the Up-country Tamil students.<sup>77</sup> They commented that the most significant linguistic contrast in the class was between Muslim (who they identified as employing non-standard varieties in their speech) and non-Muslim girls. Though the Jaffna girls seemed to emphasize their Jaffna origins to the other students (because of Jaffna's association with educational prestige), in interactions with teachers and their classmates, they refrained from speaking

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<sup>77</sup> The way that my research assistants analyzed students' speech was influenced by their own ideologies about what constitutes sociolinguistic difference.

in a way that was recognizable as Jaffna. This may have been motivated by a desire to speak like the other girls in the class, as well as the significant security risks that come with being associated with Jaffna.

But if teachers did not expect students to produce Jaffna Tamil, how did they evaluate students on their speech? During my research, I observed the classes of Jaffna teachers (science, math, commerce, and health science). In these classes, I never witnessed a single instance where teachers explicitly corrected students on the basis of their speech. In contrast with these subjects, the class that most explicitly targeted students' linguistic performances was Tamil. As I have discussed, the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students' Tamil teacher was Geetha, an Up-country Tamil Hindu. The Tamil subject head, Kiitani, was from Jaffna, but I did not get to observe any of her Tamil classes.

In addition to how well they produced the "literary" variety, I observed that Geetha would explicitly correct the students in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class for using "non-standard" features in their oratorical performances and everyday speech. These "non-standard" features were associated with region (Kandy vs. non-Kandy), and religion/ethnicity (Muslim vs. Tamil). As consistent with my research assistant's evaluation of their speech, the students in the class who were most targeted were Muslims from towns and villages outside of Kandy. For example, on one occasion, Geetha, in the period right before the start of Tamil class, teased a Muslim girl for using a shortened form of the verb 'to be,' "*irukkiradu*." She had asked another Muslim girl in the class, "*panadol iikidaa?*" (Do you have panadol (pain reliever)?), rather than "*panadol irukkadaa?*" or "*panadol irukka?*" After the class was finished, Geetha came and sat next

to me by my desk in the back of the classroom. She explained, in the earshot of several Muslim students that while Muslim Tamil is fine (*sari*) for home, in school, Muslim students should speak what she referred to as “*sadaraanamaaNa* (normal) Tamil” or “*pothuvaana* (usual) Tamil” (a different view than what she implied in the company of a fellow Muslim teacher in example three).<sup>78</sup> Other than the Muslim girls, Geetha would frequently target the speech of an Up-country Tamil Hindu girl in the class, who was studying in the English-medium stream. She said that because her family speaks Sinhala at home, Geetha said her Tamil pronunciation is Sinhala influenced, and thus “*sariyille* (not okay).” I think that for Geetha, this girls’ strong proficiency in Sinhala and English seemed to call into question her ability in Tamil.

But while teachers (whether Jaffna or non-Jaffna) did not expect students to produce varieties recognized as Jaffna Tamil, it was in the context of oratorical performances where students’ linguistic performances were directly mapped onto the Jaffna/ Up-country divisions. Here, being Jaffna was not associated with producing “spoken” forms recognized to be Jaffna, but with producing correct or appropriate “literary” Tamil.

Kiitana, rather than Geetha, was in charge of recruiting students for intra- and inter-school oratorical competitions. On several occasions I observed Kiitana coaching girls for the competition in the Tamil-medium staff room. I observe Kiitana commenting about how Up-country students’ pronunciation was not as good as the Jaffna students. One particular linguistic feature that she frequently targeted was the pronouncing of /zh/ as “l” or “L” in words such as “*tamizh*,” which is widely associated with Up-country

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<sup>78</sup> Other Tamil-medium teachers commented that Muslim girls in the younger Grades have particular trouble learning to write proper Tamil. One Up-country Tamil teacher told me that they would often write the way that they speak (in Muslim varieties).

Tamils. When Girls' College teachers were required to select students to compete in inter-school competitions (such as the National Tamil Day competition), they would invariably choose students recognized as "Jaffna" (here, the perception that they produce the "best" linguistic forms is ideologically intertwined with their Jaffna identities).

I observed that in Tamil class, Geetha, though she would frequently insist (to teachers, students, and me) that Jaffna Tamil is not superior to other Tamil varieties, would often select girls recognized to be "Jaffna"<sup>79</sup> for oratorical performances (to recite poetry, perform a drama, or sing). There is a possibility that this was related to the girls' formal training in oratory and singing (something more traditionally stressed in Jaffna), and not related to their Jaffna identities. In one particular instance, Geetha called on three girls to sing a Tamil folk song: two Jaffna Tamils and a Muslim. When they finished, she asked me to say who sang the best. Not well versed in Tamil folk singing, I said that I had no way to judge them. She then explained that the third girl, the Muslim girl, did not sing as clearly, or as fluently. This particular Muslim girl had been studying Karnatic singing, but not for as long as the other two girls.

The intra-school Tamil-medium drama competitions were another occasion where sociolinguistic differences between Jaffna and non-Jaffna girls were in especially sharp relief. In and around these competitions, I would frequently observe non-Jaffna teachers and students accusing Jaffna teachers of favoring Jaffna students. During one particular Tamil-medium drama competition, there were four plays performed. The first of the

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<sup>79</sup> As I discuss in chapter five, three girls in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class were recognized as Jaffna. Two of these girls were born in Kandy to Jaffna parents (one was the daughter of a teacher). The third girl's (Kavitha) mother was from Batticaloa in the East, and her father was born in Kandy to a Jaffna mother and a father of recent Indian origin. Though she had little connection to Jaffna, she was often described as a "Jaffna girl." This was partially because of the collapsing of Northern and Eastern Tamils as "Jaffna," as well as her mother's status as the Tamil director in the Kandy Zonal Ministry of Education.

plays, based on the Tamil epics, was in “literary” Tamil. The other three plays were in “spoken” Tamil: one set in Tamil Nadu using language similar to Tamil cinema; one set in the Tsunami affected area in the South using Tamil close to Up-country varieties; and one set in Jaffna town using Jaffna Tamil. In the fourth play, the students (North and East Tamils, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims) had been coached by a Jaffna Tamil lecturer from Peradeniya University, who had also written the play, on how to produce Jaffna “spoken” Tamil (something they regularly did in Tamil class when studying literature from Jaffna). This lecturer also served as the judge of the competition (an unbelievable bias). Though most of the teacher thought the play set in Tamil Nadu was the best, the judge chose his own play as the winner.

At Girls’ College, there is a disjuncture between ideologies about what constitutes the “best” linguistic forms, and how teachers actually correct students’ speech. While teachers are constantly debating whether or not Jaffna Tamil is the “best,” in most classroom practices, teachers evaluate students’ speech on the basis of its compliance with norms of “literary” Tamil (which can be conflated with Jaffna Tamil) and emergent Up-country “normative” varieties. As I have shown, it is often only in the context of explicit oratorical performance that students are expected to produce Jaffna “spoken” varieties (such as in the play mentioned above). Despite the fact that non-Jaffna teachers like Geetha are explicitly seeking to deflate the sociolinguistic hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups, for non-Jaffna and Jaffna teachers alike, producing the “best” literary Tamil forms is still ideologically tied to a Jaffna identity.

### **Disjuncture**

In this chapter, I have shown how Girls’ College Tamil-medium teachers are

contesting multiple and hierarchically ordered “legitimate” languages, and through this institutional power hierarchies. I have shown that social difference among teachers (relating to sub-ethnicity, religion, class, caste, level of education, and abilities in English) are often collapsed onto the sociolinguistic divisions between Jaffna Tamil, Up-country Tamils, and Muslims. I have demonstrated how there is a disjuncture between ideologies about what constitutes the “best” linguistic forms, and the way in which teachers are actually evaluating students’ speech in the classroom. I argue that this disjuncture, in turn, reflects a gap between widely circulating norms of “prestige” (based on the socio-cultural and institutional hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups), and demographic and institutional shifts in post-1983 period. Namely while being Jaffna is still tied to producing the “best” “literary” forms, in most classroom contexts, the basis for evaluating students’ speech is not Jaffna Tamil, but “literary” standards, and an emergent “normative” Up-country Tamil, spoken at Girls’ College and in Kandy more broadly. At Girls’ College, then, there is evidence of an ongoing shift in the indexical linkages between a sociolinguistic variety, and the linguistic forms associated with it. Namely, while Jaffna Tamil is still a highly salient sociolinguistic variety, it is no longer tied to particular aspects of Jaffna Tamil speech (such as a non-rising intonation or the non-nasalization of final nasal consonants), but simply with producing ideal “literary (ilakkiya)” Tamil. Thus, in this chapter, by attending to the disjuncture between ideologies inherent in explicit statements and practices, it has been possible to isolate shifts in language ideological processes (Meek 2010).

Building upon this chapter, in chapter five I will consider the complex processes by which Girls’ College Tamil-medium students (as opposed to teachers) are

interactionally configuring social differences. Focusing on three students (two Muslims and one Tamil) in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, I show how these students draw on widely circulating categories of difference to discursively construct themselves, in interactions with me, and with each other. I suggest that while Tamil-medium teachers emphasize the deeply entrenched categories of difference (the categories Jaffna Tamil, Batticaloa Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim), students are acting to reconfigure them in socially meaningful ways.



## **Chapter Five**

### **The Discursive Configuration of Difference among Girls' College Tamil-Medium Students**

In chapter four, I investigated how Girls' College Tamil-medium teachers are engaging with, negotiating, and contesting different models of correct or appropriate speech or "legitimate" language (Bourdieu 1991), and through this, challenging institutional power hierarchies. I suggested that the disjuncture between teachers' ideologies concerning which linguistic forms are the "best," and the way that are actually correcting or evaluating students' linguistic performances in the classroom, is indicative of a gap between widely circulating norms of "prestige" (based on the hierarchy of North and East Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups), and the demographic and institutional shifts in the post-1983 period. At Girls' College, while Jaffna Tamil still retains status as a "prestige" variety, teachers evaluate students on their ability to produce "literary" standards as well as an emergent "normative" Up-country "spoken" Tamil. In this chapter, I show how the Grade ten Tamil-medium students in their interaction with one another across school and non-school arenas are taking up these points of discontinuity or contradiction in the sociolinguistic field, and acting to reconfigure highly entrenched categories of difference.

While national and local educational policies and practice serve to reinforce ethnic and religious divisions, I found that among Girls' College Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, the categories that proved to be most contentious were related to sub-

ethnicity (whether they identified as Up-country or North and East) and regional of origin (whether they identified as Kandy or non-Kandy). In this chapter, I focus on a series of interactional events where three girls in the class—Nadira (Muslim), Faiza (Muslim), and Kavitha (Tamil)—make alignments with these categories and act to interrupt each other on these alignments (Agha 2005b, 2007). In contrast to literature that has treated identity as relatively fixed, I highlight the process by which individuals' self representations (or public identities) shift over interactional events (also see Agha 2007; Haviland 2005; Wortham 2005). I am also not simply interested in how participants make alignments with each other and objects of discourse in ongoing social interaction (which is defined as stance, see Irvine (2009)), but with uptake as well (Jaffe 2009). By focusing on processes of alignment/disalignment over chains of interactional events, I show how meaning is solidified or gelled (Silverstein 2005; Wortham 2005). Agha argues that enregisterment involves “encounters in which individuals establish forms of footing or alignment with voices indexed by speech and thus with social types of person, real or imagined, who those voices are taken to be” (2005b:38). Slightly shifting Agha's theoretic framework, in this chapter I underscore the shifts in social categories (“social types of persons, real or imagined”), rather than the shifts in register, though they are fundamentally part of the same process.

In the first three examples, I show how Nadira, Faiza, and Kavitha are drawing on sub-ethnic and regional categories to discursively construct themselves in interactions with me and with each other. In the fourth example, I show how they represent themselves with regard to these categories on a written survey. I suggest that in these examples, by opposing the category Jaffna to other social formations, the Grade 10

Tamil-medium girls are negotiating emergent hierarchies among Tamil-speaking groups (as related to the demographic and institutional shifts in the post-1983 period) that can no longer be encompassed within the Jaffna/Up-country opposition. I ultimately argue that these girls are seeking to define themselves in a way that is not restricted to ethnicity, sub-ethnicity (Up-country vs. Jaffna Tamil), or religion (Hindu vs. Muslim), but their belonging to Kandy as a multilingual and multiethnic urban center. I show how, as part of this process, these girls are imagining an emergent “normative” Tamil that is not linked to ethnicity, caste, or religion, but to educational level, and ties to Kandy as a “cosmopolitan” center.

### **The Grade 10 Tamil-Medium Class**

As I discuss in chapter three, though Girls’ College is one of a relatively small number of schools in Sri Lanka to combine students from all major ethnic and religious backgrounds (a remnant of its missionary origin), Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students were isolated from one another in most academic and extracurricular activities. Tamil-medium students were highly proficient in Tamil, Sinhala, and English, but rarely interacted with Sinhala-medium students either inside or outside of the classroom. Despite having little contact with Sinhala-medium students, Tamil-medium students often talked about them—comparing themselves to them, or situating themselves with respect to them. While this chapter focuses on the negotiation of difference among the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students, I am also interested in the way Tamil-medium students imagine themselves with respect to the Sinhalese mainstream of the school, and the nation as a whole. As an indication of their relative distance from them, I found that Tamil-medium

students would often talk about Sinhala-medium students as if they comprised an undifferentiated block (which, of course, was not the case).

Among the Tamil-medium teachers there were about equal numbers of Jaffna North and East Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim teachers. In the Tamil-medium stream, however, the overwhelming majority of students were Up-country Tamils (both Hindu and Christian) and Muslims. Some North and East students had come to Kandy after being displaced by the war or the 2004 Tsunami, but most were born in Kandy to parents from the North and East. Table 12 presents the ethnic, religious, and sub-ethnic makeup of the Grade ten Tamil-medium class.

**Table 12: Ethnic, Religious, and Sub-Ethnic Makeup of the Girls’ College Grade Ten Tamil-Medium Class**

Ethnicity

Tamil 55%	Muslim 45%
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Religion

Hindu 51%	Christian 4%	Muslim 45%
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Sub-ethnicity

Up-country 88%	North and East 12%	NA
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The Grade ten girls were admitted to Girls’ College in Grade six primarily on the basis of their performance on the Grade five scholarship exams. As a result of this admissions policy, students came from a wide variety of class (though few students are lower-class), caste (for Hindus), socioeconomic, and regional backgrounds. Students resided in Kandy town, villages and towns surrounding Kandy, as well as other areas in Sri Lanka (many of these students board with Kandy families). Table 13 shows the distribution of the Grade ten Tamil-medium class by place of origin.

**Table 13: Distribution of the Girls' College Grade 10 Tamil-Medium Class by Place of Origin**

Students from Kandy town= 36%
Students from Towns and Villages near Kandy Town= 39%
Students from other Areas= 25%

As I demonstrated in chapter four, Girls' College is a site for the contestation of multiple and hierarchically ordered "legitimate" languages. In the Tamil-medium stream, as related to the difference in the demographics of the teachers and students, there is a disjuncture between ideals of "legitimate" language—based on notions of "standard" and "prestige" (Jaffna Tamil) languages—and the shifting sociolinguistic situation. Namely, while Jaffna Tamil retains status as a "prestige" variety, it is a "prestige" that few of the students (who are mainly Tamils and Muslims from the Up-country) produce in classroom settings, except in emblematic ways. In everyday classroom interactions, teachers evaluate students on the basis of producing "literary" varieties, as well as Up-country "normative" varieties, which often overlap with "literary" varieties (see chapter four).

For the Tamil-medium teachers and students, the issue of speaking correct or appropriate Tamil is frequently mapped onto religion (Tamil vs. Muslim), sub-ethnicity (Up-country Tamil vs. North and East Tamil), and region of origin (Kandy vs. non-Kandy). As I discussed in chapter four, in the Grade 10 class students who were particularly targeted as not speaking varieties recognized to be "standard" were students from areas outside of Kandy, and Muslims, who in home and neighborhood environment speak varieties that are lexically, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically distinct (see Nuhuman 2007). By learning to speak varieties that were recognized by

teachers and fellows students as “standard,” these girls served to legitimize themselves as Girls’ College students, and, as Kandy girls.

### **Research in the Grade Ten Tamil-Medium Classroom**

As part of my research at Girls’ College, I spend three hours a day, four days a week, observing the Grade ten Tamil-medium class. The classroom was located next to the main office complex, removed from all the other classrooms. With forty-seven students in a small space, the classroom was very crowded. In the front of the classroom was a desk for the teacher and a chalk board. The students were arranged in two rows, with five students to every three desks. In order to avoid distracting the students, I saw at a desk in the very back of the classroom. In addition to observing teacher/student classroom interactions, I also observed and interacted with students in the absence of teachers before and after class and during the interval period. As Grade ten students were focused on preparing for the Ordinary-level (O-level) exam, which they would take at the end of Grade 11, they were frequently left alone to study on their own (with teachers present for only about 40% of the school day).

Most of the Grade 10 Tamil-medium girls had been studying together in the same class since Grade 6. As is common with this age group (14-16), students were highly concerned about how they represented themselves to one another—through their talk, dress, Grades, or the way in which they interacted with teachers (Eckert 2000). In contrast to characterizations of US high schools, where students who excel in their studies are considered to be “nerds” (see Bucholtz 2001), among the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students, it was the girls with the highest grades who were considered to be the most mainstream (or “popular”), and were the most revered by their fellow students. As

per the Girls' College policy, students with the best overall grade point averages were given leadership roles, such as class captain, vice captain, and heads of particular class subjects. Because girls who attended elite Kandy primary schools had an advantage over other students, academic achievement was often related to their Kandy or non-Kandy status.

At Girls' College I had a dual role as a researcher and teacher. However, because I did not teach English to the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class, they did not fully recognize my authority as a teacher, and saw me more as an older sister (*akkaa*). My rapport with the girls was highly influenced by my relationship with Kavitha, a student in the class. When I started coming to Girls' College, I had already been living with Kavitha's family for seven-months. Because of my familiarity with Kavitha, I was able to establish a friendly and easy relationship with the students in the class. Many of the girls felt that my presence in the classroom was a good opportunity for them to practice their English, as well as learn more about the US (including opportunities for higher education and employment). Though I could tell that they wanted to speak to me in English, almost all of the girls were reluctant to do so in front of their fellow classmates. Thus, they generally spoke to me in Tamil, often mixing English words and expressions (which in this context were relatively unmarked). The girls were generally concerned that if their classmates witnessed them conversing with me in English, they would think that they are "proud." It was only when I was one-on-one with the girls, outside of the classroom or on the school grounds, that they would practice their English with me.

The girls were very interested in talking with me about topics such as my schooling experiences, my goals and ambitions, and my plans for marriage. As I got to

know the girls better, I became a testing ground for their constructions of themselves, and each other. What would they tell me about themselves in the earshot of others? Would they describe themselves as being from Kandy town or Batticaloa? Would they tell me that their sister is in medical school in Russia, or that their father works in the gem trade? Seemingly innocuous questions that I would ask them, such as “*ongaDu soonda uur enna* (What is your native place?), would quickly become highly charged topics of conversation. While their self-constructions certainly had deep political relevance (particularly in the heightened period in the ongoing ethnic conflict), there were other things at stake for these students. What was of most immediate relevance for the students was the negotiation of hierarchies among one another. These negotiations, however, had resonance for how they situated themselves within Girls’ College, and the wider society charged with ethnic conflict. In the following analysis, I focus on the way in which three of the girls in the Grade ten Tamil-medium class align themselves with sub-ethnic and regional categories and act to interrupt each other on these alignments. In the first example, I analyze a series of interactions where Nadira aligns herself as a Kandy girl in a way that erases her status as a Muslim girl from a stigmatized area (Puttalam). As I show, her aligning of herself as Kandy was not something that she was only doing with me, but something she was doing more generally at the time.

### **Example One: Nadira**

Nadira had transferred to Girls’ College in Grade seven from a small Tamil-medium Muslim school in Puttalam. Puttalam is a Muslim-majority town on Sri Lanka’s Northwest coast. Its population is made up of Muslim and Tamil fisherman, agriculturalists, and traders. As I mentioned in chapter one, since 1990, Puttalam has



been home to thousands of Muslim refugees who were expelled from Jaffna by the LTTE. Many of these refugees are still living in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps with only basic amenities and minimal access to education (Nadira's family is not part of this population). Because of the socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged status of the Puttalam's population, Puttalam, and the varieties of Tamil associated with it, has a stigmatized status.

Nadira's father regularly commuted back and forth from Puttalam, where he has a business. He attended an English-medium international school in Kandy, and is highly proficient in Tamil, Sinhala, and English. Nadira's mother is from Puttalam. With limited education, she speaks a variety of Tamil that is recognized as "non-standard."<sup>80</sup> About two months into my research at Girls' College, Nadira shyly approached me in the hallway outside of the Grade ten Tamil-medium classroom and asked me if I would be willing to tutor her in English after school. I agreed, but only after being very clear with both Nadira and her father that these classes would serve a dual purpose. In addition to helping Nadira improve her English, they would also help me with my research among the Grade ten girls.

Nadira mentioned to me on many occasions that the transition to Girls' College from her school in Puttalam had been very difficult for her. However, some of her teachers had commented to me that while Nadira had come to Girls' College knowing very little, she had caught up quickly. Owning an ancestral home in Puttalam, Nadira's family rented an apartment in an ethnically mixed neighborhood less than a half mile from Girls' College. The main room of the apartment was entirely dedicated to being a

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<sup>80</sup> As is typical in some varieties of Muslim Tamil, Nadira's mother drops finite verb endings. For example, instead of asking "*eppaDi irukkiringa* (how are you)?" she drops the finite verb ending on the verb "to be," "*irukkiringa*," and asks "*eppaDi ikki?*"

study space for Nadira. During our lessons, Nadira and I would sit at the long table near the entranceway, while her mother worked in the kitchen, preparing us sweet milk tea, cake, and savory pastries. In the first part of the lessons we would review grammar, and at the end of each lesson, we would have some free conversation. It was during these times that we would often end up chatting—or rather “gossiping”—about her Girls’ College teachers and classmates.

Below, I focus on a series of four interactional events in my conversations with Nadira. The first three events occurred during our lessons, and the final event occurred at a Muslim wedding. I decided not to try and record these conversations, but I took extensive notes on them immediately after the lessons were finished. Below, I present excerpts from our lessons that pertain to Nadira’s positioning of herself with respect to her Grade 10 Tamil-medium classmates. I have provided the necessary contextual information in italics.

### **Lesson #1: 3/10/2008**

Nadira knew that I had lived with her classmate Kavitha’s family for nine months. So, at the end of our first lesson, she brought up Kavitha, fishing around to see if I would say anything about Kavitha’s English in relation to her own. I told her that they were both good. She said six months ago they were good friends, but that Kavitha won’t talk to her anymore.

### **Lesson# 2: 4/28//2008**

During my second visit to Nadira’s house, Nadira started talking about what she referred to as the “Jaffna/Up-country problems” among the Grade ten students. She said that the Jaffna girls always say that Up-country Tamil isn’t good. Not knowing what she meant by “Jaffna girls,” I asked, “who are the Jaffna girls?” She named three girls: Kavitha, Ananthi, and Jothika.

*Ananthi (the daughter of a Tamil-medium teacher) and Jothika were both born in Kandy to Jaffna parents. I was initially surprised that Nadira mentioned Kavitha as one of the Jaffna girls, as I knew that Kavitha’s mother was from Batticalao, in the East, and that her father was from Kandy.*

Nadira said that Ananthi is always making comments that Jaffna Tamil is better than Indian Tamil (*Indian and Up-country Tamil are used interchangeably here*). She said that Ananthi made a comment to another girl in the class that she wants to stay in the number one rank (*the students are ranked after every quarter*), just so an Indian Tamil isn't ranked first. *The girl to get the number one ranking that year was not a Tamil student at all, but a Muslim.*

*As I was interested in how Nadira, as a Muslim girl, saw her own speech as fitting into the Jaffna/Indian categories, I asked Nadira what kind of Tamil she speaks. She said, "I speak Sri Lankan Tamil..." Then she smiled, thought for a minute, and said, "No, I mean Indian or Up-country Tamil." She said that a lot of girl in the class speak Muslim Tamil, but that she doesn't. She said that when she first came to Girls' College some girls made comments that she talked like she was from Puttalam (there are significant populations of Tamil and Muslims in Puttalam, but here Nadira is referring to Puttalam Muslim varieties). Because of this, she quickly changed her speech. Nadira smiled as she started to tell me about how she even goes to Hindu temples sometimes, and that she had been to the Kandy Pillayar Kovil (Ganesh temple) to perform in a Karnatic music concert (Karnatic music is a Hindu tradition that in a Sri Lankan context is associated with Jaffna). That day in school, Jothika and another girl were asked to perform a Tamil folk song. Referring to this, Nadira mentioned that in addition to Jothika, Kavitha is also a very good Karnatic singer, but that her singing is sometimes overly Karnatic. She said that Kavitha sometimes tries to speak like she is from Jaffna.*

### **Lesson #3: 5/13/2008**

Nadira brought up the "Jaffna girls" again. This time, she added that only Jothika and Ananthi are the "real Jaffna girls." I asked her what she meant by this. She said that their parents were actually from Jaffna. I asked her if either Jothika or Ananthi speak Jaffna Tamil. She said that they don't speak Jaffna Tamil but Up-country Tamil, as they both grew up in Kandy.

### **Lesson #4: 6/03/2008**

Nadira commented that the Jaffna teachers always favor the Jaffna students. She said that the girls from Grade ten chosen to sing in the A-level drama competition were Kavitha and Jothika.

### **Wedding: 7/12/2008**

Two months after this last lesson, I met Nadira at a Muslim wedding in a large hotel in the center of Kandy. The wedding was attended by nearly a thousand guests—almost entirely Muslim—from all over Sri Lanka. When I walked into the banquet hall, the bride was sitting on a large throne in the back of the room, greeting guests. She was

wearing a white, western style wedding dress with a veil. Behind her was a green backdrop decorated with white lattice-work, intertwined with red roses. Most of the women at the wedding were wearing black *abayas*, with their small daughters decked out in elaborate lace and embroidered frocks. The tables were covered in white tablecloths; and at each table setting there was a plate of sweets and a small bottle of orange soda with a straw.

I sat down at a table next to the Girls' College English teacher, Mrs. Dawood, and her family. Though Mrs. Dawood could speak both Sinhala and Tamil, she has a strict policy of only speaking English with her Girls' College students. When Nadira and her mother arrived, they came and greeted Mrs. Dawood and me. Nadira was wearing a fancy yellow and orange *Shalwar Kameez* with long earrings; and her mother wore an Indian sari in peacock blue with red trim, with the end piece covering her head (Nadira and her mother do not wear hijabs like most Kandy Muslim women). Nadira's mother grabbed Mrs. Dawood's hand and said, "*asalam alaikkum.*" Nadira nervously greeted her teacher, saying, "good evening Madam." Mrs. Dawood acknowledged Nadira with a brief nod. I told Nadira (in English) that her *Shalwar* was nice.

After dinner, I made my way over to talk to Nadira and her parents. I stood with Nadira as her mother and father greeted friends and relatives. Feeling tired, Nadira suggested that we sit down at one of the tables. We started to chat, in Tamil, over the roar of the crowd around us. Though some people were speaking Sinhala and English, most people were conversing in different varieties of Tamil, some more marked as Muslim than others. Nadira asked me, "*indu wedding nallamaa inda wedding nallamaa* (Are Hindu weddings good, or are Muslim weddings good)? I told her that I had actually

never been to a Hindu wedding. She said that she had not either, but that she had recently gone to a Hindu death anniversary with her best friend at school, a Grade ten Up-country Tamil Hindu girl. There was a group of little boys running around in front of us. One boy shouted to the other, “*sellu* (tell [me])!” As is common in varieties of Muslim Tamil, /o/ in “*sollu*” is realized as an [e]. Nadira then asked me, in a soft voice:

(1) <b>Nadira:</b> naa kathaikkiradu muslim maadiriya, hindus maadiriya?	(1) <b>Nadira:</b> Do I speak like a Muslim or like a Hindu?
(2) <b>Christie:</b> muslim maadiri ille, anaa enakku sariyaa teriyella.	(2) <b>Christie:</b> Not like a Muslim, but I don't really know.

Nadira gave a knowing smile. Our conversation then shifted to another topic (the appropriate age for marriage in different cultures).

In these four interactional events, we can see how Nadira, partially prompted by the questions that I was asking her, discursively constructs a role that she wants to inhabit. In the first three lessons, we see how Nadira maps the Jaffna/Up-country distinction onto the Grade ten girls. While at first Nadira is certain that the Jaffna girls are Kavitha, Ananthi, and Jothika, in the third lesson, partially in response to the questions I asked her, she calls this classification into question. She progresses from describing Kavitha as a Jaffna girl to a fake Jaffna girl, who intentionally tries to speak like she is from Jaffna.

When Nadira first speaks of the Jaffna vs. the Up-country girls, it was not clear whether she is including herself in the Up-country category. But I think that this was exactly the point. By imposing the Jaffna/Up-country distinction onto the Grade ten girls, Nadira erases other, perhaps more immediate distinctions between Tamils and Muslims, and between Kandy and non-Kandy girls. Thus, by opposing Jaffna to Up-country, she includes herself within Up-country, and thus erases her own difference as a

Muslim girl from Puttalam. It is also apparent that Nadira is not just seeking to construct herself as Up-country (as a linguistic or regional category), but to associate herself with Hindus, which represent the majority of the Up-country Tamil population. But while she only hints at this here, she is more explicit about it at the wedding, when she asks me if she speaks like a Hindu or a Muslim.

This series of events, rather than being thought of as a “self-discovery,” can be considered to be more of a self-disclosure, unfolding over time. Nadira’s discursive construction of herself can be seen as part of a project of trying to fit in as a Kandy girl, which, for Nadira, involved erasing her religious and regional identity. Nadira’s positioning of herself as Kandy was not just something that she was doing with me, but, as I observed, something she was doing more generally at the time. As evidence of this, on several occasions some of her classmates (including Faiza, see below) had said that Nadira always describes herself as being from Kandy, when she is really from Puttalam.

In the next example, I look at an interaction between Nadira and her classmate Faiza that occurred in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium classroom about a week after my last lesson with Nadira (but before the Muslim wedding). In this interaction, Faiza, interpreting a comment that Nadira makes to presuppose that she is from Kandy, argues against her claim. This event is linked to the events in example one, as it not only shows Nadira’s attempt to align herself as Kandy in interactions with her classmates, but it also shows how Faiza is acting to interrupt this alignment.

### **Example Two: Faiza and Nadira**

Faiza entered Girls’ College in Grade six from Viharamahadevi, a prestigious bi-media (Sinhala and Tamil) Buddhist national school, located next to Girls’ College.

Faiza's family owns a home in an ethnically mixed residential neighborhood, not far from Nadira's apartment. Her mother, originally from Batticaloa, is a home science teacher in a Muslim school in Akurana, a Muslim majority town just outside of Kandy. Her father is a retired computer engineer from Kandy, who studied in the Sinhala-medium. Her older sister, who recently completed A-Levels in Tamil-medium science at Girls' College, is now attending medical school in Russia.

Faiza's home environment is highly multilingual. Faiza's family speaks Tamil with one another, and Tamil or Sinhala with others. While Faiza's mother's Tamil was recognizably Batticaloa, her father spoke a Tamil that was typical of Kandy Muslims (dropping finite verb endings, etc.). During visits to Faiza's house, I noticed that her father watched Sinhala-medium television (which is not surprising considering he studied in the Sinhala-medium). Also living in Faiza's house were two Jaffna Tamil students at Peradeniya University. They also rented out the ground floor of the house to an Up-country Tamil Hindu woman and her son and daughter-in-law. With her sister away, Faiza entertained herself around the house by talking to the borders, the downstairs tenants, and her Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim neighbors. In contrast to most of the other Girls' College students (such as Nadira), Faiza's parents allowed her to move relatively freely around her neighborhood and nearby commercial areas. Faiza's family expected her to wear a head scarf around head when in public. However, I noticed that she usually took it off when she went into town on her own, as I think it interfered with her cosmopolitan image.

Faiza was one of the most outgoing and talkative girls in the Grade ten Tamil-medium class. I would often hear the class captain yelling "*vaay muDinga Faiza* (shut

your mouth, Faiza). With an ambition to be a lawyer, Faiza would describe herself as being a “good” student. Some of her classmates and teachers, however, told me that though she showed promise in class, she always managed to do badly on her exams.

### **“The Fight”-6/10/2008**

In Sri Lanka, all students are required to take religion as a mandatory subject. As their Islam teacher was on maternity leave, during the bi-weekly religion period, while the Hindu and Christian girls left for class, the Muslim girls would remain in the classroom. They would use this free period to study (alone, or in pairs or groups), eat, or chat. Rather than going to the other religion classes, I would often choose to remain behind in the classroom, as it would give me an opportunity to talk to the girls.

One day during the religion period, Faiza and Nadira sat down in front of me in the back left of the classroom. Faiza and I started to talk in Tamil about my recent visit to her home. Nadira listened to us, but didn’t say anything.<sup>81</sup> During my visit, the downstairs tenant had told us a ghost story taking place at an island temple in the Jaffna Peninsula. As I didn’t fully understand the story, I asked Faiza to clarify it for me. She told me that she could not explain it, as the story didn’t make sense, as her tenant had had a very difficult life and was “*konjam paitiyum* (a little crazy).” We joked about referring to her as “*peey* (ghost/devil) auntie.” Soon, Nadira and Faiza turned away from me, and started talking to one another (aware that their conversation was being recorded).

This was the first time that I had seen Nadira and Faiza interacting with one another. It seemed that they had been good friends until a recent SMS (texting) incident.

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<sup>81</sup> Nadira had instructed me not to tell any of the other girls in the class that I was teaching her English after school. She said that if they found out, they would think that she is trying to get an unfair advantage. Because I didn’t want to reveal that I had a relationship with Nadira outside of school, I did not talk to her much in front of her classmates.



According to Faiza, Nadira had borrowed her father’s mobile phone and sent a series of anonymous messages to Faiza, making it seem like they were from a boy. Faiza’s elder cousin brother, seeing the messages, had gotten angry. After conducting an extensive “investigation” to find out who they were from, Faiza discovered they were from Nadira. Suddenly, Faiza started declaring loudly to Nadira, in earshot of me, and the other Muslim girls in the class, that if there was a bomb blast in Kandy, their upcoming exams would be cancelled. This comment was made in the contexts of a recent string of bus and roadside bombings throughout the Sinhalese-majority South (one in proximity to Kandy town). Nadira was trying to participate in the joke, but Faiza wasn’t letting her get a word in. In an attempt to attract Faiza’s attention, Nadira declares.<sup>82</sup>

(English is in italics. The Muslim Tamil features are underlined. I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.)).

<p>(1) <b>Nadira:</b> enakku kaNDi ile baamb vekkoonu. enakku kaNDi ile baamb vekkoonu. [anaa...]</p> <p>(2) <b>Faiza:</b> [kaNDi engada naaDu.] niinga puttalam. kaNDi engada naaDu.</p> <p>(3) <b>Nadira:</b> hello, hello. naanu(m) porandadu skaNDi, <i>birth place</i> skaNDi.</p> <p>(4) <b>Faiza:</b> <i>birth place</i> kaNDi endadukku niinga puttalattula poranDiinga.</p> <p>(5) <b>Nadira:</b> puttalattula porakkala <i>birth place</i> kaNDi. enakku skaNDikku urima irukku. DaaDaa kaNDi, mama daa(n) puttalam. naa(n) ippa kaNDi illadaa(n) <u>iikkireen</u>. <u>naa(n) skaNDikkudaa(n) viruppam</u>. ungalukku appaDi sol.... appaDinda niinga batticola.</p> <p>(6) <b>Faiza:</b> baTTikola vaa irundattukku naa(n) porandadu ingee daa(n).</p> <p>(7) <b>Nadira:</b> naanu(m) porandadu inga valandu <i>two, three years</i> inge daan irundeen. <i>Fourth</i>kku daa(n) ange pooneen.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Nadira:</b> I want to keep a bomb in Kandy. I want to keep a bomb in Kandy, [but... ]</p> <p>(2) <b>Faiza:</b> [Kandy is our (excl.) place.] You are Puttalam. Kandy is our (excl.) place.</p> <p>(3) <b>Nadira:</b> Hello, hello. The place where I was born is Kandy, [my] <i>birth place</i> is Kandy.</p> <p>(4) <b>Faiza:</b> You say your birth place is Kandy but you were born in Puttalam.</p> <p>(5) <b>Nadira:</b> Puttalam is the place where I went. Kandy is [my] <i>birth place</i>. I have rights to Kandy. DaaDaa is Kandy, maamaa (emph.) is Puttalam. I am now in Kandy (emph.). It’s Kandy (emph.) I like. You can’t say it like that. If it is like that, then you are from Batticaloa.</p> <p>(6) <b>Faiza:</b> For being in Batticaloa, I was born here (emph.).</p> <p>(7) <b>Nadira:</b> I was also born here and I grew up here (emph.) for <i>two, three, four years</i>. On the fourth year, I went there.</p>
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<sup>82</sup> I also discuss this particular interaction in chapter one.

<p>(8) <b>Faiza:</b> sari. <i>two, three years</i> daanee. naa(n) irukkavee illa baTTikola vila</p> <p>(9) <b>Nadira:</b> ippa <i>five years</i> aa irukkuree(n)</p> <p>(10) <b>Faiza:</b> naa baTTikola vile irukkavee ille, kaNDi engada kaNDikku mattu(m) edaavadu nadanduccendaa nadira va daa(n) kolluvee(n).</p> <p>(11) <b>Nadira:</b> appaDi solla eellaa faiza. engaDa DaaDaa Da <i>place</i> ingadaa(n) adanaal enakku inga...</p> <p>(12) <b>Faiza:</b> DaaDaa place ingeyaa irundadukku niinga ingeyille.</p> <p>(13) <b>Nadira:</b> appaDindaa ungada maamaaDa place inga. illaye ungaDa DaaDaa vu, maamaa vu inga illayee. niinga porandadu ingayee.</p> <p>(14) <b>Faiza:</b> yaaru sonnadu maamaa inga, DaaDaa ange</p> <p>(15) <b>Nadira:</b> adee maadiri daa(n) engaDa maamaa ange, DaaDaa inge. <i>Same equal</i> aahudille.</p> <p>(16) <b>Faiza:</b> <i>equal</i> aahaadu. naa(n) ingeyee porandu, ingeeyee valandadu</p> <p>(17) <b>Nadira:</b> naa(n) inga porandu valandee(n) <i>two years</i></p> <p>(18) <b>Faiza:</b> naa enDa baTTikola enDu vaay torandu sollavee maattee(n)</p> <p>(19) <b>Nadira:</b> naanu(m) vaay torandu solla ille. <i>class</i> illa puttlam girl yaaraaccu irukkura enDaa oo nadira nDa. Naa enDaa puttlam enDu iduvarakku yaaru kittayu(m) sollavee illa. <i>only</i> kaNDi daa(n) solra(n) puttlam <i>i hate</i>.</p> <p>(20) <b>Faiza:</b> aanaalu baTTikola aakkal muula kuuda.</p> <p>(21) <b>Nadira:</b> adu ungada ishDam. anda niinga sonniinga appaDiyu niinga baTTikola endiinga</p> <p>(22) <b>Faiza:</b> baTTikola muula irukku enakku</p>	<p>(8) <b>Faiza:</b> Okay. Two, three years (emph.). I (emph.) have never lived in Batticaloa.</p> <p>(9) <b>Nadira:</b> I've been in Kandy for five years.</p> <p>(10) <b>Faiza:</b> I have never been in Batticaloa. Kandy, in our (exclusive) Kandy only if something happened, I will kill Nadira (emph.).</p> <p>(11) <b>Nadira:</b> You can't say it like that Faiza. Our DaaDaa's place is here (emph.). Therefore, here...</p> <p>(12) <b>Faiza:</b> even though DaaDaa is here, you are not here.</p> <p>(13) <b>Nadira:</b> If it is like that, your maamaa's place is here. If not, your DaaDaa and maamaa aren't here. You were born here (emph.).</p> <p>(14) <b>Faiza:</b> If somebody says maamaa is here, DaaDaa is there.</p> <p>(15) <b>Nadira:</b> The same way (emph.), maamaa is there, DaaDaa is here. But not the <i>same, equal</i>.</p> <p>(16) <b>Faiza:</b> It's not <i>equal</i>. I was born and raised here.</p> <p>(17) <b>Nadira:</b> I was born here and raised here for <i>two years</i>.</p> <p>(18) <b>Faiza:</b> I won't even open my mouth and say I'm from Batticaloa</p> <p>(19) <b>Nadira:</b> I also didn't my mouth and say it. In class if someone asks if there is a Puttalam girl, they say, "Yes, it's Nadira." Up to now, I have never said that to anybody! I will only say Kandy (emph.)! Puttalam, <i>I hate</i>.</p> <p>(20) <b>Faiza:</b> Even though Batticaloa people are smart...</p> <p>(21) <b>Nadira:</b> That is your wish to say you are from Batticaloa like that.</p> <p>(22) <b>Faiza:</b> A Batticaloa brain, I have.</p>
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In line 1, Nadira takes Faiza's comment a step further by declaring, "I want to keep a bomb in Kandy. I want to keep a bomb in Kandy, but..." Faiza, taking Nadira's statement to presuppose that she is a Kandy girl, responds to Nadira in line 2 by saying

that she does not have the right to claim Kandy as her “*naaDu* (place)” as she is from Puttalam.

Prior to this interaction, Faiza had pointed out Nadira’s Puttalam status to me on several other occasions. One time I had asked Faiza what she considered to be the “best” Tamil. She said that the North and East Tamil is the “best,” and that some girls in the class who are from outside of Kandy speak badly. She then pointed over the Nadira and said, “*adu daan puttlam girl* (That (emph.) is the Puttalam girl).” As evident in the interaction, for Faiza and Nadira, the basis for belonging to Kandy seems to be their parent’s origin, their birth place, and the amount of time they spent in Kandy. In line 15, Nadira tries to argue that because they both have one parent from Kandy, and one from elsewhere, they are the same. Faiza, in line 16, argues that they are not the same (probably because Faiza thinks she has more rights to Kandy than Nadira).

In arguing their respective cases, Faiza and Nadira refer to the way that they represent themselves to their classmates. In line 19, Nadira says that though she never says to anyone that she is from Puttalam, students always point to her and say, “Nadira is the Puttalam girl.” Faiza, in line 18, says “I won’t ever open my mouth and say I’m from Batticloa.” But while Faiza argues for her own rights to Kandy, she also mentions that she is intelligent because of Batticaloa origin. Because Batticaloa is associated with educational prestige, for Faiza, having links to Batticaloa (in contrast to Puttalam) does not seem to interfere with her construction of herself as a Kandy girl.

Though Nadira and Faiza are overtly arguing about their rights to claim Kandy status, there are other social differences indexed in their interaction. Most of the Muslim girls in the Grade ten class (both in school and elsewhere) commonly switched back and

forth between Muslim Tamil varieties<sup>83</sup> and a more “normalized” Up-country Tamil. In classroom interactions, I noticed that Muslim girls tended to use more Muslim features when talking to other Muslim girls, as opposed to Tamil girls. Both Muslim and Tamil students also tend to use different amounts of English words mixed with their Tamil, depending on the situation, and the participants involved. During their argument, Nadira and Faiza both speak a “normalized” Up-country Tamil mixed with a large number of English words and syntax (partly because I was observing their interaction). In contrast to some of their other interactions I observed, they almost entirely avoid Muslim features. Nadira, however, inadvertently uses a few. In line ten, for example, she shortens the verb “to be” “*irukku*” to “*iikki*.” Also, in line ten, she uses the nominal vs. the dative case with the verb “*viruppam*,” a grammatical pattern common among Muslims in the Sinhalese-majority South. She says, “*naa(n) skaNDikkudaa(n) viruppam* (it is Kandy that I like)” rather than “*enakku kaNDikkudaa(n) viruppam* (it is Kandy that I like)” In referring to their parents they both use the English derived words, “maamaa” and “Daadaa,” which are commonly used among Muslims. By using these terms, however, they avoid choosing between the Tamil kinship terms, “*appaa*” and “*ammaa*,” and the Muslim kinship terms, “*vappaa*” and “*ummaa*.” Thus, in addition to the explicit claims that they are making, their use of “normalized” Tamil mixed with English words indexes their high educational status, the through this, their status as Girls’ College students, and as Kandy girls.

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<sup>83</sup> While there is tremendous variation in different Muslim Tamil varieties (especially between Kandy and Puttalam, for example), among the Girls’ College Muslim students there can be thought to be emergent Muslim “normalized” varieties. I talked to some Muslim students from the East who said their speech is similar to Batticaloa Hindus, after coming to Girls’ College they started speaking “Girls’ College Tamil,” which they say has a lot of “non-standard” features such as the shortening of the verb “to be”, “*irukku*” (“to be”) to “*iikki*.”

The next day, Faiza, referring to the incident, asked me, “*sandaiya naan win paNNiTTe, illaya?* (I won the fight, didn’t I?).” In addition to being slightly more verbally persuasive, Faiza has an edge over Nadira in the argument because of her stronger connection to Kandy (her family owns land in Kandy). In addition, while Puttalam (where Nadira’s mother is from) has stigmatized associations, Batticaloa (where Faiza’s mother is from) is linked with educational prestige and speaking “good” Tamil.

In this interaction, both Nadira and Faiza contrast Kandy to other regional identities. But while Nadira’s Puttalam origin interferes with her Kandy identity, for Faiza, her Batticaloa origin and her Kandy status do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Thus, Faiza can claim Kandy status while at the same time attributing her intelligence to her mom’s Batticaloa origin. But what is the relationship between the North and East /Up-country opposition and the way that the girls are discursively configuring Kandy?

In the third example, I show that while the issue of who can claim Kandy status is up for debate, so too is the issue of who can claim North and East status. In the first example, when I asked Nadira, “Who are the Jaffna Girls?” she had initially named three girls: Ananthi, Jothika, and Kavitha. However, in my lessons with Nadira, she progressed from describing Kavitha as a Jaffna girl to a fake Jaffna girl, who intentionally tries to speak like she is from Jaffna (and even sings in an overly Karnatic way). In the next example, I look at an interaction where Kavitha, who had previously represented herself as Up-country, aligns herself as Jaffna in an interaction with me. This example indicates that the trajectory in the way that Nadira describes Faiza in example one was likely related to a trajectory in Kavitha’s own self-positioning. This event is thus

linked to the events in example one, as it shows the relationship between the way Nadira is positioning Kavitha, and the way Kavitha is positioning herself.

### **Example Three: Kavitha**

For nine-months before I started my research at Girls' College I lived in a small annex on the roof of Kavitha's family's home. As is not uncommon among Kandy Tamils, Kavitha's regional and sub-ethnic origins are very complex. Her father is a retired Major in the Sri Lankan army,<sup>84</sup> who had fought twenty-five years of what he described as "face-to-face" combat in the northern Vanni region. He studied in the Sinhala-medium (he cannot read or write Tamil) at Girls' College's "brother" school, Kingswood College. His mother was from Jaffna (though I'm not sure Girls' College teachers and students knew this), and his father, who also served in the army, was of more recent Indian origin.<sup>85</sup> Kavitha's mother, who got a BA in Tamil at Peradeniya University, is the Tamil subject director for the Zonal Ministry of Education. She is responsible for overseeing the teaching of the Tamil subject in all government schools in the Kandy zone, including Girls' College. She is originally from Batticaloa, but moved to Kandy as a child.

Kavitha's family lives in a spacious house in Dangolla, a neighborhood nestled in the hillside, about two kilometers from Girls' College. The neighborhood has a stigmatized status because of the particularly severe riots that took place there during the 1987 JVP insurgency, and because of the slum settlement that was relocated there from the center of Kandy town ten years before. The neighborhood used to have a large Tamil

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<sup>84</sup> Before 1983 (when Kavitha's father joined), there were a lot of Tamils in the army. In the last few decades, however, the army has stopped taking Tamils.

<sup>85</sup> Kavitha's father said that he joined the army because he had been inspired by participating in the cadet core at Kingswood College. But it seems that it must have been related to his father's service in the army. His brother is a police officer.

population, but over the last few decades, because of the rising cost of land and security issues, almost all Tamils have moved further up the hillside, making the neighborhood almost entirely Sinhalese and Muslim. Like Faiza, Kavitha's home environment is highly multilingual. The household consists of Kavitha, her mother, father, younger sister (who also attends Girls' College), and a Sinhalese border who is doing her A-levels at an elite Kandy private school. While the immediate family mainly speak to each other in Tamil, they frequently switch into Sinhala to accommodate others (including the Sinhalese border, and the father's relatives who prefer to converse in Sinhala). They almost exclusively watch Tamil and English television. Kavitha's mother and father were not proficient enough to manage a full switch into English, but would frequently mix a large number of English words and expressions in their Tamil. This would be particularly pronounced in interactions with me pertaining to their daughters' educations.

Kavitha's father was very involved in the happenings of the neighborhood—occasionally being called in to mediate fights and disputes among neighbors. By contrast, the rest of the family was very insular. Visitors to the house were generally restricted to family members. In contrast with Faiza, Kavitha was not allowed to leave the house on any occasion without the accompaniment of a family member. Her daily routine consisted of coming and going from school (in her uncle's van), tuition classes, and extracurricular activities (such as *Bharata Natyam*, a traditional Hindu Dance). Though they used to visit Kavitha's mother's relatives in Batticaloa, they had stopped recently due to security reasons.

Kavitha and her parents would frequently talk about Kavitha's ambition to go to medical school. Because admission to Sri Lankan medical schools is so competitive,

they said that her best chance was to go to a university in India. But at the same time that her parents had ambitions for her to go abroad, they still assumed that she would return and live her life in Sri Lanka. Her father proudly mentioned that he had built an annex above their home so his daughters could live there with their husbands after marriage (and would be part of the dowry). Toward the end of my fieldwork, however, Kavitha mentioned to me that she no longer wanted to be a doctor, but a journalist instead.

Kavitha, like Faiza, came to Girls' College in Grade six from Viharamahadevi. Because of her mother's prominent position in the Ministry of Education, Kavitha had to be particularly careful in the way she positioned herself with respect to her classmates. She mentioned to me that many girls were jealous of her, thinking that her high marks were the result of her mother's help (she was ranked around 7<sup>th</sup> in the class). Kavitha had a reputation with teachers for being a highly competent and reliable student, who they described as having particularly good "character." As I observed, Kavitha did a very good job of balancing her role as a dutiful student by acting mischievously with her fellow classmates. On one occasion, commanding a very strong voice (much like her father's), she stood up and joined the class captain in trying to get the girls in the classroom to stop shouting. But, moments later, she screamed herself, coyly putting her hand over her mouth.

In my early interactions with Kavitha, she positioned herself as Up-country as opposed to North and East. For example, on my first day in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium classroom, she introduced her three best friends, who she stated were all Up-country like herself. In addition, Kavitha's mother would frequently emphasize her own North and East origin, often attributing it to her correct Tamil pronunciation. When I first moved in



with the family, my research assistant, Kumudhini, asked me to pay particular attention to Kavitha's mother's speech. When I asked her why, Kumudhini said she had a suspicion that Kavitha's mother's North and East accent was "put on," and that if I paid attention to her natural speech around the house, I would discover that it was Up-country Tamil. In contrast to her mother, when I asked Kavitha was kind of Tamil she spoke, she would say that she speaks "normal Up-country Tamil." One day her mother, in earshot of Kavitha, was talking about what constitutes the "best" Tamil speech. She said that Up-country Tamils, as opposed to Tamils from the North and East, do not pronounce "*tamizh*" correctly. She said they say "*tamil*" instead of "*tamizh*." I turned to Kavitha and asked how she says this word, and she said that she says "*tamil*" because she hates saying "*tamizh*." She then stuck her tongue out and pretended to gag. I then asked her what kind of Tamil she speaks, and she said that she speaks "normal Up-country Tamil like the people from here." In the following conversation, which occurred at the end of my research period, Kavitha shifts from previous conversations by aligning herself, and her family, as speaking Jaffna as opposed to Up-country Tamil.

### **Kavitha and the Girls' College Teachers-7/17**

One day, I sat down and had a long conversation with Kavitha in English about the teachers and students at Girls' College. Her mother and father were both around the house, but were trying to give us some privacy. I think that they were pleased to see their daughter conversing so freely with me in English. I present this interaction below, with the relevant background information in italics:

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| <p>(1) <b>Christie:</b> The staff room is very interesting.<br/>(2) <b>Kavitha:</b> Why?<br/>(3) <b>Christie:</b> Because there are Jaffna teachers, Up-country teachers, and Muslim teachers all talking.</p> |
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(4) **Kavitha:** They are fighting sometimes.

We discuss the recent fight between the Muslim geography teacher, Nabiha, and a science teacher from Jaffna, Mani.

(10) **Christie:** Mani Sir doesn't talk much with the other teachers.

(11) **Kavitha:** He is good, actually, but teachers don't like him. Because he is going on the correct path. His teaching is very good. We can understand. But he had told the children, you have to go in the correct path, you must know what you are doing, and you must know where you are going. Nabiha..., they don't care about children.

(12) **Christie:** The teachers feel uncomfortable because he doesn't talk to them.

(13) **Kavitha:** He is very good. He is correct.

(14) **Christie:** And his language, you have no problem understanding him?

(ten) **Kavitha:** I can understand his Tamil language, but some children cannot.

(15) **Christie:** Nabiha's sister's children also say they can't understand him...

(16) **Kavitha:** Muslim students can't. It's very different.

(17) **Christie:** It's very different, Jaffna Tamil.

(18) **Kavitha:** Ammaa's ("mother's") language is very different. Our language and the people's in this area is very different.

(19) **Christie:** Your family's language?

(20) **Kavitha:** Yes. With Jaffna Tamil language, you can manage in this society.

(21) **Christie:** Why?

(22) **Kavitha:** It is nice to talk. Sometimes in Kandy and Nureliya (another Up-country town), Tamil is very untidy. That kind of language is not nice in society. See, Geetha MaDam's (*the Up-country Tamil and history teacher*) language is sometimes a little rough.

(23) **Christie:** Rough?

(24) **Kavitha:** Rough. Sinhala teachers never respect her. Shouting.

(25) **Christie:** Really? The Sinhala teachers can tell the difference?

(*Kavitha didn't catch my question*)

(26) **Kavitha:** Vanisri MaDam's (*the health science teacher from jaffna*) language is good. She is calm and nice. That's nice. Geetha maDam...

(27) **Christie:** Because Sinhala people speak very softly. Sometimes you cannot hear them they are so soft.

(28) **Kavitha:** Like that language. So many of the Sinhala-medium teachers, they don't talk with Geetha maDam. In the society. Because she shouts. She don't talk in the society. That Tamil is not good. She talks like this: "*e: appadi pooringa* (why are you going there like that?)."

In line 1, I comment to Kavitha about how interesting it is to observe the teachers in the Tamil-medium staff room. In line 4, Kavitha mentions how the Tamil-medium teachers are sometimes fighting. She then discusses a recent fight between the Muslim

geography teacher, Nabiha, and the science teacher who had recently come from Jaffna, Mani. One day, because one of their teachers didn't show up, the girls had a free period. Early that morning, Nabiha, the geography teacher, had told her students to come to the staff room for class during the free period. However, at the start of the free period, without consulting the other teachers, Mani arrived at the Grade ten Tamil-medium classroom and said that he would give an extra science class. When Nabiha's students didn't show up as expected, she found out what had happened, and got very angry with Mani (many of the other Tamil-medium teachers sympathized with her). When I suggest in line 10 that the other teachers don't like Mani because he doesn't talk to them much, Kavitha defends his teaching style, saying that while the other teachers don't like him, "he is going on the correct path." She contrasts him with Nabiha, saying that she doesn't care about the students.

Several of the Tamil-medium students had told me that they had trouble understanding Mani's Jaffna Tamil. Mani differed from the other teachers from Jaffna as he made little attempt to "normalize" his speech, or to slow it down for comprehension. In line 14, I ask Kavitha if she has any problems understanding Mani's speech. Kavitha, responds by say that while she understands his language, some other children have difficulty with it. In line 18 she explains that Muslim students can't understand his speech, as it is very different. After I confirm this, in line 19, she says "mother's language is very different. Our language and the people in this area is very different." When I ask, in line 20, "Your family's language?" she responds by saying, "Yes. With Jaffna language, you can manage in society." Thus, through a discursive move, Kavitha

aligns her family's language with Jaffna Tamil (though she doesn't explicitly refer to her family's language as Jaffna Tamil).

In line 20 when I ask Kavitha to explain what she means by her previous statement, she contrasts Jaffna Tamil to Up-country Tamil, saying that while Jaffna Tamil is "nice in society," Kandy and Nuwara Tamil is "untidy." She imposes this distinction onto the Tamil-medium teachers themselves, explaining that the Up-country Tamil and history teacher Geetha's language is "rough," and because of this, the Sinhala teachers don't respect her. She then contrasts Geetha to Vanisri, the health science teacher from Jaffna, saying: "her language is good," and that "she is calm and nice." In line 29, she says that Sinhala teachers don't talk to Geetha because she is always shouting. In line 28, when I make a comment about the soft way in which Sinhalese people speak, she reiterates that Sinhalese teachers won't talk to Geetha because she shouts. She repeats, "don't talk in the society." She then imitates Geetha's speech, using a very colloquial expression, "*ee appaDi pooringa* (why are you going there like that?)."

In this interaction, Kavitha contrasts Jaffna and Up-country teachers, aligning herself (and her family) with the Jaffna teachers. In doing so, she ideologically equates the linguistic varieties, and their perceived characteristics, with the character of the people who speak them. I outline this below:

Jaffna Tamil

People who speak it: Kavitha's family, Mani, and Vanisri  
Characteristics: makes it easy to "manage in society." Nice to talk, calm, soft, respectful, get along well with the Sinhalese.

Up-country Tamil

People who speak it: Geetha  
Characteristics: untidy, rough, loud, lack of respect, don't get along well with the Sinhalese.

Through a recursive process, Kavitha maps the distinction between Jaffna and Up-country teachers onto Girls' College and Sri Lankan "society" more generally. She reasons that because Jaffna Tamil is "good," Jaffna teachers get along well with Sinhalese, and thus manage well at Girls' College and in "society." By contrast, because Up-country Tamil is rough, Up-country Tamils do not get along well with Sinhalese teachers, and thus do not manage well at Girls' College or in "society." In chapter four, I showed how a Girls' College English teacher, Tilakavati also mapped the difference between Up-country and Jaffna Tamils onto Girls' College and Sri Lankan as a whole. Tilakavati linked Sinhalese with Up-country Tamils in opposition to Jaffna Tamils by virtue of their political orientation (their belonging to the Sri Lankan state). In this example, Kavitha uses language (as indexing class and educational status) rather than political affiliation to link Jaffna Tamils and Sinhalese in opposition to Up-country Tamils (who are construed as lower class and vulgar). Thus, for Kavitha in this interaction, the North and East/Up-country opposition, rather than being about region of origin, language, or politics, seems to be mainly about class and educational status. By aligning herself with Jaffna as opposed to Up-country, she thus associates herself with educational prestige, as embodied in producing the "best" Tamil.

In the previous three examples, I have been concerned with how the Grade ten Tamil-medium girls are discursively representing themselves with respect to their sub-ethnicity and region of origin in interactions with me, and with each other. In the final example, I show how the girls represent their residence and native place (which is related to sub-ethnicity and region of origin) on a written survey that I distributed on my last day of research at Girls' College. This example is linked to the prior examples as it shows

how are representing themselves with respect to their region of origin differs in writing from how they represent themselves in interactions with me and with each other.

**Example Four: Survey-08/05**

On my second to last day at Girls' College, I administered a survey to the Grade ten Tamil-medium girls. The survey, which my research assistant had handwritten in Tamil, asked students basic questions about their personal and education histories, as well as their attitudes about language. On the survey, the two questions which seemed to generate the most discussion among the students were the following:

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) <i>enge irukkiringa</i> (where do you [live]?)</li><li>2) <i>ongaluDaiya sonda uur enna</i> (what is your native place)?</li></ol> |
|---|

I handed out the surveys during a free period, telling the girls that they didn't have to put their names on it if they did not want to (only one girl refrained from giving her name). While I sat at my desk, the girls filled out the survey in pairs and groups, many discussing the individual questions at length. When they were finished, I went to the front of the classroom, and started a free conversation in English (during their free time, I tried to give them some English conversational practice). Soon, however, the science teacher, Mani, showed up at the door and I left the classroom. Later that evening, I had an opportunity to discuss the survey with Faiza while attending a farewell dinner at her house.

When Faiza and I arrived at the house, Faiza's mother was still at the hospital, visiting Faiza's father, who had a diabetes related problem. Faiza's aunt, uncle, and cousin brother, who were visiting from Batticaloa, were all at the house. I sat down in the living room to talk to them, while Faiza stood against the back wall of the room. On

certain occasions when I was having trouble understanding her uncle's speech, she translated some words into English for me.

Soon, Faiza's mother arrived, and instructed Faiza and I to sit down at the table. The rest of the family would eat when we were finished. She started to serve the dinner that she had prepared earlier in the day, which included chicken curry, potatoes, a vegetable curry, and mango chutney, which Faiza announced had been made especially for me. Over dinner, Faiza started to talk about the survey. She said that she had gotten into another fight with Nadira when they were filling out the survey, because she had seen that Nadira had put Kandy as her "*sonda uur* (native place)." Faiza added that she had guessed that except for Kavitha, who would put Batticaloa, the other North and East girls (Ananthi and Jothika) would put Kandy. I asked Faiza what she had put on the survey. She said "Kandy." I teased her for not putting Batticaloa, and she retorted, "*nan porundatu valandatu Kandy* (I was born and raised in Kandy)." I then teased her about the comment she had made about having a Batticaloa brain (see example two). She said that for subjects like math you need a Batticaloa brain. Faiza's aunt (from Batticaloa) walked by at this moment, and hearing this, commented: "*Kandy mulla sariyellaya*" (a Kandy brain isn't good enough?).

The way that students align or position themselves on a survey is very different from the way in which they position themselves in socially-occurring talk. In contrast to the way in which they discursively construct themselves, these decisions cannot be refashioned or remolded, but are fixed instantiations. In addition, particularly because the survey was written in "literary" Tamil, similar the language used on exams, it had an "official" nature. Though the girls were well versed on my research topic, they could not

be sure of how the survey would circulate (if it would be sent to the Sri Lankan government. While the same was true about the recordings, for them, a written document was much more marked and potentially incriminating.

Though I did not tell Faiza the survey results, she had been entirely correct. The two girls in the class whose families were from Jaffna, Ananthi and Jothika, had put that Kandy as their place of residence and their “*sonda uur*,” and Kavitha had put Kandy as her place of residence, and Batticaloa as her “*sonda uur*.” The main reason why Ananthi and Jothika may have put Kandy and not Jaffna (and Faiza suspected that they would) was because of the current political climate. At the time, Tamils from Jaffna were facing a particularly high risk of arrest on suspicion of LTTE involvement. This might prompt these students to be reluctant to emphasize their Jaffna identity in any official capacity (especially on a written document). It was also common at the time for Jaffna Tamil living in the South to try to blend in with Up-country Tamils, in some cases changing their speech. For example, while attending services at the Peradeniya University NRC church interacted with a lot of Jaffna Tamils.<sup>86</sup> I met a couple from Jaffna who were passing through Kandy on their way to renew their medical licenses in Colombo. In the tea time after the service they told the congregation that while they traveled in the South, they tried to speak like Up-country Tamils as to not attract unnecessary attention. As another example, an Up-country Tamil Hindu friend of mine who was studying at Peradeniya University had a roommate from Jaffna. Once, my friend told me, in front of her roommate, that her speech was getting closer to Up-country Tamil, as she was trying to adapt to “our language (*engiDu basha*).” Faiza suspected that only Kavitha would not

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<sup>86</sup> An Up-country Tamil Hindu friend and I used to visit the university Hindu Kovil (temple) and NRC church in our free time. I found that it was a great way to interact with Tamil youth from a broad range of regional backgrounds.



put “Kandy” because of the way Kavitha likes to emphasize her connection to the North and East region. In addition, in contrast to Ananthi and Jothika, it is not as risky for Kavitha to position herself as Batticaloa, as her father, as a retired army major, has connections with the Sri Lankan government.

What the girls ended up writing on the survey was consistent with the way that they were seeking to discursively represent themselves in their interactions with me and each other (in some senses, these represented their “ideal selves”). The survey was different than their discursive self-representations, however, in that it did seem to foreground the political ramifications of the regional and sub-ethnic categories. While in examples two and three Faiza and Kavitha associated “Batticaloa” and Jaffna” with a class and educational prestige, in the process of filling out the survey, it also takes on political associations (more for Ananthi and Jothika than for Kavitha).

### **Reconfiguring Difference**

At Girls’ College, there is a disjuncture between widely circulating norms of “prestige” (based on the hierarchy of Jaffna Tamils over other Tamil-speaking groups), and the demographic and institutional shifts in the post-1983 period. As I demonstrated in chapter four, while students from the North and East are still widely associated with producing the “best” Tamil, most of these students do not actually produce Jaffna Tamil, except in emblematic ways. In this chapter, I have shown how the Grade 10 Tamil-medium students are taking up such disjunctures (which are evident of social shifts in progress), and acting to discursively reconfigure social differences.

I have shown how the Grade 10 Tamil-medium girls, by opposing the category Jaffna to other social formations, are negotiating emergent hierarchies among Tamil-

speaking groups—related to class socioeconomic level, and regional background—that can no longer be encompassed within the North and East/Up-country opposition. In example one, Nadira opposes the Jaffna girls to the Up-country girls. But for Nadira, the identity of these particular girls is not important. What is important is the categorization of Up-country as non-Jaffna, as it erases Nadira's difference as a Muslim girl from Puttalam. In example two, Faiza, in her argument with Nadira, challenges Nadira's alignment with Kandy, interrupting her construction of herself. But while for Nadira's Puttalam origin interferes with her claim to be a Kandy girl, for Faiza, her Batticaloa origin and her Kandy status are not mutually exclusive. While Faiza can claim that she is from Kandy, her Batticaloa origin (through her mother) imbues her with academic prestige. In example three, Kavitha, though she had previously represented herself as Up-country, in her interaction with me, discursively aligns herself as Jaffna in opposition to Up-country. But for Kavitha, being Jaffna is not related to political affiliation, but to class and educational prestige.

I suggest that for these Grade 10 Tamil-medium girls, the category North and East in opposing Up-country/Kandy, also acts to define it. As girls might oppose themselves to the category Jaffna, it is their shared associations and shared community with Jaffna teachers and students—especially at prestigious, national schools like Girls' College—that serves to endow Kandy with a certain orientation indexing educational prestige. In other words, it is the tension between the categories Up-country/Kandy and Jaffna that makes up Kandy as an urban multilingual and multiethnic center.

I suggest that the Grade ten Tamil-medium girls are seeking to define themselves in a way that is not restricted to sub-ethnicity (Up-country vs. North and East) or religion

(Hindu vs. Muslim), but their belonging to Kandy as a multilingual and multiethnic center. As part of this process, though Up-country Tamils, Jaffna Tamil, and Muslim Tamil are recognized as the most socially salient varieties, adolescents are imagining an emergent “normative” Tamil that is not linked to ethnicity, caste, or religion, but to educational level, and ties to Kandy as a “cosmopolitan” center.

In example three, Kavitha imposes the Up-country/Jaffna distinctions onto what she describes as “society.” This includes both Girls’ College and Sri Lanka more broadly. However, I suggest that though the girls’ aspirations to be “cosmopolitan” may involve the imagining of a multilingual and multiethnic Kandy (i.e., “cosmopolitan” girls get along well with the Sinhalese), these imaginings do not relate to actual belonging within the Sri Lankan nation-state. Rather, through a recursive process, the Grade ten girls are mapping differences among their Tamil-medium classmates onto differences between the Tamil-medium stream and the Sinhalese Buddhist mainstream of the school (as well as Kandy as a whole). Thus, as opposed to girls from peripheral areas, Kandy girls are “cosmopolitan,” well educated, and, as such, coexist well with the Sinhalese. Thus, while these girls may explicitly construct social configurations that appear to challenge this, divisions between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking groups are extremely pervasive, and will not be easily appeased. This chapter considered how students are acting to discursively reconfigure social differences through their interactions across school and non-school settings. In chapter six, I further contribute toward linking students’ lives inside and outside of school by considering peer groups in relation to different social domains.

## Chapter Six

### Beyond School Settings: Peer Groups, Linguistic Dominance, and the O-Level Exam

#### The Kandy Pillayar Kovil Before the O-Level Exam

A week before they were to take their O-level exams, a group of girls in the Hindu College Grade 11 class told me that before the exam they would go to the Kandy Pillayar Kovil (a temple devoted to the Hindu God, Ganesh, located in the center of Kandy town) to do a *puja*. They asked if I would come to wish them “best of luck.” On the day of their first exam, I arrived at the temple at 6:15 a.m., and quickly joined a group of Hindu College girls who were standing in the paved space in front of the temple. Standing a reasonable distance away from them, was a group of Hindu College boys. As they were about to take an exam that had been a focus of their education for the past two years, the students seemed exhilarated. The girls watched as the rest of their classmates arrived, saying “hi, morning, *eppaDi* (how)?” When one of boys approached, one girl whispered to another, “*enakku Michaela kaNNulayee kaTTaadu* (I hate Michael). One girl, declaring she hadn’t eaten anything that morning, begged for a sugar bun from her friend. Another girl told a story about how she had walked all the way to the bus stand without her ID for the exam, and had to run all the way back to her house to get it. Standing all together, the Hindu College students had a rare vantage point in which to observe and gossip about students from other Kandy Tamil-medium schools and streams (the girls seemed mostly interested in the boys). One girl asked the others, “*eey anga paaru yaaroo pakkattula nikkuRaanga?*” (Hey, look over there, who is standing nearby?).

Another girl suggested that they get closer so they could see his school colors. She then pointed to another boy standing right in front of the temple and whispered, “*sudu angee, sudu, sudu* (white (in Sinhala) there, white, white). Another answered, “*veLLa danee?* (*he is white (in Tamil) isn't he?*). She then snidely commented that neither of his parents have blue eyes like him (thus doubting his parentage).

This was one of the few times that the Grade 11 class had been all together away from the immediate gaze of their principal and teachers. In South Asia, Hindu temples are places where people often gather to socialize. In Kandy, and elsewhere in Sri Lanka, however, security concerns related to the ongoing civil war prevent this from happening.<sup>87</sup> In fact, after the O-level exam was over the temple manager informed the Hindu College principal that the students had been too loud and unruly, and that they couldn't gather at the temple again.

As the time advanced, the students broke off into smaller groups and took turns going into the temple for *puja*. When they came out, they resumed their places. When it was almost time for students to head to their testing locations, I shook their hands one-by-one and told them, “best of luck.” Some of the students quickly made their move with determination, and others seemed more reluctant to break away from the group.

The students would gather at the temple every morning for the remaining days of the week long exam. In the months that followed, though most students would come back to Hindu College to meet with the principal and teachers, and, most importantly, to get their exam results, they would never all be in the same place again. Students who passed their O-level exams (about 60%) would go on to do their A-levels (Grades 12 and

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<sup>87</sup> In Sri Lanka, places of religious worship such as temples, churches, and mosques have frequently been sites for violence.

13) at different Kandy schools. The others would likely remain at home, some getting jobs, some doing vocational training, and some doing nothing at all. But what made their interaction with one another at the temple so special? How do these students interact differently in school and in Sinhalese-majority Kandy town? How do norms of correct or appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic conduct differ across the different spaces that they inhabit?

### **Introduction**

Viewing the classroom as emblematic of school-based practices as a whole, many linguistic anthropological studies of education have focused exclusively on classroom interactions. In this analysis, I expand such studies by situating issues of education and linguistic dominance in a broader context. Drawing on research with the Grade 11 students (ages 15-17) at Hindu College, a mixed (girls and boys) Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school in the center of Kandy town, I explore the relationship between educational institutions and students' lives outside of them (see also Goodwin 1990; Heath 1983; Philips 1983).

A considerable body of linguistic anthropological literature on adolescence considers peer groups as units of analysis. Some studies explore how adolescents, within their school-based peer groups, draw on language and other semiotic resources to configure social identities (Eckert 2000; Rampton 1995; Rymes 2001), while others more specifically target peer groups as sites for engaging with, negotiating, and contesting social inequalities (Bailey 2000; Bucholtz 2001; Rampton 1995; Shankar 2008). With the exception of studies such as Garcia-Sanchez (2005) and Goodwin (1990), most of this literature only considers peer groups in relation to school-based settings. In this chapter,

I expand existing literature by considering peer groups in relation to different social domains.

In the first part of the chapter, I explore how Hindu College students' linguistic and social practices are differently constrained in school and non-school arenas. In school-settings, students are subjected to modes of monitoring and evaluation based on their conduct, their academic performances, their Tamil speech, and various aspects of their social identities (such as caste, religion, area of residence, and family backgrounds). In non-school settings, students face everyday forms of discrimination as lower-class Tamil minorities (either Up-country or North and East) in Sinhalese-dominated public spaces. In immediate contrast to school-settings, where students' linguistic practices are regimented to be Tamil-only, in certain public spaces (such as the bus, in shops, or on the street), the very act of speaking Tamil can be construed as offensive, or as a security threat. I demonstrate how, in their lives outside of school, Tamil students must not only deal with the challenges of a complex and multilingual urban environment, but, in this heightened moment in the almost three-decade long ethnic conflict, they also fear for their security, and even their lives.

In the second part of the chapter, I explore how students employ interactional to manage the constraints of both school and non-school arenas. I suggest that the most relevant contrast is not necessarily between students' interactions in school and non-school settings, but between students' interactions in which adults are privy and not-privy. I show how in school-settings, students' interactional strategies with their peers groups allow them to mediate teacher/student interactions (sometimes undermining the teacher's authority), mitigate evaluation, and complete everyday classroom tasks.

Similarly, I demonstrate how in non-school settings, school-based peer groups form a kind of protective barrier with which students can move through Kandy town with relative confidence and ease.

In the final part of the chapter, I look at students' everyday lives outside of their school-based peer networks (at home and on the street). Focusing on two Hindu College students, Mani and Saachee, I show how factors such as gender, sociolinguistic proficiencies, and familial circumstances impact the way they interact in different spaces in Kandy town and surrounding areas. I also show how these students are seeking to acquire skills (through formal education and other means) to try and achieve their imagined goals (either within Sri Lanka or elsewhere). Before concluding, I return to the opening vignette, discussing Hindu College students' immediate trajectories after finishing the O-level exams. I show that as they move on to the next phases of their lives, students face increased challenges as lower-class ethnic minority youth in Sinhalese-majority Sri Lanka.

### **Hindu College: Demographics and Difference**

Before discussing the way that students are evaluated in terms of their linguistic and non-linguistic performances in the classroom, I discuss Hindu College demographics, as well as salient categories of difference. As I discussed in chapter three, Hindu College differs from most other Tamil-medium Hindu provincial schools in the Kandy zone in that there are no Muslim students. The Hindu College principal and members of the Zonal Tamil-medium Ministry of Education feel that as there are so few educational resources for Tamils in Kandy town, Hindu College must be protected from incursion from other ethnic groups. The principal of Hindu College is an Up-country Tamil Hindu.



All teachers are Tamil with the exception of a Muslim science teacher, who came to the school in 2007.

While the majority of teachers and students are Hindus, there are also a significant number of Christians, both Roman Catholics and Non-Roman Catholics (Protestants). Though most of the students are from the Up-country (many whose grandparents or great-grandparents were tea plantation laborers), there are also a significant number of students from the North (Jaffna) and East (Batticaloa). Some of these students came to Kandy as recent war or Tsunami refugees, while others were born in the Sinhalese-majority South. In addition, there were also some students whose mothers are from the North and East and fathers are from Kandy (see Table 10 in chapter three for the demographic makeup of Hindu College).<sup>88</sup>

Hindu College teachers are generally middle-class, and students are lower-class or below. On a survey I distributed to the students, they described their fathers as businessmen, shopkeepers, laborers (*kuli velai*), municipal workers (street cleaners), or petty merchants (*sinna viyabaram*), and their mothers as tailors or housewives. As is typical in Sri Lanka more broadly, some students have fathers or mothers who are working in the Middle East as drivers (men) or domestic workers (women). Teachers and students vary with respect to their caste backgrounds. But while there was awareness of teachers' or students' general caste background (whether they were high- or low-caste), it was not something that they explicitly discussed.

Because of its status as a “town” school, Hindu College brings together students and teachers from a wide geographical area. Some students live in Kandy town, usually

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<sup>88</sup> It is a common pattern for women from the North and East to marry Up-country men. This is because of the shortage of men from the North and East because of the war, and because if they marry Up-country men, they often are not expected to give a dowry.

in areas considered to be “slums” (such as Mahayyava, an area near the central cemetery or Bogampura, located near Kandy’s train station), while others live in towns and villages outside of Kandy town, including Tamil-majority tea plantation areas (though very few of their parents work as tea plantation laborers). All Hindu College students (and teachers) speak Tamil as a first language. Related to their home and neighborhood environments (whether they live in Kandy town or surrounding areas), students have different competency levels in Sinhala and English.

In other Kandy Tamil-medium schools and streams, I observed that there were considerable tensions between Up-country teachers and teachers from the North and East. For example, at Talatuaya Tamil Vidyalia, a Tamil-medium Hindu provincial school located in a village just outside of Kandy town, Up-country Tamil teachers frequently complained that a particular Hinduism teacher from Jaffna was trying to dominate the school (constantly telling the Up-country principal what to do).<sup>89</sup> One instance that made the Up-country teachers particularly angry was when, as part of a school wide Tamil cultural event (*kalai vizha*), the Jaffna teacher coached a group of Up-country students to speak Jaffna Tamil for a play. One teacher commented that because the students are from this area, they should be speaking “our language (*engiDu basha*),” and not Jaffna Tamil. They even likened forcing students to speak Jaffna Tamil to being a form of abuse.

When I first started during research at Hindu College, I was surprised that there seemed to be very little apparent tension between Up-country teachers and teachers from

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<sup>89</sup> Tired of this Jaffna teacher trying to dominate the school, one of the Up-country teachers at Talatuoya did some investigation into her background in Jaffna. She spoke to a family from Jaffna who knew this teacher, and found out that she was from a very poor and low-caste family in Jaffna. She concluded that the reason that this teacher was trying so hard to dominate the Up-country teachers was because of her own feelings of insecurity based on her low-status background in Jaffna.

the North and East.<sup>90</sup> My research assistant, Kumudhini, who had taught English at Hindu College for decade, but had since transferred to another school, said that the severity of what she termed “Jaffna discrimination” varies at different times. She said that when she was teaching at Hindu College there had been a male vice Principal from Jaffna, who had grossly favored the Jaffna students. She said that he would order the Jaffna students to sit in the front of the classroom and the Up-country students to sit in the back. She told me a story about recently running into one of her former Hindu College students, who was working as a three-wheeler (auto rickshaw) driver. He told her that he had dropped out of Hindu College in Grade 7 because the Jaffna teacher had scolded him, saying “*nii poy, kuli veela ceynga* (you (non-honorific) go and do coolie labor).” He told Kumudhini that he had eloped at age 17, marrying a girl who was 16. She said that he has a five year old child, and that life is very difficult.

The lack of apparent conflict between Up-country and North and East teachers at the time of my research can be partly attributed to the principal’s strong leadership skills (he would work very hard to quell tensions among teachers), as well as the particular teachers from the North and East, who seemed to be more interested in contributing to the educational advancement of the students than in pushing any sectarian interests. In addition, the Jaffna vice Principal of the school, who also taught “social,” was not in a situation where she could yield particular authority. Unable to retire because of financial problems, she was constantly overworked and tired. The other North and East teachers, a

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<sup>90</sup> At lunch time, the teachers would gather to have their lunch in different spaces in the school, such as different clusters of desks in the main room on the first floor, a table in an upstairs hallway, and the upstairs home economics classroom. There was no correlation that I observed between the groups of teachers who ate together and whether they were from the North and East or the Up-country. While the Muslim teacher initially seemed uncomfortable at lunch time (maybe related to her different dietary habits), several teachers immediately made her feel comfortable by inviting her to eat with them.

Tamil teacher from Batticaloa (whose husband was from the Up-country), a Hinduism teacher from Jaffna, and a primary teacher from Jaffna, were devoted and considerate teachers who were genuinely invested in their students.

Though there was not any particular conflict among Up-country and North and East teachers at Hindu College, the categories Up-country and North and East were nevertheless salient modes of difference, especially in terms of academic and linguistic evaluation. For example, I observed that there was a strong expectation among the principal and the teachers alike that students from the North and East would be good students (even if they came to Hindu College following highly traumatic events). As I discuss in the following section, teachers' evaluations of student academic and linguistic performances were not just tied to whether they come from the Up-country or the North and East, but were related to numerous aspects of their social backgrounds including, but not limited to, religion, class, caste, parents' educational level, and family backgrounds.

### **Modes of Academic and Linguistic Evaluation in the Classroom**

The organization of space at Hindu College has a large impact on classroom dynamics and modes of teacher monitoring and evaluation. As the principal and teachers would frequently discuss, the school's biggest problem was the lack of space. To enter the school, you needed to walk up a steep flight of stairs, leading up from the main commercial road. The principal's office was situated in the entranceway of the school, across from a small music room. The secondary students (Grades 8-11) did not have their own classrooms, but were situated in a single main room on the first floor of the school. Each of the four Grades had its own demarcated classroom space (with Grade 9 situated on the stage), with a blackboard, a desk for the teacher, and two rows of desks.

Girls were seated on one side, and boys on the other, with a narrow aisle between them. The primary students (Grades 1-7) were located on the second floor of the school, in tiny, partially divided classrooms. By the stairwell, there was a girls' and boys' bathroom, the stench from which continually wafted through the school.

With almost one hundred and fifty students located in the single main room,<sup>91</sup> the noise level at Hindu College was extremely high. In addition, the noise from the traffic on the road (cars, buses, motorcycles) also pervaded the space. If a particular class got unruly and started making noise, this caused a domino effect, where the noise volume became so high that the other classes could not function. Because of this noise issue, teacher had to carefully monitor their classrooms. If a teacher was not available to teach a class, the principal appointed another teacher, or came in and taught the class himself. Even when all the classes were functioning smoothly, students in the back rows of the classroom spaces would find it very difficult to hear the teacher's lessons.

From September 2007 to December 2008 (the date of their O-level exam), I conducted research among the Grade 11 class.<sup>92</sup> The class had twenty-six students, with sixteen girls and ten boys.<sup>93</sup> In the class there were six Christians (both Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic), and twenty Hindus. With the exception of Arumugam, a boy born in Kandy to parents from Jaffna, and Bhanu, whose mother was from Batticaloa and father was an Up-country Tamil from Kandy,<sup>94</sup> all students in the Grade 11 class identified as Up-country.

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<sup>91</sup> During school assemblies and functions (such as the Friday morning *puja*) the main room of the school would be converted into an event hall. The Grade 9 students' desks would be removed from the stage, and the rest of the desks would be pushed back to allow room for the students and teachers to stand.

<sup>92</sup> I also conducted research with the new Grade 11 class from January to August, 2008.

<sup>93</sup> It is common for there to be more girls than boys in the higher Grades, as boys have a higher drop-out rate.

<sup>94</sup> Students would often point to Bhanu and say, in Tamil, "That is the Batticaloa girl."

The teachers, in their conversations with one another, or with the principal (outside of the earshot of students), would often distinguish among the following three types of students: students who study well (*nalla paDippaanga*); students who study moderately well (*paDippaanga* (“they study”)); and students who cannot study (*paDikka maTTaanga*). The teachers’ perception of how well students’ studied was strongly based on their performance on written exams. Other aspects of students’ classroom performances, such as how well they contributed to class discussions and their Tamil oratorical skills (how well they performed in recitation, drama, and singing), were also important.

At Hindu College, there was a strong correlation between students’ perceived academic performances, and their positioning within the classroom space. As is common in Tamil provincial schools, in the Grade 11 class, the girls had higher overall exam scores than the boys. However, the “star” student in the class was considered to be Vinod (who went on to do A-levels at a leading boys’ private school, Trinity College). Arumugam, a boy from Jaffna, and Kamilas, an Up-country boy, were considered to be the second and third best male students. These three boys always sat in the three desks closest to the teacher. The rest of the seven boys (varying in their academic abilities) usually tried to sit as close to the front of the classroom as they could. The boys who usually sat in the back row of the classroom were the following: Michael, who was considered to be a very poor student; Kannan, who only sporadically attended school because his younger brother was ill; and Selvam, who was a good student, but seemed to have little interest in moving up front.

The girls, in contrast to the boys, had devised their own seating system, where they would alternate their rows on a daily basis. The same three-five girls would usually sit in the same rows, but would alternate their positioning in the classroom (towards the front or towards the back). Three girls, however, were not part of the seating arrangement, and would usually sit in the back row. These girls included Rebecca, a girl who almost never spoke, and had poor literacy skills (her family was extremely poor and Rebecca had the sole responsibility for the care of a disabled relative); Priyanthani, who had very poor exam scores; and Saachee, a girl who had recently moved to Kandy from a tea plantation area in Nuwara Eliya. Saachee preferred to study from the textbooks on her own rather than following along with the teacher's lessons.

Students' placement in the classroom space had a large impact on how well they would be able to hear the lessons (thus perpetuating the distinction between students who study well and those who do not). While some of the teachers would make considerable efforts to direct their lessons to all of the students in the class (such as the English and Sinhala teacher, Mrs. Rose), other teachers only focused on the students in the very front row. I noticed that a few teachers seemed to gear their lessons entirely to the "star" student, Vinod. These practices were in part related to the pressure that the teachers were under to ensure that the maximal number of students passed the O-level exams (which were considered to be a direct measure of teachers' success). If students reading and writing skills were below a certain level, teachers knew that there was not hope that they could pass the exam, and thus did not want to waste their time on them.

Most Hindu College classes consist of lectures. During the lectures, to check for comprehension, teachers addressed questions to the class. If a student needed

clarification, they would raise their hands and shout out a question. As is common in Tamil-medium education Sri Lanka as well as South India, norms of Tamil purity dictated that classroom interactions (with the exception of Sinhala and English classes) were solely in Tamil. As is a common pattern, teachers would use more academic registers (involving features of “literary” Tamil) when directly discussing the subject material, and switch into a variety that is closer to “spoken” Tamil elsewhere (see chapter four for a discussion of the mixing of “literary” and “spoken” in the Girls’ College Tamil-medium stream). In classroom interactions, students were also expected to produce a variety that is close to “literary” Tamil, though they widely differed in their ability to do so.

I observed that teachers would often equate students’ general academic performances with their Tamil speech (whether or not they spoke “good” Tamil). When I asked teachers at Hindu College and other Tamil-medium Hindu schools in Kandy town what constitutes “good” Tamil, their answers were quite uniform. Teachers said that speaking “good” Tamil meant speaking “*illakkiya* (literary)” or “*suttu* (pure)” Tamil. When I asked specifically about students’ *pechu* (spoken) Tamil, they would say that students have to speak respectfully (*mariyathaiya peesuno(m)* (have to speak with respect)). When I asked teachers what this meant, they would give examples, saying that students have to say “*vaanga* (come)” instead of “*va*” (as an example of an honorific vs. a non-honorific imperative form), and that they could not use what they deemed “colloquial” “slang,” or “*kochai* (vulgar)” terms, such “*Dii*” and “*Daa*” (intimate Tamil addressive terms). Some teachers would say that “*Dii*” and “*Daa*” were appropriate



when students are speaking with one another (as they show closeness or familiarity), but not when they are speaking to teachers.

I observed that the way that teachers evaluate students' speech is ideologically tied to aspects of their social backgrounds. I illustrate this with the example of Michael, a student in the Grade 11 class. Michael, who performed poorly on his written assessments,<sup>95</sup> was frequently described by teachers as not using "good Tamil." On one level, I think this was related to his inability to produce academic registers in classroom interactions. When discussing the subject material in class, Michael spoke in a similar way to how he did with his fellow students, and with teachers outside of class. While there is relatively free word-order in Tamil, Michael had a distinctive way of speaking where he frequently puts the object of the sentence last (SVO), where it is usually comes in the middle (SOV). For example, instead of saying, "*ettanai manikki classukku pohanum?*" (What time-to class-have to go?) he says "*ettanai manikki pohanum classukku?*" (What time-have to go-to class). Though not incorrect, one of the teachers described it as a coarse way of speaking. It was possible that other features of his speech had particularly negative indexical associations. For example, I played a recording of a group of Grade 11 boys (including Michael) talking to each other in-between class to my research assistant, Kumudhini. Without telling her anything about Michael, she immediately pointed out his use of the addressive term, "*va.*" Feigning disgust, she said that if her nephew started using it, she would lock him in the house and never let him go outside. She explained that Michael's use of this term indicates that he is associating

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<sup>95</sup> Reviewing some of Ruban's exams, I noticed that he has particular difficulty with writing, itself. His letter formation was odd, and he regularly inverted numbers and letters. If he had been at a school or educational environment where he could have gotten some extra help and attention, I think he would have been able to perform much better.

with Muslim boys, who she said are always getting into trouble. She said that he is probably spending time in a “slum” neighborhood. When I told her he lived in Bogambara (a so-called “slum” neighborhood near the train station), she said this made perfect sense.<sup>96</sup> While it is not possible to assume that the Hindu College teachers would have the same ideological associations as Kumudhini, this example points to the possible negative valuing of certain aspects of Michael’s speech.<sup>97</sup>

But while the perception that Michael does not speak “good” Tamil may be related to his actual speech, it is likely that negatively valued aspects of his social background were being directly mapped onto his linguistic and academic performances. Some of the teachers would talk frequently about his particularly “bad” family background. It seemed that his mother had gone to work as a housemaid in the Middle East, and while she was gone, his father, who was a heavy drinker, had taken up with another woman, and abandoned Michael. Michael had initially gone to live with another boy in the Grade 11 class (Mani), but after some kind of problem, had gone to live with his grandmother in another part of town (by the end of Grade 11 his mother had returned). A commerce teacher, in a conversation with me, directly attributed Michael’s poor academic performance and his failure to produce “good” Tamil speech with his poor family background. I got into a small argument with her, saying that it was unfair to associate Michael with his father. She made an argument that if children do not have a

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<sup>96</sup> The following shows two examples of Ruban’s use of “*va*” in conversations with his Grade 11 classmates. The second example shows an instance of Ruban’s pattern of putting the object of the sentence first.

1. *paakkadiinga va ketta poyiruppinga va*

Don’t look -*va* -you will be spoiled-*va*

Don’t look *va*, you will get spoiled *va*

2. *aaru mani va teriyumaa?*

Six o’clock -*va* -do [you] know

Do you know its six o’clock *va*?

<sup>97</sup> But in addition to the use of this feature in his speech, Kumudhini may also be picking up paralinguistic aspects of his speech (tone, voice), as well its referential content.

good home environment, they do not study well, and they do not develop good character. When I relayed this interaction to Kumudhini, she strongly agreed with the commerce teacher. In summary, Michael's speech seemed to be indexical of his academic performance, his social background, and his character. What seemed to be erased in teachers' narratives about Michael was that while he did not perform well academically, he positively contributed to the school in other ways. Michael had excellent school attendance, was highly involved in extracurricular school activities, and seemed to care a lot about his teachers and fellow students.

I have looked at how Hindu College students evaluate and rank students on the basis of their academic performances, Tamil speech, and aspects of their social backgrounds (which may be ideologically conflated). In the next section, I shift my focus away from teacher-student interactions and examine student-student interactions. I look at how students ideologically differentiate talk in student/student interactions from student/teacher interactions. In addition, I also discuss how students employ interactional strategies in the classroom to mediate student/teacher classroom interactions, mitigate evaluation, and meet the demands of everyday classroom tasks.

### **Student-Student Interactions in the Classroom**

During my research at Hindu College, I employed specific methods to allow me to observe students' linguistic practices in the classroom. To avoid disturbing the students, I sat at a desk in the very back of the classroom space, on the girls' side. Rather than positioning my recorder on my own desk, I would place the recorder on the students' desks (with their permission), which would allow me to capture the content of the lessons and students' interactions with one another in-between and during classes (both of which

were only partially audible from my position in the classroom). The recorder thus gave me a vantage point in which to observe what I would not have been possible otherwise. The drawback of this method was that it created discontinuities between my auditory and visual observations.

I noticed early on in my fieldwork that students, in their classroom practices, were skilled at behaving in a way that would allow them to remain on the good side of the teachers, while also feeling like they could do as they pleased. As Goffman (1961) mentions in his discussion of total institutions, remaining under the radar did not necessarily entail not being noticed by authority figures, but staying within the threshold of what would be accepted without intervention. As the physical constraints of the school dictated that teachers could see students better than they could hear them (because of the overall noise volume), part of remaining under the radar of the teachers was by visually appearing to be dutiful students (by looking forward and appearing to be writing in their notebooks). When teachers disciplined students, it seemed that it was often for behavior that was immediately visually apparent—such as not having their classroom materials out, disturbing a lesson (by shouting and flailing around), or for hitting or physically disturbing other students. The teachers would often handle small disciplinary problems by screaming at students, or giving them a sharp slap on the back. For more serious problems, the principal would call students (usually boys) into the office and slap their palms with a wooden ruler.

In the following discussion, rather than solely focusing on teacher-student classroom interactions, I consider other kinds of interactions occurring in the school-space (such as student-student interactions before, after, in-between, and during classes).

In looking at these interactions, I consider those who are in hearing range of utterances, and those who are not (Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Goffman 1976, 1979; Irvine 1996).

In student-student interactions away from the immediate earshot of teachers, students make use of linguistic patterns, which serve to ideologically mark these interactions as distinct from teacher-student interactions. These features include the use of nicknames,<sup>98</sup> non-honorific finite verb forms, intimate addressive forms,<sup>99</sup> and codeswitching among Sinhala, Tamil and English. Interestingly, these features are consistent with the way that teachers describe speech that is appropriate in student-student interactions but not teacher-student classroom interactions (see above). In the following two examples, I show how Hindu College girls use of codeswitching seems to distinguish their student-student talk from the ongoing lesson. Latter examples will show the use of intimate addressive forms and non-honorific verb forms in student-student talk. In the first example, during an ongoing science lecture, Priyanthani mixes Sinhala and English to inform Sanjeweani that her notebook is full.

### Example One

(The English is in italics, and the Sinhala is underlined.

(science teacher lecturing in Tamil in the background) (1) <b>Priyanthani:</b> <i>my koppi is <u>ivarai</u></i>  engiDu koppi muDinchi (2) <b>Sanjeweani:</b> enna muDinchi? (3) <b>Priyanthani:</b> koppi muDinchi	(science teacher lecturing in Tamil in the background) (1) <b>Priyanthani:</b> <i>my koppi (notebook) is <u>finished</u></i> My koppi is finished (2) <b>Sanjeweani:</b> what is finished? (3) <b>Priyanthani:</b> koppi is finished
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<sup>98</sup> For example, Ruban was called “*karbiriyan*,” because he is dark complected, Mani was called “*maamaa* (uncle/pimp)” as he was always talking to the girls, and Kiirtana was called *kiiri pulle* (mongoose), as a play on her name.

<sup>99</sup> Such as “*Dii*” and “*Daa*”

In this example, “*koppi*” is a term used in South Asia more broadly for “notebook.” In line one, Priyanthani uses an English sentence, with the Sinhala word “*ivarai* for “finished.” She then repeats the exact phrase in Tamil. When Student B asks in Tamil “*enna muDinchi* (what is finished?)” she repeats the Tamil phrase “*koppi muDinchi* (koppi is finished).” When I played this recording for my research assistant, Kumudhini, she commented that it was particularly “in-style” for students to say something in one language and then repeat it in another (displaying that they can manage both languages). In the second example, during a math class Bhanu uses Sinhala to inform Vanisri that her bag has fallen to the ground.

### Example Two

(Sinhala is underlined.)

(The math teacher is lecturing in Tamil in the background)	(The math teacher is lecturing in Tamil in the background)
<b>(1) Bhanu to Vanisri:</b> <u>oyage bag eka bima</u> (Vanisri picks it up)	<b>(1) Bhanu to Vanisri:</b> <u>Your bag fell.</u> (Vanisri picks it up)

During lessons, students would not just exchange brief comments with one another, but would often have full conversations. While this may be typical in other Sri Lankan schools (or elsewhere), the high noise volume at Hindu College gave students particular confidence that they could communicate with one another without the teacher being able to hear them. At certain moments and circumstances groups of students would become so involved in a particular interaction, that it would completely supersede the lesson (for an example of this, see Appendix 4). Student-student interactions, however, did not only operate in a parallel fashion to lessons, but would also serve to mediate teacher-student interactions. In the following example, I discuss how students employ

interactional strategies with their classmates that enable them to protect themselves from the teacher's evaluative gaze.

### Example Three

One afternoon, the English teacher, Mrs. Rose was reviewing the answers to a practice O-level English exam that the students had just taken. On this particular day, my recorder was on Michael's desk. Michael was sitting next to Mani. Sitting across the row from them was Vanisri (she usually sat closer to the front, but today was in the very back row). The following shows that layout of the last row in the Grade 11 classroom space:

Saachee Rebecca Vanisri  
Me

\*Michael Mani Kannan

The exam had asked students to describe particular occupations, such as air hostess, clerk, housewife, etc. The teacher wrote an example of a correct answer on the board for air hostess:

Mala <sup>100</sup> is an air hostess Treats, takes care of, looks after, people on the plane She gets paid for her work Sometimes she works late in the evening
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In line 1, the teacher reads out the exam question in English. She then switches to Tamil, and explains that they need to look at the board and copy down the correct exam answer in their notebooks. Michael, in line 2, declares, in Tamil, "I can't hear anything you say." Though he addresses the teacher using the second person pronoun, from his physical comportment (looking at other students), it seemed that this utterance was not directed to the teacher, but to the other students around him. Mrs. Rose hears him,

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<sup>100</sup> Mala is a Sinhalese name. The English textbook, as issued by the Ministry of Education, tried to represent all major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, so they used Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim names.

however, and directly responds to him (line 3) by telling him he should move up to the front of the classroom (though there is not apparent space for him in the front). In line 4, Mani, turning to the students around him, asks, “How can a pot with holes understand?” Some of the students laugh. The teacher then comes to the back of the classroom and writes down the example sentences (which she had written on the board) in Michael’s notebook. Mani also watches what the teacher writes.

In line 5, Michael, feigning the voice of an ideal student in tone and intonation, tells the teacher that he understands it. Though this utterance isn’t linguistically marked, the tone distinguishes it from how he speaks to his classmates (such as in line 6). The minute the teacher returns to the front of the classroom to resume the lesson, Michael comments to Mani and Vanisri that he doesn’t understand what the teacher wrote in the notebook. Mani then comments, continuing to tease Michael and the other students around him, “While the teacher was teaching this long, were they playing?” Vanisri, standing up and looking at what the teacher had written in Michael’s notebook asks, equally perplexed, “What does she write?”

(The English is underlined. I have marked the use of the emphatic (emph.))

<p><b>(1) Teacher (To class):</b>  <u>Write a description of one of the following. Follow the example given.</u>          ida partu ida elluda soneen</p> <p><b>(2) Michael (to classmates):</b> ninga sonadu onume kekkala</p> <p><b>(3) Teacher (to Michael):</b> appoo, niinga mella varano(m) daanee?</p> <p><b>(4) Mani:</b> ottai panakku eppaDi vellungum?</p> <p>(The Teacher comes to the back of the classroom, and writes down an example</p>	<p><b>(1) Teacher (to class):</b>  <u>Write a description of one of the following. Follow the example given.</u>          I said to look at this and write [the answer].</p> <p><b>(2) Michael (to classmates):</b> I can't hear anything you say.</p> <p><b>(3) Teacher (to Michael):</b> Then you need to be up front, don't you?</p> <p><b>(4) Mani:</b> how can a pot with wholes understand?</p> <p>(The Teacher comes to the back of the classroom, and writes down an example</p>
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<p>sentence in Michael's notebook. Mani, who is sitting next to Michael, watches what she is writing).</p> <p><b>(5) Michael (to teacher):</b> ippa danee teacher velangadu</p> <p>(The teacher goes back to the front of the classroom)</p> <p><b>(6) Michael:</b> elluditu coppiya daa(n) onnume velangala</p> <p><b>(7) Mani:</b> ivalavu neeram sollikittu daanee irundaya valayandukitta irundanga?</p> <p><b>(8) Vanisri</b> (glancing at Michael's notebook): enna eluduraanga? (the three students then discuss what the teacher had written in Michael's notebook.)</p>	<p>sentence in Michael's notebook. Mani, who is sitting next to Michael, watches what she is writing).</p> <p><b>(5) Michael (to teacher):</b> now (emph.) I understand it teacher.</p> <p>(The teacher goes back to the front of the classroom)</p> <p><b>(6) Michael:</b> I don't understand anything that [the teacher] wrote in the notebook (emph.).</p> <p><b>(7) Mani:</b> While the teacher was teaching this long, were they playing?</p> <p><b>(8) Vanisri</b> (glancing at Michael's notebook): What does she write? (the three students then discuss what the teacher had written in Michael's notebook.)</p>
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In this example, as part of the exam review, Mrs. Rose is trying to demonstrate an example of a correct answer to an exam question. But Michael and the other students in the back of the class do not seem to properly understand the exam question (which Mrs. Rose doesn't gloss in Tamil), or the sample answer she had written on the board. This example shows how the teacher uses English in a direct citation of the subject material (reading the exam question and writing the answer), and Tamil elsewhere (giving the students directions for the assignment and talking to them individually). This is similar to the way teachers mix "literary" and "spoken" Tamil in Tamil-medium subjects (see chapter four).

In lines 4 and 7, Mani teases Michael and the other students around them about his inability to understand the subject material. Mani himself is a borderline student, who was positioned to either narrowly pass or fail the O-level exam. By teasing Michael, here, he seems to draw attention away from his own academic faults (and his own

potential misunderstanding of the lesson). Both Michael and Mani also seem to be showing off for the recorder.

While Michael may have had some interest in understanding the lesson, he does not seem to want the teacher to come over and help him. When the teacher comes to the back of the classroom, Michael pretends to understand what had written in his notebook, either to perform for his classmates or just to get her to go away. When Mrs. Rose returns to the front of the classroom, Michael tells his classmates, “I don’t understand anything that [the teacher] wrote in the notebook.” By feigning sincerity and then confessing his misunderstanding to his fellow students, Michael acts to reinforce the barrier between students and teachers, and slightly undermine the teacher’s authority (by making the teacher’s efforts seem ridiculous and useless). Both of these strategies, in turn, serve to protect himself and his fellow students from the teacher’s evaluative gaze (which is very important to Michael as he is frequently positioned as a poor student).

In this example, it is evident that Michael’s interest in the lesson was more for the sake of showing involvement with his fellow students in a collaborative task, than in actually trying to understand the lesson. However, students’ various collaborative strategies (involving linguistic and non-linguistic communication) can also be understood as vital in allowing them to manage the demands of their classroom tasks. For example, as a common pattern, after the lecture was finished, students would be given an in-class written assignment. After completing it, they were supposed to bring them up to the teacher to be corrected. Often, the student who finished it first would run up and have the assignment corrected. When the student sat back down, he or she would pass over the corrected notebook other students, who would copy down the correct answer (and thus

would get a perfect mark on the assignment). I observed teachers calling student out on this, but most of the time they seemed tolerant of this practice (or did not think it was worth the effort of disciplining students over it).

It was also very common for students to employ collaborative strategies during evaluative activities. At Hindu College, stronger students would often help weaker students on exams. For example, in November 2007, because of lack of space at the school, the Hindu College principal had arranged for the Grade 11 students to take a series of practice exams for O-level exam at the nearby Kandy Pillayar Kovil (where they would also meet before the O-level exam). I volunteered to help the teachers hand out the exams, and monitor the students while they wrote the exams. In those three weeks, I observed some of the most elaborate cheating methods I had ever seen. These involved the boys more so than the girls. I noticed that some of the other boys were writing their exam in a way that opened it up for view from the students behind them. On the multiple exam portion of a “social” exam, I noticed that some boys giving out answers using elaborate hand gestures. For example, to signal “for number 2, the answer is c,” they would hold up two fingers (for number two) and then three fingers (for letter c). I also noticed some of the boys writing answers on scrap paper and then throwing the paper on the floor as rubbish. Another boy would then pick up the crumpled paper, unfold it, and copy down the answer. Most of these practices followed a common pattern, where the stronger students helped the weaker students. Vinod, who was considered to be the “star” student, was particularly willing to give out answers to the other boys (in many ways, I think he was expected to). One day I asked a teacher I was monitoring an exam with what she thought about the students’ cheating practices. She acted like she didn’t

understand what I was saying. Looking at the students' exam results, I noticed that even though weaker boys had gotten so much help from Vinod, they had still managed to miserably fail their exams, getting marks like 20 out of 100 points (the highest score was around 80). Thus, it seemed likely that teachers were aware of these practices, but did not deem it necessary to interrupt them. On the O-Level exam itself, teachers said that students were very closely monitored to avoid cheating.<sup>101</sup>

I have specifically looked at how students ideologically differentiate their interactions with one another from teacher/student classroom interactions. I have emphasized how, through their interactional strategies (away from the seeming earshot of teachers), students mediate teacher/student interaction, mitigate evaluation, and manage the demands of their classroom tasks. In the second part of the chapter, I expand outward from Hindu College and look at how students interact in various non-school arenas. First, I discuss the broad constraints that Tamil students (both Up-country and North and East) face in Sinhalese-majority Kandy. Next, I show how (just as in school-settings) the strategies students employ in their peer networks are crucial for allowing them to move through Kandy town in a way that is protected from monitoring and evaluation. I thus argue that the most relevant contrast is not necessarily between students' interactions in school and non-school settings, but between students' interactions in which adults are privy and not-privy.

## **Non-School Arenas**

### **Tamil Youth in Sinhalese-Majority Kandy**

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<sup>101</sup> Despite this, however, there was much talk among Kandy students about schools that were particularly known for cheating (one of them being an elite Kandy boys' private school).

In the Sinhalese-majority South, Tamil youth, regardless of their sub-ethnic or regional background are at a considerable risk of arrest or disappearance on LTTE suspicion. Though Up-country Tamils (which comprise the majority of Hindu College students) have historically had little association with the LTTE, in this heightened period in the ethnic conflict, all Tamils are being marked as potential Tigers. Even a brief glance at a Tamil newspaper reveals that Up-country Tamils are frequently being arrested on LTTE suspicion. At the same time that Up-country Tamils may be collapsed with North and East Tamils, they are also stigmatized by their association with tea estate labor (by both Sinhalese and other Tamil-speaking groups). Students may thus be stigmatized on the basis of their Tamil identity, as well as on the basis of their sub-ethnic, class, and caste (which is related to the Up-country/North and East division) backgrounds.<sup>102</sup>

At certain times and circumstances a students' ethnic or religious identity may be more apparent, while at other times it may be more ambiguous. All public and private schools in Sri Lanka require students to wear uniforms. For boys, the uniform consists of a white short-sleeve shirt (with a badge bearing their school emblem), blue or white shorts for boys in Grades 1-7, and white long pants for boys from Grades 8-13. Girls wear a white below the knee-length dresses, with a tie bearing their school emblems. Though students' ethnic identities are not immediately evident from their uniforms, they are potentially evident from other aspects of their physical appearance. In Kandy, most Hindu girls wear small black bindis (*poTTu*) with their school uniforms. Though the wearing of bindis can also be associated with high fashion in South Asia and beyond,<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Though Up-country Tamils hail from a variety of caste backgrounds, North and East Tamils often associate Up-country Tamils as being uniformly low-caste.

<sup>103</sup> In Sri Lanka, there is a Sinhala (as well as a Tamil) version of the US reality show, American Idol. Some of the girls at Hindu College were delighted to see that some of the Sinhalese contestants wore bindis

in Sri Lanka, they are commonly considered to be overt markers of Tamil ethnic identity.

At Hindu College, Hindu girls get a lot of pressure to wear bindis from their fellow classmates. Sometimes if a girl didn't wear one, her classmates would tease her about it.

<sup>104</sup> When not in their school uniforms, most girls wear a *shalwar kameez* (a long tunic, draw-string pants, and a shawl), which is generally associated with Tamils and

Muslims.<sup>105</sup> In contrast to girls, boy's ethnicities, on the other hand, are much less evident from their dress.

In addition to physical appearance, students may also be identified on the basis of their speech (through speaking Tamil, or speaking Sinhala with a recognizable Tamil accent). There is a long history of Sinhalese identifying Tamils on the basis of how they pronounce certain words. During the anti-Tamil ethnic riots of May 1983 (so-called "Black July"), Sinhalese mobs gave people linguistic tests to see if they were Tamil. In highly entextualized example, the mobs held up a bucket and force people to tell them what it was. In Tamil, /b/ is not realized initially. Thus, if a person pronounced the word "bucket" as "*vaaldhiya*," rather than the Sinhala "*baaldhiya*," they would be recognized as Tamil, and beaten or killed.

The immediate area around Hindu College is highly multilingual and multiethnic.

There are Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslim owned shops, a mosque, the Kandy Pillayar

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with their outfits. For the contestants, the wearing of the bindis was more of a pan-South Asian fashion trend, but the girls interpreted it as a sign of acceptance towards Tamils and Hinduism.

<sup>104</sup> As Hindu College, I was also given a lot of pressure to wear a bindi, from both students and teachers. I think that for them, my wearing of a bindi showed that I was interested in being a part of the school, and their larger Tamil, Hindu community. Sometimes I would leave my bindi on, while traveling home on the bus. People would often stare at me, or give me hostile looks. In Welawatta (a traditionally Jaffna Tamil neighborhood that has been a hot bed of ethnic conflict), I came out of a Hindu temple wearing a large *puja* mark of my forehead. Two young Sinhalese soldiers, who were positioned at a nearby checkpoint, questioned me about why I was wearing a mark. I replied in Sinhala that I had visited a Hindu Temple (*kovil*), and that I wanted to go to a Buddhist temple (*pansala*), and they seemed appeased.

<sup>105</sup> Tamils and Muslims generally tie the Shalwar Kameez scarf a little differently. Muslims firmly crease it around the neck while Tamils keep it more loosely.

Kovil, the main bus stand, and the central police station. As you near closer to the center of Kandy town (less than a half kilometer from Hindu College), which consists of the *Dalida Maligawa* (The Temple of the Tooth which holds the tooth relic of the Buddha), the Kandy lake, and the main commercial center, the Sinhalese Buddhist orientation of the town is much more apparent. In the center of town, in order to protect the Temple of the Tooth, there is also a very strong police and army presence, and numerous checkpoints (which Tamil must approach with considerable caution). I would often notice Sinhalese students strolling around the lake and the *Dalida Maligawa* after school, but rarely Tamil students (likely because of security concerns).

In contrast to Colombo, where ethnic tensions were often in sharper relief,<sup>106</sup> in Kandy Tamils tended to be less concerned about overtly displaying their Tamil identities through religious markers, dress, or their speech. However, as the following examples indicate, Tamils were certainly aware of speaking Tamil in public spaces in Kandy town. One day I rode the bus home with a Grade 11 Hindu College girl, Geetha, and her younger sister, who is in Grade one. While waiting for the bus to depart, the little girl took out her notebook and asked me, in Tamil, if I would look at her drawing. Geetha slapped her on the leg, and crouching down to speak right into her, told her not to shout on the bus (*busla kaTTaaDiinga*).<sup>107</sup> In buses in Sri Lanka, there are particularly strict norms of conduct. People tend to ride to bus in near to total silence (this is in direct

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<sup>106</sup> In Colombo, I got to know some Up-country Tamil housemaids who would try to conceal their Tamil identity when they went outside. Instead of wearing a *shalwar kameez* or an Indian tied sari, which indicates their Tamil identity, they would wear ethnically neutral (or slightly Sinhalese) skirts and blouses. My friend told me that when she goes to the market, and buys her groceries in Sinhala, for all intensive purposes she is a Sinhalese lady. I noticed, however, that when she went to the market she would carry a grocery list, written in Tamil, which she would not try to conceal from view. As this example indicates, the degree to which people concealed their ethnic identities is related to their personal and financial situations. Those in precarious positions felt that they needed to be particularly careful of themselves in public spaces.

contrast to South India where people talk on the bus much more freely). The tendency to be silent on the bus is related to a general fear of public accountability, which was intensified during heightened periods in the ethnic conflict. On another occasion, while I was eating lunch with a group of teachers at Hindu College, one teacher reported to us, with shock, that she had recently seen a Tamil teacher from another school talking loudly with her sister while walking through the center of Kandy town. The teachers said that she could not believe that the teacher would do this. Another teacher then commented that she is fearless because her husband is a retired police officer.

It is common for Sinhalese people to comment that they sometimes get nervous when people speak Tamil in public spaces, as they cannot tell what they are saying. While they may be saying something innocuous, they may also be planning a suicide attack or a bombing. But the issue of speaking Tamil in public spaces is more complex than this, as many Sinhalese, particularly in Kandy and other Up-country regions, have a passive understanding of Tamil (though they may not admit to it).<sup>108</sup> The aversion of Sinhalese to Tamils speaking Tamil in public space is not only related to security concerns, but to the idea that Kandy should be Sinhala-only. Thus, the very act of speaking Tamil publically can be construed as offensive.<sup>109</sup>

### **Interacting and Inhabiting Spaces in Kandy Town**

In this section, I explore how Hindu College students interact with their school-based peer groups in Kandy town. As related to gender norms, girls and boys inhabit

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<sup>108</sup> For example, for one month I lived with a Sinhalese family in Kandy who had spent thirty years living on a tea plantation in Hatton (the father was an estate manager). They nevertheless insisted that they didn't speak Tamil. While living at the house, I spent a lot of time conversing in Tamil with their beloved Up-country Tamil cook, Michael, who is a Tamil/Sinhala bilingual. One time during a conversation with Michael, when I inadvertently used the Hindi word for "meat" rather than the Tamil word, the mother, who was sitting nearby, immediately corrected me with the Tamil word.

<sup>109</sup> This is reminiscent of Urciuoli (1991) argument that for Spanish speakers in the US, the very act of speaking Spanish in white public space can be construed as offensive.



non-school arenas in very different ways. Rather than going directly home after school, boys, who generally move around in large groups, would often hang around Kandy town, ducking into shops or tuition centers, standing in alleys, or waiting together by the bus stand. Girls, who usually moved around in groups of two or three, as a result of norms of gender propriety, were much more restricted in terms of where they could go, and who they could go with. Out of necessity, most Hindu College girls are allowed to commute to and from school alone or with peers, but were supposed to come home directly after school (as going around town unnecessarily is highly frowned upon).

My own gender played a significant role in my research with the Grade 11 students. As a female, I found it much easier to interact with the girls than the boys. Within the first month of my research at Hindu College, two of the Grade 11 girls invited me to their homes. Shortly after this, some of the Grade 11 girls started inviting me to accompany them on their after-school walk along the main commercial road to the bus stand (toward Kandy town). But while they were comfortable interacting with me and allowing me to observe them, they did not want to be recorded. By contrast, boys were much more reluctant to invite me to their homes, and did not feel comfortable walking through Kandy town with me. When I came across them in Kandy town, I would say hello and chat briefly with them before going about my way.

Because of the difficulty of observing the boys in non-school settings, I decided to employ a different research methodology. As the boys enjoyed being recorded, I asked two of the boys, Mani and Michael<sup>110</sup> to carry an mp3 recorder, and record their speech outside of school. Thus, I had very different vantage points in which to observe how

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<sup>110</sup> At first, the Hindu College Principal was adverse to my decision to choose these two students, recommending that I ask Vinod (because he was the “best” student), he eventually approved it.

Hindu College girls and boys interacted in Kandy town. In the following, I contrast the ways in which the girls and boys interacted in Kandy town in their school-based peer groups. I look at the interactional strategies they employ to avoid surveillance, as well as the how they interact with shopkeepers, bus conductors, and others as they commute to and from school.

When schools get out at 1:45 pm, Kandy town is particularly congested. The traffic comes to an almost complete stop, and the sidewalks are invariably full of shoppers, people commuting to and from work, and school students. After school, groups of Grade 11 girls would walk along the main commercial road to the bus stand. When they walked, they would converse with one another in Tamil. I observed that in order to avoid being overheard by bystanders, they would walk close enough to one another so that they could whisper in each other's ears. In order for me to hear what a particular girl was saying I had to bend down and crane my neck. When people would walk particularly close to us (passing through us or walking along side us), the girls would quickly grow silent. When they reached the bus stand, they would huddle together in a tight circle, and chat with one another before going their separate ways.

And though they walked this same route every day, the girls would rarely interact with those around them—shopkeepers, street vendors, or others. On a few occasions, I accompanied girls into shops. I noticed that the girls seemed more comfortable interacting in Tamil and Muslim owned shops than in Sinhalese owned shops. As an example, on one occasion, I went with two Grade 11 girls to a small gift shop down the street from Hindu College, owned by an elderly Muslim man. One of the girls, Geetha, wanted to buy a birthday gift for her math teacher. As they browsed for gifts, they freely

chatted with the shopkeeper about their upcoming O-level exams. When I asked one of the girls, Geetha, why she had been so friendly with the shopkeeper (I thought they had known each other), she explained that it was because he was Muslim. I think she was referring to the intimate affect that is typical of the way Muslim proprietors talk to their customers. The ease by which these girls interacted in the Muslim owned shop contrasted with the way these same girls interacted in a Sinhalese owned shop. One day I treated a group of eight Hindu College girls (including the two girls from the above interaction) to soy ice cream at a Sinhalese-owned shop just down the street from the gift shop. In this setting, the girls seemed much more reserved. While I ordered the ice cream, they sat on the chairs that ran along the perimeter of the shop, silently watching me. As they ate their ice cream, they whispered to one another in Tamil.

When I gave two of the Grade 11 boys, Mani and Michael, my mp3 recorder, I did not give them any specific instructions other than to record their speech outside of school. I found that most of what they recorded was their interactions with other Grade 11 boys as they walked around Kandy town. In the recordings, it was possible to hear the boys chatting in Tamil as they walked down the street, ducked into shops, or chatted at the bus stand. From the background noise (such as the bus conductors yelling out destinations) it was usually possible to guess their locations at a given time. I supplemented information from these recordings with visual observations I had made of the boys on other occasions. In contrast with the girls, the boys were less controlled in their behavior (they tended to shout and act a little more physically unruly). However, they seemed to employ similar interactional strategies to avoid monitoring and surveillance. While the girls did not maintain much physical contact with one another,

boys usually walked with their arms around each other's shoulders. By walking so closely to one another, they could talk to each other without having others hear them.

On one of the recordings that Mani gave me, there was evidence of boys' metapragmatic awareness of their conduct (both linguistic and non-linguistic) when walking on the road. As they are leaving their classroom space (it is possible to hear Mrs. Rose talking in the background), Jothis is teasing Mani about calling a girl (every boy in the Grade 11 class would be paired up with a girl, who they would be frequently teased about). When Jothis persists, Mani disciplines him for shouting on the road. It is not completely clear whether Mani disciplines his friends about their conduct on the road out of concern for such propriety, or to deflect attention from their teasing. Also displayed in this interaction, is the boys' use of the intimate addressive form, "**Daa**," which is marked in bold.

(I have marked the use of honorific (hon.) and non-honorific (non-hon.) and the use of the emphatic (emph.). The intimate addressive term, "Da," is marked in bold.)

<p><b>Jothis:</b> aa, sms paNNiDuvan yaarukku hello naa kausalya kattaikkiReen ah kausalya eppaDi irukkiinga kausalya (They walk out onto the road) <b>Mani:</b> Michael enga<b>Daa</b> poonaa</p> <p><b>Michael:</b> Deey koDaya taa</p> <p><b>Jothis:</b> innikki pooy anda puLLakki call paNNU Mani. Deey sarinu sollu<b>Daa</b> appadaa(n) viDuvee(n) <b>Mani:</b> Deey rooDla pooRa neeroo(m) kattaama poongaDa manusa maadiri poonga<b>Daa</b></p>	<p><b>Jothis:</b> Ah, who will he be SMS-ing? "Hello, this is kausalya speaking" "Ah, kausalya, how are you kausalya?" (They walk out onto the road) <b>Mani:</b> Where <b>Daa</b> did Michael (non-hon.) go? <b>Michael:</b> Hey, give me (non-hon.) the umbrella. <b>Jothis:</b> Go and call (non-hon.) that girl today, Mani Hey, say "okay" <b>Da</b> and then (emph.) I will leave it. <b>Mani:</b> Hey, when you go on the road, go without shouting, go (honorific) like a human being <b>Da</b>.</p>
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While I had observed some of the Grade 11 girls interacting briefly in Sinhala with shopkeeper and bus conductors, in the ten recordings that the boys gave me, there were

no examples of the boys using any Sinhala, either with each other, or with others (such as shopkeepers, street vendors etc.). This may indicate that the boys moved through Kandy town in a way that avoided interacting in Sinhala.

In considering these observations, it is difficult to know to what extent the boys and girls explicitly monitored their behavior, and how much was at the level of habit. In addition, it is impossible to know the relationship between presumed and actual threats to their safety and security. However, it is possible to determine that students within their school-based peer networks have highly patterned ways of moving through and interacting in Kandy town. In general, both the boys and girls avoided interacting with unknown others. In addition, they also employed linguistic and non-linguistic strategies to avoid monitoring and surveillance. In many ways, this collective action is similar to the ways in which they worked together to make sure that their actions remained below the threshold of teacher intervention. For both the boys and the girls, their peer networks provided a kind of safety-net in which to move through Kandy town with ease. If they stayed in packs, their internal differences (their differing sociolinguistic competencies and confidence levels walking through Sinhalese-majority spaces) were less evident. In addition, their immediate visible identity as school students (as evident from their uniforms) also helped to create a protective barrier between themselves, and those around them.

As I have shown, in school and non-school settings, students have very different constraints on their linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. At school, they must learn to manage teacher evaluation. In non-school settings, they must manage different modes of monitoring and surveillance as Tamil-minorities in Sinhalese public space. However, in

both school and non-school settings, their interactional strategies within their school-based peer groups are essential. In this discussion, however, it is crucial to point out that Hindu College students did not stay with their school-based peer groups very long. When they reached the bus stand, they went their separate ways, usually alone. In some ways, being away from the gaze of their school-based peer groups was liberating in that they did not have to manage certain kinds of constraints and accountability. But it also made students, who have very different ability levels in Sinhala and different levels of comfort moving through different space, considerably more vulnerable. In the next section of this chapter, I consider the way students interact outside of their school-based peer networks. Focusing on two Hindu College students, Mani and Saachee, I show how factors such as gender, sociolinguistic proficiencies, and familiar circumstances impact the way they interact in and inhabit different spaces in Kandy town and surrounding areas (such as homes, shops, and the street). I begin with Mani and move on to Saachee.

### **Mani**

Mani is from Digana, a Tamil-majority tea plantation area about a forty minute bus ride from Kandy town. In contrast with most of the other Grade 11 boys, Mani's spoken Sinhala skills are weak. I never observed Mani speaking any Sinhala in school or non-school contexts. While disinterested in Sinhala, Mani particularly prided himself on his English-speaking ability, which he related to his father, who had learned English while working as a driver in Jordan (his father was away at the time of this research).

As I discussed, most of the recordings that Mani gave to me were of his interactions with other Grade 11 boys as they moved through Kandy town. One recording, which I describe below, was particularly telling in showing the way in which

Mani moved through and inhabited different spaces in Kandy town. The recording begins when Michael, Mani, and four other Hindu College boys leave school and begin walking on the main road toward the bus stand. The boys chat in Tamil as they walk down the main road, cross the street, and approach the bus stand. After standing and chatting for a few minutes about their plans for the evening, they part ways, and Mani is left standing alone. A few minutes later, it is possible to hear the bus conductor yell out “Digana, Digana, Digana...” Mani boards the bus (as evident from the sound of his foot on the metal step of the bus), and for the next forty minutes (the time it takes to go to Digana), there is complete silence. The only audible noise is static, and the sound of traffic on the road.

Next, it is possible to hear the sound of Mani’s feet on the ground, as he gets off the bus, and starts walking. As Mani enters a shop near the bus stand, it is possible to hear multiple clerks interacting with customers in Sinhala. It is then possible to hear Mani asking a Tamil-speaking clerk for a packet of hair gel. It is common for large shops to employ both Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking clerks to maximize their customer base.

This interaction is presented below:

<p><b>Mani:</b> uncle anju ruva jell irukku daanee</p> <p><b>Clerk:</b> anju ruvaa jella?</p> <p><b>Mani:</b> perella teriyaadu gold color endu c endu</p> <p><b>Clerk:</b> hmm...</p>	<p><b>Mani:</b> Uncle, there is five rupee gel, isn't there?</p> <p><b>Clerk:</b> The five rupee gel?</p> <p><b>Mani:</b> I don't know the name and all the gold one. It begins with “c”</p> <p><b>Clerk:</b> hmm...</p>
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As Mani leaves the shop, it is possible to hear the voices of two other Tamil boys in the background. Boy A asks boy B for money. When boy B refuses, boy A comments that Boy B cannot give him the money because he spent it all on a prostitute (he used the

word “*saaman*,” which literally means “thing”). Boy A then addresses Mani, asking him if he is taking the O-level exam for a second time, and Mani clarifies that he is taking it for the first time. When the boy asks him if he just came from class, Mani replies facetiously that he had been to see a bride (for an arranged marriage). After chatting a little while longer, Mani carefully takes his leave from the boys, and turns off the recording (the reason for this is not known) (See Appendix 5 for the transcript of this exchange).

When I first listened to this recording, I was struck by how representative it seems of Mani’s experience moving through and interacting in Kandy town (or of Tamil students in general). When Mani leaves his friends, he is left to go about his bus ride alone. The forty minutes of silence on the recorder is representative (as an indexical icon) of the experience of riding the bus in Sri Lanka. Mani’s interaction in the shop indicates how he may have explicitly sought out a Tamil-speaking clerk, thus avoiding speaking Sinhala. The interaction with the boys from his neighborhood shows how he must deal with such older and potentially rough boys, in order to be able to go about his way. When I played this recording to my research assistant, Kumudhini, she reacted very strongly. She said that the recording demonstrated exactly what it is like for Tamil youth in Kandy town. She said that from the recording she had a strong suspicion that, as is common for Tamils without sufficient competency in Sinhala, Mani moves through Kandy town in a way that is restricted to his Tamil-speaking networks and contacts.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> It may be the case that Kumudhini’s own experiences influenced the way that she interpreted this recording. Kumudhini comes from an upper middle class and highly educated Up-country Tamil family. However, because her education exclusively focused on Tamil and English (she is an English teacher), she has limited proficiency in Sinhala. This makes certain aspects of her daily life, from moving through Kandy town, or even filling out government documents, very difficult.



As this example shows, while the relative difficulty that students may have interacting in certain spaces may be partially concealed when students are with their school-based peer networks, when they break away from them, they are more apparent. Mani, as a boy, has freedom to move through public space on his own. However, in contrast to boys from ethnically mixed Kandy neighborhoods (such as Michael), Mani, partly because of his limited proficiency in Sinhala, is particularly uncomfortable moving through Kandy town and surrounding areas. In the next section, I look at how Saachee, as related to her gender and familial situation, is much more constrained than Mani in the way she inhabits non-school arenas.

### **Saachee**

Saachee had come to Hindu College three years before from a tea plantation area in Nuwara Eliya district, south of Kandy. As the small Tamil-medium school she had attended in Nuwara Eliya district was weak, she was behind in her studies. In addition, because she grew up in a Tamil-majority area, her spoken (as well as written) Sinhala was very limited (worse than Mani's). Since coming to Kandy, however, she had been intent on catching up on the O-level syllabus, as well as to improve her competency in spoken Sinhala and English.

Saachee's parents had recently gotten divorced, which is highly stigmatized among Up-country Tamils, as well as other social groups.<sup>112</sup> Following the divorce, Saachee's mother, who is a home science teacher in a small Tamil school in Nuwara Eliya, decided to send her to live with her maternal uncle, who owns a large medical shop in the center of Kandy town and another in Colombo. Her mother remained with some

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<sup>112</sup> In addition, in Sri Lanka the divorce process is very lengthy and difficult. An Up-country Tamil friend of mine was only granted a divorce after she had been living separately from her husband for ten years.

relatives in Nuwara Eliya, and often came to visit Saachee. The youngest sister was living with her father in Nuwara Eliya. Because of his drinking problem, her sister's education and overall well being was a constant concern for Saachee.

About a month into my research, Saachee asked me if I would come to her house for lunch on the upcoming Poya Day (a Buddhist public holiday which occurs on every full moon day). She said that her maternal uncle's youngest son, who she referred to as *aNNan* (older brother),<sup>113</sup> was interested in going to the US, and wanted to talk to me about it. Saachee's family is *motta vellalar*, a dominant Up-country Tamil caste.<sup>114</sup> With businesses and property in Kandy and Colombo, they are part of the Up-country Tamil elite. Though they mostly speak Tamil at home, they are highly proficient in both Sinhala and English. Though Saachee benefited from some of their resources, Saachee and her mother have a subordinate position within the extended family. Tellingly, at Hindu College, the principal and teachers didn't treat Saachee as a privileged student, but seemed concerned about her family situation. On a survey that I had given to the Grade 11 students I asked them to describe their family's financial situation. Saachee approached me and said she didn't know whether to put wealthy (*vasudi*) or poor (*kashdam*), as she didn't know whether to answer the question in terms of her immediate family or her extended family. She ended up writing "*kashdam*."

Saachee's uncle and his family live in Purnawatta, a neighborhood next to Kandy's central cemetery. Purnawatta has traditionally had stigmatized associations because it was home to a large number of low-caste Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims

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<sup>113</sup> It is important to point out that he is a cross-cousin, which is considered to be a marriageable cousin. Given the class disparities between the two families, as well as many other factors, it is very unlikely that this cousin would marry Saachee. However, their status as cross-cousins indicates something about the nature of their relationship.

<sup>114</sup> In Kandy, Up-country *motta vellalars* have long been significant land owners.

(many of whom are municipal and leather workers). However, as was the case with many similar Kandy neighborhoods, it has very recently been settled by wealthy families (including Jaffna Tamils with access to money from foreign remittances).<sup>115</sup>

Saachee's uncle's large, gated home stands out sharply from the small homes and the shanty settlements surrounding it. In front of the house is a large garage housing two cars, a rarity in Sri Lanka given the heavy import taxes on cars, and the rising cost of petrol due to war-related inflation. There were also two guard dogs, a Doberman and a German shepherd, imported from abroad.

On my first visit to the house, Saachee met me at the bus stop, and walked with me up to her house. As we approached the house, Saachee's cousin came out and opened the gate for us. He didn't look at us or say anything. Saachee brought me in and sat me down on a beige leather couch. In front of us was a large TV tuned to Sun TV (a Tamil channel broadcast from India). Saachee's mom came in from the kitchen wearing a "nightie" (a long cotton tunic or housedress which Tamil women often wear in and around the home), with her hair in a long braid. After greeting me, she sat down next to me, but didn't say much. Saachee's cousin came in and sat on a chair on the other side of me. He said nothing, but intensely stared at the television screen.

After a few minutes, Saachee's cousin, without looking at us, got up and went into one of the back rooms. The second he left, Saachee asked me in Tamil "Why didn't you talk?" I turned to her mother and started talking to her. But Saachee interrupted and said that she was asking why I didn't talk to her cousin. I said that I wasn't sure if he

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<sup>115</sup> The large numbers of Jaffna Tamil who sought asylum in North America, Canada, and Australia often send home remittances to their families in Sri Lanka, providing these families with significant extra income.

wanted to talk to me or not. She insisted, “*ille, appaDi ille* (No, it’s not like that), and ran into the back room to get him.

When he came back in we had a long conversation, in English, about his interest in going to the US or Canada for advanced studies. During this entire conversation Saachee and her mother sat facing the TV, exchanging whispers to one another in Tamil. It seemed to me that Saachee’s cousin already knew a lot about studying abroad, but wanted to see what resources I would offer him. Though he didn’t initially mention this, I learned that he had an older brother living in Toronto, Canada. Apparently he had settled in Jaffna before 1983, and gotten a visa to Canada as a war refugee.<sup>116</sup> When we were finished talking, he excused himself and said he needed to get back to the medical shop. When he was ready to leave, he yelled “Saachee, gate!” and Saachee rushed to close the gate behind him.

When she came back from locking the gate, Saachee immediately asked me, in Tamil, “Can you take him to the US with you? (*avarai US-ukku kuTTiTTu poha muDiyumaa?*)”<sup>117</sup> It was evident from this comment, and from the rest of our conversation, that Saachee and her mother had understood little of my interaction with the cousin. In addition, they also seemed to have little understanding of his position and situation.

On the other occasions when I visited Saachee’s house, her uncle and his family were not at home. It was during these times when Saachee and I had free reign of the

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<sup>116</sup> I told him that I could advise him in terms of applying to graduate school, but in terms of getting a visa to the US or Canada, it would be better to ask his brother in Toronto, who would have access to networks of Sri Lankan Tamils living abroad.

<sup>117</sup> Many people I spoke to who didn’t have immediate knowledge of immigration processes thought that as a US citizen I could just bring a Sri Lankan back to the US with me, if I so desired. It took a lot of effort to constantly explain to people that the visa and immigration process is much more involved and difficult than this.

house, and all it had to offer. We would sit on the couch and watch Hollywood movies on DVD (such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*), as well as Star TV. One time, when I brought a camera, Saachee asked me to photograph her in an array of ensembles borrowed from her aunt's closet: jeans and a t-shirt, a fancy beaded *shalwar kameez*, and a silk sari. The family's tailor, an elderly Up-country Tamil man, would often drop by and sit around the house. On this occasion he especially asked me if I could photograph him in front of the red Honda coupe.

After a few visits, Saachee started to feel comfortable enough with me to start speaking English with me. We spent a lot of time reading through English children's books that I had brought, and practicing some simple conversations. Saachee was still struggling to put basic sentences together. One time, Saachee's nine year old cousin was visiting. Her father was Tamil (another uncle) and her mother was Sinhalese.<sup>118</sup> Her cousin knew some basic Tamil, but mainly conversed in Sinhala. At Saachee's request, the little girl had been helping Saachee improve her Sinhala. That visit, we sat outside on the veranda for hours, trying to describe aspects of the environment around us (the flowers in the garden, the parrots in the trees, and the dog tied up at the house) in Sinhala, English, and then Tamil.

Though Saachee's uncle was helping her and her mother, Saachee's position in the extended family was precarious. This was worsened by the shame that her mother's divorce brought to the family. Given the family's wealth, it was unusual that they didn't seem to have a regular maid or cook. As is common in these kinds of situations within extended families, Saachee likely earned her stay in the house by doing household

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<sup>118</sup> This may indicate that the family may have an open attitude about "love"(non-arranged) marriages outside of their caste and ethnic group, or this particular marriage may been a source of controversy within the family.

chores. My research assistant, Kumudhini, who was a distant relative of Saachee's, said that she also suspected that this was the case.

Saachee's family situation, as well as other factors (gender, ethnicity, and class), mediate the way she interacted in her home, her immediate neighborhood, and Kandy town. In contrast to the Grade 11 boys, as a girl, she is not able to go around Kandy town alone. On top of this, she doesn't have very strong school-based peer networks. She would talk to her classmates in school, but didn't associate with them outside of school. This was partly because she was new to the school, and partly because her life experiences were a little different from that of her classmates. Saachee's daily routine consisted of commuting to and from school by bus (either alone or with a relative or one of her uncle's employees), her uncle's medical shop, and her home.

But, as I have shown, despite the constraints that Saachee faced, she was able to find ways to escape the immediate gaze (and evaluation) of her extended family. It was when her family was away that she would take it upon herself to have free reign of the home, constructing impromptu peer groups with her younger cousin, her family's tailor, a young boy who lived in the nearby shanty settlement, and me. Saachee was also adept at taking advantage of the resources around her to improve her Sinhala and English. For both Saachee and Mani, their immediate goals had a lot to do with the skills they immediately sought to acquire. Mani had an ambition to work abroad like his father, and thus solely devoted to learning English (at the expense of Sinhala). He didn't imagine a future for himself in Sri Lanka, but abroad. Saachee, on the other hand sought to improve both her English and her Sinhala to fit in with her multilingual and middle-class extended family (which may never be possible), and to inhabit Kandy town with ease.

Saachee, Mani, and the rest of the Grade 11 students were at a transitional period in their lives. Firmly settled into their everyday routines as school students, they knew that as soon as they take the O-level exam, their lives would abruptly change. Before concluding this chapter, I look at the Hindu College students' trajectories after completing the O-level exam.

### **The O-Level Exam**

A symbolic culmination of their schooling, in terms of their employment opportunities and the social networks in which they would move, the O-level exam has a large bearing on the future course of their lives. Though in Sri Lanka level of education certainly does not have a direct correlation with employment (with very high unemployment levels among university graduates), without O-levels it is hard to access even the lowest-level employment.

During a grueling five days (every morning of which they met up at the Pillayar Kovil), the Hindu College students completed their O-level exams. They then waited at home for several months for their exam results. During this period, I saw some of the students, when they came in to talk to the principal or teachers. I did not see Michael or Mani after they took the O-level exam. The next time I saw them was when they both came to Hindu College with their mothers (Michael's mother had recently returned from the Middle East) to get their results. Michael found out that he had failed the exam in almost every subject. Mani found out that he had just narrowly failed it. To my surprise, he had actually failed English.

After getting his results, Mani and his mother left the school quietly. Michael, after finding out that he had failed in almost all of his subjects, walked out of the school

crying, and stood across the street (his mother had left separately). Three of the girls in the Grade 11 class who had been close to him, Sasika, Thangam, and Ani (all of whom had excelled on the exam and qualified to do their A-levels at Girls' College, a prestigious national school), called out to him, trying to get him to come back inside and talk to them, but he refused. With tears in her eyes, Sasika commented, "*paavam Michael* (poor Michael)." He remained standing on the street for another twenty minutes watching us, and then went away.

Over the next few months, I would occasionally run into Hindu College girls, who would stop by to help the principal with some tasks, or just to say hello. I repeatedly asked them if they had seen Mani or Michael, and they said that they hadn't seen or heard from them. One girl had tried to call Michael, but his mobile phone number was no longer active. Jothis (who failed the exam) came to the school to tell the principal that he was moving to Iraq, where his father had gotten a job at an athletic center on a US army base. Though concerned about safety issues, Jothis had high hopes of getting some additional education, and of improving his English. The Muslim science teacher took him aside and explained that it would be dangerous in Iraq, and that he should try to remain on the US army base at all times.

Earlier in the year I had asked Saachee what she planned to do while she was waiting for her O-level results. Saachee said that she planned to stay with her aunt in Colombo and do an IT course. After the O-levels, however, Saachee remained in Kandy with her uncle, helping out in the medical shop. When the O-level results came in, I didn't immediately hear from Saachee. When I went to talk with the principal I found



out that Saachee had failed her O-levels by only one subject. He told me that he had strongly recommended to Saachee that she take the exam again the following year.

When I met Saachee a few weeks after this, she said that she wanted to study and retake the exam, but that her uncle wanted her to take Singer sewing classes instead. This indicated that her family was no longer interested in investing in her education, and wanted her to start contributing financially to the family. A few months later, Saachee called me from a public phone, when I was visiting a Muslim family who lived nearby to me. Saachee said that she was having some problems at her uncle's house, and needed a place to stay. As it was not permitted to have any overnight guests at my apartment,<sup>119</sup> my friend Meena said that Saachee could stay with her for a couple of days. But the phone call was cut, and I tried to call her back but the number she had called from was unavailable (it was probably a pay phone). Unfortunately, I had to return to the US shortly after this, and since this, I haven't been able to get in touch with Saachee.

When students pass their O-level exams they almost always go on to A-levels, either at large multi-medium school (like Girls' College), or small Tamil-medium provincial schools. When students fail their O-level exams, their transition period is often very difficult. It is common for both boys and girls to remain at home for years, doing nothing. Most students will eventually do some sort of vocational training (sewing for girls or wood or metalworking for boys), others find low-level employment (such as working at a shop or doing manual labor). It is also not uncommon for boys to get involved in illegal activities, such as marijuana dealing.

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<sup>119</sup> I was renting an annex from private academic institute. A few months before, there had been a riot at the University of Peradeniya between the Science and Engineering faculties. An Up-country Tamil female friend of mine who was studying at the University, asked to stay with me for a few days as she feared for her safety. The staff at the institute, finding out that I was keeping a guest, forbade me from every having overnight guests again.

Students who go on to A-levels replace their old peer networks with new ones. Students who fail O-levels, however, lose most of their school-based peer networks. In combination with this, though they may occasionally visit the school, they lose most of their guidance from teachers and principals. As principals and teacher are often the only positive adult role models in their lives, this is very difficult (and unfortunate) for them. Even if they do come across their former teachers, many often feel too ashamed to talk to them.

Students' school-based peer networks, essential for the way in which they interact and inhabit school and non-school settings, turn out to be very fleeting. This was why there was something unique about those morning hours that the Hindu College students spent at the temple before the O-level exam. Not used to being able to gather in a non-school space to chat, it provided them with a rare opportunity for them to converse away from the earshot of the principal and teachers. In addition to this, it was a last chance for them to be all-together as a class before they went their separate ways, acquiring new networks and new routines.

### **Future Prospects**

In this chapter, I have sought to place issues of educational and linguistic marginalization in a larger context. Exploring the way in which students interact across school and non-school arenas, I suggest that for students, the most relevant contrast is not necessarily between interactions in school and non-school settings; but interactions where adults are privy and those in which they are not-privy. I have suggested that school-based peer networks are significant in that they enable students to learn how to handle the demands of different arenas—particularly in mitigating adults monitoring and evaluation

(the value of which may transcend their fleeting nature). When students complete school (either after O- or A-levels), they lose a layer of protection from Sinhalese-majority spaces around them. They must not only learn to interact in and move around Kandy without their school-based peer networks, but they also lose their social role as students (as was marked by their uniforms), which make them a greater potential object of suspicion. For many Tamil youth, their outlook on life and their sense of their own future potential is altered. While at school students may have ambitions for being a part of imagined social milieu's (such as by migrating abroad or becoming a part of the multilingual Kandy middle-class), as they move on to the next stage in their lives, their ambitions are often thwarted. While all Sri Lankan youth face challenges (especially in finding gainful employment), by virtue of their minority status Tamils have to deal with constant discrimination (in seeking employment and elsewhere), and even fear for their own lives. In the next chapter, I explore interactions between youth and family members in the home in order to show how they are conveying (and therefore replicating) underlying assumptions about ethnic difference and conflict.

## Chapter Seven

### **Locating Sinhala Voices: Moral Stance, Conflict, and the Configuration of Difference**

Literature on conflict in South Asia and elsewhere has focused on manifestations of physical violence (military campaigns, riots, suicide bombings, etc.) and the ethnic nationalist or religious ideologies motivating these acts (Brass 1996; Das 1990; Pandey 1992; Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986). Rather than focusing on the direct victims of violent acts (Daniel 1996; Das 1990), it is also important to consider the experiences of the indirect victims—those who are living with the ongoing threat of violence in their everyday lives. In this chapter, I apply a linguistic anthropological approach to the study of conflict by exploring how social differences are discursively constructed through the way that speakers draw on the voices of others (Keane 2000).

This analysis draws on a large body of recordings I made of a Muslim family in their home and other settings. The transcription and analyses of these data represent a collaboration among myself, my research assistant, Kumudhini (an Up-country Tamil Hindu school teacher), and others. The family consists of the mother, Meena, her husband, and their four daughters (ages 6-12). They speak Tamil as a first language, and are bilingual in Sinhala, with some proficiency in English. They speak mostly Tamil at home, and use Tamil and Sinhala elsewhere. In their interactions at home they frequently code-switch among Tamil, Sinhala, and English. However, in over fifty-hours of recorded data, I found that their only substantial switches into Sinhala involved drawing

on Sinhala voices in a way that is associated with suspicion and violence.<sup>120</sup> These instances of voicing do not just represent specific instances, but something more generalizable. I suggest that through drawing on Sinhala voices, these speakers are making clear and consistent moral claims.

In the first part of this chapter, I explore two interactions in which Meena and her younger brother, drawing on multiple resources such as code (language), volume, pitch, reported speech, and poetic parallelism, construct Sinhala voices as both distinctive and morally problematic. In the first example, Meena, in recounting an incident that occurred at her daughters' school that day, represents the voices of two named persons, a Sinhalese security guard and a Sinhalese mother. In the second example, in the wake of two bombings that occurred that day (one in proximity to Kandy town), Meena's younger brother employs a Sinhala voice to represent the inner-thoughts of Sinhalese people when they see Tamils on the bus. These voices, however, do not just index (point to) named persons, but a social type of person, the Sinhalese (Agha 2005b, 2007). I argue that involved with the employment of the Sinhala voice is a moral stance, where the Sinhala voice, and the Sinhalese themselves, are associated with suspicion and violence. I also show how the use of these voices presupposes a moral situating of Sinhala-dominant public space with respect to the Tamil-speaking home environment. In the second part of this chapter, I situate the second example in the broader context of the interaction to look at how voicing differs from more explicit forms of stance-taking (such as explicit assertions). Drawing on Silverstein (1981), I suggest that by virtue of the embedding of

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<sup>120</sup> Other substantial switches into Sinhala occurred when Meena's Sinhalese sewing assistant was in the house, or when the children were discussing their Sinhala homework (as part of government policy, all Tamil-medium students are required to take Sinhala as a subject until Grade 10).

multiple layers of linguistic and non-linguistic meaning, stances that employ the voices of others are less available for both “thinking about” and “responding to” than more explicit forms of stance-taking (Silverstein 1981). As part of bringing a linguistic anthropological approach to the study of violence, I argue that by focusing on the stance-taking that lies below the level of awareness, it is possible to see how taken for granted (or internalized) assumptions about social difference and conflict are perpetuated.

The concept of voice refers to the “linguistic construction of social personae” (Keane 2000:1). Drawing on Agha, I focus on the processes by which individuals align themselves with voices indexed by speech, or “social types of persons, real or imagined, who those voices are taken to be” (2005b:38). My discussion of voice in relation to moral stance also builds upon Hill’s (1995a) well-known piece, the “The Voices of Don Gabriel.” In her treatment of Don Gabriel’s narrative, though multiple participants witness the narrative, Hill only focuses on a single interlocutor (Don Gabriel). In my analysis, I focus on how moral stance is configured in multi-party talk. Thus, in contrast to Hill, I am interested in uptake.

Stance concerns the “speaker or author’s evaluation and assessment, either of some object or discourse or of an interlocutor” (Irvine 2009:3). As Irvine (2009:54) observes, one of the main problems with the application of stance in sociolinguistic is that “the analyst may contribute too much explanatory power to individual agency in conversational interaction.” As Irvine states, “So agent-centered a concept, emphasizing an individual speaker’s knowledge, intentions and attitudes explicitly expressed in talk, risks producing a form of methodological individualism, such that the speaker’s role in constructing social and linguistic outcomes is taken to be the only, or at least the most

crucial, focus of analysis and locus of explanation”(2009:54). When approached with caution, stance is a particularly useful tool for analyzing how speakers make alignments with one another (and the objects of discourse) in multi-party talk. I contribute to literature on stance by showing the way in which stance resides not only in explicit assertions (the referential functions of language), but also in other aspects of communication such as paralanguage, poetics, and reported speech. In addition, in contrast to studies that foreground code-choice in ascriptions of identity, I show how the construction of the Sinhala voice is not only dependent on code (thus the speakers can employ Sinhala without employing the Sinhala voice), but a complex layering of linguistic and nonlinguistic features.

### **Sri Lankan Muslims**

In Sri Lanka, Muslims residing in the Sinhalese-majority South are politically and economically distinct from Muslims residing in the war ravaged North and East.<sup>121</sup> Southern Muslims, who are highly urbanized, have been primarily involved in trade and business, while northern and eastern Muslims are mainly engaged in agricultural activity. Living in scattered pockets throughout the South, southern Muslims are politically integrated with the Sinhalese.<sup>122</sup> In addition, in contrast to their northern and eastern counterparts, Muslims have remained largely on the periphery of the conflict (O’Sullivan 1999: 254).

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<sup>121</sup> As I discuss in chapter one, in 1990, Muslims living in Jaffna in the North were forcibly evicted by the LTTE. Tens of thousands of Muslims are still living in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps in Puttalam, Anuradapura, and other areas (Nuhuman 2007).

<sup>122</sup> In the post-independence period, southern Muslims aligned with Sinhalese Buddhist majority governments, and by doing so, were able to receive valuable concessions to protect their political, economic, and educational interests. While some Muslim groups enjoy wealth and political prominence, others are among the poorest in Sri Lanka. The Muslims living in IDP camps in the North are without basic facilities. In addition, Muslims living in the Southeast were among those most severely impacted by the 2004 Tsunami.

The interactions that I discuss in this chapter occurred in May and June 2008, which was a particularly heightened period in the conflict. The Sri Lankan army was trying to gain control of the last LTTE strongholds in the North, in an attempt to bring about a military solution to the conflict. Though the fighting was mostly confined to the North, there were frequent suicide, bus, and roadside bombings were taking place throughout the island (with many concentrated in the greater Colombo area). Sri Lankans living in the Sinhalese-majority South are not as immediately impacted by the war, but are living with the threat of civilian-targeted violence (as well as arrest or disappearance) in their everyday lives.

Meena's family rents a house in a middle-class neighborhood along one of Kandy's main commercial roads. The household consists of Meena, her mother, her husband, and four daughters, all of whom study in the Tamil-medium at Girls' College, which is only about a half kilometer from them. Meena completed her Advanced-levels in Tamil-medium science at Girls' College and had a short career as a nurse. However, when her father died and her mother became ill, she resigned and started a sewing business, which she could run from the home. Her husband works as a van driver. Though Meena and her family have access to top-ranking educational institutions, they struggle financially, especially as compared to most of their relatives, their neighbors, and other Girls' College families.<sup>123</sup>

### **Example One**

I met Meena through her older sister, a Tamil-medium teacher at Girls' College, where I conducted research for nine months. As I lived just across the street, I would

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<sup>123</sup> Admissions to Girls' College is based upon proximity to the school (which is in an affluent area), parents' educational level, and other factors. Though there are many exceptions, most students at Girls' College come from families with significant financial resources.



often visit Meena's family in the evenings. Usually when I arrived, Meena would go to the outdoor kitchen in the back of the house to prepare tea while I spent some time chatting with her daughters. This time, however, Meena sat down with us at the dining room table and began to tell us a story about her experience at Girls' College that day. She said that though she had told her daughters, Naseeka (age 9) and Nahla (age 6), to come to the gate early (at 11 a.m.), they had not come.

The narrative, which I present below, emerges as a co-construction among Meena, her daughters, and I. Meena's holds the floor from line 1 until line 6. I verbally acknowledge my uptake of her story in lines 2 and 4. Throughout the narrative, the four girls show their engagement with the story through their bodily comportment (turning towards Meena), eye contact, and laughter. As evident from the timing of their laughter, Meena's daughters seem to particularly respond to Meena's voicing of the Sinhala utterances. Meena's sister-in-law interjects in line 6 to confirm that Meena should have properly instructed her daughters to come to the gate. Responding, in line 7, Naseeka interjects to confirm that her mother had, in fact, forgotten to tell her and her younger sister, Nahla, to come to the gate early that day. As I discuss, within the narrated event the Sinhala utterances are clearly contrasted from the rest of the text through code, shifts in volume and pitch, direct reported speech markers, and poetic parallelism.

At Girls' College, all parents had been restricted from entering the school because of security reasons. The school has a main gate along Kandy's main commercial road, and an upper gate situated on a residential road behind the school, where parents wait to pick up their children. In her interaction with the security guard, Meena is immediately

identified as Muslim by her *abaya* (a tunic covering the entire body except the face).<sup>124</sup>

In the last decade, many Sri Lankan women, partly as a result of the influence of global Islam, have started wearing *abayas* instead of their more traditional dress (a sari with the end piece draped over the head).

The primary school students get out of school at twelve-thirty, but that day Meena needed to pick up Nahla at eleven o'clock. On the way to the school Meena stopped by a grocery shop, where she bought some eggs and rice, which she held in a bag as she approached the upper-gate of the school.

The school's security guard probably became suspicious of Meena because she was waiting by the gate for such a long time, and asked her repeatedly, "What's in your bag?" He then asked her to open her bag to see what was inside. She told him that she had eggs, and he asked, "Eggs, eggs, why did you bring eggs to school?" She said that because there were other people present, she felt ashamed, and couldn't say anything in response.

Meena turned to a Sinhalese woman who was also waiting outside the gate (presumably another mother). Rather than helping Meena, the other woman supported the guard, instructing Meena on how she needed to sufficiently answer his questions. The security guard asked her again, "What's in your bag?" She answered "rice." He asked again, "What is in your bag?" She answered, "Elastic" (which she uses for tailoring). The security guard told her that it seems like wire. She then questioned him,

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<sup>124</sup> In Kandyan, women's ethnicity is often apparent by their dress. Most professional women are required to wear saris at work. The style in which the saris are tied is heavily marked for ethnicity, with Sinhalese women often wearing saris tied in the "Kandyan" style and Tamil and Muslim women wearing saris tied in the "Indian" style. While skirts and blouses or jeans and t-shirts are ethnically neutral, only Tamil and Muslim women wear Shalwar Kameez (a long tunic worn with pants and a shawl). On top of this, certain subtleties in the way that the scarf is tied can indicate a Tamil or Muslim ethnicity. In addition, most Hindu (and some Catholic) women wear *poTTu* (bindis), which immediately identify them as Tamils.

saying “Is wire like this?” By this time, one hour had passed, and it was 12:30.

Meena explains that she had gotten very angry with the security guard and the Sinhalese lady. She suggests that perhaps she had not told the correct time to her daughters in the morning, and that was the reason they were late. Naseeka interjects in line 9 to confirm this. Through relaying the story, Meena repairs the misunderstanding with her daughters. In line 12, Meena changes the topic of conversation by asking me what time I had come home from Girls’ College that day.

For Sri Lankans, security checkpoints are a regular part of their everyday lives. At checkpoints, people are required to show their national identification cards (which indicate their ethnicity), and may be subject to searches. The Sinhala question, “*arə bag ekee monəwadə?* (what’s in that bag?),” or the imperative “*arə bag ekə balemu* (let’s see your bag/show me your bag),”<sup>125</sup> are ubiquitous. While everybody must deal with checkpoints, ethnic minorities, especially Tamils, face increased scrutiny and risk of arrest or disappearance.

Meena initially frames the story by explaining how the incident had been a waste of time. But beyond being a waste of time, this experience also seemed to doubt her belonging to Girls’ College (her former school and her daughters’ school), which is related to both her minority status, and her lack of financial resources in relation to other Girls’ College families. Meena’s interaction with the Sinhalese mother is also another experience of exclusion. While Meena appeals to her as a fellow mother, the woman rejects her, representing a failed attempt at collusion. Meena’s experience as a whole can thus be seen as one of heightened ethnic and class difference. Though she is a parent of

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<sup>125</sup> Though “*baləmu*” is directly translated as “let’s see,” several Tamil friends told me that in this context I should translate it with the more direct, “show me,” as this is the contextual meaning.

four Girls' College students, in her interaction with the security guard and the Sinhalese woman, she is positioned not only as an outsider, but as a potential threat to the security of Girls' College (something that is particularly hurtful for Meena, who has had a long-term affiliation with the school).

(In the following transcript, the Sinhala is underlined. I have chosen not to mark the English usages as they represent common words and phrases employed in both Tamil and Sinhala. The Tamil direct reported speech markers (which differentiate the utterances of others from the utterances of the speaker) are in bold. In Tamil, direct reported speech is marked with “*enru*,” which is commonly pronounced “*enDu*” in varieties of Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil. Increased vowel length and pitch are also marked.)

**Meena: mother**  
**Nahla: Grade one daughter**  
**Naseeka: Grade five daughter**  
**Christie: researcher**

<p><b>(1) Meena:</b>          Nahlaaakku naan elevenkku varassolla.          Nahla vara illa.          ivukku one o'clock taanee viDuradu.          Musliifa ivaloDa seerndu, one-ten kku          mella vandaanga.          enDa time waste.</p> <p><b>(2) Christie:</b>          sariyaana time waste</p> <p><b>(3) Meena:</b>          adula veeRa, security vandu, naan          pooraneeramee angannekke irukkakuLLa          kaDai onDu irukku.          naan muTTayum vaangikiTTu arisiyum          vangikiTTu meela geTTu kku pooneen.</p> <p>appa naan eleven la irundu irukkiReen          daanee.          security kku oru sandeeham.  <u>arə bag ekee monəwadə (pitch ↑)</u>  <u>arə bag ekee monəwadə</u>          enakku ippo koovam.  <b>(pitch ↑) arundə arində baləmu baləmu</b>  <b>enDu.</b>          enna ceyRatu?</p> <p><b>(4) Christie:</b></p>	<p><b>(1) Meena:</b>          I told Nahla to come at eleven.          Nahla had not come.          Her school finishes at one o'clock.          She came after one-ten, with her          [Naseeka].          I wasted my time.</p> <p><b>(2) Christie:</b>          Wasting too much time.</p> <p><b>(3) Meena:</b>          At the time of my going there, a security          guard came. On the way to the school is a          shop.          I bought eggs, bought rice, and went to the          upper gate.</p> <p>I was there since eleven, you know?          The security guard was suspicious.</p> <p><u>“What’s in that bag?” (pitch ↑)</u>  <u>“What’s in that bag?”</u>          I was angry at this point.  <b>(pitch ↑) “Open, open. Let’s see, let’s see,”</b>          [he said].          What to do?</p> <p><b>(4) Christie:</b></p>
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sonniingaLaa enDa naalu piLLaihaL ingee paDikkiRaanga **nnu** (*exasperated laugh*)

**(5) Meena:**

(*laugh*) sonneen.

muTTaiyaala aDikka nenacciccu avanDa muunjikki.

naan sonneen, (**pitch** ↑) bittəra tiyənəwa enDu.

bittərə, bittəra monəwətədə skooleTə.

ellaarum irundaanga daanee.

enakku oNDum solla elaatu.

vekkam.

peesaaaama irundee(n).

appa naan anganakkuLLa irunda Sinhalese

Lady kiTTa sonneen, (**pitch** ↑) bittəra.

bittəra monəwətədə skooleTə. oyaa

hahəndə eppaa, eyaa nee oyagen hahanee

**enDu.**

(*children laugh*)

appa nan sonneen, eeəətə uttəreyək dannæænee.

itin oyaa hari kiyənəkoo bittərə

monəwətədə skooleTə enDu

appiTī irundoonna anit bag ekee

monəwədə

naan sonneen rice **enDu.**

(**pitch** ↑) anit bag ekee monəwədə enDu

(*children laugh*)

naan sonneen elastic **enDu**

wire wage peenəwa enDaan.

Meemat wire tiyənəwadə enDu sonneen.

(*children laugh*)

angana paattaa piLLaihaL ellaam eppaDi

ippaDi vandu naan rooTTukku poonaa

horn aDikkiraan.

**nan sonneen** (**pitch** ↑) arəgollanəwə

balənnə kochərə bombə tiyənəwadə

dannææ. oyaa mage baaaag ekəmə

balənəwa. meeke monəwa næə enDu

sollīTTu, tiruppi tiruppi naan ippa twelve thirty aayiriccu.

enna ceyradu twelve thirtykku. innorukka

(**pitch** ↑) oyaage bag ekə baləmu.

Did you say that your four children study here? (*exasperated laugh*)

**(5) Meena:**

(*laugh*) I told [him].

I felt like throwing the eggs in his face.

I said, (**pitch** ↑) “I have eggs.”

“Eggs, eggs, why did you bring eggs to school?”

Everybody was there, you know?

I couldn’t say anything.

[I was] embarrassed.

[I] kept quiet.

Then I said to the Sinhalese lady who was

there, (**pitch** ↑) “eggs.” Why did you bring

eggs to school? “You don’t ask. He is

asking from you only,” [she said]

(*children laugh*)

Then I said, “I don’t know how to reply to that.”

“You have to sufficiently explain why you brought eggs to school,” she said.

while we were like that, [he asked],

“What’s in the other bag?”

I said “rice.”

(**pitch** ↑) “What’s in the other bag?”, he asked.

(*children laugh*)

I said “elastic.”

“It seems like wire,” he said

“Is wire like this?” I asked.

(*children laugh*)

As I saw the children coming this way and

that way to the road, if I go to the other

side of the road, they will honk the horn.

I said, (**pitch** ↑) “look at them. [You]

don’t know how many people have bombs.

You are only looking at my bag.”

I don’t have anything, I said again and

again. It got to be twelve-thirty.

What to do if it is after twelve-thirty?

Another time.

(**pitch** ↑) “Show me your bag”

<p>One aavariccu. tiruppiyum.  enakku avanooDayum avooDayum  sariyaana koovam.  enakku inge vandoonnee paattaa naan taan  morning solla ille.  naan elevenkku vaarenDu naan sonnaam.  <b>(6) Sister-in-Law:</b> adukkiTTa sariyaa  solli anupponumnu.  <b>(7) Meena:</b> illaTTi inda NaseekaKiTTa  vaareen. Naseeka avooDa veLayaaDiTTu  vaarennu.  <b>(8) Naseeka:</b>  solla illa niinga sonniinga one o'clock-kku  NaseekaavooDa vankannu. naan sonneen  ummaa pannanDu naappattanjikku  ingaRundu vaangannu. niinga ennannaa  padinooru maNikki ingaRundu  vandiTTiinga.  <b>(9) Meena:</b>  aytaan. appa naan daa(n) maRandu solli  <b>(10) Naseeka:</b>  oDanee ippa niinga enakku koLapputu.  aniyayam.  <b>(11) Meena:</b>  niinga innakki one-thirtykkaa vandiinga  Christie?  <b>(12) Christie:</b>  pannandu maNikki vandeen</p>	<p>It got to be one. again.  I was angry with him[the security guard]  and her [the Sinhala lady].  When I came here, I realized that it was me  who forgot to tell in the morning.  I seemed I told her to come at eleven.  <b>(6) Sister-in-Law:</b> [You] need to tell her  correctly.  <b>(7) Meena:</b> If not, she would say, “will  come with Naseeka, or play with  Naseeka.”  <b>(8) Naseeka:</b>  You didn't tell. You said (to Nahla) “you  have to come at one o'clock with  Naseeka.” I said, “ummaa (mother), at  twelve forty-five you have to come from  here.” But you have come at eleven from  here.  <b>(9) Meena:</b>  That's it. I forgot to tell...  <b>(10) Naseeka:</b>  Now you are confusing me. It's unfair.  <b>(11) Meena:</b>  Did you come here at one-thirty Christie?  <b>(12) Christie:</b>  I came at twelve o'clock.</p>
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During this interaction, I was trying to listen very carefully to Meena's story, as I wanted to be able to respond helpfully and appropriately. At the same time, I felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information in the narrative, unsure of how to make sense of the way she was drawing on the voices of the security guard and the Sinhalese mother. In order to get another perspective on the interaction, I shared it with my research assistant, Kumudhini, and another Tamil friend. Without telling her anything about it, I sent Kumudhini a copy of the entire sixty-minute recording. A few months later she returned a transcript of the interaction. Indicating that she found the above interaction significant, Meena left a note on the first page saying that “the story” began

four minutes into the recording. As I was unsure how to translate some of the Sinhala utterances, I emailed a copy of the completed transcript to my former landlord's nephew, a Tamil Hindu from Batticaloa in the East who was completing a BA degree in engineering at Peradeniya University in Kandy.<sup>126</sup> A week later, he sent back a document which included the transcript and his English translation. As the top of the page he wrote in large font (reproduced here in the original font type and size):

I have tried my best. Some wordings I cannot understand. Anyhow I have prepared a conversation for you. These types of incidents are happening always among us. We are used to living with all these hell [sic].

Without knowing anything about the incident, as a fellow ethnic minority, he seems to immediately identify with the scrutiny and suspicion to which Meena was subjected.<sup>127</sup>

Because they combine resources such as code, poetic parallelism, reported speech, and paralinguistic features, Meena's use of the Sinhala voices is particularly metapragmatically salient (Silverstein 2003; Keane 2008). Through the use of direct reported speech markers, Meena contrasts the narrative event (the incident at Girls' College) with the speech event (the entire interaction). Within the narrative event, rather than paraphrasing her responses to the security guard and the Sinhalese mother in Tamil, she represents the interaction in Sinhala, which has the effect of re-instantiating the original interaction.

Within the narrative event, Meena contrasts her own voice to that of the security

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<sup>126</sup> Being from a majority Tamil-speaking area, my landlord's nephew was not particularly strong in Sinhala, but because I had recently edited his BA thesis, I thought I could ask him for this favor.

<sup>127</sup> There is also some chance that he is not referring to ethnic minorities in particular, but to all Sri Lankans, who have to deal with security checks in their everyday lives. I knew a Sinhalese family, for example, whose house was right near a checkpoint. They had to stop and talk to the soldiers positioned there every time they came and went from their house.

guard and the Sinhalese woman. She makes this contrast particularly transparent by providing the subject of each sentence where it would have appeared contextually, as in line 5:

- i. naan sonneen rice **enDu**  
I-said-rice-quotative marker  
(I said “rice.”)
- ii. anit bag ekee monəwədə **enDu**  
the other-bag-in-what-quotative marker  
(“what’s in the other bag,” [he asked])
- iii. naan sonneen elastic **enDu**  
I-said-elastic-quotative marker  
(I said “elastic”)

The presentation of clear subjects, along with the use of direct reported speech markers, has the effect of rendering Meena’s voice (in the speech event and the narrative event) maximally removed from that of the security guard and the Sinhalese mother.

Throughout the interaction, the security guard and the Sinhalese mother’s voices are also marked by a rise in pitch. In addition, there is a high degree of poetic parallelism, which separates the Sinhalese utterances from the rest of the utterances.

Throughout the narrative, Meena repeats the following words and phrases:

- i. The security guard’s questions:
  - a. anit bag ekee monəwədə (twice in line 3):  
that-bag-in-what  
(What’s in that bag?)
  - b. anee bag ekee monəwədə (twice in line 5):  
other-bag-in-what  
(What’s in the other bag)?
- ii. The security guard’s command (line 3 (just “let’s see) and twice in line 5):
  - a. bag ekə balemu  
bag-one-let’s see  
(Let’s see your bag)”
- iii. The word (once in line 3 and three times in line 5):
  - a. “bittəra(egg)”

In this interaction, Meena’s use of code, direct reported speech, pitch, and poetic



parallelism has the effect of distinguishing the Sinhala voices of the security guard and the Sinhalese mother from her own. In addition, throughout the interaction, the referential (the content of Meena's, the security guard's, and the Sinhalese mother's utterances) and non-referential (use of code, pitch, and poetic parallelism) aspects associate the Sinhala voices with suspicion and the possibility of violence (the threat of Meena's arrest, as well as the threat of a bomb). It is because of their internal consistency that the voices do not simply have the effect of indexing named persons (the security guard and the Sinhalese mother), but also a social type of persons, the Sinhalese (Agha 2005b). In the next example, I look at how Meena's younger brother draws on a Sinhala voice to represent the inner thoughts of Sinhalese upon seeing Tamils in the bus. I show how these examples, when juxtaposed, produce a moral stance, where the Sinhala voice, and the Sinhalese themselves, are associated with violence.

### **Example Two**

A few weeks later, I came over around five pm and joined Meena, her mother, her younger brother, and her sister-in-law in the outdoor kitchen in the back of the house. The children were studying at the dining room table, but were still in hearing range of the conversation.

That day (June 6, 2008) there had been two violent incidences in Sri Lanka. During the early morning rush hour period, a claymore mine exploded in a public bus near the University of Moratuwa (in a Colombo suburb), killing twenty people and injuring more than sixty. Later that afternoon a bus exploded in Wattagama, a town in the Kandy district, injuring more than twenty people. The Wattagama incident was significant to many people living in Kandy, as it was the first time in recent years that

there had been a bombing in proximity to Kandy town (the LTTE bombed the Temple of the Tooth on January 25, 1998).

In lines 1-9, the grandmother speaks to me about the general nature of ethnic conflict. She mentions that behind those who commit violent acts are influential people organizing the violence. She explains that, as is common all over the world, Tamils are forced to join organizations (referring to the LTTE). If they do not join, she says, “they kill them.” She then points out that despite this fact it is the citizens/subjects (*kuDimakkaL*) who are suffering.<sup>128</sup> In line 9, she explains that if people were clear about what these organizations were actually doing, they would not join them. In the next line, through the use of “*naanga* (exclusive “we”),” she differentiates Tamils from Muslims.<sup>129</sup> The grandmother says, “We are also suffering, aren’t we? They are killing even those who are not involved.” Though clearly differentiating Tamils from Muslims (explaining that Muslims are not involved in the conflict), she points out that Tamils are often forced to join the LTTE and similar organizations against their will. This can be interpreted as an expression of compassion towards Tamils in their current situation, or, alternatively, as a way to talk about the conflict without making accusations against Tamils.

Maintaining the same general tone in the conversation, Meena’s younger brother, in line 10, distinguishes Muslims from Sinhalese through the use of the exclusive “we.” He says, “Now, Sinhalese people don’t think the way we think. Sinhala people think all Tamils are Tigers. We, of course, feel sympathetic towards them. Sinhala people won’t

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<sup>128</sup> In Tamil, *kuDimakkaL* has a connotation very similar to the conventional definition of “citizen” as “a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection.”

<sup>129</sup> Though in Tamil there is a distinction between the inclusive (*naam*) and exclusive (*naangaL*) first person plural, in most varieties of Sri Lankan Tamil, the inclusive “we” is not used.

sympathize.” Here, he means that while Sinhalese think that all Tamils are the same (Tigers), Muslims will see them as human beings and, as implied here, will not want to inflict harm upon them in an indiscriminate way. In line 10, the brother switches into Sinhala and voices the inner thoughts of Sinhalese people when they see Tamils on the bus. The brother breaks out of the Sinhala utterance through the use of the Tamil “*naanga* (we),” saying, “We only feel sorry, but Sinhala people won’t say sorry.”

(In the following transcript, the Sinhala is underlined. I have marked instances of the exclusive “we.” In all of the cases except the second use of “we” in line 9, where it is used more generally, “we” indicates Muslims. I have also marked volume and pitch.)

<p><b>Grandmother</b>  <b>Meena</b>  <b>Brother</b>  <b>Sister-in-Law</b>  <b>Christie</b></p>	
<p><b>(1) Grandmother:</b>  ivar piDiccaa ivar muuliyamaa visaarikka  eellum daanee. ivar pinnukku yaaru  iikkudunnu. ivar pinnukku ivar  paNattukkaaha ceyRa veelataanee ivar.  illayaa? appa ivankaaLE periya aakkaL  iruppaanga.</p> <p><b>(2) Christie:</b>  oo. avar pinnukku periya aakkaL  iruppanga</p> <p><b>(3) Grandmother:</b>  periya aakkaL selvaakkuLLavanga  iruppanga</p> <p><b>(4) Christie:</b> oo.</p> <p><b>(5) Grandmother:</b>  ini ivar ivanga paNattukkaaha ivangala  iyakkattilee seekkiRa. seeraaTTi poonaa  ivankaL kolRee. appaDi modallarundu  uvoru naaTTula naDakkudu daanee. anda  iyakkattilee avanga seera veeNum.  seeraaTTi avanga kolluvaanga. illayaa?</p> <p><b>(6) Christie:</b></p>	<p><b>(1) Grandmother:</b>  If you catch him you can inquire through  him. Isn’t it? And find out who is behind  him. Behind him. He is just doing it for  the money. Is it not? There will be big  people other than him.</p> <p><b>(2) Christie:</b>  Yes, there are big people behind him.</p> <p><b>(3) Grandmother:</b>  If you say big people, it means those with  influence</p> <p><b>(4) Christie:</b> yes.</p> <p><b>(5) Grandmother:</b>  So these people admit him to the group  because they have money. If they don’t  join, they kill them. Like this, from the  beginning it happens in certain countries.  They have to join (transitive) the  organization. If they don’t join, they kill  them. Is it not?</p> <p><b>(6) Christie:</b></p>

<p>mm...</p> <p><b>(7) Grandmother:</b> aanaa irundaalum kuDimakkaL enna ceyyaanga</p> <p><b>(8) Christie:</b> kuDimakkaL</p> <p><b>(9) Grandmother:</b> kuDimakkaL kashDam daanee. ippa <b>naanga</b> teliva irundaa naanga adula ellaam seeradillaiyee <b>engaLukkum</b> paavam daanee. summaa uLLa manusara aDicci kolRa</p> <p><b>(10) Brother:</b> ippa <b>naanga</b> nenakkiRo summaa singaLa aaLE ninaikkiRa illaa tamizh aaLum tiger solli. naangaNda paavam paakkiRa. singalaa aakkaL pakkiRa illayee.</p> <p><u>(volume ↓ pitch↓)Busekee uu maranda onee kapanDa onee. Kappanəwaa uu uu naetikaranDa oonee Naetikaranəwaa uu naanga</u> daan paavam. singala aakkaL paavam sollamaTTanga.</p> <p><b>(11) Sister-in-law:</b> Illa. ippa yaazhpaaNattula pooyiTTu meelaavula ellaam aDikkiRaanga. avaLoo peerayum kolRaanga. avanga ingaala aDikkiRaanga. adaan ceyRaanga.</p> <p><b>(12) Meena:</b> adi mahinda raajapaksavum sariyilla.</p> <p>Foreignla poyTTu...</p> <p><b>(13) Brother:</b> president[ sariyille]</p> <p><b>(14) Meena:</b> [President sariyille]</p>	<p>mm...</p> <p><b>(7) Grandmother:</b> But even though, what can the citizens do?</p> <p><b>(8) Christie:</b> Citizens</p> <p><b>(9) Grandmother:</b> It's difficult for the citizens <b>We</b> are very much clear [about what these organizations are doing], so <b>we</b> are not joining them.<sup>130</sup> <b>We</b> are also suffering, aren't we? They are killing even those who are not involved</p> <p><b>(10) Brother:</b> Now, Sinhalese people don't think the way <b>we</b> think. Sinhalese people think all Tamils are Tigers. <b>We</b>, of course, feel sympathetic towards them. Sinhalese people won't sympathize. <u>(volume ↓ pitch↓)Must kill it in the bus</u> <u>Must cut</u> <u>[I] will cut it</u> <u>Must destroy it</u> <u>[I] will destroy it</u> <b>We</b> only feel sorry, but Sinhala people won't say sorry.</p> <p><b>(11) Sister-in-Law:</b> No. Now they go to Jaffna and attack from the air, killing everybody. So many people they are killing They beat them on this side (also) This is what they are doing</p> <p><b>(12) Meena:</b> that Mahinda Rajapaksa (the Sri Lankan President) is not okay. [He] left for a foreign country...</p> <p><b>(13) Brother:</b> The President is [not okay.]</p> <p><b>(14) Meena:</b> [The President is not okay.]</p>
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<sup>130</sup> In this sentence the use of “we (*naangaL*)” is generic. In contrast to the other uses of “we” in the transcript, rather than referring to the family or to Muslims, it refers to people in general.

During the interaction, the background noise in the outdoor kitchen was extremely high. When the brother began the Sinhala utterances in line 10, I did not understand the content of what he was saying. From the context of this utterance and other interactional cues (putting his head down, and lowering his voice and tone), I had a feeling that he was saying something about violence. A few months later, I sent a recording of this interaction to my research assistant, Kumudhini. She transcribed the entire recording in Tamil script. However, she represented the Sinhala utterances in Sinhala, and accompanied it with an English translation (which she had not done on any of the other transcripts). She had also underlined the Sinhala utterances, pointing my attention to them. Receiving Kumudhini's transcription and translation not only confirmed my hunch about the content of the brother's Sinhala utterances, but also showed that she had found it significant as well.

Similar to the first example, through making use of code, volume, pitch, and poetic parallelism, the use of Sinhala voices in this interaction is highly metapragmatically salient. In this interaction, the brother constructs the voice, not of a named person, but a social persona, the Sinhalese. Also in contrast with example one, all of the Sinhala utterances occur within the narrated event (the inner thoughts of the Sinhalese), rather than the speech event. The Sinhala utterances are distinguished from the rest of the text not through direct reported speech markers (as in example one), but through a decrease in volume and pitch (in fact, the Sinhala utterances are barely audible).

The Sinhala utterances are also marked from the rest of the interaction through a high degree of poetic parallelism. In the Sinhala utterances, the brother uses the non-

human objective pronoun “uu” which indicated referring to a human as an animal.<sup>131</sup> The brother repeats “uu,” as well as the phrases, “will do X (c and e)” and “must do X (a, b, and d).” The use of “must (as a directive)” implies a mission, whereas the use of “will” implies the enacting of the mission (the actual act of violence). This verbs “*kappanəwaa* (will cut)” and “*naetikaranəwaa* (will destroy) are in the causative form, indicating that the action will be performed by someone else. The verbs “cut (b, c)” and “destroy (d, e),” are both repeated twice.

(a) <u>busekee uu maranda onee</u> in bus-it-must kill <i>Must kill it in the bus</i>
(b) <u>kapanDa onee</u> must cut-it <i>must cut it</i>
(c) <u>kappanəwaa uu</u> will cut-it <i>will cut it</i>
(d) <u>uu naetikaranDa oonee</u> it-must destroy <i>must destroy it</i>
(e) <u>naetikaranəwaa uu</u> will destroy-it <i>will destroy it</i>

The brother’s use of code (the switch from Tamil to Sinhala), volume, pitch, and poetic parallelism has the effect of sharpening the distinction between the voice (or inner-thoughts) of the Sinhalese and his own (or of Muslims in general), thus creating a saturation of difference. In the lines right before and after the Sinhala utterances, through the use of “we,” he differentiates Sinhalese from Muslims in terms of their essential character (being able to feeling pity or remorse for Tamils). But the use of the Sinhala voice does much more than this; it associates the internal core of the Sinhalese with

<sup>131</sup> In Sinhala, just like in Tamil, it is common for humans to be referred to with the non-human objective pronoun. My Sinhala teacher, Herath, commented that the use of “it” can be very insulting, but can also connote close friendship.

violence (having the effect of showing rather than telling). His own voice and the voice of Muslims in general, remains maximally removed. In summary, the juxtaposition of these two examples produces an effect where the Sinhala voice, and thereby, the Sinhalese, are associated with violence.<sup>132</sup>

### Discussion of Examples One and Two

While there is something consistent about the employment of Sinhala voices in these examples (in terms of the clear and consistent moral claims), they are certainly not the same. In both examples the uses of Sinhala voices are highly metapragmatically salient (involving the use of code, indirect and direct reported speech, poetic parallelism, and paralinguistic features). The first example differs from the second in that Meena’s voicing of the Sinhala utterances is part of a more self-conscious and controlled performance. But while Meena seems to be aware of her use of these voices, it doesn’t mean that she is generalizing from them (linking them with suspicion or violence) in any

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<sup>132</sup> About thirty minutes into this interaction there was another example of the employment of Sinhala “voices.” Meena’s eldest daughter Nasha, who was studying in the dining room, joined us in the kitchen. Meena was telling me how she does not like it that schools, as part of security seminars, are teaching children how bombs are made from objects such as mobile phones. Switching from Tamil into Sinhala, Nasha imitates the “voice” of a student asking another to show her how to make a bomb from a mobile phone.

(Sinhala is underlined and the Tamil quotative speech markers are in bold),

<b>Transcript</b>	<b>Translation</b>
<p><b>Nasha:</b> sila peeru atee maatiri phone ellaam eNDu vandu (pitch ↑) <u>anee meeka daala denDakoo</u> <b>nnu</b>vangataanee appa ata aRinju koLRatukku taanee sila peeru teriyaameLeyum <u>denDa...</u> Ippa tv layum handbag la bomb a koNDu vandu kuDuttuTTu poovaa. aatane kaaTTuRanga</p>	<p><b>Nasha:</b> some people can bring a similar phone and <b>ask</b> (pitch ↑) “<u>please can you put this and give,</u>” won’t they? Then they learn, don’t they? Some people without knowing say “<u>give...</u>” Even now on TV they show a woman bringing a bomb in a handbag and giving it. That is what they are showing.</p>

As with Meena’s use of the Sinhala “voice” in example one, Nasha’s switch into Sinhala is accompanied by a rise in pitch, and is framed by direct reported speech markers. Though there is not space to discuss this here, the interactions I present in this chapter can be considered to be socializing events. Meena’s four daughters, through participating in such interactions, are socialized into particular configurations of difference, which may differ from how they are being socialized in school, peer-groups, and in their exposure to mass-media.

instrumental or purposeful way. Evident by his volume (barely audible), tone, and physical comportment (his head down), the brother's use of voicing is much more spontaneous.

In contrast with Meena, the brother's voicing presents a stronger moral evaluation of the Sinhalese. Whereas Meena's use of Sinhala voices seems to link them to suspicion and implied violence (the possibility of Meena's arrest, as well as the suggestion of a bomb), the brother links the Sinhala voice very strongly to violence, relating it to the physical body (the Sinhalese seek to "cut" and "destroy" the Tamil body, which they liken to that of an animal). In addition, while in the first example, Meena (within the narrative event) represents the voices of the security guard, the Sinhalese mother, and her own in Sinhala; in the second example, the use of Sinhala distinguishes the narrative event (the inner thoughts of the Sinhalese) entirely from the speech event (the overall interaction), thus creating a stronger saturation of difference.

### **Voice, Violence, and Sinhala Public Space**

Also involved in the way that these speakers employ Sinhala voices in these examples is a moral situating of Sinhala-dominant public space. In example one, the Sinhala voices are located at the back gate of a Buddhist national school. Those who enter the interior of the school have a ratified position at the school (teachers, students, and those with special permission from the principal). The back gate of the school represents a different kind of space. Because schools are often considered to be targets of LTTE attacks, and because Girls' College is a national school, the back gate of the school is particularly associated with national security. It is here, and not inside the school, that ethnic minorities are construed as potential security threats. In example two, though the



interaction (the speech event) occurs in the home, the brother specifically locates the Sinhala voice (the narrated event) in public space, on the bus. Buses, which can be government-owned or private, are spaces where people from different social backgrounds are in close physical contact with one another, and where bombings are frequent. The bus can thus be considered to be a kind of emblematic public space, which, like the back gate of Girls' College, is highly associated with national security. Thus, related to the opposition of the Sinhala voices and their own, is the opposition of public spaces (where Sinhalese and the Sinhalese-majority state are dominant) to the home, where Tamil is spoken.

While we did not explicitly talk about the conflict very often, safety and security were a common theme of my conversations with Meena. She would often describe ways in which she managed the threat of violence in her everyday life. For example, one day Meena and I got on a bus together to go into Kandy town. She directed me to come and sit next to her in the very back of the bus. Whispering in my ear,<sup>133</sup> she explained that she always chooses this seat, as it gives her a good vantage point in which to monitor any suspicious activity. She also said that if she notices anything, she can quickly exit the bus, as these seats are closest to the back door.

Meena's strategic choice of seat on the bus can be seen as one way of maintaining control in the face of the everyday threat of violence. Meena and her brother's inhabiting of voices of the Sinhalese in the previous examples can also be interpreted as ways of producing/performing control. In co-opting the Sinhalese voice, whether of a named person or a social persona, that voice is controlled. Meena can control the voice of the security guard and the Sinhalese mother. Similarly, her younger brother can control the

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<sup>133</sup> It is common practice for Sri Lankans to avoid talking on the bus.

murderous inner-thoughts of the Sinhalese. As is also evident from these examples, for Meena and her family members it is in public spaces, and not the home, where it is necessary to maintain control (as here they bear the potential for violence).

### **Explicit and Non-Explicit Stance-Taking in Interactional Context**

In this chapter, I have shown how speakers employ Sinhala voices, and by doing so, make clear and consistent moral claims. In order to more fully understand these instances of voicing, it is necessary to analyze them in the broader context of the interaction. In the following, I situate the use of a Sinhala voice in the second example within the ongoing interaction, looking at how participants align and disalign with one another and the objects of discourse. As part of a larger inquiry into the way that difference is discursively configured in socially-occurring interaction, I also compare how voicing differs from more explicit forms of stance-taking.

After line 14 in example two, the conversation quickly turns from a general discussion of the conflict to the details of the two bombings that occurred that day. The first part of the interaction seems to persist smoothly, with all the participants in apparent alignment with one another (as evident from their ease of turn-taking and the maintaining of a consistent topic and tone). As the conversation goes on, however, overt contention arises, primarily between Meena and her younger brother.

This contention is related to things: the struggle over interactive positioning (see Goffman 1976), and the topic itself. In the discussion of the bombings, the brother immediately tries to gain and hold the floor, taking the role of the introducer and the expert (Ochs 1989). Though he tries to position himself as an authority, the brother's claims are largely uninformed and inaccurate. Meena, the grandfather, and the sister-in-

law respond by explicitly correcting him, attempting to silence him, or ignoring him (physically turning away from him and avoiding eye contact with him). Rather than just taking issue with his statements, they object more generally to his overt attempt to take the dominant role in the conversation. After all, in addition to having the status of the youngest brother (who is also unemployed, unmarried, and less educated than his siblings), he is also a visitor in the house, and is meeting their foreign friend (myself) for the first time. In the following analysis, I present three instances where Meena and the grandmother disalign with the brother's statements regarding local demographics, representations of other ethnic groups, and the prediction of future violent events. These examples also further indicate how the participants are discursively configuring social differences and conflict.

In a conversation concerning the Wategama bombing, the brother declares that Wategama (a town in the Kandy district) is a solely Tamil area. The sister-in-law, Meena, and the grandmother all immediately disagree with him, insisting that it is an ethnically mixed neighborhood, thus challenging his knowledge of local demographics. In the interaction below, it is notable that the brother fluctuates between three pronunciations of the word "Tamil." While the full realization of the alveolar /zh/, as in "*tamizh*," is considered to be the correct literary pronunciation, the final consonant is often realized as a retroflex /L/ or palatal /l/ in "normalized" "Up-country" varieties. In varieties of Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil, it is often pronounced as "*tamul*." Because he is trying to speak authoritatively (and in the company of a non-native Tamil speaker), he tries to correct to a more "normalized" form, but seems confused about how to do so. In contrast to Meena, he is not accustomed to speaking in more academic registers.

(The various pronunciations of “tamil” are italicized.)

<p>(15) <b>Brother:</b> vatteegama <b>tamul</b> eriyaa  (16) <b>Sister-in-law:</b> illa illa  (17) <b>Brother:</b> enna illa?  (18) <b>Meena:</b> Muslim aakkaL irukki  (19) <b>Grandmother:</b> Muslim aakkaL. singaLa aakkaL irukki  (20) <b>Meena:</b> Muslim aakkaL. singaLa aakkal irukki  (21) <b>Brother:</b> illa illa <i>tamul</i>...wattagama tani <i>tamil</i>. Enakku teriyumee atu. anda ariyala <i>tamizh</i>.</p>	<p>(15) <b>Brother:</b> Wattagama is a Tamil area.  (16) <b>Sister-in-law:</b> No, no.  (17) <b>Brother:</b> What no?  (18) <b>Meena:</b> There are Muslim people.  (19) <b>Grandmother:</b> There are Muslim people. There are Sinhala people.  (20) <b>Meena:</b> There are Muslim and Sinhala people.  (21) <b>Brother:</b> No, no. Tamil... Wattagama is only Tamil. I know that. That area is Tamil.</p>
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In the next instance, the brother, in the discussion of the Moratuwa bombing (which occurred near the University of Moratuwa), declares that all Jaffna University students are “Tigers.” I immediately respond by pointing out that not all Jaffna Tamils are Tigers. The grandmother and Meena, aligning with my statement, also contest his assertion.

<p>(30) <b>Brother:</b> peeraadeniya Kampasla tamils puli training cenjatu. puli. puli. ippa irukkuRaanga kampa la puli nuuru kku elubatti anju viitamirukkiRaanga. polgallayilayum irukkuRaanga. ellaa jaffna tamils taanee. jaffna tamils puli taan.</p> <p>(31) <b>Christie:</b> illa. ellarum puli ille  (32) <b>Grandmother:</b> appaDi solla elaadu  (33) <b>Meena:</b> nallavangalum irukkiRaanga. keTTavangaLum irukkiRaanga. anaa idu ippa government kku sambandappaTTadu. ippaa sela aakkaL remand la irukkuRaanga</p>	<p>(30) <b>Brother:</b> At Peradeniya campus (in Kandy) Tamils did Tiger training. Tiger. Tiger. Now there are Tigers in the campus. Out of a hundred, seventy-five are Tigers. In Polgolla also they are there. All are Jaffna Tamils. Isn't it? All Jaffna Tamils are Tigers.</p> <p>(31) <b>Christie:</b> No. Not all are Tigers.  (32) <b>Grandmother:</b> You can't say it like that.  (33) <b>Meena:</b> There are good people. There are bad people. But now it is connected with the government. Now some people are on the remand.</p>
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In line 33, Meena responds to her brother by changing the topic. She goes on to discuss how the government offers money to the families of Sinhalese death row inmates to plant bombs, posing as Tamils. Meena states, “There are so many things like that.

Even in films it's like that isn't it? It's happening in this country just like it's happening in films." Thus, in response to her brother's highly simplified view of the ethnic conflict (that all Jaffna students are "Tigers"), Meena complicates it, pointing out that it is not always clear who the perpetrators are (they may be Sinhalese or they may be Tamil).

In the previous examples, the family members oppose the brother with regard to representations of demography and social difference. In the following example, they disalign with him with respect to his prediction of future violence. In line 56, the brother tries to introduce a new topic by stating, "Everybody at Girls' College will be frightened now." Meena, without acknowledging his statement, continues the prior conversation. In line 60, the brother repeats the same utterance.

<p><b>(56) Brother:</b> Girls' kalaj la ellaam payappuDuvaanga ippa</p>	<p><b>(56) Brother:</b> Now everybody at Girls' College will be frightened now (the other interlocutors do not acknowledge him).</p>
<p><b>(60) Brother:</b> ippa Girls' kalaj la ellaam payappuDuvaanga ippa high skulukku veppaanga  <b>(61) Meena:</b> ee ivangaLLa payangaaTTiRa veeNam (referring to Christie)  <b>(62) Brother:</b> illa illa. Girls' Kalaj. Mahamaya. Dharmarajah schoolkki vekka silli irukku taanee vekkiRanga taanee munnu skulukum.  <b>(63) Meena:</b> aanaa oNDu idu suTTi ippa paadukaappu irukkum</p>	<p><b>(60) Brother:</b> Now everybody at Girls' College will be frightened. They will plant a bomb at Girls' College.  <b>(61) Meena:</b> Hey, don't frighten her (referring to Christie).  <b>(62) Brother:</b> No, no. It has been said to plant a bomb at Girls' College, Mahamaya, and Darmarajah school (other Kandy Sinhala-medium National schools). They are planting aren't they, at the three schools?  <b>(63) Meena:</b> But we can think that because of this, there is extra security....</p>

When nobody responds to his utterance in line 56, he repeats it a few seconds later. Meena then directly responds to him, telling him not to frighten me (as I was doing research at Girls' College at the time). He then tries to justify his statement, talking about

the widely circulating rumor that the LTTE was planning to bomb Kandy Sinhala-medium national schools. Meena responds by presenting a positive spin on the situation—that the threat will prompt extra security measures. She changes the subject, but soon returns to the topic of risk. In reference to the possibility of a bombing at Girls' College, she states “Only Allah knows what will happen where, and at what time.” She also adds that parents, by monitoring the area around Girls' College, can take part in its security (another reason why she had found the security guard's questioning of her particularly upsetting). Meena responds to her brother's discussion of risk (the prediction of future violent events) by redirecting it to a discussion of safety and security. Again, she suggests ways in which it is possible to maintain control in dealing with the possibility of violence. She says that though one cannot know what will happen and at what time, it is possible to make efforts to ensure security nonetheless.

The tension between Meena and her brother is exacerbated a few minutes later with the brother asks me to find him a job in the US. Drawing my gaze away from her brother, Meena changes the topic, asking me about my experience doing research at Girls' College, but the brother persists to the point where I finally give him my address and contact number in the US. A few minutes later, the brother gets up to leave. Meena, though seated right across from him, does not turn to acknowledge his departure (she either does not see him or chooses to ignore him), prompting Nasha, the oldest daughter (who had since entered the room), to say to her mother, “*ummaa pohataam* (Mother, [he] is going, it seems). Meena then addresses him, declaring overenthusiastically, with a toothy smile, “Bye bye. *asalam alaikum*.” Looking over at me, she yells out in English, “Did you like to meet her?” He doesn't acknowledge her (he likely did not catch what

she was saying as he has limited English proficiency), and continues to make his way to the front door. Meena then asks me, in Tamil, if her English was correct, thus transforming her brother's departure into a pedagogical moment.<sup>134</sup>

Though the brother's asking me to find him a job in the US was not particularly significant to me, the next day when I returned to the house, Meena took me into her back sewing room and apologized for her brother. She explained that when he asked me for a job in the US, she had become very angry with him. She said that without even trying to find work for himself, he keeps bothering others to get jobs for him. She stressed that even in Sri Lanka it is possible to find ways of earning money.

After my research assistant, Kumudhini, finished transcribing this part of the interaction, I asked her if she had any particular comments about it. She wrote the following:

The brother assumes that he knows exactly what's happening, but I feel he collects from the average uneducated people talking on the road, mostly racist. He talks like all Jaffna Tamils at the University are Tigers. He sounds like a lazy man who just doesn't want to work hard to earn a living.

Here, Kumudhini seems to share Meena's frustration with the younger brother. In addition, she makes the observation that he is not getting his information from reputable sources, but just from talking to uneducated people on the road. The kind of media that a person has access to (whether in Tamil, Sinhala, or English), and those with whom they discuss it, has a large impact on how they conceive of and represent the ethnic conflict.

As he studied in the Tamil-medium, the brother likely consumes Tamil-medium

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<sup>134</sup> As an aside, this example shows the importance of looking at sincerity in studying alignments among interlocutors. During my fieldwork I noticed that people would often feign enthusiastic dissent just at the moment where they strongly disagreed with me. It was only after a number of such occurrences did I realize what was going on.

newspapers, radio, and television. In addition, residing in the Muslim-majority area of Gampola, just north of Kandy, he is probably discussing the conflict mostly with Tamil-speaking Muslim interlocutors. Living in Kandy, and having a higher educational level, Meena consumes a broader range of media (Tamil, Sinhala, and English), and has a broader range of interlocutors to discuss it with.

Obviously the discord between Meena and her brother is not solely a product of this interaction, but is related to ongoing tensions between them (likely related to her brother's failing to financially contribute to the family). It is because of my presence in this interaction that Meena is making a particularly strong effort to maintain collusion in the conversation, interrupting her brother, changing topics, and diverting potentially problematic discussions. She is not only invested in the interaction progressing smoothly, but is also concerned about representing the ethnic conflict in a responsible way (not overly frightening me, etc.).<sup>135</sup> Meena's responsibility towards me was heightened because of the fact that I was teaching and doing research at Girls' College, the school that her children attend, and where her older sister is a teacher. More generally, she also seemed to try to represent her own community (Muslims), and the ethnic conflict, in a responsible and informed way. In our conversations, we would often have long discussions about culture, history, politics, and religion. Her brother's asking me to find him a job in the US is particularly offensive to her, as she has always treated me as a friend and a colleague, and has been careful not to explicitly ask for anything

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<sup>135</sup> Meena was very aware that as a foreigner I was not used to the ethnic conflict, and thus would be easily frightened by incidences of violence. Throughout my research period, my Sri Lankan friends and informants would often laugh at the way that I talked about violent events. I think it was very obvious to them how unaccustomed I was to everyday violence. For many Sri Lankans these events are so internalized that they do not talk about them in as straightforward ways. Even after a year and a half of fieldwork, the way I talked about violent events was still markedly different from the way others did.



from me (which would position us as non-equals).

We have thus seen how throughout the interaction the brother makes explicit stances with respect to both the topic (his views on the violent incidences) and the other participants (trying to take the dominant role in the conversation). The other family members respond by explicitly refuting his statements, and by employing interactional strategies to try to edge him out of the conversation. In this interaction, the explicit stances that the brother takes are highly available for contestation. For example, when he declares that all Jaffna students are Tigers, it is even easy for me, as a non-native Tamil speaker, to immediately refute his statement, saying, “No, not all are Tigers.” In this interaction, how do the brother’s explicit stances differ from the stances that he conveys through drawing on Sinhala voices?

In the first part of this interaction (lines 1-14), the participants maintain topic and tone, thereby seeming to be in alignment with one another. In the first example, the girls react to Meena’s voicing of the Sinhala utterances with laughter and bodily engagement with Meena. In the second example, the Meena, her mother, and her sister-in-law show no overt indication of responding to the brother’s voicing at all. Silverstein (1981) argues that certain properties of an utterance determine whether or not it lies above or below the level of native speaker metalinguistic awareness (those aspects of language that are available for commentary). I suggest that because they involve the embedding of multiple layers of metapragmatic meaning (such as code, reported speech, poetic parallelism, and paralanguage), and thus cannot be immediately made sense of, stances that involve voicing are less available for immediately “thinking about” or “responding to” than more explicit forms of stance-taking. Thus, the participants may take some time

to realize what assumptions are involved in instances of voicing, or they may never realize this at all. But just because voicing is less available for “thinking about” and “responding to” than more explicit forms of stance-taking (such as declaring that all Tamils are Tigers), it does not mean that it does not have an impact. I argue that it is exactly by virtue of embedding multiple layers of linguistic and paralinguistic meaning that stances that involve voicing can be so powerful. I suggest that through voicing speakers convey (and therefore replicate) underlying assumptions about difference and conflict.

### **Moral Stance and Violence**

A linguistic anthropological approach to conflict is extremely useful, as it allows the analyst to see how conflict and difference is configured in socially-occurring interaction. In these examples, I have shown how speakers’ employment of Sinhala voices does not just represent a specific instance, but something generalizable. Through employing the voices of others, the speakers make clear and consistent moral claims. In doing so, they differentiate themselves from the Sinhalese in terms of their essential moral character.

Stance is a particularly useful tool for analyzing how speakers make alignments with one another and objects of discourse in multi-party talk. A focus on stance allows the analyst to see that alignments lie not only in explicit assertions (the referential functions of language), but also in other aspects of communication (paralanguage, poetics, reported speech). In contrast to studies that foreground code-choice in identity ascriptions, I show how the configuration of voice is not only dependent on code, but a complex layering of linguistic and paralinguistic features (Hill 1995a).

In contrast to language-focused studies that are limited to the functions of language that lie above the level of awareness, a focus on the functions of language that lie below the level of awareness (such as how speakers employ the voices of others), it is possible to see how taken for granted (or internalized) assumptions about social difference and conflict are perpetuated. In future research, it will be important to explore what aspects of the Sinhala voicing are specific to this particular family, and which aspects is part of a broader pattern.<sup>136</sup> In addition, long-term research will be necessary in order to see how the way the speakers' draw on Sinhala voices is changing with the shifting political circumstances in the post-war period. In this sense, the way that speakers draw on the voices of others in ongoing social interaction can provide a gauge of interethnic relations.

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<sup>136</sup> Another instance of voicing I frequently observed was when Up-country Tamils imitate Jaffna Tamils' speech. I particularly observed this among teachers and principals in educational settings, where Jaffna Tamils have long maintained dominance over other Tamil-speaking groups. In contrast with the examples I discuss in this chapter, these examples, rather than being linked to violence, are ideologically linked with power hierarchies between Jaffna and Up-country Tamils.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Education in the Language of Conflict: Reproduction and Change**

This dissertation has explored the production and maintenance of difference among Tamil and Muslim adolescents in Kandy, Sri Lanka, during a period of national unrest and outright conflict. Much of the research on institutional discrimination critiques the way in which institutions perpetuate inequities (Bourdieu 1991; Heller 2001); it does not explore the way in which students can act to interrupt these inequalities. This project grounds institutional discrimination in the history and political structures of Sri Lanka, and then shows how adolescents and teachers are managing it both inside and outside of institutional contexts. A number of anthropological studies of education have looked at the linguistic and social practices of youth across school and non-school settings (Garcia-Sanchez 2005; Goodwin 1990; Heath 1983; Philips 1983). Rather than simply comparing practices in school and non-school settings (in order to understand differential access to educational resources), this study considers how youth are taking up models or ideologies from these arenas to interactionally configure difference (Agha 2005b, 2007).

Throughout this dissertation, I have used language ideology as an analytical tool with which to examine the production and maintenance of difference among Tamil-speaking adolescents. Many language ideological approaches have been focused more on the content of language ideologies than on the semiotic dimensions of language ideological processes (Philips 1998). In this dissertation, I have made use of three

approaches in order to chart the relationship between explicit language ideologies and the “terms and presuppositions of metapragmatic discourse” (Silverstein 1979). First, in chapter four, I compared teachers’ explicit ideologies concerning which linguistic varieties are the “best” with the ideologies involved in the way in which they are correcting or evaluating students’ linguistic performances in the classroom. Drawing on Meek (2010), I show that by focusing on the disjunctures between explicit ideologies and the ideologies inherent in practice, it is possible to isolate the processes by which language ideological shifts are occurring. Second, in chapter five, I look at how students in the Grade 10 Tamil-medium class are acting to discursively reconfigure social differences in their interactions with me and with each other. These interactions all involve explicit metalinguistic statements. However, by focusing on the way in which these girls align and disalign with one another and objects of discourse over multiple interactional events (see Irvine’s (2009) definition of stance), I show how both explicit and implicit ideologies are being solidified or gelled (Wortham 2005; Silverstein 2005). Finally, in chapter seven, I shift attention away from a focus on the referential functions of language, and examine the ideologies involved in the way speakers are employing the voices of others, which involve metapragmatic features such as code, pitch, volume, reported speech, and poetic parallelism.

Overall, this dissertation has been concerned with the interactive co-production of difference, iterated over time. Careful readers may be left wondering whether this analysis has shown evidence of reproduction, or new production and consequent change.<sup>137</sup> I have shown how hierarchies are currently being reordered between North

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<sup>137</sup> Thomas R. Trautmann’s comments were particularly helpful in thinking through this aspect of my dissertation findings.

and East Tamils and other Tamil-speaking groups (Up-country Tamils and Muslims). This is evident through institutional policies, practices, and discourses (especially those surrounding which Tamil linguistic forms are the “best”). However, I suggest that the divisions between Tamil-speaking groups and the Sinhalese-majority are continually being produced and reproduced. As I showed in chapter five, Tamil and Muslim youth discursively align themselves with “cosmopolitan” futures that seemingly transcend ethnic, sub-ethnic, and religions differences. However, these constructions do not interrupt the underlying divisions between Tamil-speaking groups and the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

Shortly after the end of my fieldwork in August 2008, Sri Lanka underwent a period of rapid political change. The May 2009 victory of the Sri Lankan army over the LTTE came at the cost of thousands of lives. It is estimated that since the civil war began in 1983, 60,000 Sri Lankans have died and more than a million have been displaced (New York Times 2010). The war has also been detrimental to Sri Lanka’s economy and international reputation. But while the war may be over, as a political solution to address the needs of Sri Lanka’s ethnic minorities has not been found, the ethnic conflict persists (Uyangoda 2010). In the following, I discuss the main concerns for Sri Lanka’s ethnic minority groups in the immediate post-war period. These include the following: the increasing unlikelihood of a political solution to the ethnic conflict (such as federal devolution); Sri Lanka’s weakening democracy and the crackdown on human rights and civil liberties; and the country’s economic problems. After this discussion, I draw on the findings of my research in educational institutions and beyond to make suggestions for how the national education system can contribute to lessening tensions between ethnic

minority groups and the Sinhalese-majority, and through this, contribute to bringing about positive social change.

## **The Post-war Period**

### **The Unlikelihood of a Political Solution**

Political analysts have long argued that countries such as Sri Lanka that have had a long history of ethnic conflict need to devolve power rather than concentrate it (New York Times 2010). In 1987, an amendment was passed to the Sri Lankan constitution that called for the devolution of power from the central government to the regional provinces. This, however, was never put into practice. When Sri Lanka's current president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was reelected for a second-term in 2010, he promised to devolve power to the regional governments as a way to avoid conflict among Tamil and Muslim minorities. However, Rajapaksa is yet to take any such action (Uyangoda 2010; Polgreen 2010a, b).

An immediate consequence of the Sri Lankan army's military defeat of the LTTE is that the possibility of a political solution to the conflict (such as regional devolution) is as elusive as ever. With the LTTE now decimated, Tamils have very little bargaining power in which to achieve their rights. In addition, many of the most talented Tamil leaders have been killed in the war or have left for Canada, the US, the UK, and elsewhere. Other Tamil political parties have aligned with the government, seeing the futility of struggling against the Sinhalese-majority (Polgreen 2010b). Some analysts suggest that militarism will continue if the government fails to promote Tamil rights (Uyangoda 2010). Presenting another view, Devotta (2009) argues that nationalists' plans to continue what he describes as the Sinhalese Buddhist domination of the island

(quelling internal dissent, as well as populating the North and East with Sinhalese settlers and military personnel) will ensure that any attempts at Tamil militarism are thwarted.

### **Weakening Democracy and Crackdown on Human Rights and Civil Liberties**

In the period from 2007 to 2008, the Rajapaksa government had succeeded in gaining the political support to defeat the LTTE by military means. During this same period, the government also began a campaign to crush internal dissent, which included cracking down on all those who appeared to challenge the government (including journalists, politicians, and others). The New York Times (2010) aptly describes the situation at this time:

Independent journalists have been hounded out of the country, jailed on antiterrorism laws and killed. Alongside the conventional war, a shadow war has been waged in government-held cities, including Colombo (2010). Human Rights Watch blamed the government for a string of unexplained disappearances; the victims were largely Tamils.

The government dismissed most of the criticism from human rights organization as pro-rebel propaganda (New York Times 2010).

In the post-war period, there is evidence of a further crackdown on human rights and civil liberties, as well as a weakening of democracy. After the government infiltrated the last LTTE territory in the Northern Vanni region in May 2009, it held close to 300,000 inhabitants of this area trapped in camps. The government insisted that their detainment was necessary to find the rebels among the civilians. Human rights organizations and many Western governments criticized the Sri Lankan government as conditions became deplorable in the camps, with inhabitants suffering from the lack of basic sanitation, malnutrition, and disease. After months of intense international pressure, inhabitants were finally released from the camps on December 1, 2009, and



allowed to return to their villages (New York Times 2010).

Since the end of the war, Rajapaksa has been making attempts to solidify his power, largely at the cost of Sri Lanka's democracy. As I mentioned above, shortly after the May 2009 victory over the LTTE, Rajapaksa called for an early reelection. While he said that he wanted to give the newly freed people of the North and East a chance to vote, many Sri Lankans saw it as an opportunity to capitalize on his military successes (Economist 2009). On January 26, 2010, in a landslide victory, Rajapaksa defeated the former commander of the Sri Lankan army, General Sarath Fonseka (whom Tamils had largely supported), to be reelected for a second term. Immediately following the election, Rajapaksa arrested and court marshaled Fonseka. The government officially claimed that Fonseka had broken the law by campaigning while still an active general, as well as mishandling weapons contracts. Many of Fonseka's supporters, however, saw his arrest as a sign that Rajapaksa was trying to eliminate his only opposition. In the next six months, Rajapaksa made two additional moves to solidify his power in Sri Lanka. On February 9, 2010, in an attempt to capitalize from the wide margin of victory in the presidential elections, Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament, clearing the way for elections to choose a new legislature (hoping that his United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) party would gain a majority, which it did) (Polgreen 2010a). In September 2010, Parliament passed a proposal to remove presidential term limits from the constitution, allowing Rajapaksa to run for a third term.

While there was some hope that it would ease up, the crackdown on civil liberties that occurred from 2007 to 2008 is continuing into the post-war period. Journalists, politicians, and others are regularly being arrested or disappearing. The government is

also seeking to limit the activities of international aid groups and NGOs, as well as restricting the entry of foreign researchers and even tourists. Rather than feeling more secure about their position in the post-war period, ethnic minority groups (Tamils, in particular) still fear for their basic safety and security in the Sinhalese-majority nation-state.

### **The Economy**

The nearly three-decade long civil war has been harmful to Sri Lanka's economy. In 2009, the economy was primarily orientated towards sustaining the war against the LTTE. As a result, internal and external economic policies were less prioritized (Uyangoda 2010). In the post-war period, Sri Lanka's economy has proved to be very resilient. However, attempts to restructure the Sri Lankan economy are currently being hampered by the global economic crisis (Uyangoda 2010; New York Times 2010). Today, Sri Lankans face problems such as the uneven development across urban and rural areas; high levels of unemployment; suppressed wages of workers; and cuts in social welfare (Kadiragama 2009:75). In the future, joblessness will only serve to exacerbate tensions between ethnic groups, interfering with any attempt to find sustainable peace.

### **Suggestions for the Future**

While educational reforms alone cannot ameliorate conflict, they can bring about positive social change (Wickrema and Colenso 2004). Since the post-independence period, the Sri Lankan government has prioritized the mass availability of education over all else. However, the admirable achievements of the national education system have been marred by its clear role in the perpetuation of conflict. In national contexts where

groups of people speak different languages, the availability of education in multiple mediums can enable educational access for all, and, through this, even contribute to national unity. In Sri Lanka, however, the passing of the *Swabasha* (vernacular) Act in 1956 (which led to the near complete segregation of Sinhala- and Tamil-medium schools), by reinforcing the already growing ethnic divisions between Sinhalese and Tamils, served to exacerbate the conflict.

I suggest that the only way in which the Sri Lankan educational system can promote lasting peace in Sri Lanka is to begin the gradual desegregation of Sri Lankan schools. But as my research at Girls' College has shown (see chapter three), combining Sinhala-, Tamil-, and English-medium students in the same schools is not enough to promote interethnic unity and integration. Using some successful Spanish/English bilingual schools in the US as an example, the national education system should create and implement bilingual and tri-lingual academic and extracurricular programs. These programs would be designed to enable a shared sense of participation among students of different ethnic, religious, and sociolinguistic backgrounds. The existing "official" language policy (where Sinhala-medium students have to learn Tamil and Tamil-medium students have to learn Sinhala) could still be applied, but teachers would need to emphasize spoken skills in addition to just reading and writing. As these subjects would be difficult to evaluate using the standardized national exam system, they could be evaluated at the discretion of individual schools (with the results added to students' electronic grade reports). At present, the national education system could use the existing bi- and multi-medium schools as testing grounds for the gradual desegregation of Sri Lankan schools.

However, while the desegregation of schools would have a positive result in easing interethnic relations, in order for lasting peace to be promoted in Sri Lanka, ethnic-minorities must feel that they are given fair opportunities outside of educational institutions, especially in government employment, higher education, and Tamil-medium infrastructure. The devolving of power to the regional provinces would be a productive first step toward finding a political solution to the conflict. In addition, it would also be beneficial if North and East Tamils and Up-country Tamils united to create new forms of political representation. If they remain politically divided as they are today, it will be very hard for them to ensure their rights.

Throughout my research, I found that Tamil and Muslim adults (teachers, principals, and parents) seemed to have an overwhelming sense that they do not have much of a future in Sri Lanka. While some (particularly Tamils) had a constant fear for their safety and security, others felt that because of their status as minorities they did not have any employment opportunities. Youth, however, differed from adults. I found that for the Tamil and Muslim youth in this study, imagining a “cosmopolitan” future was a very basic way they had of managing their situation—of having ambition and hope for the future. For them, being “cosmopolitan” meant being able to navigate Sri Lankan urban centers with ease (which involved speaking Sinhala, Tamil, and English), while also having global and transnational ties (either imagined or real).

Currently, Sri Lankan youth from all social backgrounds are pursuing opportunities to go abroad for employment or education. In the time since my research has finished, a significant number of people I knew have gone abroad, out of nothing but pure drive and resourcefulness. A student at Hindu College went to Iraq, where his

father had a job as the manager of a swimming pool on a US army base. One of my research assistants, Kumudhini, managed to get a visa to migrate to Melbourne, Australia. A Muslim friend of mine who had failed his A-levels, and was having trouble finding any employment in Sri Lanka got an opportunity to work for an International NGO in Europe. A young Up-country Tamil girl I knew in Colombo went to Dubai to work at a housemaid. However, whether or not they get opportunities to go abroad, for ethnic minority youth, feeling that they have ties to transnational spheres is crucial in managing their daily lives in the Sinhalese-majority nation-state.

In future research, it will be important to explore the role of electronic media in the configuration of national and transnational identities among Sri Lankan youth. There has been a significant amount of research on the role of transnational satellite television in the creation of ethnolinguistic and religious belonging among disparate South Asian groups (Eisenlohr 2006; Mankekar 1999). However, there have been relatively few studies focusing on the internet. I suggest that in being an interactive medium which combines elements of face-to-face interaction (among groups of people who use it together) and transnational networks, the internet plays a large role in the creation and perpetuation of transnational identities among Sri Lankan youth. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are particularly unique technologies in that users combine multiple forms of semiosis including talk, written communication (messages in Tamil, Sinhala, and English), and the circulation of personal photos, political images, and TV and movie clips to represent themselves to others, either known or unknown, real or imagined (Agha 2007). I hypothesize that by exploring the congruence and incongruence among these semiotic practices, it is possible to see how youth are negotiating their identities amid

politically tumultuous and uncertain post-war circumstances.

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1: Notes on Transcription and Transliteration**

### **The Tamil Language and Transliteration**

A member of the Dravidian family, Tamil is currently spoken by approximately 80 million speakers. It is primarily spoken in South India and Sri Lanka, as well as by significant populations in Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, and the U.K. Tamil has a tradition of literary and grammatical analysis dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

In Sri Lanka, where this research was conducted, the majority of the population speaks Sinhalese, which is a member of the Indo-Aryan language related to languages spoken in North India. Tamil is the second major language spoken in Sri Lanka. As in other post-colonial contexts, in Sri Lanka, the issue of which language should be the national language has been a source of contention (Canagarajah 2005; Ladousa 2005). In the post-independence period, Sinhala was declared to be the sole official language of Sri Lanka, with a provision that Tamil would also be used as a language of administration in the primarily Tamil-speaking northern and eastern provinces. In 1987, the constitution was amended to give Tamil status as a “co-official” language, and English status as a “link-language.” The medium of instruction in Sri Lankan schools is currently Sinhala and/or Tamil, with English currently being introduced in select schools.



The Tamil vowel system, called *uyir eḷuttu* (life letters) is composed of five short-long oppositions and five diphthongs:

Tamil	IPA	Transliteration
அ	ʌ	a
ஆ	a:	aa
இ	ɪ	i
ஈ	i:	ii
உ	ʊ	u
ஊ	u:	uu
எ	ɛ	e
ஏ	e:	ee
ஐ	ʌj	ai
ஓ	ɒ	o
ஔ	ɔ:	oo
ஔள	aʊ	au

The 18 consonants are referred to as *mey eḷuttu* (“body letters”).

Tamil	IPA	Transliteration
க	k, g, h	k, g, h
த	ɖ, ð	t, d
ந்	ŋ	n
ச	tʃ, s, dʒ,	ch, s, j
ஞ	ɲ	ñ
ட	ɖ, ɗ	T, D (retroflex)
ண	ɳ	N
ப	p	p
ம	m	m
ந்	ɱ	n
ய	j	y
ர	ɻ	r
ல	l	l
வ	v	v
ழ	ɻ	zh
ள	ɭ	L
ற	r, ɻ	r, t
ன	n	n

## Tamil Diglossia

Tamil was first codified by the *Tolkaappiyanaar* in the early centuries of the Common Era (Schiffman 1999), and again codified by the grammarian Pavanadi in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (since these times Tamil has been continuously codified and re-codified). Because of the differences between genres of literary Tamil and the language of spoken communication, Tamil linguists have applied Ferguson's (1959, 1991) concept of diglossia to the Tamil sociolinguistic situation (Zvelebil 1959-1964; Britto 1986; Schiffman 1999; Karunakaran 2005). Drawing on Ferguson, linguists have described different genres of Tamil. For example, Zvelebil (1959-1964) suggests that there are three levels of Tamil speech: (1) standard literary (*centamizh*); (2) standard colloquial (based on the higher status, non-Brahman speech of central Tamil Nadu, including Madurai); and (3) substandard colloquial (including regional and community based varieties). Shanmugam Pillai (1965) also makes a three-way distinction, but identifies *centamizh* as both literary Tamil and Pandit Tamil (*meTaittamizh* or "stage Tamil"). Britto (1986), based on Zvelebil (1963), Pillai (1965) and Andronov (1969), identifies the following four varieties of Tamil: (1) substandard colloquial Tamil; (2) standard colloquial; (3) literary Tamil; and (4) Pandit Tamil (*meTaittamizh*) (Bate 2000).

"Literary" Tamil is distinguished from "spoken" Tamil in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon (Levinson 1983:93). A number of scholars have analyzed the grammar of "spoken" Tamil, directly contrasting it with "literary" Tamil (Annamalai 1980; Asher 1982; Schiffman 1999). Such grammatical descriptions are misleading, however, as they often assume the existence of a single standard spoken Tamil. In addition, such descriptions also assume that there is a clear distinction between

“spoken” and “written” Tamil, when, in practice, they can be indistinguishable. The terms, “spoken” and “written” Tamil are actually misleading, as “written” Tamil can be spoken in oratory (recitation, drama, singing), and “spoken” Tamil can be written in novels, newspapers, magazines, and for pedagogical purposes (see Annamalai 2007). I thus suggest that the distinction between “literary” and “spoken” Tamil corresponds more to ideologies of language than to sociolinguistic realities. And as linguistic ideologies, the way in which they are understood is not universal, but variable upon “a participants’ understanding of their social world and the semiotic resources available in it” (Irvine 2001:22).

### **Tamil Transliteration**

The Madras University Tamil Lexicon transliteration scheme has been widely used for representing “written” Tamil in Roman script. This system, however, is insufficient for representing sounds unique to “spoken” Tamil, and difficult to follow for those unfamiliar with the Tamil language. Because this dissertation involves the transcription of large amounts of socially-occurring talk, I have chosen to employ a modified version of Madras Tamil Lexicon which I developed with L. Ramamoorthy. In creating this transliteration system, we drew on E. Annamalai’s (1980) transliteration system for “spoken” Tamil in the “Jim and Raja” conversations. Those familiar with Tamil will find this system easy to follow. In addition, those unfamiliar with Tamil will be able to get a sense of the way that Tamil sounds when spoken. While it is impossible to ever represent spoken language perfectly in written form, this system is particularly useful for depicting Tamil sociolinguistic variation as it encompasses a wide range of Tamil sounds. I have avoided the use of diacritics to facilitate ease of data exchange with

colleagues all over the world (as no special programs are required). I describe this system below:

**Long Vowels:** Rather than representing long vowels with a letter with a macron over it (e.g., ū), I represent them by double or “geminate” letters (e.g, uu). A common practice for linguistic notation (e.g., Navajo), this enables the vowel-length distinction to have the maximum visual impact (Annamalai 1980: xiii).

**Example:** *paaDu, paasam*

**Nasalization:** Nasalization is a common feature of “spoken” Tamil. Rather than using the tilde, I indicate nasalization by including the nasalized consonant in parentheses.

**Example:** In spoken Tamil, *naan* (I) is often pronounced *nãã*. I represent this as *naa(n)*.

**/E/:** In spoken Tamil, the word final /ai/ is pronounced close to /æ/. To avoid using diacritics, I represent this sound with E.

**Example:** *kaDai* is usually pronounced as *kaDE*.

**Voiced/Voiceless Consonants:** In Tamil there are six stop consonants:

Velar:  $\text{ḷ}$

Palatal:  $\text{ṣ}$

Retroflex:  $\text{ḷ}$

Alveolar:  $\text{ṇ}$

Dental:  $\text{ḷ}$

Labial:  $\text{ḷ}$

In the initial position (except for  $\text{ḷ}$  and  $\text{ṇ}$ ) and when germinated, the above stops are

phonetically voiceless (and unaspirated). When they occur after a nasal, they are all voiced. Intervocally, they are all lax, and, with the exception of  $\text{ḱ}$  (k) and  $\text{ḥ}$  (c), voiced (Schiffman 1999: 10-11). The Madras Lexicon transcribes the “hard” (obstruent) letters,  $\text{ḱ}$ ,  $\text{ḥ}$ ,  $\text{Ḍ}$ ,  $\text{ḏ}$ , and  $\text{Ḑ}$  consistently with the Roman voiceless consonant symbols k, c, t, and p even when those letters are pronounced “soft” (voiced and/or spirantized) (Annamalai 1980: viii). In this system, I distinguish voiced and voiceless consonants:

$\text{ḱ}$  = k, g, h

$\text{ḥ}$  = c(ch), s, sh

$\text{Ḍ}$  = T, D (retroflex)

$\text{ḏ}$  = t, d

$\text{Ḑ}$  = p, b

**\*c/s/sh:** In Tamil,  $\text{ḥ}$ (c) in word initial position is in free variation as [s] and [c]. In addition, in some varieties of Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil,  $\text{ḥ}$ (c), either word initially, or between vowels, is pronounced as “sh.” To represent these sound particular to spoken Tamil, I have chosen to distinguish c, s and sh.

**Example:** *sari* may be alternatively pronounced as *sari* or *chari*. *asai* may be alternatively pronounced as *ashai*.

**Retroflex:** In order to avoid the use of diacritics, rather than marking retroflex sounds with a dot underneath the relevant letter, I have marked them with a capital letter.

**Example:** *paTTam*

**Retroflex Continuent:** Many Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka pronounce  $\text{ḑ}$  (ḑ) as /L/ or /l/. In order to represent these distinctions, I transcribe  $\text{ḑ}$  alternatively as zh (ḑ), L, and l.

**Example:** In Sri Lanka, Tamil may be alternatively pronounced as *tamizh*, *tamiL*, *tamil*, or *tamul*.

**Nasal Consonants:** The diacritical marks on the velar nasal ன (ñ) and the palatal ஞ (ñ̃) nasal are omitted when they occur in conjunction with their hard-letter counterparts (they rarely occur elsewhere) since in spoken Tamil no other nasal occurs in this position and no ambiguity arises (Annamalai 1980: viii).

**Example:** *vaañga* is represented as *vaanga* and *koñ̃jam* is represented as *konjam*. In addition, the dental nasal ன (n) and the alveolar nasal ண (ṇ) are not in phonological contrast and therefore in the transcription there is no need to use the diacritic that distinguishes the respective letters from one another (Annamalai 1980: viii).

**Example:** *n(ṇ)aan* is transcribed the same way as *man (ṇ)i*

**Foreign Words:** I have tried to transcribe foreign words as they are pronounced. The distinction that I employ between voiced and voiceless consonants is highly productive to this end.

**Example:** In Tamil script, the English word bus, is written as *pas*, though it is commonly pronounced as *bassu* (Annamalai 1980: viii).

**Dropping of Sounds:** In spoken Tamil many final sounds are dropped or lost. When the meaning is ambiguous, I represent the actual sounds in brackets .

**Example:** In spoken Tamil, *vanda* represents both the conditional form, *vandal* (if I come), and the third person plural finite verb form *vandarhaL* (they come). To avoid ambiguity, I represent the conditional form as *vanda(l)*.

In places where the meaning is not ambiguous, I have tried to represent features of spoken Tamil, such as the omissions and alterations of sounds, as closely as possible.

Some spoken Tamil forms are transcribed more in accordance to how they are pronounced in spoken Tamil than according to the rules of written Tamil.

**Example:** *irukkireen* is often pronounced as *irukke(n)*, and *avaLuDaiya* is often pronounced a *avalooDa*.

### Sinhalese Transliteration and Transcription

This dissertation includes a small amount of socially-occurring talk in Sinhala. Like Tamil, Sinhala is also recognized to be a diglossic language, which significant differences between “literary” and “spoken” varieties (Suseendirarajah 1999). The Sinhala vowel system is comprised of 13 vowel phonemes out of which 7 are short and 6 are long:

Sinhala	IPA	Transliteration
අ	ʌ	a
ආ	a:	aa
ඉ	ɪ	i
ඊ	i:	ii
එ	ɛ	e
ඒ	e:	ee
ඔ	ɒ	o
ඹ	ɔ:	oo
ඹෟ	aʊ	au
උ	ʊ	u
උෟ	u:	uu
ඇ	æ	æ
ඈ	æ:	æ (long vowel)

Sinhala has 24 consonants. The major point of difference with Tamil is the absence of an alveolar stop and the presence of a voiceless/voiced contrast (Suseendirarajah 1999:74).

The voiceless/voiced contrast, however, is not realized in most spoken Sinhala varieties.

Sinhala	IPA	Transliteration
ක	k	k
ඛ	k <sup>h</sup>	-
ග	g	g

ඝ	g <sup>h</sup>	-
ඞ	ŋ	n
ඟ	<sup>n</sup> g	ng
ච	tʃ	c
ඡ	tʃ <sup>h</sup>	-
ඣ	ɟ	j
ඤ	ɟ <sup>h</sup>	-
ඦ	ɲa	ñ
ට	ndʒa	gna
ඨ	t	T
ඩ	t <sup>h</sup>	-
ඪ	d	D
ණ	d <sup>h</sup>	-
ඬ	n	N
ත	t	t
ද	t <sup>h</sup>	-
ධ	d	d
ඳ	d <sup>h</sup>	-
ඵ	n	n
ඹ	p	p
ය	p <sup>h</sup>	-
ර	b	b
඼	b <sup>h</sup>	-
඾	m	m
඿	j	y
ර	r	r
ල	l	l
ව	v	v

Throughout the dissertation I have used the same transliteration system for Sinhala and Tamil. The only symbols that I have added are the use of /ə/, as in *modəwadə*, and the use of /æ/, as in *nææ*.



## Appendix 2: “Literary” and “Spoken” Tamil Varieties in the Classroom

To illustrate the way that teachers mix “literary” and “spoken” varieties in the classroom, I provide a brief example of a Grade 10 Tamil-medium Tamil class at Girls’ College, taught by Geetha, an Up-country Tamil Hindu. That week, the lesson was based on a collection of short stories written in Jaffna called “*takali pazham* (tomato).” Geetha had asked a group of four students write and perform a play based on the short story. In order to convey the atmosphere of the play, the girls (two Up-country Tamils and two Muslims) had employed “spoken” features emblematic of Jaffna Tamil (such as the non-dropping of final nasal consonants, the use of “*oom* (yes),” and “*cheri* (okay)”). After they finished performing the play, Geetha led the class in a discussion of the performance. I present a segment of this interaction below:

(I have underlined forms which are closer to “spoken” than to “literary” Tamil. I have also tried to reproduce the feeling of “literary” vs. “spoken” Tamil in my English translation.)

<p>(1) <b>Teacher:</b> <u>poodu poodu</u>. takkaaLi pazham ciRukadayila uLLa pattirungaL naaDahamaakki naDissaanga idila uLLa niRai ennannu sollunga.</p> <p>(2) <b>Student A:</b> kirushnaavum nayaniyum nallaa naDiccaanga</p> <p>(3) <b>Teacher:</b> sila kataapaattirangaL nanRaaha naDittanar. <u>veeRa sollunga</u>, veeRa enna niRai mozhi naDai ciRuppaaha irundadu. <u>aDuttadu</u>, <u>veeRa sollunga</u></p> <p>(4) <b>Student B:</b> <u>takkaLi pazham patti sollella maDam</u>.</p> <p>(5) <b>Teacher:</b> takkaaLi pazham patri kuuRappaTavillai</p> <p>(6) <b>Student C:</b> <u>katai amaippu illa</u></p> <p>(7) <b>Teacher:</b> katai amaippu ciRappaaha amaikkappaTavillai. <u>veeRa?</u></p> <p>(8) <b>Student D:</b> <u>muDivu konjaa</u></p>	<p>(1) <b>Teacher:</b> <u>Enough, enough</u>. Tell me what your opinions are regarding the drama based on the “tomato short-story.”</p> <p>(2) <b>Student A:</b> Krishna and Nayani acted well.</p> <p>(3) <b>Teacher:</b> According to some opinions she acted well. <u>Say some others</u>. The language and the acting were good. <u>Next, say some others</u>.</p> <p>(4) <b>Student B:</b> <u>They didn’t tell about “tomato,” Madam</u></p> <p>(5) <b>Teacher:</b> They did not discuss anything pertaining to “tomato.”</p> <p>(6) <b>Student C:</b> <u>The story did not have a structure</u></p> <p>(7) <b>Teacher:</b> The structure of the story was not constructed well. <u>What else?</u></p> <p>(8) <b>Student D:</b> <u>they cut off the ending</u></p>
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<p><u>piDiccuTTaanga</u>  (9)Teacher: <u>ah. muDivula pizha. veeRa ?</u></p>	<p>(9) Teacher: <u>Ah. A mistake in the end. Others?</u></p>
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As is evident above, when Geetha discusses the subject material, she uses “literary” Tamil. However, when prompting the girls to be quiet in lines 1 and 2, or to answer her questions (it takes a lot of prompting to get a group of 47 girls to have a discussion), she uses the “spoken” honorific command form “*sollunga* (tell),” which would be “*sollungaL*” in “literary” Tamil. In contrast with Geetha’s utterances, the students’ comments are closer to “spoken” than “literary” Tamil. When the students give their comments in lines 2, 4, 6, Geetha rephrases them in “literary” Tamil. For example, in line 4, the student says “*takkaLi pazham patti sollalla madam*” (They didn’t tell about “tomato.”). In line 5, the teacher repeats this in more “literary” Tamil saying, “*takkaLi pazham patri kuuRappTavillai*” (They did not discuss anything pertaining to “tomato”). By rephrasing the students’ comments into “literary” Tamil, the teacher is socializing them into the proper “literary” register, which, in turn, also involves using the correct technical terminology (which they will have to produce on their O-level exams). In line 9, however, the teacher falters, and does not repeat the students’ comment in a more “literary” way. Rather, she just says, “*aah muDivu pila, veera* (aah, the ending was a mistake, others?”).

As this example shows, though it is the teacher’s role to inculcate students into “literary” Tamil in speech and in writing, it is rarely continuously sustained over classroom interactions. A friend of mine who is a Tamil-medium lecturer at Peradeniya University says that in the beginning of class when he is fresh he can sustain “literary”

Tamil, but by the end of class, it invariably falters (because of pronunciation or syntactical issues).

### **Appendix 3: Configuring Difference in the Tamil-Medium Staff Room**

One day I came into the staff room to find Tilakavati and Jayanthi, the music teacher from Jaffna. Slightly later, we were joined by Raavi, the math teacher from Batticaloa. The teachers were in a jovial mood that day as due to an island-wide teachers' union strike, they did not have to teach any classes. Many of the Sinhalese teachers hadn't come in to school at all, but the Tamil-medium teachers, not feeling secure in their jobs, decided to come in. I quickly realized that this was a good time to give Raavi a survey I had written for the Tamil-medium teachers. When he sat down, I handed him a copy of the survey. Raavi, Jayanthi (who had already filled out the survey), and I were sitting at one end of the table, and Tilakavati was sitting at the other end, involved in some paper correcting.

Raavi joked that he didn't know Tamil, and started to fill out the survey in English. When he met me in the staff room and other spaces around Girls' College, Raavi preferred to converse with me in English. I think that on one hand he wanted to practice his English (he was planning to take TOEFL), but on the other, he also wanted to display his English skills to the other teachers as a sign of his class and educational level.

Raavi filled out the first questions, checking with Jayanthi about what she had written for certain questions. When Raavi got to some more involved questions, he confessed that he could not answer them in English anymore. Jayanthi burst out laughing, saying (in Tamil), "I thought you didn't know Tamil?" Tilakavati also laughed.

Raavi reached the last question on the survey, # 21 (Do you think the Tamil language is important for Islam?). This question was designed to elicit comments on the importance of Tamil, in relation to Arabic, in the teaching and practicing of Islam.

Raavi, however, equipped with his own prejudices, interpreted the question to mean:

“Should Muslims even bother with Tamil?” The conversation persists:

(In this interaction Raavi makes use of the reported speech marker, “*aam.*” I have marked this with “RS.” I have also marked the use of the emphatic (emph.).)

<p>(1) <b>Raavi:</b> eppaDittaaan sonnaalum, avangaLukku teevayille tamizh teevayille (2) <b>Jayanthi:</b> iikki enDu</p> <p>(3) <b>Raavi (to me):</b> pig, adu enna teriyumaa? adu ennu ceyyumaan uutta irukkadaanee uutta (4) <b>Jayanthi:</b> pig? (5) <b>Christie:</b> oo! uutta (6) <b>Raavi:</b> uuttayenDa dust, ceer, ceer tanniyadaa(n) saappiTumaam (7) <b>Christie:</b> aanaa koozhiyum appaDi...</p> <p>(8) <b>Jayanthi:</b> kozhi appaDi ille (9) <b>Raavi:</b> anda paNDiya koNDuvandu viiTtila nippaaTTalaa(m) nallaa kuLippaTTi, soop pooTTu sunsille poTTu kazhuvi tuDacc viiTTa suuhaadaaramaa, nalla niiT aakki koNDu vandu vakkiRataam. avittu viTToom enna naDandadaam? Oree oTTamaa oDi anda uuttakkuLLa pooy kiDakkumaam. ada pooy saappiDumaam. aadavee ningaL evvaLudaa(n) solli kuDuttaalum, iikkidu enDutaan sollum.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Raavi:</b> However you may say it, it is not use. For them, Tamil is no use. (2) <b>Jayanthi:</b> they say "iikki"(shortened form of 'to be' commonly used by Muslims). (3) <b>Raavi (to me):</b> Do you know what a "pig" is? What does it do (RS)? There is dirt, right, dirt? (4) <b>Jayanthi:</b> pig? (5) <b>Christie:</b> Yes, dirt... (6) <b>Raavi:</b> "uutta" is dust, filth. It eats filth (emph.). (7) <b>Christie:</b> But chickens are also like that... (8) <b>Jayanthi:</b> chickens are not like that (9) <b>Raavi:</b> if you take that pig to your home to stay (RS) and bathe it well, put soap on it, put Sunsille(dishwashing liquid) on it, wash it well, dry it, polish it, make it (RS) "neat." If we untie it, what happens (RS)? If will run in the same dirt (RS). It will go and eat the filth (RS). Like that, no matter how much you teach them, they will always say "iikkidu."</p>
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During his conversation in the canteen with Geetha and Nabeha, Raavi had been much more diplomatic about his views about Muslim’s speech. In the following interaction, in the absence of any Muslim teachers, Raavi is very explicit about his attitudes towards Muslim Tamil, and Muslim in general. In this interaction, Raavi is trying to characterize Muslim’s Tamil speech in the most negative and offensive way possible. Likening Muslims to pigs, a reviled (*haram*) animal in Islam, he makes the

point that no matter how much you teach Muslims “good” Tamil, they will immediately go back to their own language (which he likens to the filth that pigs roll in). By making use of this metaphor, Raavi emphasizes the essentialized link between language and identity.

**Appendix 4: Student Talk during a Lesson in the Grade 11 Hindu College Classroom**

As the government does not contribute any money for school expenses, students have to raise money to pay for supplies (i.e., test papers, materials for projects, tea and coffee and snacks for special occasions). At Hindu College, because the students have very little surplus money, the task of collecting money was a highly involved process. That morning, the science teacher was giving a lecture to the Grade 11 students on electromagnetism. Sanji, who is a very vocal student, has been put in charge of collecting money to pay for the science exam papers. In the following interaction, we see how her task of collecting money takes precedence over the lesson:

(The following shows the layout of the last row two rows in the Grade 11 classroom space. The recorder was on Sanji’s desk.)

\*Sanji Vanisri                      Kannan, Michael, Ratnam  
Priyanthani Saachee Myself

<p>(1) <b>Teacher:</b> samandirama eDuttaa enna ceyyu?</p> <p>(2) <b>Sanji:</b> kuDum Tiichar (teacher continues to talk in the background but the girls’ voices makes it inaudible on the recording)</p> <p>(3) <b>Sanji (leaning over towards Kannan):</b> kaNNan, kaNNan pattu ruva kaasu enga? Test paper kaasu, tumbukaTTa kaasu taa (n) kuDuttiinga, pattu ruvaa</p> <p>(4) <b>Kannan:</b> poy (he turns away from Sanji)</p> <p>(5) <b>Sanji:</b> Test paper kaasu, science paperkku (Kannan isn’t responding)</p> <p>(6) <b>Sanji (to Vanisri):</b> kuppuDungale</p> <p>(7) <b>Vanisri:</b> How?</p>	<p>(1) <b>Teacher:</b> When it becomes parallel, what will happen?</p> <p>(2) <b>Sanji:</b> 1 a lot [of power] Tiichar (teacher continues to talk in the background but the girls’ voices makes it inaudible on the recording).</p> <p>(3) <b>Sanji (leaning over towards Kannan):</b> Kannan, Kannan, where is the ten rupees money? Test paper money. you gave money for the broomstick, 10 rupees.</p> <p>(4) <b>Kannan:</b> false. (he turns away from Sanji)</p> <p>(5) <b>Sanji:</b> test paper cash, for the science paper (Kannan isn’t responding).</p> <p>(6) <b>Sanji (to Vanisri):</b> Will you call him?</p> <p>(7) <b>Vanisri:</b> How?</p>
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<p><b>(8) Sanji (to Ratnam):</b> ratnam pattu ruva enga</p> <p><b>(9) Sanji (to Kannan):</b> kaNNan paatu ruba kaasu enga?</p> <p><b>(10) Sanji (to Vanisri):</b> Aa, niinga appaDi aaDikkorukka, aamaavasakki orukka vandiinganaa naanga eppaDi kaasu kekkuRadu naLakku arul, ratnam, KaNNan, naaLakku kaasu naa sonnee(n), pasumballa koopi poTTu kuDupponu</p> <p><b>(11) Vanisri:</b> ellarukku kuDukkuRaangaLaa?</p> <p><b>(12) Sanji:</b> Tiiccar kuDuccaa paravayilla</p> <p>(The conversation between Vanisri and Sanji continues until science class is over and the students have their lunch time interval period.)</p>	<p><b>(8) Sanji (to Ratnam):</b> Ratnam, where is the ten rupees?</p> <p><b>(9) Sanji (to Vanisri):</b> Kannan, where is the ten rupees?</p> <p><b>(10) Sanji (to Vanisri):</b> Ah, if you come to school only once a month, how can we ask money from you? Tomorrow Arul, Ratnam, Kannan, tomorrow money I said, we will put cow milk in the coffee and give.</p> <p><b>(11) Vanisri:</b> Do we have to give it to everybody?</p> <p><b>(12) Sanji:</b> If only the teacher drinks it, it is okay.</p> <p>(The conversation between Vanisri and Sanji continues until science class is over and the students have their lunch time interval period)</p>
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In line 2, Sanji, clearly paying attention to the lesson, answers the teacher's questions regarding parallel currents. However, only a second later, she abandons the lesson, and starts trying to inform the Grade 11 boys about the money that they owe. In line 3, she leans over Vanisri (who is sitting on the edge of the aisle) and asks Kannan for 10 rupees for the exam paper. Kannan denies that he owes the money in line 4, and turns away. In line 6, Sanji then asks Vanisri to call him. When she asks, "How?" Sanji yells over at Ratnam and asks for his share of the money. After making another attempt to ask Kannan for the money, Sanji turns to Vanisri and discusses the matter. She talks about the frustration of asking Kannan for money when he only comes to school once a month. They also discuss their task of bringing milk tea to the class the following day.



In this example, we see how Sanji completely disregards the teacher's lesson, and turns to the involved task of informing the boys about the money that they own. She employs interactional strategies to do this without getting in trouble from the teacher. She initially leans over Vanisri to talk to Kannan, but when he turns away, she tries to get Vanisri and possibly her other classmates to get his attention. Eventually, she gives up talking to the boys, directly, but by informing Vanisri about who owes money, in the earshot of the other students, she gets the message across. Though it is not immediately evident on the transcript, the girls around Sanji and the boys sitting near Kannan, were very distracted by Sanji's efforts.

## Appendix 5: Exchange between Mani and Boys in his Hometown of Digana

In the following I present an interaction that occurred between many and two boys in his hometown of Digana:

(I marked the use of the emphatic (emph.). The use of the intimate addressive term, “*Daa*,” is in bold.)

<p><b>Boy A:</b> nii kilaasukku poonayoo? innorukkaa o-level ceyyaniyoo? <b>Mani :</b> innorukkaa vaa? ippa daa(n) ceyyuree <b>Boy A:</b> kilasukku pooniyoo? <b>Mani:</b> illa tuntukku paakka poonee (mani sounds annoyed) <b>Boy A (to Boy B):</b> Deey keettiyaa? Avee poykki meela punda mahee <b>Mani:</b> sari maccaa pooyittu vaare  <b>Boy A (to Mani):</b> (unclear) <b>Mani:</b> nii enda schoolkku poonee? <b>Boy A:</b> asoka Asoka vile terinjavanga yaaru irukkaangalaa? <b>Mani:</b> kupeendiran <b>Boy A:</b> sari appa naa pooyittu varattaa <b>Mani:</b> okay, <b>Daa</b></p>	<p><b>Boy A:</b> Did you go to class? Are you doing O-level for the second time? <b>Mani:</b> Another time? I'm just doing it now (emph.). <b>Boy A:</b> Did you go to class? <b>Mani:</b> No, I went to see a girl/bride.  <b>Boy A (to Boy B):</b> Hey, did you ask? About a lie, she is the daughter of a bitch (she will cheat you. She is a bad girl) <b>Mani:</b> Okay, maccaa (cousin, friend). I go and come. <b>Boy A (to Mani):</b> (unclear) <b>Mani:</b> Which school did you (non-hon.) go to? <b>Boy A:</b> Asoka Is there anybody you know at ashoka? <b>Mani:</b> Kupendiran (a boy's name) <b>Boy A:</b> Okay, should I come and go? <b>Mani:</b> okay, <b>Daa.</b></p>
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