The 'Great Chronicle' of a Mythic Past:
The Narrativization of Ideology in the Construction of Sinhalese National Identity

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Abstract

Religion and nationalism can be imbricated without presupposing either analogous or causal relationships between these terms. Myth is pivotal to the imbrication of religion and nationalism. In Sri Lanka, the *Mahāvaṃsa* illustrates this relationship, because it has articulated the foundation of a Sinhalese nationalism which justifies violence against the minority Tamil population. Chapter XXV is often interpreted to provide justification for violence against non-Buddhists by eradicating the contradiction between nationalist violence and Buddhist values. It has legitimated the modern nationalist agenda. One way this has been translated into concrete policy is through the development of the 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution. Sri Lankan constitutionalism has been a product of the mythical metanarrative included in nation-building.

Introduction

Social formations are constructed, reconstructed, and legitimized through the process of myth-making, i.e., the creation of mythical primordial narratives. The arbitrary categorical boundaries that separate religious myth and political myth have frequently led to the allocation of religious influences as a secondary and less important influence in some forms of ideological identity making. Existing scholastic assessments of religion and nationalism largely pertain to what are traditionally considered 'myths' in religious studies, and do not accurately allude to the ideological 'myth-making' process that is engaged in to construct, authorize, and reconstruct social identities and formations. Based on a conception of myth that is not delineated by sacred and profane realms, this essay will show that myth, as the narrativization of ideology, constructs and legitimizes political, as well as religious identities. The analysis pertains specifically to the relationship of Buddhism and Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka.

As Rogers Brubaker points out, the contestability of both the terms 'religion' and 'nationalism' has frequently made scholarship contradictory and unclear.[1] As such, Chapter 1 will include a discussion and clarification of the terms and a brief account of their contestability. Brubaker developed a framework for approaching the relationship between religion and nationalism in different ways. It is most useful for the purposes of this paper to establish that religion and nationalism are imbricated in ways so that religion need not be viewed as an external explanation of nationalism, but as part of the phenomenon. This allows for analysis of both religion and nationalism without presupposing essentialist characteristics about either and enables dialogue with influential theories of Benedict Anderson, Lowell Barrington, and Anthony D. Smith. It does,

[1] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* v.18, n.1 (2012): 1.

however, necessitate a more thorough discussion of myth, as it has one of the primary functions in this approach to religion and nationalism.

In Chapter 2, I will examine the role of myth in the process of nation building, primarily utilizing the theoretical framework established by Bruce Lincoln. In the interest of avoiding the use of myth as a self-evident categorization, I will examine how myth is typically categorized for study, focusing on major contributions by scholars like Bronislaw Malinowski, Mircea Eliade, and Russell McCutcheon. I provide a provisional definition of myth that couples Lincoln with Burton Mack's theory of social formations, and defend it through discussion of the role of truth and sacrality. This provisional definition allows for theoretical application to the particularities of the Sri Lankan case throughout the rest of the essay.

Acknowledging that myth is multi-functional, Chapter 3 limits this study to examine the position of the *Mahāvamsa* ('Great Chronicle') in the construction of Sinhalese national identity in Sri Lanka. I focus especially on Chapter XXV, which depicts the epic victory of a Sinhalese King over Tamil invasion. This myth has provided justification for nationalist violence by eradicating the contradictions of violence with Buddhist values of non-violence. I will show how this myth articulates history in a particular way which privileges Sinhalese Buddhists and denigrates the Tamil minority population.

The discussion of the impact of mythic history in Sri Lanka will be expanded in Chapter 4 through the examination of certain principles of theocratic constitutionalism. This will be used as a heuristic template to interpret how the document of the 1978 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka functioned in its original context and how it was developed in light of Sri Lankan nationalism. The 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution shows a privileging of Buddhism, based

on the established mythic history found in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. Its unresolved contradictions between assertions of theocratic and transnational constitutionalism are the result of the discourse established by the involvement of myth in Sri Lankan nation-building.

A concluding chapter will summarize the arguments of the paper and suggest areas for further research.

Chapter 1: Religion and Nationalism: Definitions and Approaches

This chapter focuses on the connection between religion and nationalism, and will argue that the two are inextricably linked. I will begin with a presentation of Rogers Brubaker's four proposed approaches to the study of religion and nationalism, and provide brief critiques of each approach. As Brubaker points out, the contestability of both the terms 'religion' and 'nationalism' has frequently made scholarship contradictory and unclear.[2] As such, this chapter will discuss the problematic dimensions of the terms 'religion' and 'nationalism', which will substantiate the use of Brubaker's third approach as the overarching framework of analysis. The consideration of the contestability of nationalism will focus primarily on Benedict Anderson and Lowell Barrington. Brubaker indicates that his four approaches are not alternative theories and that he is not arguing for the merits of one over another, but rather provides them to present "a sense of the range and variety of questions that can be asked about the relationship between the large and multidimensional fields of phenomenon we call 'religion' and 'nationalism'."[3] However, Brubaker's third category is the most useful for the purposes of this paper because it allows an approach to the nexus of religion and nationalism in Sri Lanka without claiming that (1) religion and nationalism are analogous phenomenon, (2) that religion is the "cause" of Sri Lankan nationalism, or (3) that religious nationalism is a distinctive form of nationalism.

Four Approaches to the Study of Religion and Nationalism

Given the contestability of the terms 'religion' and 'nationalism', it comes as little surprise that analysis of the relationship between the two is varying, and even contradictory (depending on

[2] Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* v.18, n.1 (2012): 1.
[3] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 15.

how each is defined). Rogers Brubaker proposed a framework that attempts to bypass this issue by focusing on how to study the relationship through four distinct ways. The first is to treat religion and nationalism as an analogous phenomenon. Through this, nationalism is synonymous with religion and religion is a way of identifying groups (not as a distinctive way to specify the content of political claims).[4] Brubaker states that "As a principle of vision and division of the social world, to use Bourdieu's phrase, religion too provides a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community, and a set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world (and of course the supra mundane world as well)."[5] Brubaker points out, however, that this perspective is often "flattening" and ignores what is distinctive about religion in relation to nationalism.[6]

The second way of analyzing the relationship of religion and nationalism identified by Brubaker is to treat religion as the cause or explanation of nationalism. While this is most frequently argued through case studies, broader arguments focus on the transfer of religious motifs, narratives, and symbols to the political domain to construct nationalist claims.[7] Nationalism is thus an unintended consequence of religious developments. For example, the contributions of the Protestant Reformation to the generation of new modes of imagining and constructing political and social relationships, promoting literacy and the standardization of vernaculars, and aligning the polity and culture more tightly (specifically, through Confessionalism).[8] The primary problem with this approach is that the use of case studies tends to be the result of highly selective sampling (and brief presentation).

[4] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 6.
[5] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 4.
[6] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 6.
[7] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 7.
[8] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 8.

The third approach proposed by Brubaker is to view religion as imbricated or intertwined with nationalism in a way that it is part of the phenomenon, not an external explanation of it. It may provide the criteria for national boundaries as a marker of identification, or more commonly, supply myths, metaphors, and symbols for the iconic representation of the nation.[9] Nevertheless, there are conceptual and methodological difficulties in specifying the precise nature of the connection between religion and nationalism, including assessing the pervasiveness/salience of religious imagery, and ascertaining the extent it has been 'secularized' through nationalist appropriation.[10]

The fourth and final way of analyzing the relationship between religion and nationalism that Brubaker considers is religious nationalism as a distinctive form of nationalism. This is based on distinctly religious claims of nationalism that include the ordering and regulating of public life in a manner conforming with religious principles (as opposed to the independent use of mythic imagery, for example).[11] One of the primary issues with this approach is that, to effectively make this argument, a specifically "statist" definition[12] of nationalism must be employed. The dangers lie in the over-extension of the concept through loss of its discriminating power between distinctly nationalist programs, and all politics that work in and through nation states. Brubaker points out that "If Islamism is a form of nationalism, it is nationalism without a central role for 'the nation'."[13]

[9] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 12.
[10] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 17.
[11] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 17-18.
[12] Where the state has totalizing control over economic and social policy.
[13] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 20.

This analysis will focus on the third approach of studying religion and nationalism, as it has a certain degree of open-endedness that suits the purposes of this paper. I will defend this choice with reference to problematic aspects of the discussion of religion and nationalism.

Problems in Defining 'Religion' and 'Nationalism'

There is considerable debate about defining terms in religious studies, foremost, the concept of 'religion' itself. It is beyond the limits of this paper to provide an in-depth analysis of these debates.[14] In this paper, my approach follows the work of Stephen Dawson. Dawson differentiates lexical definitions of religion from theoretical definitions. He states that a "lexical definition of religion tells us how most people in a given time and place understand 'religion.' Theoretical definitions, in contrast, prescribe how terms *ought* to be used in particular situations."[15] The theoretical prescription comes in forms of persuasion, which Dawson refers to as "rogue concepts" when there is no acknowledgement of the contestability of normative claims found in the definition.[16] He rejects lexical and many theoretical approaches to defining religion because they are essentialist in nature. He recommends using other forms of theorizing which view religion as a form of discourse which is imbricated in other forms of social and political discourse.

[14] See for examples of extensive treatment of these discussions, William E. Arnal, 2000. "Definition," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 21-34; Willi Braun, 2000. "Religion," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 3-20; John R. Hinnells, "Why Study Religions?" in *The Routlege Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells, (New York, NY: Routlege, 2005), 5-20; and, Eric J. Sharpe, "The Study of Religions in Historical Perspective," in *The Routlege Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells, (New York, NY: Routlege, 2005).

[15] Stephen Dawson, "The Religious Resurgence and International Relations Theory," *Religious Studies Review* v.39, n.4 (2013): 203 (my emphasis).

[16] Dawson, "Religious Resurgence," 204. A good example of this "rogue" conceptualization discussed by Dawson is Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics*, 2nd edition, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The use of 'religion' by Norris and Inglehart is supposedly global, but is essentially referring to Protestant Christianity, with emphasis on individual religiosity, God, heaven and hell, the soul, and afterlife. See also Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) for a notably Christocentric view of the relationship between religion and nationalism.

Although Rogers Brubaker pointed out that his four approaches for the study of religion and nationalism were not mutually exclusive, my analysis primarily falls in his third categorization: "religion not as something outside of nationalism that helps explain it, but as so deeply imbricated or intertwined with nationalism as to be part of the phenomenon, rather than an external explanation of it".[17] This is largely due to Brubaker's analysis allowing for the imbrication of religion as a form of discourse. The importance of discourse will also emerge in the discussion of mythology in Chapter 2.

It is also important to clarify references to 'nation' or 'nationalism'. In Benedict Anderson's seminal work, he describes some of the issues modern theorists of nationalism have faced when attempting to formulate a cohesive definition of the phenomenon.[18] The 'nation', as traditionally conceived, contains a number of paradoxes between reality and nationalist assertions about reality. Firstly, there is an objective and measureable modernity of nations in contrast to the subjective antiquity that is conceived by nationalists. Secondly, the formal universality of socio-cultural nationality is at odds with the *sui generis* particularities of substantial manifestations of nationality. Lastly, there is a marked political power held by nationalisms that is in seeming disagreement with the frequent incoherence of nationalist contentions. Out of these juxtapositions, Anderson provided the definition of a nation as an "imagined political community that is presumed to be inherently limited and sovereign" that evokes an imagination of communality amongst members, regardless of tangible reality.[19] It is imagined with deep comradeship within the nation, despite any real inequalities that exist. While the issues he brings up with definitions are salient,

[17] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 11.
[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* 2nd Ed. (London and New York, Verso/New Left Books, 1991), 5.
[19] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 5.

his conception is radically constructivist, and somewhat problematically cites the decline of religious authority (among other influencing factors) as the catalyst for nationalism. The forces that are thought to be responsible for the origin and spread of nationalism in the eighteenth century are primarily linked to the decline in the infallible truth of sacred texts, largely due to the deterioration of religious dominance and the growth of secular languages, along with the waning of belief in monarchical legitimacy.[20] The growth of print-capitalism is said to have cemented the debility of religious prominence and the growth of secular nationalisms.

The primary issue with this theory is: if the demise of the sovereignty of religion was one of the reasons for the rise of nationalism, how is it explained when nations, like Sri Lanka, are defined by religious adherence? Although Anderson's work on the ideas of imagining a community is useful (i.e., a nation is created in the minds and sentiments of its members), his analysis of its historical basis is based on the specific nationalisms that emerged in the midst of Western Europe in the eighteenth century. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues that a certain post-colonial mimicry is found in Anderson's description of "the inner incompatibility of empire and nation"[21] (in reference to the official English nationalism).[22] So, for example, Sri Lanka does not demonstrate the incompatibility that Anderson proposes. Sri Lanka was perceived to be a model British colony that deserved autonomous rule because of the English-educated elite, universal suffrage, and an elected assembly.[23] As such, its 1948 independence occurred more or less on the back of the Indian movement, and Sri Lanka did not go through a process of nation-building that usually accompanies post-colonial struggles.

[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*
[21] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 94.
[22] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* 28 (1985): 128.
[23] A. Sivanandan, "Ethnic Cleansing in Sri Lanka", *Race and Class* 51, no.3 (2010), 60.

In contrast to Anderson's definition, Lowell Barrington points out that there are two central ideas to the understanding of a nation. A collective of people with shared cultural ideas (what Anderson focuses on) is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. It needs to be coupled with the importance of the belief in territorial self-determination.[24] Barrington's definition states that "Nations are groups of people linked by unifying traits and the desire to control a territory that is thought of as the group's national homeland."[25] Nationalism therefore includes the designation of the territorial boundaries that the nation has the right to control and the membership boundaries of the in-group, boundaries which are not necessarily easily set. Nationalism is defined as "the pursuit – through argument or other activity – of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty."[26]

Throughout this paper, nationalism and national identity will be used synonymously. Although Rawi Abdelal *et al.* point to the problematic use of identity in current scholarship due to a lack of definitional coherence,[27] the contents which they include are congruent with Barrington's definition. This includes identity for constitutive norms (formal and informal rules that define group membership), social purposes (shared goals), relational comparisons (defining group

[24] Lowell Barrington, "'Nation' and 'Nationalism': Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (1997): 712-713.
[25] Barrington, "Nation and Nationalism," 713.
[26] Barrington, "Nation and Nationalism," 714. Although Barrington's definition is somewhat restrictive and generally opposed to the notion of nationalism with adjectives (for examples, ethno-nationalism, religious nationalism, etc.), he is intent on fostering more thoughtful and consistent uses of the term that make his definition helpful for the purposes of this paper.
[27] Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives on Politics*, v.4, n.04 (2006): 695. The authors provide an extensive review of methodological approaches for the study of identity as a variable, and as such, my use of their work as coupled with a straightforward definition of nationalism may be a bastardization. However, I have tried to avoid the problems that they identify in current scholarship through definitional clarity.

identity in reference to out-group other), and cognitive models (referential worldviews of political and material conditions and interests that are shaped by a particular identity).[28]

In summary, these considerations about religion and nationalism support my choice to use Brubaker's third category. They eliminate the need to subscribe to one definition of religion or nationalism over another, and avoid essentialism and the handcuffs of rogue conceptualizations.

Nexus of Religion and Nationalism

So, what of religion and nationalism together? The secularization paradigm has long been considered a mark of modernity, and firmly bifurcated 'secular' and 'religion'. Loosely introduced by Max Weber, the concept of secularization has been a significantly salient influence on social scientific studies, particularly since the 1960s. Weber's reference to disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) meant the devaluation of mystery (not necessarily just the cessation of belief in religion), and was vague due to his infrequent use of the term 'secularization' and the absence of a definition of religion.[29] While Phillip Gorski indicates that the whole of Weber's work does indicate a decline of religious significance in the West,[30] there are many scholars who interpreted Weber as anticipating a complete disappearance, privatization, decline, or transformation of religion from public life.[31] The secularization paradigm also affected literature on nationalism. Ernest Gellner, for example, maintained an idealized ethnic culture at the centre of the nation,

[28] Abdelal et al., "Identity," 696-699. These are not mutually exclusive functions and there is recognition of the possibility of contestation in the level of agreement within the in-group over the content of the shared identity.
[29] H.W. Swatos and K.J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion*, 60 (1999): 209-228.
[30] Phillip Gorski. "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700," *American Sociological Review*, 65 (2000).
[31] See for example, Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, (New York, Doublesday, 1967); Bryan Wilson, "Secularization: The Inherited Model," in *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, ed. P.E. Hammond, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985); and, Thomas Luckman, *The Invisible Religion*, (New York, Macmillan, 1967).

rather than religion; thus, furthering the secularization of political discourse.[32] As previously mentioned, Anderson was also explicit about the negated role of religion: "… the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but also the dusk of religious thought."[33] Several scholars have also argued that nationalism has replaced religion in the function of group solidarity.[34]

The adequacy of the secularization thesis has been seriously contested since the 1980s, and there are now few scholars that persistently adhere to it in its original formulation. There has since been a revisionist trend of amendment, adaptation, and in some cases, total abandonment. For example, while Peter Berger was one of the most adamant proponents of secularization thesis in the 1960s, in works like *The Sacred Canopy*, he has since stated: "The world today, with some exceptions…is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken."[35] While the entirety of the secularization thesis is not still propagated by many scholars, remnants of the intellectual discourse are evident in some modern scholarship. For example, Jaroslav Krejći and Vítězslav Velímský argue that:

> Religion is not considered to be a sufficient cause of or reason for national consciousness. Whenever it has assumed the role of being the main mark of differentiation between what otherwise appear to be kindred people, it seems in fact to be a substitute for another

[32] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Ithaca, Cornell University press, 1983) and Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994).
[33] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1991.
[34] See for example, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992); Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. R. Bhargava, (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998); and, Carlton J.H. Hays, *Essays on Nationalism*, (New York, Macmillan, 1928).
[35] Peter L. Berger, ed. *The Desecularization of the World.* (Washington, DC, Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 2. Another example is David Martin's revision of claims made in *A General Theory of Secularization*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1978).

> determinant. It is a rallying point for those who have abandoned another, more pertinent, expression of ethnic identification such as language…[36]

Gorski and Gülay Türkman-Dervişoğlu have argued, however, that there has been a general shift from the conceptualization of nationalism as purely secular.[37] They propose acknowledgement of recognition of potential religious lineage, the influence on formation of national identities, coalescence of religious symbolism/myth and nationalist rhetoric, and the potential for religious nationalism to be a distinctively modern form of nationalism.[38] While this is congruent with the third method of relationship analysis, Brubaker points out an inherent methodological issue with the identification of religious content in nationalism.[39] Does the use of religious language ultimately imply religion? Certainly, not. But, what is the connection? Brubaker questions the differentiation between religious language and imagery, and religiously "tinged" contents which were originally religious, but subsequently secularized.[40] This discussion raises the question of mythology and its meaning in the nexus of religion and nationalism. As such, the next chapter will examine myth in more detail, and consider its role in the articulation of religion and nationalism.

[36] Jaroslav Krejći and Vítězslav Velímský, "Ethnic and Political Nations in Europe," in *Ethnicity*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), 211.
[37] This is also indicated by the review article Dawson, "Religious Resurgence."
[38] Philip Gorski and Gülay Türkman-Dervişoğlu, "Religion, Nationalism, and Violence: An Integrated Approach," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39 (2013): 203.
[39] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 14.
[40] Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism," 15.

Chapter 2: The Role of Myth in Nation-Building

The goal of this chapter is to develop a working definition of myth. Lauri Honko suggests that while definitions of myth should be based on the available and existing academic traditions and the language scholars have developed when discussing myth,[41] there is a "question of expedient liberty at the level of context, which is justified as long as the scholar limits his [sic] claims strictly to content."[42] It is thus the task of every scholar to give the concept of myth an operative definition (beyond the semantic implications of the all-inclusive defining of myth), with content which most effectively and consistently functions for the demands of the particular research situation.[43] In attempting to avoid what Dawson would call a "rogue" conceptualization, I will employ what Scott T. Klein refers to as "stipulative" definitions,[44] in an effort to circumvent problematic essentialization, while simultaneously developing an intelligible basis for exploration. The development of a working definition allows for recognition that the construction is always subject to revisions, but allows for an expedient discussion of certain phenomenon that limits study for a distinctive purpose and audience.[45]

It is important to establish the discussion of myth as discourse, rather than a static concept. As such, the foundation of this definition focuses primarily on Bruce Lincoln's theory of myth as the narrativization of ideology. This is supplemented with Burton Mack's work on social formations. It is, however, not the intention of this paper to identify the causes of or explain the

[41] Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 42.
[42] Honko, "Problem," 52.
[43] Honko, "Problem," 52.
[44] Scott T. Klein. 2013. "The Study of Religion: Introduction" in *World Religions: Canadian Perspectives: Western Traditions*, ed. Doris J. Jakobsh, (Toronto, ON: Nelson Education Ltd., 2013), 1-29.
[45] Klein, "Study of Religion," 12-13.

process by which some social formations become nationalist, while others do not.[46] The examination of truth in myth is important in viewing the establishment of a discursive framework, and it is a cornerstone in the differentiation of myth from other forms of narrative. This invites discussion about the relationship of myth to truth and sacrality. My discussion of these issues will utilize Lincoln, Mircea Eliade, and Robert Segal, and will incorporate a problematization of the traditional role of sacrality in defining myth, primarily focusing on Christopher Flood and Russell T. McCutcheon.

Myth as Discourse

According to Bruce Lincoln, myth is important in the processes of "construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of society".[47] As such, myth is a form of discourse that shapes and legitimates social boundaries and classifications.[48] As a discourse, myth persuades its audience of "taxonomic differentiation" and evokes sentiments of alienation or belonging. Lincoln demonstrates that taxonomy is more than a process of organizing information, but serves simultaneously (and foremost) to naturalize and legitimize discriminatory systems of hierarchy.[49] Ideological persuasion is the "measure of audiences' reaction to and interaction with, the

[46] See for examples: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1983); Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2000); Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz, and Yogendra Yadav, *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* v.90, n.4 (1996).

[47] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

[48] The emphasis on the functionality of myth within this essay does not imply that myth cannot be understood at more than one level. The multi-functional potential of myth in concurrent of consecutive roles with varying levels of importance is recognized within this discussion of a single function.

[49] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 3; and, and Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147.

discourse" and therefore does not reside in any particular discourse per se.[50] He shows that persuasion and evocation of sentiments are, however, separable, as an act of discourse may induce feelings of likeness, attachment, and solidarity, or sentiments of distance, separation, and otherness, regardless of the content.[51] However, not all myths are equally compelling discourses and Lincoln points out that, discourse success ultimately depends on the elicitation of sentiments which may form the basis of social formations.[52]

> Whether – and the extent to which – a discourse succeeds in calling forth a following … ultimately depends on whether a discourse elicits those sentiments out of which new social formations can be constructed. For discourse is not only an instrument of persuasion, operating along rational (or pseudorational) and moral (or pseudomoral) lines, but it is also an instrument of sentiment evocation. Moreover, it is through these paired instrumentalities – ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation – that discourse holds the capacity to shape and reshape society itself[53]

In the Sri Lankan case, both of these effects of mythic discourse are important.

If, as Lincoln claims, society is defined as the grouping of people who imagine themselves as bound as a collectivity in a corollary manner, with feelings of separation from members who do not fall within the parameters of the group; it is logical that the sentiment evocation by discourse contributes to social formations.[54] While this explains "society", Lincoln uses the concept of "a

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[50] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 7.
[51] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 9-10.
[52] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 8.
[53] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 8.
[54] In reference to the nature of discourse, Lincoln uses the language as a salient example of sentiment evocation. "Where X is not the language of choice, the introduction of a speech act in X will evoke some minimal (and probably ephemeral) sentiments of affinity between the speaker and other X speakers present and will simultaneously evoke sentiments of estrangement between this group and that constituted by nonspeakers [sic] of X" (Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 10). Interestingly, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith's edited collection on ethnicity combined ethnicity, religion, and language into a single section (John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity*, (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), 187-274). For a particularly good examination of the role language in nationalism, see Zsuzsa Csergő, *Talk of the Nation: Language and Conflict in Romania and Slovakia*, (New York, Cornell University Press, 2007). For a discussion of how

grouping of people" without exploring the idea of social formation. It is here that Mack supplements Lincoln's theory for a more comprehensive understanding of the discursive role of myth in nation-building.

According to Burton Mack, 'social formation' refers to the dynamic process by which conformations of systems and patterns of signs and practice, and their communicative institutions, are created and are relational in the development of society.[55] Lincoln indicates that myth acts as a "second-order semiotic system" within this process, and provides a meta-language to eliminate contextual and historical signification in order to imbue new and mystic conceptual content.[56] The generation of meaning in semiotic forms and functions requires explicit and implicit facets of communication, in which meanings are conveyed through the articulation of different elements with one another, while simultaneously referencing the "indexical relevance".[57] The function of myth in a communicative system of reference is an important one, but is not the focus of this paper. The absence of discourse analysis is one of the primary limitations of my use of Lincoln's work and exploitation of his definition of myth.

Mack writes that the, "mythic world corresponds to the practices and structures of determination in a society… This function is frequently institutionalized in practices that draw upon the mythic world to support consensus, stability and the replication of the social order."[58] Hedva Ben-Israel's theory about territoriality in nationalism illustrates an example of how this

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language has specifically contributed to nationalism in Sri Lanka, see K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992).

[55] Burton L. Mack, "Social Formation," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York, Continuum, 2000), 283.

[56] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 5.

[57] In this case, index refers to the context in which any sociolinguistic frame is normatively used, has a schematization of some particular sort, proportional to which we can model the ''appropriateness'' of its usage in that context.

[58] Mack, "Social Formation," 291.

property of myth functions. Ben-Israel states that, "The principle of national land was expressed in grandiloquent or divine terms, borrowing from existing models of sacred places, shrines, graves, trees, and so on, which were merged with the notion of the Holy Land."[59] He also observes that, "Claiming the land on behalf of the nation imbued it with a transcendent authority over past, present and future. With that claim, the first step was taken towards the sanctification of national land."[60] Historical intention, therefore, provides a natural justification and makes any contingency as the result of the myth appear to be eternal. Thus, myth is able to maintain social formations through rationalization, registration, and reproduction. The formation of nations and national identities occurs in the abstract ahistorical (or mythical) realm that is constructed. As such, the myths told and repeated are not solely concerned with theoretical or metaphysical implications.[61] Anthony D. Smith's theory of the cultivation of 'myths of ethnic election' is particularly illustrative in the examination of successful and unsuccessful propagation of myths for community

[59] Hedva Ben-Israel, "Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Nationalism," in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, eds. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, London, and Jerusalem: Macmillian Press Ltd. and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1998), 283. While this component of Ben-Israel's work is congruent with the argument presented in this paper, he differs in his overall argument that secular nationalism thrived because of the decline of religious beliefs. As such, the utilization of religious components, like divinity and myth, is not the imbrication or imbuement of religion into nationalism, as Brubaker suggests. Instead, Ben-Israel proposes that secular nationalism appropriated religious symbols in order to overcome and succeed religion and universalism, referring to the process of "usurpation" and "mimesis" of religion by nationalism ("Hallowed Land," 288).

[60] Ben-Israel, "Hallowed Land," 282.

[61] While there is an important connection between myth and ritual, myth will be the sole focus for the purposes of this essay. Some scholars see myth and ritual as inextricably linked (i.e., myth-ritual theory) in a manner that would not allow for this differentiation and subordinates myth to ritual, as the former is seen as an explanation of the latter (see, for example, Stanley Edgar Hyman, "The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic" in *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert A. Segal, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 231-244). Any of the dynamic functions assigned to myth by myth-ritualists are operative only when bound to ritual; but without ritual, myth is denigrated to "mere commentary" (Robert A. Segal, "Myth and Ritual," in *The Routlege Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York, NY: Routlege, 2005), 368). While the myth-ritual approach has been diversely applied, most of these approaches lack credibility, as they do not provide an explanation of origins. Even if a ritual origin is offered for a given myth, there is seldom a critical attempt to ascertain the origin of the ritual. Lincoln's interpretation of the process of constructions of myth and ritual can be seen as exemplified in Clyde Kluckhorn's observation, "In sum, the facts do not permit any universal generalizations as to ritual being the 'cause' [sic] of myth or vice versa. Their relationship is rather that of intricate mutual interdependence, differently structured in different cultures and probably at different time in the same culture" (quoted in Alan Dundes, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth.* California: University of Berkley Press, 1984), 110). Myth is thus interrelated to ritual, but able to be conceived as distinct from. This analysis is thereby solely focused on myth.

survival. Going beyond the common rhetoric of 'chosen peoples,' Smith asserts that "Because the ethnic myth is a dramatic tale that links the present with a communal past, and one that is widely believed, it helps draw the members into a distinctive community, conferring on them a special aura, that of 'the elect'."[62]

At this point, this chapter is able to provide a provisional definition of myth for the purposes of this study. I have expanded on Lincoln's definition by defining myth as "the narrativization of (an) ideology of social formation." The definition needs, however, to be defended in the light of concerns for 'truth' and sacrality in myth.

'Truth' and Sacrality in Myth

The treatment of myth as discourse raises issues of truth and sacrality. The perception of 'truth' is connected to the nature of myth; but the conception of sacrality, somewhat problematically, narrowly defines myth as pertaining solely to the sacred. Christopher Flood conceives political myth to be at the intersection of sacred myth and ideology.[63] Ideology is concerned with cultural formations in which systems of meaning in each sphere of social activity are an explicit ideological expression; such that all symbolic and other forms of interaction are arenas of ideological conflict between dominate and subordinate groups.[64] Similarly to Lincoln, Flood identifies myths as the vehicles of ideological beliefs and the supports for ideological arguments; but, he delineates political myths as distinctly separate from sacred myths because of

[62] Anthony D. Smith, "Chosen Peoples," in *Ethnicity*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), 194. While it seems that Smith is speaking specifically to ethnic survival, it is important to note that his theory of nationalism is based on the core *ethnie* group. We can thus infer that this statement also pertains to the establishment and continuation of nationalist communities.
[63] Christopher Flood, "Myth and Ideology," in *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack, (New York, NY, Routlege, 2002), 175.
[64] Flood, "Myth and Ideology," 176.

their perceived status in secular societies.[65] Even with the recognition of the interconnectedness of terms and the extent to which ideology pervades all aspects of social life, there is still a prevailing scholastic differentiation of political and sacred mythology. Flood's distinctions suggest the possibility of dividing sacred and secular. The classifications of political myth and religious myth are not, however, hermeneutically isolated, and cannot be accepted as self-evident categories.

Russell McCutcheon is deeply critical of the use of 'sacred' as an unchallenged characteristic of separation, as it results in the circular explanation of the importance of myths.[66] If myths are important because they are sacred, what makes them sacred, and what makes sacredness important? The interaction between religious symbols, practices, myths, and rituals, and the new profane secularism and national identity, has confused the distinctive boundaries that were previously delineated between the sacred and the profane.[67] Consequently, I follow Lincoln in his refusal to define political myth as a distinct ontological category.[68].

While the role of myth in nation-building has been discussed above, what does 'myth' actually refer to? How is myth differentiated from similar characterizations of legends? Lincoln differentiates myth from other classifications of stories based on the presentation of authority and credibility.[69] While fables are clearly presented as fiction; legends make truth claims similarly to myths, but lack persuasive power in their claims. McCutcheon argues that there are no stable

[65] Flood, "Myth and Ideology," 179.
[66] Russell T. McCutcheon, "Myth," in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, (New York, NY: Continuum. 2000), 199.
[67] This dissimilarity *was* cemented in the establishment of religious differences between the *sacrum*, that which belongs to the Gods, and *profanum*, the physical space in front of the temple. Michael Whan and Donna Schaper both argue that temporal displacement of sacred space has occurred through the physical deconstruction of sacral locality, and Whan continues that the self-negation of the sacred in some ways means the negation of the profane (Donna Schaper, "Sacred Spaces," *Cross Currents*, v.50, n.1/2 (2000): 221, and Michael Whan, "Myth, Disenchantment and the Loss of Sacred Place," *International Journal of Jungian Studies,* v.4, n.1 (2012): 34-45).
[68] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction."
[69] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 25.

characteristics of myth that allow for differentiation from legend and fable,[70] but Lincoln is not arguing the separation based on the static characteristics of myth.

Lincoln's view of the authority of myths is linked to Bronislaw Malinowski's recognition of myth's function as a social charter, with emphasis on obedience to rules, customs, and institutions.[71] Malinowski proposed "to show how deeply the sacred tradition, the myth, enters into human pursuits, and how strongly it controls their moral and social behaviour."[72] However, he took a somewhat different approach than Lincoln, rejecting the symbolic nature of myth. Malinowski's focus was on the anthropological study of living myth as a direct expression of subject matter. Mircea Eliade[73] problematizes the anthropological approach of Malinowski and others (for example, Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl, and Lévy-Strauss) because of the restriction to the study of "primitive" mythologies and the limitations of the application of narrow research to what Eliade identified as more complex societies and religions.[74] There is, however, considerable overlap with Eliade and Malinowski's rejection of the symbolic nature of myth. For Eliade, this rejection is grounded in the credibility of myth. Unlike Lincoln, Eliade accepts mythic credibility as self-evident. Eliade says that a myth, "once "told," in other words, once revealed, the myth becomes

[70] McCutcheon, "Myth," 200.
[71] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," in *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert A. Segal, (Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 172-179.
[72] Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life," in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), 195.
[73] Lincoln was originally an intellectual progeny of Eliade from graduate training at the University of Chicago, but their approaches now radically differ.
[74] Mircea Eliade, "Cosmogenic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), 138-139. Lincoln is deeply suspicious of the possibility of constructing an Indo-European myth prototype that would encompass all of the variations of myth. According to Lincoln, this undertaking assumes that a prototype would have the capacity to recapture a "primordial and ahistoric [sic] moment of unity, harmony, and univocal perfection." (Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991), 119-120).

apodictic truth: it establishes truth."[75] This is problematic, as it does not explain the process by which myth becomes truth or how some myths are more successful than others.

The myths told and repeated are not solely concerned with theoretical or metaphysical implications. They ground the established order in a mythological, supernatural reality in order to provide stability for social structure against disintegration through change. The credibility of truth claims is an integral component of the social function of myth; thereby present-day social phenomenon can be traced to antiquity and consequently legitimized through this process.[76] Practically, authoritative status is easier to obtain for a myth than a legend or a fable because, as Lincoln says, the level of credibility occurs out of the status of history.[77] When Alasdair MacIntyre writes that "a myth is living or dead, not true or false", according to Kevin Schilbrack, he incorrectly asserts that the life and death of a myth is tied to a phenomenon other than the credibility of truth or the falsity, which is not the case.[78] Robert Segal claims that,

> A theory which maintains that myth functions to unify society may circumvent the issue of truth by asserting that society is unified when its members *believe* [sic] that the laws they are expected to obey were established long ago by revered ancestors, whether or not those laws were really established back then. This kind of theory sidesteps the question of truth.[79]

'Truth', in fact, is not evaded in social-functionalist theories, as Segal suggests. Myths are stories which purport to be true, and as A.M. Hocart implies, "myths, like limbs, atrophy and perish when

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[75] Eliade, Mircea. "The Prestige of the Cosmogenic Myth," in *Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Myth*, ed. Robert A. Segal, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 129.
[76] While this perspective may be problematized as a very Western view, authoritative status is necessitated for the proper functioning of myth, despite the culturally relative interpretations of truth.
[77] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 28.
[78] Kevin Schilbrack, 2002. "Introduction: On the Use of Philosophy in the Study of Myths," in *Thinking through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York, NY: Routlege, 2002), 9.
[79] Robert A. Segal, "Myth and Ritual," in *The Routlege Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York, NY: Routlege, 2005), 4.

they no longer work."[80] According to Lincoln, the necessary truth claims within the discourse of myth exist within a contradictory juxtaposition.[81] This is correct, as myth needs to be considered truthful to be classified as myth per se, but the term 'myth' simultaneously signifies (in its condescending and popular uses), a story that members of a separate group (or different era) regard or regarded as true and authoritative; but that the speaker and members of his or her normative group regard as false. This is one of the mechanisms by which the construction of the 'Other' occurs, and as Gustavo Benavides points out, difference and ranking through social stratification takes place. [82]

The provisional definition of myth provided in this chapter is suitable to use in light of the discussion of religion and nationalism in the previous chapter. It allows a scope in which to consider the Sri Lankan case without presupposing too much about what nationalism or religion is supposed to look like. Moreover, it also supports the interest in examining the relationship between religion and nationalism in Sri Lanka by focusing on an important form of discourse used to establish the nation through the *Mahāvaṃsa* and the Sri Lankan Constitution.

[80] A.M. Hocart, 1998. "The Life-giving Myth," in *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 153-154.
[81] Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction," 24.
[82] Gustavo Benavides, "Stratification," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 297.

Chapter 3: The Mahāvaṃsa and Sinhalese National Identity

The reconstruction of ancient Sri Lankan[83] history through the monk-authored *Mahāvaṃsa*, or the 'Great Chronicle', has provided the source of the mythical past to narrativize nationalist ideology of social formation.[84] As such, it operates as an illustration of the provisional definition of myth provided in the previous chapter. The *Mahāvaṃsa* seeks to both persuade and evoke sentiments that are conducive to a certain type of social formation that includes some elements (i.e., Sinhalese) and excludes others (i.e., Tamils). It does this through presentation of a particular version of myth as history and the elimination of the contradiction between nationalistic violence and Buddhist values. This chapter will first contextualize the study of the *Mahāvaṃsa.* It will then briefly present the purported historical origins of the Sinhalese and Buddhism in Sri Lanka as presented in the chronicle. Chapter XXV, "The Victory of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi" will then be examined in more detail, as it is the most commonly referenced chapter in the espousal of modern nationalist ideology. It has been utilized, as it both eradicates the contradiction of Buddhist violence and helps justify the sense of entitlement Sinhalese nationalists assert over the Tamil minority population.

[83] Other works make note of distinguishing the designation of Lanka (the name given by original settlers and their descendants), Ceylon (the most common name during the colonial era), and Sri Lanka (the post-colonial modern country). For the purposes of this essay, and its focus on the role of myth on modern nationalism, Sri Lanka will be referred to by its current name throughout the entirety of the essay. For a more detailed discussion of the evolution of the island's names, see commentary by Douglas Bullis, *The Mahāvaṃsa: The Great Chronical of Sri Lanka*, (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1999), 116.

[84] Within Sinhalese traditions, there are other recorded chronicles, as well as oral myths transmitted through various ritual practices. This discussion is limited to the *Mahāvamsa* due to limitations in space and research materials. This is justified, as it is considered to be the most important chronicle and is the Great (*Mahā)* History or Chronicle (*vamsa)*. For more on the use and implications of *vamsa*, see Steven Kemper, "J.R. Jayewardene, Righteousness and *Realpolitik*," in *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict*, ed. Jonathon Spencer, (London and New York: Routlege, 1990), 187-188. For a more in-depth discussion of oral traditions, see Gananath Obeyesekere, "Gajabāhu and the Gajabāhu Synchronism: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Myth and History," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka,* ed. Bardwell L. Smith, (Chambersburg, PA, ANIMA Books, 1978), 155-176.

The Mahāvaṃsa *as History*

The significance of the *Mahāvaṃsa* for Sri Lankan national identity is difficult to overstate. Until the mid-nineteenth century, "the *Mahāvaṃsa* was largely the preserve of monks and elite Sinhalese until philologists became interested in it after the discovery of the *Tika* in 1826."[85] The *Ṭīkā* enabled authentication[86] which allowed the *Mahāvaṃsa* to be comprehended as epic literature with a combination of myth and fact, as well as providing details for the formation and substantiation of a cultural self-consciousness. Bardwell L. Smith termed the *Mahāvaṃsa* a "history written with a motive. It is *Heilsgeschichte.* It is the sacred history of a people destined with a sacred mission, namely, to maintain the purity of the *Dhamma*."[87] Additionally, he states that "the primary intent is twofold: to provide paradigmatic models for the present and the future and to engage in anamnesis or cultic reawakening of a people to the high points in its past and present identity."[88] While R.A.L.H. Gunawardana acknowledges that the myth can be read on several levels, he states that one of the primary functions of the *Mahāvaṃsa* was "the validation of a particular social order" representing "the embodiment of state ideology which sought to unite the dominant elements in society".[89] D.C. Vijayavardhana refers to this as the presentation of an inextricable "three-fold history of the Buddhist faith, the Sinhalese Race, and the Land of Ceylon"

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[85] Douglas Bullis, *Mahāvaṃsa*, 2.

[86] *Ṭīkā* is a collective of commentaries on Theravādan Buddhist literature. While the *Ṭīkā* is partially exegetical, work by scholar Buddhaghoṣa was seen to authenticate some of the claims made in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, and contribute historical context to the work. This was pivotal, as the treatment of the *Mahāvaṃsa* in early scholarship was primarily concerned with treating it as an historical document. See for example, Geiger's "Introduction" in his translation of the Chronicle.

[87] Bardwell L. Smith, "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon," in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, (Chambersburg, PA, ANIMA Books, 1978), 48. Emphasis in original.

[88] Smith, "Social Order," 49. Given the fifth-sixth century authorship of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, this seems to suggest an early Sinhala consciousness prior to the imagination of modern nationalism. It is not my intention to date the development of Sinhalese nationalism. For a more extensive discussion of this, see R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography," in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*, Jonathan Spencer, ed. (London and Ney York: Routlege, 1990).

[89] Gunawardana, "People," 57.

and "for more than two thousand years the Sinhalese have been inspired by the ideal that they were a nation brought into being for the definite purpose of carrying the Torch lit by the Buddha."[90]

The *Mahāvaṃsa*[91] purports that the Sinhala race originated with Vijaya, the earliest recorded king of Sri Lanka.[92] The coming of Vijaya (who was sired by a lion)[93] to Sri Lanka coincides with the death of the Buddha. To borrow Gananath Obeyesekere's term, this can be considered an early prototype of the nationalist "colonization myth".[94] According to the records composed by Buddhist monks, Buddhism supposedly spread quickly through royal patronage after King Asoka's son Mahinda traveled from India and converted King Devānaṃpiyatissa. It is also important to mention that Asoka's daughter, Sanghamitta, came as well, and established the nun's (*theri*) order. This is an important point in early Buddhist history in Sri Lanka. While this was two hundred years after the establishment of the Sinhalese through Vijaya, the connection with the Buddha and his purported visits to the island prior to his death supported a prophecy that Sri Lanka would become the *dhammadīpa* ("island of the [Buddha's] teaching").[95] The Tamils apparently arrived through commercial contracts from Southern India centuries later. Tamil ruler Eḷāra[96] had earned a reputation for justice and impartiality, but was defeated by Sinhala King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi

[90] D. C. Vijayavardhana, *Dharma-Vijaya (Triumph of Righteousness) or The Revolt in the Temple: Composed to Commemorate 2500 Years of Land, the Race and the Faith,* (Colombo: Sinha Publications, 1953), 3.
[91] I have chosen to consistently utilize the translation by William Geiger, as it is the most widely used and acknowledged as an accurate translation. As per convention, references utilize chapter and line numbers. Key passages were also compared with the more recent translation by Douglas Bullis. See Heinz Bechert, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: *Mahāvaṃsa* and Political Thinking," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, (Chambersburg, PA, ANIMA Books, 1978), for a more detailed discussion on the reliability of the various editions and translations of the chronicle.
[92] *Mahāvaṃsa* VI: 42-47.
[93] For a more thorough discussion of the elements of bestiality, parricide, and incest in the myth, see A.L. Basham, "Prince Vijaya and the Aryanization of Ceylon," *Ceylon Historical Journal* v. 1, n.3 (1952): 163-171 and Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," *Modern Ceylon Studies* v.1, n.1 (1970): 43-63.
[94] Obeyesekere, "Gajabāhu," 161.
[95] Bechert, "Beginnings," 7.
[96] Eḷāra is sometimes referred to as a "Dravidian" king due to the linguistic group he belonged to. However, I have chosen to identify him by his ethnic designation, as that is more salient for the discussion of modern Sri Lankan nationalism.

of Rohaṇa. The *Mahāvaṃsa* portrays the war between the two kings along ethnic divisions and glorified the victory of the Buddhists greatly out of proportion.[97] While Eḷāra was known for just rule, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi was still able to wage war to conquer the Tamil ruler of the northern principality based on his "false beliefs".[98] The basic ideology and motivations of the chronicler were "unity of nation and religion" thus making the construction an "intentional act of political relevance."[99] As Heinz Bechert further indicates, "Its object was the propagation of a concept of national identity closely connected with a religious tradition … without the impact of this idea, the remarkable continuity of the cultural as well as of the political traditions in spite of the vicissitudes in the history of the island would have been impossible."[100] The *Mahāvaṃsa* ultimately operates as a kind of foundation myth in which the original inhabitants (descendants of Vijaya) were converted to Buddhism, and then had to defend themselves against the predations of a Tamil and Hindu other.

Justification of Violent Nationalism

Chapter XXV of *Mahāvaṃsa* depicts the story of the "The Victory of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi." After having a relic placed on his spear, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi takes five hundred *bhikkhus* with his army to march in conquest across the Tamil occupied territories.[101] He victoriously conquers many kings, but states, "Not for the joy of sovereignty is this toil of mine, my striving (has been) ever to establish the doctrine of the Saṃbuddha. And even as this is truth may the armour on the body of

[97] Ghosh, *Ethnicity*, 38-39.
[98] Gunawardana, "People," 58.
[99] Bechert, "Beginnings," 7. Other essays in this edited collection also discuss the historiography of the Chronicles, including for examples, Alice Greenwald's "The Relic on the Spear: Historiography and the Saga of Dutthagamani," Regina T. Clifford's "The *Dhammadipa* Tradition of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhalese Chronicles," and Smith, "Social Order."
[100] Bechert, "Beginnings," 7.
[101] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 1-6.

my soldiers take the colour of fire."[102] As it came to pass in exactly that manner, it showed the righteousness of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's conquest. While a strong warrior, he also displayed diplomatic prowess through strategizing a victory without battle in Mahelanagara.[103] Upon hearing of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's victories, Eḷāra consulted with his ministers and resolved to go to war.[104] Once in battle, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi declared that he would be the sole one to defeat Eḷāra without the aid of his other generals.[105] Upon defeat of Eḷāra, he had celebrated funeral rites to honour the fallen ruler.[106] Sri Lanka was thus ruled over "in single sovereignty",[107] but Duṭṭhagāmaṇi was solemn for all of the destruction of battle.[108] Recognizing his guilt, monks were sent to comfort him[109] and upon their advice, he was relieved of his guilt, as the deaths were of non-Buddhists.[110] Duṭṭhagāmaṇi acknowledged the great role of the *sangha*[111] and "Here ends the twenty-fifth chapter, called 'The Victory of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi', in the Mahāvaṃsa, compiled for the serene joy and emotion of the pious." [112]

The *Mahāvaṃsa* emphasized the role of the *bhikkhus* (monks) in spiritually supporting troops on the battlefield, thus asserting an inherent connection between the *sangha* (monastic community) and worldly politics. As a monkish chronicle, it validates pragmatic actions that seem contradictory to canonical Buddhist orthodoxy of non-violence. Alice Greenwald asserts that "while Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's actions *can* be read as reflective of a tragic continuance of conquest by

[102] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 17-18.
[103] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 49.
[104] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 52-55.
[105] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 67-68.
[106] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 71-73.
[107] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 75.
[108] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 103.
[109] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 104-107.
[110] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 108-112.
[111] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 113-116.
[112] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 116.

violence or as eccentric, exploitive gestures … they are, in fact, better understood as a creative synthesis, though we presume unintentionally, of two complementary conceptions of kingship."[113] The two are "conquest by righteousness" (as popularized by Ashokan rule) and "conquest by force". Although the former is preferable, the latter was "made exemplary by the Buddha himself" in his earlier dispelling of the *yakkhas*[114] (the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka) to make the island "a fit dwelling place for men".[115] Greenwald refers to this as the overcoming of chaos and the establishment of order, thereby definitively asserting the equation of Buddhism and humanity.[116] This pattern is repeated by Vijaya's expulsion of the *yakkhas,* and later, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's overthrow of the Tamil rulers. Thus, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's acts concretize "the conquest of Dhamma over whatever comprises the imminent threat", which was the non-Buddhist element, despite Eḷāra's reputation as a just ruler.[117] The concept of legitimate authority, as defined by Buddhist-Sinhalese identity, was thus the most important element of Sri Lankan political theory.[118]

In explaining violence in Sri Lanka, some scholars have problematically utilized self-evident categories like "religion", "culture", and "nationalism". For example, Bruce Kapferer's major work attempts to explain the "culture of nationalism" in Sri Lanka by proposing an ontological relationship between "violence" and "demonological practices of sorcery" among the Sinhalese.[119] As Kapferer writes, "there is a relation between the passion of sorcery and the furious

[113] Greenwald, "Relic," 25. Emphasis in original.
[114] Greenwald, "Relic," 25.
[115] *Mahāvaṃsa* I: 43.
[116] Greenwald, "Relic," 23.
[117] Greenwald, "Relic," 26.
[118] As Greenwald points out, "by the tenth century, the King of Sri Lanka was expected to be not only a Buddhist but a Bodhisattva, a sentiment which Duṭṭhagāmaṇi, enjoying birth in the Tushita Heaven, tangentially prefigures" ("Relic," 23).
[119] For further exploration of sorcery and cursing practices among Sinhalese Buddhists, see J.P. Feddema. "Cursing practices in Sinhala Buddhism: the case of Seenigama." *Journal of Ritual Studies* v.11, no.2 (1997): 21-34; and, J.P. Feddema, "The "Lesser" Violence of Animal Sacrifice: A Somewhat Hidden and Overlooked (Ignored?) Reality in Sinhala Buddhism." *Anthropos* v.90 (1995): 133-148.

passion of ethnic violence."[120] Like Kapferer's, there are many scholarly writings regarding the relation between "violence" and "Buddhism" in Sri Lanka that are predicated on a particular assumption about each category.[121] Particularly, "Buddhism" is proposed to be authentically non-violent, and thus any "ethnic violence" is the antithesis of the "true" religion.[122] Mahinda Deegalle examined the theological implications of Buddhist violence as considerations specific to the Theravāda canonical tradition. He unequivocally argues that any verbal or physical violence in Buddhist society or against non-Buddhists is a deviation from Buddhist doctrine. This is because violence can never be used as a path or goal prescribed by the Buddha, evidenced by the Pāli canon.[123]

The presumed contradiction between violence and Buddhism, as decisively posed by Stanley Tambiah's "*Buddhism Betrayed?*" pits two uncritical categorical constructions against one another. In reference to the monastic involvement in recent Sri Lankan violence, Tambiah asks if monk "participation" results in the betrayal of Buddhism by those "who are ideally dedicated to nonviolence and required by disciplinary rules to abstain from killing and to be nowhere near the marching armies and traffic in arms."[124] Deegalle and Tambiah both examine the role of the *Mahāvamsa* in the justification of Sinhalese violence and presumed ethnic superiority (read:

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[120] Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia,* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 32. There is a particularly good critique of Kapferer's explanation of ontological cultures of violence in David Scott. "The Demonology of Nationalism: On the Anthropology of Ethnicity and Violence in Sri Lanka." *Economy and Society* v.19, no. 4 (1992): 492-510.

[121] For other examples, see Ananda Wickremaratne, *The Roots of Nationalism: Sri Lanka*, (Colombo: Karunaratne and Sons, 1995); and, Jonathon Spencer, "Popular Perceptions of Violence: A Provincial View," in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, ed. James Manor, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984). Additionally, Jonathon Spencer, ed. *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Routlege, 1990) is an anthology of works that attempt to construct violence, nationalism, and ethnic conflict, as distinct objects of knowledge.

[122] See A. Abeysekara, "The Saffron Army, Violence, Terror(ism): Buddhism, Identity, and Difference in Sri Lanka," *Numen* v.48 (2001): 2-46 for an extensive problematization of existing scholarship.

[123] Mahinda Deegalle. "Is Violence Justified in Theravada Buddhism?" *The Ecumenical Review* 55, no.2 (2003).

[124] Stanley Jeyeraja Tambiah. *Buddhism Betrayed?: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 95-96.

development of national identity), yet regard it as an aberration to the "authentic" or "true" Buddhism. Given the existing literature, I will not attempt to examine the relations of "violence" and "religion" in Sri Lanka on a macro scale. While Theravādan Buddhism is not generally considered to be a religion of strict orthodoxy,[125] it is important to note that there is no direct validation of violence (physical or verbal) in the canon.[126] Some scholars have focused on linguistic analysis, and have concluded that Sinhala provides many ambiguities and convolutions in the description of violence. For example, it may be described and translated as *balātkāraya* (force), *adantēttama* (assault), *särakama* (severity), or *ugratvaya* (severeness). However, the notable prescriptive practice of non-violence in Buddhist doctrine would indicate that the propagation of violence is a deviation from Buddhism. How then, is this reconciled with violent Sinhalese nationalism that is inextricably linked to Buddhist religiosity and tradition?

> According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*,
>
> When the king Duṭṭhagāmaṇi had provided for his people and had had a relic put onto his spear he marched, with chariots, troops and beasts for rider, to Tissamahārāma, and he had shown favour to the brotherhood he said: 'I will go on to the land on the further side of river to bring glory to the doctrine. Give us, that we may treat them with honour, bhikkhus who shall go on with us, since the sight of the bhikkhus is blessing and protection for us.'[127]

Bringing "glory to the doctrine" is the doctrine of Buddhism to which King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi shows favour by his expression of esteem for the "brotherhood" of the monastic *sangha*. The

[125] Although Theravādan Buddhism is considered to be the strictest of the sects, it would be more accurate to term Buddhism as a religion of orthopraxy, focused on right action, rather than belief-centred orthodoxy.
[126] Mahinda Deegalle, "Is Violence Justified in Theravāda Buddhism?" *The Ecumenical Review*, v.55, n.22: 123. While Deegalle stumbles close to problematically presuming an orthodoxy that may be empirically ascertained against the ideals of canonical Buddhism, I do not presume an existent Buddhist canon. I instead intend the use of canon as the "rule" upon which to measure activities against. Recognizing the potential problems of this, I have attempted to be cognisant in avoiding the construction or representation of a monolithic Buddhism.
[127] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 1-4

accompaniment of monks provided protection in battle. Walpola Rahula deems Dutthagamani to be "undoubtedly the greatest national hero of early Buddhist Ceylon," who can "justly be regarded as the originator of religio-nationalism which has persisted through the whole history of Ceylon".[128] Yet, from the first lines of the rendition of his victory, his actions appear to be antithetical to Buddhist nonviolence.

Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's Asokan-esque remorse[129] for deaths in battle is shown in his statement, "How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?"[130] The response by the monks to remedy his guilt is considered to be the most controversial in the *Mahāvaṃsa*.

> From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!" Thus exhorted by them the great king took comfort.[131]

This passage provides a justification of the deaths of non-Buddhists. It dehumanizes peoples of other faiths to the extent that they are compared with beasts. It purports that certain circumstances allow for just killings, particularly in the case of dangers to the continued existence of Buddhism

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[128] Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anurādhapura Period: 3rd Century B.C. – 10th Century A.D.,* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd., 1956), 79.

[129] It is unclear whether this parallel was the intention of the author. However, there are clear similarities between Dutthagāmani's post-battle remorse and the Indian King Ashoka's after the battle of Kālinga. This is discussed in more detail in Deegalle, "Violence". Greenwald goes as far to say the scene is "Blatantly reminiscent of Asoka's remorse after the Kalinga massacres." ("Relic," 18). She also notes other links of Asoka to Sri Lanka, established in order to "affirm a prestigious religio-national origin" in order afford "both imperial legitimation and ecclesiastical organization" (Greenwald, "Relic," 15).

[130] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 108.

[131] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 109-112.

in Sri Lanka.[132] Deegalle presents what he refers to as an "alternative explanation" from the traditional "reductionist interpretation" that sees the passage as a justification of violence. He proposes that the monks' advice was a "rehabilitation strategy" to console the king out of remorse, so that he would be an effective ruler. This does not mean that the negative accumulation of his personal *karma* was eradicated, but that the monks were attempting to channel his future energies in a positive direction to benefit the people he ruled.[133] Bechert interprets the passage differently, asserting that the record of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's victory and monks' subsequent affirmation "shows that even the basic principles of Buddhist religion" were subordinated to the ideology of the unity of nation and religion.[134] Thus, for the *Mahāvaṃsa's* author, "the war of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi against the Tamil invaders was by no means a problem of religion and morality, but it was a justified act of national politics."[135] Regardless of the interpretation of 'The Victory of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi', it functions as a myth to narrativize the nationalist ideology of social formations. It is treated as a 'truthful' foundation myth of the Sinhalese civilization. This is its pivotal role in the articulation of nationalism and how Buddhist religious tradition is deeply imbricated with Sinhalese nationalist assertions in Sri Lanka.

Sanctioned Violence

The relation of force and discourse is a particularly important one. According to Lincoln, coercive violence removes certain persons or groups from societal positions that were previously

[132] Protection and fostering of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been entrenched as a constitutional duty of the state. The Constitution includes an article which reads: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddhist *Sasana*" The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978 (as amended up to 9 September 2010), Published by the Parliament of Sri Lanka. http://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf Chapter 2, Article 9. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
[133] Deegalle, "Violence," 125.
[134] Bechert, "Beginnings," 7.
[135] Bechert, "Beginnings," 7.

held, and thereby modifies the size, shape, and nature of the social aggregate, genocide being the most extreme form.[136] Narrativization in myth thus becomes an instrument for the maintenance of separation through convinced moral superiority. Mark Juergensmeyer argues that discourse in the form of myth supplements force through ideological persuasion, and religious acts of violence are often sanitized by virtue of their position within a religious template of myth and history.[137] For example, the justification for the violence in the 1977 anti-Tamil riots was based on the premise of "natural rights to political ascendency in an undivided island".[138] As such, the development of the movement for Tamil state separation was seen as a threat to the state apparatus and all Sinhalese personally.

The message of justifiable violence against non-Buddhists was propagated throughout the contemporary Sri Lankan population in simplified, catechistic terms through an appeal to "selective scripturalism"[139] that disseminated the myth of Sinhala foundational identity through modern media press and vernacular sermons.[140] As Eric Meyer points out, "It is very significant that the Sinhalese Buddhist majority *also sees itself as a minority whose identity is threatened.*"[141] K.N.O. Dharmasada refers to this process as manipulation by the mass media in order to propagate "visions of past glory [which] are invariably linked with the destruction by the Tamils … here the

[136] Bruce Lincoln, "Discourse and Construction of Society," 4.
[137] Mark Juergensmeyer. "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no.1 (1996): 16.
[138] Elizabeth Nissan, "Some Thoughts on Sinhalese Justifications for the Violence", in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, ed. James Manor (London and Sydney, Croom Helm, 1984), 176-177.
[139] Emphasis was placed on certain doctrinal tenets, while other practices were devalued. While this was in a sense, the purification of the religious field (particularly during Buddhist revivalism), it involved a process of popularization and propagandization (Stanley Jeyeraja Tambiah. *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 58.
[140] Elizabeth Nissan, "Some Thoughts on Sinhalese Justifications for the Violence", in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, ed. James Manor (London and Sydney, Croom Helm, 1984), 59. The importance of vernacular sermons is especially pertinent. It is interesting that the foundational *Mahāvamsa* myth was actually produced in Pāli, and not in Sinhala, considering the popularity of each language at the time.
[141] Meyer, "Roots," 148. Emphasis in original.

Tamils are viewed as the perennial enemies of the Sinhalese community. Indeed, the antagonism toward the Tamils seems to have provided a necessary contrastive tension for the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity to sustain itself."[142] This justification of violence is important and telling in its interpretation for the contribution made to the formation of national identity. Through the invocation of precedents, much has been transplanted from its original inspiration in order to coincide with modern nationalist ideology. As Tambiah argues, "both the doctrinal texts and mytho-historical chronicles come to have value as sacred objects, serving as fetishes imbued with power and acting as markers of special ethnic entitlement, self-respect and identity."[143]

National Unity

In spite of the claims of unity in the *Mahāvaṃsa* by Duṭṭhagāmaṇi,[144] British colonialists were the first to uniformly rule the island under nineteenth century colonial administration. However, the belief in Sinhala national unity has consistently been a recurring theme, implicit in the nationalist political discourse.[145] This contributed to ideological assumptions about the nature of the Sri Lankan State, and its relation to the Sinhalese people as those who inherently and rightfully belong to it. Colonial rule was premised on the understanding of differences between distinct linguistic racial communities, and ethnicity was solidified as a "legitimate" political difference.[146] Ultimately, postcolonial Sri Lanka inherited a colonial state structure, but simultaneously imagined ethnic communities as a natural and non-colonial national substance.[147]

[142] Dharmadasa, *Language*, 140.
[143] Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 59.
[144] *Mahāvaṃsa* XXV: 71-72.
[145] Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?*, 105.
[146] It should be noted that I have intentionally omitted a discussion of the 1956 Bandaranaike's ethnic election "Sinhala Only" strategy. While it has relevance in the larger context of this discussion, it is beyond the limits of this paper to address it.
[147] Sharika Thiranagama. "Claiming the State: Postwar Reconciliation in Sri Lanka." *Humanity: A Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 41, no.1 (2013), 96.

If King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi is the Sinhalese champion who united the Sri Lankan kingdom under Buddhism against the threat of Tamil (i.e., foreign) invaders, then the mythic past is seen to justify the present political climate. This is evident in the preferential treatment of Buddhist Sinhalese in the construction of the 1978 Constitution. The influence of the religious myth found in the Mahāvaṃsa in Sri Lankan constitutionalism will be examined in the next chapter to substantiate the argument that Sinhalese nationalist energies translated into concrete policies.

Chapter 4: Sri Lankan Constitutionalism

This chapter examines Sri Lankan constitutionalism as a product of the myth-making included in nation-building. The concept of nation-building, of course, raises questions about the relationship between religion and nationalism that were explored in the first chapter of this essay. There I concluded that religion could be imbricated with nationalism without necessarily holding that religion and nationalism were analogous terms, that religion had to be seen as the cause of nationalism, or that religious nationalism constituted a distinct form of nationalism. Unresolved contradictions in Sri Lankan constitution illustrate the usefulness of this concept.

An examination of the 1978 Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka[148] shows that its privileging of Buddhism, based on an established mythic history, exists in problematic juxtaposition to the appearance that it adheres to principles of transnational constitutionalism. To provide a theoretical framework for the discussion, I will first examine the ideology of constitutionalism. The normative assumptions and political consensus that provide the foundation for constitutionalism are characteristic of social values. While principles of transnational constitutionalism are frequently seen as the sole legitimating norm, it is important to acknowledge the phenomenon of theocratic constitutionalism. In doing so, I will particularly focus on the scholarship of Larry Catá Backer and Ran Hirschl, as they are the most widely published constitutional scholars who include theoretical principles of theocracy in their work. I will then apply this framework to the particularities of the Constitution of Sri Lanka and show that myth-making, particularly the foundational myths found in the *Mahāvaṃsa,* fostered a certain version

[148] Hereafter referred to as the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

of theocratic constitutionalism. This nationalist exclusivity aided the construction of the Constitution.

Constitutionalism

A "constitution" is composed of a set of norms (rules, principles or values) producing, configuring, and possibly defining the limits of, governmental power and authority.[149] Understood in this way, all States have constitutions and all States are constitutional states. Anything recognizable as a State must possess some recognized means of constituting and stipulating the limitations (or lack thereof) placed upon the three basic forms of government power: legislative power (making new laws), executive power (implementing laws) and judicial power (adjudicating disputes under laws).[150] Unless otherwise indicated, the word 'power' should be taken to mean normative power. A normative power is the capability to effect a change in the relevant normative landscape of rights, duties, privileges, and so on. When a legislature enacts a new law, it exercises its normative power to alter existing legal rights, duties, etc., or create new ones that did not exist before that legal power was exercised. According to most theorists, another important feature of constitutionalism is that the norms imposing limits upon government power must in some way be entrenched, either by law or by way of constitutional convention.[151] In other words, those whose powers are constitutionally limited—i.e., the institutions of government—must not be legally entitled to change or expunge those limits at their pleasure.[152] Most written constitutions contain

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[149] *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*, 3rd ed, v.2, eds. Shirelle Phelps and Jeffrey Lehman (Detroit: Gale, 2005), s.v. "Constitution."

[150] James Buchanan, "Why Do Constitutions Matter?" in *Why Constitutions Matter*, eds. Niclas Berggren, Nils Karlson, and Joakim Nergelis, (Stockholm: City University Press, 2002), 4.

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[152] Alexander Peczenik, "Why Constitution? What Constitution? Constraints on Majority Rule," in *Why Constitutions Matter*, eds, Niclas Berggren, Nils Karlson, and Joakim Nergelis, (Stockholm: City University Press, 2002), 23-24.

amending formulae which can be triggered by, and require the participation of, the government bodies whose powers they limit. But these formulae invariably require something more than a simple decision on the part of the present government to invoke a change.[153]

Some scholars believe that constitutional norms do not exist unless they are in some way enshrined in a written document.[154] The idea of constitutionalism requires limits on government power and authority established by constitutional law. But, according to most constitutional scholars, there is more to a constitution than constitutional law.[155] Many people will find this suggestion puzzling, believing their constitution to be nothing more (and nothing less) than a formal, written document, possibly adopted at a special constitutional assembly, which contains the nation-state's supreme, fundamental law. There is, however, a long-standing tradition of conceiving of constitutions as containing much more than constitutional law.[156] Constitutions need to be viewed as legitimate, and legitimacy is a function of the community's values, which provides the foundation for constitutionalism. According to Larry Catá Backer, the current discourse of constitutionalism is much more dynamic.

> Constitutionalism at one time could be said to involve the study of peculiarities of the unique constitutional framework through which government was constituted and power institutionalized … The old consensus of conventional constitutionalism, that constitutions are legitimately grounded either in domestic law and the unique will of a territorially defined demos, is now challenged by a view that constitutional legitimacy requires

[153] As indicated by Peczenik, these safeguards protect against abuse by the majority (a pitfall of majority rule democracies).
[154] See for example, Jed Rubenfeld, "Legitimacy and Interpretation," in *Constitutionalism*, ed. Larry Alexander, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 194-324.
[155] For example, see Michael Foley, *The Silence of Constitutions: Gaps, 'Abeyances' and Political Temperament in the Maintenance of Government*, (London and New York: Routlege, 1989).
[156] Wolfgang Kasper, "The Evolution of Constitutional Qualities Under the Influence of Global Competition," in Why Constitutions Matter, eds. Niclas Berggren, Nils Karlson, and Joakim Nergelis, (Stockholm: City University Press, 2002)

> conformity with a system of universal norms[157] grounded in an elaboration of mores of a community of nations.[158]

Backer is somewhat unique in asserting that there are multiple forms of constitutionalism that are legitimate.[159] In contradiction to asserted principles of transnational constitutionalism, Backer states that, "A more useful definition suggests the characteristics of constitutionalism as originating as a system of taxonomy and legitimation that is grounded in a set of normative assumptions about the meaning and purpose of government."[160]

Theocratic Constitutionalism

There is a possibility of normative differences in the religious organization of States that are legitimately constitutionalist on their own. But, the point for most scholars is to subordinate differences within the matrix of superior normative values of transnational constitutionalism. This translates in a manner that religion may only be politicized in a way that is inferior to secular values. Backer points out that, "In a sense, then, theocracy, narrowly understood, points to a subset of the inquiry demanded within a constitutionalism framework. Implementations of a certain form does not necessarily follow from the acceptance of a divinely-mandated system of behavioral norms".[161] Some critics consider theocratic constitutionalism to be threatening and illegitimate, a challenge to the established universalizing normative constitutional order, or even a global threat

[157] These norms were thought to have been conceived in the Allied Powers drafting of constitutions post-World War II. For a more extensive discussion (and problematization) of this see for examples, Larry Catá Backer, "God(s) Over Constitutions: International and Religious Transnational Constitutionalism in the 21st Century," *Mississippi College Law Review* v.27, n.1 (2007): 11-65, and Jiang Shigong, "Chinese-Style Constitutionalism: On Backer's Chinese Party-State Constitutionalism," *Modern China* v.20, n.2 (2014): 133-167.
[158] Larry Catá Backer, "From Constitution to Constitutionalism: A Global Framework for Legitimate Public Power Systems," *Penn State Law Review* v.113, n.3 (2009): 671-672.
[159] See for example, Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) who argues that liberal constitutional democracy is the ideal system because of the mutual advantage served to politically effective groups that are politically and economically coordinated based on this order.
[160] Backer, "From Constitution to Constitutionalism," 679.
[161] Larry Catá Backer, "Theocratic Constitutionalism: An Introduction to a New Global Legal Ordering," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* v.16, n.1 (2009): 112.

to inward-looking, traditional State-based constitutionalism. However, transnational or universalizing theocratic constitutionalism has emerged in its own right as another discursive framework for thinking about the legitimacy of the political constitutions of States.[162]

While Ran Hirschl acknowledges theocratic constitutionalism as its own kind, he concludes that the challenges are inherently more difficult to overcome than ethnic or linguistic divisions in constitution drafting. Ultimately, theocratic constitutionalism "undermines the applicability of traditional power-sharing, 'consociational' constitutional models commonly proposed as a way of mitigating tensions in troubled multi-ethnic polities".[163] Problems with theocratic constitutionalism are of their own kind. Firstly, "more than any other divisions along ascriptive or imagined lines, the secular/religious divide cuts across nations otherwise unified by their members' joint ethnic, religious, linguistic, and historical origins."[164] Secondly, the uneven level of the religion and secular divide and differences in religious sensibilities (even among members of the same religion) lends to the inability of religion to serve as a unifying network consistent with constitutionalist notions.[165] Due to these problems, Hirschl ultimately concludes that the principles of theocratic governance and those of modern constitutionalism seem to be at odds. His theory of constitutional theocracy adheres to the form of constitutional organization, but privileges one religion within the state apparatus, designating it as the supreme source of law. It is presided over by a formal system of interpretation in which the institutional apparatus of the

[162] Backer, "Theocratic Constitutionalism," 120.
[163]Ran Hirschl, "The Theocratic Challenge to Constitution Drafting in Post-Conflict States," *William & Mary Law Review* v.49, n.4 (2008): 1186.
[164] Hirschl, "Theocratic Challenge," 1182.
[165] Oddly enough, Hirschl uses Sri Lanka as a positive example of the territorial divide between Tamils and Sinhalese that is unlike many other states; but notes that it may not be effective for reducing tensions. Hirschl, "Theocratic Challenge," 1184.

privileged religion is vested with official or unofficial jurisdiction over interpretation of governmental activity in light of religious prescriptions. As Hirschl states,

> The designated state religion in constitutional theocracies is often viewed as constituting the foundation of the modern state; as such, it is an integral part, or even the metaphorical pillar, of the polity's national metanarrative. In this way religion often determines the polity's boundaries or collective identity, as well as the scope and nature of some or all of the rights and duties assigned to its residents.[166]

This is evidenced by his view that constitutional theocracy is separate from "pure" theocracy, as the power resides in lay political figures, operating in bounds of the constitution, rather than from within religious leadership – separation still constitutionally enshrined.[167] Hundreds of millions live in countries with designated State religion. Further two billion live in countries like India, Indonesia or Turkey, where no particular religion is granted formal status, but affiliation is a pillar of collective identity.[168] The de facto, as opposed to de jure, boundaries of religion and State in these countries are blurred at best, and are continually contested in both the political and judicial sphere.[169] Hirschl cannot, however, overcome the sense of illegitimacy based on inconsistencies with the fundamental substantive norms of the international political order.

The Particularities of Sri Lankan Constitutionalism

Many of the components of the Sri Lankan Constitution of 1978 clearly adhere to the principles of transnational constitutionalism, however problematic they may be: namely, mandated

[166] Ran Hirschl, *Constitutional Theocracy*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 2.
[167] Hirschl, "Theocratic Challenge," 1188. This also separates it from "ecclesiocracy" where institutional religious leadership guides the State apparatus, but does not claim to be instruments of divine authority (Hirschl, *Constitutional Theocracy*, 2).
[168] Hirschl, *Constitutional Theocracy*, 5.
[169] Hirschl, "Theocratic Challenge," 1190.

secularism.[170] None of the objectives of the Constitution refer to the religious State character, and adversely claim the opposite. Sri Lanka is set out as a secular State with the positive obligations of the establishment of democracy and socialism. In the absence of a monarchy, "sovereignty is in the people and is inalienable. Sovereignty includes the powers of government, fundamental rights and the franchise".[171] The responsibilities of the "State shall ensure equality of opportunity to citizens, so that no citizen shall suffer any disability on the ground of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion or occupation".[172] So, what does it mean within this seemingly secular context that Buddhism is afforded a special place?

While no one is compelled to be a Buddhist, the Constitution requires citizen habitation in a Buddhist state, which must protect and foster the *Buddha Sasana*.[173] While the implications of this depend entirely on the way in which the Constitution is interpreted, this assertion is undoubtedly premised on the notion of a uniquely Buddhist character of Sri Lanka. In determination of the hierarchy of constitutional reading, it is important to note that the pre-eminence of Buddhism is afforded the entirety of Chapter 2 (Article 9), which reads: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddhist *Sasana*, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(e)".[174] The assurances provide a guarantee that "Every person is

[170] As Backer points out, "The critical insight here is nexus between religion and government ... But the universal values which provide the framework within which governmental power may be asserted, and the framework for evaluating the relation of individual to state is provided by religion. As in transnational secular constitutionalism, the key lies in an embrace of the ideas that certain substantive principles of state construction—certain values—are both universal and mandatory, and that such values can only be supplied by an understanding of the Divine Word." Backer, "Theocratic Constitutionalism," 121.
[171] *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka* (1978 , as amended up to 9 September 2010), Published by the Parliament of Sri Lanka. http://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf Chapter 1, Article 3.
[172] *Constitution of Sri Lanka,* 6-27-6.
[173] The *Sasana* is a descriptive word meaning 'teaching' and is used to denote Buddhist religion. The Constitution mandates the protection of the teachings of the Buddha that form the religion and religious tradition.
[174] *Constitution of Sri Lanka,* 2-9.

entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice"[175] and that every citizen is entitled to "the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching".[176] Although citizens may freely practice their religion unmolested, they are excluded from the benefit of the State, under acts of Article 9. However, the State is obligated to "strengthen national unity by promoting co-operation and mutual confidence among all sections of the People of Sri Lanka, including racial, religious, linguistic and other groups, and shall, take effective steps in their field of teaching, education and information in order to eliminate discrimination and prejudice".[177] Some, like Roshan de Silva Wijeyeratne, conclude that there is an inherent value of Buddhism and a positive obligation to foster principles of transnational constitutionalism, asserting that "Sri Lanka must resort to indigenous Buddhist resources if it is to break the cycle of post-colonial constitutional failure".[178] In this connection, Backer concludes that Sri Lanka will continue to reap the worst of both worlds—as a failed theocratic and a failed secular transnational constitution. It neither applies the substantive values of its Buddhist framework, nor does it adhere completely to the global secular system of human rights and rule of law norms.[179]

According to Sri Lankan politician W.A. Wiswa Warnapala, "The Constitution can provide only the organs of State, and the factors on which the working of those organs of State depend are the people and political parties set up as their instruments to carry out their aims in politics."[180] In commenting on the recent construction of Sri Lanka's new 1978 Constitution, Warnapala was

[175] *Constitution of Sri Lanka,* 3-10.
[176] *Constitution of Sri Lanka,* 14-1-e.
[177]*Constitution of Sri Lanka*, 6-27-5.
[178] Roshan de Silva Wijeyeratne,"Buddhism, the Asokan Persona, and the Galactic Polity: Rethinking Sri Lanka's Constitutional Present," *Soc. Analysis,* v.51, n.1 (2007): 157.
[179] Backer, "Theocratic Constitutionalism," 170.
[180] W.A. Wiswa Warnapala, "Sri Lanka's New Constitution," *Asian Survey* v.20, n.9 (1980): 1192.

remarking on the necessity of ideological constitutionalism beyond the written constitution. The normative values which comprise this system have formed a constitutionalism which is theocratic in character. Backer's assertion that it is a failed constitution (as it ineffectively combines secular transnationalism and theocratic principles) is an accurate assessment. As it presently exists, the Sri Lankan Constitution has internal contradictions for constitutional religious preference and constitutional safeguards for religious freedom. This oscillation may be compared to Anderson's discussion of the irrational articulation of national identity between assertions of primordial roots with the actual contemporary invention. This has made the constitutional development different than Hirschl's proposed theory that,

> Therefore, constitutional theocracy has emerged, to some extent as a genuine attempt at aspirational constitutionalism committed to a set of pious principles with a strong ideational outlook, but at the same time also driven, at least in part, by strategic, instrumentalist, irreverent constitutionalism aimed at containing the spread of theocratic government and bringing religious institutions under state control.[181]

The discussion of the Sri Lankan constitution as a "constitutional theocracy" overlaps with the theoretical concern for describing the relationship between religion and nationalism. The religious dimensions of the Sri Lankan constitution can be analyzed without claiming that (a) religion and nationalism are analogous phenomena, (b) that religion is the "cause" of Sri Lankan nationalism, or (c) that religious nationalism is a distinctive form of nationalism. Moreover, in terms of the constitutional theory set out in this chapter, the theocratic dimensions of a constitution do not protect it from scrutiny using other categories of constitutional theory.

In summary, a national metanarrative has been developed based on foundational myths found in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. This has contributed to the development of a specific Sri Lankan

[181] Hirschl, *Constitutional Theocracy*, 13.

theocratic constitutionalism which justifies the marginalization of the minority Tamil, non-Buddhist population. As such, the Sri Lankan Constitution is evidence of concrete policies based on myth-historical premises.

Conclusions

Given the importance of social formations and the imagination of nation-based communities, the uncritical use of 'religion' and 'nationalism' is misleading and unhelpful in the analysis of ideological discourse. It is important to approach the relationship between religion and nationalism without bringing in an understanding of either which are over-determined by Western models. Rogers Brubaker has provided a solid framework to examine the relationship between religion and nationalism. I have utilized his third category, which indicates that religion is imbricated with nationalism in a way that it is part of the phenomenon, not an external explanation of it. This has allowed for analysis without necessarily holding religion and nationalism as analogous terms, that religion had to be seen as the cause of nationalism, or that religious nationalism constituted a distinct form of nationalism. As such, religion may provide the criteria for national boundaries, or more commonly, supply the mythic foundation for the iconic representation of the nation. In the construction of the nation through ideological apparatuses, it is imperative to recognize the influence of mythic narrativization. Understanding the relationship between religion and nationalism in this way allowed for dialogue with influential views on nationalism, including Benedict Anderson, Lowell Barrington, and Anthony D. Smith.

The centrality of myth in nation-building necessitates the development of a provisional definition. Lincoln's framework is most useful in the discussion of the discursive power of myth, including the importance of truth in credibility and authority. In his conception, there is no self-evident sacred and profane bifurcation of myths. While McCutcheon's analysis of the process of mythmaking is significant, he deconstructs the category of myth so much in his unwavering rejection of the concept, that it becomes impossible to identify what a myth is in order to examine

it. Lincoln's examination of the importance of authority and credibility (as perceived truthfulness) is an explanation that enables the deconstruction of the term 'myth', without fully dismantling it. Coupled with Mack's work on social formations, my analysis allows the development of a provisional definition of myth: "narrativization of (an) ideology of social formations." Presently, the majority of literature undervalues the role of myth in ideological construction of national identity (including the imagination of a nation-based community).

This study opens the doors to additional subjects for research. Among other avenues, application of these ideas could be expanded to include analysis of the impact of the "Sinhala Only" political campaign, the relationship of Buddhism and the state, including the role of political monks in Parliament, and various ways of interpreting the historical and literary dimensions of the *Mahāvaṃsa*. While this essay focused on Chapter XXV, a reading of the entire document, and comparison with other nationalist myths or epics would expand an understanding of the document. Nevertheless, it is important not to underscore the results that have been obtained.

The influence of myth on Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka is evident. The role of myth in the imagination and construction of national identity in Sri Lanka is a paramount component in the national representation of a monolithic Sri Lankan 'culture' necessitated through both Sinhalese and Buddhist identifications. Sinhalese Buddhists have utilized mythology, particularly the *Mahāvamsa*, to create a mytho-historical account of early religion and social life in Sri Lanka. It has provided a justification for violence against non-Buddhists, even though that seems to be contradictory to canonical Buddhist orthodoxy of non-violence. Sinhalese nationalists have attempted to generate a community that defines its boundaries in a specific way. Most specifically, this has included the denigration of non-Sinhalese ethnic minorities. The persuasion and evocation of sentiments through the *Mahāvaṃsa* has helped eliminate the contradiction between nationalist

violence and Buddhist values, and helps justify the sense of entitlement Sinhalese nationalists asserts over the Tamil population.

The energies of Sinhalese nationalism translated into concrete policies in nation-building. The 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution shows a privileging of Buddhism, based on the established mythic history found in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. There are unresolved contradictions between assertions of theocratic and transnational constitutionalism that are the result of the involvement of myth in Sri Lankan nation-building.

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